

MEDIAEVAL GLASS-MAKING TECHNIQUES AND THE IMAGERY OF GLASS IN *PEARL*

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The last decades of the fourteenth century in England witnessed an upsurge of creative writing of exceptional quality. The works of the poets, among them Chaucer, Langland, and the unknown author of *Pearl*, and the writings of the mystics, Julian of Norwich, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, were all brought to life in those years. The world out of which they sprang was one of ordinary things, of the commonplace and the cruelly unexpected, of boiled peas and Perpendicular churches, of plague and Peasants' Revolt. Yet these things were to become woven into the very fabric of their visionary experience. For the poet, especially the mediaeval one, and the mystic, the very smallest things were fraught with significance, were metaphor. The poet, the maker of metaphor, stood as one endowed with the rare gift of accomplishing the transformation of the ordinary into new and poignant shapes and forms. His task was the articulation of the hidden significances of things, the joining of two worlds: of tangible and intangible, of sense and spirit.¹

By the time the *Pearl*-poet was writing, glass had been made in England for some two hundred years.² Church windows had been glazed even earlier.³ But it was in or around his own lifetime that the art of stained glass underwent far-reaching changes which were to transform the appearance of those windows. During the fourteenth century the number

of English glass painters and glaziers increased rapidly.⁴ The greatest concentration appears to have been in London, where around the middle of that century the glass painters had their own guild and set of ordinances.⁵ Outside of London they seem to have gathered at York, in East Anglia at Norwich, King's Lynn, Ipswich, and Colchester, in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, and in the South-West around Wells, Tewkesbury, Bristol, Gloucester, and Exeter.⁶

While the glaziers and glass painters of England increased rapidly in number, their technological skills underwent great advances. The most significant single development was undoubtedly the invention of silver stain. In the making of a stained glass window pieces of glass already coloured (a separate piece of glass for each shade of colour) were cut to shape. The detailed pattern was then painted on each piece in "enamel" and fired and the separate pieces were fitted together with grooved strips of lead and soldered. Around 1306 it was discovered that silver compounds -- usually silver chloride or silver oxide -- applied in solution to white glass (at the same time as the paint), then fired in the kiln, would produce an indelible yellow stain ranging from pale lemon-yellow to deep orange according to the strength of the solution and the temperature of the kiln.⁷ The new process was to revolutionize the appearance of the painted glass window. Since yellow could now be painted on to white glass, separate pieces of yellow glass were not needed. Less leading was thus required. Furthermore, yellow stain showed to best advantage on a white background, bringing about the increased use of white glass. By 1320 the new process was widespread.⁸ Its use around 1350-52 in the glazing of King Edward III's new chapel at St Stephens, Westminster, and in St George's Chapel at Windsor probably accelerated its spread all over England.⁹ By the fifteenth century the use of yellow stain had assumed a multitude of subtleties and had come to dominate the whole technique of glass painting.

In the colour schemes of mediaeval stained glass a transition can be observed over several centuries. The windows of the thirteenth century have been described as patterns of coloured glass (largely ruby and blue) into which a small amount of white was introduced. Those of the fourteenth century saw the proportion of white glass greatly increased. Red and blue were now distributed against a silvery white ground. The colours themselves were subdued in favour of lower tones.

Reds and blues, the preponderant colours of early glass, now made way for greens and yellows. By the fifteenth century many windows were little else but white glass with some dominating spots of coloured glass patterned upon it.¹⁰ While the colours were less varied in hue, the general effect was one of sparkling brilliance, of spacious expanses of silver gleaming with blue and gold.¹¹

Improvement in the texture of the glass had much to do with the new luminosity of these windows. Where the glass of the thirteenth century had been thicker and more deeply coloured -- rather like a brilliant mosaic of tiny jewels -- that of the fourteenth, though still of uneven thickness, was smoother, thinner, and lighter in colour than anything previously made.¹² White glass, at first greenish, became whiter towards the end of the fourteenth century, and much more of it was used than before, partly, perhaps, because of a shortage of coloured glass due to the Black Death in 1348-49, which killed many skilled artisans.¹³

In the latter half of the fourteenth century the line-work of painted glass became finer and more transparent, due partly to the introduction of a new technique of producing shadows by the use of a stippled, more luminous coat of enamel brown,¹⁴ partly to a change in the function of the lead work: where previously the artist drew in lead (every form surrounded by lead) and simply added to this design with finer painted lines, now the leads began to be placed so as not to interfere with the drawing. Larger pieces of glass were now used and fewer leads.¹⁵ The glass presented a surface on which to draw, a clear luminous pictorial medium; and the technical skill of the painter (using enamel and silver stain) assumed new dimensions. In the early years of the fourteenth century the windows were designed by the architect and the glass painter's task was to fill them as best he could. By the middle of that century it was the glass which determined the window design, as for example, in the great east window of Gloucester, the first in the new Perpendicular style.¹⁶

Certain architectural changes were also responsible for this development. In the new Perpendicular churches the relatively isolated units of the classic Gothic cathedral, with clear dividing lines between nave, aisles, transepts, and choir, gave way to a more homogeneous space, where the eye was now allowed to wander into vast distances.¹⁷ Architecturally, the result was an enormous increase in window size. This

development, together with the use of white glass, produced within the Perpendicular buildings of late fourteenth-century England the new lightness of the so-called glasshouse-church.¹⁸

The cumulative effect of all these changes was that in the whole scheme of the new buildings the painted glass of the windows became far more arresting than ever before. Three examples will suffice. The great east window of Gloucester (erected probably between 1350-60), a huge expanse of glass 78 feet high by 38 feet wide, was quite unlike anything which had gone before it. The whole east wall of the church opened into one great window, consisting, except for the heavy mullions by which it was partitioned, of a series of glazed panels. The fields of the columns of lights are red and blue, and the overall impression created by this window, which portrays the coronation of the Virgin with the Apostles, saints, and angels, is one of a white pattern over a background of vertical red and blue stripes.¹⁹ Such an extensive use of white glass was, in its own day, an enormous novelty. So was the startling effect of pure crystalline radiance in which it resulted.

A similar luminous brilliance is to be found in the antechapel of New College, Oxford, constructed between 1379-86; it is the largest extant single collection of late fourteenth-century English glass. Though these windows are occupied by figures who radiate an exuberance of many colours standing against a background blue and red in alternate lights, there is over all, from the large amount of space devoted to the yellow stained white canopy work, a pervasive sense of delicate whiteness: greenish, yellowish, and pure white.²⁰

The finest example of all English Perpendicular glass is generally held to be that in the great east window of York Minster. The choir of the Minster, the largest of any English cathedral, a vast translucent structure simply ribbed and braced with stone, dates from 1405-08. The east window, although not quite so large overall (78 by 32 feet) as that of Gloucester, is unbroken by heavy mullions and contains a bigger area of glass: a single expanse with three "great lights" subdivided by two reticulations into nine lights, divided into 117 roughly square panels, the majority of which depict scenes from the Book of Revelation.²¹

Whether this window was ever seen by the *Pearl*-poet, whose work is generally held to date from the end of the fourteenth century or the very beginning of the fifteenth,²² cannot now be known, although the reader

of *Pearl* who sees this window cannot fail to notice the obvious correspondence between the two works of art, in subject matter (both depict scenes described in the Book of Revelation) and in visual impact: in sheer luminosity and expressive use of pure colour. While the whole scheme consists of a large amount of white glass with lesser proportions of ruby and blue patterned upon it, every little scene has its own appropriate scheme, ranging from the spring-like greens of the garden of Eden to the brilliant yellows and golds of the celestial Jerusalem and the Lamb of the Apocalypse. The window as a whole, with its many little bright figures thrown into relief against the pale background, presents a jewelled and twinkling mass of colour.²³ "At their best," it has been said, "the windows of the choir remind one of patches of coloured sunlight on running water." Standing at a point midway between the two transepts and in front of the altar, "glittering screens of glass and soaring shafts of stone are to be seen on all sides; the whole effect is one of triumphant light and space and colour."²⁴ Such impressions are of more than a little interest to the reader of *Pearl*, for they call to mind some of the poem's most vivid and unusual images, such as the translucent crystal cliffs of line 74 and the glimmering pool of line 117.

Outside of churches, glass windows were relatively uncommon. In the houses of the well-to-do they were not unknown, as Chaucer's description of the chamber in *The Book of the Duchess* suggests ("Ful wel depeynted, and with glas / Were al the wyndowes wel yglased").²⁵ The scene is one of opulent warmth and light. But among the ordinary folk, glass windows were still regarded as a luxury. Even until around 1700 the windows of their houses were usually covered with greased paper or linen.²⁶ As one historian observes, it is very probable that a visitor to England about the time of the Black Death would have found, as did a seventeenth-century traveller in Ireland, that a third of the houses were "wretched nasty cabbins without chimney, window or dore-shutt, and worse than those of the savage Americans."²⁷ Viewed against the background of the squalor and transience of day-to-day life, "poor, nasty, brutish, and short," the brilliance and permanence of the great cathedrals is something which we today can never fully appreciate. To the common folk, unaccustomed in their ordinary surroundings to the presence of large windows at all, let alone glazed ones, the sight of vast expanses

of this jewelled pearly substance in the windows of churches and cathedrals must indeed have given cause for wonder.

The dream vision literature of the late fourteenth century to which *Pearl* belongs hints at the impression made by these buildings on the people of that age. Splendid glass houses occur in at least two places. The scene in the first book of Chaucer's *House of Fame* is set in a glass temple. In the opening lines of John Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* (1400-03), the dreamer is transported to a glass building of breath-taking splendour, its painted walls covered with brightly coloured images, a wondrous place which shines with light of blinding crystalline clarity:

Me did oppresse a sodein dedeli slepe,
 Wip-in þe which me þouȝt[e] þat I was
 Rauysshid in spirit in [a] temple of glas-²⁸

The resemblance between this and line 1088 of *Pearl*, where the dreamer of that poem stands in awe before the vision of the glassy city, is striking:

I stod as styllle as dased quayle
 For ferly of þat frelich fygure,
 Þat felde I nawþer reste ne trauayle,
 So watȝ I rauyste wyth glymme pure. (1085-88)

It is not only conceivable but altogether probable that neither the *Temple of Glas* nor *Pearl* could have been written as it was had the authors of these works never experienced the awed uplifting, or "ravishing," of spirit that must have been felt by the people of that age as they stepped within the doors of the great Perpendicular cathedrals with their painted walls and brilliant expanses of glass.

One of the most striking things about *Pearl* is its imagery. Sights perceived in vivid colour and detail meet the reader on page after page. This imagery has been analyzed,²⁹ and its possible origins have received considerable attention. Some of the poet's inspiration for his visionary landscape may have derived from literary sources, such as the conventional setting of mediaeval dream vision literature stemming from the *Roman de la Rose*, or from contemporary descriptions of the earthly Paradise.³⁰ As for the heavenly Jerusalem of its conclusion, the scriptural source is

clear enough, and, as has been pointed out, its detail may even have derived from such objects as the brilliantly illuminated Apocalypse books of the later Middle Ages³¹ or the great jewelled chandeliers that hung from the vault of mediaeval churches.³² But there may yet be more. Much of the powerful impact of *Pearl* derives from the presence of images of light gleaming through glass. These images are found throughout, some very explicit, others less obvious and carefully woven into the texture of the poem. They occur with particular intensity at all the emotional peaks of the narrative.

The development of the poem's glass imagery closely parallels that of the narrative itself; although at first indiscernible, it is present from the very beginning. The narrator, desolate, grief-stricken, pained by the memory of past joy mourns, in a garden, the loss of his precious pearl, the seeming ground of all his bliss. Yet that very earth in which the pearl lies buried "in moldeȝ dunne," "hir color so clad in clot," is unexpectedly filled with a profusion of life and colour. The image is a striking one:

Blomeȝ blayke and blwe and rede
Per schyneȝ ful schyr agayn þe sunne. (27-28)

Four lines in the following stanza fill in the details:

On huyle þer perle hit trendeled down
Schadowed þis worteȝ ful schyre and schene,
Gilofre, gyngure and gromlyoun,
And pyonys powdered ay bytwene. (41-44)

Situated on or around a small hill which they overshadow, these resplendent flowers (gillyflowers, ginger, gromwell, and peonies) shine brightly in the sun: a yellowish or whitish brightness,³³ blue and red.

The imagery of stanza group one holds within itself the mysterious contradiction of brilliance and life amidst death and decay which lies at the heart of *Pearl*. The paradox is stated in words vibrant with overtones of the gospel:³⁴

For vch gresse mot grow of grayneȝ dede;
No whete were elieȝ to woneȝ wonne. (31-32)

The statement, pointing as it does, to the emotional core of the poem -- an experience of death and spiritual transformation -- is here, on its very first appearance, linked to a visual image of brilliant vitreous quality.

The theme is developed by means of an unusual stylistic device peculiar to the *Pearl*-poet, and one which he employs with what has been described as an almost "compulsive" fondness: the echoing of key words and expressions.³⁵ Across a measured background space, as homogeneous as the interior expanses of the great Perpendicular cathedrals -- twenty stanza groups subdivided into five stanzas of twelve four-beat lines -- there runs an intricate play of resonance and allusion.³⁶ Some of these allusions, echoes of words and expressions so delicate as to be all but invisible, have only recently been noticed.³⁷ Others yet more subtle and elusive, echoes of sounds and of sequences of sounds, and a series of visual resemblances, have not, perhaps, been appreciated.

Exhausted by his grief, the narrator falls into a sudden deep sleep in which the dark mound and resplendent flowers of the garden are silently assumed into the visionary landscape of his dream. Crystal cliffs encompass a forest of dazzling splendour, with gleaming rocks and pearly gravel, silver-leaved trees and multi-coloured birds. Glittering, shimmering, and shining, the whole scene bursts with a fantastic jewelled brilliance. By comparison even the sunbeams seem "bot blo and blynde." The effect is now no longer one of natural sunlight but of an intense reflected brilliance.³⁸

The crystal cliffs enclose the whole scene providing a frame within which the description moves, using a technique employed also in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, from general impression to detail, carefully rendering the natural movement of the human eye in an unfamiliar situation.³⁹ Initially the dreamer finds himself disoriented. As he becomes aware of his surroundings his eye is drawn first to the cliffs (65-66), then caught by a dazzling burst of light in the forest beneath, its rocks gleaming with unbelievable light. The dreamer's gaze passes back to the cliffs (73-74). His eye then moves to focus on the individual trees, on their trunks and then leaves, with the peculiar detail of their sliding movement (77-78), the dazzling brilliance of reflected light caught by the alliteration of sibilant "sch" sounds:

Quen glem of glodeȝ agaynȝ hem glydeȝ,
Wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle þay schynde (79-80)

To the ear of the attentive reader lines 79-80 carry an echo of the flower image at lines 27-28. The pattern of sound is similar, the sequence "gl"- "sch" recalling "bl"- "sch" in that initial burst of brilliant light. Finally the dreamer's attention passes down to the tiniest fragments of the landscape, the pearly gravel underfoot (81-82). The movement of the eye is thus from a general view of the whole scene within the enclosing frame of the cliffs to a close-up of the tiny constituent part. This procedure is repeated at several key points in the poem.

After the intensity of this initial burst of brilliant imagery the description continues in quieter, more lyrical tones as the dreamer moves forward viewing the wonders of the landscape from different directions. His progress halts at the river banks ("of beryl bryȝt"), and the closing image of the second stanza group is one of ethereal purity. The river glances with light, its swishing sweep and swirl caught in repeated "s" and "r" sounds. As he gazes into its depths the dreamer catches sight of glistening stones which are described by means of two similes: the image of light gleaming through glass, intensified by a vision of the height and radiance of the stars in a dark wintry sky while mortals sleep. The unusual evocative power of this group of images hinges largely on their simple contrast of otherworldly height, brilliance, and clarity with lowness, darkness, earthliness, and mortality. Glass is now unmistakably present. Again the alliteration of "gl"- "s" sounds:

The dubbemente of þo derworth depe
Wern bonkeȝ bene of beryl bryȝt.
Swangeande swete þe water con swepe,
Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryȝt.
In þe founce þer stonden stoneȝ stepe,
As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt,
As stremande sterneȝ, quen strope-men slepe,
Staren in welkyn in wynter nyȝt. (109-16)

As before, the sequence of description moves from general impression to particular detail:

For vche a pobbel in pole per py3t
 Wat3 emerad, saffer, oper gemme gente,
 Pat alle þe lo3e lemed of 1y3t,
 So dere wat3 hit adubbenent. (117-20)

Thus the sight of a mass of water framed by its banks of beryl, slightly ruffled by its sweep and swirl, glittering like light through glass, resolves itself into a myriad of little gems, every pebble in the pool an emerald, sapphire, or other precious stone. The brilliance of a larger space within a frame is focused down into the sharp detail of the individual jewel. The sequence of visual impressions closely resembles the natural movement of the human eye over the surface of a stained glass window, as it takes in first the whole within a frame in a blurry brilliance (109-16), then narrows its gaze to focus sharply on the small individual pieces of glass (117-18), then moves again to a general view of the whole -- the pool of water gleaming with light (119-20). If one were to seek for a single simile to describe the visual effect of a stained glass window in sunlight, what could be more apt than that of a sheet of dancing water twinkling with a myriad of little lights.

The dreamer's grief drops away. The gathering momentum of his progress and the accompanying flood of "blys," "wele," "gladne3" and "myrþe" mingled with longing in the repeated refrain, "more and more," rises insistently, until finally he is confronted across the stream by the most startling sight of all: a radiant crystal cliff at whose foot sits a wondrous being, a "faunt" or "mayden" with all the qualities of a child. Once again it is the crystal cliff by which his eye is caught. At first the maiden seems to be an adjunct to the cliff:

More meruayle con my dom adaunt:
 I se3 byzonde þat myry mere
 A crystal clyffe ful relusaunt;
 Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere.
 At þe fote þerof þer sete a faunt,
 A mayden of menske, ful debonere. (157-62)

The spatial arrangement here, of the maiden at the foot of the resplendent glassy cliff, recalls that of the garden scene in stanza group one, where the pearl lay buried in the earth at the foot of brilliant flowers shining in the sun.

As the dreamer's attention is drawn to the maiden at the foot of the cliff and he recognizes his lost pearl, his initial impressions are of sudden dazzling light and colour. Lines 163-72 hold within themselves a sequence of visual impressions alternating with expressions of surprised recognition, culminating in a pun:

Blysnande whyt watȝ hyr bleaunt.
 I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere.
 As glysnande golde pat man con schere,
 So schon pat schene an-vnder shore.
 On lenghe I loked to hyr pere;
 Pe lenger, I knew hyr more and more.

The more I frayste hyr fayre face,
 Her fygure fyn quen I had fonte,
 Suche gladande glory con to me glace
 As lyttel byfore perto watȝ wonte.

The dreamer's first impression is of the bursting whiteness of the maiden's garment (163), followed by equally sudden recognition (164) and a flood of glistening, golden light (165) caught in repeated "sch" sounds (166); his gaze intensifies (167), his recognition deepens (168), his eyes search her face (169) and her figure (170), and finally his astonishment and joy burst into exclamation (171): "Suche gladande glory con to me glace," with its play on the word "glace" -- "to glide," but also the verb "to glaze," or the noun "glass."

We have seen already how in the fourteenth century mediaeval glass-making and architectural techniques underwent advances which brought about far-reaching changes in the appearance of stained glass windows. In Perpendicular buildings all over England, there appeared great expanses of clear, pearly-white glass stained in yellows of varying intensities, whose visual effect was one of brilliance and splendour on a scale previously unknown. Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that the descriptive passages of *Pearl* which are filled with the greatest sense of wonder and delight are those in which the imagery of light on glass is unmistakably present, and whose predominant colours are gold and a brilliant, bursting silvery whiteness.

Again the description moves from general impression to close and careful observation, the initial burst of light and colour now resolving itself into all the separate details of the maiden's appearance. Each one is reverently contemplated: her mantle, her kirtle, her crown, and the peerless pearl in the centre of her breast. The maiden's face shines with a purity that pierces the dreamer's heart, the round whiteness of her countenance (white as ivory, whiter than whale bone) framed by the gold of her hair (211-14). The reader's mind is drawn fleetingly back to the opening image of the poem, "Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye / To clanly clos in golde so clere," now clearly resolved into the image of the beloved face with all its gentle radiant qualities.

Within the mediaeval genre of dream visions *Pearl* stands out for its genuinely dream-like qualities, those elusive nuances which evade words and quickly evaporate before the waking consciousness. Thus, as here, the images of *Pearl* move with a subtle fluidity through their various transformations. Many of these images are dream-like not only in their movement but also in their very substance. The pearl or jewel and its variants, the child, the flower, the circle, the square, are archetypal human symbols of healing and wholeness.⁴⁰

Just as dream-like and visionary as these archetypal images is the overwhelming flood of light which accompanies them. In Neoplatonic tradition light had long been the classic mediaeval image for beauty of the highest order, light in general, that is. In *Pearl*, however, there is almost no such thing as light in general. Light is present. But the word "lyȝt" appears far more often as a verb, adjective or adverb, than as a noun, as here for example at line 214: "On schyldereȝ þæt leghe vnlapped lyȝte," or line 238: "And haylſed me wyth a lote lyȝte." This play on light begins with the maiden's appearance and reaches its climax in the repeated "delyt" of the final stanzas. On the whole, the manifestations of light, kaleidoscopic in their profusion, tend to be precisely described: "glysnande," "blysnande," "glemande," "stremande," "schymeryng," "schrylle" and "schyr," not light in general, but light as seen, and seen in its most luminous and spectacular form, reflected from shiny transparent surfaces, above all, glass. In its visual impact glass is unique. In sheer translucence it strikes the eye as no other substance. So it must have seemed to the people of the Middle Ages, for glass was universally recognized as the symbol of transparent human purity, the

Virgin Mary.⁴¹ And so in *Pearl* the play of light on glass is inseparable from the clarity and purity which dawn upon the dreamer in the presence of the "mayden."

In the long dialogue between maiden and dreamer which occupies the centre of the poem (stanza groups five to sixteen) light, glass, and pearl images disappear, and the paradoxes stated visually in stanza group one -- of beauty and life amidst death and decay -- are now verbally developed. The progress of the maiden's discourse through Gospel precept and parable holds within itself an almost imperceptible play on the flower and garden imagery of stanza group one. The dreamer unthinkingly assumes that he can cross the stream (283-84). The maiden reprimands him: if he wishes to cross over he must first submit to other counsel: "Py corse in clot mot calder keue" (320). The fleeting reappearance of the word "clot" recalls the image of the buried pearl at line 22, "hir color so clad in clot." As the dreamer, standing outside the transcendent realm into which he cannot cross, listens to the maiden's instruction, he moves gradually to a dawning realization of the distance that separates her from him. He begins to perceive something of the courtesy, purity, simplicity, and grace of the heavenly kingdom to which he aspires, and the play on light begins once more (682). At line 789 ("pe hyl of Syon, þat semly clot") hill and "clot" are briefly linked. The maiden's discourse begins to centre on the Lamb and his whiteness (841-44) and a paradox appears which recalls that of stanza group one (life and joy amidst death and decay): "Alþaȝ oure corses in clottez clynge, . . . þe Lombe vus gladeȝ, oure care is kest" (857-61). Finally, in open acknowledgement of his own lack of purity the dreamer now identifies himself with the clod (911) and the clod-encrusted pearl. His eyes are opened, and what he sees is the flower, archetypal symbol of wholeness:

I am boþ mokke and muȝ among,
And þou so ryche a reken rose. (905-06)

This delicate, almost indiscernible play on the flower and garden imagery of stanza group one becomes clear and unmistakable as the final vision unfolds. The maiden explains that although he cannot cross over unless he be clean, he has, by great favour, been granted a sight of the heavenly kingdom. She then directs the dreamer to bend upwards toward

the river's head, while she follows on the opposite bank. The dreamer, like the Apostle John, finds himself on a hill. The transformation of the dark mound in the garden hinted some two hundred lines earlier ("þe hyl of Syon, þat semly clot") is now complete. His sight is opened (various forms of "se3" and "sy3t" occur repeatedly in these stanzas) and what he sees is the city in a burst of light. The image of the city,

Bysonde þe brok fro me warde keued,
 Þat schyrrer þen sunne wyth schafte3 schon, (981-82)

holds within itself, in the presence of sunlight and alliterative sequence of "b"- "sch" sounds, the echo of lines 27-28:

Blome3 blayke and blwe and rede
 Þer schyne3 ful schyr agayn þe sunne.

The full implication of the flower imagery in stanza group one, with its mysterious paradox of life amidst death, is now apparent. Flower and city, it begins to appear, are interchangeable images in *Pearl*.

As in previous descriptive passages the initial impression is of a startling burst of light, stressed by the play on "ly3t" in line 988. Unlike previous descriptions, the vision which the dreamer now sees is illuminated no longer by reflected light but by an inner lightness, that of his own dawning self-realization. The change indicates a deep transformation within the psyche of the dreamer. So powerfully does the poet seem to have been affected by the sight of stained glass that the image by which this deep sense of inner illumination and wholeness is repeatedly expressed is that of light gleaming through burnished golden glass. In the closing stanza groups of *Pearl* glass images are inseparable from the rising flood of wonder and joy which the dreamer now experiences.

In addition to the passage of the eye over the surface of the scene from top to bottom to top,⁴² there is a slight movement in and out of focus, closely resembling that in the initial image of the pool. As the description of the city unfolds through stanza group seventeen, it alternates almost imperceptibly between blurred glassy brilliance in a larger space framed by the city wall, and sharp detail of individual gems in a smaller space. After the initial burst of dazzling golden light the dreamer's eye moves down to the foundation, narrowing its gaze to focus on each

separately coloured brilliant stone:

Jerusalem so nwe and ryally dyzt,
 As hit was lyzt fro pe heuen adoun.
 Pe bor3 wat3 al of brende golde bryzt
 As glemānde glas burnist broun,
 Wyth gentyl gemmez an-vnder pyzt
 Wyth bantelez twelue on basyng boun,
 Pe foundementez twelue of riche tenoun. (987-93)

Each stone is then listed following the order of the scriptural source. His eye moves to the glistening glassy wall ("O jasporye, as glas þat glysnānde schon" 1018), from the wall to the streets of golden glass, back to the glassy wall, then inwards again to the dwellings adorned with all kinds of gems:

Pe cyté stod abof ful sware,
 As longe as brode as hy3e ful fayre;
 Pe strete3 of golde as glasse al bare,
 Pe wal of jasper þat glent as glayre;
 Pe wone3 wythinne enurned ware
 Wyth alle kynnez perré þat mozt repayre, (1023-28)

and finally back to a general view of the height, breadth, and length of the city (1029-32). What the dreamer sees is an overwhelming flood of light streaming towards him from a glassy jewelled object whose luminosity and translucence are far more vivid and apparent than that of his ostensible model in the original scriptural source.

Perhaps the most suggestive part of the description is that near its conclusion in lines 1026-28, where his eye focuses closely on the gems of the dwellings within the wall: "Pe wal of jasper þat glent as glayre; / Pe wone3 wythinne enurned ware / Wyth alle kynnez perré, þat mozt repayre." In Revelation 21 there is no mention of these dwellings. The only parts of the city there described are the foundations, the wall, the gates, and the streets. That the dreamer so describes the streets and houses lying behind the wall indicates either an uncharacteristic disregard for visual reality, or that he could see right through the wall. This latter in fact proves to be the case, as he soon tells us (at line

1049). What is described, then, is a facade of jasper with jewelled objects behind, which thus appear to the onlooker to be within the wall itself, as are the separate pieces of coloured glass in a stained glass window.

The celestial city and the pool, it would seem, are manifestations of one and the same thing. Within the two images the sequence of visual impressions is almost identical. In stanza group two, the dreamer, gazing into the river, caught sight of gleaming stones glittering like light through glass, like stars in the sky on a winter's night. This general view then moved to a close-up of the individual pebbles in the stream, each one an emerald, sapphire, or other gem. The same sequence of movement, from the overall brilliance of a larger glassy space to the sharp detail of individual gems in a more restricted space, is held within the image of the city.

With the impressionistic transience of a dream, the images of *Pearl* move through their varied appearances. The glassy wall of the city against which is seen in the final vision the pearly whiteness of the heavenly company, has strong visual associations with the crystal cliff of stanza group three at whose foot sat the pearl maiden, an image which recalls the gleaming flowers in stanza group one, at whose foot lay the buried pearl. The key images of *Pearl*, the flowers, the pool, the city, all of them characterized by a vitreous brilliance, would appear to be a series of reappearances of one and the same thing, a compelling image of singular luminosity, clarity, and beauty, a symbol of interior wholeness, whose brilliance and clarity increases on each new appearance, and whose resemblance to the stained-glass window of a mediaeval church is conceivably more than coincidence.

In stanza group eighteen the dreamer now becomes aware of the source of the light which gleams in the city's streets, God himself, the "lombelyȝt." As the pun is elaborated in line 1047 his gaze is drawn to "Þe Lombe her lantyrne," enclosed by and shining out through the transparent city. A quality of pure translucence pervades the images of this passage (1045-50), a translucence expressive of an inner limpidity of soul which becomes ever more present as the final vision unfolds.

As before, the dreamer is totally absorbed by the scene in front of him ("rauyste wyth glymme pure," 1088). He scarcely notices the approaching procession until it is right before his eyes. Like the emergence of

the full moon in the evening sky when it has already risen in daylight, the city is suddenly filled without summons by the company of virgin brides, all arrayed in white, gliding in unison over its glassy streets. Led by the Lamb, now the awesome creature of the Apocalypse, they move amidst a flood of glassy light towards the throne. The white-robed company is set against a brilliant background of golden glass:

Wyth gret delyt þay glod in fere
On golden gateȝ þat glent as glasse, (1105-06)

as is the Lamb himself: with seven horns of clear red gold and garments white as prized pearls (1111-12) and now finally recognized as the most precious jewel of all (1124).

The dreamer's attention focuses fully on the Lamb in all his simplicity, love, and gentleness. Lost in wonder, what he now perceives is a sight more moving and mysterious than anything he has yet beheld. In the Lamb's white side there gapes a terrible bloody wound which arouses in him a rush of pity and astonishment. Yet in the presence of pain and horror, the wounded creature radiates unspeakable delight. The poem's conclusion gives expression to the deepest paradox of all, anguish and joy strangely one at the very heart of reality.

The Lombe delyt non lyste to wene.
Þaȝ he were hurt and wounde hade,
In his semblaunt watȝ neuer sene,
So wern his glenteȝ glorious glade. (1141-44)

The dreamer's contemplation of the Lamb and his subsequent awareness of the maiden in the presence of the Lamb are the climax of the narrative. And here, with the play on "glenteȝ" in line 1144, the glass imagery of *Pearl* unobtrusively reaches its peak.⁴³ The sequence of "gl" sounds in "glenteȝ glorious glade," echoes that at line 114 in the image of the pool, "As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt." The pool with its swirling water and gleaming stones, its ethereal luminosity, and its elusive resemblance to a stained glass window, is thus quietly recalled in the presence of the source of light himself, the Lamb. Seized by a terrible "luf-longyng" at the sight of the maiden in the presence of the Lamb, the dreamer, in an unbearable ecstasy of "delyt," prepares to

leap the stream and is abruptly wrenched into reality, awakening in confusion with his head upon the dark mound.

The glass images of *Pearl* could scarcely be more central to the poem's meaning. Closely bound up with the flow of the narrative, they occur at all the points of greatest emotional intensity. As the dreamer moves toward a state of deep inner illumination the predominant colours of the poem become those of the great windows of the fourteenth-century churches and cathedrals, golden yellow and a brilliant, pearly whiteness. Moreover, the form in which his dawning sense of wholeness and self-integration is repeatedly expressed is not simply one of light, but of glassy light, in a series of images -- the flowers, the pool, the celestial city -- beneath which may be discerned the presence of something which strongly resembles a stained-glass window. How completely the poet, a man of great sensitivity to the visual, reacted to and absorbed into his narrative what he saw, may be judged from the fact that images of glass, far more vivid and immediate than in the original scriptural source, are ultimately indistinguishable from the overwhelming flood of interior light and recognition with which the poem culminates in the presence of the Lamb.

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NOTES

¹ See M.F. Nims, "Translatio: 'Difficult Statement' in Medieval Poetic Theory," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 43 (1973-74) 215-30, pp. 221 and *passim*.

² Until the sixteenth century white glass only was made in England, and on a small scale; the glass industry appears to have been centred in Chiddingfold and surrounding villages on the borders of Surrey and Sussex. The principal sources of supply were Burgundy and Lorraine, Normandy and Hesse, the Netherlands and Venice. See J. Baker, *English*

Stained Glass (London 1962) 22-23, and L.F. Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages* (London 1964) 183-87.

³ Since the second quarter of the twelfth century: L.F. Salzman, *Building in England Down to 1540* (Oxford 1952) 175.

⁴ In Patent and Close Rolls, the names of glaziers appear from 1236 onwards, and after 1300 the number of Verrers in these records increases greatly. C.H. Ashdown, *History of the Worshipful Co. of Glaziers of the City of London* (London n.d.) 15-16.

⁵ C. Woodforde, "English Stained Glass and Glass-Painters in the Fourteenth Century," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939) 29-49; at p. 47.

⁶ *Ibid.* 42-47. For exact locations and descriptions of extant collections of fourteenth-century glass see C. Woodforde, *English Stained and Painted Glass* (Oxford 1954) 10-17, and B. Coe, *Stained Glass in England: 1150-1550* (London 1981) 94-128.

⁷ Salzman (at n. 2) 190-93; Baker (at n. 2) 23-26; Coe (at n. 6) 6-9.

⁸ E.L. Armitage, *Stained Glass: History, Technology and Practice* (Newton, Mass. 1959) 30; Coe (at n. 6) 9.

⁹ J.D. Le Couteur, *English Mediaeval Painted Glass* (London 1926) 96.

¹⁰ Armitage (at n. 8) 34; H. Read, *English Stained Glass* (London 1926) 92-95; Baker (at n. 2) 87-88.

¹¹ Le Couteur (at n. 9) 109.

¹² *Ibid.* 8; Coe (at n. 6) 11, 33.

¹³ Baker (at n. 2) 88; Coe (at n. 6) 33-34.

¹⁴ See Read (at n. 10) 97; Coe (at n. 6) 34.

¹⁵ L.B. Saint and H. Arnold, *Stained Glass of the Middle Ages in England and France* (London 1913) 219; Coe (at n. 6) 9-11, 32.

¹⁶ Woodforde (at n. 5) 32-33; Read (at n. 10) 96.

¹⁷ E. Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Latrobe, Penn. 1957) 17; N. Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (7th ed., London 1963) 153, 139.

¹⁸ J. Harvey, *The Perpendicular Style 1330-1485* (London 1978) 67.

¹⁹ Saint and Arnold (at n. 15) 199-200.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 203-04.

²¹ S. van Rensselaer, *English Cathedrals* (London 1892) 350; Harvey (at n. 18) 116; Saint and Arnold (at n. 15) 229-30.

- ²² E.V. Gordon, ed., *Pearl* (Oxford 1953) ix, x. All quotations from *Pearl* are from this edition.
- ²³ Saint and Arnold (at n. 15) 230-32; Armitage (at n. 8) 36.
- ²⁴ A. Clutton Brock, *The Cathedral Church of York* (London 1921) 110.
- ²⁵ Lines 321-38, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass. 1957) 270.
- ²⁶ Salzman (at n. 3) 185, 173.
- ²⁷ Ibid. citing Historical Manuscripts Commission, Eighth Report, p. 90.
- ²⁸ Lines 14-16, ed. J. Schick, EETS E.S. 60 (London 1891) 1.
- ²⁹ See W.S. Johnson, "The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*: Toward an Interpretation," *ELH* (A Journal of English Literary History) 20 (1953) 161-80; P.M. Kean, *The Pearl: An Interpretation* (London 1967) 53-85; A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge 1970) 137-70; L. Blenkner, "The Pattern of Traditional Images in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology* 68 (1971) 26-49; J. Finlayson, "*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision," *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974) 314-43.
- ³⁰ See Kean (at n. 29) 89 ff.; Spearing (at n. 29) 117 ff.
- ³¹ E. Salter, "The Alliterative Revival.I," *Modern Philology* 64 (1966-67) 146-50, at p. 149, n. 24; Spearing (at n. 29) 103-04.
- ³² I. Bishop, "The Significance of the 'Garlande gay' in the Allegory of *Pearl*," *Review of English Studies* N.S. 8 (1957) 12-21, at p. 20.
- ³³ "Blayke" is rendered "whitish, white" by the Middle English Dictionary, "yellow" by Gordon (p. 121), an apparent anomaly springing probably from the origins of the word. OE "blāc, blāece," from which ME "bleik" is derived, appears to have referred to brightness rather than hue. The Anglo-Saxon approach to colour was concerned chiefly with the differentiation of light and dark: see N.F. Barley, "Old English Colour Classification: Where do Matters Stand?" *Anglo Saxon England* 3 (1974) 15-28.
- ³⁴ John 12:24-25 (ed. Gordon, p. 47).
- ³⁵ R.W. Ackerman, "The Pearl-Maiden and the Penny," *Romance Philology* 17 (1964) 615-23, at p. 622.
- ³⁶ Both E. Salter ("The Alliterative Revival.II," *Modern Philology* 64 [1966-67] 233-37, at p. 236) and Spearing (at n. 29) 98 have noted parallels between the "Decorated" art and architecture of the fourteen century and the structure of *Pearl*.

³⁷ H. Phillips, "The Eucharistic Allusions of *Pearl*," *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985) 474-86.

³⁸ See Johnson (at n. 29) 168.

³⁹ M. Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study* (London 1962) 123-24, points out that the narrator in *Gawain* tends to see objects in relation to one another within a limited space or frame, with the resultant effect of fullness or crowding, and at times a three-dimensional projection and depth in the imagined scene, as for example, in the description of the forest into which Gawain rides in search of the Green Knight's castle, his eye being drawn first to the hills on either side which frame the whole scene, then to the hundred great oaks, then nearer to the tangled hazel and hawthorn bushes, the hanging hoary moss, and finally to the cold, frost-bitten birds on the twigs under which he passes. Renoir describes a "cinematic" technique whereby the poet, from a uniformly illuminated scene, draws out in close-up a single detail by narrowing the field of vision to focus upon it ("Descriptive Technique in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Orbis Litterarum* 13 [1958] 126-32). And Kean notices a movement from overall mass to sharply defined detail in the account of Gawain's first glimpse of the Green Knight's castle (at n. 29) 97, n. 19.

⁴⁰ C.G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, tr. R.F.C. Hull, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Bollingen Series 20, vol. 9, part 1 (London 1959) 151-81, at pp. 160, 164, 180. It has been suggested that *Pearl* is an actual account of a visionary experience: P. Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London 1971) 161. Piehler's methodology has been criticized by R. Levine ("The *Pearl*-child: Topos and Archetype in the Middle English *Pearl*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* N.S. 8 [1977] 243-51), but his argument is not invalidated.

⁴¹ For a brief history of this notion in the Middle Ages see Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (1945) 175-81.

⁴² Pointed out by Kean (at n. 29) 214.

⁴³ There are six previous occurrences of the word "glent" or "glente" (at lines 70, 114, 671, 1001, 1026, and 1106), five of which refer to the glinting of glassy light.