"O perle": Apostrophe in *Pearl*

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This article addresses the Pearl-*poet's use of apostrophe in his elegiac dream vision. Drawing on classical and medieval discussions of this rhetorical device, as well as contemporary poetic criticism, it argues that the trajectory of apostrophe in the poem traces the development of the Mourner-Dreamer as he gains insight from the Pearl-maiden's lesson and moves toward consolation. The Mourner's calls to his lost pearl in the proem demonstrate the unproductive cycle of his sorrow. His apostrophes to the Maiden in the early part of his dream similarly threaten to undo the solace he gains in the earthly paradise. By contrast, the Maiden's three short apostrophes serve an exemplary function and show the Dreamer how to deploy apostrophe without getting caught up in the diversionary aspects of the device. In the closing frame of the poem, the now-awakened Dreamer uses apostrophe in a controlled manner that permits him to turn away from the isolation of grief.*

T HE Middle English dream vision *Pearl* is a poem about loss. It is also a poem about language. Throughout the poem, the sorrowful Jeweller struggles to articulate his grief. The use of apostrophe is the first and perhaps the best example of the Mourner-Dreamer's difficulties with language. The device opens the poem and returns at intervals in the proem, in the dream that follows, and twice more in the final scene after the Dreamer wakes. While few critics have overlooked the importance of the opening line—"Perle, plesaunte to prynceȝ paye" (1)—no one, to my knowledge, has offered an extended analysis of the poet's use of apostrophe.[1] This essay investigates the poet's use of apostrophe as a means of exploring the challenges that both the *Pearl*-mourner and the elegist face. I contend that apostrophe stands at the crux between the successful elegy and the depressing failure of the incomplete work

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from E. V. Gordon, ed., *Pearl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

of mourning.[2] In the funereal garden before his dream, the Mourner's apostrophes bring him no consolation; indeed, they only redouble his sorrow. In his dream, apostrophe threatens to undo the solace he manages to gain from the salutary landscape and the encounter with the Pearl-maiden. As I will argue below, the Maiden's apostrophes stand in contrast to the Dreamer's wayward speech. Whereas his calls to the lost pearl are predicated on intense feeling and indicate a forfeiture of emotional control, her brief apostrophes are reserved and carefully meted.

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[2] The issue of classifying *Pearl* as an elegy is as old as *Pearl* criticism itself. In his 1864 edition, the inaugural publication of the Early English Text Society, Richard Morris read the poem as an elegy, specifically an elegy for the poet's daughter (*Early English Alliterative Poetry*, EETS, o.s., 1 [London, 1864], xi). Sir Israel Gollancz likewise pushed for an autobiographical and elegiac reading in his revised edition of 1891 (*Pearl: An English Poem of the Fourteenth Century* [London, 1891]). Gollancz's reading became one of the major poles in the debate that would characterize early twentieth-century criticism of *Pearl*. For while the poem is now generally accepted as an elegy—whether biographical or not—there arose in the early decades of the last century a contentious interpretation of the poem that insisted the dream vision was not an elegy but an elaborate allegory. W. H. Schofield first posited that the daughter in the vision is an allegorical figure of "clean maidenhood" ("Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in *The Pearl*," *PMLA* 24 [1909]: 638). As Gordon notes, Schofield's reading did not come to dominate the literature surrounding the poem, but its departure from the accepted view opened the door for other interpretations and theorizations. More recently, for instance, Theodore Bogdanos has suggested that the dream is an allegorical quest, "a dramatization of man's encounter with the divine" (*Image of the Ineffable: A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983], 1). I will not categorically deny the existence of allegory or allegorical imagery in the poem, but, because I find loss and longing to be at the heart of *Pearl*, I shall treat the poem as an elegy. For a refutation of the allegorical reading, see A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 130–31, which argues that the poet shows "little tendency towards allegory" and that the *Pearl*-poet's deft use and explication of allegory—where it serves—suggests that other parts of the poem are not concealing allegorical meaning.

Even among scholars who accept *Pearl* as an elegy, controversy persists. I agree with the majority of commentators that the poem is an elegy for the Mourner-Dreamer's daughter and that the Pearl-maiden the Dreamer encounters is the divine manifestation of that lost beloved. I shall not, however, enter into the debate as to the historical truth (if any) behind the mourning poem. For my purposes, it does not matter whether the lamented child belongs to the poet or one of his patrons, be it the Earl of Pembroke or Thomas of Woodstock, or to no one in particular. The poem is, first and foremost, a poem of mourning, and, as J. R. R. Tolkien put it in the introduction to his translation of the poem, "Even a feigned elegy remains an elegy" (*Sir Gawain, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo* [London: Unwin, 1975], 10). For alternative interpretations of the object of the elegy, see Sister Mary Madaleva, *Pearl: A Study in Spiritual Dryness* (New York: Appleton, 1925); Sister Mary Vincent Hillman, "Some Debatable Words in *Pearl* and Its Theme," in John Conley, ed., *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 9–17; and Mother Angela Carson, "Aspects of Elegy in the Middle English Pearl," *Studies in Philology* 62 (1965): 17–27. On the question of the parent-child bond, see Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 125, and Gordon, ed., *Pearl*, 73.

These exemplary utterances demonstrate for the Pearl-mourner the appropriate measure of apostrophic expression. The Mourner bears this lesson back to the waking world. When he rises from the mound where he slept, he deploys the device with care and solemnity. Apostrophe can thus be read as a gauge for the Dreamer's progress through and beyond his grief.

APOSTROPHE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Apostrophe is particularly important to the elegist. The core principle behind the apostrophe, to give voice to and converse with an otherwise silent (and possibly absent) entity, is remarkably similar to one of the idealized goals of the elegy, to conjure the deceased, to have her turn back from the grave and toward the speaker. Both apostrophe and elegy depend on an element of invocation—a hope, if not a belief, that the poet can do things with words. "[T]o apostrophize," writes Jonathan Culler, "is to will a state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to your desire."[3] The apostrophizing poet reaches out to the object of the address, and the elegizing poet aims to overcome the distance between the quick and the dead. It should be no surprise, then, that so many elegies make frequent use of the device.[4]

The definition of apostrophe is deceptively simple. In its broadest sense, the term refers to any poetic address, but is generally understood to mean a direct address to unhearing and unresponsive entities—insentient objects, natural forces, animals, abstract emotions or concepts, or absent persons. Apostrophe comes from the Greek ἀποστροφή, "turning away," and was borrowed directly into Latin.[5] In the *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian broadly defines apostrophe as "utterances that divert the attention of the hearer from the question before them." More specifically, he explains that it is the figure by which the orator's address is turned from the judge in order to attack an opponent, to make

[3] Culler, "Apostrophe," in *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 139.

[4] The direct address to, or would-be invocation of, the deceased appears in elegies and elegiac passages, both in the dream vision genre and beyond. In Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, for example, the second half of the Man in Black's first lament is an address to Death (lines 481–86). See *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

[5] See *OED*, s.v. "apostrophe, n.1." See also Culler, "Apostrophe," 135.

an invocation, or to implore aid.[6] In book 4 of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, pseudo-Cicero writes that the apostrophe allows the writer or speaker to express either a sentiment of pain and suffering or of indignation toward a man, a city, a place, or an object.[7] Both classical authors acknowledge the power of the apostrophe even as they caution against its use. Quintilian says that apostrophe can be "wonderfully stirring" but also notes that it can prove to be a flaw and a distraction.[8]

Some medieval theories of rhetoric and poetics treat apostrophe as a powerful tool and give it a more prominent place than it had in the classical period.[9] Geoffrey of Vinsauf, whose *Poetria nova* (ca. 1200–1215) was a dominant influence on late medieval poetry and poetics, includes apostrophe as one of the eight types of *amplificatio*. Apostrophe, writes Geoffrey, allows one to travel the more leisurely and spacious route in his poetic endeavors. He encourages the poet to "[t]ake delight in apostrophe," for "[b]y it you may cause the subject to linger on its way, and in it you may stroll for an hour."[10] For Geoffrey, apostrophe is not only a "leisured delay" at the poetic feast but an opportunity for opulent display: his discussion of the device's merits reiterates its sumptuousness. He extends the metaphor of the lavish feast, praising the "splendour of dishes arriving in rich profusion" and calling the apostrophe "food for the ear" which is "delicious and fragrant and costly" (26).[11]

We cannot be entirely certain that the *Pearl*-poet knew Geoffrey's *Poe-*

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[6] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, ed. and trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 9.2.38–39. See also 4.1.63.

[7] *Rhetorique à Herennius*, ed. and trans. Guy Achard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), 4.22. The passage reads: "Exclamatio est quae conficit significationem doloris aut indignationis alicuius per hominis aut urbis aut loci aut rei cuiuspiam conpellationem."

[8] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 9.2.38 and 4.1.63. In each of Quintilian's short discussions of the figure, he stresses the important aspect of turning away from the main subject of discourse. He repeatedly highlights the term's etymological meaning, even punning on it at one point: in the most effective instances of apostrophe, writes Quintilian, *vere aversa videatur oratio* (4.1.67), "the address would seem truly turned away."

[9] Some do not. In his *Ars versificatoria* (ca. 1175), Matthew of Vendôme merely mentions apostrophe (*exclamatio*) in passing as he encourages students to investigate it and several other rhetorical colors. See Matthew of Vendôme, *Ars versificatoria* 3.47, in Edmond Faral, ed., *Les Arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1982), 109–93. See also the translations by Aubrey E. Gaylon (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980); and Roger G. Parr (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1981).

[10] Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), 25–26. All subsequent quotations from this text will be given parenthetically. See also the translation in Ernest Gallo, *The* Poetria Nova *and Its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971). The Latin text is found in Faral, ed., *Les Arts poétiques*, 197–262.

[11] We can already see some of the appeal for the *Pearl*-poet and his narrator.

tria nova, but it seems likely that the *Pearl*-poet, a man of high learning and breadth of knowledge, would have encountered the text or commentaries on it in the course of his education. The *Poetria nova* was, after all, "[t]he most popular of the medieval arts of poetry" and survives in over two hundred manuscripts.[12] Geoffrey's text was one of the chief instructional manuals in medieval schools, and his advice for the *ars poetriae* overlaps significantly with the *ars praedicandi*.[13] I do not presume to claim that the *Pearl*-poet is directly imitating Geoffrey's examples in the *Poetria nova* (though Chaucer did so in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*). I do, however, want to suggest that both Geoffrey of Vinsauf and the *Pearl*-poet are similarly interested in the function of apostrophe, the opportunities it affords and the pitfalls it holds for the mourning tongue. By investigating Geoffrey's presentation of apostrophe, we will better understand the intellectual and poetic contexts in which the *Pearl*-poet approaches apostrophe.

Geoffrey's fourth and fifth examples of the appropriate occasions, objects, and forms for apostrophe may have held particular significance for the *Pearl*-poet as he pondered the power of words and the project of elegy. The fourth example, in which the speaker addresses England, "Queen of kingdoms while King Richard lives," is, according to the intro-

[12] Gallo, "The *Poetria nova* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf," in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 68. See also Marjorie Curry Woods, *An Early Commentary on the* Poetria nova *of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (New York: Garland, 1985), xv; and Nims, introduction, in *Poetria Nova*, 12.

In her study on the pedagogical life of the *Poetria Nova*, Woods identifies some fifteen manuscripts of English provenance dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Another ten survive from the fifteenth century. See *Classroom Commentaries: Teaching the* Poetria nova *across Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

[13] As Jane Chance explains, "Although [the allegorical, the tropological, and the anagogical senses of meaning] did not originate in preaching tracts, by the fourteenth century they had been assimilated into the preacher's art as a type of rhetorical ornament and would have been commonly understood and accepted by contemporary homilists and poets." See "Allegory and Structure in *Pearl*: The Four Senses of the *Ars Praedicandi* and Fourteenth-Century Homiletic Poetry," in *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the* Pearl-*Poet*, ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, and Julian N. Wasserman (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1991), 33.

Damien Riehl Leader asserts that "[t]he *Poetria Nova* was the most popular of the *artes poeticae* in the English universities." See *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, *The University to 1546* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119. See also Martin Camargo, "Toward a Comprehensive Art of Written Discourse: Geoffrey of Vinsauf and the *Ars Dictaminis*," *Rhetorica* 6 (1988): 167–94; and Jessica Fenn, "Apostrophe, Devotion, and Anti-Semitism: Rhetorical Community in the *Prioress's Prologue and Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013): 432–58.

ductory passage, intended for a "time of success, [a] time of auspicious fortune." It is also intended, however, "as presage of grief to come" (28). The passage focuses on the transience of earthly boons: mirrors will shatter, bright stars will be eclipsed, strong pillars will "shudder and crash," and "the shadows of twilight will usher in night." The address to England also includes a lesson on the difference between human and divine knowledge and perspective: "To know present things is permitted to man; God alone knows the future." Geoffrey stresses that only one piece of foreknowledge is granted to man: "that no power can be lasting; that fortune ordains short life for prosperity" (28–29). A similar *transit gloria mundi* message is at the heart of the Pearl-maiden's first lesson for the Dreamer when she explains to him "þat þou lesteȝ watȝ bot a rose / Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef" (*Pearl*, 268–69).

Geoffrey's fifth example is more closely aligned with the central concerns of *Pearl*. This passage is meant for a "time of grief" and demonstrates the manner by which one may express sorrow. The prompt for this model exercise is the death of Richard I, the "grief to come" foretold in the previous passage. The speaker begins by addressing England, and calls the mourner to "bear witness to your woe in the gestures of sorrow": "Let your eyes flood with tears. . . . Let writhing anguish twist your fingers. . . . Let your cry strike the heavens" (*Poetria nova*, 29).[14] He moves from the figure of the mourner to apostrophize the cruel days of Richard's wounding and death, and then, moving from event to actor, he questions and curses the treacherous soldier who shot the king (29–30). Still seeking some solace by locating the cause of, and placing the blame for, Richard's death, the speaker telescopes his apostrophes. He first addresses Death, then Nature, which is the source of both life and death, and finally he moves beyond the worldly sphere to chide the ultimate source of all being, God (30–31). The passage concludes with a reminder of the transience of mundane joy and the inescapable sorrow of this world: through Richard's death, God has "made us know how brief is the laughter of earth, how long are its tears" (31). The *Pearl*-mourner likewise seeks to locate the cause of his loss and his grief. He begins by calling out to the pearl itself and later twice attaches agency to it, making it the active source of his loss (*Pearl*, 13 and 245–50). He castigates Nature, represented in the flowers that grow on the *huyle* (25–36) and the *moul* that "marre[st] a myry iuele" (23). The Mourner similarly doubts the power of God in the wake of personal loss. Geoffrey's speaker asks, "O God, most excellent of beings, why do you fail in your

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14 Chaucer mocks the hyperbole of this passage in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* (VII.3347–51).

nature here?" (*Poetria nova*, 31). The grieving man in the *erber* gains no solace from the "kynde of Kryst" (*Pearl*, 55).

In both his theoretical discussion and his practical examples, Geoffrey demonstrates one of the defining characteristics of the device: apostrophe as diversionary tactic. As a form of amplification, apostrophe is "a mode of delay" (*Poetria nova*, 25). He does not invoke Quintilian directly, but Geoffrey seems to draw on the same etymological awareness for his interpretation and presentation of the device: as I mentioned above, he introduces apostrophe using the metaphor of travel, the pleasant wayside and the scenic route. The notion of "turning away" contains within it an implicit criticism, however, that the speaker is somehow neglecting or rejecting his point of focus or his obligations. In the *ad Herennium*, pseudo-Cicero cautions the rhetor against overuse of apostrophe.[15] Although Geoffrey is generally positive about the potential outcomes of apostrophe, one of his concluding remarks likewise suggests an element of caution. He sums up the various countenances of apostrophe:

> Sic igitur variat vultum: vel more magistri
> Corripit errorem pravum; vel ad Omnia dura
> In lacrimis planctuque jacet; vel surgit in iram
> Propter grande scelus; vel fertur ridiculose
> Contra ridiculos. Ex talibus edita causis
> Et decus et numerum lucratur apostrophe verbis.
>
> (455–60)

[Apostrophe varies its countenance thus: with the mien of a magistrate it rebukes vicious error; or it languishes in tearful complaint against all that is harsh; or is roused to wrath over some great crime; or appears with derisive force in attacking buffoons. When evoked by causes such as these, apostrophe contributes both adornment and amplification.] (*Poetria nova*, 32)[16]

Geoffrey does not explicitly condemn apostrophe, but a warning is there in the verb *jacet* ("lies or languishes"). The three other types of apostrophe Geoffrey enumerates in this concluding passage—the didactic, the accusatory or prosecutorial, and the mocking—are active and assertive, if not outright aggressive. Corrective apostrophe "rebukes" (*corripit*) "depraved error, after the manner of a teacher." The apostrophe

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[15] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 4.22.

[16] Nims's translation perhaps overemphasizes the stultifying effects of the grieving apostrophe. Gallo offers the more literal "it lies in tears and lamentations for any difficult lot" (*The* Poetria Nova *and Its Sources*, 39).

used for mockery adopts (*fertur*) a ridiculous attitude to take up arms against buffoonery. The prosecutorial apostrophe, which responds to "a great crime," "rises up in anger" (*surgit in iram*).[17] Apostrophe in lamentations, however, is not active in the same sense. Whether we translate Geoffrey's *jacet* literally, "lies," or adopt Nims's more dramatic "languishes," we see that the apostrophes of a grieving speaker have a stationary or stalled aspect. They are the most potentially dangerous type of apostrophe, a "turning away" from which one might not be able to turn back.

In *Pearl*, the opening apostrophe marks the Mourner's turning away from the social world to dwell in his grief. When he enters into the *erber*, he effectively turns his back on the active and lively community of harvesters who labor in the fields in "Augoste . . . / Quen corne is coruen wyth croke3 kene" (39–40). He instead returns to the site of his sorrow, the small garden in which he lost his precious pearl. Rather than speak with his fellows among the living, he elects to call out to the absent, inanimate, and mute pearl, and so isolates himself further. He becomes a sad and lonely voice crying in the garden, addressing an object (or a person) that cannot respond and thus cannot offer consolation.[18] This first instance of apostrophe in *Pearl* announces and encapsulates the Mourner's quandary: he longs for contact with that which is not present, seeks a response from that which cannot answer, and, in the frustration born of his failures, becomes suspicious of the medium in which he operates. He doubts the power of words.

Apostrophe, according to Culler, is much closer to the heart of poetry and poetic language than modern criticism might otherwise suggest. Apostrophes function most often—as Quintilian, pseudo-Cicero, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf all note—"as intensifiers, as images of invested passion."[19] Culler draws on the work of Pierre Fontanier, who claims that apostrophe arises from "feeling stirred up within the heart until it breaks out and spreads itself about on the outside."[20] Culler suggests

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[17] Gallo, *The* Poetria Nova *and Its Sources*, 39.

[18] For a further discussion of the harvest metaphor in *Pearl*, see Lynn Staley Johnson, "The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Eleventh Hour," in Blank et al., *Text and Matter*, 3–15. She explains the relationship between the August harvest and the Mourner's experience of loss and consolation: "If the dreamer's early expressions of grief can be described as the barren harvest of his sorrow, then the poem that begins 'Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye' surely can suggest true fruit, the bountiful harvest of love and labor" (10).

[19] Culler, "Apostrophe," 138.

[20] Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours* (1830; Paris: Flammarion, 1968). Culler translates from 372. (One assumes Fontanier had read his Wordsworth.)

that apostrophes can function as metonymic signs of that passion. He is reluctant to accept that this characterization of the apostrophe is universally true, however, and he reminds us that apostrophe can also have a more measured and controlled tone and delivery. What is more, in some instances, the intense feeling which spurs the apostrophizer to speak is not sentiment for the object or person addressed but "an intense feeling for the act of addressing."[21] The poetic speaker can love the apostrophized object, yes, but he can also be half in love with apostrophe itself.

Culler's reading identifies one of the possible traps in apostrophe, one into which the Pearl-mourner would be likely to fall: the apostrophizing speaker must avoid being caught—dazzled or glamored—by what Geoffrey of Vinsauf identifies as the "delicious and fragrant and costly" splendor of poetic ornament. Indeed, the overflowing passion of which Fournier writes can easily become a confused mixture of intense feelings for the object of the address and for the act of reaching out verbally to that object, just as the apostrophe itself is at once an effect of heightened emotion and an intensifier of that same emotion.[22] The Mourner's cries in the *erber* stem from his sorrow at the loss of the pearl, but they increase that sorrow rather than assuage it. As Theodore Bogdanos notes, "The hero's initial lamentation is charged with powerful, even self-luxuriating emotion," and his "emotional violence is made to suggest a corresponding degree of impotence."[23] The Mourner risks perpetuating a vicious cycle of impassioned calling without response. The consequent frustration reinforces that passion until he comes to lament his own limitations rather than his lost loved one.

Barbara Nolan posits that the mourning speaker has already fallen into this pattern in the first stanzas of the poem. She argues that "the 'I,' not the 'pearl,' is the real subject of the jeweler's grief" and that the Mourner-Dreamer is "full of self-importance and self-pity." Citing the

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[21] Culler, "Apostrophe," 139.

[22] What Culler's discussion emphasizes, though he does not explicitly say so, is that if the apostrophe is indeed born of intensified and intensifying passion, then the nature of that passion is an important factor. If the passion is problematic, the apostrophe is also a problem. In *Pearl*, much of the Mourner's grief is the result of misplaced value and misdirected affection. He is, as the Maiden repeatedly points out, too attached to the things of this world. According to the Maiden's lesson—"þat þou lesteȝ watȝ bot a rose" (268)—even his opening address is off the mark: he cannot hope for his address to succeed if he has not called upon the right referent. Similarly, although he admires the pearl for its extreme beauty and perfect qualities, he hails the pearl primarily out of a jealous self-interest.

[23] Bogdanos, *Image of the Ineffable*, 21.

prevalence of first-person singular pronouns in the proem and through-
out the dream, Nolan states: "Syntax works to intensify our impression
of the jeweler's self-absorption. Concentrating attention on his loss, he
allows the pearl, as well as the garden setting, to slip into prepositional
phrases and subordinate clauses."[24] Despite his efforts to set the pearl
front and center by naming it first, the Mourner himself quickly eclipses
both pearl and garden: his grief obscures the original point of inter-
est and shifts the focus to him as a speaker. The whirlpool effect of the
apostrophe thus reveals the isolationist and even solipsistic tendencies
of grief and of the elegy.

   As I suggested above, the Mourner's departure from the commu-
nity of harvesters is an important marker of his isolation in grief. Many
scholars suggest that the date in "Auguste in a hyȝ seysoun" (39) is the
English Lammas festival held on the first of August, when the first
harvest was gathered together and presented to the local church for
the making of host wafers.[25] Lammas was a heavily communal event:
"Though harvest was the season of the year when everyone, young
or old, man or woman, had to work hardest," writes George Caspar
Homans, "the very circumstance that everyone who could be spared
from other work was in the fields must have made it a time of company,
and the many traditional sports and gifts of harvest helped the work
to go forward cheerfully."[26] The Mourner's conspicuous absence from
the collective labor and celebration reinforces the isolating effects of his
sorrow. The lonely enclosure of the *erber* stands in contrast to the teem-
ing open fields, and his unproductive mourning is juxtaposed to the
bounty gathered by the harvesters.

   The turn away from the harvest (and from the Mourner's colloquy
with his peers) also represents a turning away from, a refusal to be

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[24] Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,
1977), 160–61. Spearing likewise notes that the Mourner's "grief is really for himself, not
for her" (*Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 121).

[25] Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400–1700* (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1994), 44. Among the *Pearl* scholars who favor a 1 August date are
most of the poem's editors, including Gollancz, Gordon, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald
Waldron, and Sarah Stanbury.

[26] Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uni-
versity Press, 1941), 371. Hutton elaborates on the customs of Lammas, explaining the
group activities and creations that went along with the celebration: practices at Lammas
include "the crowning of girls as harvest queens by sets of reapers, the bringing home
of the last load of corn covered in garlands, with loud acclamations, and the weaving of
images from grain stalks" (*The Ritual Year*, 44). There are several resonances here with the
events and images recounted in *Pearl*.

part of, the march of time. The annual harvest festival symbolizes the advance of time, not only year to year, but the progress from seed to stalk to ripe grain. The Mourner's uneasiness with irresistible temporal movement is demonstrated in the stanza that precedes the mention of the harvest. In the third stanza of the proem, the Mourner considers the "spot of spyceȝ" (25) growing in the *erber* and focuses on the issue of the pearl's probable dissolution. He contemplates the likelihood that the buried pearl nourishes the flowering spices that grow on the mound:

> Flor and fryte may not be fede
> Þer hit doun drof in moldeȝ dunne;
> For vch gresse mot grow of grayneȝ dede;
> No whete were elleȝ to woneȝ wonne.
>
> $(29–32)^{27}$

The Mourner is anxious over this (imperfect) form of rebirth.[28] The transfer of life is imperfect, because it is perennial. The cycle of life, death, and rebirth certainly exists, but it is not, as the Mourner acknowledges, a closed circle; it is a spiral. The beauty of the spice-flowers is fleeting: at the end of the next season they will fade and die and their seeds, not the corpse of the child, will give rise to the next year's crop. Moreover, if the corpse of the child (the pearl, the seed) is transformed into the new life of the flowers, her presence in the mound will end. The memory of the deceased daughter will quickly dissipate, and "his loss will then be total."[29] The Mourner seeks to order a halt to the natural cycle; he wants to escape from time.[30]

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[27] This paraphrase of John 12:24–25 is typically understood as the Mourner's attempt to console himself by emphasizing the continuity of life in the cycles of the natural world. Andrew and Waldron explain: "This is a familiar Christian formula of *solacium* . . . for the inevitable fact of death" (eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, 5th ed. [Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008], 55). Gordon observes that the lines are very similar to those in the C-text of *Piers Plowman* 13.179–81 but maintains there is little likelihood of a direct relationship, suggesting instead that the similarity speaks to the circulation and popularity of this passage at the end of the fourteenth century (47).

[28] See Edward Vasta, "*Pearl*: Immortal Flowers and the Pearl's Decay," in *The Middle English* Pearl, 185–202, especially 191–93.

[29] Vasta, "Immortal Flowers," 193.

[30] Vasta argues we should read these lines not as a contemplation of the life that might grow and in its turn fade, but as a command (or attempted command) against any such transformation. The key to his interpretation is in the word "fede" ("Immortal Flowers," 29). Most editions and translations interpret the word in the sense of weakening, diminishing, or dying away. Gordon reads it as a descendant of the Old French root *fade* and suggests that we think of the flowers as having lost color. Gollancz links the word to Old Norse *feyja* and glosses it as "decay." Vasta interprets "fede" as akin to Modern English "fed" through the past participle of Middle English *feden* ("to feed"), from the Old English

The Mourner's anxieties about time are linked to his doubts about language. Time is necessary for language—for words and sentences—to unfold. Language is, as St. Augustine says, "sound[ed] in time," one syllable after the other, and leaves the world after the silence at the end of an utterance.[31] However, it is precisely this unfolding of things in time which leads to death, separation, dissolution, and final loss. The elegist's ambivalences to time and to language are again underscored: they are respectively the dimension and the medium in which he operates and through which he hopes to access his beloved, but which also limit and even undermine his efforts. The elegist thus wants to use language (in time) to move beyond language, to break out of time.

Apostrophe resists time. It is a decidedly lyric device, one dependent on an internalizing focus of the poem and of the speaker. The shift to internalization is important, writes Culler, "because it works against narrative and its accompaniments: sequentiality, causality, time, and teleological meaning."[32] Apostrophe has its own special temporality, a sort of "timeless present," which, according to Culler, is more closely identified with discourse than with story.[33] In predominantly narrative poems such as dream visions, the apostrophe intrudes upon the organized series of events that make up the story. Like ekphrasis, apostrophe diverts the flow of narrative into the eddying backwaters of lyrical meditation. In elegiac poetry, apostrophe allows for a circumventing of temporality by manipulating the relationship between presence and absence: "Apostrophes displace this irreversible structure [e.g. the temporal sequence of loss] by removing the opposition between presence and absence from empirical time [narrative] and locating it in discursive time. The temporal movement from A to B, internalized by apostrophe, becomes a reversible alternation between A′ and B′: a play of presence and absence governed not by time but by poetic power."[34]

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fedan. Taken together, the passage thus reads: "flower and fruit may not be fed where the Pearl lies—may not feed on the Pearl's decay." See "Immortal Flowers," 192. Vasta's reading further depends on a reinterpretation of "may" as well. It should not be interpreted as a comment on ability but in the sense of permission (from the Old English *magan*).

[31] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.6.8 (225). Cf 11.23.29 (237). See also *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.3–14.

[32] Culler, "Apostrophe," 148.

[33] Ibid., 149.

[34] Ibid., 150. Culler cites elegy as the "clearest example of this structure," for the elegiac poem "replaces an irreversible temporal disjunction, the move from life to death, with a dialectical alternation between attitudes of mourning and consolation, evocations of absence and presence" (150).

Apostrophe can thus offer the elegist the best aspects of temporality and timelessness. It allows the speaker to call to the lost beloved and (seemingly) to call her back from the dead. Its anti-temporal properties also provide the mourner with the opportunity to negate the sequence of events that led to his loss. Apostrophe is a powerful tool, yes, but it must be wielded deftly. This is one of several important lessons the Pearl-mourner learns from his dream.

A LONE VOICE IN THE GARDEN: APOSTROPHE IN THE PROEM

"Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye / To clanly clos in gold so clere" (1–2): this article reads the first lines of *Pearl* as an apostrophe. There is no clear consensus that the poem opens with the device, however. Some critics simply disregard the issue altogether.[35] Others are more direct in their denial of apostrophe. Robert J. Blanch dismisses outright the possibility of a rhetorical opening and insists that these lines are written in imitation of "the phraseology and formulae of medieval lapidaries."[36] Less decisively, Gordon writes, "The first two lines are probably not an apostrophe."[37] Nonetheless, several editors do read the lines as apostrophe. Schofield sets the opening word apart by the insertion of a long dash (a second dash appears at the end of the line). Gollancz, Osgood, and Stanbury all punctuate the first line as an apostrophe by inserting a comma after "Perle."[38]

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[35] For instance, J. J. Anderson observes that "[t]he poem's first word is its focal point" but does not elaborate on the manner in which the word (*Perle*) is brought into focus. See *Language and Imagination in the* Gawain-*poems* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 20. Lynn Staley notes that, like the *Book of the Duchess* or Dante's *Vita Nuova*, *Pearl* shares in the strategies of the elegiac mode, but she does not cite the apostrophe as one of these strategies. See *The Voice of the* Gawain-*poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 146.

[36] Blanch, "Precious Metal and Gem Symbolism in *Pearl*," in *Sir Gawain and Pearl*: *Critical Essays*, ed. Robert J. Blanch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 86.

[37] Gordon, ed., *Pearl*, 45.

[38] See Gollancz, ed., *Pearl*; Charles G. Osgood, Jr., ed., *The Pearl* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1906); and Sarah Stanbury, ed., *Pearl* (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2001). Interestingly, Gordon does the same: his discussion of the line's syntax serves to explain this choice, but the addition of the comma certainly opens up the possibility of alternate, apostrophic readings. Andrew and Waldron place a comma after the second word, "Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye," and their gloss also leaves open the possibility of an apostrophic reading: "Lovely pearl, which it pleases a prince to set radiantly (*or* chastely) in gold so bright" (*Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*).

The forthcoming edition from the Cotton Nero A.x. Project (ed. Murray McGillivray and Jenna Stook) argues that the syntax break at the end of the second line, which the editors mark with a Schofieldian long dash, provides convincing evidence for an apos-

Patricia M. Kean labels the opening lines using the Latin term *excla-matio*, whereby she highlights the rhetorical nature of the condensed and economic structure of the proem.[39] The two-line *exclamatio*, writes Kean, provides the *propositio* with concise, almost proverbial force. She situates the *Pearl*-poet's use of this topos in an enduring European tra-dition, citing both Tertullian and Milo of St. Amand, whose Latin poem *De sobrietate* includes an address to the *margarita micans*, the "shining pearl."[40] The effect of Kean's reading is twofold. First, it clearly identi-fies the opening apostrophe as such and, as I have said, invests it with the authority of participation in a long tradition. Second, it reconciles other dismissive readings to the apostrophic interpretation. Here, she acts upon the possibility Gordon leaves open even as he tries to deny the apostrophe: "The first two lines *are probably not* an apostrophe" (my emphasis). Much of Gordon's note is dedicated to explaining the syn-tactic reasons behind this assertion, but he remains guarded. As I noted above, Blanch insists that the lines are drawn strictly from "the phrase-ology and formulae of medieval lapidaries." Kean shows that the lines can be both an adoption of lapidary material and an apostrophe. Her readings of Tertullian and Milo make clear that the texts which explic-itly link fine pearls with gold mounting also include direct addresses to the gemstone. Kean's assessment strikes me as the correct one. After all, why should we doubt that the *Pearl*-poet, a devotee of word games, doubled meanings, and semantic slipperiness, would not look upon the lapidary material and read the description as an apostrophe? Such a gesture fits with the dynamic nature of the pearl symbol throughout the poem: in the twelve lines of the first stanza, for example, the pearl shifts from the object closed in gold to the lost "her."[41]

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trophic reading. For a preview of the print edition, see *The Cotton Nero A.x. Project* ⟨http://gawain-ms.ca⟩.

[39] Kean, *The Pearl: An Interpretation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 8. Given the "economy of organization and a condensation of meaning" in the opening sec-tion, Kean insists that the "best way to understand the poet's purpose will be to study the rhetorical structure of the opening." She points out, too, that the "devices of formal rhetoric were the natural tools of a poet of this period." Cf. Chance, *"Ars Praedicandi,"* 33.

[40] Kean, *The Pearl*, 8–9. For Milo of St. Amand, see *De sobrietate*, 2, 44–46, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* (Berlin, 1896), 646. Kean quotes from Ter-tullian's *De resurrectione carnis* wherein he explains that the only appropriate setting for pearls is "choice gold." In his poem, Milo apologizes to his pearl, explaining that, while "thrice-fired gold" is the proper setting for the gem, he has "only harsher bronze for your enclosing" (Kean's translation).

[41] Eugene Vance accounts for the hyr-hit flux. The I-her axis, he explains, is "fraught with self-pity," the survivor's sorrow which must be spoken and gradually overcome. The I-it axis, by contrast, is a distancing gesture, one meant to protect the speaker from feel-

Bogdanos, who accepts the apostrophe more readily than most other critics, states that the initial instance of *perle* is "[i]solated by a caesura" from which it gains its dramatic force.[42] Although his interpretation appears to depend largely on an acceptance of the editorial comma, this is not wholly the case. The first word is set off from the rest of the line by the simple necessities of pronunciation. Eugene Vance points out that it is impossible to pronounce the word *perle* in haste—it is "a word sweet to the English ear, and languorous to utter"—but Vance does not elaborate on the phonetic features that contribute to the sweet effect.[43] The word sounds longer than its two syllables. The burst of the [p] begins the poem with Bogdanos's "dramatic force" and likewise captures the sudden outpouring of emotion through the apostrophe. The tongue is slowed immediately, however, as it encounters the adjacent rhotic and lateral liquids. This tongue-twisting pair, sandwiched between a short middle vowel and the voiced final –e, creates a mellifluous luxury which the speaker relishes even as he utters it. The alliteration through the end of the line refracts and recombines these sounds, "*pl*esaunt to *pr*ynces," without again achieving the full richness or pacing of the first word.

In its combination of sudden sound and slow, difficult pronunciation, the word *perle* verbalizes the challenges the Mourner-Dreamer faces in both his plaint in the *erber* and his encounter with the Maiden in the dreamscape: he frequently stumbles, tripping over his hasty words while trying to rein in his unthinking outbursts. Similarly, the pleasantness of the word itself, with its implicit invitation to relish and repeat it, represents the peril of the apostrophe, the chance that the speaker will become obsessed with the repetition of the utterance—whether successful or not—and lose sight of the cause and the goal of the address. The possibility of waywardness arises several times in the course of the dream and threatens to derail the Mourner's pursuit of consolation.

The initial apostrophe establishes an important tone for the rest of the

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ings of guilt if not of helplessness. It allows the Mourner to claim, as Vance puts it, "'I' did not lose 'her'; rather, 'it' slipped from me into the grass." See "*Pearl*: Love and the Poetics of Participation," in *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 134. Compare Nolan's comments regarding the Mourner's precise use of prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses (*The Gothic Visionary Perspective*, 60–61).

[42] Bogdanos, *Image of the Ineffable*, 13. He posits that the apostrophe to the pearl initiates an "emphatic confrontation" with the poem's chief image and yet "transfixes us with its total arbitrariness as 'the beginning.'"

[43] Vance, "Poetics of Participation," 131.

poem: from the first sound he makes, the Mourner in the garden identi-
fies himself as a troubled speaker grappling with the frustrations of the
apostrophe. Indeed, because of the prominent placement of the address
to the pearl, it is possible to read the whole poem as one long apostro-
phe, or, perhaps less drastically, as an effort to resolve the speaker's
(and by extension the poet's) troubled relationship with apostrophe. We
may thus use the other instances of apostrophe to plot the Mourner-
Dreamer's progress from the anxiety and futility of grief to the settled
and controlled utterances with which the poem concludes.

   The first stanza of the poem, with its address to the pearl and the con-
cise presentation of the Mourner's problem in the final four lines, sets
an apostrophic tone for the stanzas which follow in section 1:

> Allas! I lest hyr in on erbere;
> Þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
> I deweyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
> Of þat pryuy perle wythouten spot.
>
>   (9–12)

The second stanza presents the Mourner's response to his loss: he goes
frequently to the spot where his pearl sprang from him and under-
goes a degree of emotional torment. The Mourner recounts the experi-
ence of his grief largely in the imperfect tense and so covers many un-
determined past instances; the account thus stands in for the unspoken
buildup to the outburst that opens the poem even as it prepares for
the time in the *erber* when the Mourner enters into the dream (37–60).
The pain of the Mourner's visits is fully disclosed: standing at the grave
and longing for the pearl "dotȝ bot þrych my hert þrange, / My breste
in bale bot bolne and bele" (17–18). The grief associated with this site
pierces his heart oppressively, and his sorrow burns and swells within
his breast. An emotional storm is brewing, and the feeling soon proves
too much, at which point it is released as an apostrophe: "O moul, þou
marreȝ a myry iuele" (23).

   The Mourner now turns away from his prior account to give voice to
his sorrow. In the first stanza, he spoke *about* his grief: he told how he
lost the pearl and narrated his consequent response. Here, at the end of
the second stanza, he expresses that grief directly. Like the speaker in
Geoffrey of Vinsauf's fifth example, he cries out to the earth, seeking to
redirect his anger. This instance of venting establishes a symmetrical
structure for the first two stanzas: the Mourner's identification of his
loss (9–12) and his response to it (13–22) are sandwiched between the

two apostrophes (1 and 23). The shape suggests the cyclical nature of his grief and his inability to break from its endless repetition. Through his address to the *moul* he tries to transfer blame to the mound in which the pearl is "clad in clot" (22). The apostrophe works to transform the ground from an object to a subject, one that actively "marreȝ" the buried pearl and is thus a worthy recipient of blame. The earth does not respond, however, either in words or by releasing the pearl.

The first section of *Pearl* contains a third instance of apostrophe, I believe, although it occurs obliquely. In the skewed temporalities of the opening section, the Mourner switches from the atemporal or ill-defined address of the first three stanzas to the specific moment narrated in the fourth and fifth stanzas, when he enters again into the *erber* and begins his plaint: "To þat spot þat I in speche expoun / I entred in þat erber grene, / In Auguste in a hyȝ seysoun" (37–39). What follows, after a second and more detailed account of the flowers and spices on the mound, is a real-time account of the Mourner's most recent experience at the grave-mound:

> Bifore þat spot my honde I spenned
> For care ful colde þat to me caȝt;
> A deuely dele in my hert denned,
> Þaȝ resoun sette meseluen saȝt.
> I playned my perle þat þer watȝ spenned
> Wyth fyrce skylleȝ þat faste faȝt[.]
>
> (49–54)

From what we know about the *Pearl*-mourner in the first three stanzas—he is a man prone to emotional outbursts, one who seems at once to loathe and to relish the opportunity to speak his lost beloved's name—it is safe to assume that this latest lament is similar in form and in degree of passion. The desolating grief (*deuely dele*) that lies in the Mourner's heart recalls his earlier comment that reflecting on the lost pearl "dotȝ bot þrych my hert þrange, / My breste in bale bot bolne and bele" (17–18). The vehement arguments (*fyrce skylleȝ*) that clamor within him further evince the frantic character of his pining before the grave mound. The Mourner's plaint is no doubt full of cries of the pearl's name: we can imagine him feverishly repeating the word until he works himself into a hysterical state. He again calls out to the pearl, but the pearl, enclosed in the equally silent ground, again does not respond. Although the Mourner knows that the "kynde of Kryst" (55) should grant him comfort, the violence of the scene progresses until his reason is un-

settled and his "wreched wylle" causes him to carry on in painful woe (56). The emotional turmoil suddenly overwhelms the Mourner and casts him into the "slepyng-slaȝte" (59).[44] Here the implied apostrophes of the final plaint, presaged by the opening of the poem and the sudden and agitated address to the earth, appear to induce the dream. Apostrophes bookend the proem and mark the boundary between waking life in the garden and the otherworldly dreamscape.[45]

Because of the prominent role of apostrophes in the proem, what follows in the dream is, in part at least, a response to the Mourner's disappointment with the lack of consolation that apostrophe affords. Indeed, in one sense, the dream-encounter with the Pearl-maiden is a fantasy of the apostrophic mind. It fulfills and realizes what Culler calls apostrophe's optative character.[46] In an admittedly roundabout way, the hailing of the lost pearl leads to the sleep that then leads to the dream in which the Maiden appears: the invocations of poetic mourning are successful.[47] The dream thus provides an opportunity to achieve that elusive consolation and to put an end to grief.

"O PERLE . . . IN PERLES PYȜT": DREAMING APOSTROPHE

Despite the prominence of apostrophes in the proem of *Pearl*, the device appears relatively infrequently in the course of the dream. These few instances occur at important intervals, however. There are, by my count, a total of five apostrophes in the dream sequence. Of these five, the Mourner-Dreamer speaks two and the Maiden three. The Dreamer's first apostrophe is the most significant. After he journeys through the earthly paradise, increasingly amazed by the otherworldly sights and

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[44] Gordon's note to this line emphasizes the frantic and painful experience that leads to the Mourner's fainting: "The usual meaning of *slaȝt* is 'a violent or sudden blow'" (ed., *Pearl*, 49).

[45] In books 2 and 3 of the *House of Fame*, the Chaucerian speaker deploys several apostrophes within his invocations as he launches into another leg of his dream-journey. These passages show how apostrophe can be used as both a technique of transition and an energizing device.

[46] Culler, "Apostrophe," 146.

[47] The wonder with which the Dreamer greets the Pearl-maiden demonstrates his surprise at the apparent success of his calls to the pearl. It is also reminiscent of the shock with which the dreamer in the *Book of the Duchess* wakes in the dream, amazed that his prayer-bribe to Morpheus appears to have worked. The irony in *Pearl* is that the Maiden does not, in fact, appear at the Mourner's behest; rather, she is sent by Lamb who has permitted the Dreamer a sight of the Heavenly City (967–68). Compare Dante's journey which is not undertaken by his own will but was "willed on high," *vuolsi ne l'alto* (*Inferno*, 7.11). See Dante, *La Commedia: Inferno*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1977).

sounds, the Dreamer sees the Maiden. Following the elaborate, four-stanza description of her appearance, he calls out to her: "'O perle,' quoth I, 'in perles pyȝt, / Art thou my perle that I haf playned, / Regretted by myn one on nyȝte?'" (241–43).

There is an argument to be made that calling to the pearl at this juncture does not constitute a proper apostrophe because the Maiden is standing before him, albeit on the other side of the river. Be that as it may, the Maiden's presence is questionable on a couple of fronts. First, we must recall that this is a dream vision, and so the veracity of the events and actors is already in doubt.[48] At this point in the narrative, at least, she could be a figment of the Dreamer's imagination. Second, even within the world of the dream, her presence is not certain. After the Dreamer states his wish to join her "byȝonde þise waweȝ" (287), the Maiden rebukes him for his faulty logic:

> Þy worde byfore þy wytte con fle.
> Þou says þou traweȝ me in þis dene,
> Bycawse þou may wyth yȝen me se
> . . .
> I halde þat iueler lyttel to prayse
> Þat leueȝ wel þat he seȝ wyth yȝe[.]
> (294–96, 301–2)

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[48] Drawing on theological, philosophical, and scientific texts, as well as literary precursors, medieval dream-vision poets frequently play upon the unreliability of dreams. In the proem to Chaucer's *House of Fame*, for example, the narrator begins his account by enumerating the types of dreams and the difficulty dreamers (and readers) have deciding into which category a dream falls (1–58). Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose* similarly opens by casting doubt on the reliability of such visions:

> Maintes genz dient que en songes
> N's se fables non et mençonges;
> Mès l'en puet tex songes songier
> Qui ne sont mie mençongier,
> Ainz sont après bien aparant
> (1–5)

> Many men sayn that in sweveninges
> Ther nys but fables and lesynges;
> But men may some sweven[es] sen
> Whiche hardely that false ne ben,
> But afterward ben apparaunt.
> (1–5)

See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 3 vols., ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1968); and Chaucer's translation, Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 686. For discussions of dream visions' muddying of signs and signification, see, for instance, J. Stephen Russell, *English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), especially chapters 2 and 3; and Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 8–11.

She begins her rebuke by attacking his unreasonable statements: "Wy borde ȝe men? So madde ȝe be!" (290). Her comments imply that he is mistaken to think she is really there just because he has seen her. Much later, at the climax of the vision, the Dreamer is surprised to see his pearl among the many maidens of the procession: "Þen saȝ I þer my lyttel quene / Þat I wende had standen by me in sclade" (1147–48). Gordon glosses "wende" as "supposed" from the Old English *wenan*. The poet's diction highlights the Dreamer's error in thinking the Maiden was truly present on the far side of the river. The uncertainty of the Maiden's presence makes an apostrophic interpretation more plausible, especially if we bear in mind that the poet is here exploring the capacities of apostrophe. We should at the very least consider this utterance a quasi-apostrophe, an address to a figure that is at once absent and not absent, a poetic instance which challenges the definition of apostrophe as it similarly broadens the device's applicability and ponders an improved, even successful form. The first (quasi-)apostrophe of the dream thus teeters between being a joyful success exceeding all expectations and a heartbreaking failure of transient reunion and consolation. On the surface, it is an improvement on the apostrophes in the *erber*, which fall flat, but it does not yet promise solace.

The Dreamer's call and question to the Pearl-maiden are the first words he utters in the vision, and the passage recalls the first lines of the poem. Like the opening "Perle," his speech here is prompted by intensified emotion, a burgeoning joy as he recognizes the figure:

> No gladder gome heþen into Grece
> Þen I, quen ho on brymme wore.
> Ho watȝ me nerre þen aunte or nece
> My joy forþy watȝ much þe more.
>
> (231–34)

The recollection of the first lines is bittersweet. On the one hand, it offers an opportunity for apostrophe and elegy to succeed in bridging the gap between the speaker and the addressee, to correct the failed apostrophes of the waking section that were linked so strongly with pain and sorrow. On the other hand, the symbolic return to the beginning of the poem threatens to undo the healing the Dreamer has undergone in the early stage of his vision.

As he progresses through the earthly paradise, the Dreamer's sorrow melts away: "The adubbemente of þo downeȝ dere / Garten my goste al greffe forȝete" (85–86). Voided of grief, he begins to accrue joy in its place:

> The dubbement dere of doun and daleȝ,
> Of wod and water and wlonk playneȝ,
> Bylde in me blys, abated my baleȝ,
> Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my payneȝ.
> (121–24)[49]

The deeper he moves into the paradisal realm, the greater the increase of his bliss—"ay more and more" (132). The repetition of the initial apostrophe threatens to undo this healing, however. The Dreamer does not delight in the moment of reunion. His first words to the Maiden return immediately to the sustained period of grief:

> Much longeying haf I for þe layned,
> Syþen into gress þou me aglyȝte.
> Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned . . .
> What wyrde hatȝ hyder my iuel vayned,
> And don me in þys del and gret daunger?
> (244–46, 249–50)[50]

The potential relapse signalled by the renewed apostrophic trope is further emphasized by the repetition of key words from the proem. Line 250 takes us back to the intensity, and compounds the grief, of the fraught scene in the *erber* where the Mourner is "fordolked of luf-daungere" (11) and suffers from the "deuely dele" (51) caused by the emotional wound.

The possibility of a return to the troubled state in which the poem opens is also reinforced by the heavy repetition of "perle." The word *perle* (or *perles*) appears fifty-one times in the poem.[51] The hailing of the pearl in the dream is one of two instances wherein the Dreamer repeats the word with such frequency—three times in the space of two lines—and the proximity of these recurrences betrays the speaker's mind drifting back to a physical covetousness and fetishization of the lost object of address. In the section that precedes his hailing, the Dreamer describes the Maiden's appearance in great detail. As in his account of the marvel-

[49] The healing aspects of the Dreamer's vision are here underlined through the repetition of the word *bale*, which appears only once before, when the Mourner's consideration of the grave mound spurs his sadness: "My breste in bale bot bolne and bele" (18).

[50] This passage also sees a problematic reversal of the semantic parsing that Vance claims the Mourner carries out through his *ho-hit* substitutions ("Poetics of Participation," 134; cf. n. 41 above). The Dreamer, once again speaking without weighing his words, swiftly blames the Pearl-maiden for abandoning him in the mutable, mortal world while she lives "a lyf of lykyng lyȝte, / In Paradys erde, of stryf vnstrayned" (247–48). Andrew and Waldron comment that the "injured, self-pitying tone of the second half [of the Dreamer's address] . . . complicates the reader's sympathy for him" (66).

[51] The synonym *margary(es), mariorys* appears three times (199, 206, and 1037).

lous land through which he wanders, the Dreamer relishes the richness
of the physical details:

> Þat gracious gay wythouten galle,
> So smoþe, so small, so seme, sly3t,
> Ryse3 vp in hir araye ryalle,
> A precios piece in perle3 py3t.
>
> (189–92)

The four stanzas of the description stress the pearliness of the Maiden's
apparel and accoutrements: the word appears no fewer than eleven
times (192, 193, 202, 204, 207, 216, 219, 221, 228, 229, and 240), and
there are two occurrences of the synonym *margary(es), mariorys* (199
and 206)—more than one fifth of the total instances of "perle(s)" in the
poem and nearly one quarter of the combined references to the object.
Pearls proliferate in this passage in a manner reminiscent of the grind-
ing gravel over which the Dreamer treads. The heavy repetition also
evinces the temptation in the luxurious and luxuriating pronunciation
of the word.[52] As the Dreamer's eye delights in the sight of the Maiden,
so does his tongue lavishly speak the word over and over again. The
first lines of his greeting (241–43) are thus an intensification of this ver-
balized fetishization, reducing the space between repetitions to the
most concise point found in the poem. The instant shift back to sor-
row—"Much longeyng haf I for þe layned, / Syþen into gress þou me
agly3te. / Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned" (244–46)—suggests the like-
lihood that his consolation in the earthly paradise was illusory.

The other instance of such dense repetition occurs in an apostrophe
at lines 745–47: "'O maskele3 perle in perle3 pure, / Þat bere3,' quod I,
'þe perle of prys, / Quo formed þe þy fayre figure?'" As with the first
call to the Pearl-maiden, the Dreamer is perilously close to falling back
into his old habits and abandoning the lessons the Maiden has tried to
impart. She has just concluded her explanation of the grace afforded to
the innocent (section 12) and has also related the parable of the pearl of
great price (729–44). Rather than concentrate on the metaphysical im-
port of her speech, the Dreamer responds by inquiring about her dress,
focusing on the rich trappings and artistic value: he compares her favor-
ably to the natural world, the paintings of Pygmalion, and the sage writ-
ings of Aristotle (749–51). The effect of the repetition is heightened by
the Dreamer's inversion of the Maiden's phrasing in the lines that pre-
cede his response. At the end of her speech, she reiterates the lesson of

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[52] Cf. Vance, "Poetics of Participation," 131.

the parable: "I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode / And porchace þy perle maskelles" (743–44). His inversion is indicative of his tendency to debase the allegorical and even the anagogical meanings of the pearl to a literal one, which is likewise demonstrated by his attention to her physical appearance. Here, nearly five hundred lines after he first calls to the Pearl-maiden, the Dreamer still threatens to turn away from the right path and revert to languishing in his sorrow.

Three other apostrophes occur in the space of the dream. These are less prominent than those spoken by the Mourner-Dreamer, but they warrant examination, for they serve as counter-examples for his first four apostrophes. The Pearl-maiden speaks all three, though two are quotations from the Psalter. The Maiden's first (and most important) apostrophe comes in response to the Dreamer's queries about the her position in heaven relative to the Virgin Mary:

> "Cortayse Quen," þenne sayde þat gaye,
> Knelande to grounde, folde vp hyr face,
> "Makeleȝ Moder and myryest May,
> Blessed bygynner of vch a grace!"
>
> (433–36)[53]

Whereas the Mourner-Dreamer's apostrophes are prompted by intense emotions derived from self-pity and self-interest, the Maiden's call involves genuflection, deference, and respect. Similarly, while she turns away from their debate for a brief space of three spoken lines, she instantly returns to the matter at hand: "Þenne ros ho vp and con restay, / And speke me towarde in þat space" (437–38). She neither is distracted by the apostrophe nor does she expect any gain from the performance.

The two psalm passages, both of which quote David addressing God, similarly demonstrate the value of concision and self-effacement in apostrophe. Both come into play as the Maiden elucidates the grace granted to innocents "by ryȝt." She uses the first quotation, adapted from Psalm 23 (24 in the Authorized Version), to explain the qualities— "of hert boþe clene and lyȝt" (682)—which those who would see the face of God must possess: "Þe Sauter hyt satȝ þus in a pace: / 'Lorde,

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[53] The apostrophic nature of this address is also ambiguous. The Blessed Virgin's presence at this instance is debatable: unlike the Lamb, Mary is never seen in the dream; she is only alluded to. Like the Maiden, however, the Virgin Mary seems to be simultaneously there and not there. As the empress of Heaven, Earth, and Hell (441–42), Mary is symbolically present throughout her realm. For a discussion of apostrophes to the Virgin in poetry contemporary with *Pearl*, see Fenn, "Apostrophe, Devotion, and Anti-Semitism," especially 435–41 and 444–48.

quo schal klymbe þy hyȝ hylle / Oþer rest wythinne þy holy place?'"
(677–79). The second apostrophe, which derives from Psalm 142 (143),
comes only a few lines later and serves to reinforce the lesson on grace:

> Anende ryȝtwys men, ȝet saytȝ a gome,
> Dauid in Sauter, if ever ȝe syȝ hit:
> "Lorde, þy seruaunt draȝ neuer to dome,
> For non lyuyande to þe is justyfyet."
>
> (697–700)[54]

As she does elsewhere, the Maiden appeals to the authority of scrip-
ture. In these instances, she also deploys David as an exemplary poet
and speaker and in so doing provides an example to teach the Dreamer
how and when apostrophe should be deployed: to address or to serve
the Lord.[55]

TO ÞAT PRYNCEȜ PAYE: APOSTROPHE AFTER THE DREAM

The final two apostrophes of the poem, spoken by the man after he
wakes from his dream, follow the example of the three apostrophes de-
ployed by the Pearl-maiden and thus correct the Mourner-Dreamer's
wayward use of the device in the proem and the dream. The first is di-
rected at the now decidedly absent pearl:

> 'O perle,' quod I, 'of rych renoun,
> So watȝ hit me dere þat þou con deme
> In þys veray avysyoun!
> If hit be ueray and soth sermon
> Þat þou so stykeȝ in garlande gay,
> So wel is me in þys doel-doungoun
> Þat þou art to þat Prynceȝ paye.'
>
> (1182–88)

This apostrophe begins like the others we have seen. There is an ele-
ment of passion here: he states "I raxled, and fel in gret affray" (1174)
and that a "longeyng heuy me strok in swone, / And rewfully þenne I

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[54] The use of this quotation also hearkens back to the Maiden's early lesson that the
living Mourner-Dreamer cannot join her on the other side of the river: "Þou wylneȝ ouer
þys water to weue; / Er moste þou ceuer to oþer consayle: / þy corse in clot mot calder
keue" (318–20).

[55] Later in Psalm 23 (24), the speaker turns to address the city gates—"Lift up your
gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates"—but he does so that "the King of
glory may come in" (7). See Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd
ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

con to reme" (1180–81). However, this apostrophe is much more tem-
pered than those earlier, impassioned speeches. For one thing, there is
no repetition of "perle" (as at 241–42 and 745–46), nor is there any sign
of dwelling on the pearl's physical characteristics (as at 5–6, 189–240,
or 745ff.) beyond the brief mention of her "rych renoun." Indeed, after
this final address, the word *perle* appears only three times more, twice
in reference to the lesson the Maiden imparts (1192 and 1206) and, in the
final line, as an image of the blessed as God's treasure (1212). More im-
portantly, whereas an apostrophe opens the poem and marks the first
words the Dreamer speaks, this latest apostrophe is not the man's first
utterance in this part of the poem. When he awakes on the hill in the
erber, he sighs to himself and speaks the final lesson of *Pearl*: "Now al be
to þat Prynceȝ paye" (1176). The timing is important. As I have already
noted, the Mourner's penultimate apostrophe does, in fact, arise from
feeling "payed ful ille to be outfleme / So soddenly of þat fayre regioun"
(1177–78), but, in light of the Maiden's lesson, he is able to control his
emotions and his tongue.

In the Dreamer's previous apostrophes, he turned away from the mat-
ter at hand and showed no signs of turning back. In the *erber,* his cries
to the *moul* (23–24) lead to the commands that attempt to halt the natu-
ral order (25–36). In the dream, he first turns from the question of the
pearl's identity (241–43) to focus on the experience of his grief (244–52).
In the second *erber* scene, he turns to address the pearl but is capable of
turning back to the world in which he has reawakened: "So wel is me in
þys doel-doungoun / Þat þou art to þat Prynceȝ paye." These lines pre-
pare the way for the final act of committing the pearl to God: "to God
I hit bytaȝte / In Krysteȝ dere blessyng and myn" (1207–8). The seven
lines of the last apostrophe to the pearl thus demonstrate the control he
has learned to exert over the potentially disastrous distraction of apos-
trophe and the wallowing in sorrow it can emblematize.

These lines also show that the Mourner is turning his back on the
practice of what we might call improper apostrophe. He demonstrates
this change by apostrophizing God: "Lorde, mad hit arn þat agayn þe
stryuen, / Oþer proferen þe oȝt agayn þy paye" (1199–1200).[56] In this

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[56] Several times in the poem, the Dreamer utters what, on the surface, appears to be an
apostrophe to God. For instance, as he surveys the marvels of the earthly paradise he ex-
claims, "Lorde, dere watȝ hit adubbement!" (108). In the moments before the dream ends,
he is so moved by the sight of his little queen that he cries out, "Lorde, much of mirþe
watȝ þat ho made / Among her fereȝ þat watȝ so quyt!" (1149–50). In both these cases, I
contend, the Dreamer is not consciously calling to God. Rather, he is using the name as a
mild expletive, much as we might say, "Jesus, that's hot!" or "Christ, do I hate the Leafs!"

final apostrophe, he emulates the Pearl-maiden and David. Like the Maiden, his apostrophe is one of respect and obeisance: he acknowledges the authority of God and refrains from striving (or speaking) against his will. Like David's address, his apostrophe is carried out in service of the Lord. The man thus uses the final apostrophe to prove himself one of the "homly hyne" (1211) and a "precios perl[e] vnto his pay" (1212). What was initially a disruptive and problematic feature of the Mourner-Dreamer's grief and speech is recuperated and, in the final stage of the poem, becomes the manner by which he is reconciled to his fate and to his God.

By tracing the trajectory of apostrophe in *Pearl*, we can plot the Mourner-Dreamer's progress through the lessons the Maiden teaches him. In the proem, the Mourner's use of apostrophe serves only to deepen his grief. His addresses to the lost pearl and to the *moul* in which the pearl lies buried reveal his troubled mind and further his isolation. In the course of the dream, his apostrophes represent the peril of returning to the endless cycle of sorrow. The Maiden's use of apostrophe, however, serves an exemplary function by showing the Mourner-Dreamer how best to deploy the device. Upon waking from the dream, his apostrophes have none of the erratic and frantic quality of his initial cries in the *erber*. Though still emotionally charged, his addresses to the pearl and to God are measured and controlled. The last apostrophe of the poem, appearing in the penultimate stanza, prefaces the Mourner's final act, turning away from his isolating grief to the communal, consolatory symbol of the Eucharist.[57]

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