

PEARL

fourteenth century

Written by the anonymous “Pearl Poet” in the fourteenth century, *Pearl* is in the dialect of England’s northwest midlands. The same author is credited with the writing of three other poems: *Patience*, *Cleanness*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, all of which are found in a single manuscript now in the British Library, known as Cotton Nero A. x. All are written in alliterative verse, associating the author with the so called “alliterative revival,” which saw poets using the older, pre-conquest, Germanic prosody that characterized Anglo-Saxon poetry. Poems in that tradition typically employed alliteration but not rhyme. *Pearl*, however, employs both (as does *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the “bob and wheel” that ends each stanza of that poem).

Pearl recounts a father’s grief at the death of his young daughter (not even two years old). As he mourns beside his daughter’s grave he experiences a dream vision in which he encounters his now beatified child in Paradise. In their dialogue she teaches him lessons needed for his salvation—especially the lesson of humility.

The dream vision first appears in medieval literature in the enormously influential *Consolation of Philosophy*, written by the sixth-century Roman philosopher Boethius. In it, Boethius, a prisoner awaiting execution, is visited in a dream by Lady Philosophy, who teaches him the importance of withdrawal from earthly vanities and the development of the inner life of virtue. Anglo-Saxon examples of the dream vision include *Caedmon’s Hymn*, in which an illiterate cowherd is visited in a dream by an angel who imparts to him the gift of poetry, and *The Dream of the Rood*, in which the dreamer describes a magnificent cross that engages him in conversation. In the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose*, an influential French work in the courtly literature of the period, the poet-lover dreams that he is on a quest for possession of his beloved, figured symbolically as a rose enclosed in a garden. The English poet who made the most extensive use of dream visions was a contemporary of the Pearl Poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. His *Book of the Duchess* (one of four dream-vision poems) has been compared to *Pearl* in its elegiac character.

In *Pearl*, the dreamer is presented as a self-absorbed materialist whose chief regret at his daughter’s death is that *he* has lost something that was the source of *his* happiness. In the early dialogue with his daughter, the father can understand only the most literal, material sense of words and concepts; both these spiritual limitations are largely overcome by the end of the poem through Pearl’s teaching.

Dream vision facilitates allegory, and most of the dream visions of the Middle Ages are allegorical. The chief allegorical device in *Pearl* is the pearl itself, which is at one and the same time a gem (described as round, white, and spotless) and a deceased child (whose name, it is hinted, may have been Marguerite or Marjorie, both derived from the Latin word for pearl, *margarita*). The attributes of the pearl—among them its shape, its purity, its color, its rarity, and its spotlessness—open up many possible paths for symbolic interpretation. Through the allegorical process, the qualities of the gem or pearl, established at the literal level, are transferred to the child—whose spotlessness is moral as well as physical.

Critics have suggested that the pearl that is repeatedly referred to as having been lost is the dreamer’s soul or, alternatively, the souls of all humankind, lost in Eden and redeemed on Golgotha. It is through the structure of the poem, however, that the poet displays his genius most impressively, bringing form and meaning together in a variety of ways. One key to the symbolic structure of the work is found in medieval numerology. Numbers were conceived not only as representing quantity, but also as metaphysical realities. In this system, One was the monad, pure simplicity and unity from

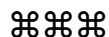
which was produced all numbers and multiplicity; it represented God. Two was the dyad, duality and the first instance of multiplicity. It represented, among other things, Jesus the Christ, Son of God and second person of the Trinity, and it signified his double nature as God and man. Three, considered the first actual number, a product of One and Two, represented the Holy Ghost, and, in its geometrical expression (Δ) it represented the Trinity.

The first three digits together also signified the theological-metaphysical concept of the Godhead's going out (*editus*), remaining (*residuus*), and returning (*reditus*); God the One goes out of himself into the world as Jesus while all the time paradoxically remaining within himself in heaven. This remaining represents the Holy Ghost. Jesus-God, whose *editus* through the world brings redemption, returns into himself, *reditus*, at the Resurrection. Thus, theologically, the number three represents the structure of the Trinity as well as its inner dynamic—an endless, simultaneous “Going out,” “Remaining,” and “Returning.” The process seems to be mimicked in the dreamer's spirit leaving earth, “going out” to Paradise, “returning” to earth at the end of the poem, while his body is all the time “remaining” in the earthly garden.

In *Pearl*, the principal symbolic numbers are 1, 2, 10, and 12. The number 10 symbolizes fulfillment and completion. The same symbolism pertains to 100, 1000, and so on, which are numerologically simply forms of 10 signifying completion. *Pearl* is composed of 101 stanzas, each with 12 lines, giving the poem 1212 lines in all. The twelve lines of the stanza suggest the “going out” of the monad into the dyad and beyond, just as one stanza goes out to the next. This pattern is reinforced by another important device in the poem, the repetition of a word in the last line of a given stanza in the first line of the next. This linking word is repeated through sets of five stanzas, the last line of the first stanza of the new group introducing a new link word that is carried on through the next five stanzas.

There are nineteen sets of five stanzas and one of six making up the poem, forming a chain of linked units or, in the metaphor that the Pearl Poet clearly intended, a string of pearls. Here, it becomes clear how in *Pearl* form is meaning and meaning is form.

The Pearl Poet constructed *Pearl* with 101 stanzas, signifying completion, continuation, and re-beginning—appropriate for a poem in which the speaker, after returning to earth, must re-commence his life and quest for perfection. The 1212 lines of the poem bespeak the repetition of the monad and the dyad, and re-enforce the central image of the poem as a circle, a round pearl, a chain, a necklace—an “endless round,” as the poet says (l.738)—that in turn connects with eternity, the prize that Pearl herself possesses and that the dreamer must strive for.



Pearl

1

Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye
 To clanly clos in golde so clere,
 Oute of Oryent, I hardyly saye,
 Ne proved I never her precios pere.
 5 So rounde, so reken in uche araye,
 So smal, so smothe her sydes were,
 Queresoever I jugged gemmes gaye
 I sette hyr sengeley in synglure.
 Allas, I leste hyr in on erbere;
 10 Thurgh gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
 I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
 Of that pryvy perle withouten spot.

Sythen in that spote hit fro me sprange,
 Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande that wele
 15 That wont was whyle devoyde my wrange
 And heven my happe and al my hele.
 That dos bot thrych my herte thrange,
 My breste in bale bot bolne and bele.
 Yet thought me never so swete a sange
 20 As styлле stounde let to me stele;
 Forsothe, ther fleten to me fele
 To thenke hir color so clad in clot.
 O moul, thou marres a myry juele,
 My privy perle wythouten spotte.

25 That spot of spyses mot nedes sprede
 Ther such ryches to rot is runne:

*Pearl*¹

1

Pearl, worthy of a prince's pay,²
 Goodly set in gold so clear,
 Out of the East, I dare say,
 Never found I her precious peer.
 So round, so radiant in every way,
 So small, so smooth her sides appear.³
 Wherever I judged jewels gay,
 I set her apart as most dear.
 Alas, I lost her in a garden's way;
 Through grass to ground from me it shot.
 And now I pine from love-loss, yea,
 For that precious pearl without a spot.

2

Since in that spot it from me went,
 I languished, longing for that good
 That from my wrongs once me did shent,^o *hesitate/disgrace?*
 Made me merry and raised my mood.
 But now my heart is all to-rent,
 Burns my breast with bale^o so rude. *evil*
 No sweeter song was to me sent
 Than she who stole upon my mood.
 Yet vexing thoughts I yearned to vent,
 Of how her clearness under clot
 The earth did mar, to shadows sent,
 My precious pearl without a spot.

3

So on that spot be spices spread
 Where such treasure to rot has run.

¹ *Pearl* The present text has been translated and edited for *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature* by David Williams.

² *pay* A significant word since it links the first word of the poem with the last, emphasizing the circularity of the whole and echoing the controlling image of a necklace of pearls. In Middle English, *paye* has a range of meanings, but here seems to mean "delight" or "pleasure." In the last line of the poem, *paye* signifies the "delight" God takes in the salvation of souls.

³ *So small... appear* In medieval poetry, the adjective "small" often signifies feminine beauty; "sides" may be understood as "figure," again a woman's (see Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 3.1248 where Criseyde's "sides" are described).

Blomes blayke and blwe and rede
 Ther schyne ful schyr agayn the sunne.
 Flor and fryte may not be fede
 30 Ther hit doun drof in moldes dunne;
 For uch gresse mot grow of graynes dede,
 No whete were elles to wones wonne.
 Of goud uche goude is ay bygonne—
 So semly a sede moght fayly not
 35 That spryngande spyces up ne sponne
 Of that precios perle wythouten spotte.

To that spot that I in speche expoun
 I entred in that erber grene
 In Augoste in a hygh seysoun
 40 Quen corne is corven wyth crokes kene.
 On huyle ther perle hit trendeled doun
 Schadowed this wortes ful schyre and schene:
 Gilofre, gyngure, and gromlyoun,
 And pyonys powdered ay bytwene.
 45 Yif hit was semly on to sene
 A fayr reflagr yet fro hit flot.
 Ther wonys that worthyly, I wot and wene,
 My precious perle wythouten spot.

Bifore that spot my honde I spenned
 50 For care ful colde that to me caght.
 A deuely dele in my hert denned
 Thagh resoun sette myselven saght.
 I playned my perle that ther was penned
 Wyth fyrce skylles that faste faght.
 55 Thagh kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
 My wretched wylle in wo ay wraghte.
 I felle upon that floury flaght—
 Suche odour to my hernes schot,
 I slode upon a slepyng-slaghte
 60 On that precios perle wythouten spot.

Blooms of yellow, blue, and red
 There shine and shimmer in the sun.
 No fruit nor flower is faded dead
 Where Pearl lies in decaying dun;¹
 All grass doth grow from grain gone dead,
 Or else no wheat were to harvest won.²
 From good each good is ere begun.
 Surely so sweet a seed dies not,
 Lest sprig and spices there sprout none
 From that precious pearl without a spot.

4
 At the spot that in speech I rhyme
 I entered into the garden green
 In August, in the harvest time,³
 When corn is cut with cutters keen.
 Where pearl had vanished in that clime
 There fairest flowers could be seen,
 Pinks, ginger, grummel^o in their prime, *mud*
 With peonies peppered in between.
 If they were seemly, more sublime
 Was the perfume from that plot
 Where dwells my dearest for a time,
 My precious pearl without a spot.

5
 Before that spot my hands I clasped
 For care full cold my mind had caught,
 By greatest grief my heart was grasped.
 And though reason sweet solace sought,
 I wept for pearl whom earth had hasped,
 While fiercest forces in me fought.
 Though Christ's comfort to me sped,
 My weakened will was still distraught.
 I fell upon the flowery bed,
 And perfume through my senses shot,
 So I to sudden sleep was brought
 Near precious pearl without a spot.

¹ *dun* Dull or dingy brown color. (Presumably describing the fields where the body is buried.)

² *All grass ... harvest won* See 1 Corinthians 15.35–38 and John 12.24–25.

³ *harvest time* The Middle English “hy seysoun,” here translated as “harvest time,” probably refers to Lammas, a British harvest festival celebrated on 1 August.

2

Fro spot my spyryt ther sprang in space—
 My body on balke ther bod in sweven.
 My goste is gon in Godes grace
 In aventure ther mervayles meven.
 65 I ne wyste in this worlde quere that hit wace
 Bot I knew me keste ther klyfes cleven.
 Towarde a foreste I bere the face
 Where ryche rokkes wer to dyscreven.
 The lyght of hem myght no mon leven,
 70 The glemande glory that of hem glent,
 For wern never webbes that wywes weven
 Of half so dere adubbemente.

Dubbed wern alle tho downes sydes
 Wyth crystal klyffes so cler of kynde;
 75 Holtewodes bryght aboute hem bydes
 Of bolles as blwe as ble of Ynde.
 As bornyst sylver the lef on slydes
 That thike con trylle on uch a tynde;
 Quen glem of glodes agayns hem glydes
 80 Wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle thay schynde.
 The gravayl that on grounde con grynde
 Wern precious perles of Oryente.
 The sunnebemes bot blo and blynde
 In respecte of that adubbement.

85 The adubbemente of tho downes dere
 Garten my goste al greffe forgete.
 So frech flavores of frytes were
 As fode hit con me fayre refete.
 Fowles ther flowen in fryth in fere
 90 Of flaumbande hwes bothe smale and grete;
 Bot sytole-stryng and gyternere
 Her reken myrthe moght not retrete,
 For quen those bryddes her wynges bete
 Thay songen wyth a swete asent.
 95 So gracios gle couthe no mon gete
 As here and se her adubbement.

2

6

From that spot my spirit sped in space,¹
 My body bound on earth in dream.
 My soul did soar by God's good grace
 To wander forth where wonders teem.
 Never I knew in this world such place;
 I found me cast by cliffs a gleam.^o
 Toward a forest I turned my face
 Where rocks the richest me did seem.
 Who could believe the light they spent?
 No musing that a man could dream

gleaming

Could bear so bright an ornament.

7

Ornaments on every side
 And crystal cliffs of clearest hue;
 Below them woodlands stretching wide.
 Trunks of trees are indigo blue,
 Their silver leaves on soft winds ride,
 And branches quivered as they blew,
 While lines of light upon them glide
 With shimmering sheen shining true.
 The gravel I grind beneath my shoe
 Is all of pearls of Orient;
 Dim seems the sun compared to
 That most glorious ornament.

8

Ornaments of those fields so fair
 Made my spirit forget its woe.
 Fragrance of fruit so fresh and rare
 Caused my courage t'awake and grow.
 Bevies^o of birds were flying there,
 Their festive feathers all aglow.
 No minstrel might with them compare,
 When those birds from ground did flare,
 So sweetly they sang in one assent.
 They bettered all mortals, I swear,
 By sight and sound of their ornament.

flocks

¹ *space* The Middle English word "space" can mean either a period of time or a place, or the distance between two places.

So al was dubbet on dere asyse
 That fryth ther fortwne forth me feres.
 The derthe therof for to devyse
 100 Nis no wyy worthé that tonge beres.
 I welke ay forth in wely wyse,
 No bonk so byg that did me deres:
 The fyrre in the fryth, the feier con ryse
 The playn, the plonttes, the spyse, the peres;
 105 And rawes and randes and rych reveres
 As fyldor fyn her bukes brent.
 I wan to a water by schore that scheres—
 Lorde, dere was hit adubbement.

The dubbement of tho derworth depe
 110 Wern bonkes bene of beryl bryght.
 Swangeande swete the water con swepe
 Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryght.
 In the founce ther stonden stones stepe
 As glente thurgh glas that glowed and glyght,
 115 As stremande sternes quen strothe-men slepe
 Staren in welkyn in wynter nyght.
 For uche a pobbel in pole ther pyght
 Was emerad, saffer, other gemme gente—
 That alle the loghe lemed of lyght
 120 So dere was hit adubbement.

3

The dubbement dere of doun and dales,
 Of wod and water and wlonke playnes,
 Bylde in me blys, abated my bales,
 Foridden my stresse, dystried my paynes.
 125 Doun after a strem that dryyly haies
 I bowed in blys, bredful my braynes.
 The fyrre I folwed those floty vales
 The more strengthe of joye myn herte straynes.
 As fortune fares theras ho fraynes,
 130 Whether solace ho sende other elles sore,
 The wyy to wham her wylle ho waynes
 Hyttes to have ay more and more.

9

All was decked out in ornament
 In that forest fortune led me to.
 How hard it is to represent!
 Of worthy words there are too few.
 I meandered in mind content;
 No bank so big to block my view.
 Fairer still the further I went
 Were fruits and flora and spices, too;
 Strands, streams, and hedges grew
 Like a golden thread opulent.
 Down to winding waters¹ blue,
 Oh Lord! how lovely that ornament.

10

The ornaments of that dear deep
 Were beautiful banks of beryl² bright.
 Whirling waters by them did sweep,
 Whispering songs in soft sounds slight.
 From the bottom, sparkling, pebbles peep
 As if through glass, an eye's delight,
 Like streaming stars when mortals sleep
 That watch from heaven on winter's night.
 Emeralds, sapphires, jewels lent
 To all the water a wondrous light,
 So lambent was that ornament.

3

II

The ornament of down^o and dale,^o
 Of woods, waters, and pleasant plain,
 Buoyed my bliss, broke all my bale,
 Assuaged my ache, appeased my pain.
 By flowing streams that never fail
 I bowed while bliss imbued my brain.
 The further I followed this fair vale,
 My heart its health it did regain,
 Though fickle fortune does remain,
 And gives man good or grievous sore,
 He who can her favor gain,
 Will find he garners more and more.

hill / valley

¹ *waters* Reference to the “water of life” described in Revelation 22.1–2.

² *beryl* Transparent precious stone.

More of wele was in that wyse
 Then I cowthe telle thagh I tom hade,
 135 For urthely herte myght not suffyse
 To the tenthe dole of tho gladnes glade.
 Forthy I thocht that Paradyse
 Was ther over gayn tho bonkes brade.
 I hoped the water were a devyse
 140 Bytwene myrthes by meres made.
 Byyonde the broke, by slente other slade,
 I hoped that mote merked wore;
 Bot the water was depe, I dorst not wade,
 And ever me longed ay more and more.

145 More and more and yet wel mare
 Me lyst to se the broke byyonde,
 For if hit was fayr ther I con fare
 Wel loveloker was the fyrre londe.
 Abowte me con I stote and stare;
 150 To fynde a forthe faste con I fonde.
 Bot wothes mo iwysse ther ware
 The fyrre I stalked by the stronde,
 And ever me thocht I shulde not wonde
 For wo ther weles so wyne wore.
 155 Thenne nwe note me com on honde
 That meved my mynde ay more and more.

More mervayle con my dom adaunt;
 I sey byyonde that myry mere
 A crystal clyffe ful relusaunt;
 160 Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere.
 At the fote therof ther sete a faunt,
 A mayden of menske ful debonere.
 Blysnande whyt was hyr bleaunt.
 I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere.
 165 As glysnande golde that man con schere,
 So schon that schene anunder schore.
 On lenghe I loked to hyr there—
 The lenger, I knew hyr more and more.

12

More bliss there was beyond all price
 Than I could tell 'though time I had,
 For human heart could not suffice
 To feel a tenth of what made me glad.
 So I presumed that Paradise
 Beyond those banks might well be had.
 The water, I hoped, was but a device
 To separate glad from glad.
 Beyond the torrent, in glory clad,
 I hoped to see a city soar.
 The water was deep, doubts I had,
 'Though ever I longed, more and more.

13

More and more, and yet still more
 I sought to see beyond the strand.
 Though fair I found this present shore,
 Far fairer was the further land.
 To find a ford¹ I 'gan explore,
 Here and there did I stare and stand,
 But dangers did I encounter sore
 The further I fared along the strand.
 But why, I thought, should I be banned
 By fear and grief from joys galore.
 Then a new notion came to hand,
 That moved my mind still more and more.

14

Marvels more did abash my mind.
 I saw beyond that stream so fair
 A crystal cliff that brightly shined,
 Royal rays rose into the air.
 There at the base a babe reclined,
 A maid so mild, so debonair,^o
 Her dress was all in white designed.
 I knew her well; I had seen her ere.
 Like shredded gold in strands so rare
 Shimmered the light along the shore
 Through which I gazed long at her there.
 And so I knew her more and more.

meek

¹ *ford* Shallow place where he might cross by wading.

170 The more I frayste hyr fayre face,
 Her fygure fyn quen I had fonte,
 Suche gladande glory con to me glace
 As lyttel byfore therto was wonte.
 To calle hyr lyste con me enchace
 Bot baysment gef myn hert a brunt.
 175 I sey hyr in so strange a place,
 Such a burre myght make myn herte blunt.
 Thenne veres ho up her fayre frount,
 Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yvore,
 That stonge myn hert ful stray astount—
 180 And ever the lenger the more and more.

4

More then me lyste my drede aros;
 I stod ful styлле and dorste not calle.
 Wyth yyen open and mouth ful clos
 I stod as hende as hawk in halle.
 185 I hoped that gostly was that porpose;
 I dred onende quat schulde byfalle
 Lest ho me eschaped that I ther chos,
 Er I at steven hir moght stalle.
 That gracios gay wythouten galle,
 190 So smothe, so smal, so seme slyght,
 Ryses up in hir araye ryalle,
 A precios pyece in perles pyght.

195 Perles pyghte of ryal prys
 Ther moght mon by grace haf sene
 Quen that frech as flor-de-lys
 Doun the bonke con bowe bydene.
 Al blysnande whyt was hir beau biys,
 Upon at sydes and bounden bene
 Wyth the myrreste margarys, at my devyse,
 200 That ever I sey yet with myn yyen;
 Wyth lappes large, I wot and wene,
 Dubbed with double perle and dyghte,
 Her cortel of self sute schene
 Wyth precios perles al umbepyghte.

15

The more I looked on her fair face,
 Her flawless form, the more I found
 Greatest glory and splendid grace
 As never before did so abound.
 I wished to talk, face to face,
 But confusion did me astound.
 She lifted up her forehead crowned,
 White as ivory a face she bore.
 Her beauty did my mind confound
 The longer I looked, more and more.

4

16

More than I wanted my awe arose.
 I stood full still and dared not call—
 My eyes I open, my mouth I close.
 Tame I was as a hawk in hall—
 A sacred sense I did suppose.
 I fully feared what might befall,
 Lest she fled from me before I chose,
 Before by speaking I could forestall
 That gracious girl so virginal,
 So smooth, so small, so well displayed.
 Up she rose in her robes royal,
 A precious pearl in pearls arrayed.

17

Pearls arrayed in rows precise,
 There men by grace may well have seen,
 When she as fair as fleur-de-lys°
 Came right down the rolling green,
 Her gleaming gown was white as fleece,
 With open sides, beaded between
 With pretty pearls all of a piece,
 That ever one saw with eye so keen.
 Her frock with flouncy folds did preen,
 With double pearls all well displayed.
 Her kirtle° matched her gown so sheen,
 With many precious pearls arrayed.

*lily**petticoat*

205 A pyght coroune yet wer that gyrle
 Of marjorys and non other ston,
 Highe pynakled of cler quyt perle
 Wyth flurtd flowres perfet upon.
 To hed hade ho non other werle,
 210 Her here-leke al hyr umbegon.
 Her semblaunt sade for doc other erle,
 Her ble more blaght then whalles bon;
 As schorne golde schyr her fax thenne schon
 On schylderdes that leghe unlapped lyghte.
 215 Her depe colour yet wonted non
 Of precios perle in porfyl pyghte.

Pyght was poyned and uche a hemme
 At honde, at sydes, at overtüre,
 Wyth whyte perle and non other gemme,
 220 And bornyste quyte was hyr vestüre.
 Bot a wonder perle wythouten wemme
 Inmyddes hyr breste was sette so sure,
 A mannes dom moght druyly demme
 Er mynde moght malte in hit mesure.
 225 I hope no tonge moght endure,
 No saverly saghe say of that syght,
 So was hit clene and cler and pure,
 That precios perle ther hit was pyght.

Pyght in perle, that precios pyse
 230 On wyther half water com doun the schore.
 No gladder gome hethen into Grece
 Then I quen ho on brymme wore.
 Ho was me nerre then aunte or nece;
 My joy forthy was much the more.
 235 Ho profered me speche, that special spyce,
 Enclynande lowe in wommon lore,
 Caghte of her coroun of grete tresore
 And haylsed me wyth a lote lyghte.
 Wel was me that ever I was bore
 240 To sware that swete in perles pyghte.

18

A crown arrayed carried the girl
 Beset with pearls, no other stone,
 With pinnacles built up of pearl,
 Upon which flowers fairly shone.
 Around her brow naught else did curl
 But lovely locks, that crown alone;
 Her gaze as grand as duke or earl,
 Her skin whiter than white whale bone.
 Her shining locks golden grown,
 Shaped on her shoulders, loosely laid,
 Her complexion was of the tone
 Of purest pearls, in rows arrayed.

19

Arrayed were both handcuff and hem
 At wrist, at sides, at openings,
 With pearls perlucent, no other gem.
 The wardrobe white was dazzling;
 Peerless pearls, but none of them
 Shone as bright or as sparkling
 As that on her breast, the best item.
 Human mind, despite its trying,
 Could not describe it without lying.
 Brighter it was in light and shade,
 Crystal clear it shimmered shining
 More than any gem so arrayed.

20

All arrayed that maiden free
 Across the stream came toward the shore.
 Twixt here and Greece no man could be
 As glad as I to see her, for
 Closer than aunt or niece to me
 Was she; my joy was much the more.
 She deigned to speak, so genteel she,
 In courtesy the crown she wore
 She removed, no crown she bore;
 Spoke to me sweetly, love displayed.
 I blessed the day forever more
 That I spoke to pearl, so sweet arrayed.

5

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

That juel thenne, in gemmes gente,
 Vered up her vyse wyth yyen graye,
 255 Set on hyr coroun of perle orient
 And soberly after thenne con ho say,
 “Sir, ye haf your tale mysetente
 To say your perle is al awaye
 That is in cofer so comly clente
 260 As in this gardyn gracious gaye,
 Hereinne to lenge forever and play
 Ther mys nee mornynge com never nere.
 Her were a forser for thee, in faye,
 If thou were a gentyl jueler.

265 “Bot, jueler gente, if thou schal lose
 Thy joy for a gemme that thee was lef,
 Me thynk thee put in a mad porpose
 And busyes thee about a raysoun bref.
 For that thou lestes was bot a rose
 270 That flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef;
 Now thurgh kynde of the kyste that hyt con close
 To a perle of prys hit is put in pref.
 And thou has called thy wyrde a thef
 That oght of noght has mad thee cler.

5

21

“O Pearl,” I cried, “in pearls arrayed,
 Are you my pearl for whom I mourn?
 I was at night by grief low laid;
 Much sorrow for you have I borne
 Since in the grass from me you strayed,
 Left me longing with heart forlorn
 While you in Heaven with angels stayed,
 In Paradise, by strife untorn.
 Why are you so well entourned,^o
 And I left in state far crueler?
 Our solid love was then all torn,
 And I have been a joyless jeweler.”

surrounded

22

Then that jewel in jewels dressed
 Lifted her look with eyes of gray,¹
 Put on her crown, of crowns the best,
 And sagely then had this to say:
 “What you have said is misexpressed!
 To say your pearl is all away
 Who is in fact in choicest chest
 As is this garden gracious, gay,
 To dwell with spirits, ever stay
 Where loss and mourning never were.
 Here be a chest for you someday,
 Were you a gentle jeweler.

23

But gentle jeweler, if you lose
 Your joy for a gem you once did love,
 Me thinks your mind you do misuse.
 Transience you make too much thereof,
 What you regret was but a rose
 That flowered and failed by law above.
 The chest that does your pearl enclose
 Itself perfects the pearl through love.
 A filcher^o your fate you now think of
 That from aught to naught has brought her.

petty thief

¹ *eyes of gray* In the Middle Ages, gray eyes were considered the most beautiful eyes a woman might have. What color exactly was understood is not clear but presumably a shade of blue. The prestige of gray eyes has also to do with the belief that Athena, goddess of wisdom, had such eyes.

275 Thou blames the bote of thy meschef.
Thou art no kynde jueler."

A juel to me then was thys geste
And jueles wern hyr gentyl sawes.
"Iwyse," quoth I, "my blysfol beste,
280 My grete dystresse thou al todrawes.
To be excused I make requeste;
I trawed my perle don out of dawes.
Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste
And wony wyth hyt in schyr wod-schawes
285 And love my Lorde and al His lawes
That has me broght thys blysse ner.
Now were I at yow byyonde thise wawes,
I were a joyfol jueler."

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

6

"I halde that jueler lyttel to prayse
That loves wel that he ses wyth yye,
And much to blame and uncortoyse
That leves oure Lorde wolde make a lyye
305 That lelly hyghte your lyf to rayse
Thagh fortune dyd your flesch to dyye.
Ye setten Hys wordes ful westernays
That loves nothynk bot ye hit syye;
And that is a poynt o sorquydryye
310 That uche god mon may evel byseme—
To leve no tale be true to tryye
Bot that hys one skyl may dem.

You curse the cure got from above—
You are no gentle jeweler."

24

A jewel for me was this guest,
Jewels were every word she made.
"Indeed," I said, "my blissful best,
My great distress you have allayed.
To be excused I make request.
I thought my pearl in dark was laid;
Now I have found it and make fest,
To dwell with it in greenest glade.
I love the Lord and the laws He made
Who me has cleaved so close to her.
Across these waters could I but wade,
I would be a joyful jeweler."

25

"Jeweler," said that jewel so fair,
"Why mock, you men? Insane you be!
Three words just now you did declare,
And much mistaken were all three.
You know not what notions they bear;
Your words before your wits do flee.
First, you reckon I here repair
Because with eyes you can me see;
Second, that you can stay with me
In this place, you do aver.
Third, to cross this water free,
That may no joyful jeweler.

6

26

I judge that jeweler worth no praise
Who believes what he beholds with eye,
And full of blame for wrongful ways
He who thinks our Lord would lie.
He swore your sunken soul to raise,
Though fortune caused your flesh to die.
His words unworthy you appraise
Believing what you see with eye;
The sin of pride that does imply,
That in good men would ill beseem,
On written doctrine not to rely,
And private reason right to deem.

315 “Deme now thyself if thou con dayly
 As man to God wordes schulde heve.
 Thou says thou schal won in this bayly.
 Me thynk thee burde fyrst aske leve—
 And yet of graunt thou myghtes fayle.
 Thou wynes over thys water to weve;
 Er moste thou cever to other counsayle.
 320 Thy corse in clot mot calder keve,
 For hit was forgarte at Paradys greve;
 Oure yorefader hit con mysseyeme.
 Thurgh drwry deth bos uch man dreve
 Er over thys dam hym Dryghtyn deme.”

325 “Demes thou me,” quoth I, “my swete,
 To dol agayn, thenne I dowyne.
 Now haf I fonte that I forlete,
 Schal I efte forgo hit er ever I fyne?
 Why schal I hit bothe mysse and mete?
 330 My precios perle dos me gret pyne.
 What serves tresor bot gares men grete
 When he hit schal efte wyth tenes tyne?
 Now rech I never for to declyne
 Ne how fer of folde that man me fleme;
 335 When I am partles of perle myne,
 Bot durande doel what may men deme?”

“Thow demes noght bot doel dystresse,”
 Thenne sayde that wyght, “why dos thou so?
 For dyne of doel of lures lesse
 340 Ofte mony mon forgos the mo.
 Thee oghte better thyselfen blesse
 And love ay God in wele and wo,
 For anger gaynes thee not a cresse.
 Who nedes schal thole be not so thro;
 345 For thogh thou daunce as any do,
 Braundysch and bray thy brathes breme,
 When thou no fyrre may to ne fro
 Thou moste abyde that He schal deme.

27

Deem yourself if you spoke ill
 With words that man his God would grieve.
 You state that stay in this place you will,
 Without so much as a “by your leave!”
 Even with that you may fail still.
 To cross this water you conceive,
 But first a duty you must fulfill,
 Your body must death’s kiss receive.
 In Eden it did the soul deceive
 Where our father did misesteem.
 So now must death us all bereave
 Ere over this stream us God redeem.”

28

“Deem you me doomed” said I, “my sweet,
 To mourn anew? Then I must pine.
 What I lost, now anew I greet;
 Must I grieve till the grave be mine?
 Why my pearl must I miss and meet?
 Your words, white pearl, cause me to pine.
 What proffers treasure but tears replete
 When to lose it at last we must resign?
 I care not how my days decline,
 Forced afar from this strand and stream.
 If parted from that pearl of mine,
 Save endless dole,^o what may men deem?”

sorrow

29

“You deem only grief’s worst distress,”
 Said pearl to me, “Why plain you so
 By loud lament for things worthless?
 Still better boon may men forego.
 Better for you yourself to bless,
 To love God always in weal and woe;
 Anger will win you only the less.
 We all must suffer, resist not so,
 Though you dance like a frightened doe,
 Twist and turn and in temper scream,
 When at last you weary grow
 You must accept what He shall deem.

350 “Deme Dryghtyn, ever Hym adyte,
 Of the way a fote ne wyl He wrythe.
 Thy mendes mountes not a myte,
 Thagh thou for sorwe be never blythe.
 Stynst of thy strot and fyne to flyte
 And sech Hys blythe ful swefte and swythe;
 355 Thy prayer may Hys pyté byte
 That mercy schal hyr craftes kythe.
 Hys comferte may thy langour lythe
 And thy lures of lyghtly fleme.
 For marre other madde, morne and mythe,
 360 Al lys in Hym to dyght and deme.”

7

Thenne demed I to that damyselle,
 “Ne worthe no wraththe unto my Lorde
 If rapely I rave, spornande in spelle.
 My herte was al wyth mysse remorde
 365 As wallande water gos out of welle.
 I do me ay in Hys myserecorde;
 Rebuke me never wyth wordes felle
 Thagh I forloyne, my dere endorde,
 Bot kythes me kyndely your coumforde,
 370 Pytosly thenkande upon thysse:
 Of care and me ye made acorde,
 That er was grounde of alle my blysse.

375 “My blysse, my bale, ye han ben bothe;
 Bot much the bygger yet was my mon
 Fro thou was wroken fro uch a wothe.
 I wyste never quere my perle was gon;
 Now I hit se, now lethes my lothe;
 And quen we departed we wern at on.
 God forbede we be now wrothe—
 380 We meten so selden by stok other ston!
 Thagh cortaysly ye carpe con
 I am bot mol and maneres mysse.
 Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon,
 Thise arn the grounde of alle my blysse.

30

“Deem you the Lord, Him indict?^o *accuse*
 Not a whit will He waver from His way.
 Your protests matter not a mite,
 Nor your sorrow can they allay.
 Stop the struggle and end the spite,
 And piously His pity pray.
 Your prayer His mercy may invite,
 Mercy may put its power in play;
 Its comfort can your grief allay,
 Out of gloom make joy to gleam.
 Rage and rave, or make no display,
 All lies with Him to judge and deem.”

7

31

I deemed it right to her to speak:
 “Against the Lord, let no wrath be!
 If madly I spoke, I am now meek;
 My heart’s regrets rise amply,
 Like water coursing in a creek.
 To His great mercy repair I me.
 Do not, I pray, to censure me seek
 Though I spoke in speech unseemly.
 But instead, in conduct kindly,
 Comfort me and consider this:
 To rueful rack you’ve reconciled me,
 You, who are source of all my bliss.

32

“To me you’ve been both bliss and woe,
 But woe has been the bigger part
 Since you from all life’s doles did go.
 I knew not why you did depart;
 It slakes my sorrow to see you so;
 We were as one ere we went apart,
 Now God forbid we grudging grow,
 Seldom I see you in any part.
 You speak to me from noble heart
 Though I be dust and manners miss,
 May Christ, Mary, and John impart
 Their mercy mild which makes my bliss.

385 "In blysse I se thee blythely blent,
 And I a man al mornyf mate;
 Ye take theron ful lyttel tente
 Thagh I hente ofte harmes hate.
 Bot now I am here in your presente
 390 I wolde bysech, wythouten debate,
 Ye wolde me say, in sobre asente,
 What lyf ye lede erly and late.
 For I am ful fayn that your astate
 Is worthen to worschyp and wele, iwysse;
 395 Of alle my joy the hyghe gate,
 Hit is in grounde of alle my blysse."

"Now blysse, burne, mot thee bytyde,"
 Then sayde that lufsoum of lyth and lere,
 "And welcum here to walk and byde,
 400 For now thy speche is to me dere.
 Maysterful mod and hyghe pryde
 I hete thee arn heterly hated here.
 My Lorde ne loves not for to chyde
 For meke arn alle that wones Hym nere,
 405 And when in Hys place thou schal apere
 Be dep devote in hol mekenesse.
 My Lorde the Lamb loves ay such chere;
 That is the grounde of alle my blysse."

"A blysful lyf thou says I lede;
 410 Thou woldes know therof the stage.
 Thow wost wel when thy perle con schede
 I was ful yong and tender of age,
 Bot my Lorde the Lombe, thurgh Hys Godhede
 He toke myself to Hys maryage,
 415 Corounde me quene in blysse to brede
 In lenghe of dayes that ever schal wage.
 And sesed in alle Hys herytage
 Hys lef is. I am holy Hysse—
 Hys pyese, Hys prys; and Hys parage
 420 Is rote and grounde of alle my blysse."

33

In bliss I see you blithely be
 While pains in me perpetuate;
 But of that you nothing seem to see
 Though my harm you, too, should hate.
 Now I've come in your company
 And will avoid all vain debate
 If you will surely show to me
 How you survive in this new state,
 For your new joy I celebrate,
 To do else I would be remiss,
 For all my joy this holy state
 Is the ground of all my bliss."

34

"May bliss betide you," the maiden cried,
 Lovely of limb, her face so clear,
 "Welcome here to walk and bide
 Now your discourse is to me dear.
 Masterful mood and haughty pride,
 I tell you true, are hated here.
 It does not cheer my Lord to chide,
 Docile are those who dwell Him near,
 And when before Him you shall appear,
 Be meek and show submissiveness.
 My Lord, the Lamb, much loves such cheer,
 Who is the ground of all my bliss."

35

"A blissful life you say I lead,
 But just how high you want to know
 Because when I from life was freed
 I was young of years, a child, but now
 My Lord, the Lamb, He has decreed
 His bride I be by holy vow,
 Crowned me queen, a doughty^o deed,
 With bliss eternal did me endow,
 To be His heir He did allow.
 His love I am, I am wholly His,
 His worth, His good, His glory now
 Is root and ground of all my bliss."

worthy, brave

8

“Blysful,” quoth I, “may thys be trwe?
 Dyspleses not if I speke errour.
 Art thou the quene of hevenes blwe
 That al thys worlde schal do honour?
 425 We leven on Marye that grace of grewe,
 That ber a barne of vyrgyn flour.
 The croune fro hyr, quo moght remwe
 Bot ho hir passed in sum favour?
 Now for synglerty o hyr dousour
 430 We calle hyr Fenyx of Arraby
 That freles flewe of hyr fasor
 Lyk to the quen of cortaysye.”

“Cortayse quen,” thenne sayde that gaye,
 Knelande to grounde, folde up hyr face,
 435 “Makeles moder and myrrest may,
 Blessed bygyner of uch a grace.”
 Thenne ros ho up and con restay
 And speke me towarde in that space,
 “Sir, fele here porchases and fonges pray
 440 Bot supplantores none wythinne thys place.
 That emperise al hevens has
 And urthe and helle in her bayly,
 Of erytage yet non wyl ho chace
 For ho is quen of cortaysye.

445 “The court of the kyndom of God alyve
 Has a property in hytself beyng;
 Alle that may therinne aryve
 Of alle the reme is quen other kyng;
 And never other yet schal depryve,
 450 Bot uchon fayn of otheres hafyng
 And wolde her corounes wern worthe tho fyve
 If possyble were her mending.
 Bot my lady of quom Jesu con spryng
 Ho haldes the empyre over uus ful hyghe,

8

36

“But blissful one, can this be true,”
 Said I, “or do I ask in error?
 Are you the queen of heaven blue
 Whom all on earth must hold in honor?
 We honor Mary from whom grace grew,
 Who while a virgin a babe she bore.
 Who could carry off her crown, who
 But one who had gained greater favor?
 Since her sweetness is the more,
 We call her the Phoenix of Araby,¹
 Fashioned flawless by her Creator,
 Like to the Queen of Courtesy.”

37

“Courteous Queen,” Pearl then said,
 Knelt on turf, turned up her face.
 “Matchless Mother, merriest Maid,
 Blessed beginner of every grace.”
 Up she stood, her prayer she stayed
 And spoke to me within that space:
 “Sir, many who seek here are well paid,
 But usurpers have here no place.
 That Empress’s realm does Heaven embrace,
 Earth and Hell, commands them she.
 From their due she will none displace,
 For she is Queen of Courtesy.

38

“The court of the King, God Alive,
 Respects a rule in its very being;
 Each who may therein arrive
 Of all that realm is queen or king.
 No one the other shall deprive,
 All rejoice in others’ having
 And wish their crowns were more by five,
 If one consider their amending.
 Mary, from whom Jesus did spring,
 Rules over us all completely,

¹ *Phoenix of Araby* The Phoenix was believed to live five hundred years, at the end of which it built a nest of frankincense and myrrh in which it was consumed by fire. Immediately, out of its own ashes, it arose again alive. Thus, the phoenix was in the Middle Ages a symbol of Christ or, more rarely, a symbol of Mary.

455 And that dyspleses non of oure gyng
For ho is quene of cortaysye.

“Of courtaisye, as says Saynt Poule,
Al arn we membres of Jesu Kryst.
As heved and arme and legg and navle
460 Temen to Hys body ful trwe and tryste,
Ryght so is uch a Krysten sawle
A longande lym to the mayster of myste.
Thenne loke what hate other any gawle
Is tached other tyed thy lymmes bytwyste;
465 Thy heved has nauther greme ne gryste
On arme other fynger, thagh thou ber byghe.
So fare we alle wyth luf and lyste
To kyng and quene, by cortaysye.”

“Cortaysé,” quoth I, “I leve,
470 And charyté grete be yow among.
Bot my speche that yow ne greve,
.....
Thyself in heven over hygh thou heve
To make thee quen that was so yonge.
475 What more honour moghte he acheve
That hade endured in worlde stronge
And lyved in penaunce hys lyves longe
Wyth bodyly bale hym blysse to byye?
What more worschyp moght he fonge
480 Then corounde be kyng by cortaysé?”

9

“That cortaysé is to fre of dede
Yf hyt be soth that thou cones saye.
Thou lyfed not two yer in oure thede;
Thou cowthes never God nauther plese ne pray

And that grieves none of her following,
For she is Queen of Courtesy.”

39

“By courtesy, as says Saint Paul,¹
All members of Jesus Christ are we,
As head and arm and leg and all,
Are justly joined to man’s body,
Just so is every Christian soul
Limb of the Lord spiritually.
Consider then if grudge or gall
Between your members could ever be.
Your head no hate has for your knee,
Nor for ring on finger has envy,
So fare we all with love full free
As kings and queens of courtesy.”

40

“Courtesy,” I said, “I do believe,
Charity too, ’mongst you do reign,
But at my speech you ought not grieve
.....²
Too high in heaven you do conceive
Yourself, so young, a place did gain.
What higher honor might one achieve
Who longer in life did remain,
Period of penance did maintain,
By trial and time redeemed he be?
What more honor might he attain
Than be crowned a king by courtesy?”

9

41

“Such courtesy is far too free,
If it be so what you now say.
Less than two years lived you with me.³
God you knew not to please or pray—

¹ *Saint Paul* The reference here is to Saint Paul’s analogy in 1 Corinthians 12.12–27, which produces the basis for the concept of the mystical body of Christ.

² The line is missing in the manuscript.

³ *Less than ... with me* This line establishes the age of Pearl and is the basis of identifying her as the narrator’s daughter, who died before her second birthday. The theological discussion of the poem is based on Pearl dying before reaching the age of reason (thought to be seven years old).

485 Ne never nawther Pater ne Crede—
 And quen mad on the fyrste day!
 I may not traw, so God me spede,
 That God wolde wrythe so wrange away.
 Of countes, damysel, par ma fay,
 490 Wer fayr in heven to halde asstate
 Other elles a lady of lasse aray -
 Bot a quene! Hit is to dere a date.”

“Ther is no date of Hys godnesse,”
 Then sayde to me that worthy wyghte,
 495 “For al is trawthe that He con dresse
 And He may do nothynk bot ryght.
 As Mathew meles in your Messe,
 In sothfol gospel of God almyght,
 In sample He can ful graythely gesse
 500 And lyknes hit to heven lyghte.
 ‘My regne,’ He says, ‘is lyk on hyght
 To a lorde that hade a vyne, I wate.
 Of tyme of yere the terme was tyght
 To labor vyne was dere the date.’

505 “That date of yere wel knawe thys hyne;
 The lorde ful erly up he ros
 To hyre werkmen to hys vyne
 And fyndes ther summe to hys porpos.
 Into acorde thay con declayne
 510 For a pené on a day, and forth thay gos,
 Wrythen and worchen and don gret pyne,
 Kerven and caggen and man hit clos.
 Aboute under the lorde to marked tos
 And ydel men stande he fyndes therate.
 515 ‘Why stande ye ydel?’ he sayde to thos,
 ‘Ne knawe ye of this day no date?’

Not Pater, not Creed, nor ABC—
 And made a queen the very first day!
 I cannot credit it, so help me,
 That God would act in such wrong way.
 A countess, damsel, by my fay,^o
 Were high enough as an estate,
 Or else a lady of less array.
 But Queen’s a rank too soon to date.”

faith

42
 “There is no date for His goodness,”
 She said to me, that maiden white,
 “For all is truth that His words express,
 And He will do no deed but right.
 In the Mass Matthew¹ does profess,
 In God’s Gospel that does truth indite,^o
 By parable does well impress,
 And compares his thought to celestial light:
 ‘My land,’ He says, ‘I liken might
 To vineyard ripe that does await
 The season when the time is right
 To have the harvest on that date.

utter

43
 That date’s well known to workers all.
 The master early up arose
 Harvesters to work to call,
 And some for this job he then chose.
 Into agreement they did fall
 To have a penny a day, and those
 Went off to labor, to lop and haul,
 Beginning before the sun arose.
 At nine the master to market goes
 And there sees some who idle wait:
 “Why stand ye idle? Shall I suppose
 Ye know not either date or day?”

¹ *In the Mass Matthew* See Matthew 20.1–16 for the parable here cited.

“‘Er date of daye hider arn we wonne,’
 So was al samen her answar soght.
 ‘We haf standen her syn ros the sunne
 520 And no mon byddes uus do ryght noght.’
 ‘Gos into my vyne, dos that ye conne,’
 So sayde the lorde and made hit toght.
 ‘What resonabele hyre be naght be runne,
 I yow pay in dede and thoghte.’
 525 Thay wente into the vyne and wroghte
 And al day the lorde thus yede his gate
 And nw men to hys vyne he broghte
 Welnegh wyl day was passed date.

“At the date of day of evensonge,
 530 On oure byfore the sonne go down,
 He sey ther ydel men ful stronge
 And sade to hem, wyth sobre soun,
 ‘Wy stonde ye ydel thise dayes longe?’
 Thay sayden her hyre was nawhere boun.
 535 ‘Gos to my vyne, yemen yonge,
 And wyrkes and dos that at ye moun.’
 Sone the worlde bycom wel broun,
 The sunne was down and hit wex late.
 To take her hyre he mad sumoun;
 540 The day was al apassed date.

10

“The date of the daye the lorde con know;
 Called to the reve, ‘Lede, pay the meyny!
 Gyf hem the hyre that I hem owe
 And fyrre, that non me may reprené,
 545 Set hem alle upon a rawe
 And gyf uchon inlyche a peny.
 Bygyn at the laste that standes lowe
 Tyl to the fyrste that thou atteny.’
 And thenne the fyrst bygonne to pleny
 550 And sayden that they hade travayled sore.
 ‘These bot on oure hem con streny!
 Uus thynk uus oghe to take more.

44

“We’ve been here since dawn of day!”
 This was their answer, plump and plain,
 “We’ve stood here since the sun’s first ray,
 But none our labor does retain.”
 “Go to my vineyard, work as you may,”
 Bade the lord, and made a bargain:
 “I vow in work and word to pay
 What wage you win by sweat and strain.”
 Into the vineyard they went for gain.
 But the vineyard’s lord took his way,
 Back to market he went again,
 And hired others late that day.

45

At the time of day for evensong,
 An hour before the sun had set,
 He saw there slacking men full strong.
 With biting words he them beset:
 “Why stand you idle the whole day long?”
 They said no work they had found yet.
 “Come to my vineyard, come along,
 And there you will good profit get.”
 Darkness soon the daylight met,
 The sun was spending its last ray,
 ’Twas time to pay the wage he’d set,
 For now had passed away the day.

10

46

The lord the time of day did know,
 Said to the steward, “Pay them all.
 Give them the wages that I owe,
 And, so I none of them appall,^o
 Range them all up in a row.
 Then pay to them a penny all.
 Start with the last who is below
 Till to the first the farthing fall.’
 But some, however, began to bawl,
 Said they had longer labored sore:
 “Others have worked but an hour in all.
 Surely by right we should get more.”

shock

555 “More haf we served, uus thynk so,
 That suffred han the dayes hete
 Thenn thyse that wroght not houres two—
 And thou dos hem uus to counterfete.’
 Thenne sayde the lorde to on of tho,
 ‘Frende, no waning I wyl thee gete.
 Take that is thyn owne and go
 560 And I hyred thee for a peny agrete.
 Quy bygynnes thou now to threte?
 Was not a pené thy covenauant thore?
 Fyrre then covenaunde is noght to plete.
 Wy schalte thou thenne aske more?

565 “More, wether loulyly is me my gyfte
 To do wyth myn quatso me lykes?
 Other elles thyn yye to lyther is lyfte
 For I am goude and non byswykes.’
 ‘Thus schal I,’ quoth Kryste, ‘hyt skyfte:
 570 The laste schal be the fyrst that strykes
 And the fyrst the laste, be he never so swyft.
 For mony ben called thagh fewe be mykes.’
 Thus pore men her part ay pykes
 Thagh thay com late and lyttel wore;
 575 And thagh her sweng wyth lyttel atslykes,
 The merci of God is much the more.

580 “More haf I of joye and blysse hereinne,
 Of ladyschyp gret and lyves blom,
 Then alle the wyyes in the worlde myght wynne
 By the way of ryght to aske dome.
 Whether welnygh now I con bygynne,
 In eventyde into the vyne I come.
 Fyrst of my hyre my Lorde con mynne;
 I was payed anon of al and sum.
 585 Yet other ther werne that toke more tom,
 That swange and swat for longe yore,
 That yet of hyre nothynk thay nom—
 Paraunter noght schal to-yere more.”

47

“More we worked, that well we know!
 We’ve labored through the long day’s heat.
 Others began two hours ago,¹
 Yet as equals you would all treat.”
 To him the master his mind did show:
 “You of your wage I do not cheat.
 Take what I promised you and go.
 I promised you a penny neat,
 So why with whining do you bleat?
 ’Twas a penny you bargained for;
 More than agreed, do not entreat.
 For what reason request you more?”

48

“Am I not allowed with my own gift
 To do with it whatever I will?
 Or do you your eye to envy lift
 Since I’m generous and of good will?”
 “Thus,” said Christ, “shall the order shift,
 The last shall be the first to cash his bill,
 The first shall be last no matter how swift.
 Many called but few chosen still.”
 Thus the poor may get their fill,
 Though the last come late and not before,
 And though their work may be judged ill,
 The mercy of God is much the more.

49

“More joy and bliss have I herein,
 Of ladyship and life eterne,
 Than all those on earth might win
 Through good works, reward to earn.
 Though only now I entered in,
 Came to vineyard at daylight’s turn,
 The Lord with me did pay begin.
 Full pay He gave I could discern,
 Though others still for more did yearn
 Who toiled and troubled long before
 But more money they did not earn,
 And may need wait for yet years more.”

¹ *Others began . . . ago* In the parable reported by Matthew the line paraphrased here (Matthew 20.12) reads “these have wrought but one hour and thou hast made them equal to us.” The poet has changed “one hour” to two, perhaps for the sake of rhyme, but also to parallel the two years that Pearl has spent on earth. In line 551 the line from Matthew is paraphrased correctly.

Then more I meled and sayde apert,
 590 "Me thyngk thy tale unresounable.
 Goddes ryght is redy and evermore rert
 Other Holy Wryt is bot a fable.
 In Sauter is sayd a verce overte
 That spekes a poynt determynable:
 595 'Thou quytes uchon as hys desserte,
 Thou hyghe kyng ay pertermynable.'
 Now he that stod the long day stable
 And thou to payment com hym byfore—
 Thenne the lasse in werke to take more able,
 600 And ever the lenger the lasse, the more."

11

"Of more and lasse in Godes ryche,"
 That gentyl sayde, "lys no joparde,
 For ther is uch mon payed inlyche
 Whether lyttel other much be hys rewarde.
 605 For the gentyl Cheventayn is no chyche;
 Quether-so-ever He dele, nesch other harde,
 He laves Hys gyftes as water of dyche
 Other gotes of golf that never charde.
 Hys fraunchyse is large; that ever dard
 610 To Hym that mas in synne rescoghe,
 No blysse bes fro hem reparde,
 For the grace of God is gret inoghe.

"Bot now thou motes, me for to mate
 That I my peny haf wrang tan here;
 615 Thou says that I that com to late
 Am not worthy so gret fere.
 Where wystes thou ever any bourne abate,
 Ever so holy in hys prayere,
 That he ne forfeited by sumkyn gate
 620 The mede sumtyme of hevenes clere?
 And ay the ofter, the alder thay were;
 Thay laften ryght and wroghten woghe.

50

I spoke again and simply said:
 "Unreasonable is what you say.
 God's justice is in all displayed,
 Or else Scripture sends us astray.
 In Psalter¹ there is a verse portrayed
 In which the wholesome truth holds sway:
 By his deserts each one is paid
 By the High King who does all survey.
 If one did labor all the day,
 And at pay time you passed before,
 Then laboring less gets better pay.
 It is not right that less gets more."

11

51

"Of more and less in God's domains
 No question arises," said the maid,
 "For same stipend there each one gains,
 And every man equally paid.
 No cheat our Chief who royally reigns,
 Whether sore or sweet His gifts conveyed.
 His Grace like rivers He on us rains,
 Like streams whose flows are never stayed.
 His gifts are endlessly displayed.
 For those who love Him he will rebuff
 All of their faults, their faith repaid,
 For the Grace of God is great enough.²

52

"Now you try to get checkmate,
 Saying my wage unfairly was got,
 That to the vineyard I came too late,
 And such a fee deserve I not.
 You know that of men one does relate
 That however pious be their lot
 Still they forfeit some of their estate,
 Heaven's prize that they had sought.
 The longer on earth, the more they're caught,
 Seized by sin in vice's vile slough.

¹ *Psalter* Book containing the Psalms. The reference here is to Psalm 15 and Psalm 24.3–4.

² *enough* The Middle English word "inoghe/eno e" rhymes with and means the same as the word "now," and thus the linking function here is preserved.

Mercy and grace moste hem then stere,
For the grace of God is gret innoghe.

625 “Bot innoghe of grace has innocent.
As sone as thay arn borne by lyne
In the water of babtem thay dyssente.
Then arne thay boroght into the vyne.
Anon the day, with derk endente,
630 The nyght of deth dos to enclyne
That wroght never wrang er thenne thay wente.
The gentyle Lorde thenne payes hys hyne;
Thay dyden hys heste, thay wern thereine.
Why schulde he not her labour alow—
635 Yys, and pay hym at the fyrste fyne?
For the grace of God is gret innoghe.

“Inoghe is knawen that mankyn grete
Fyrste was wroght to blysse parfyt;
Oure forme fader hit con forfete
640 Thurgh an apple that he upon con byte.
Al wer we dampned for that mete,
To dyye in doel out of delyt
And sythen wende to helle hete
Therinne to won withoute respyt.
645 Bot theron com a bote astyt;
Ryche blod ran on Rode so roghe
And wynne water then at that plyt.
The grace of God wex gret innoghe.

“Innoghe ther wax out of that welle,
650 Blod and water of brode wounde;
The blod uus boght fro bale of helle,
And delyvered uus of deth secounde.
The water is baptem, the sothe to telle,
That folwed the glayve so grymly grounde,
655 That wasches away the gyltes felle
That Adam wyth inne deth uus drounde.
Now is ther noght in the worlde rounde
Bytwene uus and blysse bot that he wythdrow,
And that is restored in sely stounde,
660 And the grace of God is gret innogh.

By God’s great Grace they will be bought
For the Grace of God is great enough.

53
“Enough of Grace have the innocent
As soon as born, by lawful line.
Through baptism be their descent,
And then they venture to prune the vine.
Anon the day, its splendor spent
Does toward the death of night incline.
Who did no wrong before they went,
To them will the Lord rewards assign.
They worked His will in their confine,
Why should God their work rebuff,
Or not to them first rank assign?
For the Grace of God is great enough.

54
“Well enough Mankind we know
First to bliss was wrought aright,
But our first father^o fell so low
840 When the apple he did bite.
Through that fruit were we damned to woe,
To doleful death without delight,
And to the heat of hell to go,
To wail in woe without respite.
But soon a saviour did quick alight
And rich blood ran on the rood so rough,
And water, too; so for that plight
The Grace of God was great enough.

Adam

55
“Waters enough washed from that well,
Blood and water from widened wound:
Blood that bought us from baleful hell.
From second death we were unbound.
Baptism the water, truth to tell,
Spilt by the lance sharpened so sound.
All guilt it washes away quite well,
Through which by Adam in death we drowned.
Now there is not in the wide world round
A bar to bliss He has not cast off
And given us back a bliss profound,
For the Grace of God is great enough.

12

“Grace innogh the mon may have
 That synnes thenne new, yif hym repente;
 Bot wyth sorw and syt he mot hit crave
 And byde the payne therto is bent.
 665 Bot resoun, of ryght that con not rave,
 Saves evermore the innoscent.
 Hit is a dom that never God gave
 That ever the gyltles schulde be schente.
 The gyltyf may contrysyoun hente
 670 And be thurgh mercy to grace thryght,
 Bot he to gyle that never glente
 As inoscente is saf and ryghte.

“Ryght thus I know wel in this cas
 Two men to save is God, by skylle;
 675 The ryghtwys man schal se Hys face,
 The harmles hathel schal com Hym tyll.
 The Sauter hyt sas thus in a pace,
 ‘Lorde, quo schal klymbe Thy hyghe hylle
 Other rest wythinne Thy holy place?’
 680 Hymself to onsware He is not dylle:
 ‘Hondelynges harme that dyt not ille,
 That is of hert bothe clene and lyght—
 Ther schal hys stepe stable stytle.’
 The innosent is ay saf by ryght.

685 “The ryghtwys man also sertayn
 Aproche he schal that proper pyle
 That takes not her lyf in vayne
 Ne glaueres her nieghbor wyth no gyle.
 Of thys ryghtwys, sas Salamon playn,
 690 How kyntly oure Koyntyse hym con aquyle.
 By wayes ful streght he con hym strayn
 And scheued hym the rengne of God awhyle,
 As quo says, ‘Lo, yon lovely yle!
 Thou may hit wynne if thou be wyghte.’
 695 Bot hardyly, wythoute peryle,
 The innosent is ay save by ryghte.

12

56

“Grace is enough that man may have
 Who sins anew, if he repent.
 With sobs and sighs he must it crave,
 Perform the penance that is sent.
 But reason, that rightness cannot waive,
 Always saves the innocent.
 Unjust pain God never gave;
 To grieve the guiltless He never meant.
 The guilty must to confess assent,
 And through His mercy Grace incite.
 But those who to sin did not consent,
 Their innocence saves them by right.

57

“Right thus I now knew in this case
 Two types of men God may save by skill:
 The righteous man shall see His face;
 The innocent man come to Him will.
 The Psalter asks in a certain place:
 ‘Lord, who shall mount Thy mighty hill,
 Or stay within Thy holy space?’
 Quick to answer is His will:
 ‘He who with hand has done no ill,
 Who is of heart both hale° and light,
 There shall his step be stable still.’
 Innocence is ever safe by right.

healthy

58

“The righteous man, I do maintain,
 He shall approach God’s domicile.
 Who does not lead his life in vain
 And does his neighbor not beguile.
 The righteous man, says Solomon plain,¹
 Honors fittingly can compile.
 Wisdom’s ways did him constrain²
 And showed to him God’s reign awhile,
 As if to say, ‘that lovely isle
 Could be your home and heart’s delight.’
 But sure it is, there’s no denial,
 The innocent are saved by right.

¹ *Solomon plain* Prophet and king of Israel.

² *Wisdom’s ways ... constrain* Reference to Wisdom 10.10 where Wisdom is personified as a woman. Medieval exegetes identified Wisdom as Christ.

“Anende ryghtwys men, yet says a gome,
 David in Sauter if ever ye sey hit,
 ‘Lorde, Thy servaunt draw never to dome,
 700 For non lyvyande to Thee is justyfyet.’
 Forthy to corte, quen thou schal com
 Ther alle oure causes schal be tryed,
 Alege the ryght—thou may be innome
 By thys ilke spech I have asspyed.
 705 Bot He on Rode that bloody dyed,
 Delffully thurgh hondes thryght,
 Gyve thee to passe, when thou arte tryed,
 By innocens, and not by ryghte.

“Ryghtwysly quo con rede,
 710 He loke on bok and be awayed
 How Jesus Hym welke in arethede,
 And burnes her barnes unto Hym brayde
 For happe and hele that fro Hym yede.
 To touch her chylde thay fayr Hym prayed.
 715 His dessypeles wyth blame, ‘Let be!’ hym bede,
 And wyth her resounes ful fele restayed.
 Jesus thenne hem swetely sayde,
 ‘Do way, let chylde unto me tyght;
 To suche is hevenryche arayed.’
 720 The innocent is ay saf by ryght.

13

“Jesu con calle to Hym Hys mylde
 And sayde Hys ryche no wyy myght wynne
 Bot he com thyder ryght as a chylde
 Other elles nevermore com therinne.
 725 Harmles, trwe, and undefylde,
 Wythouten mote other mascle of sulpande synne—
 Quen such ther cnoken on the bylde,
 Tyt schal hem men the gate unpynne.
 Ther is the blys that con not blynne
 730 That the jueler soghte thurgh perré pres

59

About rightness, a man once thought,
 ’Twas David who in Psalter cried:
 “Thy servant, Lord, condemn him not,
 For none of the living are justified.”¹
 When to the bar you shall be brought
 Where all our cases will be tried,
 Asserting your right will come to naught,
 By this same speech I have descried.
 May He on cross that bloody died—
 The spikes in His hands held him tight—
 Grant you Grace when you are tried,
 For innocence and not by right.

60

Let him whoso can rightly read
 Look on the Book and be there taught²
 How Jesus lived with ancient seed
 And cherished children to Him brought,
 To seek health and hope in their need.
 His touch on their young the elders sought.
 “Let Him be!” the apostles plead
 And with their cries the crowd besought.
 But Jesus sweetly said, “You ought
 Welcome the children whom I invite,
 For the likes of them is Heaven wrought.”
 The innocent are saved by right.

13

61³

Jesus summoned His servants mild
 And said no man his realm could win
 Unless he come there like a child;
 Else never should he enter in.
 Innocent, true, and undefiled
 By mark or mote^o of soiling sin,
 When come calling these unbeguiled
 For them men shall the gate unpin.
 Ceaseless bliss there is therein
 That the jeweler did with gems equate.⁴

particle

¹ *For none ... are justified* Cf. Psalms 143.2.

² *Let him whoso ... taught* See Matthew 19.13–15, Mark 10.13–16, and Luke 18.15–17.

³ 61 The only stanza that is not linked with the previous one.

⁴ *That the jeweler ... equate* See Matthew 13.45–46.

And solde alle hys goud, bothe wolen and lynne,
To bye hym a perle was mascelles.

735 “This makelles perle, that boght is dere,
The joueler gef fore alle hys god,
Is lyke the reme of hevenesse clere—
So sayde the Fader of folde and flode—
For hit is wemles, clene, and clere,
And endeles rounde and blythe of mode,
And commune to alle that ryghtwys were.
740 Lo, even inmyddes my breste hit stode!
My Lorde, the Lombe that schede Hys blode,
He pyght hit there in token of pes.
I rede thee forsake the worlde wode
And porchace thy perle maskelles.”

745 “O maskeles perle, in perles pure,
That beres,” quoth I, “the perle of prys,
Quo formed thee thy fayre fygyre?
That wrought thy wede, He was ful wys.
Thy beauté com never of nature;
750 Pymalyon paynted never thy vys,
Ne Arystotel nawther by hys lettrure
Of carpe the kynde these propertes.
Thy colour passes the flour-de-lys;
Thyn angel-havyng so clene cortes—
755 Breve me, bryght, quat kyn ostriys
Beres the perle so maskelles?”

760 “My makeles Lambe that al may bete,”
Quoth scho, “my dere destyné,
Me ches to Hys make, althagh unmete
Sumtyme semed that assemblé.
When I wente fro yor worlde wete,
He calde me to Hys bonerté:
‘Cum hyder to me, my lemman swete

And sold all the goods that he did win
To purchase a pearl immaculate.

62

“This pearl immaculate, bought so dear,
Which cost the jeweler all his good,
Is like unto the heavens clear,
So said the Father of field and flood,
For it is spotless, clean, and clear,
An endless round, merry of mood
And shared by all the righteous here.
Lo! In the midst of my breast it stood.
My Lord the Lamb who shed His blood,
Pointer to peace, placed it ornate.
‘I bid you scorn all worldly good
And purchase the pearl immaculate.’”

63

“Immaculate pearl in pearls so pure.
Who bears,” said I, “the pearl as prize,
Who formed for you your fair figure?
Who wrought your wardrobe was full wise.
Your beauty never was from nature,
Pygmalion¹ did not your face devise,
Nor did Aristotle’s literature
Your person’s properties apprise.
Your hue the fleur-de-lys defies,
Angel-like your every trait.
What rank, bright one, me advise,
May wear this pearl immaculate.”

64

“Immaculate Lamb all ills does treat,”
Said she. “My dearest destiny
As mate chose me, although unmeet
May have seemed that nobility.
When from your world I did retreat
He called me to His company:
‘Come forth to me beloved sweet,

¹ *Pygmalion* Mythical sculptor whose works were so magnificent that he fell in love with a statue of a woman he had carved in ivory. Through the intervention of Venus, the statue was brought to life and Pygmalion consummated his desire for her (See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*). In the Middle Ages, the story of Pygmalion was interpreted as a warning against delusions caused by lust.

765 For mote ne spot is non in thee.¹
 He gef me myght and als bewté;
 In Hys blod He wesch my wede on dese
 And coronde clene in vergynté,
 And pyght me in perles maskelles.”

770 “Why, maskelles bryd, that bryght con flambe,
 That reiates has so ryche and ryf,
 Quat kyn thyng may be that Lambe
 That thee wolde wedde unto Hys vyf?
 Over alle other so hygh thou clambe
 To lede wyth Hym so ladyly lyf.
 775 So mony a comly anunnder cambe
 For Kryst han lyved in much stryf,
 And thou con alle tho dere out dryf
 And from that maryag al other depres—
 Al only thyself so stout and styf,
 780 A makeles may and maskelles.”

14

“Maskelles,” quoth that myry quene,
 “Unblemyst I am, wythouten blot,
 And that may I wyth mensk menteene,
 Bot ‘makeles quene’—thenne sade I not.
 785 The Lambes uyves in blysse we bene,
 A hondred and forty thowsande flot
 As in the Apocalypes hit is sene.
 Sant John hem syy al in a knot
 On the hyl of Syon, that semly clot;
 790 The apostel hem segh in gostly drem,
 Arayed to the weddyng in that hyl-coppe,
 The nwe cyté o Jerusalem.

For there is no spot in thee.¹
 Force and fairness He gave to me.
 My robes in His blood did He consecrate
 And crowned me clean in virginity,
 Covered me in pearls immaculate.”

65

“Immaculate bride blazing bright,
 Displaying royalty rich and rife,
 What kind of Lamb is He who might
 Wed you as His eternal wife?
 Above all others you claim the right
 To lead with Him such lofty life.
 So many, comely combed, in plight
 Have lived for Christ, in strain and strife,
 And all those dears you did deprive,
 Chance of marriage you did extirpate,^o
 To be the only bride so blithe,^o
 A matchless maid immaculate.”

destroy
gentle

14

66

“Immaculate,” said that fair queen,
 “Unblemished I am, without a blot;
 That state I got through Grace’s lien.²
 But ‘matchless queen’ I said not.
 All are wives of the Lamb, I mean,
 A hundred forty thousand fraught.³
 In Apocalypse it may be seen.
 Saint John them saw as in a knot,
 On Sion’s hill, that seemly spot.
 In a dream th’Apostle did see them
 Mantled for marriage on that hill top,
 The city called New Jerusalem.⁴

¹ *Come forth to me ... in thee* See Song of Songs 4.7. This was a widespread medieval hymn to the Virgin. A popular version is found in Chaucer’s “General Prologue” (line 672) to the *Canterbury Tales*.

² *lien* I.e., through God’s grace.

³ *A hundred ... fraught* See Revelation 14.1, where the number of virgins is given as 144,000. The poet gives this number in lines 869–70.

⁴ *The city called New Jerusalem* See Revelation 21.2f.

795 “Of Jerusalem I in speche spelle;
 If thou wyl know what kyn He be,
 My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere juelle,
 My joy, my blys, my lemman fre,
 The profete Ysaye of Hym con melle
 Pitously of Hys debonerté:
 800 ‘That glorious gyltles that mon con quelle
 Wythouten any sake of felonye,
 As a schep to the slaght ther lad was He,
 And as lombe that clypper in lande nem,
 So closed He hys mouth fro uch query’—
 Quen Jues Hym jugged in Jerusalem.

805 “In Jerusalem was my lemman slayn
 And rent on Rode wyth boyes bolde.
 Al oure bales to bere ful bayn,
 He toke on Hymself oure cares colde;
 Wyth boffetes was Hys face flayn
 810 That was so fayr on to byholde.
 For synne He set Hymself in vayn
 That never hade non Hymself to wolde.
 For uus He lette Hym flyye and folde
 And brede upon a bostwys bem;
 815 As meke as lomp that no playnt tolde
 For uus He swalt in Jerusalem.

820 “Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galalye,
 Ther as baptysed the goude Saynt Jon,
 His wordes acorded to Ysaye.
 When Jesu con to hym warde gon,
 He sayde of Hym thys professye:
 ‘Lo, Godes Lombe, as trwe as ston,
 That dos away the synnes dryye
 That alle thys worlde has wroght upon.’
 825 Hymself ne wroghte never yet non
 Whether on Hymself He con al clem.
 Hys generacyoun quo recen con
 That dyed for uus in Jerusalem?

67

“Of Jerusalem the tale I tell,
 If you wish to know what He be,
 My Lamb, my Lord, whom I love well,
 My joy, my bliss, my beloved free.
 Prophet Isaiah on Him did dwell,¹
 Describing His humility,
 That matchless man whom they did quell,
 Though no finding was there of felony.
 A sheep to slaughter led was He;
 Like lambs when the shearer seizes them,
 He closed His mouth to each query
 When judged by Jews in Jerusalem.

68

“In Jerusalem He was slain
 And bound on cross by bullies bold.
 Our sins He bore to lift our bane,
 Carried He our curse so cold.
 Blows and buffets His face did stain,
 A face so fair once to behold.
 For our sins His life He did distain,
 Though of Him no sin was told.
 For us to torture was He sold,
 Stretched on the cross’s wooden stem,
 Meek as a lamb of the fleecy fold
 For us He died in Jerusalem.

69

“Jerusalem, Jordan, Galilee
 Where baptized the good Saint John,²
 With Isaiah’s his words agree.
 When to him had Jesus gone,
 He spoke of Him this prophesy:
 ‘Tried and true, God’s Lamb took on
 Himself mankind’s iniquity—
 All sorry sins that man had done.
 Although He had committed none,
 He bore the blame for all of them.
 Proclaim the pedigree well known
 Of Him who died in Jerusalem.’”³

¹ *Prophet Isaiah ... dwell* See Isaiah 53.7.

² *Jerusalem ... Saint John* There is no evidence to support the suggestion here that John baptized elsewhere than in the river Jordan.

³ *All sorry sins ... in Jerusalem* The poet asserts that John 1.29 is an allusion to Isaiah 53.

830 “In Jerusalem thus my lemman swete
 Twyes for lombe was taken there,
 By trw recorde of ayther prophete,
 For mode so meke and al Hys fare.
 The thryde tyme is therto ful mete,
 In Apokalypes wryten ful yare.
 835 In mydes the trone there sayntes sete,
 The apostel John Hym saw as bare,
 Lesande the boke with leves sware
 There seven syngnettes wern sette in seme;
 And at that syght uche douth con dare
 840 In helle, in erthe, in Jerusalem.

15

“Thys Jerusalem Lombe hade never pechche
 Of other huee bot quyrt jolyf
 That mot ne maskle moght on streche,
 For wolfe quyte so ronk and ryf.
 845 Forthy uche saule that hade never teche
 Is to that Lombe a worthyly wyf,
 And thagh uch day a store He feche
 Among uus commes nouthter strot ne stryf,
 Bot uchon enlé we wolde were fyf.
 850 The mo the myrtyr, so God me blesse!
 In compayny gret our luf con thryf,
 In honour more and never the lesse.

855 “Lasse of blysse may non uus bryng
 That beren thys perle upon oure bereste,
 For thay of mote couthe never mynge
 Of spotles perles tha beren the creste.
 Althagh oure corses in clottes clynge
 And ye remen for rauthe wythouten reste,
 We thurghoutly haven cnawyng;
 860 Of on dethe ful oure hope is drest.
 The Lombe uus glades, oure care is kest;

70

In Jerusalem my Beloved sweat.
 Twice the Lamb was taken there
 By true account of each prophet.¹
 His manner meek where'er He fare.
 Beside those two the third is set
 As th'Apocalypse does declare.
 Mid the throne where saints were set,
 Apostle John his words laid bare,
 Perusing the Book's pages square²
 Where seven seals were on them set.
 At that sight all souls were ware^o
 In hell, earth, and Jerusalem.

wary

15³

71

“The Jerusalem Lamb had no stain
 Of other hue but whitest white,
 Where no spot, no speck could remain;
 His wool was white and blazing bright.
 Thus all souls that from sin refrain
 Are worthy wives to the Lamb by right.
 Though daily He more souls does gain,
 We have no hate nor sense of sleight—
 Were each one five, it would us delight.
 The more the merrier, God me bless!
 By greater number loves gains might
 In honor more and never the less.

72

“Less bliss may none of us here bring
 Who bear this pearl upon our breast,
 Of quarrel's qualms we know no thing
 Who bear of purest pearls the crest.
 Our corpses in clods lie moldering,
 And you groan and grieve without arrest,
 But we understand everything
 Concerning death, where hope is best.
 Fear of death the Lamb puts to rest,

¹ *By true ... each prophet* Reference to the three descriptions of Christ's silent suffering by Isaiah (819), John the Baptist (818), and John the Evangelist (the “third” of line 833).

² *pages square* Reference to pages in a book, whereas in Revelation what John reads is a scroll.

³ 15 Here begins the section that contains an extra stanza.

He myrthes uus alle at uch a mes.
 Uchones blysse is breme and beste—
 And never ones honour yet never the les.

865 “Lest les thou leve my tale farande,
 In Appocalyppece is wryten in wro:
 ‘I seghe,’ says John, ‘the Loumbe Hym stande
 On the Mount of Syon ful thryven and thro,
 And wyth Hym maydennes an hundrethe thowsande
 870 And fowre and forty thowsande mo.
 On alle her forhedes wryten I fande
 The Lombes nome, Hys Faderes also.
 A hue fro heven I herde thoo,
 Lyk flodes fele laden runnen on resse,
 875 And as thunder throwes in torres blo
 That lote, y leve, was never the les.

“Nautheles thagh hit schowted sharpe
 And ledden loude althagh hit were,
 A note ful nwe I herde hem warpe;
 880 To lysten that was ful luffly dere.
 As harpores harpen in her harpe,
 That nwe songe thay songen ful cler
 In sounande notes, a gentyl carpe.
 Ful fayre the modes thay fonge in fere
 885 Ryght byfore Godes chayere,
 And the fowre bestes that Hym obes,
 And the aldermen so sadde of chere—
 Her songe thay songen never the les.

“Nowthelese, non was never so quoynt
 890 For alle the craftes that ever thay knewe,
 That of that songe myght synge a poynt
 Bot that meyny the Lombe that swe.
 For thay arn boght, fro the urthe aloynte,
 As newe fryt to God ful due,
 895 And to the gentyl Lombe hit arn anjoynt
 As lyk to Hymself of lote and hwe.
 For never lesyng ne tale untrwe
 Ne towched her tonge for no dysstresse.
 That moteles meyny may never remwe
 900 Fro that maskeles mayster never the les.”

At Mass He heaps on happiness,
 And each one’s bliss is blithely blest,
 Yet no one’s honor is any the less.

73
 “Lest less my tale you do believe,
 Apocalypse announces clear:¹
 ‘I can,’ says John, ‘the Lamb perceive,
 On Zion’s mount He does appear.
 Maids a hundred thousand to Him cleave,
 Forty four thousand more adhere,
 Who all on forehead do receive
 The name of the Lamb and His Father’s dear.
 A hue from heaven I did hear
 Like roar of rivers’ swift egress,^o
 And like the thud of thunder drear.
 That sound I swear was never the less.”

going out

74
 “Nonetheless, though it raged and roared,
 And had a voice so harsh to hear,
 A new note then they did record,
 Clarion clefs of notes so clear,
 As harpers harp and hail accord,
 To sing new song they did persevere.
 Full fair the flow of notes so near
 To God’s great throne that they revere,
 And the four beasts who Him did bless,
 And Elders all with look severe,
 Their song they sang, nevertheless.”

75
 “Nevertheless, none had skill so great,
 For all the crafts they ever knew,
 In that song to participate
 Save those who did the Lamb ensue.
 For they from earth had left of late
 Like first fruits that to God are due,
 And with the Lamb associate,
 Like to Him in humor and hue.
 Never lying nor tale untrue
 Touched their tongues to cause distress.
 That unblotched band never withdrew
 From their matchless Master, nevertheless.”

¹ *Apocalypse announces clear* See Apocalypse 14.1–5.

“Never the les let be my thonc,”
 Quoth I, “my perle, thagh I appose.
 I schulde not tempte thy wyt so wlonc
 To Krystes chambre that art ichose.
 905 I am bot mokke and mul among,
 And thou so ryche a reken rose
 And bydes here by thys blysful bonc
 Ther lyves lyste may never lose.
 Now, hynde, that sympelnesse cones enclose,
 910 I wolde thee aske a thyng expressse,
 And thagh I be bustwys as a blose,
 Let my bone vayle never the lese.

16

“Neverthelese cler I yow bycalle
 If ye con se hyt be to done.
 915 As thou art glorious, wythouten galle,
 Wythnay thou never my ruful bone.
 Haf ye no wones in castel walle,
 Ne maner ther ye may mete and won?
 Thou telles me of Jerusalem, the ryche ryalle,
 920 Ther David dere was dyght on trone—
 Bot by thyse holtes hit con not hone,
 Bot in Judee hit is, that noble note.
 As ye ar maskeles under mone,
 Your wones schulde be wythouten mote.

925 “Thys moteles meyny thou cones of mele,
 Of thousandes thryght, so gret a route—
 A gret ceté, for ye arn fele,
 Yow byhod have wythouten doute.
 So cumly a pakke of joly juele
 930 Wer evel don schulde lyy theroute;
 And by thyse bonkes ther I con gele
 I se no bygyng nawhere aboute.
 I trowe alone ye lenge and loute
 To loke on the glory of thys gracious gote.
 935 If thou has other bygynges stoute,
 Now tech me to that myry mote.”

76

“Nonetheless, my thanks to you,”
 Said I, “Pearl, though questions I pose.
 I would not test your wit so true,
 You who Christ to His chamber chose.
 I am with muck and mold run through,
 And you so rich and rare a rose
 Who in this land live all anew,
 Dwell in delight you’ll never lose,
 You who do all grace enclose,
 I would beg of you a boon express:
 Though I be boorish, heaven knows,
 Accept my prayer, nevertheless.

16

77

“Nevertheless, I you entreat,
 That you accept my piteous plea.
 You, whose perfection is complete,
 Refuse not to respond to me.
 Have you no house on strand or street,
 No manor to meet in nobly?
 You speak of Jerusalem, city sweet,
 Where David, King, ruled royally.
 That is not here in woods or lea,^o
 But in Judea, that earthly plot.
 As under moon you moteless be,
 Your home should be without a spot.

meadow

78

“A spotless company you describe,
 Thousands strong. So great a rout
 A citadel should circumscribe.
 A treasure trove, without a doubt,
 To all your troupe I would ascribe,
 But not if left to lie about.
 Not by these banks on any side
 See I a building strong and stout.
 You linger alone without redoubt^o
 And gaze upon this glorious lot.
 If you have lodgings hereabout,
 Show to me that special spot.”

fortification

“That mote thou menes in Judy londe,”
 That specyal spyce then to me spakk.
 “That is the cyté that the Lombe con fonde
 940 To soffer inne sor for manes sake.
 The olde Jerusalem, to understonde,
 For there the olde gulte was don to slake.
 Bot the nwe that lyght, of Godes sonde,
 The apostel in Apocalyppe in theme con take.
 945 The Lompe ther wythouten spottes blake
 Has feryed thyder Hys fayre flote,
 And as Hys flok is wythouten flake,
 So is Hys mote wythouten moote.

“Of motes two to carpe clene
 950 And Jerusalem hyght bothe, nawtheles—
 That nys to yow no more to mene
 Bot ‘Ceté of God’ other ‘Syght of Pes’—
 In that on oure pes was mad at ene.
 With payne to suffer the Lombe hit chese.
 955 In that other is noght bot pes to glene
 That ay schal laste wythouten reles.
 That is the borgh that we to pres
 Fro that oure flesh be layd to rote;
 Ther glory and blysse schal ever encrese
 960 To the meyny that is wythouten mote.”

“Moteles may, so meke and mylde,”
 Then sayde I to that lufly flor,
 “Bryng me to that bygly bylde
 And let me se thy blysfyl bor.”
 965 That schene sayde, “That God wyl schylde!
 Thou may not enter wythinne Hys tor.
 Bot of the Lombe I have thee aquylde
 For a syght therof thurgh gret favor.
 Utwyth to se that clene cloystor
 970 Thou may, bot inwyth not a fote;
 To strech in the strete thou has no vygour
 Bot thou wer clene wythouten mote.

“You speak of a spot in Judah land,”
 That splendid spirit to me spake,
 “A city where the Lamb had planned
 His sacrifice for mankind’s sake—
 ‘Old’ Jerusalem understand.
 The grip of guilt He would there break.
 Of the ‘New,’ built by God’s command,
 Th’Apocalypse a theme would make.
 The Lamb for His company’s sake
 Led us here to this lovely lot.
 Just as His flock all stains forsake,
 So is His spot without a spot.

“Jerusalem as spot may mean
 To us, at once, two things apiece;
 The simple sense well you wean°
 As ‘City of God,’ ‘Place of Peace.’
 In one, was made our peace serene
 Where the Lamb chose pain without release.
 In th’other eternal peace we glean,
 Perfect peace that will never cease.
 Thence we travel, let our speed increase,
 From the time our flesh begins to rot.
 There glory and bliss, like white fleece,
 Will mantle the many without spot.”

understand

“Maid without spot, so mild and meek,”
 Said I to that lovely flower,
 “To enter there is what I seek.
 Let me see that blissful bower!”
 “God on that a ban did speak;
 You may not enter His holy tower,
 But from Him a favor I did eke,°
 One he did grant in all His power,
 For you to view it, but from outer:
 From without you may, within may not!
 To enter in you have no power,
 Before you are clean without a spot.

also

17

“If I this mote thee schal unhyde,
 Bow up towarde thys bornes heved,
 975 And I anendes thee on thys syde
 Schal sue tyl thou to a hil be veved.”
 Then wolde I no lenger byde,
 Bot lurked by launces so lufly leved
 Tyl, on a hyl, that I asspyed,
 980 And blusched on the burghe as I forth dreved.
 Byyonde the brok, fro me warde keved
 That schyrrer then sunne wyth schaftes schon.
 In the Apokalypce is the fasoun preved
 As devyses hit the apostel John.

985 As John the apostel hit sye with syght,
 I sye that cyty of gret renoun,
 Jerusalem so nwe and ryally dyght
 As hit was lyght fro the heven adoun.
 The borch was al of brende golde bryght,
 990 As glemande glas burnist broun—
 Wyth gentyl gemmes anunder pyght,
 Wyth bauteles twelve on basyng boun,
 The foundementes twelve of riche tenoun.
 Uch tabelment was a serlypes ston,
 995 As derely devyses this ilke toun
 In Apocalypes the apostel John.

As John thise stones in Writ con nemme,
 I knew the name after his tale:
 Jasper hyght the fyrste gemme
 1000 That I on fyrst basse con wale.
 He glente grene in the lowest hemme;
 Saffer helde the secounde stale.
 The calsydoyne thenne wythouten wemme,
 In the thrydde table con purly pale.
 1005 The emerade, the furthe, so grene of scale;
 The sardonysse, the fyfthe ston,
 The sexte, the rybé, he con hit wale
 In the Apocalypce the apostel John.

17

82

“So I may to you this spot unhide,
 Turn up here toward the river’s head,
 And along with you, on my side,
 I’ll walk till to hill you’re led.”
 I couldn’t wait, I wouldn’t bide,
 But bounded through branches, broadly spread,
 Until on a hill I espied,
 Made out a city,¹ and there I sped.
 Beyond the brook there was its stead,
 Sheerer than shafts of sun it shone.
 In Apocalypse it is thus read
 As written by Apostle John.

83

Like Saint John with open eye
 I saw a city of great renown:
 Jerusalem stood royally,
 As if were sent from Heaven down,
 Gilded² gold, of flaws all free,
 Like gleaming glass the entire town.
 Bejeweled the base generously;
 Twelve cross beams there set on stone,
 On foundations lying prone,
 A single stone was placed upon,
 As does describe in reverent tone,
 In Apocalypse, Apostle John.

overlaid with

84

These stones does John in Scripture name,
 And by his account these names I knew:
 First in order the jasper² came;
 On the first floor it came in view,
 Glowing green in this lowest frame.
 In second place was a sapphire blue.
 Next milky quartz he does acclaim
 As waxy white when light shines through.
 Emerald is fourth, so green of hue;
 Sardonyx, fifth, was set thereon;
 Ruby³ sixth he referred to,
 In Apocalypse, Apostle John.

¹ *Made out a city* See Revelation 21.10

² *jasper* Refers to the modern chalcedony, a precious stone.

³ *Ruby* In Revelation, John calls the sixth gem sard.

Yet joyned John the crysolyt
 1010 The seventhe gemme in fundament;
 The aghthe, the beryl cler and quyt,
 The topasye twynne-hew, the nente endent.
 The crysopase, the tenthe is tyght,
 The jacyngh, the enleventhe gent.
 1015 The twelfth, the tryeste in uch a plyt,
 The amatyst, purple wyth ynde blente.
 The wal abof the bautels bent
 Of jasporye as glas that glysnande schon.
 I knew hit by his devysement
 1020 In the Apocalypes, the apostel John.

As John devysed yet saw I thare;
 Thise twelve degres wern brode and stayre.
 The cyté stod abof ful sware,
 As longe, as brode, as hyghe ful fayre;
 1025 The stretes of golde as glasse al bare—
 The wal of jasper that glent as glayre—
 The wones wythinne enurned ware
 Wyth alle kynnes perre that moght repayre.
 Thenne helde uch sware of this manayre
 1030 Twelve forlonge space, er ever hit fon,
 Of heght, of brede, of lenthe to cayre,
 For meten hit syy the apostel John.

18

As John hym wrytes yet more I syye;
 Uch pane of that place had thre gates,
 1035 So twelve in poursent I con asspye.
 The portales pyked of ryche plates
 And uch gate of a margyrye,
 A parfyt perle that never fates.
 Uchon in scrypture a name con plye
 1040 Of Israel barnes, folewande her dates—
 That is to say, as her byrth-whates.

85

Here John joins the chrysolite,¹
 The seventh gem set in the base.
 The eighth was beryl, bright and white;
 The two-toned topaz in ninth place;
 Chrysoprase,² tenth in line of sight,
 And jacinth³ in eleventh space.
 Twelve, noblest number, did invite
 The amethyst purple with its indigo grace.
 The wall above the pillars' brace
 Like glassy jasper glittering shone.
 I knew it by reading, in this case,
 The Apocalypse of Saint John.

86

As John described, so saw I there
 The twelve tiers all steep and broad where
 The city stood above, foursquare,
 And long, and broad, and high, and fair.
 The streets of gold all glimmered clear;
 Walls of jasper beyond compare.
 The homes within embellished were
 With jewels and gems a generous share.
 Each city section was a square
 Twelve furlongs⁴ long they continued on.
 Of height, and length, and breadth aware,
 Marvelous measure, was Saint John.

18

87

Though John writes much, yet more saw I.
 Each side of that site had three gates,
 So twelve in all I did espy.
 All portals decked with precious plates,
 Each gate one pearl did occupy,
 A perfect pearl one highly rates.
 Names there inscribed identify
 The Sons of Israel by their dates—
 Their birthdays each gate allocates,⁵

¹ *chrysolite* Green-colored gem.

² *Chrysoprase* Golden-green stone.

³ *jacinth* Blue-colored gem.

⁴ *Twelve furlongs* Revelation 12.16 has 12,000 furlongs.

⁵ *Their birthdays ... allocates* See Revelation 12.16 and Exodus 28.10–11.

The aldest ay fyrst theron was done.
Such lyght ther lemed in alle the strates,
Hem nedde nawther sunne ne mone.

The eldest first was thereon hewn.^o
Such light the streets illuminates
They needed neither sun nor moon.

chiseled

88

1045 Of sunne ne mone had thay no nede;
The selfe God was her lambe-lyght,
The Lombe her lantyrne, wythouten drede.
Thurgh Hym blysned the borch al bryght.
Thurgh wowe and won my loking yede,
1050 For sotyle cler noght lette no syght.
The hyghe trone ther moght ye hede
Wyth alle the apparaylmente umbepyghte,
As John the appostel in termes tyghte;
The hyghe Godes self hit set upone.
1055 A rever of the trone ther ran outryghte
Was bryghter then bothe the sunne and mone.

Of sun or moon they had no need
For God Himself was their lamp-light.
The Lamb their lantern was indeed,
Through Him the city blazed all bright.
Through house and hall did my sight speed,
So clear that nothing dimmed that light.
And there Heaven's Throne one must heed,
With all adornments well bedight,^o
As John Apostle well did write.
The High God sat thereupon.
A river ran from that throne outright
With waters brighter than sun or moon.

equipped

89

Sunne ne mone schon never so swete
As that foyssoun flode out of that flet;
Swythe hit swange thurgh uch a strete
1060 Wythouten fylthe other galle other glet.
Kyrk therinne was non yete—
Chapel ne temple that ever was set.
The Almyghty was her mynster mete,
The Lombe the sakerfyse ther to refet.
1065 The gates stoken was never yet,
Bot ever more upen at uche a lone.
Ther entres non to take reset
That beres any spot anunder mone.

Sun nor moon shone never so sweet
As the fulsome flood that there spilt.
Swift it swirled through every street,
With no sludge, no slime, nor any silt.^o
Of churches the city was deplete;
No chapel or temple had been built.
The Almighty was their minster meet,
The Lamb was the Mass whose blood was spilt.
The gates full open to the hilt,
Flung wide to all, late and soon,
But there enters none who bears guilt
Or is stained with sin under moon.

fine sand

90

The mone may therof acroche no myghte;
1070 To spotty ho is, of body to grym,
And also ther ne is never nyght.
What schulde the mone ther compas clym
And to even wyth that worthy lyght
That schynes upon the brokes brym?
1075 The planetes am in to pouer a plyght
And the selfe sunne ful fer to dym.
Aboute that water arn tres ful schym
That twelve frytes of lyf con bere ful sone;
Twelve sythes on yer thay beren ful frym
1080 And renowles nwe in uche a mone.

The moon thereof obtains no might,
Too spotty it is, of body grim;
And also there, there is no night.
Why should the moon through phases skim,
Compete against that greater light
That shines upon the brook's bright rim?
The planets are in too poor a plight;
Even the sun is far too dim.
At water's edge the trees¹ are trim,
Twelve fruits of life they bear full soon,
Twelve times a year with fruit they brim,
Renewed again with every moon.

¹ At water's edge the trees See Revelation 22.2.

Anundre mone so gret merwayle
 No fleschly hert ne myght endeure
 As quen I blusched upon that bayle,
 So ferly therof was the fasure.
 1085 I stod as styлле as dased quayle
 For ferly of that freuch fygyre,
 That felde I nawther reste ne travayle
 So was I ravyste wyth glymme pure.
 For I dar say, wyth conciens sure,
 1090 Hade bodyly burne abiden that bone,
 Thagh alle clerkes hym hade in cure
 His lyf wer loste anunder mone.

19

Ryght as the maynful mone con rys
 Er thenne the day-glem dryve al down,
 1095 So sodanly on a wonder wyse
 I was war of a prosessoun.
 This noble cité of ryche enpryse
 Was sodanly ful, wythouten sommoun,
 Of such vergynes in the same gyse
 1100 That was my blysful anunder croun.
 And coronde wern alle of the same fasoun,
 Depaynt in perles and wedes qwyte.
 In uchones breste was bounden boun
 The blysful perle with gret delyt.

1105 With gret delyt thay glod in fere
 On golden gates that glent as glasse.
 Hundreth thowsandes, I wot ther were,
 And alle in sute her livrés wasse;
 Tor to know the gladdest chere.
 1110 The Lombe byfore con proudly passe
 Wyth hornes seven of red golde cler.
 As praysted perles His wedes wasse.
 Towarde the throne thay trone a tras.
 Thagh thay wern fele, no pres in plyt,
 1115 Bot mylde as maydenes seme at mas
 So drov thay forth with gret delyt.

91

Beneath the moon a marvel great;
 No human heart might it endure,
 What I saw gazing on that estate.
 So marvelous was its allure
 That like a quail I stood sedate,
 Astonished by that fine figure,
 So I felt neither small nor great,
 So ravished I by rapture pure.
 And I dare say, with conscience sure,
 Had mortal man endured that boon,
 Though all the clerks essayed his cure,
 His life were lost below the moon.

19

92

Just as the mighty moon will rise
 Before the daylight does away,
 Suddenly in a wondrous wise
 I saw a procession wend^o its way. *turn round*
 This seemly city of noble size
 Was suddenly scene of such display
 Of virgins all in the same guise.
 My loved one was in same array;
 The very same crown carried they,
 Adorned with pearls and wearing white.
 On each one's breast beautifully lay
 The precious pearl of great delight.

93

With great delight they glided there
 Through golden gates that gleamed like glass.
 There were a hundred thousand fair,
 And all the same there livery was.
 Hard to tell the most debonair!
 The Lamb before did proudly pass
 With seven horns of red gold clear.¹
 Like precious pearls His raiment^o was. *dress, apparel*
 Toward the throne they trod en masse
 Without crowding, though packed in tight,
 Mild as maidens meeting at Mass.
 So forth they fared with great delight.

¹ *With seven horns ... clear* See Revelation 5.6.

Delyt that hys come encroched,
 To much it were of for to melle.
 Thise aldermen, quen he aproched,
 1120 Grovelyng to his fete thay felle.
 Legyounes of aungeles, togeder voched,
 Ther kesten ensens of swete smelle.
 Then glory and gle was nwe abroched;
 Al songe to love that gay juelle.
 1125 The steven moght stryke thurgh the urthe to helle
 That the Vertues of heven of joye endyte.
 To love the Lombe His meyny in-melle,
 Iwysse I laght a gret delyt.

Delit the Lombe for to devise
 1130 With much mervayle in mynde went,
 Best was He, blythest, and moste to pryse
 That ever I herde of speche spent.
 So worthy whyt wern wedes Hys,
 His lokes symple, Hymself so gent;
 1135 Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse
 Anende Hys hert thurgh hyde torente.
 Of His quyte syde his blod outsprent.
 Alas, thought I, who did that spyt?
 Ani breste for bale aght haf forbrent
 1140 Er he therto hade had delyt.

The Lombe delyt, non lyste to wene;
 Thagh He were hurt and wounde hade,
 In His sembelaunt was never sene,
 So wern His glentes glorious glade.
 1145 I loked among His meyny schene,
 How thay wyth lyf wern laste and lade.
 Then saw I ther my lyttel quene
 That I wende had standen by me in sclade.
 Lorde, much of mirthe was that ho made
 1150 Among her feres that was so quyt!
 That syght me gart to thenk to wade
 For luf longyng in gret delyt.

94

The Lamb's approach caused great delight,
 Far too much for me to tell.
 The elders, when He came in sight,
 Before His feet, on their faces fell.
 Legions of angels all in flight
 Spread their incense of sweetest smell.
 Glee and glory they did incite;
 All sang in praise of that jewel.
 Their voices rang from earth to hell,
 Jocund^o the joys of Heaven recite;
 This multitude does praise Him well.
 Forsooth I felt a fond delight.

cheerfully

95

Delight the Lamb to visualize,
 My mind there in amazement went.
 A marvel He and most to prize
 On whom I ever heard speech spent.
 Wondrous white His garments' guise;
 His expression was benevolent.
 But a wound was seen of great size,
 Beneath His heart, through skin all rent.
 From His white side the blood did vent.
 Alas, thought I, who did such spite,
 His breast should burn till he repent,
 Lest in that deed he took delight.

96

The Lamb's delight none would demean;
 Though woeful wounds he plenty had,
 In His demeanor 'twas not seen,
 But glee and gladness it did add.
 I looked upon the crowd to glean
 How they with love and life were clad,
 And there I saw my little queen
 Who before across the brook had
 Made me happy and full glad,
 Now with her friends all wearing white.
 The distance between us made me sad;
 I wished to wade to my delight.

20

Delyt me drof in yye and ere—
 My manes mynde to maddyng malte.
 1155 Quen I sey my frely, I wolde be there
 Byyonde the water, thagh ho were walte.
 I thoght that no thyng myght me dere,
 To fech me bur and take me halte,
 And to start in the strem schulde non me stere
 1160 To swymme the remnaunt, thagh I ther swalte.
 Bot of that munt I was bitalt.
 When I schulde start in the strem astraye,
 Out of that caste I was bycalt;
 Hit was not at my Prynces paye.

1165 Hit payed Hym not that I so flonc
 Over mervelous meres so mad arayde.
 Of raas, thagh I were rasch and ronk,
 Yet rapely therinne I was restayed.
 For ryght as I sparred unto the bonc,
 1170 That brathe out of my drem me brayde.
 Then wakned I in that erber wlonk;
 My hede upon that hylle was layde
 Ther as my perle to grounde strayd.
 I raxled and fel in gret affray,
 1175 And sykyng to myself I sayd,
 “Now al be to that Prynces paye.”

Me payed ful ille to be outfleme
 So sodenly of that fayre regioun—
 Fro alle tho syghtes so quyke and queme.
 1180 A longeyng hevy me strok in swone,
 And rewfully thenne I con toreme,
 “O perle,” quoth I, “of rych renoun,
 So was hit me dere that thou con deme
 In thys veray avysyoun!
 1185 If hit be veray and soth sermoun
 That thou so stykes in garlande gay,
 So wel is me in thys doel-doungoun
 That thou art to that Prynses paye.”

20

97

Delight infused my eye and ear,
 Madness melted my burning brain.
 When I saw sweet pearl, I would be near,
 But across the stream she did remain.
 I thought t’was nothing there to fear,
 To hold me back or me restrain.
 To swim the stream the way seemed clear,
 To make it across though death me claim.
 But fast frustrated was my aim
 When into the stream I tried to ease.
 For blunder bold I was to blame,
 For it did not my Savior please.

98

It pleased Him not that I should go
 Over that magnificent mere.^o
 In madness I rushed all aglow,
 But away from it I had to veer.
 For as I reached the water’s flow,
 My dream began to disappear,
 And in the garden I woke below.
 Laid on a hill I did appear,
 On ground that closed my pearl so clear.
 As I arose my heart did seize,
 Said I, speaking to my inner ear,
 “Let all be done as Him may please!”

boundary

99

It pleased me not to be cast out
 So suddenly from that fair place,
 From sights and sounds fair throughout.
 A longing fierce fell on me apace,
 And in sayings sad I shouted out,
 “Pearl,” I said, “full of grace,
 Dearest to me beyond a doubt,
 You revealed a vision in that place
 That, if it be true in your case,
 Among His flock you are at ease,
 Then I accept here to run my race,
 Since you do well the Prince to please.”

1190 To that Prynces paye hade I ay bente
 And yerned no more then was me gyven,
 And halden me ther in trwe entent
 As the perle me prayed that was so thryven—
 As helde, drawen to Goddes present,
 To mo of His mysterys I hade ben dryven.
 1195 Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente
 Then moghten by ryght upon hem clyven.
 Therfore my joye was sone toriven
 And I kaste of kythes that lastes aye.
 Lorde, mad hit arn that agayn Thee stryven
 1200 Other proferen Thee oght agayn Thy paye.

To pay the Prince other sete saghte,
 Hit is ful ethe to the god Krystyin.
 For I haf founden Hym, bothe day and naghte,
 A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.
 1205 Over this hyul this lote I laghte
 For pyty of my perle enclyin;
 And sythen to God I hit bytaghte
 In Krystes dere blessing and myn,
 That in the forme of bred and wyn
 1210 The preste uus schewes uch a daye.
 He gef uus to be His homly hyne
 And precious perles unto His pay.
 Amen Amen

100

To please the King I, too, was bent
 And craved no more than I had right;
 I held me there with high intent,
 As Pearl had taught to my delight,
 And willingly toward God I went.
 More to know Him she did incite.
 Every man would his joy augment
 Beyond that to which he has a right,
 So my joy was put to flight.
 He did me from that realm release,
 Mad are they who with Him would fight
 Instead of trying the Prince to please.

101

To please the Prince and at peace to be,
 A Christian may with ease succeed,
 For day and night He comes to me,
 My God, my Lord, my Friend indeed.
 To this garden with groans did I flee,
 To mourn for Pearl, my misery feed.
 Then to God I did give it free
 For Christ's own blessing and for mine,
 Who in the form of bread and wine
 The priest lifts up every day.¹
 He made us to be His faithful line,
 Like precious pearls in Prince's pay.
 AMEN

¹ *The priest ... every day* Referring to the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ through the words of Jesus (repeated by the priest at Mass).

