

Chapter 23

Planted spirits and Plantagenet ethos

14TH CENTURY SENSE TO THE PLANT NAME WITH EVIDENCE IN THE PEARL POET'S POEMS.

August 2001. One of a series of Chapters by Dr. John S. Plant, Keele University, England, ST5 5BG.

It is conceivable that sense in the Plant name may date back to early medieval times though it is uncertain that there was hereditary continuity from the times of the 8th century Merovingian name Plantard¹. By the late 14th century, evidence of meaning can be analysed for the Plant homeland of east-Cheshire, for where clues can be sought in the character of the Green Knight, for example, who appears in a poem of the so-called 'Pearl poet' or 'Gawain poet'. A scheme of understanding can be constructed for the Plant name that remains consistent with local literature, customs, and dialect. An anagogical interpretation of the name, with sense related to worshipping the Lord's ancestral plant (OED *plant* *n*¹ 11b), seems more likely than 'a gardener' and this may underlie an influential 'Plantagenet ethos' extending from France.

23.1 A backdrop of *spiritual* Natural History

Sthough there is for example earlier evidence for 'Plant-like' names, in medieval France, P.H.Reaney² restricts his consideration to just *some* of the 'Plant like' names that can be found in 13th century England — he thereby offers a meaning 'a gardener' for Plant. A fuller consideration of the evidence, however, indicates a different meaning. It is to be noted, in particular, that sense to a name such as *Plant* needs careful consideration in a context of contemporary beliefs.

In 12th century "Plantagenet" England, there were a variety of illustrated books — herbals, bestiaries, lapidaries. Though the underlying content was little changed from Pliny's *Natural History*, considerable efforts were made to add descriptions and moralisations from uptodate authors like Gerald of Wales and Peter of Cornwall. In the late 12th century, most students were concerned with adding to the moral superstructure of ancient observations³ rather than extending the physical observations themselves⁴. The *De Naturis Rerum* of Alexander Neckam (1157-1217)⁵ was a huge collection of spiritual interpretations of natural phenomena taken from a large number of sources. A comment in its preface betrays its emphasis of interpretation:-

I do not wish the reader to think that I am investigating the nature of things in order to write a philosophical or physical work: I am writing a moral (that is to say allegorical) treatise.'

Such evidence suggests that it may be appropriate to seek *spiritual* or *anagogical* interpretations of such 13th century English names as Planterose and Plante.

¹Y-line DNA testing may throw some further light on this point.

²P.H.Reaney (1958) *Dictionary of British Surnames*.

³For example, a new abbreviation of Pliny's *Natural History* was made c1170 by Roger of Cricklade, prior of St Frideswide in Oxford, and presented to Henry II.

⁴R.W.Southern (1992) *Robert Grosseteste; The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, pps 96-101.

⁵Alexander Neckam *De Naturis Rerum*, ed Thomas Wright, RS, 1863, esp. pps 2-3, 163-4, 168-9.

Nequam's botany begins by addressing the question of why does a plant (*herba*) grow green or fresh (*viridis*). He notes the blackening effects of cold, dry earth (*cf.* the darkness of rot) and the whitening effects of cold, wet water (*cf.* the light of creation and generation). He then proceeds to the question of why do herbs of contrary effects grow in the same earth. From there, he progresses to the various moral qualities of various plants. In moralising about the rose, Nequam makes points of precaution and longing, along the lines of:-

*A bramble of spine armour begets the rose whose touch is sweet and smooth ... Just as under
the rose are concealed afflicting thorns, so is desire of familiarity disquieting to the soul.*

A fitting interpretation to the name *Planterose* (c1230) might accordingly be an '*implanter of a foreboding longing of the soul*'. This would be in keeping with the contemporary name *Plantefolie* (c1209) which means an '*implanter of contrition of sin*'.

23.2 The Pearl poet and the word *plant*

The Pearl poet has been tentatively identified with, for example, the Rector of Stockport around the times of the c1340 local marriage of Sir Edward Warren, of the illegitimate Warren Plant(a/e)genet descent, into *de Stockport* lands. The last Warren earl of Surrey died in 1347 and the Plant surname is thereafter found in proximity to the illegitimate Warren descent around east Cheshire. Though there is controversy over the precise interpretation of much in the medieval North West Midlands dialect, the poems (c1360-90) of the so-called *Pearl poet* can be used to elucidate a meaning to the Plant name *in its 14th century east Cheshire homeland*.

A medieval emphasis on *spices* is worth examining in detail since this is key to the Pearl poet's use of the word *plonttez*. To pursue such a clue, we may turn first to Herbert Pilch (1964)⁶ who notes, for example, that the bride in the *Song of Solomon* is described by:-

*My sister, my spouse is a garden enclosed
a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up ...
Arise north wind, and come, south wind;
blow through my garden and let the aromatic spices thereof flow.*

Here, the spreading of spice aroma may be taken to symbolise the spreading of the bride's symbolic form which is said to represent the spreading of the spirit of the church.

To such a concept of *spice* can be added an understanding of some contemporary philosophy which is relevant to an understanding of the *perle* of the Pearl poet. For the "Plantagenet scholastic" Robert Grosseteste (c1170-1265), spiritual corporeal light permeated the body and transmitted to it the will of the incorporeal soul. Rather like received pearls of wisdom, the soul embraced God's *plant*. This *plant* included not only created intelligence directly from God's spiritual Word but also powers from the ancestral *plant* through generation of the life species. For example, the vegetative generative power was exhibited as the mineral power as well as in the plant and animal species and in the reproduction of humans. In the light of such a philosophy, it may be commented that it was effectively by transubstantiating through the life species that the pearl *gem* achieves, in the *Pearl* poem, orthodox eternity becoming first a dead seed and then '*that special spice*'⁷ and becoming, by the poem's end, the spiritually ascended Pearl Maiden as a bride of Christ in a courtly heaven. As will be explained further below, 'that special spice' may be interpreted as 'that special form or species' issuing from a *plant-egg* (OED *plant* *n*¹ 11a) of creation.

The 3rd stanza of the Pearl poet's poem *Pearl* has been considered by many to display

⁶The Middle English Pearl, edited by John Conley (1970), pps 173-5.

⁷*Pearl*, lines #235 and #938.

much of that poem's perspective⁸. For some, it describes the grave of the Pearl Maiden⁹ though, for others, this grave is initially identified with the spot where the pearl *gem* was lost which is next identified with a turfed seat or mound, with spices, in a contemporary garden¹⁰. With Luttrell's translation, this stanza reads:-

*That spot, where such riches have run to rot,
must surely spread with spices,
and yellow, blue, and red flowers
shine there brightly in the sun.
Flower and fruit cannot be without vigour
where it fell down into the dark soil;
for every gresse must grow from dead seed;
otherwise no wheat would be gathered into the barn;
Everything good always takes its origin from what is good;
so excellent a seed cannot then fail
to have rising spices springing up from it,
that precious pearl without a spot.*

As the narrator falls into a dream in *Pearl*, his '*spyryt sprang in space*' (line #61) and he was led by Fortune into a '*fryth*' (line #97) where (lines #103-4):-

*The fyrre in the fryth, the feier con ryse
the playn, the plonttez, the spyse, the perez.*

The first line can be translated as *The farther into the king's (or lord's) forrest (or peace), the fair can rise*. However, the second line is then generally translated, rather unimaginatively, as *the meadow, the shrubs, the spice plants, and the pears*, giving *plonttez* the rather arbitrary meaning 'shrubs'. However, reference to the Middle English Dictionary shows that a more purposeful interpretation of this second line is:-

the playn, — *the earth,*

the plonttez, — *the planted spiritual forms of the species,*

the spyse, — *the visible forms or shapes of those species^a,*

the perez — *the nobles, or peers of the king (on earth or in heaven).*

^aIn particular, it can be noted that the Middle English Dictionary defines *spice n(2)* as:-

1. (a) A type or kind or person, flavour, etc.; (b) the human species; (c) a species of plant; a genus of animals, fish, trees, etc.; (d) a type or variety of disease, humour, etc.; (e) a sub-class or branch of sin, penance, moral virtue, etc.; (f) a subdivision of a subject of study; etc.
2. (a) A visible form or shape; appearance or semblance; (b) the intelligible or sensible aspect of an object or odour; *plural* the shapes or forms of that which is perceived by any of the senses; (c) the bread or wine as the eucharistic element in its physical or visible form; (d) splendour, beauty.

A meaning for *plonttez* is hence inserted as '*the planted spiritual forms of the species*' and such sense is in keeping with contemporary Middle English reference to '*planted virtue*', the '*planted Word of God's creation*', and the '*planted grace of noble lineage*'. More particularly, this remains in keeping with the Pearl poet's use of the word *plant(t)ed* in other poems.

Lines #1006-7 of the Pearl poet's poem *Cleanness* (sometimes called instead *Purity*) are:-

*That euer [ever] hade ben an erde [region] of erthe the swetest [fairest]
As aparaunt [dependency] to paradis that plantted the drystyn [Lord]*

⁸Edward Vasta (1967) *Pearl: Immortal Flowers and the Pearl's Decay*, Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LXVI, pps 519-31; included in *The Middle English Pearl*, edited by John Conley (1970), esp. pps 185-6.

⁹Herbert Pilch (1964) *The Middle English Pearl: Its Relation to the Roman de la Rose*, Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, LXV, pps 427-446; in John Conley (1970) *ibid*, esp. p 172.

¹⁰C.A.Luttrell (1965) *Pearl: Symbolism in a Garden Setting* Neophilologus, VLIX, pps 160-176; in John Conley (1970) *ibid*, esp. p 308.

This refers to the Lord's *planting* of the form of paradise on earth — in other words, *planting* implies a transmission of the spiritual form of an elevated paradise to the subordinate earth. In a rather similar fashion, lines #109-112 of the Pearl poet's poem *Patience* read:-


Watz neuer [There was never] *so joyful a Jue* [Jew] *as Jonas* [Jonah] *watz thenne* [was then]
That [Who] *the daunger* [power] *of drystyn* [God] *so derfly* [audaciously] *ascaped* [escaped]
He wende wel that [He turned well that, or believed that] *that wyz* [that wise one, i.e. God] *that*
al the worlde planted
Hade no mazz [power] *in that mere* [sea] *no man for to greue* [to bring a man to grief].

Again there is clear reference to God's having *planted* the form, that is to say his having created, in this case, 'all the world'.

From such contemporary literature, it is clear that there is a more general sense to *planting* than just human assistance as a gardener to the regeneration of *vegetable* life.

To summarise, the Pearl poet's use of the word *pl(a/o)nte* is significantly different from modern senses that are usually assumed for the word *plant* and it is to be doubted that *Plant* meant just a 'gardener'. As a surname, *Pl(a/o/e)nt(e)* evidently relates to God's creation of human life and it can be taken to mean the '*planted (or created) form (or spice or species) of the lord*'.

23.3 Reassessing Plantagenet and similar names

 n the late 12th century, in "Plantagenet England", there is mention of elevated bodies emanating their ethos to subordinate bodies. Alexander Nequam, who lectured in theology at Oxford (c1190-7), wrote¹¹:-

'The stars are placed on high to give light to many. Similarly, spiritual men, the lights of this world, are useful to many if they are in high positions.'

Few were in higher positions than the Warren earls of Surrey who were evidently using *Plant(a/e)genet* as a surname and this may have sustained sense to *Plant* and similar names near them.

23.3.1 A controversial medieval background to the Plantagenet name

The Plantagenet name had arisen in 12th century France. Earlier in medieval times, the long haired Merovingian priest kings, from the Frankish Sicambrian tribe, had ruled large parts of France and Germany between the 5th and 8th centuries¹². The 7th century chronicler Fredegar maintained that the chieftain, Merovich, had been conceived when Chlodio's wife went swimming and encountered a sea monster called a Quinotaur. This implies supernatural origins for the Merovingian kings or an allusion to an early Christian heretical belief¹³. Fredegar¹⁴ implicitly compared the sons of the great Merovingian king, Clovis I (481-511), to bears and wolves and Clovis's grandsons to dogs. NeoPlatonic belief included animal spirits attached to the ancestral *plant* of creation.

More controversially there is a published genealogy for the Counts of Razés in which 'Plant like' names are associated with the lost heirs of the Merovingian kings. The surviving surname *Plantard* is well recorded in France since 732AD and it is said to mean '*ardently flowering offshoot*' of the Merovingian vine, in other words *réjeton ardent*. This name is said to relate on to the name *Plantavelu* (c886) providing hints of creation or generation through

¹¹*De Naturis Rerum*, pps 37-8.

¹²In return for military protection, however, Pope Ravenna had bestowed legitimisation of the title of king on Pepin in place of the last of the Merovingian kings. This led on to political severance between the Western and Eastern Empires. Bertrand Russell (1996) *History of Western Philosophy*, pps 386-7.

¹³At this point of the story the 6th century historian Gregory, Bishop of Tours, digressed to an outburst against idolatry. Ian Wood (1994) *The Merovingian Kingdoms 250-751*, p 37.

¹⁴Fredegar, III, 12.

The *nutritive* Virgin and Child (Line #19177) “Even Albumazar, however he knew about the matter, testifies that with the sign of the virgin would be born a worthy maiden who will be, he says, virgin and mother and will give suck to her father, and whose husband will be near her without touching her at all.”



The “Trinitarian” fountain of life issuing *nutritive* milk and *generative* fluid (cf. a *Eucharistic element*) (Line #20471) “The fountain that I have spoken of, with its beauty and its usefulness as a cure for all tired-out animals, always rolls its delicious waters, sweet, clear, and lively, from those fine springs. ... We have never seen such a fountain, for it issues from itself. Other fountains, issuing from alien veins, do not produce it. ... It needs no marble stone nor the covering of a tree, for water, never ceasing, comes from a source so high that no tree can grow so tall that the height of the water is not greater.”



Figure 23.1: Illustrations relating to the *nutritive* and *generative* vegetative soul powers and the *planted* Word in a 15th century illuminated manuscript of the 13th century *Roman de la Rose* (MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 195, French, 1487-95, executed for Charles d’Orléans and his wife Louise de Savoie — the illuminations are attributed to Robinet Testard.). See Figure 23.2 for the *augmentative* power.

the species since *velu*, in modern French, means ‘hairy, shaggy or rough; or hairy part’¹⁵. A further name *Plant-Amor* (c975) appears in the controversial Razés genealogy and it can be translated as an ‘establisher or offshoot of the Lord’s creative love’¹⁶. This then provides a background of creative or generative senses to ‘Plant like’ names such as *Plantagenet*¹⁷.

It has been argued, earlier in the current work (Chapter 22), on the basis of other evidence, that Plantagenet can mean either ‘sprig of broom’ or ‘of well balanced flesh, transubstantiated through the plant and horse genera, capable of receiving a high implant of God’s Word’. Such an interpretation is in keeping with such evidence as, for example, the teachings of Neo-Platonic philosophy, the teachings of Grosseteste, and of Averroes (1126-98) who reiterated an ancient scheme for the generation of man from the four elements, through the plants and animals to humans (Chapter 20).

23.3.2 The Plant(a/e)genet name and the Pearl poet

The locations associated with the writings of the Pearl poet and the *Roman de la Rose* poem may be thought to be compatible with an idea that these poems may have shown a moderate awareness of some “Plantagenet favoured” concepts. The 14th century Pearl poet refers to the 13th century *Roman de la Rose* poem, which was written ‘not far’ from “Plantagenet Anjou” (Figure 23.1). Some similar ideas to those near “Plantagenet Anjou” in western France may have followed through into the NW Midlands Plant homeland, albeit perhaps with a different emphasis (*cf.* Figure 23.2).

There were three *vegetative* operations of the soul. The most commonly referenced is *nutrition*, rather more than *augmentation* or *generation*. There is widespread emphasis of the *nutritive* in the Pearl poet’s poems. The following example seemingly relates, furthermore, to the meaning of the Plant(a/e)genet name (the following extract is from a poem called *Patience*, lines #391-2):-

Sesez childer of her sok, [Snatch children from sucking her,] *soghe hem so neuer*, [sow them so never,]
Ne best bite on no brom, [Neither beast eat broom,] *ne no bent nauther*, [or field neither,]

As well as referring to the nutritive, the first line above appears to associate babes with the sowing of seed and, hence, continues an association with the vegetative. The second line refers to broom as the nutritive source for beasts before going on to refer to the pasture of the fields. This can be compared with the suggestion in Chapter 21 that broom may have been seen as a vegetative origin, and hence an origin for life, perhaps partly because it was a source of vegetative powers to the parasitic herb broomrape and thereon to other

¹⁵This allusion to hair might be related back to deference to the magic of long hair, which had been a characteristic of the Merovingians, and this might be related back still further to Samson of the Old Testament.

¹⁶This can be placed in a context that has been related by some to the cult of the Black Virgin. This cult, observing the day of January 19, dates from at least 792-5AD. V.Saxer (Paris 1959) *Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident*, Vol.2, p 412.

¹⁷Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (1996) *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, pps 107, 184, 188, 189, 271, 273, 279, 316, 434, 496. I am grateful to Lizzi Plant for drawing my attention to this reference. It is supposed, in this controversial book, that the ‘lost heirs’ of the Merovingians were the *Plantards*, beginning with Sigisbert IV (676-758) Count of Razès. A descendant, another Count of Razès was called Bernard *Plantavelu* or *Planta-Pilus* (d877) and he established the Duchy of Aquitaine. His nephew Sigisbert VI married the daughter of Charles II of France and was called Prince Ursus¹⁸ (d 884/5) but he is said to have been the last of the Merovingian Counts of Razès as his line was exiled to Brittany after a failed uprising against Louis II in 881. Prince Ursus’s son, Guillaume II, is said to have fled to England in 914 to escape Viking raids on Brittany and to have started a “blood line” in England called *Planta*. Prince Ursus’s great-great-grandson, Bera VI (d975), is said to have been an ‘architect’ in England and his son Arnaud is said to have founded a family branch called *Plant-Amor*. Bera VI’s great-great-great-great-grandson, Eustache II, Count of Bologne (d1081), is said to have accompanied William the Conqueror to England. It is also said, in this controversial book that a son of Eustache II was Godfroi (1061-1100), Count of Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine, and King of Jerusalem and that, in 1131, Fulques V, Count of Anjou married Godfroi’s niece, the legendary Melusine or Mélisande. Fulques or Fulk V thereby became king of Jerusalem from 1131 until 1143. He was the father of Geoffrey *Plantagenet* of Anjou who was the father of Henry II, King of England (1154-89) and of Hamelin Plantagenet, the Warren Earl of Surrey.

life species.

The most commonly supposed interpretation of the Plant(e/a)genet name is ‘sprig of broom’ and this may be compared with the evidence above that broom was seen as a nutritive source for beasts. Transubstantiation through the horse can be associated with the direct interpretation *plant-horse* of *Planta-Genet* — it can be added that Nequam had extolled the fine moral qualities of the horse. The *animal*¹⁹ or *light spirits* of contemporary Alchemy, no doubt, would have been seen as an essence that participated in transubstantiating broom (*planta genisita*), as eaten by beasts, to the generative seeds (*plant-eggs*) of animal life²⁰. This leads on to a notion that there may have been a heightened sense to Plant(e/a)genet in terms of the ‘catalysis’ of flesh (as in ‘plant-horse’ transubstantiation) by spirits from the vegetative, animal, and intellective operations of the soul (Chapters 20 to 22).

Both transubstantiation *and* animal spirits formed an accepted part of medieval belief. Following the tradition of Avicenna, animal spirits are compatible with Grosseteste’s philosophy and such spirits can be considered to be an emanation from the sensory (animal) operations of the soul. It may be noted further that, in medieval Latin²¹, *geneta* means a foal or a civet cat, such that Plant(e/a)genet can be translated not only as ‘plant-foal’ but also as ‘plant-civet’. The civet cat is known for a secretion used in perfume and, for Grosseteste, smell was activated by a mixture of spiritual light and damp misty air such that, in place of ‘transubstantiated through plant and horse’, the noble name Plant(e/a)genet could have become instead an ‘implant (or instiller) of horse or civet cat spirits’. This might have been thought by some to be the essence of the most noble *spiritual* sense to the Plantagenet name. Views that the spirit was more noble than the flesh are borne out, as described below, by a reference to the ‘filth of the *flesh* that horses have used’.

The poem that has been called *Saint Erkenwald* has been attributed to the ‘Pearl poet’, albeit that its content may be associated also with London in South East England which had been under an earlier influence of the Warren Plantagenet earls of Surrey. This poem contains a reference to two crafts of soul and body, which seems consistent with Grosseteste’s model (Chapter 22) that there were two separate entities of soul and flesh which were mediated by spiritual light (lines #344-7):-

*And alle the blee of his body was blakke as the moldes,
As rotten as rottok that rise in powdere,
For as sone [soon] as the soule was sesyd [accepted] in blisse [heaven]
Corrupt was that othir crafte that couert [covered] the bones.*

This can be compared with a further extract from the Pearl poet’s poem *Cleanness* which states (line #202):-

As for the fylth of the flesch that foles [horses] han [have] used

with the poet going on (lines #203-10) to place the uncleanness of that flesh subject to God’s wrath, as even was his most noble angel (Lucifer)²². The apparent absence here of

¹⁹In the Plant homeland, in a legend of the Leek moorlands, the so-called ‘Old Witch of Frith’ transforms herself into the shape of a hare. John Sleigh (1862) *ibid*, pps 163-4. This legend has been associated with a farm called *Old Hag* in Leek parish. In the legend, the Hag transforms herself into the shape of a hare to allow herself, for the sake of a small gratuity, to be coursed by dogs. On one occasion, the leading dog manages a bite before the Hag escapes, as usual, through a gap in the fence and, after she transformed back, she was left with a wound on her forehead.

²⁰Averroes (1126-98) stated *the plant comes into existence through composition out of the elements; it becomes blood and sperm through being eaten by an animal and from sperm and blood comes the animal, as is said in the Divine Words: ‘We created man from an extract of clay ...’.*

²¹R.E.Latham, *Revised Latin Word-list from British and Irish sources.*

²²In the contemporary philosophy this can be compared with a notion that, following the Black Death, transmuted plant and horse flesh was seen as less noble than the separate soul, with its vegetative, sensory, and intellective operations. In the *Commentary on Celestial Hierarchy*, Grosseteste had commented that the ‘obstacle impeding the soul’ was that of the flesh and inordinate affections combined. In the *Hexameron*, Grosseteste had looked upon the *whole man*, from the *intelligentia* to the body, as fallen and redeemed — he had not looked upon redemption as increasing freedom of the soul from the body but as a liberation from the totality of conditions which have unhinged human nature.

In the Plant homeland, the name of Dieulacress Abbey translates as ‘God increase it’^a. The Virgin Mary appears in the seal (Figure 23.2) of John Plant near Dieulacress Abbey which was in the Plant homeland parish of Leek. A local legend^b maintains that the Abbey foundation had followed a dream of Ranulph, earl of Chester (d 1232)^c in which he was told that a ladder would be built on the site, which was formerly a chapel to the Virgin, by which the prayers of angels could ascend and descend carrying men’s vows and God’s favours. In a similar philosophy, a ladder or climbing plant could be visualised as seeking the highest possible level of spiritual favour^d. The *augmentative* meaning ‘God increase it can be compared with a petition to the vegetative function of *augmentation* in a separate noble soul for abundant growth.

The appending of a heraldic red rose to the Plant blazon has been tentatively associated with the reconciliation of the Warrens and the Lancastrians after their feud. According to heraldic tradition, the rose badge of Edmund, first earl of Lancaster, was tinctured red to difference it from the gold rose of his brother, Edward I. Heraldic *augmentation* might be compared with an elevated sense to *rose*.

In the court of Edward I, there are records of a practice of ‘chair lifting’ and, given Grosseteste’s philosophy, this might be associated with elevating a person to receive a higher level of spiritual (angelic) light. The same custom, generally thought locally to be a particular example of a more widespread practice called ‘heaving’, is in evidence for the Plant homeland. In Leek, on Easter^e Monday, it was customary for the young men to deck out a chair with flowers and ribands, to carry it about, compelling every young woman they met to get in it, and suffer herself to be lifted as high as they could reach, or to be kissed, or pay a forfeit. On Easter Tuesday the young women decked out their chair, and lifted the men, or made them pay a fine^f. This lifting might be seen as petitioning for augmentation, or Mary’s *grace of grewe*, as can be associated with the Dieulacress Abbey legend, as well as with the Pearl poet’s evident meaning of *rose* as elevation.

In the Pearl poet’s poem *Pearl*, the pearl in the first stanza is put forward in terms of its great earthly value but, by the last stanza, the concern is with pleasing the Prince of heaven, such that the Dreamer-narrator should become one of the *precious perlez vnto His pay*. When he learns that the ‘Pearl Maiden’ has been married to Christ (*cf.* the Black Virgin), as each soul is united with God in heaven, the Dreamer protests (lines #423-31):-

Art thou the quene of heuenez blwe, [Are you the queen of blue heaven,]
That al thys worlde schal do honour? [To whom all this world shall do honour?]
We leuen [rise or gain Word] *on Marye that grace of grewe*,
That ber a barne [child] *of virgyn flour*.
The crowne fro hyr quo mozt rewme [Who could remove the crown from her]
But ho hir passed in sum fauour? [But she who (sur)passed her in full grace or favour?]
Now, for singlarity [singularity] *o hyr dousour* [of her sweetness]
We calle hyr Fenyx [Phoenix] *of Arraby*,
That fereles fleze of hyr Fasor — [Who uniquely flew from her Creator —]
Lyk to the quen of cortaysye [courtesy].

This refers to rising on Mary’s grace of growth that bore a child from the (vegetative) *flour* or flower and likens this to the Phoenix (associated with rising in rebirth from the ashes) of Arabia, perhaps signifying the Magdalene or Black Virgin.

Many believed in the late infusion of the intellective soul, until when a foetus was solely vegetative and sensory, and it seems apt to note in particular that the vegetative had the function of augmentation as well as of generation so that, with Mary’s ‘*grace of grewe*’, together with God’s *planted* Word, even the legacy of the Christian Messiah could ensue.

^aM.W.Greenslade & D.G.Stewart (1998) *A History of Staffordshire*, p 57.

^bJohn Sleigh (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek in Staffordshire*, pps 36-7.

^cChapter 18.

^dHowever, away from the Plant homeland, there was evident satire of the climbing plant in the form of a vetch. The Yorkshire mystic Richard Rolle (c1300-49) referred to ‘*augmentum iugerit omnium uiciorum*’ which can be translated as ‘judges an increase of all vetches’ while, at Lincoln in 1434, Richard Misyn translated this as ‘norrysches the plants of all vyce’ (Chapter 21).

^eThe word Easter comes from the Anglo-Saxon Spring goddess, Eostre, and this was converted into a festival of Christ’s rising from the dead, by Saint Bede in the 8th century.

^fJohn Sleigh (1862) *ibid*, pps 138-9.

Table 23.1: Augmentation, the Rose, and Mary’s *grace of grewe*

any attempt to defend a concept of ‘horse used flesh’²³ might be related to the Warren’s having distanced themselves from their erstwhile Plantagenet name, since they had feuded with the Lancastrians who had seemingly taken over that name, with its plant-horse sense. The Warren affinity may have retained faith, however, in senses of a *spiritual plant-egg of creation* as the essence of a ‘plant-horse’ or ‘plant-civet’ interpretation of Plantagenet²⁴.

23.3.3 Understanding Planterose in spirit as well as flesh

The meaning of *rose* is key when considering a consistent scheme of interpretation for a set of early 13th century ‘Plant like’ names in England. Planterose has been cited as the strongest of evidence for a ‘gardener’ meaning, though this adheres to a modern interest in earthly plant flesh. The presumed ‘gardener’ meaning is to be doubted since it is incompatible with sense for the contemporary name Plantefolie for example (Chapter 21).

In keeping with the Middle English Dictionary, Planterose (1230) can be translated (more consistently with other names) as a ‘grown (graft or im)plant’ or, more anagogically, as a ‘raised or roused spirits imparter’. High spirits are in evidence in the Plant homeland in a chair lifting ceremony that was found also in Edward I’s court (Table 23.1) — chair lifting might be considered to have been a petitioning for a higher level of heavenly spirit. Given known medieval sense to ‘rose’ rather similar to ‘rows’, Planterose can become furthermore an ‘establisher of elevated spirits, order, or hierarchy’. Such meanings can be assessed further, for the Plant homeland, in the poems of the Pearl poet.

In the Pearl poet’s poem *Cleanness*, rose scent is evidently associated with the fragrance of Virgin birth since the birth is followed by the line (line #1079):-

And there watz rose reflayr [?:reflower or scent] *where rotz* [roots or decay] *hatz ben euer* [ever],

This seems to stress the presence of a fragrant vegetative spirit in place of rot. This can be taken to be symbolic of the roots of life. At that time there was particular interest in generated life as against rot or corruption with, for example, Roger Bacon (c1214-92) associating the life force with the vegetative power of *augmentation*, specifically with sense in the augmentation of light as against its diminution. Planterose accordingly carries sense as an ‘instiller of fragrant life-raising spirits’.

For the name Rose, Reaney²⁵ offers the meanings ‘fame-kind’ or ‘from the sign of the rose’ which is consistent with a notion that *rose* was *symbolic* also of a sense of elevated praise. Such sense is found in the writings of the Pearl poet. In the poem *Cleanness*, there is the word *rose* with the meaning ‘to elevate or to praise’ (*Cleanness* lines #1371-2):-

To rose him in his rialty [royalty] *rych men soghtten* [sought or went]
And mony [many] *a baroun ful bolde, to Babylon the noble.*

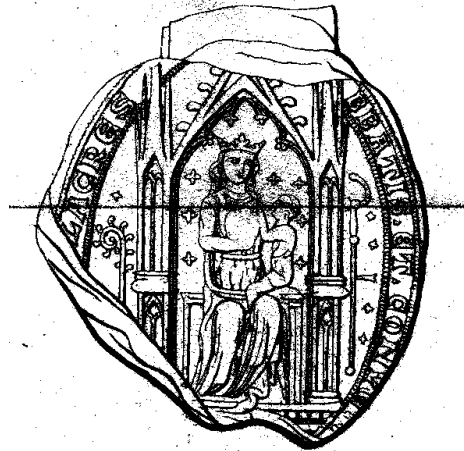
Thus, in the Pearl poet’s poem *Cleanness*, the word *rose* may be seen as representing either the raising of a vegetative foetus to its fragrant birth, or the raising of rousing praise. There are also references to *rose* in the Pearl poet’s poem *Pearl*, with senses of ascension through death, or a lasting presence of soul in a courtly heaven.

In *Pearl*, the rose is an ephemeral flower, with the death of the Pearl Maiden, or perhaps the ascension of a soul (Pearl lines #269-70):-

²³The Albigenses (Cathars) are alleged to have believed that all matter was created by an evil principal and therefore the flesh should be thoroughly mortified.

²⁴The Warren affinity in the Plant homeland of east Cheshire could have retained particular faith in concepts of soul, perhaps with some similarity to Grosseteste’s model of a separate noble soul with its vegetative and other operations.

²⁵P.H.Reaney (1958) *A Dictionary of British Surnames*.



DEC. 10. 1534.

A SALAMANDER LIVES IN THE FIRE
WHICH IMPARTS TO IT A MOST GLORIOUS HUE.



This is the Reiteration, gradation, and amelioration of the Tincture,
or Philosophers' Stone; and the whole is called its Augmentation.

Figure 23.2: The name of Dieulacress Abbey, in Leek parish, is translated as “God increase it” which can be related to the *augmentative* power of the vegetative soul. *Augmentation* can be associated with expansion in a fire of flames or love, the Salamanders’ fabled ability to regrow a limb, and the alchemists’ dream of a Philosophers’ Stone to transmute metals to gold (after Oliver C. de C. Ellis (1932) *A History of Fire and Flame*). More particularly, there is an early local literary link to the ‘*grace of grewe*’ of Mary (the Virgin or the Black Virgin, the Magdalene). The seal of John Plant of Stonycliffe in Leek parish was the crowned Virgin with a child in her arms, in an arch (John Sleigh (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek in Staffordshire*).

For that thou lestez [For that which you endured] *wotz bot* [was but] *a rose* [perhaps *rose* as an ascension though then qualified as an earthly flower or longing]
That flowered and fayled [failed in the flesh but perhaps not as soul] *as kynde* [descended spiritual form for its species perhaps in conjunction with *kind* meaning the two Eucharistic elements] *hit gave* [gave to it].

In a further extract from this poem (Table 23.1), there is mention of Mary's '*grace of grewe*', the bearing of a child from a virgin *flour* (*cf.* the elevated hedge rose flower), and the Arabian Phoenix flying from the flames as though to rise to a courtly or heavenly queen (*cf.* the Virgin or, indeed, the medieval cult of the Black Virgin, the Magdalene). With the 'Pearl Maiden' married to Christ in heaven (*cf.* the Magdalene), the rose has more clearly *ascended* heavenly associations, becoming more clearly the traditional rose of a courtly or heavenly love (Pearl lines #906-8):-

And thou so ryche a reken [noble] *rose*,
And bydez [remains] *here by this blysfyl* [heavenly] *bonc* [bank]
There lyuez [life or soul] *lyste* [it pleases] *may neuer* [never] *lose* [*i.e.* the Dreamer considers the noble *rose* as an eternal soul in heaven].

Though it seems that most modern minded people jump (mistakenly, it seems) to assuming that Planterose associates mostly with 'gardening', the evidence of the Pearl poet suggests that this is substantially inappropriate to the contemporary "Plantagenet ethos". Instead, it seems probable that the predominant emphasis was anagogical and focussed on an elevated (courtly or heavenly) meaning of Planterose as an elevated 'planted spirit' having grown in life through the vegetative *augmentative* power²⁶. The predominant meanings of Planterose may accordingly have been an 'implant(er) of the fragrance of a grown or ascended (heavenly) spirit' and, also, an 'impart(er) of praising (courtly) spirits'.

23.4 Identifying the most topical meaning of Plant

The 13th century meanings for some 'Plant related' names can be sought in a philosophy that was close to the activities of the Warren Plantagenets. Anagogical senses to the names Plantagenet and Planterose have been considered in some detail above. Another name is Plantebene (1199) and this also has spiritual sense, as a 'petitioner of the Virgin Mary of favour of the plant soul' (Chapter 21). The Pearl poet refers to the Virgin Mary's '*grace of grewe*' (Table 23.1). This suggests that there may have been particular sense to Plantebene as a 'petitioner of favour of Mary's grace of grewe' (*i.e.* a petitioner of favour of the vegetative power of augmentation). Such meaning is reminiscent of a contemporary legend, in the Plant homeland, for Dieulacress Abbey (Table 23.1) which relates to angelic spirits elevating men's vows and returning God's favours in a context of Dieulacress meaning 'God increase it'. This suggests a more spiritual meaning to Plantebene than just a 'gardener'. According to Reaney²⁷, the name Bean may mean kindly, King of the Company, or life. Thus, Plantebene may become a 'kindly, kingly, or hallowed planting of life giving spirits' as a response to petitioning for augmentation. This is in keeping with a scheme for the likely meaning of other 'Plant like' names.

A general sense for Plant might accordingly be considered to be an '(im)plant or (im)planter of spirits'. Various types of spirit might be considered:-

²⁶The *augmentative* operation of the soul can be associated with a 'plant', in as much as this was a *vegetative* operation, and this yields sense in culturing life, though this need not necessarily imply sense in 'horticulture'. The sense of an *augmentative* capability of a 'plant' may well have been reinforced by the more *elevated* senses of the word *rose* in conjunction with the *plant* component of the name Planterose implying, as discussed earlier, the formation of created human (rather than just vegetable) spirits.

²⁷P.H.Reaney (1958) *Dictionary of British Surnames*.

In *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, P.H.Reaney (1958) lists early instances of the surname Green — these are *de Grene* 1188 (Kent), *de la Greene* 1200 (Norfolk), *Attegrene* 1206 (Lincolnshire), etc. He suggests that this usually means ‘from residence near the village green’ but adds that occasionally we may have green in the sense ‘young, immature’ which may be compared with the French names *Vert* and *Levert* — Dauzat^a refers to ‘*le verdeur de l’homme, sa vigueur, sa jeunesse, sa vivacité*’.

In *English Surnames*, C.M.Matthews (1966) points out that colours are generally associable with hair colour, but not so for Green(e). In early 1960’s Directories, Green is the 9th most common surname in London and New York. Matthews adds that, in some villages, the leading figure in spring ceremonies was dressed in green leaves and spoken of as ‘the green man’ or ‘Jack in the Green’, thereby personifying the figure of spring and linking the ceremony to ancient fertility cults. He continues that, of the early forms of this name, *atte Grene* is definitely locative but *de la Grene* is open to other possibilities. These suppositions of Matthews conform with the current thesis that *de la Plaunt* means ‘from the first principal of life’ (*cf.* Aquinas).

For the context of the Plant name’s formation, light explained both the vegetative ‘life force’ and the vehicle by which lordly Word was transported. Light, in the early 13th century English philosophy of Grosseteste, was not only intermediate of the heavens and the soul but also intermediate of the soul and the body. The spiritual light in humans (*irradiato spiritualis*) was engendered by lordly light (*lux suprema*) and, rather similarly, there were two types of light involved in seeing a colour such as green. Grosseteste maintained that light is *incorporated* into a medium and it requires further light to be shone on it from from outside before it is made capable of affecting the eye^b.

^aA. Dauzat (1951) *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de familles et prénoms de France*.

^bJames McEvoy (1982) *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pps 321-2.

Table 23.2: Published views about the name Green

Plantagenet: horse, civet, noble	Plantebene: pleasant, kingly, lively, hallowed
Plente: generous, abundant, fertile	vegetative: nutritive, augmentative, generative
Plantefolie: contrite	Planterose: elevated, courtly, heavenly, fragrant, orderly
Plantefene: happy, eager	

Rather similarly, the spirit of green *incorporated light* might be considered to have been *vigorous* and *youthful*, as for the French name *Vert* (Table 23.2). In disputes over land in Leek parish (Chapter 18), the complainants were, in 1567, Christopher Plante and Thomas Plant but, by 1591, they were Thomas Greene and Lawrence Plont. Given the scope for some overlap in meaning between the names, it might be *wondered* if, in this main Plant homeland, Greene was on occasion an alias for Plante.

Following the death of the last Warren earl of Surrey in 1347, the Pearl poet refers to the giant Green Knight. It may even be imagined that this headless Green Knight, with his green horse, gone from court to Cheshire, could have been reminiscent of the now leaderless Warren Plantagenet affinity, gone from court to east Cheshire though this character might alternatively be associated with the beheaded medieval giant Bran, who was associated with the cauldron of life. There is a pervasive local legend of the Leek moorlands, in the Plant homeland²⁸, of a ghostly headless horse-rider which might be compared to the local poem of the headless Green Knight. Green might be associated with the *generative* green cord of the Green Knight’s wife or his *augmentative* stature (Table 23.3) or, rather like *Vert*, with the *augmentative* vigour of young green wood.

The giant Green Knight ambivalently pardons Sir Gawain with (Table 23.3):-

As pearl beside thee what *pese* is more precious

This might be associated with elevating the vegetative *peas* to the virtue of *Peace*, as for Grosseteste’s Prince of Peace (Chapter 22). Similar elevation is found for the *pl(a/e/o)nte* of *pees* of the contemporary poet Langland who considered *pees* not as mere vegetable flesh, but who elevated it to the status of the heavenly love of the lord, describing it as the most precious of *vertues*. Langland also elevated the generative, with its association with the vegetative soul, to the status of a *plonte* of *Trewe-love*.

²⁸John Sleight (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek in Staffordshire*, pps 163-4.

There is just a hint of consistency between *plant* as scum in dialect and as the generative life force of the vegetative. In local south Cheshire dialect, *plant* means the scum that rises to the surface of the vinegar²⁹. Though the antiquity of the local dialect word *plant* has not been dated, it might be compared to the formation (planting) of spirit³⁰ in the ‘vegetative (e.g. grape) waters’ of vinegar. This then perhaps points to some consistency of meaning in terms of ‘planted spirits’, whether this be a spirit passing the virtue of the father by seed to the progeny (generation), or a spirit engendered by a divine light (creation), or a spirit emanating from an elevated body (regal ethos), or incorporated spirits from the soul in the body (the transmission of will), or a breath of life as a spiritual emanation from vinegar (cf. the Nag Hammadi scrolls and the resurrection of Jesus)³¹.

Certainly there is Plant homeland evidence of belief in the soul³² as indicated by an old Leek custom on All Saints’ day, November 1st, which involved children begging, or ‘*puling*’ for soul-cakes³³. Soul-cake might be compared with the Eucharistic element, bread, which was produced from the flour of a vegetative seed³⁴.

It may be noted in summary that there are meanings for Plant to be considered that are attached to the vegetative operations of the soul. For Grosseteste, celestial light (*lux suprema*) engendered spirits in the flesh (*irradiato spiritualis*) and, since *spiritus* has sense as ‘breath’, the vegetative ‘life force’ might be compared with a ‘breath of life’ and thereby related to ‘lively emanating spirits’ in a dialect meaning of *plant*. Earlier names in medieval France, such as Plant-Ard and Plant-Amor, seem consistent with a sense involving the generation of ardent offshoots of a loving spirit of the Lord. Late medieval sense in England for Plant, as a ‘planted spirit of the lord’, may have led on to further sense as an ‘establisher child’. Perhaps compatibly with a context of Plantagenet campaigns against the Welsh from Chester, it can be noted that there is a Welsh emphasis on a perhaps rather satirical *fertile* sense as well as on the *child* (in Welsh, *planta* means to beget children and *plant* means child). Preserved meanings suggest that *persistent* senses, from those for an initial meaning of the Plant name, revolve around child (evidently from sense as a planted ‘fertile’ spirit) and also around ‘generous foundation’, which can be compared with a ‘generosity implanter’ sense to the name Pl(a/e)nt(e) (Chapter 21). The Oxford English Dictionary includes reference to two relevant senses of *plant*, relating to *child* and *establishing*³⁵. Similar sense appears in a c1621 Cheshire reference to ‘*that hopeful Plant (cf. young implant of spirit), that is the apparent Heir Of all his glory*’. There was still by then another persistent sense in the Plant homeland, which is *lordly*, as evidenced by a 17th century Wincle Chapel inscription ‘*Here Doe O Lord Svre Plant Thy Word*’. An earthly ‘planted spirit’ sense is hence strongly in evidence for the Plant name, albeit well removed from the late 20th century *presumption* of a ‘gardener’ meaning.

²⁹Vinegar was used for purification, as in the legend of the Leek plague stone. Purification of objects by vinegar on the Leek plague stone has been associated with the 1646-7 plague. John Sleight (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek*, p 28.

³⁰The English word spirits is thought to derive from the Old French word *esperit* or the Latin word *spiritus* meaning breath or spirit.

³¹In medieval philosophy, ‘life giving spirits’ can be associated with the *virtue* of the father. There is little reason to suppose that much distinction was made between spirit as *corporeal* light in the philosophy of Grosseteste or as ether or fragrance or as ‘ghostly mist’ in local legend. With ‘breath of life’ substituted for the role of light in the contemporary philosophy for the vegetative ‘life force’, it becomes conceivable that *plant* could relate to a ‘life giving spirit’ and be associated with the ‘scum that rises in (vegetative) vinegar’, as recorded for Cheshire dialect.

³²Comments on the *transmigration* of souls, as opposed to spiritual emanation, occur in Meun’s continuation, around 1275, of the courtly *Roman de la Rose* poem with ‘*Many people say that (in dreams) their souls leaves their bodies and go with good ladies running around the world ... but this idea is a horrible folly*’.

³³This was accompanied by some such song as ‘*Soul, soul, for All-souls’ sake! pray good mistress a soul-cake; An apple, a pear, a plum, or a cherry, or any good thing to make us merry*’.

³⁴The other Eucharistic element, wine, was like the plant of vinegar in as much as both were produced from ‘vegetative (e.g. grape) waters’.

³⁵The OED defines *plant* as ‘a young person’ or ‘to establish a colony, a religious foundation, etc.’. It can be added that, for the Pearl poet, *plant(t)ed* means ‘established’.

The Pearl poet's poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has attracted particular attention. For us, this poem seems pertinent in trying to understand Green in proximity to the emerging homeland of the Plant name. This poem is in the tradition of Arthurian chivalry with a complex interplay of competing virtues. It is interesting that there are two possible interpretations of the following passage (Lines #482-3), which follows the decapitation of the Green Knight and his departure to the Green Chapel^a:-

*The kyng and the gode knyght, and kene [bold or, alternatively, bitter] men hem serued [served them]
Of alle dayntyez [luxuries or, alternatively, courtesies] double, as derrest myght falle [the most precious
(angelic light) might descend or, alternatively, the noblest men might perish]
Wyth alle manner of mete and mynstralcie both [With both all kinds of heavenly manna and angelic art or,
alternatively, with both all sorts of ordered food and minstrel singing]*

For those with sympathies with the decapitator Gawain, who remained at King Arthur's court, the interpretation may be one of bold men gladly serving Gawain and the King with heavenly manna and spiritual art. For those with sympathies for the dismissed Green Knight, the interpretation may be one of bitter men, under pain of perishing, supplying food and a minstrel's performance. Either way there is sense in lordly authority from above.

The giant Green Knight had allowed Gawain to behead him, without killing him, at King Arthur's court under the understanding that Gawain would later go to the Green Knight's homeland (evidently Cheshire) to be repaid in like fashion. In fulfilling his pledge, the sole breach of faith of Sir Gawain is to accept, not the ring of his temptress, but her silken green cord or belt, as a guarantee of his ongoing life (*cf.* ongoing generation). Lines #1851-4 of this poem are:-

*For quat gome so is gorde with this grene lace [For whatever game is spurred on with this green cord]
While he hit had hemely halched about [While a man had it closely fastened about]
Ther is no hathel vnder heuen to hewe hym that myght [He can't be hewn under heaven by heroes, though
fierce,]
For he myght not be slayn for slyght [cunning] upon erthe.*

The armourless Green Knight, with his Green horse, ambivalently pardons Gawain with (lines #2358-65):-

*For hit [it] is my wede [clothing] that thou werez [weareth], that ilke [same] wouen [woven] girdel
Myn owen wyf [My own wife] hit the weued [gave it to thee (or, weaved it for thee)], I wot [know] for
sothe [for truth],
Now know I wel thy cosses [kisses] and thy costes als [and all your nature (or contrivances)],
And the wowyng [wooing] of my wyf. I wrought hit myseluen [I conjured it myself];
I send hir [her] to asay [test] the [thee], and sothly [truly] my thynkkez
On [you seem to me] the faultlest [the most faultless] freke [knight] that euer [ever] on fote [foot] ghede
[?went].
As perle bi the quite pese is of prys more [As pearl beside thee what pea (or peace) is more precious –
though this is often said to have a more materialistic meaning – As a pearl is more precious than the
white pea]
So is Gawain, in god fayth, by other gay knyghtez [So is Gawain, in good faith, beside other fine knights].*

The comparison of a pea and a pearl, or a resignation to peace as precious, in the last two lines above can be compared with William Langland's contemporary description of the *pl(a/e)nte of pe(e)s* (peas or peace) as the most precious of virtues amidst the sovereign salve of love. The pea (or peace) is evidently compared, by the Pearl poet, with a pearl of heavenly perfection.

^a[#447-66] "Be prepared to perform as you've promised, Gawain. You must feret with faith till you find me at last. Just as here in this hall all have heard you now pledge. To the Green Chapel's chambers I charge you to go. Such a stroke as you've struck you'll receive in return. You'll accept it yourself, good sir, New Year's morn. I am known far and wide as the Knight of the Green Chapel, Whom you'll find if you faithfully feret me out. Therefore come, or be called most recreant knight!" The ripping the reigns, he reels about, Quits the hall with his head in his hand in such a rush That fierce sparks start to shoot from his steed's mighty hooves. To what region he rode no retainer there knew; Nor from whence he had wandered could anyone guess. What then? The king and Gawain both at the Green Knight laugh and grin. But they think it in truth a marvel among men.

Table 23.3: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight