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"Perle plesaunte": the Lapidary Tradition in London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X

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Foreword

In order to introduce the possibility of a shared intention behind the conspicuous use of stone imagery adopted to describe the characters and settings of the narrations, this dissertation proposes an interpretation of the anonymous Middle English poems contained in London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X. focusing on the lapidary tradition developed in mediaeval England. This analysis reviews how the lore of gemstones, particularly pearls, influenced the imagery and terminology enclosed in the poems. The shared inclination for detailed descriptions of settings and garments employing gemstone imagery and luxury terminology relate *Pearl*, *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to the deeply rooted mediaeval tradition believing in the affinity between Christian virtues and stones. . All but one poem, *Patience*, show a conspicuous use of specific terminology and images associated to gemstones, and particularly to pearls.

To fully investigate the lapidary influence on the poems, this dissertation has been organised into three chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the manuscript and its poems. London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.X is one of the very few English illustrated manuscripts of the late fourteenth century. It presents forty-eight embellished capital letters and twelve coloured illustrations which represent the episodes and *exempla* narrated in the poems. The manuscript contains four alliterative Middle English poems, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Although the author is unknown, scholars agree it must have been composed by a single scribe and using a single scribal dialect from Cheshire. Scholars have focused persistently on the author, the patron, the date and place of composition mainly because only one copy of the manuscript survives. Since nothing is known about the authorship of the poems, the debate on whether the poems were compiled together and composed by the same author or brought together much later than the years of the original composition is still discussed. However, the use of the same dialect in all compositions, the similarities in style and imagery and the similar formulaic phrasing suggest that they were composed by a single author.

The second chapter is aimed at briefly exploring the lapidary tradition and the most influential lapidaries, bestiaries and encyclopaedias in the mediaeval period, particularly in England. Gemstones have always been considered objects with natural and supernatural properties. In the classical world, precious stones occupied a significant place that persisted throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. However, while in the ancient world the attributes of stones were compiled inside encyclopaedias which contained information about all aspects of the natural world, in the Middle Ages, the properties and attributes of the precious stones began to be compiled inside specific books called lapidaries. As is attested by the numerous testimonies of the lapidary tradition, the interest in

the properties of gemstones increased since they were believed to carry medical traits and were perceived as carriers of Christian virtues and allegories. Thus, the chapter generally outlines an overview of the history of lapidaries, bestiaries and encyclopaedias focusing on the classical authorities read by the mediaeval scholars to gather information. The works presented in this section are used as an apparatus in the following chapters to analyse the gemstone imagery and its lore in the Cotton Nero poems.

The third chapter focuses on the imagery of gemstones and pearls in the Cotton Nero manuscript. In order to create a clear analysis of the lapidary influence on the poems of the manuscript, the chapter is organised in sub-chapters and sections. To remark and highlight the prominence of these images, the first sub-chapter presents a study on the traceability of the word "pearl" and its occurrences in *Pearl*, *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Through the creation and analysis of a 37,438-word-token corpus out of three sub-corpora (*Pearl*-corpus.txt; *Cleanness*-corpus.txt; *SGGK*-corpus.txt) and a manual analysis of the poems, an overview of the instances in which the word "pearl" and its synonyms are employed is proposed. This part of the dissertation is devised to try and explain the use of synonyms which is mostly related to alliterative and rhyming reasons, and to support the general and individual importance that the pearl carries which creates connections and homogeneity between the poems of the manuscript. The second sub-chapter focuses on the influence of the lapidary tradition in Cotton Nero A.X. The first section explores the extensive descriptions that characterize the poems and the author's specific terminology and imagery that mainly belong to the lapidary and luxury fields. The section provides an analysis of the specific architectural, jewellery and lapidary terminology that permeates and establishes the various allegories and meanings carried by the poems. After this general analysis, the next section dives into the lapidaries *formulae* the poet employs in the proem of *Pearl*. Adopting as examples the lapidary works previously introduced in the second chapter, this section presents a close analysis of the initial stanzas of the first poem of the manuscript. The aim is to list and explain the shared *formulae* and terminology that characterise the lapidary lore and the poem. Through this analysis, the poet's knowledge of these lapidary works or, at least, of this tradition is evident. This topic is further discussed in the next sub-chapter where a close reading and analysis of the pearl in the poems is presented. In the classical and Christian tradition, the pearl is associated with a multitude of meanings, qualities and figures. This section of the dissertation is devoted to the analysis of all the instances in which the pearl is employed as symbol. Many of the pearl's meanings derive from the Holy Scriptures, one of the major sources for the episodes narrated and for the meanings carried by the pearl. Through a close reading of the Biblical sources used by the poet and the lapidary works, the sub-chapter is aimed at analysing the multitude of meanings carried by the precious gemstone. Directly linked to this analysis, the last section of the

dissertation is aimed at the particular associations the poems disclose. The author creates a pattern in the associations between the pearl and the figures connected to it. Indeed, all the characters that are adorned with or compared to pearls belong to a liminal state. The conclusive section of the dissertation is entirely devoted to the analysis of the pearl and the reasons that make this gemstone the perfect carrier of the concept of liminality. Comparing the most popular lapidary works of the mediaeval period in England and the mediaeval beliefs on the process of conception of the precious stone, the achievement of a further level of understanding of the poems is possible.

The cumulative use of specific jewellery and gemstone terminology is a signal of the popularity of the lapidary tradition during the creation of the poems contained in the Cotton Nero manuscript. Although, it is impossible to know with certainty if the author of the poems read any of the lapidaries listed in the second chapter of the dissertation, the evident similarities between the poems and the lapidaries, encyclopaedias and bestiaries highlight the importance that this tradition carried in the period in which the poems were written.

1.An Introduction to London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X

1.1 Manuscript, Authorship and Structure

The four poems preserved in London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X are recognized by scholars as some of the finest compositions of Middle English literature.[1] *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* survive in a single manuscript dated by scholars to the late fourteenth century, British Library Cotton Nero A.X, also known as the *Pearl* manuscript or *Gawain* manuscript. It consists of ninety vellum leaves that measure only 4¾ × 6¾ inches and display the poems in one column of thirty-six lines to a page in Gothic cursive. The manuscript displays the four poems in the following order: *Pearl* (ff.41r-59v), *Cleanness* (ff.60r-86r), *Patience* (ff.86r-94r) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ff.94v-130r).

Scholars agree on its significance and value.[2] Indeed, it is one of the very few English illustrated manuscripts of the period. It presents decorations that embellish with blue and read ink certain capital letters, which at times have been interpreted as carrying visual and structural significance. There are forty-eight embellished capital letters: twenty-one in *Pearl*, thirteen in *Cleanness*, five in *Patience* and nine in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Scholars generally regarded the embellished capital letters as a sign for the internal divisions of the poems.[3] Besides the decorations of certain capital letters, the manuscript displays twelve brightly coloured illustrations that draw closely on the episodes and *exempla* narrated in the poems. Four illustrations appear on the *folia* that precede *Pearl*, each one depicting either the Dreamer, or the Dreamer together with the Pearl-Maiden in the crucial moments of the narrative. Indeed, the first image (f.41r) illustrates the Dreamer wearing a red gown and lying asleep on a "erber grene" (l.38)[4], while the second image (f.41v) depicts the Dreamer standing beside the stream of Earthly Paradise, visually establishing the setting of the dream vision. Although in the first two illustrations the only character depicted is the Dreamer, in the third and fourth illustrations, the Pearl-Maiden is visually introduced, but always coupled with the Dreamer. Indeed, the third illustration (f.42r) depicts the Dreamer standing on the banks of the river of Earthly Paradise and, on the other side, the Pearl-Maiden dressed in a white gown and wearing a yellow crown. The last illustration in the *Pearl* section (f.42v) illustrates one of the crucial moments of the poem with the

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[1] Andrew, Malcolm, and Ronald Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript. Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and the Green Knight*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007, p.1. This is the reference for all the quotations from the poems, except where noted.

[2] Edwards, A.S.G., "The Manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x", in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *A Companion to the* Gawain-*Poet*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002, p.197.

[3] Edwards, p.200.

[4] Andrew, and Waldron, p.56. From here on quotations will be followed by the title of the poem and the line numbers in brackets. I will refer to the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with the nomenclature *SGGK*.

Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden standing on opposite sides of the river; on the Maiden's side is depicted what may be identified as the City of New Jerusalem.

The two illustrations that appear between *Pearl* and *Cleanness* depict two of the nine *exempla* that the poet narrates in *Cleanness*. The first illustration (f.60r) depicts the episode of the Flood (ll.249-544): Noah's ark is crowded with seven figures. The illustrator does not depict any animal on the ark but he is careful to add three fishes in the water, under the vessel. The second illustration (f.60v) depicts the *exemplum* of Belshazzar's feast and death (ll.1333-1708). Two figures, Belshazzar and his wife, are seated at a table. On the left, a hand is writing the words 'Mane . Techal . Phares'. At the centre of the scene, Daniel is kneeling down, probably explaining the meaning of the writing on the wall, as happens in the poem.

Before the beginning of *Patience*, the illustrator adds two illustrations, both representing the main character of the third poem, Jonah. The first illustration (f.86r) is added and placed under the text. It represents the crucial moment when Jonah is cast at sea and a "wylde walterande whal" (l.247) is swallowing him. The second illustration (f.86v) depicts the city of Nineveh on the background and Jonah preaching to the Ninevites.

The last four illustrations depict the events narrated in *SGGK*, and while the first one is placed on the *folium* before the poem, as the illustrator has done with all the other poems, the others are added at the end of the manuscript. The first illustration (f.94v) can be referred to as a double illustration: in the same image two different moments are depicted. At the top of the illustration, King Arthur and Guinevere, both recognizable from their attires and crowns, are talking to a man in a red robe, Sir Gawain. The scene is probably depicting the moment King Arthur agrees Sir Gawain should challenge the Green Knight in the beheading game. At the bottom of the illustration is depicted the moment right after the beheading of the Green Knight. While Sir Gawain is still holding the large axe he just used, the Green Knight is holding his own head, following closely the description of the episode in the poem. The second illustration (f.129r) depicts one of the three moments in which Lady Bertilak, who is wearing a robe with green and red dots and a yellow headdress decorated by gemstones, visits Sir Gawain in his bedroom. The third illustration (f.129v) depicts Sir Gawain while he is approaching the Green Chapel, where the Green Knight is waiting for him holding a large axe. This illustration is similar to the first illustration of the poem. Indeed, although the settings of the scene in the poem and in the illustration are different, the posture of Sir Gawain and of the Green Knight are similar. Moreover, the weapon, a crucial element of the narration, is depicted in the exact same way in both illustrations. The last illustration of the poem and of the manuscript (f.130r) depicts the return of Sir Gawain to the court of Camelot, displaying the moment when "þe king comfortez þe knyȝt" (l.2514).

The illustrations, the embellishments and the shape of the letters offer much evidence on the scribe and help scholars identify the period in which the manuscript was compiled. The "very individualistic small, sharp, angular character"[5] used by the scribe in all the poems provides some ground for believing that the scribe copied the manuscript with the intention of compiling the poems together. However, some scholars believe that the poems were first compiled separately and then later assembled together.[6] Moreover, the illustrations of the manuscript proved useful to expand the studies and theories on the years of its compilation. Scholars agree that the scribe and the author of the poems do not coincide.[7] Thus, the Cotton Nero A.X cannot be appointed a "holograph and it is clearly separated by some interval from the original transcription of the poems it contains"[8]. The only temporal hint given to the public is contained inside *SGGK*. Indeed, the poem ends with the line "HONY SOIT QUI MAL PENCE" (l.2532), the motto of the Order of the Garter founded in 1348 by Edward III. This line provides the earliest date for the transcription of the manuscript, yet, although it can be assumed that the earliest year possible for the composition of the manuscript is 1348, studies show that it was compiled much later. Indeed, palaeographical and epigraphic studies show that the manuscript belongs to the second half of the fourteenth century.[9] However, some scholars believe that the illustrations added in the manuscript can give strong evidence of a later compilation. The style in clothing and the details displayed in the illustrations would date the manuscript to the early fifteenth century.[10]

The origins of the manuscript are unknown, even if scholars try to put forward hypotheses on authorship and ownership. Scholars have focused persistently on the origin of the manuscript and in particular on its commission, mainly because only one copy of the manuscript survives. Research provides evidence that the manuscript was first mentioned before 1614 in a list made by Henry Savile of Banke, where it is described as an "An owld booke in English verse beginning Perle pleasant to Princes pay"[11]. The manuscript may have been owned by and written for the Stanley family, since the family "had an evident interest in vernacular literature (they owned an important manuscript of Chaucer's poems)"[12]. However, the history of Cotton Nero A.X is uncertain until 1621, year in which Sir Robert Cotton acquired the manuscript describing it in his library catalogue as "Gesta Arthuri regis et aliorum anglico"[13]. It is the acquisition of the manuscript by Sir Robert Cotton, one of the

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[5] Edwards, p.197.
[6] Edwards, pp.199-200.
[7] Edwards, pp.199-200.
[8] Edwards, p.198.
[9] Edwards, p.199.
[10] Edwards, p.199.
[11] Edwards, p.198.
[12] Edwards, p.198.
[13] Edwards, pp.197-219.

most influential antiquaries of the period, that provided the manuscript with its name, which derives from its owner, its position inside Sir Robert Cotton's library and its shelf location.

The question of the transmission of the manuscript is of great relevance and is related to the issue of authorship. Whether the poems were compiled together because composed by the same author or brought together much later than the period of the original composition is a crucial debate on which scholars have focused their research.[14] Similar views on the common authorship of the poems have been expressed by numerous scholars.[15] The use of the same dialect in all four compositions, identified as a dialect of a part of Cheshire, certain similarities of style and imagery, similar formulaic phrasing and the use of the same periphrases for God, are evidence that suggest that a single author produced the four compositions.[16] Moreover, the poems compiled in the Cotton Nero A.X present similar metrical and stylistic features. *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *SGGK* display a great use of alliteration. Indeed, the metrical system of the four poems is perceived as a witness of what happened from the second half of the fourteenth century until the first part of the sixteenth century. In this period, scholars observe a revival of the alliterative verse, a metrical system popular in the Old English tradition.[17] The Cotton Nero poems base their metrical structure on the alliterative line. This stylistic Old English tradition is used as principle to achieve a precise metrical structure. The alliterative verse used in the poems broadly adheres to the rules of the Old English tradition. In both the Old and the Middle English tradition, the reader is presented with an alliterative verse which splits with a *caesura* the long line in two half-lines, producing in each line two or three *lifts* and from one to four *dips*. However, the two traditions differ greatly. While Old English poetry is really strict in employing the *caesura* which splits and creates an almost perfect syntactic break in the line, in the Middle English tradition the structure is looser and variations in the positioning of the *caesura* or even in the existence of it are detected. The alliterative verse is applied to three poems of the Cotton Nero manuscript. The metrical systems of *Patience*, *Cleanness* and *SGGK* correspond in the ninety percent of lines to patterns of the alliterative verse.[18] However, there is an irregularity in the alliterative verse structure of *SGGK*. Indeed, like *Pearl*, *SGGK* is 101 stanzas long. Each stanza presents between twelve and thirty-seven alliterative long lines and it concludes with the "bob and wheel" structure: five lines with the *ababa* rhyme scheme of a single iambic foot and four irregular iambic trimeters.[19] *Pearl* is often assumed to have the same metrical structure as the other three poems

[14] Edwards, pp.199-200.
[15] Davenport, W.A., *The Art of the Gawain-Poet*, London: Athlone Press, 1978, pp.215-220.
[16] Spearing, A.C., *The Gawain-poet. A Critical Study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp.32-40.
[17] Cornelius, Ian, "The Origins of the Alliterative Revival", in *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse: The Pursuit of a Medieval Meter*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp.67-68.
[18] Duggan, H.N., "Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect", in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002, p.224.
[19] Duggan, p.237.

of the Cotton Nero, but it is not identical. *Pearl* is composed in iambic tetrameter, a popular metrical form of the late Middle Ages. The poem employs a shorter alliterative line in which the accented syllables alliterate more loosely and with more variety. The line is split by a *caesura* and presents ornamental alliteration. Every stanza displays twelve lines which follow the iambic tetrameter and the rhyme scheme *abababababbcbc*.[20]

Based on this evidence, scholars of the first half of the nineteenth century raise a further assumption.[21] The author of the four compositions in the Cotton Nero A.X could be the same as the one of another masterpiece of mediaeval literature, *St Erkenwald*.[22] However, the majority of contemporary scholars do not agree with this hypothesis. The evidence on which this assumption is based has been disputed by recent studies and further research on the manuscript. Indeed, it was once believed that the common phrasing, the lexical echoes, the imagery and the long descriptions shared by *St Erkenwald* and the Cotton Nero poems were steady evidence of common authorship. However, further research on the poems and on their language shows that the linguistic similarities between *St Erkenwald* and the poems of the Cotton Nero are not enough to state a common authorship. Thus, the possibilities of a literary tradition that involved 'borrowing' and of a shared tradition of phrasing, *formulae* and imagery were introduced.[23] Thus, even if many hypotheses were brought up by scholars about the scribe, the author (or authors), the intention of the compiler and of the commissioner, scholars have not been able to answer these doubts with certainty.[24] Although none of this evidence can be held as conclusive proof that all four poems were written by the same author, the assumption of a common authorship is a popular hypothesis between scholars.[25] However, for now, these remain unanswerable questions that scholars have to try and continue investigating on.[26]

After offering an overlook of London, British Library, Cotton Nero A.X as a whole, I will now focus only on *Pearl*, *Cleanness* and *SGGK*.

1.2 The Symmetry and Circularity of the Poems

Although the Cotton Nero manuscript includes poems which share the common feature of alliteration, it is rather the poems' shared circularity, importance of numerology, shared inclination for descriptions, their *formulae* and imagery that establish a solid ground for the hypothesis of a

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[20] Duggan, p.237.
[21] Peterson, C.J., "Pearl and St.Erkenwald: Some Evidence for Authorship", *The Review of English Studies* 25, 97, 1974, pp.49-53.
[22] Finch, Casey, *The Complete Works of the Pearl-Poet*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, pp.22-26.
[23] Benson, Larry D., "The Authorship of 'St.Erkenwald'", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64, 3, 1965, pp.393-405.
[24] Peterson, pp.49-53.
[25] Davenport, p.2.
[26] Peterson, p.53.

common authorship. The author of the poems displays great interest in developing a sense of circularity and symmetry in the structures and plots of the poems using common *formulae* and numerology. *Pearl* echoes this tendency primarily in its structure, ruled by the importance of numbers. The poem consists of 1212 lines arranged in 101 twelve-line stanzas. The repetition of the number 12 in both the number of lines and in their arrangement echoes the importance of numbers and structural symmetry in mediaeval tradition. Indeed, 12 is a number that occurs often in the Book of Revelation, the religious text paraphrased for the crucial scene of the Dreamer's Vision of New Jerusalem. In both descriptions of New Jerusalem, the number 12, symbol of eternity and perfection, is repeated multiple times. The city of New Jerusalem presents 12 gates adorned by 12 pearls and 12 gemstones. Moreover, *Pearl* attains to have the same number of stanzas as in *SGGK*, by adding a sixth stanza in its fifteenth section, while the rest of the poem exhibits fitts that contain only five. This element produces a manner of perfection enclosed in the meaning of number 1 in the Christian tradition. It creates circularity and symmetry in the poem itself and within the manuscript. Indeed, it begins with the display of a 101 stanzas poem, *Pearl*, and ends in the same way, *SGGK*. *Pearl* employs the use of *concatenatio*: a refrain repeated at the beginning and the end of each stanza of the fitt. This rhetorical device has the primary goal of summarizing the central argument and teaching of each fitt. It grants the poem transitions between sections and creates a possible connection between the end of the poem and its beginning. Indeed, the last line of the poem, "Ande precious perlez unto His pay" (l.1212), displays exactly the *concatenatio* word of the first fitt of the poem. The last line is a slightly modified version of the first, "Perle pleasaunte to prynces paye" (l.1). Thus, the *concatenatio* process simultaneously creates a distinct identity for each section and a circular movement in the poem.[27] Although the structure of the poem and the use of particular rhetorical devices help achieve a sense of circularity, another device is used to emphasize this sense. The poem develops circularity in its settings. The circular structure is emphasized by the return, at the end of the poem, to the first setting of the narration: the garden. Indeed, *Pearl* is developed around three settings: the garden, the Terrestrial Paradise and the city of New Jerusalem. The return in the last fitt to the initial setting of the poem echoes the circular structure displayed by the author. It visually brings the reader to the beginning of the poem and it suggests that the Dreamer has to return where he started his spiritual journey to confront the religious issues that afflict him.[28]

 SGGK displays the same number of stanzas as *Pearl*. Like the first poem of the manuscript, it develops around two numbers: 1 and 5. The constant use of these numbers creates a subtle circular movement in the poem. 1 is the most recurrent number of the structure of the poem. Indeed, *SGGK*

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[27] MacQueen, John, *Numerology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985, pp.97-98.
[28] Andrew and Waldron, p.12.

presents 101 stanzas echoing, like *Pearl*, a structural return to the beginning of the poem. 5 is reiterated in the poem's imagery. It gives shape to the pentacle, the shape painted inside Sir Gawain's shield that serves as an intermediary with the Virgin Mary. Although the pentacle is not circularly shaped, it does not have a beginning or an end. Moreover, the pentacle is both the carrier of Christian symbols, the five joys of the Virgin Mary and the five wounds of Christ, and of secular ones, the five virtues of chivalry, "fraunchyse" (l.651), "felaȝschyp" (l.651), "clannes" (l.652), "cortaysye" (l.652), "pité" (l.653). Sir Gawain's adventure reiterates the importance of the number 5, since this is the number which symbolizes the subjugation of the flesh.[29] Thus, 5 is the number that gives thematic circularity throughout the poem. Moreover, circularity is displayed in settings. Like *Pearl*, *SGGK* presents a return to the first setting of the narration. The settings can be divided into the ones that belong to domesticity and to wilderness. The poem starts in the domestic setting of Camelot and moves to the forest. Then, Sir Gawain encounters another domestic place, Sir Bertilak's castle, and then the Green Chapel, a liminal place that belongs to both domesticity and wilderness. The narration concludes in Camelot's court. This return to the first setting of the story establishes a circular movement.

Rather than circularity, *Cleanness* displays symmetry in its structure. The poem can be divided into five parts: the introduction (ll.1-204); the first exemplary sequence (ll.205-544); the second exemplary sequence (ll.601-1048); the third exemplary sequence (ll.1149-1809) and the conclusion (ll.1805-1812). The author plays with intervals of intricate symmetry in its divisions of the three exemplary sequences. Each sequence presents two minor *exempla* and continues with the narration of a major *exemplum*, then finishes each sequence with a link passage that makes each transition appear methodical and symmetrical in their structure.

Thus, while the poems share symmetry as the foundation for their structure, circularity is the aim the poet obtains throughout structure, imagery and the importance of the numbers. Even if the poet did not manage to achieve a circular movement in all poems, his attempt is obvious. The structural symmetry and circularity of the poems is a key element that will be developed further by the poet in the imagery shared within them.

1.3 Plots

1.3.1 *Pearl*

Arranged in an elaborate pattern of rhyming stanzas, *Pearl* depicts with a first-person narration the grief of a man to the loss of his "Perle plesaunte" (l.1) and the revelation of the divine truth through

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[29] MacQueen, p.71.

a dream vision. The poem opens displaying an elegiac tone, where the Dreamer is described in a garden as "dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere/ Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot" (ll. 11-12). After the lament of the Dreamer, which takes the entire first fitt, the narrator falls asleep attaining an other-worldly vision set in the Terrestrial Paradise. After a long and detailed description of the garden, its river and nature, the Dreamer looks across the shore and sees a young maid whom he identifies with his lost Pearl. The Dreamer describes thoroughly her attire and looks. Then, he asks what happened to her and how he can cross the river. She explains that the Lamb, Christ, has taken her as His Queen and that to cross the river he must abandon himself completely to the mercy of God. The Dreamer wonders whether the Pearl-Maiden has taken the place of the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven, disapproving of this decision because he deems her too young to merit such position. Employing as an example the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, she answers that she has not taken the Virgin Mary's position. Instead, the people who have crossed the river are part of the body of Christ. The Dreamer does not believe that God rewards every man equally, but the Pearl-Maiden explains that God gives the same gift to all: Christ's redemption. The Pearl-Maiden focuses on the explanation of sin and salvation, describing Christ's sacrifice and glory. To develop thoroughly these elements, she associates the pearl she is wearing to the Parable of the Pearl of Price. Thus, she advises the Dreamer to renounce everything to buy this pearl, symbol of salvation and heaven. Then, the Dreamer asks about Heavenly Jerusalem. She describes it as the city of God. He asks to visit the "myry mote" (l.936), but the Pearl-Maiden tells him that "To stretch in þe street þou hatz no vygour,/Bot þou wer clene, withouten mote" (ll.971-2). Although the Dreamer cannot enter the city, he is allowed to see it through divine exemption. Indeed, New Jerusalem descends from heaven to the Terrestrial Paradise where he may see it. He depicts New Jerusalem referencing "þe apostel John" (ll.984, 996, 1008, 1021, 1032) numerous times at the end of each fitt and following the description of the Heavenly City in the *Book of Revelation*. After the vision of New Jerusalem, the Dreamer sees the procession of the blessed. Then, he awakes returning to the "erbere" (l.9), the setting described in the first part of the poem. The poem's last fitt hints at a change in the Dreamer's perspective and his will in fulfilling God's wish and the Pearl-Maiden's preaching.

1.3.2 *Cleanness*

Consisting of 1812 alliterative long lines, *Cleanness* is a didactic poem with the purpose of instructing the public on the virtue of "Clannesse" (l.1). The poem opens with an introduction in which the importance of the sixth beatitude, cleanness, is praised. The author supports this declaration with an echo of God's hate of filth and through the metaphor of the banishment of those who are not properly dressed. Indeed, God cannot accept uncleanness and humankind is able to enter the heavenly

kingdom only if everybody follows purity, as they would not present themselves wearing filthy clothes to a banquet arranged by God. The author employs this extended "clothing" metaphor to introduce the Parable of the Wedding Feast, an *exemplum* that illustrates the importance of moral purity. The retelling of the parable and its application creates moral and religious contexts from which the poem develops. Indeed, the poem unravels following three exemplary sequences. Scholars usually divide each exemplary sequence into two minor *exempla* and one major *exemplum*, and a link passage that creates cohesiveness throughout the poem.[30] The first exemplary sequence presents three instances of God's wrath: the minor *exempla* of the Fall of Lucifer (*Cleanness*, ll.205-34) and of the Fall of Adam and Eve (ll.235-48), and the major *exemplum* of the story of the Genesis Flood narrative (ll.249-544). These three *exempla* provide the public with an exposition of God's wrath as punishment for evil and filth. The episode of the Flood is presented as punishment for "fylþe upon folde þat þe folk used,/ Þat þen wonyed in þe worlde withouten any maysterz" (ll.251-2). The story of the Flood is followed by a link passage which has the aim of giving the public a moral comment on the episode and emphasizing God's wrath towards uncleanness. This passage ends advising the reader to be "pure" and "clene" because even if God stopped punishing the whole of humankind, it is true that some particularly unclean groups of people were punished for this sin.[31] This last passage creates a perfect link for the beginning of the new exemplary sequence which culminates with the major *exemplum* of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (ll.890-972, 1001-1048). Previous to the major *exemplum* of this sequence, the author adds the minor *exempla* of Abraham and Sarah (ll.601-76) and Lot and his family (ll.677-890, 973-1000) which are circumstantial to the destruction of the cities. Similarly to the major *exemplum* of the first sequence, the first minor *exemplum* of the second sequence provides the reader with a positive character, Abraham. His trust in God's providence and in His words differ greatly from Sarah's approach. Indeed, Sarah's doubts about the divine prediction of future child-bearing reflects failure in faith. The other minor *exemplum* of this section presents similar characters, Lot and his wife. As in the previous *exemplum*, while the male character represents faithfulness and trust in God, Lot's wife represents mistrust. The author specifies she was found guilty of two sins. First, she lied and tricked the Angels, putting salt into their food, a substance that prevents fermentation and, thus, a form of corruption for divine creatures.[32] This episode does not come from the Bible, but the author uses it as link to create a smoother transition to the other sin Lot's wife commits. Second, she looked back to the city of Sodom. Although God explicitly instructed them not to turn back to the city, Lot's wife does not follow God's command,

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[30] Andrew and Waldron, p.17.
[31] Andrew and Waldron, p.18.
[32] Andrew and Waldron, p.146.

"ho blusched hir bihynde, þaʒ hir forboden were;/For on ho standes a ston, and for þat oþer,/And alle lyst on hir lik þat arn on launde bestes" (ll.998-1000). The second exemplary sequence concludes with a link passage which exhorts to cleanness introducing as models of the sixth beatitude Christ and the Virgin Mary (ll.1049-1148). The third, and last, exemplary sequence presents a structure similar to the one displayed in the second section of the poem. While the first minor *exemplum* introduces the major *exemplum*, the second minor *exemplum* is added as part of the major *exemplum*. The sequence begins with the minor episode of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem, his conversion and death (ll.1157-1332). Then, the sequence displays the major *exemplum* of Belshazzar's feast, the man who succeeds Nebuchadnezzar and gives indulgence to blasphemy ordering to use the sacred Temple vessels as plates to serve meals during his banquet (ll.1333-1650, 1709-1804). This episode provides a frame for the minor *exemplum* of Daniel's account of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion (ll.1651-1708). The poem concludes with a reassertion of the importance of purity and cleanness as crucial virtues for the faithful to achieve spiritual salvation.

1.3.3 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

SGGK differs greatly from the other poems in the manuscript. Indeed, while the other poems present a Christian elegiac and didactic tone, *SGGK* presents the secular material of chivalric romance and Arthurian adventures.

The first two stanzas of the poem describe the historical frame of the story. The narrator is careful to mention the British foundation myth, thus linking the Arthurian setting to "þe sege and þe assaut […] at Troye" (l.1).[33] From the third stanza, the poet begins the narration of the episode central to the poem, the adventure of Sir Gawain. In Camelot, the New Year's celebrations are disrupted by the arrival of a curious figure, a knight entirely green in appearance who is riding a green horse and is holding in one hand a green axe and in the other a holly bough. He enters the court and challenges the attendants of the feast to a game: someone has to strike one blow with his axe, on one condition, he will return the blow in exactly one year and a day. Sir Gawain volunteers to play the game and strikes. Astonished, the court of King Arthur witnesses the Green Knight surviving and picking up his own head. After having reminded Sir Gawain that in one year and one day the two will meet again at the Green Chapel to complete the beheading game, the Green Knight leaves the court.

The second fitt begins with a brief narration of the passing of the year, until Sir Gawain, on All Soul's Day, decides to depart to look for the Green Chapel. The author describes thoroughly Sir Gawain's arming, mixing Christian symbology and numerology with knightly virtues and imagery. Finally, Sir Gawain departs from the court searching for the Green Chapel "In þe wyldrenesse of

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[33] Andrew and Waldron, p.22.

Wyrale" (l.701). The poet briefly describes Sir Gawain's adventures in the wilderness alluding to the knight's encounters with "wormez", "woluesz", "wodwos" and "etaynez" (l.720-723). Almost hopeless, Sir Gawain prays to the picture of the Virgin Mary he has on the shield and sees a "schemered and schon" (l.772) castle in the distance. He meets the lord of the castle, his wife and an old lady. Sir Gawain tells them the purpose of his journey and asks them if they know anything about the Green Chapel. The lord tells him that the place he is looking for is located near the court and that he may spend the days before the encounter with the Green Knight in his court.

The third fitt of the poem is set in two places, one dominated by domesticity, the court, and the other by wilderness, the woods. The lord proposes a game to Gawain. He suggests Gawain to rest for the next three days, while he will go hunting. The lord will give Gawain whatever he catches during the hunt, on condition that Gawain will give him whatever he had gained during the day. Sir Gawain accepts. After the lord leaves, his wife visits Gawain's chamber, seduces and kisses him. When the lord comes back to the castle, he gives Gawain the prey he has caught, a deer; while Gawain gives the lord what he had gained, a kiss. The next day the lady returns to Gawain's chamber, seduces him and gives him two kisses. The exchange of winnings is repeated. The lord gives Gawain the prey he had killed, a boar, and the knight gives the lord two kisses. The next morning, the lady returns again to Gawain. Once her advances are refused, she tries to give Gawain a gold ring as love token but he does not accept it. She, then, pleads with him to take a girdle which she assures is charmed and will keep him from being killed during his encounter with the Green Knight. Afraid for his life, Sir Gawain accepts the charmed object and they exchange three kisses. On that day, the lord gives Sir Gawain the prey of the day, a fox, and the knight gives the lord three kisses, not mentioning the enchanted object given him by the lady.

The fourth, and last, fitt begins with Gawain's departure from the lord's castle and his journey to the Green Chapel. He discovers that the Green Chapel is a mound containing a cavern; inside, the Green Knight is sharpening his axe, ready for their encounter. Following the rules of the beheading game, Gawain bends his neck, ready to receive the first blow. While on the Green Knight's first attempt at hitting Gawain's neck the Arthurian knight flinches, on the second attempt Gawain is ready and does not flinch. The Green Knight slightly cuts Gawain's neck and then stops, ending the game. The Green Knight reveals he is the lord of the castle, Lord Bertilak, and that his adventure was a trick of the old lady he met when he first entered the castle, Morgan le Fay. Sir Gawain's wound is the punishment for his attempt to break the terms of the winnings game. As a sign of his moral failure, Gawain decides to wear the girdle. He returns to Camelot and King Arthur and his knights absolve him. They decide that each will wear a green sash as a reminder of moral honesty.

2. The Lore of Gemstones in the Middle Ages

The tradition of lapidaries and bestiaries was highly relevant during the Middle Ages. It is essential to focus on these texts to fully analyse and understand the cultural and literary contexts in which London, British Library, Cotton Nero, Ax was composed. The symbolism and allegories adopted in the Pearl-manuscript belong to a field of shared imagery coming directly from the Christian lapidary and bestiary lore. The chapter will outline the characteristics of the most influential lapidaries and bestiaries in the mediaeval period, adopting them as examples of shared knowledge. The literary works presented in this section will be used as an apparatus to analyse the gemstones' imagery and their lore in the Cotton Nero poems.

2.1. The Importance of Lapidaries and Bestiaries in the Middle Ages in England

From the earliest time in history, gemstones have always been considered objects with peculiar and distinctive properties. Precious gems occupied a significant place in the Greek and Latin traditions and their relevance persisted throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[34] In the ancient world, their natural attributes were compiled inside encyclopaedias and lapidaries; the latter being texts either in verse or prose which describe the gemstones' material and medical properties. Lapidaries and encyclopaedias were not the only literary genres where information about precious stones was compiled. Indeed, classical authors and mediaeval scholars knew and attributed the creation of some precious stones, such as pearls, to different kinds of animals. The attributes and the process of creation of such stones were deeply analysed and described inside bestiaries. Bestiaries are compositions that describe the attributes of animals, both real and fantastic, which were interpreted as spiritual and moral lessons.[35] Similarly to the information about stones, knowledge about animals was initially located inside encyclopaedias where general material about the natural world was gathered. The classical authorities that were used as authoritative knowledge on the natural world, and in particular on animals, were Pliny the Elder and Aristotle who proposed a more descriptive approach that focused on the natural attributes of animals. However, the mediaeval period witnessed an increase in associations of moral and Christian attributes developed by beasts. These attributes, whether real or fictional, referred to the physical aspects of creatures, to their behaviour, to their relationships with other animals or humans.[36] It is worth noting that the mediaeval bestiary

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[34] Kunz, George Frederick, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, New York: Halcyon House, 1938, pp.1-2.
[35] Willene B. Clark and Meredith T. McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: the Bestiary and Its Legacy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, p.1.
[36] Pastoureau, Michel, *Bestiari del Medioevo*, Torino: Einaudi, 2012, p.19.

tradition differed greatly from the classical tradition, indeed "animal habits were interpreted as reflections of human behaviour, examples of Divine Will, or illustrations of scriptural truths"[37].

As attested by the numerous mediaeval testimonies of the lapidary and bestiary tradition, in the Middle Ages, the interest in the properties of gemstones increased. However, their supposed magical qualities were lost, specifically due to the influence of the Christian Church which "opposed to magic in all its forms, condemned the engraved talisman, but carried on the tradition of the medical amulet"[38]. Indeed, during the Middle Ages, a new perspective on gemstones arose: they were not only believed to carry medical traits, but were also perceived as carriers of Christian virtues and allegories. While their qualities and descriptions continued to be compiled in encyclopaedias and lapidaries, their Christian allegories started to be described in commentaries of biblical passages.

Although there was a shift in the interest in precious stones, from a magical focus to a religious one, classical literary works were nonetheless used as sources by readers and writers of the time. There were three main classical authorities read during the Middle Ages for the study of gemstones: the sixth century A.D. *Naturalis Historia* written by Pliny the Elder, which displayed in book XXXVII "a generous mixture of factual information and the fancies current in the Hellenistic world"[39], the third century A.D. *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium* written by Gaius Julius Solinus which dealt with dozens of precious gemstones in book XVI, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae sive Origines*, a collection of material mainly from Pliny.[40] Written in the seventh century, Isidore of Seville's work was particularly influential on mediaeval European culture, as it is proven by the nearly thousand copies of his works that survive; moreover, the majority of lapidaries and bestiaries composed during the mediaeval period referenced and used material from Isidore's work.

Another important work from which mediaeval scholars gathered information about beasts and gemstones was the first testimony of this long tradition, an anonymous allegorical Greek text written at the end of the second century A.D. which focused strictly on the qualities of animals and precious stones. After its first translations in Latin in the early sixth century, the work was given the name *Physiologus*. It described the attributes of approximately forty animals and of some precious stones. Most of its sections are introduced by biblical passages that are concerned with the animal which was about to be described. Essentially, this work gathered the allegorical interpretations of the biblical

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[37] Hassing, Debra, "Beauty in the Beasts: A Study of Medieval Aesthetics", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 19/20, 1990/1991, p.139.
[38] Evans, Joan, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Particularly in England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922, p.29.
[39] Kitson, Peter, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I, the Background: the Old English Lapidary", *Anglo-Saxon England* 7, 1978, p.10.
[40] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", pp.10-11.

passages and it attributed special qualities to real or invented animals.[41] This ancestor of the bestiary was a great resource for mediaeval scholars and, indeed, authors such as Isidore of Seville used this work as a reference to write their works. During the eighth and ninth centuries, the popularity of bestiaries and the interest for the descriptions of nature increased. This is attested by the many Latin translations of the *Physiologus*. These translations presented some innovations: the exclusion of some chapters, in particular the ones which focused on gemstones and plants attesting a much more ordered approach in the division of natural world's information; the increase of the zoological material; the transformation of some moral and allegorical interpretations of animals due to new religious needs; the adoption of more accurate classifications of the animals.[42]

The mediaeval interest in the study of gemstones, and in particular in recognizing the gemstones as carriers of Christian virtues, was due to the importance gained by the Old and New Testaments' passages which describe precious stones: the twelve stones of the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17-20), the nine ornaments of the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:13), and the twelve foundations gemstones of the holy city of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:19-20).[43] This new Christian perspective changed the attitude in which gemstones were perceived and the approach according to which precious materials were described. Biblical commentaries, especially the ones focusing on the Apocalypse, began to examine precious stones outlining the possible connections between them and Christian virtues and allegories. The interest in perceiving the gemstones as Christian allegories is proven by the increasing production of European Christian lapidaries during the early Middle Ages. Indeed, "if medical lapidaries in the first millennium were few and had few readers, Christian lapidary writings were more numerous and much more read"[44]. The Christian lapidary tradition mainly developed through commentaries of biblical passages. The first attempts at interpreting scriptural passages concerned with gemstones are found in Augustine and the full realization of his undertaking came later, through the commentaries of the Italian monk Amatus of Monte Cassino, the French ecclesiastic Hildebert, and the German monks Hrabanus Maurus and Walafrid Strabo. Although most of these literary productions were prolific in France, Germany and Italy, the English monk Bede, one of the most prominent scholars of the Middle Ages in Europe, focused part of his production on the commentaries of the Apocalypse. Using as main sources the classical materials and the *Etymologiae sive Origines*, Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, a work dated approximately to the beginning of the eighth century, commented the Apocalypse emphasizing the role of gemstones and adding a

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[41] Zambon, Francesco, ed., *Bestiari Tardoantichi e Medievali: i Testi Fondamentali della Zoologia Sacra Cristiana*, Milano: Bompiani, 2018, p.XIII.
[42] Zambon, pp.XXVI-XXVII.
[43] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", p.20.
[44] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", p.20.

Christianized tone to the strictly natural and magical descriptions of his Latin and Greek sources. Indeed, the commentary spent nearly ten columns describing the jewels that constitute the foundations of the city of New Jerusalem and the qualities symbolized by the each of the twelve stones.[45] *Explanatio Apocalypsis* influenced the compositions of later commentaries and was widely spread and read soon after its composition, remaining an extensively known reference throughout the Middle Ages.[46]

An important step forward in the spreading of the lapidary tradition across Europe was made when their vernacular translations started to emerge. One of the most copied and translated Christian lapidaries of the eleventh century is Marbodus de Rennes' *De Lapidibus*, a didactic poem, dated around the 1096, in Latin hexameters, that described in sixty chapters, sixty precious gemstones.[47] After the great popularity gained by the production of this work, Marbodus followed the composition of *De Lapidibus* with the creation of three other lapidaries, one in verses, *De Duodecis Lapidibus Pretiosis*, and two in prose, *De Lapidum Naturis* and *Lapidum Pretiosorum Mystica seu Moralis Applicatio*, in which he focused persistently on the gemstones' Christian symbolic and allegorical attributes. The purpose of his work was not only to describe the natural attributes of the gemstones, but rather the natural, medical and Christian virtues carried by these precious materials. This great example of lapidary poem "was widely read and copied, and formed the basis of most later mediaeval literary lapidaries, whether in Latin or in the vernaculars"[48]. The importance attributed to Marbodus' lapidaries is attested by the number of copies of his lapidaries that still survive today. Indeed, out of the 616 mediaeval manuscripts on the matter of gemstones and precious stones, 125 are copies of Marbodus' lapidaries or to lapidary works which referenced his compositions.[49] Furthermore, the popularity of his lapidaries is proved by the number of languages in which his works were translated into, including French, Italian, Irish, Danish, Hebrew, English and Spanish.[50] Nearly forty testimonies of Marbodus' work existed in English public collections and more than one hundred survive in continental libraries.[51]

The importance the Christian commentaries had on the English lapidary tradition is evident. The production of texts that contained Christian explanations of precious gemstones, either in vernacular or in Latin, began to be produced between the tenth and the eleventh centuries.[52] In particular, the

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[45] Kitson, Peter, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part II, Bede's "Explanatio Apocalypsis" and Related Works", *Anglo-Saxon England* 12, 1983, pp.74-75.
[46] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: part II", p.74.
[47] Di Rennes, Marbodo, and Bruno Basile, eds., *Lapidari: La Magia delle Pietre Preziose*, Roma: Carocci, 2006, p.9.
[48] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", p.12.
[49] Di Rennes, p.9.
[50] Evans, p.34.
[51] Studer, Paul and Evans, Joan, eds., *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, Paris: Edouard Champion, 1924, p.XIII.
[52] Evans, Joan, and Mary Sidney Serjeantsen, eds., *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1990, p.XI.

influence of Bede's commentary is evident in later mediaeval works which focused prevalently on the Christian attributes of the stones. From Bede's account of the twelve stones of the Apocalypse derived the Old English Lapidary (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius, A.iii), which scholars identified as the oldest vernacular lapidary of Western Europe.[53] Written in England probably around the first half of the twelfth century, the Old English Lapidary is a product of the interest in the lore of precious stones felt in England. The manuscript contains "monastic rules, followed by a long miscellany of short pieces, mainly prognostic or religious"[54]. To this miscellany of short texts belongs the lapidary which was compiled between the *folia* 101v and 102r.[55] The sources used by the author were various, Bede, Pliny, Isidore, Solinus and Augustine.[56] However the author did not follow strictly the descriptions the classical sources produced. Following the Christian teachings, the descriptions of gemstones are closely linked to religion and a notable feature of the text is the absence of the magical properties that could be carried by the gemstones, thus following strictly the preachings of the Christian Church.[57]

From the twelfth century, the distinction between works which focused solely on the stones' natural attributes and the ones which described their Christian virtues began to disappear. Indeed, the natural and Christian attributes of gemstones started to be compiled together.[58] The Christian commentaries were still being read during the twelfth century and their influence can be detected in the emerging new genre which compiled all gemstones' qualities together, an approach that was bound to supplant the earlier method employed to organize the contents of lapidaries. This new type of lapidaries did not change the basic qualities traditionally attributed to the gemstones, instead mediaeval scholars focused on joining together in a single compilation all the characteristics of the gems: natural, medical and religious. Indeed, the popularity these lapidaries carried in Europe during the Middle Ages is attested by the numerous copies that were transcribed and still remain in France, England and Italy.[59]

The interest in the natural world and its description is furthermore attested by the translations of the works containing descriptions of precious stones, plants and animals into vernacular. In particular, between the twelfth and thirteenth century, *Physiologus* was translated or adapted into Old, Middle and High German; Anglo-Saxon; Anglo-Norman; Old and Middle French; Norse. It was from the increasing interest in this particular genre that during the Middle Ages the word *bestiary* was coined. The term derived from the French *bestiaire* that appeared for the first time at the beginning of the

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[53] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", p.31.
[54] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", p.31.
[55] Kitson, "Lapidary Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England: Part I", p.31.
[56] Evans and Serjeantsen, p.13.
[57] Evans and Serjeantsen, p.13.
[58] Studer and Evans, pp.XVI-XVIII.
[59] Evans, p.51.

twelfth century in a work of Philip de Thaun, an Anglo-Norman monk who worked for the English court of Henry I Beauclerc, the ruler of England from 1100 until 1135. Philip de Thaun was one of the mediaeval pioneers in the descriptions of the natural world, focusing his works on descriptions of animals and precious stones.[60] His production attests that the bestiary and lapidary traditions where somewhat intertwined during the Middle Ages. Indeed, in his *Bestiaire*, the descriptions of the natural world were compiled together, thus the qualities of animals and stones where gathered inside the same literary work. Philip de Thaun's *Bestiaire* was divided into thirty-eight chapters. While thirty-five developed descriptions of animals (beasts and birds), the concluding three focused on the descriptions of precious stones. In the introduction of his bestiary, Philip de Thaun subtly explains that the three sections that divide his work are meant to signify a progression that reached its peak in the natural elements closer to God, precious gemstones. The first chapter focused on beasts which having their face oriented towards the ground, in opposition to God's direction, are the symbol of the men who are only interested in material goods. The second section described birds, creatures which fly in the sky, symbol of *homines caelestia meditantes*. The third and concluding chapter included the descriptions of precious stones, symbols of the wise men, the blessed and even of *Deus ineffabilis*. This ordered structure traced the progression towards God. Indeed, Philip de Thaun's work concluded with the description of the *union* (pearl) the greater symbol of divine unity.[61]

Philip de Thaun's interest in precious stones and their Christian qualities is attested also by his production of two lapidaries, one alphabetical and the other allegorical. The alphabetical lapidary describes precious stones approximately in alphabetical order, as its title suggests, "an arrangement which […] is exemplified in the Latin Lapidary written early in the 13th century by Arnoldus Saxo, and in the derived lapidary given by Albertus Magnus"[62]. Dated to the early part of the twelfth century, Philip de Thaun's allegorical lapidary describes the twelve stones of the City of New Jerusalem and "he mentions the diamond and the pearl (*union*), which may also be considered Apocalyptic on the ground that the foundations of adamant and the gates of pearl of the Heavenly City"[63].

The thirteenth century saw another rise of interest in the tradition that described the natural world through Christian religion. Indeed, one of the most popular texts that was concerned with the descriptions of the world, taking as reference the classical authorities and the religious allegories and symbolism, was Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. This encyclopaedia is "arranged in nineteen books; the number, the sum of the twelve signs of the zodiac and the seven planets,

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[60] Pastoureau, p.25.
[61] Zambon, pp.1087-1091.
[62] Studer and Evans, p.200.
[63] Studer and Evans, p.261.

signified universality"[64]. The books followed a precise and ordered progression. The first three books ("De Deo"; "De Proprietatibus Angelorum"; "De Anima") were concerned with the descriptions of religious matters, namely God, angels and the soul.[65] Then, Bartholomaeus focused on the human realm, exploring, from book four to seven, the nature of man and the humours ("De Humani Corpori"), the parts of the body ("De Hominis Corpore"), the role of man in society ("De State Hominis") and his illnesses and diseases ("De Infirmitatibus"). Book eight and nine delineated the concepts of space ("De Mundo") and time ("De Temporibus"). From book nine to eighteen, Bartholomeus focused on the descriptions of what belongs to the natural world. In particular, in book sixteen, "De Lapidibus" and "Metallis", the author produced detailed descriptions of precious gemstones and their attributes. Lastly, the encyclopaedia concluded with book nineteen ("De Accidentibus") which focused on the explanation of colours, tastes, smells, numbers and music. The encyclopaedia was concerned with almost every aspect of knowledge, "essentially *De Proprietatibus Rerum* is a synthesis of biblical knowledge, a gloss on things and places mentioned in the Bible and not a theological or philosophical work"[66]. Similarly to Marbodus' works, the popularity of Bartholomaeus' text is supported by the numerous translations that survived. The original version was translated for the first time in 1372 from Latin into French and a number of manuscripts of the Latin and French versions survive.

The second quarter of the fourteenth century witnessed the translation of lapidaries that combined "Christian symbolism, literary description, and popular belief"[67] from Latin into French vernacular. Indeed, a witness of this phenomenon was the translation from Latin into French of many lapidaries. Among these translations, it is interesting to note how the thirteenth century Lapidary of King Philip was created exactly through this translation process. Its production was linked to the translation of different Latin lapidaries which then were assembled. The interest on lapidary lore increased not only in France but also in England. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two English translations of the Lapidary of King Philip were produced, proving again the increasing interest that the lore of gemstones was gaining during the mediaeval period in England. The first translation, dated approximately to the fourteenth century, presented a dialect close to the Northern or West-Midland and it appeared to be a close translation of the French vernacular version. It described the stones of the breastplate of the Apocalypse, adding the description of the properties of the diamond, a gemstone which does not belong to the Book of Revelation's descriptions. The rest of the text presented a treatise, *De Lapidibus Pretiosis Eciam In Quibus Locis*, which referenced the attributes described

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[64] Seymour, M.C., et al., *Bartholomaeus Anglicus and His Encyclopedia,* Cambridge: Variorum, 1992, p.11.
[65] Seymour, et al., p.11.
[66] Seymour, et al., p.12.
[67] Evans, p.77.

almost three hundred years before by Marbodus in his *De Lapidibus*.[68] The second, and later, translation of the Lapidary of King Philip into English presented the South-Eastern Midland dialect. Rather than the previous English version, this text appeared to be a direct translation of the French text. It followed quite precisely the first Lapidary of King Philip, adding, however, a short section that referenced the prologue of Marbodus' *De Lapidibus*.[69]

Although translations are considered a proof of the lapidaries' popularity, the fame of the works which focused on the descriptions of the natural world during the mediaeval period is also attested by the high percentage of bestiaries whose *folia* were illuminated. The creation of such manuscripts required a considerable amount of time and resources. Thus, the presence of a great amount of them attests to their importance. Indeed, approximately sixty percent of bestiaries produced between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are illuminated usually on a large scale.[70] The choice of the animals depicted mirrored the tradition followed during the commission of the manuscript. Although, usually, the most important animals of the Christian tradition, such as the dragon, the animals associated with three of the Evangelists (calf, eagle and lion) and the dove, were depicted, the choice of which animal species to be depicted was also connected to the demands of the commissioner, the function of the manuscript and the commissioner's herald.[71] The production of illuminated bestiaries increased and reached its peak between the end of the twelfth and beginning of the fourteenth century. In the thirteenth century almost every religious library owned at least one bestiary. Indeed, this genre of illuminated manuscript played an important role in preachings and sermons. Similarly to lapidaries, bestiaries allowed the transmission of religious messages through allegorical images familiar to the public.[72]

Two witnesses of the illuminated bestiary tradition are particularly important in England, the *Aberdeen Bestiary* (Aberdeen University Library, Univ. Lib. MS 24) and the *Ashmole Bestiary* (Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1511). These manuscripts compiled between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries display Christian allegorical descriptions of animals referencing materials that come from Isidore's *Etymologiae Sive Origines*, Solinus' *Liber Memorabilium*, Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, Saint Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* (a fourth century commentary on the Genesis' passage describing of the six days of the creation of the world) and Rabanus Maurus' *De Universo* (an encyclopaedia that references Isidore's works, which aim was explaining the natural world through the Christian religion and allegories).

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[68] Evans, pp.78-79.
[69] Evans and Serjeantsen, p.38.
[70] Pastoureau, p.27.
[71] Pastoureau, p.30.
[72] Pastoureau, p.30.

Dated to the twelfth century, the *Aberdeen Bestiary* is an English illuminated bestiary decorated following the gilded technique. It features large illuminations and gold and silver leaves were used in its decorations. The bestiary begins with a preface where the Genesis' passage of the Creation was provided, the main focus of the author was the description of the natural world. The main text is the bestiary and the reproduction of Hugo of Fouilloy's *Aviarum*, an eleventh century treatise on birds written as a theological and moral guide. In this section of the text, the author divided the species following the mediaeval order of categories usually employed in bestiaries, *Bestiae*, *Pecora*, *Minuta animala*, *Aves*, *Serpentes*, *Vermes* and *Pisces*. Then, the manuscript presents two other sections, one dedicated to descriptions of trees and plants (*Arbores*) and one to humans and their parts of the body (*Natura Hominis*), which the author had taken mainly from Isidore's *Etymologiae Sive Origines*. The manuscript concludes with a lapidary which was added in the late thirteenth century. The later addition of a lapidary in a manuscript whose aim was to describe the natural world through Christian religion and allegories stresses the importance precious stones gained in the late mediaeval tradition. The added descriptions of precious stones are a great indicator of the importance that the lore of precious stones and, in particular, of gemstones and their Christian attributes were acquiring at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The *Ashmole Bestiary* is considered by scholars an especially fine manuscript which was compiled and adorned around the late twelfth century and the early thirteenth century.[73] Furthermore, it is considered a "sister" manuscript to the *Aberdeen Bestiary* because of the similarities in their images and contents[74], as the two manuscripts present similar and "extensive use of exempla, the repetition of animal patterns in various compositions, as well as repetition and variation of the same attitudes in several figures"[75]. The manuscript contains approximately one-hundred and thirty miniatures of the animal species the author described. Like the *Aberdeen Bestiary*, the manuscript referenced mainly Isidore's *Etymologiae Sive Origines* and Hugh of Fouilloy's *Aviarium*.

These two bestiaries are catalogued by scholars as luxury productions. Their creation had two main functions. Since these manuscripts are "luxury productions that make lavish use of gold and artistic skill"[76], Hassing puts forward the possibility that this manuscripts' production was intended for the entertainment of royalty and wealthy patrons. The second function is connected to the manuscript's contents which intertwined the description of animal species with ones of precious stones, "the

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[73] Hassing, p.138.
[74] Muratova, Xenia, "Workshop Methods in English Late Twelfth-Century Illumination and the Production of Luxury Bestiaries", in Willene B. Clark and Meredith T. McMunn, eds., *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: the Bestiary and Its Legacy*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, p.53.
[75] Muratova, p.58.
[76] Hassing, p.139.

bestiary stories […]provided material for vernacular sermons, they probably aided in the moral instruction of the lay congregation as well"[77].

The use of lapidary and bestiary imagery inside sermons is reasonable when considering the Christian intentions of attributing to animals and precious gemstones aspects closely related to virtues and figures that belong to the Christian tradition. The aim of these texts was not the scientific study of nature but the gathering of information to illustrate the allusions, similes or metaphors to understand biblical passages.[78] The common belief behind these literary works is that everything that belongs to the material world is an image or symbol that mirrors the spiritual and divine realms, thus the natural world becomes a symbol of the divine understandable by men.[79] This perfectly ordered worldview did not consider animals and gemstones as mere objects of an external reality but imbued them with a hidden meaning. Only unravelling their true meaning would lead men closer to a fuller understanding of God and Nature.

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[77] Hassing, p.140.
[78] Zambon, p.XI.
[79] Zambon, p.XIV.

3.Pearls in Cotton Nero AX

3.1 The Traceability of the Word "pearl" in Cotton Nero AX

Pearl, *Cleanness* and *SGGK* are poems closely connected to the image of the pearl. Indeed, they present a high frequency in the use of this noun and its declinations. An approach which demonstrates the importance of the pearl imagery throughout the poems is the tracing of the noun frequency and of the collocations of "pearl" in the manuscript. For the purpose of my research, I have created a 37,438-word-token corpus out of three sub-corpora (*Pearl*-corpus.txt; *Cleanness*-corpus.txt; *SGGK*-corpus.txt) that contain the three poems.[80] In order to produce an attentive analysis of the frequency of the term, the various synonyms adopted in the poems have been replaced by "perle" or its plural "perles". The collected data derives from the analysis of the corpus through AntConc and, due to the many variables that occur, a manual check of the distribution of the word "pearl" in the manuscript. The purpose of this corpus-based research is to analyse the frequency and position in which "pearl" occurs to support the wide use of this specific gemstone in the poems.

Through a preliminary analysis of the poems using AntConc and then a manual check of the instances in which "pearl" occurs, some interesting data have emerged. The author uses "pearl", one of its synonyms or declinations sixty-three times in all three compositions, fifty-three times in *Pearl* (tab.1), eight times in *Cleanness* (tab.2) and two times in *SGGK* (tab.3). While the noun in the singular form, "perle", is used forty-five times in total, thirty-nine times in *Pearl*, five times in *Cleanness* and one in *SGGK*, the author uses the plural forms, "perles" and "perlez", eighteen times. He employs its synonyms only three times, twice in *Pearl* ("margarys", l.199; "margyrye", l.1037) and once in *Cleanness* ("margerye", l.556).

Row	FileID	FilePath	FileTokens	Freq	NormFreq	Dispersion	Plot
1	0	Pearl-corpus.txt	8365	53	6335.923	0.714	

Table 1: Plot of *Pearl*-corpus

Row	FileID	FilePath	FileTokens	Freq	NormFreq	Dispersion	Plot
1	0	Cleanness-corpus.txt	16377	8	488.490	0.480	

Table 2: Plot of *Cleanness*-corpus

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[80] The corpus was produced with the texts edited by Andrew Malcolm and Ronald Waldron in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript. Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and the Green Knight*.

Row	FileID	FilePath	FileTokens	Freq	NormFreq	Dispersion	Plot
1	0	SGGK-corpus.txt	21061	2	94.962	0.333	

Table 3: Plot of *SGGK*-corpus

From the graphs above (tab. 1, 2, 3), it can be inferred that the use of "pearl" is not so pervasive in *Cleanness* and *SGGK*, whereas it is a frequent term in *Pearl*. The distribution of the term in the first poem of the manuscript does not prove to be regular. The word is extensively employed in the first and last sections. The central part of the poem sees a sharp decrease: sections eight to twelve do not display the use of "pearl", as these stanzas focus on the retelling of the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt.20:1-16) and, indeed the Gospel's passage referenced by the author does not employ this term either. In *Cleanness* and *SGGK*, the use of "pearl" is less consistent and more sporadic. The graph shows that in *Cleanness* the word is repeated mostly in the central section of the poem, that is, in the link passage between the second an third exemplary sequences which narrates the immaculate conception and subtly compares Christ to a pearl. The rest of the composition does not present a high usage of the term; the only other instance in which it is employed is during the description of the holy vessels during the *exemplum* of Belshazzar. In *SGGK*, the word "pearl" is even more sporadic: it is employed only twice, in the description of the garments worn by Lady Bertilak and as a term of comparison for the knighthood of Sir Gawain.

The predominance of the term "pearl" in the first poem can be also demonstrated by the fact that, in the word list, it is among the highest-ranking positions, occupying the 23rd position, if we count its synonyms, and the 25th, if we count strictly the use of "perle" and its plural "perlez" and "perles". However, the first positions in the list are occupied by personal pronouns, prepositions and declinations of the verb "to be", thus, the most frequent noun employed in the poem is "pearl", a data that further underlines the importance of the gemstone in the poem.

The importance of the image of the pearl and of the term itself is emphasized by the restricted usage of synonyms employed to refer to this precious gemstone. The author employs synonyms and words that recall generally the gemstone imagery ("gemme", "juel") but paired to a modifier that clarifies their usage to reference the pearls. If we analyse the instances in which the author employs synonyms, it could be argued that there is the chance that they are employed to preserve the strict structures of *Pearl* and *Cleanness* which require the use of alliteration, rhymes, and for what concerns the first poem of the manuscript the *concatenatio*. Indeed, at line 23, the construction used to refer to the Pearl-Maiden, "myry juel", is adopted to maintain the rhyming scheme of the stanza which relies on the ending "-ele". While "myry" is employed to maintain the alliteration of the "m" and to connect

the wide meaning of jewel to the pearl, "juele" is used to maintain the rhyming pattern ("wele", "hele", "bele", "stele", "fele", "juele"). Similarly, at line 1039, the author uses the synonym "margyrye" to describe the stones that adorn the Heavenly Jerusalem as a result of the necessity to adhere to the rhyming scheme which relies on "-ʒe/-ye" ("syʒe", "asspye", "margerye", "plye").

To comply with the alliterative necessities of the structure, at line 199, the author uses the synonym "myryeste margarys" and, at line 289, "gemme". While in the former case the semantic field is quite specific, in the latter the synonym adopted conveys only a general meaning. Indeed, "gemme" does not refer specifically to the pearl but it could indicate all kinds of precious stones. At line 289, the use of "gemme" differs from the other instances in which the author adopts this term or its plural form, "gemmez" (ll.7; 118; 219; 253; 266; 991; 999; 1011). In the other instances, the word is used with its general meaning and not as a synonym of "pearl". Thus, at line 289, to create a unequivocal connection between "gemme" and the pearl, the author pairs it with the adjective "clene", a modifier that in the composition is employed only to describe the virtues of the Pearl-Maiden, "So was hit clene and cler and pure" (l.227), "For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere" (l.737), her physical qualities, "Þyn angel-hauyng so clene cortez" (l.754), the items she is wearing, "coronde clene" (l.767), the qualities of the blessed, "of hert boþe clene and lyʒt" (l.682), "To stretch in þe street þou hatz no vygour,/Bot þou wer clene, withouten mote" (ll.971-972), the approach in the description of the city of New Jerusalem, "Of motez two to carpe clene" (l.949), and the Blessed City itself, "clene cloystor" (l.969). In *Pearl*, this adjective is always employed in contexts related to Christian religion and its teachings, enabling the reader to create an immediate connection between "gemme" and the pearl.

Another term employed to refer to the pearl is "juel", adopted four times in *Pearl*. While at line 23 the term is not used to maintain the structure of the poem, in the other three instances it is employed to preserve either the alliteration scheme of the line or the *concatenatio* elements. Since the *concatenatio* word of the fifth section is "juel", its variables and derived words, and in these sections the narrator is addressed as a Jeweller for the first time, "juel" is employed as a synonym to attain cohesiveness throughout the stanza. Similarly to "gemme", "juel" belongs to a general semantic field. In order to link this word with the specific field of the pearl, at line 249, the author pairs it with the possessive pronoun "my" and, at line 253, he refers to the pearl with the construction "That juel þenne in gemmez gente". Instead, at line 277, "juel" is employed to maintain the alliteration. Its link to the pearl is clarified in the construction of the next line, where a variation of the term occurs, "A juel to me þen watz þys geste,/And juelez wern hyr gentyl sawez" (ll.277-278). In these instances, the author employs semantic constructions and adjectives to create explicit associations between the terms belonging to the general semantic fields and the specific gemstone. Since "juel" is also used in two instances to refer to Jesus, "my dere Juelle" (l.795) and "gay Juelle" (l.1124), and once to refer to the

blessed, "So cumly pakke of joly juele" (l.929), the choice of adding a modifier to the synonym to define the connection with the pearl is quite important. The only instance where a synonym is not employed due to structural or metrical issues occurs at line 206 where the term "marjorys" is not used to refer to the Pearl-Maiden; instead, it is used to describe the gemstones that adorn her crown.

While in *Pearl* the author uses different words and terms that derive from a general semantic field paired with specific adjectives to refer to the pearl, in *Cleanness*, the only instance where a synonym is employed presents the repetition of "perle" as part of the term itself, "margerye-perle" (l.556). Similarly to *Pearl*, *Cleanness* presents a structure that follows strictly the alliterative verse, and the choice of using this synonym may be also linked to the author's determination to keep the structure of the line as regular as possible. Although the author maintains the alliteration through the use of "margerye", what is striking is his choice of adding "perle" as part of the term. Indeed, it would have been sufficient to use the first word of the construction, as he does in *Pearl* at line 1039. What emerges from the use of this synonym in *Cleanness* is the intention of the author to reiterate and repeat the word "perle" even when not strictly necessary. The sporadic use of synonyms and the instances in which these occur may be taken as evidence of the importance that the precise ordered structure and the actual term have for the author.

Another interesting element is the position in which "pearl" occurs in the sentence. There are only three instances in which this term is used in the first position, all occurring in *Pearl*. Although this word appears sporadically in the first position, there is one instance worth noting. The first poem of the manuscript begins with the word "Perle". The proem is employed as an ode to the precious stone, the author pairs the gemstone with the adjective "plesaunte", describes its placing, "[…]to prynces paye/To clanly clos in golde so clere:" (ll.1-2), and gives specific information about its place of origin, "Oute of oryent" (l.3). The choice of establishing "Perle" in first position of the poem, and thus of the manuscript, allows the reader to identify from the first line the central figure of the pearl and the perceptive experience that the reader and the Jeweller have to acquire to understand its imagery and function. The choice of using the construction "Perle plesaunte" (l.1) in first position in the sentence, the poem and the manuscript is linked to the powerful imagery of this precious gemstone and to the careful structure devised by the poet. The use of "perle" in the first line allows the poem to acquire a circular structure, a characteristic that is shared by this gemstone and the composition itself. The circular organization of each stanza and section echoes the concentric structure of the various pearls described in the composition.[81] The choice of beginning the poem with "Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye," (l.1) is the greatest example of the use of *concatenatio* in the manuscript. While usually in the

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[81] Zeeman, Nicolette, "Medieval Religious Allegory: French and English", in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.158.

composition this device is adopted to create cohesiveness throughout the stanzas and generally throughout the poem, in this instance it is used to re-introduce the poem. The composition concludes with the line "Ande precious perlez vnto His pay" allowing, by placing "perle" in the first position and "paye" in the first line, the creation of a connection between the end and the beginning of the composition, establishing the circular structure of the poem.[82]

The structure of the poems, the use of synonyms and the collocation of "perle" and its variables are proofs of the relevance of this gemstone in the manuscript. The instances in which the term is used and the careful construction of sentences are proofs of the general and individual importance that the pearl carries in the instances in which the word is employed. The consistent repetition of "pearl" in the three poems creates a connection between them which is emphasized by the poet's strategic use of synonyms and constructions.

3.2 The Influence of the Lapidary Lore in Cotton Nero A.X

3.2.1 Symbology, Lapidary and Luxury Terminology in Cotton Nero A.X.

The Cotton Nero poems are characterised by extensive descriptions in which the poet employs terminology and imagery that mainly belong to the luxury and lapidary field. The descriptions of holy settings and garments are subjects of value and material splendour, crucial concepts in the poems. The emphasis on precious stones, metals and ornaments aims to the creation of tangible images for mediaeval readers, the recognition of an aristocratic setting familiar to the public and the creation of further meanings in the poems. Through the luxury system within which the descriptions are set, the poet is able to introduce further meanings to the compositions. The descriptions of holy places are rich in specific architectural terminology. The garments are richly described and ornated. The characters are fully adorned with all kinds of gemstones and precious fabrics and silks. The splendid materials employed in the descriptions create an aesthetic experience of luxury that is used to communicate the didactic narrative of each poem. The author employs luxury and lapidaries' images as poetic forms to share the devotional contents of the poems.[83] The influence of lapidaries is detected in the terminology employed in the Cotton Nero manuscript in which the concept of the human evaluation of jewels is recurrent and reiterated. This attitude is generally pursued by the poet in *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, particularly in Belshazzar's *exemplum* of the worthy vessels, and in *SGGK*, in the descriptions of the garments worn by the characters and their multiple meanings. The poet's decision

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[82] Zeeman, p.158.
[83] Kertz, Lydia Yaitsky, "The Positive Lessons of Luxury: *Pearl* as a Romance-Adjacent Text", *Medieval Perspectives* 33, 2018, pp.79-82.

of adopting specific terminology, gemstones and pearls' metaphors emphasizes the importance of precious materials throughout the poems.

In *Pearl*, the concept of luxury is introduced from the opening lines which refer to a prince who, from the hints given in the first line, may appreciate well-shaped pearls in a setting like gold. Then, it is developed through the Dreamer treasuring his Pearl-Maiden, a human jewel, the further explanation of her value employing the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, and the closing allusion to the opportunity of becoming pearls for those who lead pure lives.[84] To explore fully the concepts of luxury, the Dreamer starts to use the term "jeweller" to refer to himself. Although the Dreamer is implicitly established as a jeweller in the first stanza of the composition, the importance of his status and thus the position of the Pearl-Maiden is reiterated by the choice of employing this term as the *concatenatio* word in the fifth section (ll.252; 264; 265; 276; 288; 289).[85] The Dreamer's social position is clear, he is a "juelere" (l.252), an activity that in the Middle Ages had a wider meaning compared to the definition given nowadays. The word "jeweller" is first recorded in the English language in the early fourteenth century and is used for:

> someone who works with, or trades in, precious stones and gems. […] Jewellers were either goldsmiths or merchants trading in luxury goods for their social superiors. Jewellers were most likely to be retailers, or merchants, though the term sometimes also refers to craftsmen who made or set stones.[86]

The poet's choice of disclosing the activity of the Dreamer is a detail which allows the analysis of the particular terminology employed by the narrator in the composition, a characteristic that the poet also employs in specific descriptions of *Cleanness* and *SGGK*. In the poems, the narrator, who in *Pearl* is the Jeweller himself, is fascinated by luxury, and his interest is displayed by the use of a specific terminology of wealth. The descriptions of settings and garments disclose the focus on adornment and decoration, signs that refer to courtliness and the lapidary lore. In the poems, the terminology employed is quite general but still the persistent interest in the description of luxury is something that is to be taken into account. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the vocabulary used to refer to jewellers' techniques derived from French. The poet focuses extensively on descriptions of luxurious objects adopting a vocabulary that belongs to the fields of wealth and jewellery. This process allows the widening of symbols and allegories associated with the elements represented. In *Pearl*, the setting of the precious stone is quite general, even if the connection with the lapidary tradition is evident and not accidental. The verbs used by the poet to describe the setting of the pearl

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[84] Davenport, Tony, "Jewels and Jewellers in "Pearl"", *The Review of English Studies* 59, 241, 2008, p.508.

[85] Barr, Helen, "Pearl—or 'The Jeweller's Tale'", in Helen Barr, *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.43.

[86] Barr, pp.42-43.

are generic, "clos" (l.2) and "clente" (l.259). However, the pearl is pictured inside a "cofer" (l.259) and "forser" (l.263).[87] According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, both terms derive from the Old French and they specifically refer to a trunk, chest or case for storing or carrying valuable objects.[88] Further evidence of an attentive use of terminology connected to the jeweller and lapidary fields can be detected in the imagery conveyed in the description of the Garden of Eden. The Earthly Paradise is described in terms of "adubbement", the *concatenatio* word of the second section. The shining rocks of the setting surpass the splendour of the most beautiful tapestries, "Þe glemande glory þat of hem glent,/ For wern neuer webbez þat wyȝez weuen" (ll.70-71); the leaves sliding onto each other are described as "bornyst syluer" (l.77); the slopes of the forest are described as "fyldor fyn" (l.106) and the stones of the river are connected with powerful images of light (ll.114-120).[89] This sequence, rich in comparisons with luxury imagery, maintains a distinctive and specific mercantile, lapidary and goldsmith terminology which has the aim of emphasizing the ornaments, glitter and value of these materials.[90]

The specific luxury and lapidaries terminologies are also employed in the description of New Jerusalem (*Pearl*, ll.973-1092), especially due to the attributes associated to the gemstones of the Heavenly City. In the description of this holy setting, the author uses as his source the Book of Revelation. The extensive use of the Scriptures as the main source for the passage is highlighted by the adoption of "John" as *concatenatio* word in the section. The city is described through the eyes of the Jeweller; however, his recognition of the foundation stones of the City derives from the knowledge of the passage from the Bible, as he states at the beginning and at the end of each stanza of the fitt: "In þe Apokalypce is þe fasoun preued,/ As deuysez hit þe apostel John" (ll.984-985); "As John þe apostel hit syȝ with syȝt," (l.986); "As derely deuysez þis ilk toun/ In Apocalyppez þe apostel John" (l.995-996); "As John þise stonez in writ con nemme,/ I knew þe name after his tale" (ll.997-998); "[…] He con hit wale/ In þe Apocalyppce, þe apostel John" (ll.1007-1008); "Ȝet joyned John þe crysolyt," (l.1010); "I knew hit by his deuysement/ In þe Apocalyppez, þe apostel John" (ll.1019-1020); "As John deuysed" (l.1021); "For meten hit syȝ þe apostel John" (l.1032). The repetition of the *concatenatio* phrase "þe apostel John" purposely establishes an objective authority for the Jeweller's vision and for the description of the City. The authority of the apostle is stronger than the authority of the Dreamer, "the effect is to validate the Dreamer's visionary experience with a point of

[87] Davenport, p.511.
[88] *Middle English Dictionary* [website] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED8261/track?counter=1&search_id=66130146, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED16708/track?counter=1&search_id=66130146 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[89] Barr, p.45.
[90] Barr, p.45, n.22.

reference in the reliable apostolic vision"[91]. Although the author references directly his source (Rev.21: 23), throughout the section, he changes and adds some details. He reduces the size of the city from twelve thousand furlongs (Rev.21: 16) to "Twelve forlonge space, er euer hit fon,/ Of heȝt, of brede, of lenþe to cayre" (ll.1030-1031). Unlike its source, *Pearl* displays various details designed to heighten the visual effects the description conveys. While St John simply lists the twelve foundation stones of the Heavenly City, the Pearl-poet adds some adjectives to provide a more visually appealing vision.[92] New Jerusalem in both compositions presents, even if described differently, twelve precious stones, as its foundations, and pearls. While in the Holy Scriptures the gates of the Heavenly City are described as being pearls, "Et duodecim portae, duodecim margaritae sunt: et singular portae erant ex singulis margaritis"[93] (Rev.21: 21), in *Pearl* the gates are described as being adorned with pearls, "Þe portalez pyked of rych platez,/ And vch ȝate of a margyrye/ A parfyt perle þat neuer fatez" (ll.1036-1038). Similarly to the description of the twelve foundation stones, the author adds further elements to the description of the gates' pearls enhancing and reiterating their perfect state. The author emphasizes all the precious stones of the City of New Jerusalem through the use of adjectives in the description for two main reasons. Firstly, the precious stones carry the theme of treasure in the composition. Secondly, the description allows the poet to maintain a balance between this section and the earlier ones, which focused on the Garden of Eden and the garments worn by the Pearl-Maiden.[94] The arrangement followed by the author in the description of the Heavenly City is simpler than the previous, more elaborate descriptions. The author decides to divide the listing and description of the twelve stones, six for two stanzas of the seventeenth section, and each stone is presented in one or more lines by the addition of suitable adjectives or qualities carried by the gemstone.[95] This arrangement differs greatly from its source. The Book of Revelation presents four gems in the first verse and the other eight in the next one, a structure which does not comply with the constant pursuit of symmetry that the poem exhibits.[96] The effect of glimmer and of multi-colour glitter that the passage suggests is far more striking than its Biblical source and the setting created by the Pearl-poet does not allow a verisimilar account of a city. Indeed, the real aim of the poet is the creation of an image that in its lavishness surpasses the bounds of the material world and enters the divine realm.[97] Through the use of gemstone and luxury imagery in the description of the

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[91] Field, Rosalind, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*", *The Modern Language Review* 81, 1, 1986, p.9.

[92] Spearing, C.A., *The Gawain-poet: a Critical Study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.103.

[93] Colunga, Alberto, Turrado, Laurentio, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam: Nova Editio*, Matriti: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 1959, p.1239, "The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate being made of a single pearl." New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[94] Kean, P.M., *The Pearl: An Interpretation*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2020, p.215.

[95] Kean, p.215.

[96] Kean, p.215.

[97] Spearing, p.103.

City of New Jerusalem, the poet is able to connect the heavenly setting to the *exemplum* of purity of the poem, the Pearl-Maiden. The City of New Jerusalem and the Pearl-Maiden share the essential Christian qualities, purity, light and joy, and it is through the specific luxury terminology that the solid reiteration of religious attributes is possible.[98]

The other instance in which the poet employs the specific terminology of goldsmiths and luxury may be found in the *exemplum* of Belshazzar and the holy vessels (ll.1453-1492). The author devotes a long part of the poem to the description of the vessels which are depicted as made of gold and enamelled with lapis lazuli. The vessels' tops are embossed with branches and leaves, magpies and parrots. In their blooms there are "blyknande perles", and the fruits on their branches are made of gemstones, sapphires, cornelians, topazes, almandines, emeralds, amethysts, chalcedonies, chrysolites, rubies and pearls. Similarly to the previous instances where the imagery of gemstones is employed, the homily of Belshazzar's feast and vessels is offered as an *exemplum* of an accurate visual perception connected to a correct Christian behaviour.[99] The value carried by the vessels is represented in the terminology employed in their descriptions and in the gemstones the author decides to include in their ornaments. This *exemplum* is partly based on the Book of Daniel 5: 1-20; however, the episode in *Cleanness* and the one in the Holy Scriptures differ greatly in the description of the vessels. While the Book of Daniel describes the vessels generally, referring to them only twice and as made of gold and silver, "vasa aurea et argentea"[100] (Dan.5: 2-3), the author of *Cleanness* includes a lengthy description to its source, adding the presence of specific gemstones which are carriers of deep meanings in the Christian tradition:

> For alle þe blomes of þe boȝes wer blyknande perles,
> And alle þe fruyt in þo formes of flaumbeande gemmes,
> Ande safyres, and sardiners, and seemly topace,
> Alabaundarynes, and amaraunz, and amaffised stones,
> Casydoynes, and crysolytes, and clere rubies,
> Penitotes, and pynkardines, ay perles bitwene (ll.1467-1472)

Most gemstones decorating the vessels are the same as the ones that embellish the city of New Jerusalem already described in *Pearl*. The holy vessels present seven of the twelve gemstones of New Jerusalem (sapphires, topazes, emeralds, amethysts, chalcedonies, chrysolites, rubies) and pearls, the latter not belonging to the foundations of the City but to its gates. The poet's decision of adding to the source text the actual gemstones which adorn the vessels emphasizes the true Christian value that

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[98] Field, p.9.

[99] Stanbury, Sarah, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p.43.

[100] Colunga, Turrado, p.881, "gold and silver vessels", New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=34&bible_chapter=5 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

these objects carry in the mediaeval Christian tradition. Moreover, the use of the foundation gemstones accentuates the sanctity and holiness that these gems have in the Christian tradition. The holy vessels are sanctified images that reveal their role as visible blessed objects through their ornamentation, their function and the terminology employed in their description, even if their function is not fulfilled nor understood by Belshazzar and his court.[101] Although the vessels should be used as blessed objects, during the feast Belshazzar orders his courtiers to use them to fulfil a role associated with vices:

> Nov is alle þis guere geten glotounes to serue,
> Stad in a ryche stal, and stared ful bryȝte;
> Baltazar in brayd: 'Bede vus þerof!
> Weȝe wyn in þis won! Wassayl!' he cries. (ll.1505-1508)

The poet employs technical architectural terminology to refer to the impressive construction of the holy vessels. To evoke their luxurious imagery, the author uses specific terms such as "enbaned" and "bantelles", "Enbaned vnder batelment with bantelles quoynt" (l.1459), "coperounes" and "fylyoles", "Þe couperones of þe couacles þat on þe cuppe reres/ Wer fetysely formed out fylyoles longe" (ll.1460-1461). Furthermore, the author employs terminology that applies to the practice and creation of ornaments, such as "bolled" (embossed), "al bolled abof with braunches and leues" (l.1464), "trayled" (decorated with a design which resembles trailing branches) and "tryfled" (ornamented with trefoils), "So trayled and tryfled atrauerce wer alle" (l.1473), "grauen" (engraved), "Þe gobelotes of golde grauen aboute" (l.1475), and "fretted" (inlaid), "And fyoles fretted with flores and fleez of golde"(l.1476).[102] The adoption of methodological and pictorial ornamental terminology underlines the author's knowledge of an artistry connected with the lapidary and gemstone lore. Furthermore, the use of this imagery and terminology induces the depiction of more vivid and powerful images of luxury of the holy vessels. In a feast where consecrated ornaments are employed in a blasphemous way, the lengthy description of the holy vessels reverses the pattern of imagery the author previously applied to portray the Dead Sea (ll.1009-1048). While Belshazzar's *exemplum* portrays the holy vessels employing adjectives of "clanesse" and craftmanship, the description of the Dead Sea features adjectives and comparisons that belong to the "filþe" and nature, "drouy" (l.1016), "dym" (l.1016), "ded in hit kynde" (l.1016), "blo" (l.1017), "blubrande" (l.1017), "blak" (l.1017), "stynkande" (l.1018). The different approach on descriptions is useful to emphasize the visual importance that the gemstones, and particularly pearls, carry even if the value of the vessels eludes the idolatry of the Babylonians.[103] Belshazzar orders to use these objects to serve his concubines and the court, a usage

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[101] Stanbury, p.62.
[102] Davenport, p.512.
[103] Stanbury, pp.60-61.

which suggests the vessels of the eucharist. However, unlike their use during the sacrament of the eucharist, Belshazzar's feast abuses their holy value: their holiness is adopted for a blasphemous practice.[104] The visual and accurate description of the vessels creates an association between the material world and God's kingdom.[105] This connection is intensified by the use of the foundation stones as their ornaments creating a process of imitation between the vessels and the City of New Jerusalem. The use and misuse of these holy objects exemplify the reader's and viewer's capacity to recognize the holy symbols and to begin a process of spiritual modelling.[106] The sacred vessels may be recognized as love-tokens, "their status as physical objects, crafted by hand, emphasises the role of particularity in love"[107]. As God created each person, so the craftsman used these gemstones and precious materials to create an object that would have been used during holy occasions. The description of the vessels celebrates physicality[108], the holy vessels crafted by God can be perceived and could symbolize the body: the vessel and carrier of the soul. The body should be perceived as an object of delight to human beings and to God who devised it as his vessel.[109] This symbology would explain their careful descriptions and the care with which the author lists the precious gemstones that ornate them. The precious stones employed in their description carry a deep meaning in the mediaeval Christian tradition. Each listed gemstone is a carrier of Christian qualities and virtues that mirrors the soul of the perfect Christian. The aim of Belshazzar's *exemplum* is to engage the audience in the recognition of his unholy behaviour. The Babylonian king should have cherished and used the vessels as sanctified and holy objects, as the perfect Christians should cherish their body. However, Belshazzar did not employ nor viewed the vessels as signs of God's presence.[110]

The luxury terminology employed in the descriptions of New Jerusalem and the vessels is echoed in *SGGK*, particularly in the imagery employed in the description of the Castle of Hautdesert. Similarly to the City of New Jerusalem, the first characteristic ascribed to the castle is its qualities of gleaming and shining, "schemered and schon" (l.772). Furthermore, specific architectural, ornamental and luxury terminology is employed in its description. Although the castle does not present any obvious reference to precious gemstones, the Pearl-poet conveys the luxurious image and the architectural features through Sir Gawain's eyes. The Pearl-poet employs a terminology similar to the one previously adopted in the descriptions of the City of New Jerusalem and the holy vessels. Particularly, he uses the terms "enbaned", "Enbaned vnder þe abataylment, in þe best lawe" (l.790),

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[104] Stanbury, p.62.
[105] Stanbury, p.63.
[106] Stanbury, p.63.
[107] Hatt, Cecilia A., *God and the Gawain-Poet: Theology and Genre in Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015, p.102.
[108] Hatt, p.102.
[109] Hatt, p.122.
[110] Hatt, p.123.

"barbican", "A better barbican þat burne blusched vpon neuer" (l.793), and "fylyoleȝ" (pinnacle), "Fayre fylyoleȝ þat fyȝed, and ferlyly long,/ With coroun coprounes, craftyly sleȝe" (l.795-796) that mirror closely the description of the vessels. The castle of Hautdesert presents "coroun coprounes" (l.797) and "mony pinakles" (l.800) that evoke the previous descriptions. Although the castle does not present gemstones in its architectural features, the poet uses the word "loupe", "Wyth mony luflych loupe þat looked ful clene" (l.792), conscious of the double meaning this term carries. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the term has two different meanings, the embrasure in a wall for the protection of archers, or a precious stone that resembles sapphire.[111] Both meanings fit the description of the castle, particularly the meaning of "loupe" as sapphire matches its modifier "ful clene" which throughout the poem is predominantly attributed to gemstones. The use of "loupe" as a precious stone resembling sapphire is recorded in *Mandeville's Travels* (1499), a work which was taken as source for some of the imagery and descriptions of the Cotton Nero poems in numerous passages[112]:

> For whoso wil bye the dyamand, it is nedefulle
> to him that he knowe hem because that men countrefeten hem
> often of cristalle that is yalow, and of the saphires of cytrine colour
> that is yalow also, and of the saphire loupe, and of many other
> stones[113] (ll.22-26)

In particular, the descriptions of the blessed settings draw details from this work, the portrait of Belshazzar's feast and vessels overlaps with Mandeville's account of the Great Chan's palace and the land of Prester John.[114] The Pearl-poet was familiar with the terms employed by Mandeville and thus he may have been acquainted with the double meaning of "loupe". Even if the reference is subtle, it is clear that the author wanted to add a double meaning to the sentence and a detail to the castle which exposes once more the author's incredible knowledge of ornaments, gemstones and luxury.

Specific terminology is also employed in the description of garments in the Cotton Nero poems. In particular, the Pearl-Maiden and the characters in *SGGK* present a wide use of terms that belong to the luxury vocabulary. In the description of the garments worn by the Maiden, the Jeweller recounts the details of her dress with a gaze focused on courtly terms. Several details and the related terminology display the Jeweller's status as a merchant. The description highlights the Maiden's garments as those of an aristocratic woman and the terminology employed refers to a vocabulary

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[111] *Middle English Dictionary* [website] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=hnf&q=loupe [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[112] Andrew, Malcolm, and Ronald Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript. Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and the Green Knight*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007, p.19.

[113] Mandeville, John, ed. by M.C. Seymour, *Mandeville's Travels*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967, p.117.

[114] Menner, Robert J., ed., *Purity; a Middle English Poem*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920, pp.109-110.

concerned with courtly fashioning and craft.[115] Her crown is luxuriously decorated creating a clustering of courtly details. The Maiden's complexion is compared to the colour of a whale's bone, hinting to mercantile imagery and her hair is compared to gold.[116] The Jeweller's description of the Maiden's dress focuses on courtly embellishments and ornamentation:

> Perlez pyȝte of ryal prys
> Þere moȝt mon by grace haf sene,
> […]
> Al blysnande whyt watz hir beau biys,
> Vpon at sydez, and bounden bene
> Wyth þe myryeste margarys, at my deuyse,
> Þat euer I seȝ ȝet with myn yȝen;
> Wyth lappez large, I wot and I wene,
> Dubbed with double perle and dyȝte;
> Her cortel of self sute schene,
> With precios perlez al vmbepyȝte. (ll.193-204)

The author's approach to the description of the garments shows a concern with courtly fashion and craft.[117] The cluster of vocabulary employed presents the Maiden as an aristocratic woman, something that has been already introduced in the first section by the construction "so reken in vche araye" (l.5), referring to the setting of the precious stone, and repeated at line 192 in a general description of her attire, "hir araye ryalle". "Araye" refers to the royal clothing the Maiden is wearing, "the specific sense 'royal' is appropriate in view of the crown she is wearing"[118]. Furthermore, the *concatenatio* word of the section gives further emphasis on the author's interest for the courtly details of the Maiden's garments. The *concatenatio* word "Pyȝt" and its variations, earlier forms of the modern English "pitched", are employed with their specific meaning of "set, adorn with gems" to describe precisely the Maiden's garments and appearance.[119] The use of the *concatenatio* word appears to be linked in every instance with "perle", its plural form, "perlez", or one of its synonyms. In the description of the Maiden's attire and appearance, pearls are her most exclusive ornament and are employed as terms of comparison. She is depicted as "A precios pyece in perlez pyȝt" (l.192), her garments and tunic are adorned with "perlez pyȝte of royal prys" (l.193) and "myryeste margarys" (l.199). She is wearing a symbolical attire, her white garments, her crown and her breast are adorned with pearls.[120] Two features are particularly prominent in her description, the crown on her head and

[115] Barr, pp.45-46.
[116] Barr, p.47.
[117] Barr, pp.45-47.
[118] Turville-Petre, Thorlac, *Pearl*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021, p.66.
[119] Turville-Petre, p.61.
[120] Schofield, William Henry, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", *PMLA* 24, 4, 1909, pp.651-652.

the great pearl on her breast.[121] The crown is decorated with "marjorys and non oþer ston" (l.206) and even its pinnacles are ornated by "[…]cler quyt perle,/Wyth flurted flowrez perfet vpon" (ll.206-207). The elaborate decorations of the crown resemble the ornaments of the jewels of the fourteenth century.[122] The importance of this feature is reiterated and developed at line 255, where the poet adds that the crown is ornated with "perle orient" (l.255), creating a further analogy between the Maiden and the inanimate object since the pearl's place of origin, the Orient, has already been stated at line 3. The Maiden embodies purity and virginity and the crown is one of the symbols that carry these virtues. Indeed, later in the composition, the poet discloses that the Maiden was crowned by the Lord as "clene in vergynité" (l.767).[123] The second feature on which the poet focuses is the pearl on the Maiden's breast. This precious stone is described as "wonder" and "withouten wemme" (l.221), a construction that links her to the refrain "withouten spot" used in the first section.[124] This particular pearl is later identified by the Maiden herself with the Pearl of Great Price (Matt.13: 45-6). From line 729 to line 744, she reiterates and interprets the pearl of the parable as a symbol of salvation.[125] The Maiden represents, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom of heaven. The "makellez perle" symbolizes salvation, "and the Maiden herself is Pearl in pure pearls; indeed she *is* the 'perle of prys', as she had explained in Section V"[126]. The constant use of luxury terms to describe the Maiden is what relates the pearl as an inanimate object in the first lines with the Maiden herself. The terminology employed plays a major role in the identification of the inanimate with the animate and in the creation of allegories. Her moral perfection is described through perfect physical features and culminates in the lengthy description of her garments and of the pearl that adorns her breast, the visible sign of blessing, perfection and salvation.[127]

The imagery and technical terms that belong to the field of lapidaries and luxury are appropriate to figure the eternal beauty of the heavenly realms (Garden of Eden, City of New Jerusalem), the holy objects (the holy vessels), the ornaments and castles of specific characters of the poems. Indeed, in *SGGK*, the instances where gemstones, and particularly pearls, are mentioned are drastically less than in the other two poems; pearls are mentioned only twice. Although this gemstone is less discussed, the author employs the imagery of precious materials as ornaments in the descriptions of the garments and objects belonging to Guenevere, Sir Gawain, the Green Knight and Lady Bertilak.

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[121] Schofield, pp.618-619.
[122] Barr, pp.46-47.
[123] Schofield, p.619.
[124] Turville-Petre, p.64.
[125] Andrew, Waldron, p.88, n.729-39.
[126] Turville-Petre, p.141.
[127] Kertz, p.92.

The poem focuses on the concept that primitive natural forces can penetrate the lives of men, in particular they have the capacity of disrupting courtly life comforts. This image is hinted at in the poem's style which displays a mixture of vigorous statements and subtle and elegant descriptions. The juxtaposition of moods, characters, settings and actions suggests the contraposition between nature and civility, sin and courtliness. These oppositions are subtly developed through the descriptions of the characters' garments and objects which symbolize their association with the natural or courtly dimension. While the presence of the colour green together with the attributes that belong to nature signals a connection with the natural dimension, the presence of luxurious fabrics and precious stones indicates a link to civility and courtly values. It is through the descriptions of material splendour and exquisite craftmanship that the author illustrates the morality of characters.

Precious gemstones are used as meaningful ornaments in the descriptions of the Green Knight's physical features and attire. The knight is described with green hair and beard, his clothes are "dubbed wyth ful dere stonez" (l.192) and are adorned by "blyþe stones" (l.162) and his saddle skirt "Þat euer glemered and glent al of grene stones" (l.172). This description carries ambivalent connotations. On the one hand, the knight is ascribed the positive connotations of the literary green man, such as youth, natural vitality and love, symbolized by his fine physique and ornated attire.[128] On the other hand, grotesque features such as colour, stature, green beard and hair connect him with the tradition of the wild man.[129] It is through the detail of his green skin that the blend of these two traditions and, thus, the creation of the figure of the Green Knight is possible. Indeed, he carries the green of his garments into his hair, beard and skin spreading some of the wild man's grotesque features into the portrait of a figure that proves to be entirely benevolent by the end of the poem.[130] The combination of these features creates a figure who does not belong entirely to the courtly realm nor to the natural world. While his green appearance, his long beard and the green bob of holly he carries in his hand announce his connection with nature, fertility and natural growth, the silken dress, the axe carried in the other hand and the gold and emerald ornaments of his garments proclaim his connection with the contrasting life of civilization. The Green Knight clearly symbolizes nature and its features, but, simultaneously, he is a representative of courtliness. The precious stones that adorn him attest to his link with the sophistication which reveals him to be a courtly creature.[131] Even the appellative the author attributes to the knight exposes his paradoxical nature, "*Green* represents untamed natural

[128] Davenport, W.A., *The Art of the Gawain-Poet*, London: Athlone Press, 1978, p.154.
[129] Besserman, Lawrence, "The Idea of the Green Knight", *ELH* 53, 2, 1986, p.220.
[130] Besserman, pp.220-221.
[131] Godhurst, William, "The Green and the Gold: The Major Theme of Gawain and the Green Knight", *College English* 20, 2, 1958, pp.61-62.

forces, and *Knight*, the effects of courtly civilization"[132]. Expensive fabrics, gemstones and luxury terminology employed in his description are what links the Green Knight to the courtly world.

Similarly to the Green Knight, the description of the girdle discloses ambivalent characteristics. The object exhibits similar ornaments and the same colour-combination of green and gold as the Green Knight's attire, "Gered hit watz with grene sylke and with golde schaped" (l.1832).[133] The girdle offered by Lady Bertilak presents details which display the juxtaposition of nature and civilization. The object is green, suggesting that it could be a match for the Green Knight's powers and, indeed, at line 1851, its magic is disclosed. Although the girdle's ornaments hint at natural and supernatural powers, the author adds connotations that link the object to the courtly dimension:

> […]a riche rynk of red golde werkez,
> Wyth a starande ston stondande alofte,
> Þat bere blusschande bemez as þe bryȝt sunne (ll.1817-1819)

The girdle is made of gold and exquisite silks and is adorned with precious stones and materials that symbolize the sophistication of the court. Similarly to the Green Knight, its description discloses its magical and natural powers, thus, it is portrayed as something that simultaneously belongs to the luxury of the court and the natural world. Moreover, the ambiguous value the green girdle displays causes Sir Gawain's internal conflict on whether to accept this gift or not. The final acceptance of Lady Bertilak's gift marks the fall of the exemplary knight, symbol of Christian chivalry.[134] The five virtues of chivalry, which Sir Gawain at the beginning of the second fitt was the *exemplum* of, should have led him to resist to the calling of this object, "and to cling to the 'gold' of the image: courtliness, grace, and the denial of natural impulses"[135].

The importance of precious gemstones, and in particular pearls, is reiterated in the description of Lady Bertilak's attire, the first instance in *SGGK* where pearls are mentioned as ornaments. Similarly to the descriptive approach applied to the Green Knight, the lady's attire and jewels hint at an ambivalent figure. Lady Bertilak is described in opposition with an old lady, later identified with Morgan Le Faye:

> […]þe fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre
> And of compass and colour and costes, of alle oþer,
> And wener þen Wenore, as þe wyȝe þoȝt. (ll.943-945)

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[132] Godhurst, p.64.
[133] Burrow, John Anthony, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p.15.
[134] Burrow, p.104.
[135] Godhurst, p.64.

Her luxurious garments and "Kerchofes of þat on wyth mony cler perlez" (l.954) which cover her head, emblems of the court and of her social status, are juxtaposed to the description of her complexion. Her bosom and throat are compared to the natural and primitive element of the snow, "Hir brest and hir bryȝt þrote, bare displayed,/Schon schyrer þen snawe þat schedes on hillez" (l.955). The tension the author devises by contrasting the elements of material splendour of the court and nature makes the reader aware of the coexistence of nature and civilization that characterizes Lady Bertilak, a figure that will prove to be connected to the ambiguous figure of the Green Knight.[136]

Unlike the Green Knight and Lady Bertilak, Guenevere is portrayed with garments that belong exclusively to the courtly realm. The composition opens with the description of the historical context in which the narration is set, then shifts to the description of Arthur's court during the New Year's celebrations. Sitting in the middle of the scene is Guenevere who is described wearing silk and canopies embroidered with precious gemstones of quantifiable value, "þe best gemmes/Þat myȝt be preuen of prys wyth penyes to bye/In daye" (l.78-80). Not only are Guenevere's ornaments described as precious, she also has great value since she is the "comlokest to discrye" (l.81), "she is finally subject to judgements of value, the most beautiful to describe, the fairest queen any man might see"[137]. The particular use of gemstones and the addition of her monetary assessment invoke the judgement of an imaginary group who would think her the fairest of all creatures.[138] Her ornated garments are a signal of her association with courtly values and luxury.

While the Green Knight and the girdle present contrasting imagery that belong to both the courtly and natural realms, the ornaments of Sir Gawain's attire and his shield are symbols of his exclusive association with the courtly dimension. At the beginning of the second fitt, the author focuses extensively on the knight's garments, his armour and attire are decorated with precious gemstones and gold, a material that not only links Sir Gawain to court and civilization, but also symbolizes morality.[139] The knight's armour includes "knotez of golde" (l.577), "gold sporez" (l.587), laces that "lemed of golde" (l.591), his saddle has "mony golde frenges" (l.591), his bridle is "with bryȝt golden bounden" (l.600), the armour is ornated by "ryche golde naylez,/Þat al glytered and glent as glem of þe sunne" (l.603-604), the visor is embroidered "wyth þe best gemmez" (l.609) and his head is ringed by a band of gold embellished with diamonds. Even Sir Gawain's "schyr goulez" (l.619) shield is ornated with gold, the "pentangel depaynt of pure golde hwez" (l.620). The luxurious descriptions of the knight and his shield associate him to the courtly realm and suggest his moral qualities disclosed later in the same stanza:

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[136] Godhurst, p.63.
[137] Stanbury, p.100.
[138] Stanbury, pp.100-101.
[139] Burrow, p.39.

> Gawan watz for gode knawen and, as golde pured,
> Voided of vche vylany, wyth vertuez ennourned
> In mote. (ll.633-635)

Gold and precious stones imagery is used to describe Sir Gawain's external appearance and his moral virtues. Hence, the thorough description of Sir Gawain's arming provides the illustration of the parallel between material splendour of garments and morality.[140] His appearance and ornaments are a tangible manifestation of the courtly realm and perfect knighthood exemplified by Sir Gawain. Indeed, in the next stanza, the knight is described as an *exemplum* of the five virtues of chivalry: "fraunchyse" (generosity, magnanimity), "felaȝschyp" (companionableness), "clannes" (cleanness, purity), "cortaysye" (courtesy) and "pité" (pity).[141]

Although Sir Gawain's perfect morality and knighthood are displayed through gold imagery, in the fourth fitt, the author employs a traditional image for the testing and finishing of virtue, the pearl as example of perfection.[142] Indeed, this gemstone is the term of comparison for worth:

> As perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more,
> So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay knyȝtez. (ll.2364-2365)

The poet uses precious materials to claim Sir Gawain's worth, however, the knight cannot be declared entirely faultless and perfect. While in the second fitt, the knight is associated with gold and the reader believes the knight to be an *exemplum* of knighthood, in the fourth fitt, when the pearl comparison occurs, it is clear that the knight could be perceived as relatively faultless at best. However, Sir Gawain's acceptance of the girdle and his denial of courtly values has its justification of his behaviour. The knight was not interested in the fine workmanship of the girdle, nor did he want it as Lady Bertilak's token of love, he accepted the gift because he feared losing his life, an understandable motive as Lord Bertilak states, "þe lasse I yow blame" (l.2368). The untruthfulness of Sir Gawain is dictated not by a sin of malice or ignorance, such as the love for a lady, he acts upon one of the passions of the soul, fear, which constitutes an alleviating reason for the knight's sinful behaviour. The girdle is tied to the specific sin of the corruption of the flesh, "Þe faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed,/How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylþe"(ll.2435-2436).[143] At the same time, Gawain is right when he accuses himself of cowardice and finds the root of his actions in this sin, one

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[140] Mann, Jill, "Price and Value in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", *Essays in Criticism* 26, 4, 1986, p.295.
[141] Burrow, pp.39-50.
[142] Silverstein, Theodore, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A New Critical Edition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984, p.164.
[143] Fisher, Sheila, "Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History, and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", in Thelma S. Fenster, eds., *Arthurian Women: a Casebook*, New York and London: Garland, 1996, p.84.

that could be governable by will.[144] Thus, cowardice is a term that could be applied to Gawain's situation because "the single passion, fear, gives valid occasion both for extenuation ('love of life') and for blame ('cowardice')"[145].

Precious gemstones and pearls which adorn the characters' garments are subtle the symbols of the court. The Green Knight and Lady Bertilak serve as representations of the conflicts between civilization and nature, concepts that transpire through their descriptions, their ornated attire and their disguise as lord and lady of the Hautdesert castle. Through the contrasting elements of their descriptions, they do not simply carry the concepts of the natural, primitive and uncivilized, they are also symbols of the court.

Lapidaries and luxury images and terminologies are of crucial importance in the manuscript. Material consciousness permeates the poems and establishes through descriptions of blessed settings and characters' garments the social valency of the allegories and meanings of the poems. The specific terminology of material splendour is pivotal to introduce the concepts of morality and spirituality in a socially recognizable and tangible realm that can be recognized by the mediaeval public. Through rich descriptions, the poet interpolates settings and characters into a system within which spiritual perfection is illustrated through the specific vocabulary of luxury.

3.2.2 Lapidaries *formulae* in the Proem of *Pearl*

In Cotton Nero A.X, precious gemstones and, in particular, pearls carry important meanings. Their crucial position is emphasized by the author's conspicuous use of lapidary images and *formulae*. The author develops its poems around the Christian lapidary lore which was popular in Europe, particularly in England. During the Middle Ages, the literary tradition employed gemstones' imagery to symbolize moral and abstract qualities and conditions. From the thirteenth century, the old lapidary lore of pagan inspiration was employed as foundation of elaborate Christian allegories in poems and compositions.[146] The poems that belong to Cotton Nero A.X prove the popularity this tradition gained during the late fourteenth century and its influence on the literary compositions of the time. To expand the metaphors, allegories and symbols in the poems, the author engages with the lapidary lore and as I previously explained, the descriptions of holy settings, castles and garments employ luxury terminology to deliver further meanings to gemstones and to the expensive materials of the descriptions.

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[144] Burrow, pp.133-135.
[145] Burrow, p.135.
[146] Schofield, Henry William, "The Nature and Fabric of the Pearl", *PMLA* 19, 1, 1904, pp.163-164.

In particular, due to its specific imagery, *Pearl* displays the majority of instances concerning gemstones. The opening stanza of *Pearl* presents structural similarities to the mediaeval verse lapidaries and, like to the texts belonging to this immense tradition, *Pearl* opens with the name of the gemstone that will be described, "Perle" (l.1). While the anonymous *Physiologus* did not immediately state the passage's topic neither via a title that was usually chosen by the author of the lapidary work, nor by stating the gemstone's name, the most popular mediaeval lapidaries engaged in the use of this structural device which helped the readers to rapidly identify the material they were interested in, without having to read the entire work. In some cases, the author clarifies the focus of the description by using both devices, a title and the placing of the gemstone in first position of the section. Lapidaries such as Marbodus de Rennes' *De Lapidibus* and the *Alphabetical* and the *Allegorical* lapidaries present the use of a title to introduce the topic of the paragraph, moreover, in the majority of cases, the gemstone is either placed in first position or is mentioned in the first line of the passage, thus evidently marking the focus of that section. Other lapidaries, bestiaries or encyclopaedias, such as *De Lapidum Naturis*, *Lapidum Pretiosorum Mystica seu Moralis Applicatio*, the *London Lapidary of King Philip*, the *North Midland Lapidary*, Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary* and Bartholomeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* always adopt in first position of the section the matter about to be discussed. To reinforce the similarity between the opening of *Pearl* and the strict organization of the introduction *formula* in lapidaries, Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary* can be taken as example:

> UNION ad nun ceste pere, nule ne pot estre plus chere;
> Pur çeo est union numée, jà sa per n'ert mais trovée
> [Unio is the name of this stone, none can be more precious;
> therefore it is named unio, the equal of it was never found] (ll.1482-1483)[147]

The proem of *Pearl*, "Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye" (l.1), echoes the *formula* found in Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary*, which may be taken as an example of the general structure of lapidaries. The qualities added by Philip de Thaon to the description of the pearl are similar to the manner in which the Cotton Nero poet refers to the "perle" in the proem. Uniqueness is a quality generally attributed to the pearl. In both compositions the precious stone is defined as peerless, in the *Bestiary* as "the equal of it was never found" (l.1482) and in *Pearl* as "Ne proued I neuer her precios pere" (l.4). *De Lapidibus* introduces the pearl employing a similar concept:

> Tollitur a conchis species memoranda marinis
> unio dictus ob hoc, quod ab una tollitur unus,
> non duo vel plures unquam simul inveniuntur

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[147] Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiary*, edited and translated by Wright, Thomas, "The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon", in *Popular treatises on science written during the Middle Ages, in Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English*, London: R. & J.E. Taylor, 1841, p.127.

[From sea shells is extracted the variety of the memorable gem
called unio because of this, from one shell is taken one (gem),
not two or more together can be found](ll.627-629) [148]

The works which describe gemstones associate pearls with the qualities of incomparability and uniqueness. These concepts are heightened by the multiple terminologies employed to reference its preciousness and the gemstone itself. In the Latin, French and English texts, the pearl takes either the name "margarita", a borrowing from Old French, or "unio", a borrowing partly from Old French and Latin.[149] There are various explanations connected to the reason of the name "unio", Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* explains that the classical Latin word "ūniō" derives from "ūnus", "one", because every pearl is unique.[150]Instead, Isidore's *Etymologiae* introduces the pearl with the term "margarita" and defines the pearl as "prima candidarum gemmarum"[151] and adds an explanation of the reason the pearl is referenced as "unio", "ex quibus margaritis vacantur, aptum nomen habentes, quod tantum unus, nunquam duo vel plures simul reperiantur"[152]. Likewise, *De Proprietatibus Rerum* defines this precious stone as "Margarita omnium gemmarum candidarum est precipua"[153] and adds that the gemstone is also known as "unio" because no more than one pearl is found inside the shell of the oyster. A further example of the use of "unio" can be found in *De Lapidibus* which introduces its description with the title "De unione". In both explanation of the lemma, the uniqueness of the gemstone is heightened, a quality attributed to the precious stone also in the proem of *Pearl* and of which the Maiden becomes a symbol. The uniqueness of this gemstone is reiterated by the mediaeval belief surrounding its conception and birth, processes which are subtly explained by the construction "Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye/I sette hyr sengeley in synglure." (*Pearl*, ll.7-8), the particular use of "in synglure" highlights the uniqueness the pearl symbolizes according to its etymology and attributes.

The influence of lapidary tradition in the proem of the first composition of the Cotton Nero manuscript can be also detected in the detail of the pearl's placement, "to clanly clos in golde so clere" (l.2). The reference to gold in connection with pearls is a common concept in lapidaries, an example of which can be found in *De Lapidibus* where Marbodus de Rennes specifies that "Cujus ad ornatum

[148] Di Rennes, Marbodo, and Bruno Basile, eds., *Lapidari: La Magia delle Pietre Preziose*, Roma: Carocci, 2006, pp.86-89. All translations of Marbodo's works are mine, otherwise noted.

[149] *Oxford English Dictionary* [website] https://www.oed.com/dictionary/union_n1?tab=etymology&tl=true, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/margarite_n1?tab=etymology [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[150] *Oxford English Dictionary* [website], https://www.oed.com/dictionary/union_n1?tab=etymology&tl=true

[151] "the most excellent of the white gems", Isidorus of Seville*, Etymologiae*, edited and translated by Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W.J., Beach, J.A., Berghof, Oliver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.324.

[152] "a certain pearl is called *unio*, an apt name because only one (*unus*) is found at a time, never two or more", Isidorus of Seville*, Etymologiae*, edited and translated by Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W.J., Beach, J.A., Berghof, Oliver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.324.

[153] Anglicus, Bartholomaeus, *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, Frankfurt: Minerva G.M.H., 1964, p.745.

laudatur candida forma/ cum deceat vestes, deceat nichilominus aurum" (ll.630-631)[154]. The specific setting of the pearl connects the inanimate object with the figure of the Maiden who, like the pearl is described through the imagery of gold and light. Moreover, gold symbolizes the purity, wisdom and chastity of Christ[155], "in golde so clere" (l.2) creating a further association between the Pearl-Maiden and her role as one the blessed souls of the Lamb, enhancing the circular structure of the poem since the Dreamer in the last stanza refers extensively to God, "Prince" (l.1201), "Hym" (l,1203), "God" (ll.1204; 1207), "Lorde" (l.1204), "a frende ful fyin" (l.1204), "Krystez" (l.1208).

The author of *Pearl* adds another important detail about the precious stone: its place of origin. This specific aspect is introduced at line 3, "oute of oryent", and then repeated twice in the poem, once at line 82, "perlez of oryente", and at line 255, "coroun of perle orient". While at line 3 the detail refers directly to the Pearl-Maiden, the other two instances refer to pearls simply as ornaments and are employed as descriptive terms for the Garden of Eden and for the crown of the Maiden. This detail hints at the author's knowledge on works that dealt with precious gemstones. Commonly, the pearl is associated to the Orient, particularly to India and, indeed, in its description of this land, *Etymologiae* explains "Mittit et ebur, lapides quoque pretiosos: beryllos, chrysoprasos et adamantem, carbuncolos, lychnites, margaritas et uniones, quibus nobelium feminarum ardet ambitio"[156]. Moreover, the pearl is mentioned in Isidore's description of Taprobane, an island situated in the south-east of India. In this section, he writes that this land is "scinditur amni interfluo; tota margaritis repleta et gemmis"[157], an image that alludes to the description of the river of Eden in *Pearl*. The concept of the Orient, and particularly India, as producer of pearls is marked in other compositions, such as *De Lapidibus* and Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary*. While Marbodus mentions the place of origin of this precious stone at the end of the lines devoted to the gemstone explaining that the biggest pearls are produced in India, Philip de Thaun, similarly to the Cotton Nero poet, refers to its place of origin in the first lines, "Union naist par grant raisun en un isle Tapné ad nun;/ En cele idle ad tele speres, ki sunt faites en tel maneres" (ll.1485-1486)[158]. Pearls in mediaeval lapidaries and encyclopaedias are believed to be produced mainly in the Orient, the place where in the Middle Ages Eden was located. While lapidaries do not

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[154] "its pure form as an ornament is praised, such as it suits garments, equally it suits gold", Marbodo Di Rennes, p.89.
[155] Blanch, Robert J., "Color, Symbolism and Mystical Contemplation in *Pearl*", *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 17, 1973, p.76.
[156] "it also yelds ivory and precious stones: beryls, chrysoprase, and diamonds, carbuncles, white marble, and small and large pearls much coveted by women of the nobility", Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae*, edited and translated by Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W.J., Beach, J.A., Berghof, Oliver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.286.
[157] "intersected by a river and everywhere full of pearls and precious stones", Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae*, edited and translated by Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W.J., Beach, J.A., Berghof, Oliver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.294.
[158] "The unio grows by great right in an isle named Tapné;/ in that isle are such stones, that are made in such manner", Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiary*, edited and translated by Wright, Thomas, "The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon", in *Popular treatises on science written during the Middle Ages, in Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English*, London: R. & J.E. Taylor, 1841, p.127.

clearly indicate a connection between the pearl and Eden, in *Pearl* the connection is more explicit since the author employs two sections of the poem for the description of the holy garden. The author uses gemstones as important elements in the descriptions of settings that belong to the Christian tradition; they are employed in the descriptions of Earthly Paradise and of the City of New Jerusalem. The symbology carried by the gemstones differs greatly between the two settings. While the Earthly Paradise presents a general indication of the gemstones which, in this case, do not carry any specific value, the gemstones employed in the description of New Jerusalem carry specific Christian virtues. The second section of the poem is devised for the description of Eden, one of the most beloved *topoi* of the mediaeval literary tradition, the *locus amoenus*. The vision of the Jeweller opens in a wide country, with emphasis on precise descriptions of the trees, rocks, cliffs and, particularly, the river.[159] Like other passages and descriptions in the poem, this section references the Bible, particularly the Genesis. In *Pearl*, the Earthly Paradise is described with hills adorned by crystal cliffs, trunks of trees as blue as indigo, the leaves of the trees that slid over each other are described as burnished silver, the gravel on the ground is made of "precious perlez of oryente" (l.82). The author spends more than one stanza of the second section describing the river of Eden. He explains that the banks of the river are made of "beryl bryȝt" (l.110) and to create a vivid image, he adds acoustic details, "Swangeande swete þe water con swepe,/Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryȝt." (ll.111-112). He includes similes to deliver an accurate image of the shining properties of the river and a list of the gemstones that belong to the stream's bed:

> In þe founce þer stoden stonez stepe,
> […]
> For vche a pobbel in pole þer pyȝt
> Watz emerad, saffer, oþer gemme gente,
> Þat alle þe loȝe of lyȝt,
> So dere watz hit adubbement. (ll.113-120)

The description of the river of Eden references Gen.2: 10-12. The two descriptions share the precious stones' imagery. However, in Genesis, the river created by God to water the garden divides into four streams, and the stones' imagery is only employed in the description of the first stream, the Phison:

> Et fluvius egrediebatur de loco voluptatis ad irrigandum paradisum, qui inde dividitur in quatuor capita. Nomen uni Phison: ipse est qui circuit omnem terram Hevilath, ubi nascitur aurum; et aurum terrae illius optimum est; ibi invenitur bdellium, et lapis onychinus.
> [A river flowed from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided to make four streams. The first is named the Pishon, and this winds all through

[159] Kean, p.31.

the land of Havilah where there is gold. The gold of this country is pure; bdellium and cornelian stone are found there.] (Gen.2: 10-12)[160]

Unlike *Pearl*, in Genesis, gemstones are not employed in the description of the river. Precious stones are adopted to contextualize the presence of precious materials in Hevilath, a land located in Arabia to which the Phison is directed.[161] The general use of gemstone imagery in both compositions creates a clear connection between the two texts. The association between the river of Eden and the Orient is accentuated by the subtle use of gemstones in Genesis in the description of a territory located in the east and by the use of the construction at line 82, "precious perlez of oryente". In *Pearl*, the description of the treasures of the Earthly Paradise follows the natural passage of the eyes from a general point of view to the details, from the cliffs and the forest to the rocks and leaves, from a distant description of the river to its sounds and a detailed list of the stones that are present in its bed. Differently from the description in the proem, the second section is organized by the author imitating the way in which the human eyes would look at the setting.[162] This method allows the reader to gather the general importance of the gemstones of the bed of the river, their shining and glimmering qualities:[163]

> As glente þurʒ glas þat glowed and glyʒt—
> As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe,
> Staren in welkyn in wynter nyʒt; (ll.114-116)

The description of the Garden of Eden and its connection with the Orient are something of crucial importance because they draw further associations between the lapidary tradition, the Holy Scriptures and the poem.

The poet's knowledge of these literary works is evident in the poem's *formulae* which permeate the construction, function and imagery of the poem. While in the other poems the references to lapidary *formulae* are sporadic and subtler, in *Pearl*, the poet is more explicit. Through the continuous links to this mediaeval popular tradition, the author is trying to constantly create new images to increase the poem's field of symbolism.

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[160] Colunga, Turrado, p.5, New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online*
https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=1&bible_chapter=2 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[161] Foster, Charles, *The Historical Geography of Arabia*, Vol.1, London: A. Spottiswoode, 1844, pp.40-41.
[162] Kean, p.97.
[163] Kean, p.205.

3.3 The Meaning of Pearls in the Lapidary Christian Tradition and its Influence in Cotton Nero A.X.

In the mediaeval period, gemstones were perceived as inanimate natural objects, which were ascribed specific qualities that turned them into symbols of Christian virtues. Mediaeval poets and scholars regularly employed gemstones to exemplify specific qualities and conditions. This view of the natural world was developed in lapidaries which attributed moral and mystical meanings to precious stones. This process allowed a change in the perception of gemstones that made them perfect carriers of allegories and metaphors in literary works, such as *Cleanness*, *Pearl* and *SGGK*.

Pearls were particularly significant in the lapidary tradition and in Christian religion. In the mediaeval period, the pearl was recognized as a symbol of uniqueness, innocence, purity and virginity. [164] Its traditional attributes mainly derived from its place of origin, colour, shape, the way it was believed to be conceived and the processes which allowed to find them. Generally, the texts that belonged to the lapidary tradition described pearls as pure gems with a brilliant white colour and a round and perfect shape.

The Holy Scriptures played an important role in the attribution of virtues to what belonged to the natural world. The popular tradition which perceived nature as an image that mirrored the spiritual and divine realms pervaded literary works. The poems contained in the Cotton Nero manuscript align with this view by employing the gemstone imagery and symbology to develop allegories and *exempla*. To fulfil and convey more clearly their didactic purpose, the poems reference in a subtle and explicit manner passages of the Bible where the gemstone imagery is employed. In *Pearl* and *Cleanness*, the author devises the episodes and their symbolism in connection to the Holy Scriptures and, indeed, passages of the Bible are frequently paraphrased and quoted. It is through the use of these texts and references that the poet is able to create and fully develop the image of the pearl and of the figures and virtues associated with it which derive from the Christian lapidary tradition. Although the author employs traditional gemstone imagery, the poems display different meanings associated with the pearl. While in *Pearl* and *Cleanness*, the gemstone is mainly employed as an allegory and is correlated to Christian figures and concepts, in *SGGK*, the precious gemstone is used in correlation with its general meaning of worthy stone playing a more general and inanimate role.

The descriptive terminology used by the poet to refer to the pearl alludes to its common mediaeval image and to the method applied in its lapidary descriptions. The Cotton Nero manuscript shares its approach and terminology with the mediaeval lapidary texts, which, like the poems, describe the gemstone through its colour, shape, brightness and preciousness (tab.4). *Pearl* and *Cleanness* describe the gemstone using a similar descriptive terminology, they reference its roundness, smoothness,

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[164] Luttrell, G.A., "The Mediaeval Tradition of the Pearl Virginity", *Medium Aevum* 31, 1962, pp.194-200.

spotlessness, white colour and brightness (tab.4). On the contrary, due to the sporadic use of the pearl imagery, *SGGK* does not employ a wide range of descriptive terminology. However, in the two instances in which the pearl is mentioned, the Gawain-poet underlines its clearness, "cler perlez" (l.954), and value, "is of prys more" (l.2364). The same features and qualities are described in lapidaries, encyclopaedias and texts which generally analyse the natural world. The anonymous *Physiologus*, Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary* and the *Aberdeen Bestiary* emphasize the pearl's preciousness. Isidore de Seville's *Etymologiae* underlines its perfection by stating that among white gems the pearl is the most precious. Moreover, its round shape and smoothness are attributes always mentioned in these works. *De Proprietatibus Rerum* describes the pearl as "rotunda" (round) and "candida" (pure), Marbodus' *De Lapidibus* employs the construction "candida forma" (pure shape) and "baccas candidiores" (pure pearls), an imagery further developed in the Cotton Nero poems where the author employs similar descriptive terminology to create links between the "mayden of menske" and the "perle". The endless shape of the pearl is emphasized in Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary*, "Union est Pere e Fiz, union est Saint Espiriz;/ Union est cumencement, union est definement;/ Union est alpha & ω; Benedicamus Domino"[165]. In this instance, the roundness and endlessness of the pearl is associated with the popular passage of the Book of Revelation "Ego sum alpha et omega, primus et novissimus, principium et finis"[166] (Rev.22: 13) which underlines the important symbology carried by the shape of the gemstone, a tangible image represented by the author in the structure of the first poem and in the pentacle, a symbol that carries similar attributes to the pearl in *SGGK*. The *Etymologiae*, which references the gemstone multiple times in different sections, always refers to the pearl as white. However, there are instances where the pearl is described as having different colours; for example, Philip de Thaon's *Apocalyptic Lapidary* describes the gemstone as having "ad colours toutis maniers/E engenderé de la rosee del ciel"[167]. Although different descriptions of the pearl exist, the Pearl-poet follows its traditional image as a spotless and white gemstone. In the poems, the use of specific adjectives hints at the popularity and influence that these specific texts had on the creation of the image of the pearl presented in the Cotton Nero manuscript. Moreover, the source texts of the poems help define the possible influence the lapidaries of Marbodus de Rennes had on Cotton Nero. Indeed, scholars have identified multiple similarities in structure, alliteration and syntactic *formulae*

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[165] "Unio is Father and Son, unio is the Holy Ghost;/ unio is beginning, unio is end;/ unio is alpha and omega; Benedicamus Domino!", Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiary*, edited and translated by Wright, Thomas, "The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon", in *Popular Treatises on Science Written during the Middle Ages, in Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English*, London: R. & J.E. Taylor, 1841, p.130.

[166] Colunga, Turrado, p.1239, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.", New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=22 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[167] Studer, Paul and Evans, Joan, eds., *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, Paris: Edouard Champion, 1924, p.275, "has colours of all types and (it is) generated by the Rose of the Sky".

between *Patience* and Marbodus' *Naufragium Jonae Prophetae*.[168] Marbodus' skillful versification, intra-linear rhymes and multiform alliterations contributed considerably to the popularity gained by his texts. Marbodus' *De Lapidibus* had great influence on the creation of Anglo-Norman Lapidaries, such as the ones by Philip de Thaun. Due to the immense popularity of Marbodus' lapidary works and the many similarities between *Patience* and *Naufragium Jonae Prophetae*, scholars suggest that the Cotton Nero poet knew Marbodus' lapidary production. [169] Manuscripts containing Marbodus' works and Anglo-Norman lapidaries were abundantly produced and numerous testimonies that belong to this tradition from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries survive.[170] These elements are witnesses to the presence of a common tradition and knowledge on lapidaries that influenced the images developed in the Cotton Nero manuscript.

Descriptive terminology	*Pearl*	*Cleanness*	*SGGK*
Blissful	Blysful (l.1103)		
Clear/ Brilliant	Cler (ll.207; 227; 737)	Schyr (l.1121) Blyknande (l.1467)	Cler (l.954)
Hidden	Privy (ll.12; 24)		
Flawless / Peerless	Maskelle (ll.732; 733; 744; 745; 756; 768; 780; 781) Makeles (ll.780; 784)		
Merry	Miry (ll.23; 781)		
Perfect	Parfyt (l.1038)	Fyn (l.1122)	
Perfectly placed	Reken in vche araye (l.5)		
Pleasant	Plesaunte (l.1)		
Precious	Worþyly (l.47) Precios / Precious (ll.36; 48; 60; 82; 192; 204; 216; 228; 330; 1212)	Worþe (l.1125)	

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[168] Fàj, Attila, "Marbodean and Patristic References in Patience", *Revue de littérature comparée* 49, 1975, pp.284-290.
[169] Hatt, p.226, n.4.
[170] Fàj, p.286.

	Of prys (ll.272; 746)	Prys (l.1117)	Of prys (l.2364)
Pure	Pure (ll.227; 745) Clene (ll.227; 289; 737)	Clene (ll.554; 1067)	
Slender	Slender (l.190)		
Small	Smal (ll.6; 190)		
Smooth	Smoþe her sydez were (l.6) Smoþe (l.190)	Sounde on vche a syde (l.555) Playn (l.1068) Polyced (l.1068)	
Spotless	Withouten spot / Wythouten spot (ll.12; 24; 36; 48; 60) Withouten wemme (l.221) Withouten maskle oþer mote (l.556) Wemlez (l.737) Wythouten blot (l.782) Vmblemyst (l.782) Spotlez (l.856)	No sem habes (l.555) Wythouten faut oþer fylþe (l.1122)	
Round	Rounde (l.5) Endelez rounde (l.738)	Of schap rounde (l.1121)	
Royal	Ryal (l.193)		
White	Quyt (ll.207; 219)	Whyte (l.1120)	

(Table 4: Descriptive Terminology of Pearls)

The greatest examples of the influence of the lapidary tradition in the Cotton Nero poems may be found in *Pearl* and *Cleanness* where the precious stone reaches the most elevated images. It engages in a process of personification, from inanimate perfect object to guide and model of salvation. The

author gathers the Christian attributes carried by the pearl and infuses its qualities into the Maiden. In doing so, he creates an overlap between the inanimate object's Christian values and the Maiden's attributes, establishing the pearl as symbol for the Maiden, the blessed souls, New Jerusalem and Christ. The same process is employed in *Cleanness* where the pearl is referred to as a symbol of Christ.

The transformation from inanimate object to spiritual guide, either symbolized by the Pearl-Maiden and the blessed souls in *Pearl* or by Christ in *Cleanness*, is achieved through the various meanings the pearl carries in the Christian lapidary tradition. The Pearl-poet displays knowledge of lapidary descriptions and to further analyse the pearl he employs the passages of the Bible that refer directly to this precious stone. By quoting, paraphrasing and reinterpreting holy passages where the pearl is mentioned or employed as a metaphor, the poet connects the gemstone with the holy figures previously defined by the Bible, lapidaries, encyclopaedias and bestiaries creating an exceptionally strong link between the holy figures and the precious stone. The attributes of the pearl derive partially from the Holy Scriptures, as recorded in the anonymous *Physiologus* which references the Parable of Great Price in its description of the gem. In the poems, the author employs parables and other passages from the Holy Scriptures to obtain the clearest descriptions of the qualities attributed to the pearl: purity, divine wisdom and salvation. The image of the pearl as metaphor, simile and ornament is employed in three passages of the Bible: Matt.7: 6, Matt.13: 45-46 and Rev.21: 21. Matthew's parables were widely popular in the mediaeval period as it is demonstrated by their reference in lapidaries to explain the attributes of pearls. Although in the Bible the gemstone is attributed the general quality of purity, each passage of the Holy Scriptures connects the pearl with specific Christian concepts and figures. The Biblical Scriptures are the basis for the further analysis of the pearl presented in some of the commentaries of the Apocalypse where passages from the Book of Revelation are presented and, in the case of the pearl, Matthew's Gospel is usually quoted, as it is found in Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis*.[171]

In the first poem of the manuscript, the pearl can be identified through four different levels: literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical. For what concerns the first level, the pearl is simply identified as a precious gemstone: this value serves as a unifying point in which the other levels are implied. Allegorically, it is the "mayden of menske" and the Church's members who will be allowed in the celestial procession, thus the innocent kind, a value which encourages the development of the disposition of innocence and Christian virtues the reader should obtain. Tropologically, the pearl symbolizes the soul that has reached innocence and purity through an act of true penance and is able to demonstrate how this spiritual status can be obtained. Finally, anagogically, it represents the

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[171] Marshall, pp.2-9.

innocent life in the city of New Jerusalem: the account of the reward if a virtuous life is followed.[172] Through these various levels of meaning the very aim of the poem is disclosed: from the first line up to the last, the "pearl" as an image embarks in a process of enrichment; from its original purely literal meaning, it finally gains its purely symbolical form.[173] The purpose of the author is to reveal the true meaning of the pearl through careful symbolic and allegorical processes.[174] The poet is able to disclose all these different levels of meaning with the employment of images that derive from the lapidary tradition, a popular lore during the mediaeval period.

The poem's allegorical meaning is developed from the first section of the composition which opens with a conventional *formula*, the *propositio* that treats of the real inanimate object, the pearl, and arranges the proper premises for its elaboration.[175] The opening apparently presents a literal celebration and appreciation of the "perle", which in this section is valued adopting earthly terms.[176] Although the first three lines, and in general the first section of the poem, present the gemstone as an inanimate object, the pearl is described as "plesaunte", an adjective that can be used to describe both an inanimate object and a human quality. The author describes its setting "clanly clos in golde so clere" (l.2), a hint to the pearl's inanimate state, and its place of origin, "Oute of oryent" (l.3), characteristics that connect the poem with the lapidary tradition and that emphasize the pearl's link with earthly values.[177]

The process of transformation actually begins at line 4 where the poet refers to the pearl with the female personal pronoun "her" (l.4). In the first section, the author varies in the use of personal pronouns. Indeed, the pronouns oscillate from the feminine ones, "her" (ll.4; 6), "hyr" (ll.8; 9) and "hir" (l.23), to the neuter pronoun "hit" (ll.10; 13; 31; 41; 45; 46). Thus, the personification of the pearl starts to emerge slowly while the poet continues to alternate the use of personal pronouns up until the end, when the real meaning of the pearl is disclosed to the reader. The pronouns employed are variable throughout *Pearl*. While in the first section the function of the feminine pronouns is to provide the foundations for the later identification of the pearl with the Maiden, the neuter pronouns allow to maintain the meanings and symbolism carried by the inanimate object.[178] The unusual use of pronouns to refer to the pearl is another method to create further associations between the gemstone and its meanings. *Pearl* and *Cleanness* display the use of both the neuter and feminine pronouns when referring to the precious gemstone. While in the former the use of feminine and neuter pronouns may

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[172] Martin, Priscilla, "Allegory and Symbolism", in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002, pp.315-328.
[173] Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", pp.585-675.
[174] Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", p.588.
[175] Kean, p.10.
[176] Martin, p.323.
[177] Blanche, p.58.
[178] Andrew, and Waldron, p.53, n.3-4.

be ascribed to the double meaning of the gemstone, the pearl as an inanimate object and as a feminine figure (the Maiden), in the latter, the use of both pronouns creates ambiguity. From line 1117 to 1128, the author employs only the female pronouns "ho" and "hir" to refer to the precious gemstone. While in *Pearl*, the precious gemstone is an allegory for the "mayden of menske", preparing the reader for the later identification of the pearl with the Maiden, in *Cleanness* the gemstone is compared or is employed as a symbol of the blessed, hence a generic group of people, or of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that, unlike in *Pearl*, in *Cleanness*, there is no connection between the gemstone and female figures. Thus, the variability with which the author refers to the pearl is odd. Only one notable exception to this point can be presented which is due to the traditional image of the Mother of Christ associated with the gemstone. However, the connection is not direct, as the Virgin is associated with the oyster bearing the pearl, which in turn is used as a symbol of Jesus Christ.

Another detail that suggests the doubleness of meaning carried by the pearl is the description found at line 6, which reads "so smal, so smoþe her sydeȝ were". The adjectives employed by the author are equally appropriate for the descriptions of a precious stone and of feminine beauty. The association of the gemstone with the Maiden is strengthened by the description of the narrator's grief as "luf-daunger", a compound noun which refers to the power that the mistress has over her suitor.[179] Although this word is reminiscent of the *topos* of courtly love, here it is used as a generic metaphor to suggest the longing for a beloved object increasing the ambiguity on the real meaning carried by the pearl.[180] At this point of the poem, the identification of the pearl with the Maiden is reinforced, but not yet complete.

After the next two sections which focus mainly on the description of the landscape where the narrator finds himself after his "spyryt […] sprang in space" (l.62), at line 162, the query about the real meaning of the precious stone reemerges in the moment when the "mayden of menske" (l.162) appears to the Dreamer. This first general description of the Maiden shares characteristics with the "perle" previously described in the first stanza of the poem. Firstly, they share colour: the Maiden is described as wearing a white robe, "Blysnande whyt watz hyr bleaunt" (l.163), and her skin is white, "Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yuore" (l.179). Moreover, in both descriptions, the author references gold, while in the first stanza this material is said to be the position in which the pearl is settled, "to clanly clos in golde so clere" (l.3), in the third and fourth sections it is employed to extend the characteristics of the Maiden. In the third section, the precious metal is used as simile to describe her quality to shine, "As glysnande golde þat man con schere,/So schon þat schene anvnder schore" (ll.165-166). The link with gold is reiterated in the fourth section where the appearance and physical

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[179] Andrew, and Waldron, p.54, n.11.
[180] Kean, p.13.

features of the Maiden are described. Here, it is used again as a simile to describe the hair which enclose the Maiden's face and shoulder, "As schorne golde schyr her fax þenne schon,/On schylderez þat leghe vnlapped lyȝte" (ll.214-215), reiterating the image previously displayed in the first section. The light that gold carries within both descriptions displays a marked progression in intensity. The quality of brilliance carried by the Maiden herself and by her garments establishes her role as a guide for the revelation of divine wisdom since the poem narrates the Dreamer's ascension to the light of eternal Truth.[181] The gold imagery employed by the author is connected to the lapidary Christian tradition that links this precious material to purity, glory and brightness and carries the Holy Scripture's symbol of majesty and honour.[182] It represents celestial purity, wisdom and the charity of the Lamb. Indeed, gold ornaments are worn by the Maiden, the blessed souls and Christ, "Wyth hornez seuen of red golde cler" (l.1111).[183]

In the third section of the poem, the narrator hints at the overlap between the pearl and the Maiden. From line 165, the Dreamer begins to display the certainty that he, indeed, already met and knew the Maiden creating a clearer association between the inanimate object introduced in the first stanza and the Maiden introduced in this section:

> I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere.
> [...]
> On lenghe I loked to hyr þere;
> Þe lenger, I knew hyr more and more.
> The more I frayste hyr fayre face,
> Her figure fyn quen I had fonte,
> Suche gladance glory con to me glace
> As lyttel byfore þerto watz wonte.
> […]
> And euer þe lenger, þe more and more. (*Pearl*, ll.164-180)

At the beginning of the fourth section, the figure of the Maiden becomes even more ambiguous. Through the paraphrase of lines 5 and 6, "So rounde, so reken in vche araye,/ So smal, so smoþe her sydez were", the poet is able clearly convey the real meaning of the image of the pearl in relation to the figure of the Maiden:

> Þat gracios gay wythouten galle,
> So smoþe, so smal, so seme slyȝt,
> Rysez vp in hir araye ryalle,
> A precios pyece in perlez pyȝt. (*Pearl*, ll.189-192)

The paraphrase and extension of the lines of the first section help the poet "to hold in suspense the full recognition of the fact that the dropped pearl [that]stands for a human being lost through death"[184].

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[181] Blenkner, Louis, "The Pattern of Traditional Images in "Pearl"", *Studies in Philology* 68, 1, 1971, pp.26-49.
[182] Blanch, p.65.
[183] Blanch, p.76.
[184] Kean, p.13.

The adjectives employed in this section reiterate the previous description of the pearl. Although the poet uses the same adjectives and *formulae* to describe the pearl and the Maiden, the second description hints more clearly at the mediaeval traditional portrayal of the lady. The connection between the depictions of the gemstone and the Maiden is particularly evident in the use of variations of the word "arrai", a noun that carries a double meaning. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the term may refer to clothes or to the setting of a jewel, in this instance of the pearl.[185] To emphasize the duplicity of meaning of the gemstone, the poet employs both definitions. While in the first section it is employed to refer to the gold setting the pearl is placed in, "So rounde, so reken in vche araye" (l.5), later in the poem, since the association between the pearl and the Maiden has already began, "araye" refers to the royal clothing which dresses her.

Moreover, in this section, the *concatenatio* gives further emphasis to the concept that the precious stone is the allegory of the "mayden of menske". The keyword "pyȝt" and its variations, earlier forms of the modern English "pitched", are employed with their specific meaning of "set, adorn with gems" to describe precisely the Maiden's garments and appearance.[186] The use of the *concatenatio* word appears to be linked in every instance with "perle", its plural form ("perlez") or one of its synonyms. In the description of the Maiden's attire and appearance, pearls are her most exclusive adornment and are employed as terms of comparison. She is depicted as "A precios pyece in perlez pyȝt" (l.192), her garments and tunic are adorned with "perlez pyȝte of royal prys" (l.193) and "myryeste margarys" (l.199). She is wearing a symbolical attire, white garments covered with pearls, with a crown decorated with the same set of jewels and a pearl that adorns her breast and, for what concerns her age, fully mature.[187]

The complete identification of the pearl with the Maiden is achieved in the fifth section of the poem. The passage reports the first dialogue between the Maiden and the Dreamer, here the narrator addresses her with an *invocatio*:

> 'O Perle,' quoþ I, 'in perlez pyȝt,
> Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,
> Regretted by myn one on nyȝte?
> Much longeyng haf I for þe layned,
> Syþen into gresse þou me anglyȝte. (*Pearl*, ll.241-245)

Although the moment of recognition had already began in the previous section, "I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere" (l.164), the Dreamer is now fully understanding who this figure truly is. Indeed, he

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[185] *Middle English Dictionary* [website] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED2315/track?counter=1&search_id=66772662 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[186] Turville-Petre, p.61.
[187] Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", pp.651-652.

is greeting the Maiden by naming her himself and defining her importance to him. [188] Furthermore, the Dreamer repeats the term "daunger" (l.250) to echo the motif of the "luf-daungere" presented in the first stanza. However, if it is true that the Dreamer finally recognizes the Maiden, he reverts to motifs and constructions that echo the descriptions of the inanimate object. He does so, by recalling the moment when the pearl was lost in the grass, still being incapable of acknowledging this event as death. [189] The Dreamer's recognition of the Maiden is attested by her gestures and replies. The Maiden who in the previous stanza greeted the Dreamer by bowing and taking off her crown in recognition of their relationship, now looks at him and replaces it on her head. Moreover, the intimate relationship between them emerges from the Maiden's use of personal pronouns to address the Dreamer. At first, she addresses him by using the formal constructions, "Sir" and "ȝe", but, from line 264, she uses "þou", a pronoun much more intimate than the previous one. [190] The Pearl-Maiden does not correct the Jeweller when he addresses her as "perle", she only reproaches him about the attitude he is displaying in not accepting her departure. While the narrator complains about his lost pearl, she tells him that his perceptions are mistaken, that the gemstone, thus herself, is not lost, she is now in the garden of bliss. In this section, she exploits the flexibility of words, in particular the *concatenatio* word "juel" and the images carried by the "cofer", by reinterpreting them to reprimand the Jeweller. The imagery of enclosure links, once again, the inanimate object to the Maiden, reiterating a theme introduced in the first section. However, at the beginning of the poem, the narrator had described the pearl as he is desperately lamenting the "perle þat þer watz penned" (l.53), providing to the gemstone's enclosed state negative connotations. On the contrary, the Maiden now describes herself "in cofer so comly clente" (l.259) and tells the Dreamer that it is the nature of the casket in which she is placed that allows her to be "a perle of prys" (l.272). Thus, as the poem's narration goes forward, the imagery is moved from negative to positive, as the Maiden turns her death into a delightful event which has allowed her into the most positive form of enclosure, the one in the garden of delights.

The poem presents a "well-ordered climax from the material to the spiritual, from the actual to the figurative"[191]. The images from the opening section serve as foundations for the symbolism the author plans to develop and disclose throughout the poem. By transforming and developing the pearl imagery of the first sections, the author accesses the reinterpretations of a symbolism already familiar to the reader, providing them with different connotations to reproach the Dreamer. The author leads his audience from the descriptions of the actual precious gemstone to the pearl as symbol that the reader,

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[188] Kean, p.117.
[189] Turville-Petre, p.75.
[190] Turville-Petre, p.76.
[191] Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", p.612.

and the Jeweller, are preached to reach in order to achieve the spiritual qualities of the Pearl-Maiden and to attain the joys of Paradise.[192]

As noted above, the Gospels play an important role in expanding the image of the pearl. Matthew's Gospel attributes to the pearl two different meanings, divine wisdom (Matt.7: 6), and salvation (Matt.13: 45-46). Both concepts are reiterated in the lapidary tradition and in the Cotton Nero poems. In Matt.7: 6, the pearl is attributed qualities of purity and holiness, features that synthetize perfectly the figure of the Pearl-Maiden, the blessed and Christ:

> Nolite dare sanctum canibus: necque mittatis margaritas vestras ante porcos,
> ne forte conculcent eas pedibus suis, et conversi dirumpant vos.
> [Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs,
> or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces][193]

In Jewish culture, dogs and pigs were considered unclean animals, indeed Moses' laws forbid eating pork. In this passage, Jesus states that giving something holy or sacred, the pearls, to dogs and pigs would be useless. In the parable, the pearl symbolizes something holy and valuable, that is, divine wisdom. The correlation between this precious stone and eternal truth is reiterated in *Pearl* where it is symbolized through the Pearl-Maiden. The "mayden of menske" is ascribed the role of *exemplum* of divine wisdom, and, indeed, she is the Dreamer's guide who has to teach the Jeweller the difference between earthly and heavenly values. Through her intercession, the Dreamer is able to see the Maiden's dwelling place:

> Þat schene sayde: 'Þat God wyl schylde;
> Þou may not enter withinne Hys tor;
> Bot of þe Lombe I haue þe aquylde
> For a syʒt þeof þurʒ gret fauor.
> Vtwyth to se þat clene cloystor
> Þou may, bot inwyth not a fote;
> To stretch in þe strete þou hatz no vygour,
> Bot þou wer clene, withouten mote (*Pearl*, ll.965-972)

Her intercession is able to finally reconcile the narrator with God: the Dreamer finally commits his pearl to the Lord. He is able to recognize that redemption may be obtained only through the sacrifice of Christ, a moment which is represented in the celebration of the Mass at the Elevation.[194] In the last section, the Jeweller returns to the initial place of the narration and reflects on his failure. The circular movement of the poem, developed through the *concatenatio* and the physical return to the first setting,

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[192] Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl", pp.611-612.
[193] Colunga, Turrado, p.1002, New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online*
https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=47&bible_chapter=7 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[194] Turville-Petre, p.210.

leaves the reader to consider how much the Jeweller is changed by the vision.[195] He is finally able to understand the difference between earthly and heavenly values, and he reiterates the pearl as symbol of salvation and divine wisdom in the last lines of the poem where he hopes to become God's "homly hyne/ And precious perlez vnto His pay" (ll.1211-1212).

The pearl is employed in another of Matthew's parables, Matt.13: 45-46, also known as the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. This passage of Matthew's Gospel associates the pearl with the general meaning of salvation. This concept is developed in lapidaries and encyclopaedias, such as Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, and the anonymous *Physiologus*, in order to symbolize the major *exemplum* of salvation, Jesus Christ. The meanings developed by the holy passage and the lapidary lore are employed in the Cotton Nero poems. In *Pearl*, Matthew's parable symbolizes the figures and places connected to the concepts of Christian salvation, the blessed souls, and by implication the Pearl-Maiden, the city of New Jerusalem and the major *exemplum* of salvation, Jesus Christ. This last association is also reiterated in *Cleanness*.

While, as in Matt.7: 6, the pearl maintains its symbology as something holy, in Matt.13: 45-46, it acquires a further level of meaning, salvation:

> Iterum simile est regnum caelorum homini negotiatori, quaerenti bonas margaritas. Inventa autem una pretiosa margarita, abiit, et vendidit omnia quae habuit, et emi eam.
> [Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls;
> when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.][196]

In this passage of Matthew's Gospel, while the merchant represents a good Christian, the Pearl of Great Price symbolizes salvation. Indeed, the merchant, after having found the most valuable pearl, sacrifices everything so that he may completely appreciate what he had gained. The gemstone catches the attention of a merchant who seeks fine pearls and concludes his search when he finds the one of great value. In relation to the meanings of the parable aforementioned, the symbol of the Pearl of Great Price carries three different meanings in the poem, it represents the just, the City of New Jerusalem and Jesus Christ.

For what concerns the first correlation, in *Pearl*, the poet references Matt.13: 45-46 to create a complex imagery which links to the Pearl-Maiden and the Dreamer the characters of the parable. The Jeweller is the jeweller from Matthew's Gospel to whom the Pearl of Great Price is revealed, "this matchless pearl represents, as the Gospel records, the kingdom of heaven, and the Maiden herself is

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[195] Turville-Petre, p.203.
[196] Colunga, Turrado, p.1010, New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online*
https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=47&bible_chapter=13 [accessed 28/06/2024]

Pearl in pure pearls; indeed she is the 'perle of prys'"[197]. In the poem, the pearl of Matt.13: 45-46 is used to indicate the general concept of salvation which the Pearl-Maiden is the symbol of, and indeed, it is the main ornament of the Maiden and blessed souls' garments. Differently from Matt.7: 6, in the thirteenth section, the author paraphrases directly Matthew's Gospel with the intention of developing correlations between the characters of the poem:

> Þat þe jueler soȝte þurȝ perré pres,
> And solde alle hys goud, boþe wolen and lynne,
> To bye hym a perle watz mascellez.
> 'This makellez perle þat boȝt is dere,
> Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god (*Pearl*, ll.730-734)

The pearl symbolism abandoned in the fifth section, now is adopted again in correlation to the Maiden and the Jeweller through the paraphrase of Matthew's Gospel. In the fifth section, the narrator refers for the first time to the Maiden as "perle of prys" (l.272) and the Dreamer reiterates this specific Christian gemstone symbology through the use of the Holy Scriptures in the thirteenth section. The correlations between the two passages are evident, the poet employs as *concatenatio* word "juel" and its variables, and among its forms the term "jueler"/"juelere" is used seven times (ll.252; 264; 265; 276; 288; 289; 301). It is in this passage that the Dreamer is introduced for the first time as "jeweller" creating a strict correlation between Matthew's parable and the poem. Thus, it is from the fifth section of the poem that the author references, even if subtly, the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, to develop it fully in the thirteenth section. In the fourteenth stanza, the Maiden proceeds in widening the symbolism carried by the pearl in Matthew's Gospel and associates the pearl with the City of New Jerusalem, one of the main *exempla* of salvation in Christian religion:

> This makellez perle þat boȝt is dere,
> Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,
> Is lyke þe reme of heuenesse clere—
> So sayde þe Fader of folde and flode—
> For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere,
> And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,
> And commune to alle þat ryȝwys were (*Pearl*, ll.733-739)

Thus, the Pearl of Great Price is now fully associated with the "reme of heuenesse" as they share the same attributes. However, the poet further enhances the characteristics carried by the pearl, and particularly the ones introduced by Matthew's Gospel. Earlier in the poem, the Pearl of Great Price was already mentioned as one from the ornaments of the Maiden's garments, "Perlez pyȝte of ryal prys" (l.193), however, in the thirteenth section the poet clarifies that the characteristics that associate

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[197] Turville-Petre, p.141.

the Pearl of Great Price with the Maiden and with the City of New Jerusalem are "commune to alle þat ryȝwys were" (l.739). The pearl of Matthew's Gospel is then employed again as ornaments of the Maiden's dress, now referencing the Pearl of Great Price as main ornament:

> Lo, euen inmyddez my breste hit stode:
> My Lorde þe Lombe, þat schede Hys blode,
> He puȝt hit þere in token of pes (*Pearl*, ll.740-742)

The Pearl of Great Price becomes the symbol of the Maiden, which is a concept that is further reiterated in the next stanza where the author is referring to her as bearer of the Pearl of Price, "'O maskelez perle in perlez pure,/ Þat berez,' quoþ I, 'þe perle of prys" (l.745). While in this section she is referred to as the only figure who carries the Pearl of Price, in the fifteenth section, the Maiden alludes to the concept that all the blessed souls carry this gemstone on their breast:

> Lasse of blysse may non vus bring
> Þat beren þys perle vpon oure breste,
> For þay of mote couþe neuer mynge
> Of spotlez perlez þat beren þe creste (*Pearl*, ll.853-856)

This information is reiterated again, in the nineteenth section, where the author discloses that to all the blessed souls of the Heavenly City are attributed a pearl on their breast. The author does not use the term "perle of prys" nor one of its variations, however, it is clear that he is alluding to the pearl from Matthew's Gospel. The description of the garments of the "vergynez" is not as detailed as the previous description of Maiden's dress and ornaments recorded in the fourth and fifth sections, nonetheless, from the few details the author alludes to and the first lines of the stanza, reading "Of such vergynez in þe same gyse/Þat watz my blysful anvnder croun" (ll.1099-1100), clearly the virgins' attire is identical, to the one of the Maiden, previously described in the fourth and fifth sections of the poem:

> And coronde wern alle of þe same fasoun,
> Depaynt in perlez and wedez qwyte;
> In vchonez breste watz bounden boun
> Þe blysful perle with gret delyt. (*Pearl*, ll.1100-1103)

The author strengthens the concept that they are all dressed in the same manner and in the next lines, where the author analyses the procession of the virgins, he explains that "[…] alle in sute her liuréz wasse" (l.1108). Through the various intersections and descriptions in the poem. The author at first relates the Pearl of Great Price only to the Maiden, and then, through constant reinterpretations and allusions, he widens the symbology referring to all the blessed souls of the City of New Jerusalem. Thus, it may be inferred that the precious gemstone gathers more than one meaning and the poet

meticulously creates associations between the pearl and its various meanings, widening the traditional associations that derive from the Christian and lapidary traditions.

Secondly, the Pearl of Price carries the general meaning of salvation, symbolized by being the main ornament of the blessed souls' garments. In the Christian tradition, salvation is not only represented by the blessed souls, indeed, one of the major *exempla* of redemption is the City of New Jerusalem. Indeed, even in the description of the Heavenly City, both in *Pearl* and the Book of Revelation, pearls are employed as significant ornaments. In heaven, the Jewellers from the Cotton Nero manuscript and Matthew's parable will find everlasting joy which, in allegorical terms, is what they searched for through their search for precious gemstones. The paraphrase of Matthew's Gospel encourages the exploration of the concept of salvation, and consequently of New Jerusalem. The features that had previously been attributed to pearls and to the Maiden are used to describe the Heavenly City. It is important to understand how the Book of Revelation is used to enhance the description of the Celestial City, which presents great luxury and jewel imagery in a much more complex and lavish way when compared to other passages of the Holy Scriptures. In particular, it employs the image of the pearl as one of the materials for the construction of the City of New Jerusalem described as "habentem claritatem Dei"[198] (Rev.21: 11) and "lumen eius simile lapidi pretioso tanquam lapidi iaspidis, sicut crystallum"[199] (Rev.21: 11). Moreover, the passage lists the twelve foundation stones:

> Fundamentum primum, iaspis: secundum, sapphirus: tertium, calcedonius: quartum, smaragdus: quintum, sardonyx: sextum, sardius: septimum, chrysolithus: octavum, beryllus: nonum, topazius: decimum, chrysoprasus: undecimum, hyacinthus: duodecimum, amethystus.
> [The foundations of the city wall were faced with all kinds of precious stone: the first with diamond, the second lapis lazuli, the third turquoise, the fourth crystal, the fifth agate, the sixth ruby, the seventh gold quartz, the eighth malachite, the ninth topaz, the tenth emerald, the eleventh sapphire and the twelfth amethyst] (Rev.21: 19-20)[200]

Although in the list of the twelve foundation stones the pearl is not mentioned, this precious gem does play an important role in the description of the Heavenly City, "Et duodecim portae, duodecim margaritae sunt, per singulas: et singulae portae erant ex singulis margaritis" (Rev.21: 21)[201]. The

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[198] Colunga, Turrado, p.1238, "It had all the glory of God" New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[199] Colunga, Turrado, pp.1238-1239, "glittered like some precious jewel of crystal-clear diamond", New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[200] Colunga, Turrado, p.1239, New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21 [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[201] Colunga, Turrado, p.1239, "The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate being made of a single pearl", New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21 [accessed 28/06/2024]

uniqueness of the pearl is emphasized in St. John's vision, "singuli margaritis". Furthermore, it is implicit that, as a material devised to be part of the Heavenly City, the pearl is a carrier of purity and preciousness. Although the Book of Revelation does not mention the qualities of gemstones, the various significances of the precious stones in the Christian tradition derive mainly from these passages. The Christian qualities are further analysed and ascribed through the commentaries of the passages from the Holy Scriptures, and in particular of the ones which gained extensive popularity in the mediaeval period.[202] A testimony of this tradition is Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis* which comments thoroughly the description of the Heavenly City. Bede states clearly that the stones represent the virtues on which the City is built, "Variorum nominibus lapidum, vel species virtutum, vel ordo, vel diversitas, indicatur, quibus tota Jerusalem coelestis exstruitur."[203]. Each of the twelve foundation stones is thoroughly analysed and associated with one or more Christian qualities. The author does not simply create a connection between Christian religion and the gemstones, but he thoroughly describes their physical appearance, colours and origin connecting these elements with their Christian qualities. Thus, Bede follows the method of lapidaries in his Christian commentary, tracing back their qualities to their natural characteristics. After the description of the Heavenly City, the attribution of particular qualities to each stone and the explanation of their importance, the author adds:

> Haec de lapidibus pretiosis copiosius fortassis quam commaticum interpretandi genus decebat videor exposuisse. Necesse enim erat eorum naturas patriamque diligenter exponere, deinde sacramentum investigare solertius, sed et ordinem numerosque prosequi. Quantum vero ad ipsam rei profunditatem pertinet, videor mihi perpauca, et haec breviter strictimque dixisse.
> [This exposition of the precious stones I seem, perhaps, to have made more fully than the method of interpretation by clauses expressed. For it was necessary to explain carefully their qualities and their country, then to inquire into their sacramental meaning, and further to treat of their order and number. But as regards the profoundness of the subject itself, I seem to myself to have said very few things, and those briefly and summarily][204]

This passage demonstrates the importance the lapidary tradition carried in the Mediaeval period. Bede explicitly states his will in expanding the material of the Book of Revelation and while the description

[202] Sprouse, Sarah J., "Lady Bertilak's Pearls: "Instrumenta Dei" and the Stone Imagery that Unites the Cotton Nero A.x. (art.3) Poems", *Arthuriana* 28, 4, 2018, p.25.
[203] *Documenta Catholica Omnia* https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0627-0735__Beda_Venerabilis__Explanatio_Apocalypsis__LT.pdf.html [accessed on 28/06/2024], "By the names of the several stones is shewn either the form, or the order, or the variety of the virtues, of which the whole heavenly Jerusalem is built up", edited and translated by Marshall and Edward in *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, p.149.
[204] *Documenta Catholica Omnia* https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0627-0735__Beda_Venerabilis__Explanatio_Apocalypsis__LT.pdf.html [accessed on 28/06/2024], edited and translated by Marshall, Edward, Oxford and London: James Parker and Co, 1878, p.163.

of the City of New Jerusalem only listed the foundation gemstones, Bede explains their Christian qualities, the basic feature of lapidaries.

The general meaning of salvation attributed to pearls is developed in the first poem through the images of the Celestial City and the blessed souls aiming at the spiritual improvement of the Dreamer, which unravels the didactic purpose of *Pearl*: every Christian has to be like the Pearl-Maiden, and thus imitate the pearl in its natural qualities and virtues, "He gef vus to be His homly hyne/ Ande precious perlez vnto His pay" (*Pearl*, ll.1210-1211). *Cleanness* presents similar associations, the pearl as "clannesse". When the pearl is mentioned in this poem, it is always associated with purity, disclosing the gemstone as perfect *exemplum* for the carrier of the sixth beatitude.

In the second poem, the author employs the pearl to create a comparison with the beryl, one of the foundation stones of the City of New Jerusalem. The passage aims at clarifying the virtues attributed to this stone as a carrier of the Christian virtue of "clanesse":

> As þe beryl bornyst byhouez be clene,
> Þat is sounde on vche a syde and no sem habes—
> Withouten maskle oþer mote, as margerye-perle (*Cleanness*, ll.554-556)

The author describes the beryl using the same adjectives previously employed in the first poem to describe the pearl. Both gemstones are portrayed as "clene", smooth and perfectly shaped, "so rounde, so reken in vche araye" (*Pearl*, l.5), "sounde on vche a syde" (*Cleanness*, l.555). The author employs the *formula* "withouten maskle oþer mote" (*Cleanness*, l.556) previously used to describe the pearl in the first poem. He employs for the first time this exact construction to introduce the Pearl of Great Price at line 726 and then a similar *formula*, "For mote ne spot is non in þe" (*Pearl*, l.764), to report directly the words of Christ while he was crowning the Pearl-Maiden "clene in vergynté" (*Pearl*, l.767). The adjectives employed by the author in both descriptions are similar, the pearl of the parable is described as:

> For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere,
> And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,
> And commune to alle þat ryʒtwys were. (*Pearl*, ll.736-738)

The poems describe the gemstones as pure, perfect on each side, flawless and without blemishes or stains. The *formulae* are similar, if not at times exactly the same. However, in *Pearl*, the construction "Wythouten mote" is repeated multiple times throughout the sixteenth section, as "mote" serves as its *concatenatio* term. In these stanzas, the adjective is employed in the descriptions of all the Christian symbols of salvation: the Celestial City, "Your wonez schulde be wythouten mote" (*Pearl*, l.924) and "Hys mote wythouten moote" (*Pearl*, l.948), and the ones who can enter it, the blessed souls, "þe meny þat is withouten mote" (*Pearl*, l.960) and "þou wer clene, withouten mote" (*Pearl*,

l.972). Unlike *Pearl*, *Cleanness* presents the use of this construction only in the instance previously mentioned. However, in the second poem the *formula* is employed to describe both the pearl and the beryl, and it may be argued that "margerye-perle" is introduced because, as its significance was more known, the connections with the virtues would have been easier to understand. Hence, the presence of the pearl may be instrumental to the understanding of the beryl. In their imagery and descriptions, the compositions are linked to each other and it seems that the poet expects the audience to have gained knowledge on gemstones from the previous poem. The poet does not expand on the attributes of the beryl, but rather simply compares it to the pearl.

In both poems, the beryl is not described at length; however, the attributes listed connect the description of this gemstone to the lapidary tradition. The author emphasizes its brightness, "beryl bryȝt" (*Pearl*, l.110), "beryl cler and quyt" (*Pearl*, l.1011), "schyre"(*Cleanness*, l.553), "bryȝter þen þe beryl"(*Cleanness*, l.1132), and its connection to water. While in *Pearl* the beryl is the material of the banks of the river of the Earthly Paradise, "Wern bonkez bene of beryl bryȝt" (*Pearl*, l.110), in *Cleanness*, the gemstone is mentioned a few lines below the powerful image of the water that washes away sins, "Tyl any water in þe worlde to wasche þe fayly" (*Cleanness*, l.548).

The adjectives and images of the passage concerned with the description of the beryl may once again be related to the ones of the Latin, English and French mediaeval lapidaries in which the gemstone is described as perfectly shaped and its brilliant colour is connected with the image of water struck by the rays of the sun. Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis* employs the construction "quasi consideres aquam solis fulgore percussam"[205]. In the *Lapidum Pretiosorum Mystica seu Moralis Applicatio*, Marbodus de Rennes writes "Berillus lucet quasi acqua sole percussa"[206], an image reiterated in *De Duodecim Lapidibus Pretiosis* where he adds "Berillus est limphaticus,/ ut sol in acqua limpidus"[207] and that is repeated in a much later work, the *Aberdeen Bestiary*, "lucet quasi acqua sole percussa"[208]. The association between the beryl and water can be detected in the *Old English Lapidary*, where it is described as "luttran wætere gelic"[209] and in the *London Lapidary of King Philip*, "Berille is a stone þat is a colour like to water when þe sonne shyneth"[210]. The choice of employing the beryl as *exemplum* of "clannesse" (*Cleanness*, ll.554-556) is definitely connected with

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[205] *Documenta Catholica Omnia* https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0627-0735__Beda_Venerabilis__Explanatio_Apocalypsis__LT.pdf.html [accessed on 28/06/2024], "is as if thon shouldest imagine water to be struck by the rays of the sun", edited and translated by Marshall Edward in *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, p.156.
[206] "the beryl shines almost as water struck by the sun", Marbodo Di Rennes, p.128.
[207] "the beryl is pale, as the clear sun in the water", Marbodo Di Rennes, p.137.
[208] "it shines like water struck by the sun", Aberdeen Bestiary https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f98v [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[209] "which is like pure water", Evans, Joan, and Mary Sidney Serjeantsen, eds., *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1990, p.14.
[210] Evans, Serjeantsen, p.28.

the numerous lapidary associations between the gemstone and water with which the poet demonstrates his being acquainted by subtly referring to it a few lines before the description of the gemstone. In the poem, water symbolizes the element which purifies the sins of the world. In the proem, the author introduces this concept by linking spiritual to physical "clannesse", "Forþy hyȝ not to heuen in haterez totorne,/ Ne in þe harlatez hod, and handez vnwaschen" (ll.33-34). Later in the narration, the association is developed and emphasized by the major *exemplum* of the Flood (ll.249-544), in which it purifies the world of its sins, "For I schall waken vp a water to wasch alle þe worlde" (l.323), "Such a rowtande ryge þat rayne schal swyþe/ Þat schal wasch alle þe worlde of werkez of fylþe" (ll.354-355), "For when þe water of þe welkin with þe worlde mette,/ Alle þat deth moȝt dryȝe drwned þerinne" (ll.371-372). The continuous reiterations of this natural element is the perfect context in which to introduce the beryl. Indeed, in lapidary descriptions, the beryl is portrayed as carrying the colour and qualities of water. As the Flood brought "clannesse" to the world, the beryl symbolizes "þe holy age of þe Resurrection"[211], a sign of renovation of purity accomplished by confession. In the explanation of this sacrament, the poet employs again the image of water, "Bot war þe wel, if þou be waschen wyth water of schryfte" (l.1133), and compares the state of the soul after this act of penance to the pearl and beryl, creating a further connection to the natural element:

> So if folk be defowled by vnfre chaunce,
> Þat he be sulped in sawle, seche to schryfte,
> And he may polyce hym at þe prest, by penaunce taken,
> Wel bryȝter þen þe beryl oþer browden perles. (*Cleanness*, ll.1129-1132)

Although *Cleanness* introduces the beryl as a symbol of regeneration and purification, the pearl remains one of the general *exemplum* of salvation of the soul. Indeed, it is through the comparison to the "margerye-perle" that the poet is able to employ the image of the beryl, devising a more understandable image for the readers. Moreover, the association between the pearl and the blessed, already introduced in the first poem of the manuscript, is employed in a lengthy passage in *Cleanness* which creates a further link between the two compositions. The association between the pearl and pure souls, that in the first poem is personified in the Pearl-Maiden and the virgins of the City of New Jerusalem, is introduced in the link passage between the second and the third exemplary sequences, after the major *exemplum* of the destruction of the cities of Gomorrah and Sodom and before the minor *exemplum* of Nebulchadnezzar's seizure of the vessels, his conversion and death. This moral commentary explains how readers can apply the lessons illustrated in the *exempla* to find spiritual salvation. [212] The passage is introduced by the question "Hov schulde þou com to His kyth bot if þou

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[211] Evans, Serjeantsen, p.28.
[212] Andrew, Waldron, p.158, n.1111-48.

clene were?" (l.1100) that underlines the importance of "clannesse". The author alludes to the traditional concept of the pearl surviving unblemished its burial in mire, an image already employed in the first section of *Pearl*, "To þenke hir color so clad in clot!" (*Pearl*, l.22), that creates a link between the poems. In *Cleanness*, the image is thoroughly explained and the author explicitly instructs the readers to be like this gemstone:

> […]Þaȝ þou be man fenny,
> And al tomarred in myre, whyle þou on molde lyuyes
> Þou may schyne þurȝ schyfte, þaȝ þou haf schome serued,
> And al pure þe with penaunce tyl þou a perle worþe (*Cleanness*, ll.1113-1116)

The poet employs the pearl as image to resemble if one wants to find salvation, "tyl þou a perle worþe" (l.1116). While the pearl may not be considered the most valuable gemstone in terms of monetary value, it surely is the most valuable among gemstones. The main element that makes this gemstone so precious is "[…]hir clene hwes" (l.1120). The poet reiterates the perfection and the external qualities of the pearl which manifest the Christian virtues it carries, "For ho schynes so schyr þat is of schap rounde,/Wythouten faut oþer fylþe ȝif ho fyn were" (ll.1121-1122). Similarly to the state of the soul, the pearl grows in the world through being worn, the precious stone does not deteriorate but rather remains valuable. If it becomes stained, it is to be washed with wine and it will become brighter and purer than before. The process of polishing the pearl is compared to the sacrament of penance and the author includes some "housewifely advice about using wine to wash a long-neglected pearl and restore its original sheen"[213].

In the Christian tradition, the other symbol of salvation is represented by New Jerusalem. Because it is irradiated by the light that comes directly from God, "Þe self God watz her lombe-lyȝt,/ Þe Lombe her lantyrne, wythouten drede" (ll.1046-1047), in *Pearl* and in the Book of Revelation, the Heavenly City is described as possessing the qualities of purity and light. Indeed, it does not need any sunlight or moonlight, as it is stated in the Holy Scriptures, "Et civitas non eget sole, neque luna ut luceant in ea, nam claritas Dei illuminavit eam, et lucerne eius est Agnus" (Rev.21: 23)[214], and in *Pearl*, "Hem nedde nawþer sunne ne mone./ Of sunne ne mone had þay no need" (ll.1044-1045).[215] From the vision of the Celestial City, the author is able to develop the concepts of mutability and eternity and to create an analogy between the pearl and the City. In the mediaeval alchemical and lapidary tradition, the pearl is often associated with the moon since they share roundness, the colour white and

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[213] Bowers, John M., *An Introduction to Gawain Poet*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012, p.67.
[214] Colunga, Turrado, p.1239, "and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God, and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it", New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=21 [accessed 28/06/2024]
[215] Field, p.9.

opaqueness.[216] However, the moon is the ruler of mutability and the eighteenth section of the poem emphasizes its negative qualities, "To spotty ho is, of body to grym" (l.1070), thus, setting in opposition the pearl and the planet.[217] The "spotty" and changeable moon does not belong to the Heavenly realm, in which the pearl plays an essential part, and the poet dismisses the role of planets and their powers in comparison to the light of God:

> What schulde þe mone þer compass clym
> And to euen wyth þat worþly lyȝt
> Þat schynez vpon þe brokez brym?
> Þe planetez arn in to pouer a plyȝt,
> And þe self sunne ful fer to dym. (ll.1072-1076)

The eighteenth section relates to the idea of replacing the earthly sun and moon with what the mediaeval alchemists would have called "Our Sun" and "Our Moon": the radiant light of God and the Lamb.

While the moon is described as "spotty" and "grym", the characteristics the Celestial City presents in the Book of Revelation are connected with images of purity and salvation, reiterated in the first poem and relating the New Jerusalem with the precious gemstone. In describing the Holy City, the author employs the same adjectives and imagery previously used in the description of the Pearl-Maiden and the garments and qualities of Christ, continuously drawing links between the various images of salvation of the poem and between the different episodes, since in *Cleanness*, the pearl is clearly referenced as symbol a of Christ (*Cleanness*, ll.1067-1072). The poet describes the City using general adjectives that do not strictly relate the holy place and the Pearl-Maiden, "noble" (l.922), "gret" (ll.925; 926), "bygly" (l.962), "blysful" (l.963). However, specific details original to this author create a strong connection between the various figures of Christian salvation of the poem. The Maiden and the Celestial City share a royal appearance, while the Dreamer's guide is presented as wearing "araye ryalle" (l.191), New Jerusalem is described as "ryche ryalle" (l.919) and "new and ryally dyȝt" (l.987). The poet's decision of employing the *concatenatio* word "mote" in the sixteenth section, enables, with its double meaning of "blemish" and "place", the continuous repetition of an important characteristic shared by the pearl and the City, their spotlessness, "Your wonez schulde be wythouten mote" (l.924), "mote withouten moote" (l.947). The spotlessness of the City is further reiterated a few lines later, where the Pearl-Maiden explicitly says to the Jeweller "To stretch in þe strete þou hatz no vygour,/ Bot þou wer clene, withouten mote", reestablishing her and the New Jerusalem's purity. To create a further link between the various figures and places of salvation, the poet employs the adjective "clene", "clene cloystor" (l.968), a term widely used to refer to the Pearl-Maiden.

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[216] Kean, pp.143-145.
[217] Kean, p.9.

Furthermore, as previously explained, the description of the Maiden presents the use of terminology linked with light, and similar images are employed in the description of the City. Both descriptions present references to the sun's beams, "Þat schyrrer þen sunne with schaftez schon" (l.981) and a reference to gold. However, while the pearl is "close in golde so clere" (l.2), the holy burgh is "al of brende golde bryȝt" (l.989). Through these correlations, the author is able to reiterate the meaning of the concepts of "cofer" (l.259) and "kyste" (l.271) used by the Maiden in the fifth section to explain to the Dreamer that it is through her enclosure that "To a perle of prys hit is put in pref" (l.272). Indeed, the Holy City is portrayed as an enclosure, an image that derives from its architectural construction and from the Dreamer's dialogue with the Maiden:

> So cumly a pekke of joly juele
> Wer euel don schulde lyȝ þereoute,
> And by þyse bonkez þer I con gele
> I se no bygyng nowhere aboute (*Pearl*, ll.929-932)

Finally, the third meaning the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price is able to disclose in the poem is the correlation between the pearl and Christ. *Pearl* and *Cleanness* initially associate general gemstones and jewels with the figure of Jesus Christ and then, through specific details and lengthy explanations, he is attributed the symbol of the pearl. In *Pearl*, Christ is explicitly connected with the general image of the jewel and with a particular precious material, gold. The associations with jewellery are clearer as Christ is defined as "My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle" (l.795) and "gay Juelle" (l.1124), he is portrayed "wyth hornes seven of red golde cler" (l.1111) and always associated with the sun's quality of shining, "Of sunne ne mone had thay no need;/ The selfe God was her lambe-lyght/ The Lambe her lantyrne, wythouten drede" (ll.1045-10147). In exegetical and lapidary texts, the sun was associated with gold; it was believed that this precious material grew by a coagulation process starting from the heat of the sun, since the creation of other natural materials was influenced by other planets.[218] Consequently, it was attributed qualities of resurrection, purity, glory and brightness, virtues traditionally associated with Jesus in the Christian tradition. In Scriptures, gold symbolizes honour and it is an emblem of "faith triumphant in adversity and suffering, while its brightness and value make it equally appropriate as a symbol of majesty"[219]. Its virtues and attributions to the figure of Jesus Christ derive from the Bible which mentions the precious material more than four hundred times. Gold is the perfect form of matter and, similarly to pearls, it was believed to be created as a perfect sphere.[220] Moreover, this material was believed to be unaffected

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[218] Kean, p.145, n.17.
[219] Hulme, Edward F., *The History Principles and Practice of Symbolism in Christian Art*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891, p.162.
[220] Kean, pp.163-164.

by fire, and thus it was considered the purest substance.[221] This belief derived from the multiple passages of the Bible in which gold is mentioned in relation to fire, "Ipse enim quasi ignis conflans, et quasi herba fullonum; et sedebit conflans, et emundans argentum, et purgabit filios Levi, et colabit eos quasi aurum et quasi argentum"[222] (Mal.3: 2-3), "Suadeo tibi emere a me aurim ignitum probatum"[223] (Rev.3: 18), "ut probation vestrae fidei multo pretiosor auro (quod per ignem probatur)"[224] (1 Pet.1: 7). In the Holy Scriptures, gold is the symbol of the virtuous man who survives trial, "Ipse vero scit viam meam,/ Et probavit me quasi aurum quod per ignem transit"[225] (Job 23: 10), a concept personified in Jesus and reiterated in *Pearl*, "Bot þeron com a bote as tyt:/ Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe,/ […] þen at þat plyt/ Þe grace of God wex gret innoghe" (ll.645-648), "Bot he on rode þat blody dyed,/ […]Gyue þe to passe when þou arte tried,/ By innocens and not by ryȝte" (ll.705-708), "My Lorde, þe Lombe, þat schede hys blode,/ He pyȝt hit þere in token of pes" (ll.741-742), "Þat is þe cyté þat þe Lombe con fonde/ To soffer inne sor for manez sake" (ll.939-940). Moreover, gold symbolizes kingship which is connected with Christ both in the Holy Scriptures and in the first poem. Matthew's Gospel (Matt.2: 11) recounts that gold, incense and myrrh were the three symbolic gifts brought by the wise men to Bethlehem after the birth of Christ. According to ancient legends, the choice of gifts was aimed at clarifying the identity of the baby. Indeed, if he were to choose gold, he was a king, myrrh would have meant he was a poor man and choosing incense would have proved he was God.[226] Since Christ is both God, man and Celestial King, he accepted all three of the gifts.[227] In *Pearl*, the association between Christ and gold as a symbol of kingship is an important topic. Heaven and New Jerusalem are portrayed as reigns ruled by God and Christ, and the Lamb is referred to in the first and last sections of the poem as "Prince". Lapidaries and encyclopaedic works, such as *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, present gold following the symbols previously attributed by the Holy Scriptures' passages; the precious material is described as the purest of all, with outstanding shining qualities, the fairest ever seen and with the most perfect shape among all metals.

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[221] Kean, p.164.

[222] Colunga, Turrado, p.947, "For he will be like a refiner's fire, like fullers' alkali. He will take his seat as refiner and purifier; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver" New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=46&bible_chapter=3 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[223] Colunga, Turrado, p.1227, "I warn you, buy from me the gold that has been tested in the fire to make you truly rich" New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=73&bible_chapter=3 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[224] Colunga, Turrado, p.1214, "So that the worth of your faith, more valuable than gold, which is perishable even if it has been tested by fire, may be proved -- to your praise and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=67 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[225] Colunga, Turrado, p.464, "Let him test me in the crucible: I shall come out pure gold" New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=22&bible_chapter=23 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[226] Hulme, pp.162-163.

[227] Hulme, p.163.

In both *Pearl* and *Cleanness*, Christ is also symbolized by the pearl. As previously stated, the Holy Scriptures only sporadically mention the pearl, however, the association between pearls and Christ is an all-encompassing concept throughout lapidaries and encyclopaedic works. A text that uses this symbology is the *Physiologus* which employs the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price to associate Jesus with the pearl. This work links the gemstone to two passages of the Holy Scriptures, John 1:29 and the passage of the Pearl of Great Price from Matthew's Gospel. After a brief description of the process of conception of the pearl, the focus is moved on to its Christian symbology. The agate, the stone with which the pearl can be found, is associated with John because he is the one who showed men the spiritual pearl when he said "Ecce agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi"[228] (John 1:29). The men who search for pearls represent the prophets, while the two shells symbolize the Old and New Testament. The moon, sun and stars which take part to the process of conception of the pearl symbolize the martyrs and apostles and the dew which inseminates the oyster represents the Holy Spirit which penetrates the Old and New Testament. Thus, the pearl is identified as the symbol of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the author mentions the Parable of Great Price and adds that men obtain the pearl, hence Christ, only by leaving all material things behind.[229] The *Physiologus* uses the nature of the pearl to create and explain complex allegories that connect nature with the traditional Christian images.

The same association is put forward by Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis*. Although the Book of Revelation employs this gemstone only in connection to the precious material that constitutes the gates of the City of New Jerusalem, in Bede's commentary, the Christian value attributed to pearls is expanded, creating a further association between the gemstone and Christ:

> Omnis gloria capitis refertur ad corpus. Et sicut lux vera quae illuminat omnem hominem (Joan. I, 9), sanctis donavit lumen esse mundi, sic et ipse, cum sit margarita singularis, quam negotiator sapiens venditis omnibus emat (Matth. XIII, 46), suos nihilominus margaritarum fulgori comparat.
> [All the glory of the Head is imputed to the body. And as "the true light which lighteth every man," gave to the saints to be "the light of the world;" so also, although He Himself is the matchless pearl which the wise merchant sells all that he has to buy, He nevertheless compares His own with the brightness of pearls][230]

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[228] Colunga, Turrado, p.1082, "Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" New Jerusalem Bible *Catholic online* https://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=50 [accessed on 28/06/2024]

[229] Zambon, Francesco, ed., *Bestiari Tardoantichi e Medievali: i Testi Fondamentali della Zoologia Sacra Cristiana*, Milano: Bompiani, 2018, pp.61-63.

[230] *Documenta Catholica Omnia* https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0627-0735__Beda_Venerabilis__Explanatio_Apocalypsis__LT.pdf.html [accessed on 28/06/2024], edited and translated by Marshall Edward in *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, p.163.

Bede emphasizes the gleaming quality of the pearl, a detail shared by numerous lapidaries and by the descriptions of Christ and the gemstone in the Cotton Nero manuscript, elaborating this concept further and creating a comparison between this attribute and the brightness of Jesus. Hence, while it is not part of the foundation gemstones, the importance of the pearl is emphasized by the metaphor employed in the first part of this passage. *Explanatio Apocalypsis* associates the precious stone to the major figure of salvation explaining briefly the parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matt.13: 45-46) and disclosing a new interpretation of the parable itself. Similarly to what happens in the poems, in the commentary, Christ is generally associated with gemstones and jewels and then is related to a specific stone: the pearl.

Differently from *Cleanness*, in *Pearl*, Christ is never compared directly to pearls. However, details that hint to this correlation may be found. He is described as spotless, "makelez Lambe" (l.757), and peerless, adjectives usually used both in the Cotton Nero poems to describe the Maiden and the Virgin Mary, and in the description of this gemstone in the lapidary tradition. Particularly prominent is the thirteenth section where "makelez" ("spotlessness") and "maskellez" ("peerlessness") are employed as link-words. The *concatenatio* word in these stanzas reinforces the pearl symbolism, which in turn further highlights the purity, peerlessness of the heavenly state as well as the stone as symbolic representations of the characters in the poem. It is in this section that the author paraphrases the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. Here the Maiden and Christ are described with a conspicuous use of adjectives which had been related to the pearl.

Another instance in which Jesus is described as "maskelez" occurs in the fifteenth section. Here, the poet employs this term to create an association between the brides of the Lamb and Christ himself, adding then their shared characteristics:

> And to gentyl Lombe hit arn anjoynt,
> As lyk to hymself of lote an hwe.
> For neuer lesyng ne tale vntrwe
> Ne towched her tonge for no dystresse,
> Þat motels meyny may neuer remwe
> Fro þat maskelez mayster, neuer þe les (ll.895-900)

The author emphasizes Christ as the primary carrier of spotlessness, and indeed he is called "mayster". Thus, the qualities of the blessed souls are compared to the ones displayed by their "maskelez mayster", Jesus.

The adjectives and images associated with the Maiden and the Pearl of Great Price are also applied in the brief descriptions of Christ and his garments. Christ is portrayed as "wythouten mote other mascle of sulpande sinne" (l.724), he is associated with the colour white as he is wearing white garments, "So worþly whyt wern wedez Hys,/His lokez simple, Hymself so gent" (ll.1133-1134), and

his complexion is of the same colour, "Of His quyte syde His blod outsprent" (l.1137), emphasizing the contrast between his skin and the blood of the wound from the piercing of the spear. Although the author does not meticulously describe his attire, the passage maintains the courtliness and joyfulness introduced in the proem, while reiterating the importance of this precious gemstone in Christian symbology. Indeed, the qualities of purity and incorruptibility that they share are strengthened by the detail that adorns the Lamb's clothes:

> Þe Lombe byfore con proudly passe
> Wyth hornez seuen of red golde cler;
> As praysed perlez His wedez wasse. (*Pearl*, ll.1110-1112)

Through the description of the Lamb's ornaments, the author clarifies that purity and whiteness are shared between the Lamb, the maximum *exemplum* of perfection, the Maiden, the blessed virgins and the City of New Jerusalem.[231] Thus, the pearl becomes the symbol of all that can bring salvation, a concept that the poet clearly explains towards the end of the poem, just before the description of the City of New Jerusalem:

> Þe Lombe þer withouten spottez blake
> Hatz feryed þyder Hys fayre flote;
> And as Hys flok is withouten flake,
> So is Hys mote withouten mote. (*Pearl*, ll.945-948)

Similarly to what happens in the first poem of the manuscript, in *Cleanness* the pearl undergoes a process of evolution from inanimate object to symbol of a figure of salvation. While in *Pearl* the precious stone is mainly used as an allegory to which meaning is added throughout the poem, in *Cleanness* it is used as general image of purity associated with the spiritual aspiration of a good Christian. The composition is characterised by the adoption of rich descriptions and the use of lavish and concrete imagery. The visual dimension has the aim of operating on the audience's senses directing the readers to the importance of the sixth beatitude, "clannesse".[232] The author focuses on the relationship between the soul's moral state and its ability to reach spirituality and divine knowledge. Indeed, it is the purity of the soul that will enable men to approach God's presence. With its numerous *exempla* and descriptive passages, the poem preaches that "clannesse" may be reached not only through spirituality, but also through material means, such as images that can be observed by the eyes. The earthly images' descriptions are used to enact a process that enables us to reach God.[233]

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[231] Field, pp.10-11.
[232] Stanbury, p.42.
[233] Potkay, Monica Brzezinski, "'Cleanness' on the Question of Images", *Viator* 26, 1995, pp.181-193.

In *Cleanness*, the importance of visual images is suggested from its opening lines which provide the reader with the connection between visual imagery and poetic ornament.[234] The composition opens with an *invocatio* to the virtue of purity in opposition to its contrary, "fylþe". From the first lines, the poet creates the relevant connection between Christian behaviour and visual perception, a correlation that will be recurrent in the poem to indicate the state of the Christian soul. It is the imagery of precious gemstones, particularly of the pearl, which is employed as visual form of edification and *exemplum*.[235] The Cotton Nero manuscript borrows elements from the secular supernatural to lead the reader to the recognition of a clear spiritual aim. In particular, the marvels and hidden meanings of gemstones are employed subtly to develop the *exempla* discussed in the poems.[236] Indeed, the perfect image that is able to symbolize bodily cleanness is the pearl, chiefly due to its association with Christ, the traditional figure connected to this virtue. While in *Pearl* this is done subtly and the pearl is connected with the concept of salvation in general, in *Cleanness*, the pearl is explicitly referenced as a symbol of Jesus. Although the passages in which the pearl is mentioned are fewer than those of the first poem, the author is here more explicit in the explanation of the pearl symbology. The pearl is the perfect representation of "clannesse" since this precious gemstone carries the Christian virtue of purity exemplified in Christ. The author, by alluding to the lapidary and gemstone lore, broadens the previous general assumption that the pearl stands for the blessed, introduced at line 554, and explicitly associates the figure of Christ with the pearl:

> If þou wyl dele drwrye wyth Dryȝtyn þenne,
> And lelly þy Lorde and His leef worþe,
> Þenne confourme þe to Kryst, and þe clene make,
> Þat euer is polyced als playn as þe perle seluen. (*Cleanness*, ll.1067-1068)

Although this passage connects the pearl with the well-known tradition that associates the pearl with heaven and salvation, in *Cleanness* the author references explicitly Christ as *exemplum* of "clanesse", and the readers are instructed to be like Christ, like a pure pearl. The author is adopting the lapidary and exegetical traditions that associate Jesus with the stone and he advises explicitly the reader to be like Christ, a construction commonly ascribed to the same tradition as found, among all, in the *Physiologus*. The poet emphasizes Christ as major carrier of this virtue conspicuously employing the word "clene" and its variations. While this term is used throughout the composition, in this section it is employed mainly to describe this virtue in relation to Christ, "Þenne confourme þe to Kryst, and þe clene make" (l.1067), "blyþe Barne burnyst so clene" (l.1085), "His clannes" (l.1087), "so clene"

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[234] Stanbury, p.43.
[235] Stanbury, p.45.
[236] Cooper, Helen, "The Supernatural", in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *A Companion to the* Gawain-*Poet*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002, p.282.

(l.1088), "clanly He þenne com" (l.1089), "Wel clanner þen any crafte cowþe devyse" (l.1100), "He kyryous and clene" (l.1109), to the Virgin Mary, "Bot much clener watz hir corse" (l.1072), to the state of the soul of men if they want to enter the Heavenly Jerusalem, "Hov schulde þou com to His kyth bot if þou clene were?" (l.1100), and to the precious gemstone, "Quat may þe cause be called bot for hir clene hwes" (l.1119). The continuous repetition of this adjective in relation to Christ creates a connection between this poem and *Pearl* and delivers a more explicit and understandable symbology, already introduced in the previous poem. Furthermore, Jesus' purity is emphasized in the next lines where the author explains that the "lazares", "lepre", "lome", "lomerande blynde", "poysened" "parlatyk", "pyned in fyres", "drye folk and ydropike, and dede" (ll.1094-1096) came to him asking for help. An opposition is here established: while the author associates physical sickness with spiritual uncleanness, the Lamb is portrayed as spiritual and physical healer, that is, the traditional image of the Son of God of the Gospels.[237] To clarify that he is referring to the cure of unclean souls, the poet adds that Christ demonstrates his "clannesse" by using only his hands, and not scalpels, to cure people, a manifestation of divine order.[238] The author gradually constructs an image of what perfect Christian goodness is, finding as the maximum *exemplum* Christ and connecting him to precious stones, either the beryl or the pearl. The poet uses images and symbolism familiar to his audience to present his readers with a correct way of leading a life.[239] Whether the pearl is used in a simile as a term of comparison to describe the qualities of the beryl (ll.555-556), as the *exemplum* and symbol of Christ (ll.1066-1148) or as jewel in descriptions (ll.1456-1492), it is perceived and used as a visual cue. Indeed, the image is conceived as a tangible hint for divine salvation. Objects and imagery, including first and foremost precious stones, participate as symbols of spiritual concepts and have the aim of teaching, as carriers of Christian meanings, how to attain spiritual "clannesse". The reader's salvation depends on their willingness to recognize these visual signs as assumptions of spiritual perfection.[240]

Pearls are mentioned only twice in *SGGK*. Differently from the various attributes and Christian meanings the pearl carries in *Pearl* and *Cleanness*, as noted before, in the last poem, the gemstone is employed only as an inanimate object and does not carry any specific Christian meaning. Indeed, the pearl is mentioned as an ornament of Lady Bertilak's clothing, "Kerchofes of þat on wyth mony cler perlez" (l.954), and as term of comparison for Sir Gawain's virtues of chivalry. In both instances, its use emphasizes its rich value, which is a characteristic highly anticipated in the previous poems. While in the first instance, the pearl is the only gemstone mentioned in the description of Lady

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[237] Andrew, Waldron, p.157, n.1093-1108.
[238] Bowers, p.67.
[239] Hatt, p.79.
[240] Stanbury, p.45.

Bertilak, where it enhances the importance of this ornament, in the second instance, the pearl is used in the *formula* "As perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more,/ So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay knyȝtez" (ll.2364-2365) to denote the chivalric worthiness of Sir Gawain.[241] The use of the pearl to highlight great value and of the pea to describe little worth is a traditional *formula* in the mediaeval period.[242] However, one must note that the two objects tended to be employed separately. The first instance in which the pearl and the pea are brought together in the same sentence is located in Christine de Pisan's English translation of *The Epistle of Othea to Hector*, where the parable of the pearls before swine is paraphrased, "Perles among pesen is foly to strew/ Before swyn & oþer bestes vnresonable".[243] Nonetheless, the comparison employed in *SGGK* to express the excellence of Sir Gawain has not been found in other mediaeval English literary works, thus denoting the Gawain-poet's knowledge and creativity in the employment of syntactic *formulae* and metaphors in which a gemstone is portrayed.

In *SGGK*, precious gemstones are not the preferred instrument through which representing Christian virtues are represented. In their place, the image of the pentacle absolves that very function. This geometrical shape allows the poet to discuss the moral issues most relevant to him. In doing so, he is able to emphasize the role of Sir Gawain as a representative of civilization, his religious and chivalric values.[244] Numerology comes to serve an important role in relation to the pentacle. Indeed, the poet spends fifty lines (ll.619-669) on the description of Sir Gawain's shield and symbol, highlighting the importance of number five, which is the amount of the points of this geometrical shape and its structure. In the mediaeval period, the "pentaungel" had both negative and positive associations; on the one hand, it was linked to black magic and natural powers, on the other hand, it was connected to the name of Jesus (*Iesus*) and Mary (*Maria*), because of the number of letters comprised in their names, and to the five wounds of Christ.[245] While the pentacle is described as "depaynt of pure golde hwez" (l.620), a colour associated with the court and a material employed conspicuously in the description of Sir Gawain's armour, hinting at the chivalric virtues the shape and the knight carry, its Christian attributes are introduced by its connection to Solomon, "Hit is a syngne þat Salamon set sumquyle" (l.625). With its shape, colour and associations, the pentacle symbolizes Gawain's ideal knighthood and its possible realizations.[246] The knight becomes a reflection of the pentacle, as the geometrical shape is "depaynt of pure golde hwez" (l.620), the knight "watz for gode

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[241] Whiting, Bartlett Jere, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500*, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1968, p.451, P91.
[242] Silverstein, p.164, n.2364.
[243] Silverstein, p.164, n.2364.
[244] Spearing, p.175.
[245] Andrew, Waldron, p.230, n.625.
[246] Burrow, p.41.

knawen and, as golde pured,/ Voyded of vche vylany, wyth vertuez ennourned/In mote" (ll.633-635). Sir Gawain is the carrier of these virtues, and the poet lists them in the passage, he is faultless in his five senses (l.640), he never fails his five fingers (l.641), he trusts the wounds of Christ (l.642), he draws his strengths from the five joys of the Virgin Mary (l.646) and he carries the five virtues of chivalry (ll.652-654), thus making Sir Gawain the *exemplum* of knighthood.[247]

Although in the first two poems of the manuscript, the pearl is the carrier of virtues, in *SGGK*, following the traditional beliefs of the mediaeval period, the pentacle becomes the carrier of these attributes. The similarities between the two symbols are numerous. The first aspect they share is their connection to gold. This material is of great importance in all of the poems and it describes the perfect form of matter. As I previously explained, this substance is the symbol of purity and in the first poem of the manuscript, it is associated with Jesus, the Maiden and the City of New Jerusalem, in *SGGK*, it attributes the same characteristic to the already "pure 'pentaungel'" (l.664).

Another aspect shared by both the pearl and the pentacle is their shape, which the author describes as endless. In the lengthy description of the Pearl of Great Price in *Pearl*, the author lists all the physical attributes of the gemstone, "For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere" (l.738), and adds its "endelez rounde" shape. In *SGGK*, the poet employs the exact same adjective to describe the pentacle:

> And vche lyne vmbellappez and loukez in oþer
> And ayquere hit is endelez (and Englych hit callen
> Oueral, as I here, 'þe endeles knot') (ll.628-630)

The author describes again its shape at the end of the fifty lines employed in the description of Solomon's symbol. Differently from the round shape of the pearl which is simpler and requires little explanation, the pentacle is a more difficult shape to understand and, indeed, in these lines, the author thoroughly explains to the reader why this shape can be called endless:[248]

> Now alle þese fyue syþez forsoþe were fetled on þis knyȝt
> And vchone halched in oþer, þat non ende hade,
> And fyched vpon fyue poyntez þat fayld neuer,
> Ne samned neuer in no syde, ne sundred nouþer,
> Withouten ende at any noke I oquere fynde,
> Where euer þe gomen bygan or glod to an ende. (ll.656-661)

In both poems, this characteristic symbolizes the perfection of the objects and the interdependence of the virtues of the pearl and of the pentacle. This shape carries the attribute of endlessness as a geometrical shape. Sir Gawain's symbol can be self-replicated, it contains within itself a regular

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[247] Burrow, p.45.
[248] Arthur, Ross G., *Medieval Sign Theory and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987, p.34.

pentagon, in which a similar pentangle may be inscribed, creating a process that ideally may be repeated forever.[249] Through the repeated emphasis on the endlessness of Sir Gawain's symbol and on its intertwining lines that create the shape, the author is able to conceptualize the interdependence of the pentacle's virtues. The endlessness the pearl and the pentacle share represents God and the human virtues.[250] Endlessness and roundness are key aspects in the poems, indeed, in *Pearl*, these characteristics establish the gemstone as the perfect symbol to represent the kingdom of Heaven:

> 'This makellez perle þat boȝt is dere,
> Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,
> Is lyke þe reme of heuenesse clere—
> […]
> For it is wemlez, clene, and clere,
> And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,
> And commune to alle þat ryȝtwys were. (*Pearl*, ll.733-739)

Thus, not only the pentacle and the pearl share these attributes, but their shared characteristics are integrated in the depiction of heaven itself, giving a deeper meaning to the gemstone and to the shape painted in Sir Gawain's shield.[251] Thus, the pearl and pentacle become symbols of wholeness.

The two concepts share another important characteristic: truth. In the first poem of the manuscript, the pearl symbolizes God's eternal Truth which the Dreamer is able to understand at the end of the narration. Although the pearl symbolizes eternal wisdom, this attribute is not stated openly, the readers are responsible for the understanding of the hidden meanings of the gem. Differently from *Pearl* where the author continuously gives subtle hints to the reader about the many meanings the gemstone carries, in *SGGK*, the Gawain-poet explicitly describes the pentacle as symbol of truth, "Hit is a syngne þat Salamon set sumquyle/In bytokyng of trawþe, bi tytle þat hit habbez" (ll.625-626). The concept of "trawþe" links the poems of the manuscript. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the term has various meanings. In the fourteenth century, it is employed to refer to the general virtue of goodness and moral soundness which could refer to the fidelity to a principle.[252] However, this term has two other meanings which relate Sir Gawain to the general Arthurian tradition and with the characters of the other poems, particularly the Pearl-Maiden. Related to knighthood, this term means honour, integrity and adherence to the chivalric ideal.[253] Although this sense fits quite perfectly the narration of Sir Gawain's episode, it clashes with the reference to Salomon in which "trawþe" is employed. The third meaning denotes religious characteristics, indeed, the term expresses faithfulness

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[249] Arthur, pp.34-35.
[250] Arthur, p.35.
[251] Turville-Petre, p.145.
[252] *Middle English Dictionary* [website] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED47016 [accessed 28/06/2024]
[253] *Middle English Dictionary* [website] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED47016 [accessed 28/06/2024]

and religious devotion to God and the Virgin Mary.[254] In this sense, the term indicates one of the three theological virtues, along with Hope and Charity.[255] Although the exact sense of "trawþe" in this context is difficult to identify, its religious connotations create various connections with the Christian poems of the manuscript. Indeed, similarly to the pearl, the pentacle is the carrier of divine and eternal wisdom, since it is "bytokyng of trawþe", a symbol of the five wounds of Christ and of the five joys of the Virgin Mary.

The two symbols are described as pure. In the first two poems, the author uses various adjectives to recall the purity of the pearl. The gemstone is described as "pure" (*Pearl*, ll.227, 745) and "clene" (*Pearl*, ll.227, 289, 737; *Cleanness*, ll.554, 1067). In *SGGK*, the pentacle is described using the same concepts of purity and innocence. Indeed, the symbol is referred to as "pure 'pentaungel'" (l.664). The attribution of purity to the pentacle is connected to the virtues it carries, particularly to those of chivalry described as "pure fyue" (l.654), and to the gold employed to depict it, "þe pentangel depaynt of pure golde hwez" (l.620). This luxurious material is a characteristic shared by the pearl and Sir Gawain's shape. While the pearl is "clanly clos in golde so clere" (*Pearl*, l.2), the pentacle itself is made of gold (*SGGK*, l.620) and this characteristic is reiterated at the end of the passage when the purity of the shape is described:

> Þerfore on his schene schelde schepen watz þe knot,
> Ryally wyth rede golde vpon rede gowlez,
> Þat is þe pure 'pentaungel' wyth þe people called
> With lore. (ll.662-665)

As the pearl represents perfection and "clanesse" in the first two poems, the pentacle, due to its shape and colour symbolizes Gawain's ideal and the realization of it. The emphasis the two symbols receive in the narrations and their lengthy descriptions emphasize their intertwining virtues and interdependence which represent the many Christian virtues they symbolize. Both symbols are employed as devices to explain moral issues. Their detailed symbolic interpretations give the Maiden and Sir Gawain the role of representatives of civilization and religious values.[256]

Hence, in the classical and Christian tradition, the pearl is associated with multiple meanings, qualities and figures. The pearl "appears a more malleable and flexible image, with a strange origin combining natural processes with a sense of mystery and evanescence, and in its roundness and whiteness providing ideas of perfection of form and purity of colour"[257]. The malleability of the symbology of the pearl makes the precious stone the perfect symbol to be used in didactic

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[254] *Middle English Dictionary* [website] https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED47016 [accessed 28/06/2024]
[255] Burrow, p.43.
[256] Spearing, p.175.
[257] Davenport, "Jewels and Jewellers in "Pearl"", p.519.

compositions such as the Cotton Nero poems. The Pearl-poet employs the various concepts with which the pearl is associated with in the Christian tradition to convey multiple meanings and to characterize multiple figures in the poems.

3.3.1 Pearls and their Association with Liminal Figures

In the Christian tradition and in lapidary works, the pearl is associated with the concept of liminality. As noted before, this gemstone does not entirely belong to the inanimate nor to the animate state. Indeed, it is a gemstone conceived and created by an animate creature, the oyster. Perhaps, it is because of its connection with the concept of liminality that, in the poems, it is associated with the Pearl-Maiden, the Virgin Mary, Christ and Lady Bertilak, all figures that do not belong entirely to the human or to the spiritual realm. The Maiden is one of the blessed souls who is seen by the Jeweller through a dream vision, an event which allows him to witness the luxury of the heavenly realm. In the Christian tradition and in the poems, the Virgin Mary and Christ are figures that belong to both realms. Mary is able to conceive the Son of God through the Heavenly Spirit and Jesus Christ is both a human and a divine creature. Similarly, at the end of the poem, Lady Bertilak is discovered to be Morgan Le Fay, an enchantress, hence, a figure belonging to both the supernatural and to the human state. Moreover, in the poems and in the Holy Scriptures, all the figures associated with the pearl play the role of mediator between the heavenly and the earthly values. This pattern may explain the absence of stones in *Patience*, in which the protagonist, Jonah, speaks directly with God and does not need any intermediary agents.[258]

As previously introduced, the liminality of the gemstone is rooted in the process concerning its conception which was extensively analysed in lapidaries and that associates the oyster and the pearl with the Virgin Mary and Christ, figures that are symbolized by this gemstone in the poems. In the lapidary tradition, the generation of the pearl is usually compared to the Immaculate Conception. Here, the Virgin Mary is compared to the oyster, and Christ is associated with the product of the mussel, the perfect and pure pearl. Isidore's *Etymologiae* describes pearls in multiple sections of his work, where the pearl is always ascribed great value and pureness. In the passage devised for the description of the oyster he explains "Dequibus tradunt hi qui de animantium scripsere naturis quod nocturno tempore litora appetant, et ex caelesti rore margaritum concipiunt"[259]. Moreover, in the chapter titled "De Lapidibus et Metallis", in the section devoted to the description of "de candidis"

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[258] Sprouse, p.30.
[259] "people who have written on the nature of animals say concerning these creatures that they seek the shore at night, and conceive the pearls by means of celestial (*caelestis*) dew", Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae*, edited and translated by Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W.J., Beach, J.A., Berghof, Oliver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.262.

(white gems), he adds "gignitur autem de caelesti rore, quem certo anni tempore cocleae hauriunt"[260], reiterating the mediaeval belief that finds in the celestial dew the substance that impregnates the oyster. The same concept is described in *De Rerum Proprietatibus* where the conception of the pearl is attributed to the same substance. However, before disclosing this detail to his reader, Bartholomeus specifies that this information comes from lapidaries "Dicitur in Lapidar"[261], thus, testifying once again to the popularity and wide knowledge derived from these works. Marbodus de Rennes narrates a similar process of conception, describing it as strictly related to the morning dew:

> Conchae, temporibibus certis, referuntur hiantes
> in coelum, patulae rores haurire supernos
> ex quibus orbiculi cadentes concipiuntur (ll.632-634)
> [In certain seasons, the shells are said to have their valves
> Spread in the air, opened absorbing its dew
> From which candid corpuscles are born][262]

These encyclopaedic and lapidary works hint at the divine state of the pearl by tracing back its conception to this divine material. Moreover, the whiteness and purity of the gemstone is connected to the substance that impregnates the oyster, since it refers to something divine connected to the heavenly spirit. Indeed, some lapidaries are more explicit in the various correlations between the pearl's conception and the miracle of the Immaculate Conception. In particular, Philip de Thaun's *Bestiary* explicitly states the associations between the Virgin Mary and the oyster and the pearl and Jesus Christ. In the first part of the passage, he simply states:

> Del cel la ruseie receivent, de cele enpreingnent, de cel veient,
> Ceo fusent vives creatures, puis se revugnent senz faitures;
> Tant est la rusée en la pere, que la rusée devent pere,
> E tuz jurz i est altretant cum mere porte sun enfant (ll.1490-1493)
> [they receive the dew of heaven, become impregnated with it, and live by it,
> as if they were living creatures, then become again without shapes;
> the dew is so long in the stone, that the dew becomes stone,
> and it is there always as long as the mother carries her child][263]

This general analysis of the pearl introduces the association with the Christian Nativity through the image of a mother carrying her child. However, in the following passage of his *Bestiary*, Philip de

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[260] "It is made from celestial dew, which shellfish absorb at a certain season of the year", Isidorus of Seville, *Etymologiae*, edited and translated by Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W.J., Beach, J.A., Berghof, Oliver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.324.
[261] "As it is said in lapidaries", Anglicus, Bartholomaeus, *De Rerum Proprietatibus*, Frankfurt: Minerva G.M.H., 1964, p.746. All translations of Bartholomeus' *De Rerum Proprietatibus* are mine, otherwise noted.
[262] Marbodo di Rennes, p.88.
[263] Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiary*, edited and translated by Wright, Thomas, "The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon", in *Popular treatises on science written during the Middle Ages, in Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English*, London: R. & J.E. Taylor, 1841, pp.127-128.

Thaun explicitly connects the Christian tradition to the conception and birth of the precious stone by adding:

> UNIO, ki naist de rusée e ki en pere est engendrée,
> Unio Jhesu signefie, pere dunt naist Sancte Marie;
> Unio, ki naist de rusée, signefie grace aprestée
> Par grace fud que li Fiz Dé fud à la virgine presenté;
> Par grace en cuillit le salud, e par grace fud conceud;
> Cum la pere overe senz faiture, e ele se joinst senz crevue;
> Cum la pere fait la rusée, si fud la Virgine consecrée,
> E issi concut e enfanta la Virgine ki Jhesu porta;
> Virgine concut, virgine fauta, virgine parmist e parmaindrat.
> [Unio, which is born of the dew and which is engendered in stone,
> unio signifies Jesus Christ, the stone from which was born St. Mary,
> unio, which is born of dew, signifies grace that is made ready;
> it was by grace that the Son of God was presented to the Virgin;
> by grace she received the salvation, and by grace he was conceived;
> as the stone opens without making, and it joins itself without crack,
> as the stone does the dew, the Virgin was consecrated,
> and thus the Virgin who carried Jesus conceived and was with child;
> a virgin she conceived, a virgin she brought forth a child, a virgin she remained and
> shall remain.][264]

While other lapidaries and encyclopaedic works are subtler in the associations between the Christian figures and the gemstone, Philip de Thaun explicitly refers to this connection. As the Virgin Mary was consecrated by receiving the Holy Spirit and carrying the Son of God, the oyster is blessed in receiving the heavenly dew and in the birth of a gem which symbolizes the purity and cleanness of Christ.

Similarly to these works, the *Aberdeen Bestiary* describes the pearl conceived from "rore celi" ("heavenly dew") and connects the precious gemstone with the Virgin Mary referencing Isaiah's passages in the Holy Scriptures and the words pronounced by the archangel Gabriel during the Annunciation (Luke 1:35):

> Lapis ergo iste qui diciture conchus, figuram gerit sancte Marie. […] Sicut enim de mari ascendit ille lapis, sic sacta Maria ascendit de domo patris sui ad templum dei, et ibi accepit rorem celestem.
> [The stone, therefore, is called conchus; it symbolizes Saint Mary. […]For just as the stone rises from the sea, so Saint Mary went up from the house of her father to the temple of God and there received the dew from heaven.][265]

The author associates the stone to the Virgin Mary and explains that the moment when the mussel opens its mouth to receive the heavenly dew corresponds to the occasion when she welcomes the

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[264] Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiary*, edited and translated by Wright, Thomas, "The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon", in *Popular treatises on science written during the Middle Ages, in Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English*, London: R. & J.E. Taylor, 1841, p.128.
[265] *The Aberdeen Bestiary* https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f96r [accessed on 28/06/2024]

Holy Spirit to be pregnant with the Son of God. However, this explanation is quite ambiguous since it would identify the Virgin Mary with the oyster and the pearl with Christ, following the explanations and associations of the previous works. The author of the *Aberdeen Bestiary* creates ambiguous associations which hint at the connection between Jesus and the pearl, rather than between the Virgin Mary and the gemstone.

In the Cotton Nero poems, this tradition is employed and further developed through the use of the pearl and its imagery in connection to Christian figures. The numerous references to the imagery of enclosure draw a connection between the lapidary tradition which describes the pearl as enclosed inside the oyster and the figure of Christ as enclosed inside the Virgin Mary's womb. Indeed, in *Pearl* the verb "to enclose" is repeated multiple times and in all the instances is employed to describe the state of the Pearl-Maiden, "clanly clos in golde so clere" (l.2), a *formula* repeated in later passages when the overlap between the gemstone and the Maiden is not complete, "Now þurȝ kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close" (l.270), "Now, hynde, that sympelness cones enclose" (l.909). Although the author in the first poem does not explicitly refer to the oyster, the connection with the lapidary tradition and its *formulae* is clear. The employment of the imagery of enclosure is one of the most repeated themes in the sections of the lapidary works concerned with the description of the pearl.

In *Cleanness*, the poet further emphasizes the connection between the conception of the pearl and the birth of Christ. At line 1066, the poet preaches the reader to be like Christ, a passage followed by the explanation of the conception of the Son of God creating multiple associations between the information in the lapidary tradition and the ones introduced in the manuscript. Indeed, the poem compares the uniqueness of the conception of the pearl to the miracle of the Immaculate Conception, a traditional comparison deriving, as previously explained, from the lapidary tradition. Similarly to the heavenly dew which descends from the sky to impregnate the oyster, the conception of Christ is described in the same manner. The Mother of Christ conceives from the divine and, similarly to the oyster, creates perfection and pureness while remaining the "makelez moder" (*Pearl*, l.435). Through the lines "þenne confourme þe to Kryst, and þe clene make,/þat euer is policed als playn as þe perle seluen" (*Cleanness*, ll.1067-68), the author proposes a powerful comparison between the pearl and Christ, a figure whose purity resembles the pearl. Furthermore, in this passage, the subtle reference to the Virgin Mary creates an even stronger imagery. The author introduces her presence using only the words "lel mayden" (*Cleanness*, l.1069) and adds:

> […]fro fyrst þat He lyȝt withinne þe lel mayden,
> By how comly a jest He watz clos þere,
> When venkkyst watz no vergynyté, ne violence maked,
> Bot much clener watz hir corse, God kynned þerinne (*Cleanness*, ll.1069-72)

Through the image of Christ as a pearl, enclosed inside the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus is subtly compared to the oyster, an association that differs from the one displayed in *Pearl*, where the gemstone is directly connected to female figures. If we investigate the lapidaries and bestiaries of the mediaeval tradition, we discover that the Virgin Mary is connected both to the oyster and the pearl. The mussel carries the imagery of motherhood, protection and enclosure, as it transpires in *Cleanness*. Indeed, usually, the oyster is described as a fish enclosed inside a shell that opens and closes when it pleases, or following the stages of the moon. The oyster can either be fecundated by the crescent moon, the light of the sun or, in most cases, by the heavenly dew. If the oyster is fertilized by the dew, its product will be the purest thing that could ever be created in the natural world, as it is stated in the *Aberdeen Bestiary*:

> Ergo cum ascenderit a loco suo supra mare, aperit os suum et suscipit intra se de rore celi et circumfulget eum radius solis, et sic fit intra eum margarita preciosa et splendida valde, quippe que rore celi concepta est, et radio solis clarificata.
> [The stone lies at the bottom of the sea and comes to life early in the morning. When it rises from its resting-place to the surface of the sea, it opens its mouth and takes in some heavenly dew, and the rays of the sun shine around it; thus there grows within the stones a most precious, shining pearl indeed, conceived from the heavenly dew and given lustre by the rays of the sun][266]

Thus, similarly to what stated in lapidary and encyclopaedic works, in *Cleanness*, the oyster is the symbol of the Virgin Mary who fecundated by the heavenly dew, the Holy Spirit, gives birth to the pearl, Jesus Christ. The Pearl-poet never specifies the meaning of the oyster nor the creation of the pearl, he leaves the reader unaware of the deep meaning of the images he displays, or rather, he knows that the lapidary imagery is something shared within the mediaeval public and hence he subtly delivers it.

From this analysis of the pearl imagery in the Cotton Nero poems, it is evident that the gemstone is used as the main ornament and symbol for the liminal and *mediator* figures both in the Christian tradition and in the narrations. The use of stone imagery as main features of particular characters helps the reader identify a foreshadowing of the protagonist's need for intercession.[267] The Jeweller needs the help of the Pearl-Maiden to understand the difference between the earthly and heavenly values. Belshazzar needs the intervention of Daniel. Sir Gawain needs the intercession of Lady Bertilak to question his knightly and Christian values. However, the poems aid the reader to understand the different meanings of the gemstone. While in *Pearl* the symbology carried by the Maiden is widely explained, in *Cleanness* and *SGGK*, the reader is required to have understood and

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[266] *The Aberdeen Bestiary* https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f96r [accessed on 28/06/2024]
[267] Sprouse, p.30.

interiorized the meanings of the pearl to interpret the didactic lessons of the poems. In the latter poems, in particular, in *SGGK*, the pearl imagery is merely hinted at and it is the reader's duty to understand the complex symbology of the gemstone which the poet expects to have been interiorized. When the poet introduces Lady Bertilak as wearing pearls, the reader is expected to recognize that she is going to be a mediatory agent and that she will play a similar role to the ones of the Pearl-Maiden and Daniel.[268] Nonetheless, the achievement of this level of understanding is rendered possible only by having read or listened to all the poems of the manuscript. It is only then through the understanding of the lapidary imagery that the homiletic purpose of the poems may be achieved.

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[268] Sprouse, p.42.

Conclusion

Many different studies have tried to prove the identity of the author of the Middle English poems contained in London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X. Due to the fact that this manuscript is a *codex unicum* and no clear evidence is presented in the manuscript conecrning the authorship or commissioner, scholars have spent many years trying to figure out the true nature of the poems and still a satisfactory result has not been reached. However, I think that the shared lapidary imagery and terminology is evidence of a common authorship of the poems contained in the manuscript. Indeed, all but one poem, *Patience*, show a clear connection to the lapidary imagery and lore popular at the time in which the poems were written. Certainly, I do not expect to find or prove an absolute truth, but I nevertheless have tried a different approach connected to the study of the possible lapidaries that the Pearl-poet could have read or, at least, connected to the shared lapidary tradition popular at the time.

The poems show a clear connection to each other. Firstly, they present structures that deeply rely on the use of alliteration and numerology, with which the author is able to create a sense of circularity and symmetry that pervades the poems and that creates a further sense of circularity in the manuscript. However, my dissertation focuses on the lapidary lore and the specific gemstone, in particular the pearl, imagery and luxury terminology that are shared between the poems. My study has been conducted starting with the analysis of the most popular lapidaries that circulated during the Middle Ages in England. The choice of lapidaries, encyclopaedias and bestiaries that I consulted is based on the witnesses that survived and the ones that were used as main sources during this period. From a comparative analysis of the poems contained in the Cotton Nero manuscript and the lapidary works introduced in the second chapter of the dissertation, many similarities arose. My study began with an objective analysis of all the instances in which the word "pearl" and its synonyms are employed in the poems. Through the creation and analysis of a corpus and a manual check of all the instances, my aim was to analyse the frequency, traceability and position in which this term was employed to support the clear intention of a constant repetition of the term inside the poems.

To further emphasize the use of lapidary material in the Cotton Nero poems, I analysed the symbology, lapidary and luxury terminology that the author employs in the manuscript. From my analysis, it can be stated that the concept of the human valuation of jewels and gemstone is recurrent and reiterated. This attitude is generally pursued in *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, in Belshazzar's *exemplum* of the worthy vessels, and in *SGGK*, in the descriptions of the garments worn by the characters, their multiple meanings and in the description of the castle of Hautdesert. The poet focuses extensively on descriptions of luxury objects adopting a vocabulary that belongs to the fields of wealth and jewellery. This process allows the widening of symbols and allegories associated with the elements represented.

The imagery and technical terms that belong to the field of lapidaries and luxury are appropriate to figure the eternal beauty of the heavenly realms (Garden of Eden, City of New Jerusalem), the holy objects (the holy vessels), the ornaments and castles of specific characters of the poems. Through rich descriptions, the poet interpolates settings and characters into a system within which spiritual perfection is illustrated through the specific vocabulary of luxury.

The greatest example in the poems of the use of lapidary structures and imagery can be found in the proem of *Pearl* that presents structural similarities to the mediaeval lapidaries introduced in the second chapter of my dissertation. The analysis of the first stanzas of the poem compared to the lapidaries popular in that period allows to understand the deeper meanings carried by the pearl and the image the author wanted to convey through the *formulae* that belong to the lapidary lore. Having considered the results of the comparative analysis, I believe that it is evident that the poet read, or at least, had some knowledge connected to the lapidaries introduced in the second chapter. It would be unimaginable that the poet could have employed such terminology, *formulae* and images, if he would not have come across these texts.

My research dived in the specific analysis of the pearl imagery that came from the popular Christian tradition associated to the poems. From the analysis of these specific passages in comparison with mediaeval lapidary lore, it is clear that in the classical and Christian tradition the pearl is associated with multiple meanings, qualities and virtues that the poet was acquainted with. The pearl proves to be a malleable and flexible image that can be employed in all the poems with different meanings and number of instances. The Pearl-poet employs the various concepts with which the pearl is associated with in the Christian tradition to convey multiple meanings and to characterize multiple figures in the poems. Finally, the pearl is employed in connection with the concept of liminality. Indeed, I believe that the poet uses the gemstone and, particularly, the pearl imagery to symbolize the liminal figures in the Christian tradition and narrations. While in *Pearl* the symbology carried by the Maiden is widely explained, in *Cleanness* and *SGGK*, the reader is required to have understood and interiorized the meanings of the pearl to interpret the didactic lessons of the poems. In the latter poems, in particular, in *SGGK*, the pearl imagery is merely hinted at and it is the reader's duty to understand the complex symbology of the gemstone which the poet expects to have been interiorized.

The specific method that I employed to carry my research emphasizes the possibility of the common authorship of the poems and the shared knowledge of the lapidary lore. For if it is true that no absolute answer can be given on whether the poems were indeed written by the same author, the results of my research point in that direction. Indeed, the employment of the shared lapidary imagery throughout almost all the poems of the manuscript allow the author to create a *fil rouge* and develop

each poem consistently. Furthermore, the choice of using this specific terminology proves that the readers were expected to be knowledgeable about the references to the lapidary lore and the poet came across the texts belonging to this tradition.

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Riassunto

Questa tesi propone un'analisi approfondita dei poemi contenuti nel manoscritto Londra, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X nel tentativo di delineare l'intenzione dell'autore nell'utilizzare immagini e descrizioni di pietre preziose che derivano dalla tradizione lapidaria popolare in Inghilterra durante il Medioevo. Tutti i componimenti eccetto uno, *Patience*, dimostrano l'utilizzo nelle descrizioni delle ambientazioni, degli abiti e accessori indossati dai personaggi e nel simbolismo associato ad essi, una chiara dipendenza dalla tradizione lapidaria. Il metodo utilizzato per l'analisi dei poemi è quello di una lettura comparativa: attraverso l'analisi di lapidari, bestiari ed enciclopedie che hanno permeato la conoscenza e lo studio delle pietre preziose, la tesi ha come scopo la dimostrazione di un interesse condiviso dall'autore e dal pubblico nelle gemme e nel loro significato nella tradizione medievale inglese Cristiana.

Numerosi studi sottolineano l'importanza e il valore del manoscritto Londra, British Library, Cotton MS Nero, A.X, in quanto è l'unico testimone a noi pervenuto contenente i quattro poemi compilati al suo interno. Il Cotton Nero presenta quarantotto lettere maiuscole decorate, ventuno in *Pearl*, tredici in *Cleanness*, cinque in *Patience* e nove in *SGGK*. Oltre a queste decorazioni, esso presenta dodici miniature probabilmente aggiunte a posteriori, all'inizio del quindicesimo secolo. Il primo poema presenta quattro illustrazioni che rappresentano il *Jeweller* e la *Pearl-Maiden*. Prima di *Cleanness* sono presentate due illustrazioni dedicate alla rappresentazione di due dei nove *exempla* contenuti nella narrazione, l'episodio dell'arca di Noè e di Belshazzar. A *Patience* appartengono due illustrazioni collocate appena prima dell'inizio del poema entrambe raffiguranti il protagonista della narrazione, Giona. Nella prima l'artista rappresenta il momento in cui Giona viene ingoiato dalla balena, mentre la seconda rappresenta lo stesso personaggio biblico mentre predica agli abitanti di Ninive. Le ultime quattro illustrazioni rappresentano invece gli episodi narrati all'interno del poema arturiano *SGGK*. Solamente la prima illustrazione è posizionata nel *folium* precedente al poema, le altre invece sono collocate all'interno di esso. Le miniature presenti all'interno del manoscritto hanno la funzione di indice dei testi ed inoltre offrono un'interpretazione di essi, in particolare mettendo in risalto gli episodi, che l'artista o colui che aveva commissionato il manoscritto pensava fossero più importanti all'interno delle narrazioni.

Il manoscritto Londra, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A.X contiene quattro poemi i cui generi sono diversi. Le prime tre composizioni possono essere definite cristiane in quanto parte della narrazione deriva dalle Sacre Scritture: *Pearl* è una visione onirica elegiaca, *Cleanness* è un sermone versificato e *Patience* una riscrittura della storia biblica di Giona. Il poema conclusivo, *SGGK*, tratta invece di materia arturiana a cui appartengono però tratti cristiani. Il manoscritto si presenta come un *codex unicus*, perciò molti suoi aspetti tradiscono una notevole ambiguità. Il manoscritto non presenta

nessun indizio sull'identità dell'autore, il committente o una precisa data di composizione, perciò qualsiasi informazione sulla sua stesura si basa su uno studio della lingua e su evidenze testuali. I diversi studi sul dialetto nel quale i poemi sono stati composti è stato identificato come appartenente alla zona del Cheshire o dello Staffordshire. La lingua di stesura non è l'unica caratteristica che accomuna questi poemi, infatti, i concetti e le immagini utilizzate nelle diverse narrazioni presentano un interesse per la numerologia e per le estese descrizioni del mondo materiale. Nonostante le numerose somiglianze tra i poemi, la loro struttura è differente. In *Patience* e *Cleanness*, l'autore utilizza il verso allitterativo lungo come base della loro struttura metrica, mentre *SGGK* è composto da versi allitterativi e non rimati seguiti da cinque versi brevi rimati ed allitterativi, di cui il primo chiamato *bob* che rima con il secondo ed il quarto, mentre i rimanenti, chiamati *wheel*, si articolano seguendo lo schema BABA. L'allitterazione è inoltre utilizzata nella stesura di *Pearl*, ma in questo poema ha una funzione prettamente ornamentale in cui la sua particolarità è l'utilizzo della *concatenatio*: un termine o costruzione sintattica ripetuta all'inizio ed alla fine di ogni stanza di ogni sezione del poema. Il copioso utilizzo dell'allitterazione all'interno dei poemi rende il manoscritto un testimone della tradizione letteraria sviluppatasi dalla seconda metà del quattordicesimo secolo fino alla prima metà del sedicesimo: l'*alliterative revival*.

I poemi non solo condividono l'esteso utilizzo dell'allitterazione ma tendono inoltre a mostrare una certa simmetria e circolarità nella loro struttura utilizzando la numerologia e *formulae* ripetute. In particolare, *Pearl* presenta la ripetizione del numero 12 nella sua struttura, infatti il poema è composto da 1212 versi. Questo numero è particolarmente importante in uno dei testi utilizzati dall'autore nella stesura del poema, l'Apocalisse di Giovanni in cui questo numero è ripetuto numerose volte nella descrizione della Città Celeste. La circolarità del poema è ottenuta anche dal numero di stanze presentate, 101 lo stesso numero di stanze che presenta *SGGK*, l'ultimo poema compilato nel manoscritto. Inoltre, *Pearl* presenta l'utilizzo di un particolare meccanismo stilistico, la *concatenatio* che crea un'ulteriore circolarità e simmetria tra stanze del poema. Il poema presenta inoltre la ripetizione nel primo verso e nell'ultimo verso della stessa costruzione sintattica creando quindi una struttura circolare. Analogamente, *SGGK* mostra la ripetizione dei numeri 1 e 5 che creano un sottile movimento circolare che caratterizza l'intero poema. *Cleanness* dimostra invece la sua simmetria nella sua struttura precisa e ripetitiva degli *exempla* presentati. Il poema può essere diviso infatti in cinque parti: l'introduzione (vv.1-204); la prima sequenza di *exempla* (vv.205-544); la seconda sequenza di *exempla* (vv.601-1048); la terza sequenza di *exempla* (vv.1149-1809) e la conclusione (vv.1805-1812).

La struttura dei poemi, le numerose descrizioni del mondo materiale utilizzando una terminologia specifica e il presunto periodo di composizione avvicinano il manoscritto ad un altro poema dello

stesso secolo, *St Erkenwald* a cui molti studiosi hanno attribuito la stessa autorialità. Tuttavia, altre ricerche contemporanee sostengono che il dialetto in cui sono stati composti e le somiglianze linguistiche non siano elementi sufficienti per avanzare l'ipotesi di uno stesso autore. Secondo questi studiosi è più probabile che nel periodo di composizione dei poemi ci fosse un processo di continuo prestito da differenti tradizioni letterarie e l'esistenza di *formulae* ed immagini condivise. Numerose ipotesi sull'identità dell'autore, dello scriba, l'intenzione del committente e l'esistenza di un solo testimone sono un ostacolo che impedisce di rispondere a queste questioni con certezza.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra nel fornire una panoramica della tradizione lapidaria in quanto popolare nel periodo indicativo di stesura dei poemi conservati all'interno del Cotton Nero. Infatti, queste composizioni non solo condividono l'utilizzo dell'allitterazione, ma soprattutto un immaginario e terminologia specifica legata alle pietre preziose, la cui derivazione può essere collegata alla tradizione che aveva come scopo quello di analizzare e descrivere la natura.

L'interesse verso la natura e le sue proprietà viene espressa dall'uomo già dall'antichità, periodo nel quale le pietre preziose erano considerate oggetti con particolari significati, virtù e proprietà mediche. Queste caratteristiche venivano analizzate ed elencate all'interno di enciclopedie e lapidari. Tuttavia, altri testi si occupavano dell'analisi delle proprietà di alcune gemme. Gli autori medievali attribuivano la creazione di alcune pietre, quali la perla, agli animali, ed è quindi bene prendere in considerazione anche questi testi per creare una panoramica il più esaustiva possibile legata alle pietre che l'autore del Cotton Nero elenca. Nel periodo medievale, l'interesse nelle proprietà delle pietre aumentò, come testimoniano le numerose copie di testi appartenenti a questo periodo che sono stati rinvenuti. Tuttavia, nel medioevo, le proprietà magiche attribuite alle gemme durante il periodo classico vengono perse e alle pietre preziose vengono associate virtù e qualità cristiane. I testi classici, anche se nella maggior parte dei casi non attribuiscono queste caratteristiche alle gemme, vengono comunque utilizzate come testi di riferimento nella creazione di nuovi lapidari e testi enciclopedici. In particolare, quattro testi venivano utilizzati come testi di riferimento per lo studio delle pietre preziose, *Naturalis Historia* scritta da Plinio il Vecchio (VI d.C.), *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium* di Gaio Giulio Solino (III d.C.), *Etymologiae sive Origines* di Isidoro di Siviglia (VII d.C.) ed il *Physiologus*, un testo greco risalente al II secolo d.C.. Durante l'VIII e IX secolo la popolarità e l'interesse verso questo tipo di testi aumentò come attestato dalle numerose traduzioni dell'anonimo testo greco soprattutto in Latino. L'interesse nella visione delle gemme come simboli delle varie virtù cristiane era dovuto soprattutto alla crescente popolarità dei passaggi delle Sacre Scritture in cui le pietre preziose venivano citate: le dodici pietre del pettorale del giudizio (Esodo 28:17-20), gli ornamenti dell'abito del re di Tiro (Ezechiele 28:13) e le dodici pietre della Città Celeste (Apocalisse 21:19-20). Questo interesse fu una delle ragioni che spinsero gli autori dell'epoca alla creazione di

commentari della Bibbia ed in particolare dell'Apocalisse. I primi tentativi nel commentare le Sacre Scritture furono state messe in atto da Agostino, ma la completa realizzazione di questo genere si trova in un'epoca leggermente più tarda, nelle opere di Amato di Monte Cassino, Ildeberto di Lavardin, Rabano Mauro e Valafrido Strabone. Questa tradizione prese piede in tutta Europa, particolarmente in Francia, Germania ed Italia. Tuttavia, in Inghilterra uno dei più famosi studiosi dell'epoca, Beda il Venerabile concentrò la sua produzione letteraria nella composizione di uno tra i più famosi commentari dell'Apocalisse, l'*Explanatio Apocalypsis*. A differenza di molti altri commentari, l'opera di Beda enfatizza il ruolo che le gemme occupano nella tradizione Cristiana aggiungendo un tono religioso alle precedenti descrizioni di pietre preziose che si trovavano nelle fonti da lui utilizzate nella stesura del testo, quale l'*Etymologiae sive Origines* di Isidoro di Siviglia.

Un altro autore la cui produzione letteraria si è focalizzata nell'analisi di gemme preziose e nel loro ruolo all'interno della religione Cristiana è Marbodo di Rennes. Uno tra i lapidari cristiani composti nell'XI secolo più copiati e tradotti secolo fu il suo *De Lapidibus*, un poema didattico che descrive in sessanta capitoli, sessanta differenti pietre. La produzione di Marbodo si conncentra particolarmente sulla stesura dell'analisi di gemme preziose ed infatti questo poema è seguito da altre tre produzioni lapidarie, uno in versi, il *De Duodecis Lapidibus Pretiosis*, e due in prosa, il *De Lapidum Naturis* ed il *Lapidum Pretiosorum Mystica seu Moralis Applicatio*. L'importanza dei testi lapidari di Marbodo è attestata dalle numerose copie rinvenute, su 616 manoscritti medievali che analizzano le gemme preziose, 125 sono i testimoni che presentano testi di Marbodo o che utilizzano i suoi lavori come fonte primaria. Inoltre la popolarità della sua produzione è attestata dalle numerose traduzioni in vernacolare ad oggi rinvenute. In particolare, la produzione di Marbodo era particolarmente popolare in Inghilterra, dove più di quaranta copie dei suoi lapidari sono state rinvenute in biblioteche inglesi appartenenti a collezioni pubbliche. Le opere di Beda il Venerabile e di Marbodo di Rennes sono state utilizzate come fonti primarie per la stesura di ulteriori opere in cui vengono analizzate pietre preziose. Ad esempio, i numerosi passaggi dell'*Explanatio Apocalypsis* sono stati utilizzati come fonte primaria per la stesura dell'Old English Lapidary (Londra, British Library, Cotton Tiberius, A.iii), il testo definito dagli studiosi come il più antico lapidario scritto in vernacolare nell'Europa occidentale.

Specifiche analisi di pietre preziose, come quelle della perla, venivano compilate anche all'interno di bestiari, un termine utilizzato per la prima volta da Philippe de Thaun, un monaco anglo-normanno che lavorò per la corte di Enrico I (1068-1135), come titolo per la sua opera in cui i primi capitoli analizzano animali mentre i tre capitoli conclusivi si focalizzavano sulla descrizione di pietre preziose. Philippe de Thaun scrisse altri due lavori relativi alle gemme, uno alfabetico e l'altro allegorico.

Anche le enciclopedie sono testimoni importanti per l'analisi delle pietre preziose e segnalano ulteriormente l'interesse che le gemme stavano raccogliendo nell'epoca medievale. Un esempio di particolare importanza, che verrà ampiamente utilizzato nei successivi capitoli della tesi per la l'analisi dei poemi è infatti il *Proprietatibus Rerum* di Bartholomeus Anglicus, un'enciclopedia che dedica un intero capitolo alla descrizione di pietre preziose, il "De Lapidibus".

La popolarità dei lapidari durante il periodo medievale è testimoniata dalle numerose traduzioni che sono ad oggi pervenute. Infatti, la seconda parte del XIV secolo ha visto la traduzione di lapidari che combinavano il simbolismo cristiano, la descrizione di pietre preziose e le credenze popolari. In questo processo di traduzione, si distingue il Lapidario di Re Filippo, una produzione in volgare creata tramite la traduzione di passaggi provenienti da diversi lapidari, poi annessi insieme.

La popolarità di manoscritti e testi contenenti descrizioni di pietre è ulteriormente testimoniata dalle numerose illustrazioni contenute all'interno di essi. Due manoscritti sono particolarmente interessanti per le loro numerose e sontuose illustrazioni, l'*Arberdeen Bestiary* (Aberdeen University Library, Univ Lib. MS 24) e l'*Ashmole Bestiary* (Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1511). Entrambi i testi contenuti in questi manoscritti descrivono dettagliatamente numerosi animali, tra cui l'ostrica, importante per lo studio della perla nei poemi contenuti all'interno del manoscritto Cotton Nero, e vengono conclusi con una descrizione delle pietre appartenenti alla Città Celeste. Questi manoscritti sono catalogati dagli studiosi come "produzioni di lusso", un indizio che sottolinea l'importanza di questo genere letterario.

Per comprendere i poemi del Cotton Nero nella loro integrità è perciò necessario analizzare anche questi testimoni della tradizione lapidaria, poiché essa era una conoscenza diffusa all'interno del periodo medievale in cui ogni cosa presente sulla terra era simbolo della realtà Cristiana. Infatti, l'obbiettivo di questi testi non era prettamente uno studio scientifico della realtà, ma la raccolta delle varie allusioni, similitudini e metafore che permettevano una totale comprensione del mondo materiale in relazione a quello spirituale. Il mondo materiale diventa quindi simbolo comprensibile nel quale Dio trasmette diversi simboli e allusioni all'uomo.

Dopo una panoramica generale del manoscritto e della tradizione medievale lapidaria, il terzo capitolo ha come obbiettivo quello di mettere in relazione le due tematiche introdotte dai primi capitoli per comprendere le relazioni tra il manoscritto Cotton Nero e la tradizione lapidaria. Il primo sottocapitolo si occupa della tracciabilità del termine "perla" all'interno dei poemi. Attraverso la creazione di corpus di 37,438 caratteri, formato da tre diversi sub-corpora (*Pearl*-corpus.txt; *Cleanness*-corpus.txt; *SGGK*-corpus.txt), ed un'analisi manuale dei poemi. Questa sezione della tesi si occupa di analizzare le istanze in cui "perla" ed i suoi sinonimi vengono utilizzati per comprendere

le intenzioni che hanno portato il poeta ad utilizzare in modo così esteso l'immaginario legato a questa pietra preziosa.

Il secondo sottocapitolo si occupa di analizzare l'influenza che l'immaginario dei lapidari ha avuto sulla composizione dei poemi contenuti nel manoscritto. L'influenza dei lapidari si manifesta in particolare nelle estese descrizioni di abiti, accessori e paesaggi, in cui il poeta con cura utilizza terminologie legate alla tradizione dei lapidari e del lusso. In particolare, le descrizioni dei luoghi appartenenti ai testi biblici e degli abiti indossati dai personaggi dei poemi sottolineano il valore e lo splendore dei materiali, concetti cruciali all'interno dei poemi. Questa analisi mira a sottolineare l'atteggiamento messo in atto dal poeta in *Pearl*, in *Cleanness*, particolarmente nell'*exemplum* di Belshazzar, e in *SGGK*, nella descrizione dei vestiti indossati dai personaggi e dei loro molteplici significati. La decisione del poeta nell'adottare questo tipo di terminologia enfatizza l'importanza delle pietre preziose e delle perle nelle composizioni. I lapidari, le immagini e le terminologie di lusso sono di fondamentale importanza nel manoscritto. La coscienza materiale permea le poesie e stabilisce, attraverso le descrizioni delle ambientazioni e delle vesti dei personaggi, la valenza sociale delle allegorie e dei significati delle poesie. La terminologia specifica dello splendore materiale è fondamentale per introdurre i concetti di moralità e spiritualità in un ambito socialmente riconoscibile e tangibile che possa essere riconosciuto dal pubblico medievale. Attraverso ricche descrizioni, il poeta interpola ambientazioni e personaggi in un sistema all'interno del quale la perfezione spirituale è illustrata attraverso il vocabolario specifico del lusso.

Il capitolo si snoda in un ulteriore sottocapitolo in cui un'analisi dettagliata delle *formulae* lapidarie utilizzate nel proemio di *Pearl* viene introdotta. L'autore sviluppa le sue poesie attorno alla tradizione lapidaria cristiana popolare in Europa, in particolare in Inghilterra. Durante il Medioevo, la tradizione letteraria utilizzava immagini di pietre preziose per simboleggiare qualità e condizioni morali e astratte. A partire dal XIII secolo, l'antica tradizione lapidaria di ispirazione pagana fu impiegata come fondamento di elaborate allegorie cristiane in poesie e composizioni. Le poesie appartenenti al Cotton Nero A.X testimoniano la popolarità che questa tradizione acquistò alla fine del XIV secolo e la sua influenza sulle composizioni letterarie dell'epoca. Per espandere le metafore, le allegorie ed i simboli all'interno delle poesie, l'autore si cimenta in descrizioni di ambientazioni sacre, indumenti e accessori utilizzando una terminologia del lusso per fornire ulteriori significati alle pietre e materiali preziosi. La conoscenza del poeta di una tradizione letteraria associata all'analisi delle gemme è evidente nelle *formulae* che permeano la struttura, la funzione e le immagini nel proemio di *Pearl*. Mentre nelle altre poesie i riferimenti a *formulae* lapidarie sono sporadici e più sottili, in *Pearl* il poeta è più esplicito. Attraverso i continui collegamenti con questa tradizione popolare medievale, l'autore cerca di creare costantemente nuove immagini per ampliare il simbolismo del poema.

Il successivo sottocapitolo svolge un'ulteriore analisi dei poemi presenti nel manoscritto Cotton Nero, in particolare mette in relazione le perle con gli episodi contenuti nei poemi. Le perle erano particolarmente significative nella tradizione lapidaria e nella religione cristiana. Nel periodo medievale la perla era riconosciuta come simbolo di unicità, innocenza, purezza e verginità. I suoi attributi tradizionali derivavano principalmente dal suo luogo di origine, colore, forma, e modo in cui si credeva fosse concepita, e dai processi che permettevano il suo ritrovamento. In genere i testi appartenenti alla tradizione lapidaria descrivevano le perle come gemme pure, dal colore bianco brillante e dalla forma rotonda e perfetta. Per adempiere e trasmettere più chiaramente il loro scopo didattico, le poesie fanno riferimento in modo sia sottile che esplicito a passaggi della Bibbia in cui viene utilizzato l'immaginario delle pietre preziose. In *Pearl* e *Cleanness*, l'autore concepisce gli episodi ed il loro simbolismo in connessione con le Sacre Scritture e, infatti, i passaggi della Bibbia sono spesso parafrasati e citati. È attraverso l'utilizzo di questi testi e riferimenti che il poeta riesce a creare e sviluppare compiutamente l'immagine della perla e delle figure e virtù ad essa associate che derivano dalla tradizione lapidaria cristiana. Sebbene l'autore utilizzi immagini tradizionali delle pietre preziose, le poesie mostrano significati diversi associati alla perla. Mentre in *Pearl* e *Cleanness* la pietra preziosa è utilizzata principalmente come allegoria ed è correlata a figure e concetti cristiani, in *SGGK* è utilizzata in correlazione al suo significato di pietra preziosa che svolge un ruolo più generale e inanimato. La terminologia descrittiva usata dal poeta per riferirsi alla perla allude all' immaginario comune medievale ed al metodo applicato nelle sue descrizioni lapidarie. Il manoscritto Cotton Nero condivide l'approccio e la terminologia con i testi lapidari medievali, che, come i poemi, descrivono la pietra preziosa attraverso il suo colore, forma, luminosità e preziosità. *Pearl* e *Cleanness* descrivono la pietra preziosa utilizzando una terminologia descrittiva simile, facendo riferimento alla sua rotondità, levigatezza, immacolatezza, colore bianco e luminosità. Al contrario, a causa dell'uso sporadico dell'immagine delle perle, *SGGK* non utilizza un'ampia terminologia descrittiva. Nella tradizione classica e cristiana, quindi, alla perla vengono associati molteplici significati, qualità e figure. La perla appare come un'immagine più malleabile e flessibile, con una strana origine che unisce processi naturali ad un senso di mistero ed evanescenza, e nella sua rotondità e candore fornisce idee di perfezione della forma e purezza del colore. La malleabilità della simbologia della perla rende questa pietra preziosa il simbolo perfetto da utilizzare in composizioni didattiche come le poesie del Cotton Nero. Il poeta utilizza i vari concetti a cui la perla è associata nella tradizione cristiana per trasmettere i molteplici significati e per caratterizzare molteplici personaggi delle poesie.

Il capitolo conclusivo espande le analisi dei precedenti capitoli, in particolare introducendo l'associazione tra le figure liminali e la loro visibile associazione con la perla all'interno dei poemi.

Nella tradizione cristiana e nelle opere lapidarie la perla è associata al concetto di liminalità. Questa pietra preziosa non appartiene interamente allo stato inanimato né a quello animato, essa è infatti una gemma concepita e creata da una creatura animata, l'ostrica. Forse è proprio per il suo legame con il concetto di liminalità che, nelle poesie, viene associato alla *Pearl-Maiden*, alla Vergine Maria, a Cristo e a Lady Bertilak, tutte figure che non appartengono del tutto all'umano o al regno spirituale. La *Pearl-Maiden* è una delle anime beate che viene vista dal *Jeweller* attraverso una visione onirica, evento che gli permette di assistere al lusso del regno celeste. Nella tradizione cristiana e nei poemi la Vergine Maria e Cristo sono figure che appartengono ad entrambi i regni. Maria è in grado di concepire il Figlio di Dio attraverso lo Spirito celeste e Gesù Cristo è una creatura umana e divina allo stesso tempo. Allo stesso modo, alla fine del poema, si scopre che Lady Bertilak è Morgan Le Fay, un'incantatrice, quindi una figura appartenente sia allo stato soprannaturale che a quello umano. Inoltre, nei poemi e nelle Sacre Scritture, tutte le figure legate alla perla svolgono il ruolo di mediatrici tra i valori celesti e quelli terreni. Questo schema potrebbe spiegare l'assenza di pietre in *Patience*, in cui il protagonista, Giona, parla direttamente con Dio e non ha bisogno di agenti intermediari. Da questa analisi dell'immaginario della perla nei poemi di Cotton Nero, è evidente che la pietra preziosa è utilizzata come ornamento principale e simbolo per le figure liminali e mediatrici sia nella tradizione cristiana che nelle narrazioni. L'uso delle immagini della pietra come caratteristiche principali di particolari personaggi aiuta il lettore a identificare un presagio del bisogno di intercessione del protagonista. Il *Jeweller* ha bisogno dell'aiuto della fanciulla per comprendere la differenza tra i valori terreni e celesti. Belshazzar ha bisogno dell'intervento di Daniele. Sir Gawain ha bisogno dell'intercessione di Lady Bertilak per mettere in discussione i suoi valori cavallereschi e cristiani. Tuttavia, le poesie aiutano il lettore a comprendere i diversi significati della pietra preziosa. Mentre in *Pearl* la simbologia portata dalla fanciulla è ampiamente spiegata, in *Cleanness* e *SGGK* è richiesto al lettore di aver compreso e interiorizzato i significati della perla introdotti nel primo poema per interpretare le lezioni didattiche delle poesie. In queste ultime composizioni, in particolare in *SGGK*, l'immaginario della perla è semplicemente accennato ed è dovere del lettore comprendere la complessa simbologia della pietra preziosa che il poeta si aspetta sia stata ormai interiorizzata. Quando il poeta presenta Lady Bertilak mentre indossa delle perle, ci si aspetta che il lettore riconosca che sarà un agente mediatore e che svolgerà un ruolo simile a quello della *Pearl-Maiden* e di Daniele. Tuttavia, il raggiungimento di questo livello di comprensione è reso possibile solo dall'aver letto o ascoltato tutte le poesie del manoscritto. È solo allora attraverso la comprensione delle immagini lapidarie che lo scopo omiletico delle poesie può essere raggiunto.