The Creation of Heaven in the Middle Ages

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THE CREATION OF HEAVEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

December 2014

ABSTRACT
THE CREATION OF HEAVEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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My dissertation focuses on the intersection of the discourses of space and place, art, religion, and politics in poetical accounts of heaven. My study investigates how authors deploy these various traditions to create a heaven that accommodates the needs of a particular audience. Heaven is, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, a "mythical place," which cannot be located. To avoid the problems of a "mythical place," we represent that location with slightly-blurred experiential knowledge or communally-sanctioned practices. The creation of heaven, I argue, does not occur *ex nihilo* but through a refashioning of knowledge and practices to engage audiences with descriptions of heaven. To examine this concept, I primarily analyze the descriptions of place in *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, while providing discussion of *Paradiso*, *The Vision of Tnugdal*, and episodes from the writings of Hadewijch that offer competing and complementing visions. This study offers an opportunity to view heaven not as simply a consistent and monolithic feature of society but as a created site. Rather than examining heaven solely as art, or only through doctrinal concerns, heaven must be considered in terms of a variety of discourses. The layering of art, politics, religion, and space and place remind readers of the medieval religious project. God, for the medieval, was not an abstract ideal but an ever-present quality of their daily existences; as God could be seen in all facets of life, so too can heaven be seen through aspects of life that seem mundane and removed from ethereal experience.

The first chapter of *The Creation of Heaven in the Middle Ages* outlines the problem of considering heaven as a monolithic entity. By tracing the history of heaven, the chapter demonstrates that we cannot view heaven as outside of time and place; heaven responds to the needs of particular audiences. As such, heaven cannot be considered only a religious place; heaven is a place that depends upon the engagement of multiple ideas, including theories of space and place, art history, and politics. The second chapter investigates the places of the afterlife in *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. While similarities exist between the two, each text offers a striking vision of the afterlife; and while a cityscape, and a besieged church and tower evoke distinct impressions of heaven, the chapter examines how each of these visions forces the reader to wonder if heaven might be a viable end. The third chapter engages in how the aesthetic choices of heaven work to create meaning within the mind of the reader. The larger goals of medieval aesthetics, embodied in stained-glass windows, reflect the projects of *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, namely to teach through a series of highly colored and instructive scenes. The final chapter offers a view of heaven through the political atmospheres of Ricardian England, reflecting the various choices of that monarch that impacts not only earth but also the heavenly retinue. A brief postscript closes out the dissertation that asks how these medieval visions might allow us to view the current interest of heaven, which can be seen in the popularity and success of life after death accounts

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much like the conception of heaven that I argue in this dissertation, this work was directed for the wants and needs of a particular audience. It was also a work that depended upon the input of many kind and thoughtful individuals, and so I would like to take the opportunity to thank as many of them as possible. While I attempt to thank many of them here, I may forget certain people and moments that contributed to this study. But much like Geoffrey Chaucer in his "Retraction," ascribe all the fault to my ignorance, for I would have written better if I had the knowledge.

First, I would like to thank my committee for their enthusiasm for and criticism of this project. In particular, I owe a great debt to Dr. John Curran, my dissertation director. I met Dr. Curran in the fall of 2003 in his Shakespeare class, and since that time he has challenged me to be a better scholar, teacher, and man with every meeting. That same semester, I stumbled into an undergraduate Chaucer course; I can trace my interest in Medieval Literature to that course. I would not be here without that class, so thank you to Dr. M.C. Bodden. I count myself fortunate to consider her a friend and mentor these many years later. Thanks are owed, in addition, to Dr. Albert Rivero for his thoughtful commentary on my project, and for allowing me to see the image of the consummate professional and critic.

Many professors have encouraged me along the way, both here at Marquette University and the University of Mississippi. So I would like to thank Drs. Gregory Heyworth and Mary Hayes for their guidance when I began my graduate career. Though he is no longer an active presence in this work, Dr. Tim Machan's influence can be seen in each page of this work, and I hope that one day I can become a scholar that he will be proud to count as one of his former charges.

I owe Brandon Chitwood and Eric Dunnum, the other two legs of the Tri-Pod, thanks for their friendship and advice during my time here at Marquette. To say the least, our conversations and adventures opened my work up to new possibilities, and (you know the tone) I am forever grateful to them.

To my other friends, thank you for your support over the course of this project. To Benjamin and Jacqueline Wydra, you are great friends and better listeners. To Michael and Emily Keller, Gabrielle Lee, Myles Bergeron, Michael Silva, Jesse Wentworth, and Margaret Michalski—your friendships make life better.

I would literally not be here without my parents David Storm and Kathleen Entes, making this a ghost story and not a dissertation on heaven. Thank you for your support and love when it would have been easier not to offer either. Thank you to my sisters— Kristina, Kimberly, and Maeve—for never telling me to stop talking about my work. I owe thanks to my grandparents, Rudolph and Diane Timm, for their love and support; such sentiments are also owed to my stepmother, Cathy Storm. Then, there is Theresa Mire, Mama T—no one could be prouder of my accomplishments.

As this is a dissertation on heaven, I think often of the people I have loved and lost over my life. To my grandparents William and Barbara Storm, and Dorothy Timm, I hope I got the picture right. To my stepfather, Kenneth Entes, you laughed at my ideas on "spot," but I think I know the spot where you can now be found. Then there is Sarah

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Mayville, the fiercest scholar I will ever know—I hope your heaven allows you to argue to your heart's content.

But all of these words, however good or bad, however correct or wrong, however skilled or lacking, would be nothing without the love of Anna Storm, my wife (it still feels strange to type those words). My heaven is wherever you are.

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I

Foregrounding the Re-Creation of Heaven

"That damned argument: something cannot become nothing, there's the misery. Creation has become so broad, there's no emptiness. Everything is packed and swarming. The void has destroyed itself; creation is its wound."[1]

Heaven exists outside the scopes of human experience and memory in a conception that Yi-Fu Tuan calls "mythical space." Tuan argues that mythical space can be divided into two categories. The first is a "fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known," and the second is a "conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities."[2] Because of an inability to locate mythical space, our options are to blur the distinctions of experiential knowledge or to populate that location around communally sanctioned practices. Heaven, to medieval exegetes, conforms to both these categories. Time and space bind humanity to certain aspects of life. And yet, heaven as it comes through the writings of early Church fathers and theologians exists outside of the normal categories of human existence. It is a place beyond time, and yet, heaven is still a place. There is no death, and there is no ageing. One remains at a perfect age, in a state of joy that cannot be expressed in human language. Difficulties arise with both the contemplation of heaven and God because of the limitations of human language, and yet, language is the means by which we most often approach the divine.

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[1] George Buchner, *Danton's Death, Leonce and Lena, Woyzeck,* trans. Victor Price (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), pp. 56-57.
[2] Yi- Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota, 2005), p. 86.

The medieval accounts of heaven that will be discussed in this study present a series of issues that confront all who attempt to understand heaven, including matters of language, history, art, theology, and psychology. The moment of creation as outlined in Genesis highlights not only the problems of creation but also the Christian dependence on and reverence for place and all its complexities:

> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God say that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

The creation story holds that God created life as we know it in six days, choosing to rest and enjoy that creation on the seventh day. From that creation story, one of the central tenets, if not the most important tenet, is that God creates *ex nihilo*. So entrenched is this fact that this expression, meaning "out of nothing" almost reflexively evokes the act of creation and the creation story. If one looks closely at this opening, however, creation is anything but *ex nihilo*. Those recognizable lines assert that, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2). We note that there is a "deep" and that the wind moves "over the face of the waters." God has yet to create, and yet, there are already present materials. Edward Casey points that the "tehom," or deep, of creation has something substantial enough for it to be referenced to as a face, and that face can be moved by the winds of God.[3] While the earth may have been a formless void, the creation story points to there being something

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[3] Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkely: U California P, 1998), p. 12.

there to be worked upon by God. In fact, the inclusion of "formless" seems to strengthen the claim of present, however undifferentiated, materials. This reading is supported by Genesis 1:9: "And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.'" So what we see, instead of land appearing from nothingness, is that land was already present but simply hidden by the waters of the deep. The notion that creation, specifically this creation story, is *ex nihilo* remains influential due to the belief "in the power of a certain cosmologic, which dictates that nothing *should* or *must* precede the act of creation."[4] Even so, it might be argued, that this reading of the creation story does not invalidate the claim that God creates *ex nihilo*. In fact, God might have already created these elemental forms prior to the story.

As it comes down to readers in first Genesis, then, creation requires already present forms. For the purposes of this study, the creation story highlights the preconditions for creation of any place and landscape, including the place and landscapes of heaven: 1) language is the means of creation, and 2) creations stems from the materials already present to the creator. Creation does not occur *ex nihilo*; rather creation takes place through an inter-related process of ordering and separating. For example, God must separate light from dark, the waters of earth from those of the sky, and earth from water. There then must be distinct qualities of the various elements to establish order. Without a distinct order, earth and sky are not separate, and the earth falls back into an undifferentiated form and void. If we take these preconditions and we amend them with the mythical space of Yi-Fu Tuan, we might better understand what medieval authors attempted with their visions of heaven.

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[4] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p. 12. Author's emphasis.

That heaven exists outside of the normal framework of human experience is clear from the simple fact that no one has ever gone to heaven and returned to tell the story.[5] Then there is the Bible, which offers little clarification of the whereabouts or the true nature of heaven. Into that void, theologians and critics have battled to create a heaven of their own, using the bits and pieces from scriptures to form a cohesive afterlife. So from that absence of precise knowledge—Tuan's fuzzy knowledge—medieval exegetes and writers attempted to extend or invert their experiential knowledge, bringing those notions together around a place of communally sanctioned ideas. By approaching the question of how medieval authors conceived of heaven via history, language, art, theology, and psychology, I will ultimately show that the creation of heaven was, in fact, a multivalent pursuit. These modes of inquiry mirror the interpretive skills required of the medieval audience, as these depictions force an audience to be familiar with often-disparate fields. I will argue that this interpretive stance required of audiences mirrors the project of Christian theology, blending earthly experience with a vision firmly fixed on the afterlife. And ultimately, the associations and creations made by individual authors (and their pilgrim counterparts) constitute the true afterlife, an individualized partitioning off a section of comfort within the larger heavenly field. Jeffrey Burton Russell points to this idea, noting that each writer focuses on what offers relief from the rigors of the writer's own climate.[6]

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[5] In Bede's *Ecclesiastical Histoy of English Speaking People*, he relates the story of Drythelm's death and journey to heaven. Because of his reliance on hagiography and exemplum, Bede's tale reads less like an account of heaven and more as a teaching tool about the proper spiritual ways of approaching life and death.

[6] Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven*: *The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), p. 5.

These heavens are not single creations solely consistent with the teachings and purviews of the Church or a single culture. Rather, these havens are created entities that depend upon multivalent means and ideas. This dissertation breaks these medieval visions of heaven into their various parts, noting that the author might employ not only those ideas but the effects of and the reasons for the usages. Ultimately, heaven cannot be viewed through one lens; heaven must be viewed via multiple lenses that highlight the cultural, theological, historical, and linguistic underpinnings that the authors deploy. Recent studies, including *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, eds. Muessing and Putter, and *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages*, eds. Emerson and Feiss, have highlighted the various ways that authors engage with ideas within visions of the afterlife, and recent critics, such as Howes, Ganim, and Calabrese, have begun to note how places can be shaped by authors for effect. Some studies, including Ann Meyer's *Medieval Allegory and the Building of New Jerusalem,* even recognize architectural elements. All these critical approaches to heaven and landscape, I believe, fail to recognize vital aspects of these texts. The medieval authors employed these various concepts not simply to show how these disparate elements might work to create an afterlife but because that is the very process of creation. Creation brings together those elements present to the author, and the author engages with those elements via language to create an afterlife. Ultimately, heaven, for these authors, is meaningless unless individually crafted and resonant for the particular wants and needs of an author or audience. More to the point, while it may seem heretical and even against commonsense, heaven cannot be heaven unless it fits the needs and ideas of individuals, and so at its very core, heaven is individually created. Again, Russell notes something of this impulse when he remarks,

"each writer focuses on what offers relief from the rigors of his own climate."[7] Heaven,,

in the Middle Ages, then, may be unique in that it is an idea that must be borne

completely out of the imagination of people. Alister E. McGrath writes of this impulse:

"Heaven is perhaps the supreme example of a Christian concept that is mediated directly

through images. To speak of 'imagining heaven' does not imply or entail that heaven is a

fictional notion, constructed by deliberately disregarding the harsher realities of the

everyday world. It is to affirm the critical role of the God-given human capacity to

construct and enter into mental pictures of divine reality, which are mediated through

Scripture and the subsequent tradition of reflection and development."[8]

This opening chapter will outline the various lenses that must be engaged by the

reader when viewing these medieval visions of heaven, noting not only how these ideas

were considered within the time frame of their production and the questions and ideas to

which these authors are responding but how critics have generally approached these

ideas.

The Historical Formation of Heaven

While heaven appears to many in faith communities to exist outside of a historical

context, created by God specifically for humanity and located in a realm outside of the

constraints of time and space, heaven's own history indicates that it is not removed from

variations and engagement with the needs of several audiences. This history confirms

certain matters of theological concern while at the same time exposing a series of issues

that promote shifting ideals for specific communities. Heaven has been alternately used

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[7] Russell, *A History of Heaven*, p.21
[8] Alister E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), p. 5.

as a means of exclusion and inclusion, prompting the acceptance of trends that seek to enlarge heaven's community to the detriment of one faction over another. For example, as Christianity became the dominant force of the Western world, the church could no longer portray itself as a community of suffering penitents; this stance had been the dominant mode of identification for Christians, however. Instead, heaven became painted in valedictory terms and regal tones. Representations of heaven typically involve three key principles: humans are composed of a corporeal form with an immortal soul, God alone can confer the privilege of residence in heaven, and righteousness should be rewarded. Of course, while heaven may be grasped quickly and with little discomfort in thought, the process of coming to such easily defined terms took centuries to derive. And so it is important to understand not only the historical moments during which each of the texts examined in the dissertation were produced, but also the ways in which views of heaven are informed by the decisions and history of heaven itself.[9]

As I noted above, heaven is rarely mentioned in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.[10] In fact, the Psalmists fail to give any description of the heavenly realm. When heaven is mentioned, there tends to be little amplification or contextual details. This void of detail and description is hardly surprising because these texts were primarily written prior to any popular notions of heaven reaching the Jewish communities. Even perhaps more troubling for a study of heaven is the very language of heaven: "In Hebrew

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[9] There are a number of books on the history of heaven; however, the best is Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988). Also of use were Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987); Alister E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

[10] Depending on various estimates and versions of the Bible, the word "heaven" appears some 700 times in the text, with some 250-300 of those occurrences in the Old Testament. The majority of those appearances, however, relate to simply the sky or looking northward.

the word for heaven is *shamayim*. Interestingly, this word is plural . . . but it is used in

this same plural form whether it refers to the sky or to the place where God dwells. No

distinction is made in Hebrew between the two uses. The Hebrew word is always plural

no matter what is being referred to. Interestingly Greek does use both singular and plural

nouns to refer to heaven, but this usage does not match our English conventions."[11] So

discussion of heaven and distinguishing between the two forms requires a sense of

context. When Jewish religious communities did engage in the debate and construction

of heaven, they, like their Christian descendants, depended greatly on the influence of

pagan thought, specifically that of Greek philosophy.[12] Concepts such as heaven being

above in the sky and the notion of the immortal soul, for example, are due in part to

Jewish familiarity during the Diaspora with Greek thought. Plato surmised that heaven

must be above the earth because the soul was stronger once rid of the body at death and

rose because it was godlike.[13] Philo of Alexandria, living during the reign of Caesar

Augustus, further refined the Jewish thought on heaven. He posited that death restores

the soul to its original birth-like state and that because the soul belongs to the spiritual

world, life in the human body is transient and unfortunate. Along with these ideas, Philo

believed that the soul was asexual and lived after death in a realm with pure ideas, angels,

and God. And so as Christ entered the world, spreading his Gospel and proclaiming a

coming Kingdom of God, three ideas of the afterlife dominated thought in Palestine.

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[11] Paula Gooder, *Heaven* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), p. 2.

[12] Of course, Jewish conceptions of heaven cannot be solely derived from the experiences of the diaspora community mingling with Greek thought. Many of the heavenly concepts can be found in the area of Israel before the destruction of the kingdom. Such influences include Egyptian, Sumerian, and Mesopotamian. For discussion of these influences and an overview of Near East afterlife, see J. Edgar Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

[13] Plato, *Phaedrus* 246E-249D and *The Republic* 614A-621D, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntingon Cairns (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986).

The Sadducees, descendants of Aaronites and maintainers of the high priestly duties in the Temple, believed that the soul perished with the body. Such a notion was fairly traditional, connecting the conception of heaven to some of the oldest Jewish teachings on the soul. Next, the Pharisees, forefathers of the rabbinical movement and believers in the oral tradition and importance of the Torah, believed that there would be a re-establishing of the Jewish kingdom, with God in the seat of power, and the resurrection of the dead.[14] This concept of heaven promoted the image of God as judge who would punish sinners for their inequities and reward the faithful. And finally, there were the Essenes, a group of Jews who rejected the Judaism of Jerusalem and what they believed to be the corruption of the Temple. Their mission was to remove themselves from such squabbles and iniquity, allowing for a more sincere and truer version of Judaism. Heaven, for the Essenes, was a place therefore where the immortal soul ascended to after death; existence in heaven was pleasant, and heaven was a place without borders and restrictions on movement. The chief act in the Essenes' version heaven was contemplation of God.[15]

And so into a Jewish milieu of three political and theological factions, each championing ideas of death and the afterlife, Jesus began his ministry. While we can see that Christian thought would embrace both aspects of the Essenic and Pharisaical heavens, Jesus, within the pages of the New Testament, along with his apostles writing to early Christian communities, would amend and add to those notions already present in the first century Judaic zeitgeist. The heaven of the New Testament attempts to remove the notion of compensation. No longer would one expect to be rewarded because of

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[14] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, p. 16.
[15] Ibid., p. 23.

faithful service and proper attention to ceremony. Rather, heaven was framed as a place of promise where the disciples of Jesus, specifically those who retain a true faith and innocence in the eyes of God, would be able to experience the divine fully: ". . . for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). These first followers of Jesus were not typical Jews, since Galileans had been removed from the theoretical and practical debates occurring amongst the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.[16] So what we see is a striking new form of Judaism as experienced by the inner-circle of Jesus. It is a Judaism that eschews a veil of formality or dogged attention to procedural issues. Rather, Jesus was seen as an unmediated source of the wisdom of God, a holy man who performed miracles that appeared sanctioned by the power of the divine. He was the living incarnation of those stories long told in the Torah of an interventionist God sent to the people when those people were most in need. While we might point to the various reasons why Jesus would eventually prove to be a threat to the Jewish establishment, what is important to note, as it was noted by his own followers, is that he was regarded as something remarkable, something ethereal. And so if God, as they would later believe Jesus to be, is otherworldly, then his kingdom must be otherworldly.

The Gospels offer not theoretical but practical discussion of the afterlife. In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus presents no less than six different ways of understanding the kingdom of heaven. We are told that the kingdom of heaven may be "compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field (Matthew 13:24); that it is also

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[16] Ibid. Galileans were not considered typical Jews, according to McDannell and Lang; they were not familiar with the priestly and rabbinical elements of Judaism. They were, in essence, considered provincial people, who were removed from the real issues of the country and Judaism.

like "a mustard seed" (Matthew 13:31); and that heaven is also "like yeast that a woman

mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Matthew 13:34).

Shifting from agricultural metaphors, Jesus utilizes metaphors of wealth and prestige,

informing his audience that "heaven is like treasure hidden in the field" and "like a

merchant in search of fine pearls" (Matthew 13:44-45). Finally, Jesus employs fishing to

aid his discussion, claiming that "heaven is like a net that was thrown in the sea and

caught fish of every kind" (Matthew 13:47). One certainly does not see a clear picture of

what heaven is or is not from Jesus' figurative language, but those images, however,

emphasize removal, worth, and struggle, which are typical tropes for the ineffable. This

language, though ambiguous and often evasive, attempts to focus the attention not on

what heaven will be like but what living outside of heaven will be like. Yes, heaven is

the ultimate in terms of pleasure and contentment. But what is it to live outside of

heaven? As portrayed in the Gospels, death and being alive after the end of human

history, i.e. the Final Judgment, are the same thing. They are states of exclusion and

loneliness, because they involve living outside of the rapture and protection of God.

Jesus' concept of heaven, much like other issues of theology, provided merely the

point of departure. Those who came afterwards, here the Apostle Paul and John, put

together the framework and theology of Christianity together, including heaven. For

Paul, discussion of the afterlife was not set in terms of the present but the future:

> For we know that if the earthly text we live in is destroyed, we have a
> building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the havens.
> For in this text we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly
> dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found
> naked. For while we are still in this text, we groan under our burden,
> because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what
> is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:1-4)

Paul's letter frames the longing and pains of life on earth as well as the release granted in death, a death all must undergo. That solitary death is nothing, though, in comparison to the Final Judgment, and so Paul stressed the second coming of the Messiah; it is only then that the Final Judgment will take place. Those resurrected then will be dead Christians with spiritual bodies. Spiritual bodies, as elucidated by Paul, are resurrected bodies unconcerned with Earthly matters. Paul clearly formed this view in part from the accounts of the other Apostles who saw Christ after his resurrection and noted his disinterest in food and sleep, as well as how he seemed to be of a different type of body. Paul's notion of the spiritual body quickly, and rather authoritatively in typical Pauline style, became the dominant way of thinking about the heavenly body superseding the most animal and most practical needs of the human body. The physical body, according to Paul, remains in the grave, and the spiritual body ascends to heaven, sharing the essential qualities of God, spirituality and immortality.

John's vision of heaven is more clearly defined and constructed, as it is a major theme in Revelation. The problem with Revelation, however, which is similar to most of the Bible in regard to heaven, is that heaven is given secondary importance. It is the final battle between good and evil that takes precedence over the place where humanity, once good has triumphed evil, will spend eternity. According to John's vision, in any case, heaven is a place of gems that amplify the awe and splendor of God's throne and humanity's resting place. We are given, as well, a sense of movement and are struck by the ever-present light that illuminates both God and heaven. John has, in effect, taken the afterlife of Ezekiel and repopulated and resituated humanity so as to have a place next to

the divine throne. Without losing its awe-inspiring celestial dignity, heaven has become

more human.[17]

While later exegetes will refer to this as the New Jerusalem and the City of God,

what becomes clear is that what John describes is not truly a city. Rather adapting

Ezekiel's vision, John creates a third Temple, the true resting place whence God rules the

universe, a cube with sides measuring fifteen hundred miles: "The angel who talked to

me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies

foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen

hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one

hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using"

(Revelation 21:15-17).   Further, John becomes so enraptured with the description of the

building, mentioning the various jewels and gems in the construction, that he provides

little to no description of the activities that occur within the temple:

> The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The
> foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first
> was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the
> fifth onyx, the sixth cornelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the
> ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth
> amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a
> single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.
> (Revelation 21:18-21)

Because this new temple dominates the heavenly landscape, as perhaps no

building had ever done, the New Jerusalem of John becomes the center of all activity of

Earth. Not only has the New Jerusalem become the center of all earthly activity, John's

account enforces the idea that there is nothing of worth outside of the New Jerusalem.

The Earth, as it were, is defined by the temple of New Jerusalem, and then there are those

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[17] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, p.39.

places that exist outside of New Jerusalem, which lack all meaning and importance. In

fact, John is instructed not to leave this new temple during his measurements, because

after a series of testimonies and warring between nations: "the beast that comes up from

the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill, and their dead

bodies will lie in the street" (Revelation 11: 7-8). In other words, life cannot exist outside

of heaven. Heaven has become, in John's vision, androcentric, and because heaven has

become the center of the world, the world is now theocentric. While this heaven allows

for humanity to have a place of honor next to the throne of God, not all are allowed to

view God. All are allowed to approach God, but only the servants of God are allowed to

view Him face to face in what Augustine and later theologians would describe as the

beatific vision. [18]

However disparate from each other, Paul's and John's visions of heaven provide

authoritative conceptions of the afterlife that the early Christian fathers and theologians

used to extend the boundaries of the afterlife in two main directions: orientation towards

the divine and distance from the ordinary society. The early Christians, as has been well-

documented, were victims of cruelty and resided on the margins of each society. Because

they preached and lived a life that did not conform to the expectations of either Judaic or

pagan societies, the early Christians were often imprisoned and subjected to martyrdom.

And so it is not surprising that their concept of the afterlife would attempt to situate

heaven as being fully oriented towards the divine and remove the elements of ordinary

society from heaven. Society chose to reject Christianity because of what were deemed

non-normative beliefs—we should recall that early Christians were accused of

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[18] Russell, *A History of Heaven*, p. 5.

cannibalism—and so they imagined a world where God, the being at the center of their worldview, would dominate the landscape.

Iranaeus of Lyons's theories on heaven are emblematic of this rejection of ordinary society and the need to remove Christian communities from pagan spheres of influence. Heaven, in Iranaeus' view, returned to the place of compensation—a church of martyrs, in fact.   Augustine, in turn, would later reject this notion, claiming that heaven was a continuation of the ascetic and contemplative life. Not only was heaven to be a church of martyrs, but it was also an ecclesiastical community.[19] This Church of Martyr philosophy believed that the world was a good that Christians were unable to enjoy because the world was already occupied by pagan cultures that inhibited their ability to enjoy the created world.[20] What is interesting was that these martyrs actually longed to live in the world and enjoy the world, but to them the ability to do so was denied at seemingly every turn. And so the possibility of heaven became that goal, that hope to live a life absent of danger and persecution. Not a viable option available to the martyrs in daily life, heaven became an imaginary place outside of the human experience, and so they attempted to focus their attentions on this world.[21]

Iranaeus, understanding the travails of the martyrs and early church communities, divided human history into three distinct stages, but these are not merely stages for the individual to undergo. These stages encompass all human existence, and so we might refer to them as epochs. While he termed this human history, it is more appropriately termed Christian history, because the world made sense to Iranaeus only through a

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[19] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven,* p.47.
[20] William H.C. Frend, *Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries* (London: Variorum, 1980), p. 34.
[21] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, p. 50.

Christian lens. The first stage was persecution. The second was the Kingdom of the

Messiah. And the final stage of history was the Kingdom of God. For Iranaeus, the

Kingdom of God was less important than the Kingdom of the Messiah because it would

follow a period of upheaval and the reckoning of the quick and the dead. During the

Kingdom of the Messiah, the great battle for human history would be waged, and those

whose loyalties had been tested would be granted a full life on Earth with extremely

fertile bodies placed in an ideal society.[22]

The historical persecution of Christians would come to a quick end with the

conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Milan in 313. And while Christianity would

not become the state religion of Rome until the Edict of Thessalonica in 380, Christians

were thrust not to the margins but to the very center of everyday life. So without

persecution, Christians could no longer prove loyalty to their religion by suffering at the

hands of the oppressor. Asceticism became a way to recapture this spirit of suffering—

and loyalty to the faith—in terms individually governed. All attempts, either via

persecution or asceticism, sought to engage God in passionate terms, drawing God's

presence to the penitent. Plotinus, writing nearly a century and a half before Augustine's

conversion, urged people to remove themselves from the world of cities and society so as

not to fall prey to the world, which detracted from the ultimate good to be found in the

contemplation of true beauty. This contemplation led to a solitary connection with the

deity, loosening the soul's connection to the material world. St. Augustine was able to

capture the spirit of this new movement with his own vision of the afterlife. During an

afternoon in his garden, both Augustine and his mother were transported to heaven. The

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[22] Iranaeus proposes to allow true Christians the ability to procreate in a world devoid of violence. In other words, God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled by the Christian descendants.

light of God, giving complete bliss and happiness and leading to silence and sighs, touched each of them. While they were both taken to heaven at the same time and while each was vaguely aware of the other, their experiences were remarkable because of the individual experience, not the shared communion with other saved souls. Heaven, for Augustine and Monica, was God-centered, leaving for no communication amongst the blessed. With no communal elements Augustine's initial vision of heaven is a solitary place for the blessed; it is the sight of God and the subsequent reflection on the Divine that enthralls the blessed: "We would hear his word, not through the tongue of the flesh, nor through the voice of an angel, nor through the sound of thunder, nor through the obscurity of a symbolic utterance. Him who is these things we love we would hear in person without their mediation. That is how it was when at that moment we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things."[23] The body, much like communal bliss, was irrelevant for Augustine, and so he removed the body from the equation, leaving only the soul present in the afterlife.

Augustine's views on heaven, changed as he aged, however. While he would write in *City of God* that eternal bliss consisted of the supreme enjoyment of seeing God, Augustine's stance on other matters shifted dramatically. No longer was heaven a solitary engagement with God. It now offered the expectation of reunion with friends and family, re-asserting the social dynamic of Christianity into the Christian afterlife. Not only is heaven intended for social interactions, then, but those interactions are enjoyed with a body. Adapting Pauline thought, Augustine claims that the bodies are more spiritual, engaging in eating and drinking for pleasure. Augustine's notion of

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[23] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), IX. x (25).

spiritual bodies hinges on the claim that the flesh, in the resurrected state in heaven, casts off the rebellious nature inherited via original sin and instead serves the spirit.[24] Because these bodies' states relate to the spirit and not the flesh, the flesh throws off imperfection, with martyr's bodies being cleansed of all scars. In Augustine's view, we are able to enjoy our bodies free of the strictures of lust, with the female body in particular inspiring praise for God. [25] Moving from the notion of bodies free from lust, Augustine believes the nature of love radically differs in heaven. While Augustine's heaven frees us from lust and returns us to our families and friends, all the love we feel towards them cannot exist without reference to God. God is love, for Augustine, and so the love for our families exists because of love of God, which it reinforces.   That love for God, being so great and all-encompassing, and the love for family and friends absorb one another into one complete, comprehensive, and undifferentiated community of love. Love exists all around in heaven, because heaven is the place of the very workings of God, and God, as Paul wrote, is love.

Augustine's notions of heaven influence medieval thought on heaven perhaps more than any other Christian thinker. Prior to Augustine, the Jewish communities could not come to a consensus on what heaven was, and there were those who did not believe that heaven even existed. As Christianity began to become the dominant social, cultural, religious, and political institution of Europe, heaven became more widely taught and understood within the Church, but during that period the concept did not exist outside of Christian thought. Yes, there were still pagan religions that had their own view on the afterlife, but heaven could, for the great majority of the population, only be tied to a

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[24] St. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 13:20.
[25] Ibid., 22:17.

Christian ethos. It was in the Middle Ages, primarily using Augustine's model, that the notion of heaven transcended Christianity and became a part of the general, Western worldview. Partly, heaven entered the general discourse of the Middle Ages because of an ability of the medieval mind's ability to think outside of a strict theological discursive practice that enforces ideas not of faith but of religious minutiae. But it also did so because in the minds of the Christian population, heaven filled the need for something outside of the ordinary.

The vast majority of late Antique and early medieval heavenly visions, excepting John's and brief mentions by Jesus, seem to refer to heaven as a paradisiacal landscape, which is often most clearly associated with the Garden Eden. The medieval audience believed that Eden was an actual location, probably in the East, waiting to be found between mountains or tucked away in a deep forest. And while certain accounts were influenced by certain local climatic or cultural elements, those places most assuredly remain the Garden Eden. It is not coincidental that Augustine's first vision of heaven, leading to his conversion, occurs in a garden with its strong implication of a pre-lapsarian world. Eden was not simply the paradise *par excellence*; it was the only paradise to be found. Only would the original paradise, created especially for humans by God, be sufficient as the eternal resting place of the blessed souls, angels, and God.

But as cities began to develop and provide more labor opportunities within an urban economy, we see a shift in landscape for heaven. As trade increased and merchants travelled to sell their wares, cities grew up around former castles and fortresses, which offered a sense of protection and community. The growth of cities relate both to the belief in opportunities for steady work within the trades and the effects

of the Little Ice Age, especially in England.[26] As crop production sagged due to harsh

growing conditions, fewer people were needed on the farm to harvest and sow the crops.

While this initial growth of cities changed perceptions of everyday life, the effects of the

Plague furthered the movement towards the city.[27] As the Black Death wiped out entire

neighborhoods, decimating merchants and laborers in all trades, people flocked from the

countryside to fill those needed positions. With this general movement to the city, no

longer is heaven the paradisiacal garden, though monks cloistered in abbeys would

continue to use that imagery[28]; rather, heaven has become a city. This is not the city,

however, of John's New Jerusalem in *Revelation*. We see accounts of a proper city, a

proper New Jerusalem with streets, buildings, suburbs, walls, castles, etc. The cities of

the Middle Ages were the perfect miniatures of New Jerusalem. While the actual

medieval city might lack certain amenities, writers sought a New Jerusalem that did not

lack for perfection. New Jerusalem was well-ordered, well-stocked, well-protected, and

well-endowed with the best of all things theological, political, and cultural. Giacommo

of Verona's "On the Heavenly Jerusalem," for example, brings up not just the exterior

view of the city but also the interiority of the city, both in action and buildings.[29]   Then

there is Gerardesca's vision of heaven, as a kind of city-state with a vast park running

through it. Geradesca's Italian background may account for him asking for just such a

city-state, as that was the political and cultural mode with which he was familiar, but it is

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[26] Jean M. Grove, *The Little Ice Age* (New York: Metheun, 1988).

[27] John Kelly, *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

[28] Paradise as garden is particularly strong in the liturgy of the 9th century. The monks, we might argue, keep this thought alive because of their own surroundings. If all one has is the cell, and the work in the fields or garden provides some color and fresh air to that existence, then it might be hardly surprising that heaven would remain best viewed as a garden. Of course, we might see the monks' insistence to heaven as garden as a re-assertion of traditional views against more mainstream movements.

[29] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, p. 73.

his attempt to reconcile the religious past of paradisiacal garden with that of the modern city that brings our attention to the struggle that these authors faced. While Gerardesca places the park within the city walls, we see countless accounts where the city is surrounded by beautiful landscapes and vistas. The problem with those accounts, much like Geradesca's attempt, is that no matter how one attempts to incorporate both city and garden, they remain two distinct elements. There is never a blend, and one does not become the other. We are asked to see that these elements are both vital to a sense of heaven, but it is never clear how each works in a heavenly vision and why they are both needed. Later in this dissertation, I will argue that partitioning of cities from gardens is a necessary feature of heavenly visions, as the medieval authors continue the essential task of clearly defining architectural and geographical locations. Without clearly defined places and spaces, heaven becomes subject to the disorder of the everyday.

Another important feature of heaven that stemmed from the cultural development of the later Middle Ages as well as for St. Augustine was a new influence on love, specifically courtly love. In both the Gospel of John and Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, God is not merely equated with love; God is love. By this seemingly minute distinction, not only are God's actions filled with the spirit of love and the sacrificial nature of love, but also God's very nature is love. Indeed, God's very actions are love, because medieval Christianity posited that God is that very spirit of sacrifice and love. This equation provides a movement towards a common ground with the divine. If God's very nature is love and humans participate in the act that constitutes God's very nature, then by loving—of course, in the same spirit of God—humans become not simply an image of God like but part of the very nature of God, a union that transcends creeds and

ecclesiastical concerns. Love crystallizes in action the very aspect of God that people most need to live a life in concordance with the tenets of Christianity. The love of God, in turn, recalls Christ's passion and suffering and the sacrifice that parents have for children.

Another cultural contribution of the Middle Ages was courtly love, which sought to move this all-encompassing, sacrificial love into other arenas. Having its antecedents in the troubadour traditions of both Italy and France, courtly love attempted, in short, to govern the passions that people feel for members of the opposite sex. Such a program requires complex and often paradoxical rule and regulations. Often courtly love has been viewed as simply a literary convention; however, courtly love became the dominating mode of social interaction. And as these complex and often paradoxical relationships became the mode of operating within the actual world, these relationships became integrated into the world of heavenly visions. In the middle English poem, *Pearl*, we see the Jeweler using familiar terms of address and tender language, while the Pearl Maiden treats him with dismissive, formal terms of address and the stance of a courtly lover. What is intriguing is that courtly love attempted to stifle passions and desire, but passion and desire seem to be pre-requisites to emulate the love of God. Bernard of Clairvaux, in fact, argued that only love full of passion and desire directed the soul to God.[30] Furthering the melding of the courtly and the divine, the relationship between the blessed and the God does not remain simply that of penitent and absolver of sins. Rather, God becomes portrayed as the ruler of a court, and the blessed are the courtiers and ladies-in-waiting whose goal is not to follow set rules of the Church but to please the lord. The

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[30] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven,* p. 98.

super-imposition of courtly love onto heaven provides readers with another lens with

which to view heaven, and that lens must attempt to answer why authors would use a

sexually charged form of love in a space that would be more fitting for chaste and pure

notions of love. While the nature of the court and courtly love will be examined in detail

later in the dissertation, we can, for the moment, note that the addition of courtly

relationships and formal discourse reinforce the material world—a world known to the

audience—as an ever-present component of heavenly visions.

Beyond the addition of courtly elements and urban scenery, the Middle Ages

produced a greater emphasis on an intellectual pursuit towards the thought of heaven.

Prior to the High Middle Ages, Augustine's work on heaven stood as the standard for

thought on heaven. But with the introductions of universities and the Scholastic

movement, St. Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries attempted systematically to

define the relationships between the blessed and God and what exactly heaven

represented to the Christians. Borrowing from Aristotle's cosmology, the Scholastics

believed that the universe was made of concentric spheres and levels and that beyond the

firmament of the material universe, God's own world existed—heaven, with two levels.

The first level was the spiritual heaven or the empyrean, where angels and the blessed

resided. Above the empyrean was the heaven of heavens, where God ruled the cosmos.

There is a lack of detail within any description of the empyrean, but there is a firm

concept of the importance of light within this particular realm of heaven:

> God created the empyrean or highest heaven as a pure and simple radiance
> encircling and enclosing all the heavens and every corporeal and material
> thing which he ever created. It is the exterior dwelling-place and kingdom
> of God and of his saints and is filled with glory and eternal joy. Because
> this heaven is eternally resplendent and free of all admixture, there is

within it neither movement nor change, for it is securely established in a changeless state above all things.[31]

Light focuses attention on the physical experience of heaven, but his true discussion remains on the joy of heaven as unmediated access to God through the beatific vision: an experience of God's very essence without interference.[32] In contrast to Augustine's notion of social interaction, Aquinas elides any discussion of how the blessed interact together or with the heavenly corps of angels. Consistent with his own background in teaching and interest in thought, heaven for Aquinas contained no active life. The blessed engage in solitary and continuous contemplation of God, with the highest bliss being achieved in the beatific vision. By viewing God, one received an influx of knowledge and understanding about nature, God, and life, but the degree to which one was able to understand and how much knowledge was given varied due to merit and station. Additionally because of the reliance on and the importance of contemplation, heaven, for Aquinas, lacks movement. It is filled, rather, with light and "beatific immobility."[33] A corporeal heaven, it seems, offers no consolation for those driven by intellectual pursuits.

As this recounting of the history of heaven shows, heaven is not a static vision or a monolithic idea. Rather, concepts of heaven vary from cultures and historical moments. Even with nearly a thousand year Christian history, heaven enters the late Middle Ages an incomplete and fragmented concept, requiring further amplification and correction. It

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[31] John Ruusbroec, quoted in *Heaven: A History*, eds. McDannell and Lang, p. 83.

[32] Lawrence V. Hundersmark, "Thomas Aquinas on Beatitude," *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jan S. Emerson and Hugh Feiss (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 165-184, at p. 167. This article provides a nice overview of how Aquinas views the benefits of the afterlife and the activities one engages in, which is primarily—almost exclusively—contemplation and adoration of God. These views can be found in the *Summa* in questions 92 to 96.

[33] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ed. Timothy McDermott (South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 1989) II: X: 2.

is the job of the author of any heavenly vision to work within not only heaven's own history but to engage with various lenses to amplify an individual understanding of heaven, re-creating a heaven that resonates for a particular author and audience.

Medieval Theology

While the later medieval period witnessed heaven becoming more closely associated with the general culture of the Western world, heaven's history as a Christian place and idea could not be shaken from its conception. In other words, despite appropriations as a general, Western thought, heaven was still Christian. And so the authors of medieval visions of the afterlife were forced to confront the beliefs and practices of the Christian church when conceiving of an afterlife. Christian doctrine provided the framework for understanding God, and as heaven was primarily the seat of God, those beliefs must be considered in any gloss of heaven in the Middle Ages. Medieval Christianity was characterized by its increased devotion to Christ, standardization of the Eucharist, emphasis on teaching and uniformity of beliefs, and increased importance of Apocalyptic thought.

Medieval Christianity underwent a transformation of purpose, increasing the devotion to Christ, and at the heart of that devotion was the Eucharist, a process in which the relatively innocuous and mundane items of bread and wine underwent a metaphysical transformation. The fact that the miracle of the Eucharist—transubstantiation—was at the heart of all the visions and purported miracles taking place in the medieval period underscores the importance of the Eucharist and its ability to capture the attentions of

Christians.[34] Of course, this miracle's importance belied its relative age in terms of

Church doctrine. Only after the conversion of the Saxons and the Avars in the ninth

century did the nature of the Eucharist become a part of the ecumenical conversation,

when because of the huge influx of new converts, the Church sought a standardization of

instruction that would best encapsulate the important doctrines of Christianity.

Paschasius Robertus' *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* claims that after consecration the

body and blood of Christ are truly present in the sacrament as the historical body and

blood of Christ. The body and blood are present invisibly, however, so that the bread and

wine were "sacraments of faith," both a truth and a figure.[35] Due to the uproar

surrounding this document, Charlemagne issued orders via *De partialarie Saxonae* and

Admontio generalis that any infidelity to Christian practices was punishable by death and

that articles of faith should contain instruction along with explanations of key concepts.[36]

Charlemagne's instructions recognize that certain Christian concepts are, in fact, quite

confusing, but that they also point to the desire to have all Christians at the same level of

understanding. This new emphasis on teaching attempted to correct misconceptions,

creating a uniformity of beliefs and practices that all Christians, regardless of education,

status, or location, could follow. With the institution of the Catechism, Church

authorities sought to transform ritual into narrative and liturgy into history. The

Catechism, much like the systematic approach of the later Scholastics, attempted to bring

order to what had become a numinous feat. The question that the Church confronted was

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[34] Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), p. 9.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 17.

how best to make the entirety of the Church comprehensible to its members? What is gained when mystery is extinguished?

While the Church's move towards educational reform and uniformity of beliefs intended to captivate medieval Christians, such moves paled in comparison to a period of great enthusiasm and expectation with the Church membership, namely for the impending apocalypse. Beginning around the dawn of the millennium, the anticipation for Christ's return became a theme that ran throughout Christendom. The destruction of Christ's sepulcher in Jerusalem in 1009 and the millennium of Christ's passion in 1033 strengthened this sense. In France, councils were held to determine if this was truly the end of times, and these councils benefited from great popular support and participation. Around these councils, the masses visited tents containing relics, giving the proceedings a mixture of ecumenical council, pilgrimage, and carnival. The problem was, of course, that the world did not end. And for those who are left and survived the pilgrimage, the end of history no longer held sway over their lives. Apocalyptic strains greatly influence visions of the afterlife, because heaven is the great promise of the apocalypse: the end of suffering and the complete fulfillment of Christ's promise. Because of the anticipated apocalypse and the subsequent non-event, visions of the afterlife were forced to confront how medieval Christians would think of the end times. These texts must make use of the immediacy of apocalypse; however, as the Christian audience lived through either a promised apocalypse or a near-apocalyptic pandemic, apocalypse had to be re-imagined for the purposes of heavenly visions. Writers inverted the societal dread of apocalypse into a personalized sense of apocalypse, using that concept to engage their audiences in a more immediate sense of dread for the end times.

Moving from the apocalyptic strain in medieval Christian thought, let us return to the suffering and passion of Christ. In the above section, the Eucharist is noted as being a central concern and point of emphasis in teaching and devotion to Christ. But the Eucharist's mystical elements did not satisfy the longings of Christians to participate in the suffering of Christ, which therefore came to dominate church art, both in painting and crucifix form. Christians see in these depictions, according to Gregory, a recollection of God in his love for humanity. With crucifixes, in turn, the image demands the viewer recognize the debt owed to God that was incurred in the passion. This passion, so evident in Christ's suffering on the cross and etched in the face on the reproductions, inspired medieval Christians to share in that suffering. Prayers were offered, not to replace Christ on the cross, but to allow the penitent to share in the passion. These prayers create an issue, however. Are these prayers a way of lessening Christ's own suffering? Is it a way of recognizing one's own debt to Christ? Does this prayer, in turn, lessen one's own debt to Christ? Prayers, however effective or not, did not seem to participate fully in the suffering of Christ. While the sincerity of the request may be real, praying for participation in Christ's suffering presents only an abstract participation in Christ's suffering, leaving the penitent with only the hope of the participation. To that lack of participation in the suffering of Christ, Peter Damian brings self-flagellation to the fore of Christian devotional worship. According to Damian, the fear of judgment by God can only be alleviated at the total cost of one's physical, social, and economic well-being.[37] Flagellation left distinct reminders of the pain one underwent to share in the suffering of Christ. Those reminders would remain with the body even when the person stood before

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[37] Ibid., p. 90.

God during the Final Judgment. Damian believed that one could only pay Christ with the belongings one brought to judgment, the body and soul, the body marred with the same marks and suffering that the Judge underwent during his time on Earth. The act of flogging also was a kind of pre-judgment, informing the Judge that the flagellate took his debt seriously. But also in that same vein, those same marks might allow the Judge to forego his responsibilities, simply allowing the penitent to join the ranks of the blessed.

Religion offers critics a way of interrogating literary texts to see how authors were engaged with the ideas of medieval Christianity, and more importantly how they might have differed from the accepted ideas. Heaven, I believe, offers both of those opportunities, as doctrinal ideas on heaven were always in flux. In the end, I believe that most of the narratives will shy away from open discussion with religion,[38] as the purpose is to find a personal connection with the ethereal landscapes.

Medieval Aesthetics

Almost any modern depiction of the Middle Ages finds a world dulled to color and life, in which people have lost the great knowledge of the classical world and are adrift in a sea of illness and destitution. Umberto Eco accurately summarizes this sentiment when he writes, "To this day, many people, victims of the conventional 'Dark Ages' image, think of the Medieval period as a somber epoch, even as far as color was concerned."[39] In other words, medieval people did not view their lives in such stark terms. Undoubtedly, life was not easy for the great majority of people, as death was a

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[38] Though religion cannot be completely divorced from the texts, religion seems less important for many of the characters, as they are already present in heaven. And once present in heaven, people do not want to know how this element relates to this doctrinal issue or this parable; rather, people expressed the love and beauty of being in heaven.

[39] Umberto Eco, *History of Beauty,* trans. Alistar McEwen (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), p. 99.

constant companion even to the very wealthy of society. And yet, "Medieval people . . . saw themselves (or at least portrayed themselves in poetry and painting) as living in extremely bright surroundings."[40] Such a worldview caused medieval society to wonder about the nature of beauty—what was beautiful? What colors are beautiful? How might proportion play into beauty? These questions did not lead medieval thinkers to create their own theories. When we examine medieval engagement with ideas of beauty, we should not "expect to find new and original definitions in the Middle Ages, for the medieval thinkers sought neither to discover nor to defend such definitions."[41] Rather, the medieval thinkers sought to mine those sources that were readily available to them, namely the Bible, works of philosophers, technical books, and the writings of the Greek and Latin Fathers.

Such a melding of traditions, I believe, fits well into this project, because it asserts the need to work with the already present forms. This melding of traditions presented a number of issues, including the ways the Middle Ages approached aesthetics. The Classical world looked to nature to draw inspiration on ideas of beauty, but the medieval world looked back at the Classical world for ideas on beauty because medieval culture was based on classical ideas. But even in attempting this act, the medieval thinkers, however consciously or unconsciously, rejected the classical approach to aesthetics. First and foremost, issues of beauty for classical thinkers were abstract ideas present in practical applications, which can be illustrated in Plato's notion of forms. But "beauty

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[40]Ibid., p. 99.

[41] Edgar de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Ungar, 1969), p. 1.

for the Medievals did not refer first to something abstract and conceptual"; it referred more "to everyday feelings, to lived experience."[42]

The greatest disjoint between medieval and classical aesthetics was the overwhelming concern for metaphysics shown by the medievals. Beauty and life were not separate notions, and God and beauty and life were not separate notions. This sentiment is highlighted by Honorious of Autun's thoughts on the threefold goals of painting: "one was 'that the House of God should be thus beautified'; a second was that it should recall to mind the lives of the Saints; and finally, 'Painting is the literature of the laity.'"[43] But what Honorious' thought might miss is the understanding of where beauty truly originates, which can be seen fully in Chalcidius' commentary on the *Timaeus*: "Of all the beauties of creation pride of place must go to the world . . . It is the image of the beauty of God . . . If the world possesses incomparable beauty, as indeed it does, the fact that it reflects the highest workmanship."[44]

In other words, contemplation and study of beauty gave humanity another avenue to approach the divine. While the divine might imbue beauty in certain scenes, that beauty fell short of the splendor present in heaven. But, as understood by St. Isidore, earthly beauty could help instruct the medieval mind, as "It is from finite beauty that God gives us an understanding of infinite beauty." [45]

The conception of infinite beauty leads directly to heaven, as there would be no other place where a divine creator would be less encumbered by the limitations of earthly, finite beauty. While viewing heavenly scenes, readers are meant to be struck by

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[42] Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), p. 4.
[43] Ibid., p. 16.
[44] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, p.6.
[45] Ibid., p. 7.

the overwhelming beauty and detail provided by the author. Medieval aesthetic theory

provides another framework for the author to amplify detail and specificity to the creation

of heaven. Medieval people understood that Earth was a beautiful place, filled with

wonders and sights by God for the enjoyment of humanity. And if Earth is beautiful, the

thought must be that heaven, where God was thought to live by some, would be all the

more beautiful, because all the goodness of a benevolent creator would be manifested

within heaven. In other words, a place designed by God, unencumbered by the strictures

of earthly life, would shine radiantly with the glory assigned to God. But if heaven is to

be beautiful, how might that beauty be described? That beauty might simply remind the

reader that the writer cannot do justice to the supposed beauty of heaven, or the author's

imagery might fail to invoke the majesty with which heaven would evoke in the eyes of a

believer. One of the underlying themes of this study is, in fact, how the description of

heaven differs from a description of an everyday experience or place. Must the beauty of

heaven be different than that of earth? Or, is the beauty of heaven simply a difference of

degree rather than kind?

     Examinations of medieval ideas of beauty must acknowledge how art plays into

literary representations of the afterlife. In fact, in literature, art and architecture can

suggest that "[a]ll things, like and unlike, forms and genera, the different orders of

substantial and accidental causes, combined together in a marvelous unity. There was not

a single medieval writer who did not turn to this theme of the polyphony of the

universe."[46] The most striking examples of beauty in the everyday medieval experience

were the architecture and ornamentation of medieval cathedrals, which increased

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[46] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages,* p. 18.

significantly in number towards the end of the Middle Ages, even though the churches

that were being replaced were not structurally unsound, out-dated, or inadequate in size.

Such massive edifices were built because the lords believed, rightly or wrongly, that all

those engaged in God's mission in the church held sway with God, and so they feared

how the Church would use such influence against them not only in this world but the

next. To placate the clerics, resources increased for the arts, in general.[47] At that time,

however, there was no greater art than sacred art, and the highest form of sacred art was a

church. Since the sacred art of Christianity could not remove itself from the overt

displays of temporality and wealth, all art became infused with ornamentation.

As the church authorities gained more power and wealth, constructions projects

increased in earnest. Between 1045 and 1220, construction began on over twenty-eight

cathedrals in England, including Durham and Ely Cathedrals. The constructions of Notre

Dame de Paris, Speyer Cathedral, the churches in Puglia, St. Patrick's Cathedral Dublin,

St. Michael and St. Gudula Cathedrals in Brussels, the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore

in Florence, St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, Cologne Cathedral, and the Cathedral of

Toledo were all begun during that same period. This increase in building derived not

only from the wealth being donated by the aristocracy but also the prestige offered to

each city. But more importantly, I believe is the fact that churches offered a very real and

concrete way for Christians to approach the divine. No longer would heaven reside as a

simply an abstract quality, as the church builders and architects attempted to concretize

the experience of heaven within the walls of medieval cathedrals. To accomplish this,

light played upon the windows.

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[47] Georges Duby, *The Age of Cathedrals,* trans. Eleanor Levieux and Barbara Thompson (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1983), p. 38.

Of particular interest in this regard, because it became the central image of most churches, are the rose windows. In Gothic architectures, the walls were seemingly stretched to the very reaches of heaven, due to the use of the arc-boutants or flying buttresses. These massive walls allowed for greater impact of light and greater surface area, and so the medieval architect was able to strategically place stained glass windows to maximize the effect of light. Light, we will be reminded in nearly every account of heaven, signifies God's essence and can be found inundating all aspects and materials in Paradise. These buildings, through their use of light and stained glass windows, were able to convey a new sense of energy and upward striving towards heaven and God. The jewels that adorn the temple, the New Jerusalem in John's account in *Revelations* find their earthly counterparts in the rose windows. Suspended between the floor and the ceiling, as if between heaven and earth, these windows mimic the divine light that pervades the heavenly New Jerusalem. The wheel windows, in particular, evoke the vision of Ezekiel.[48] Ezekiel's wheel is one of confinement without the possibility of escape. But those images of death and an endless circularity of the seasons would be replaced by the rose window, symbolizing creation and life. The architecture and rose windows installed by Abbot Suger's at St. Denis were novel because they employed typological iconography. With the rose windows, dimension and measure seem to

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[48] Ezekiel 1:15-21: "As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl; and the four had the same form, their construction being something like a wheel within a wheel. When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved. Their rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When they moved, the others moved; when they stopped, the others stopped; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels."

disappear, as they could be infinitely large or small, representing the eternal truth of the divine Logos.[49] One can see the larger outline of the rose as being the central focus, but examining how the lines and shapes came together in these windows suggested the intricate nature of the divine's connection to humanity.

What we see in the rose window are separate, individual elements brought together to form a unifying picture of Christianity. Composed of both theological subject matter and the workings of human hands, the rose windows demonstrate how the temporal and eternal might mix to make a statement on the aesthetics and ethics of Christianity. Ultimately, the essence of Christianity is a hidden truth, 'the pearl of great price' that cannot be imparted in words but must be approached by allusion, allegory, and symbol.[50] So the rose window is one attempt to approach that hidden truth, and the goal is to transport the viewer into a transcendent vision of Christianity, which served as a preview of the splendor of heaven.

While heaven is meant to be beautiful, that beauty might not always conform to medieval notions of beauty, aesthetics provides a framework for individual author's, might in fact conform or modify the various notions of beauty that were held during the Middle Ages. By examining visions of heaven via aesthetic theory, we are able to view "the ways in which a given epoch solved for itself aesthetic problems as they presented themselves at the time to the sensibilities and the culture of its people."[51] Medieval aesthetic theory will not change the effects of certain choices made by authors, but this frame aids in understanding what the medieval audience would have associated with the

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[49] Painton Cowen, *Rose Windows* (London: Thames & Hudson), p.10.
[50] Ibid., p. 99.
[51] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 2.

various choices made by the author. Included within the discussion of medieval

aesthetics will be notions of light, numbers, and jewels (drawing on medieval lapidaries).

Using the theories of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor and others, we

will ground the various elements of the texts within the medieval aesthetic view.

Concepts of Place

Christianity grew out of Judaism, which as a religion places far less emphasis on

places than has Christianity. With the exception of the first and second temples, and now

the Western Wailing Wall, Judaism is not tied to particular places in terms of worship.[52]

It is a religion, then, of thought and tradition, which can be evidenced in the Talmudic

traditions that sprang up after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE.

Christianity, however, places extreme importance on place, but such a general thought

cannot encapsulate the larger understanding of place in Christian tradition, which could

no longer worship in the places of its infancy. This was a religion, comprised of a large

Jewish sect, who no longer had the connections with the holy places of Judaism. Unlike

Judaism which believed that a certain land and certain temple were seats of power for its

religion, Christianity was not tied to certain locales. In fact, sacredness had been

removed from a geographical location. But even that seems to overstate the issue, as the

Christian Biblical tradition stresses the particularity of place: "It is expressed implicitly in

the diversity of the Gospels, written with self-conscious attention to distinctive localized

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[52] This is, of course, a very general argument. The Jewish people, however, are infinitely concerned with place as cultural, religious, and social significance because God within the Bible promises those lands to them. But in a very practical sense, it was the displacement of Jews and their alienation during WWII that began the re-immigration to Palestine, and so their very existence, and their very identity, is tied to place. But, in terms of religious practice, this is not a religion that venerates particular sites as being more holy than others. For example, even the Western Wailing Wall is not a required place to visit, unlike Islam's Hajj.

audience, in the Pauline letters targeted at communities named after the places they inhabited and in the specific judgments pronounced on different local churches in the book of Revelation."[53] Philip Sheldrake suggests that, "Christianity was powered by a belief that revelation was focused not on a land or a temple, but on a person, Jesus Christ."[54] And so when places did become important, the importance of place was not because of the place itself but because of what people did there. In other words, "Places could be said to be sacred by association with human holiness."[55]

So while one can certainly make arguments for the importance of pilgrimage in terms of a social and economic practice, we see that it is to specific shrines and places that these pilgrims traveled. And it is not only that these pilgrims traveled, but that there were sites that were considered more holy and more important than others. Canterbury, while important, is not all together dissimilar from any other Gothic cathedral in England. It is, in other words, a very English experience. When one goes to Canterbury, one understands that there was the spot where Beckett died, and his death changed the relationship between the church and the monarchy in Britain. So while people can make the connection between place and former actions, I would argue that place's importance, a phenomenon that we still experience, relates to the fact that place allow for long-lasting emotional connections.[56] And what places allow for is a portal through which one experiences emotion and history. Buildings, if well designed, remind us of the past, and they evoke a sense of history and the connection to the holiness of the person died there.

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[53] Phillip Sheldrake, *Places of the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), p. 33.
[54] Ibid., p. 37.
[55] Ibid., p. 38.
[56] David V. Canter, *The Psychology of Place* (New York: Architectural P, 1977).

A pilgrimage to the Holy Land removes the mediated connection to holiness offered in

certain pilgrimage sites. There is Calvary where Christ was crucified. There is the

Church of the Nativity where Jesus was born. There is, in very basic terms, an immediate

connection with God established in the Holy Land. One is not simply reminded of

Christ's sacrifice; one can attempt to experience that sacrifice by walking the same paths

and visiting the places of that sacrifice. The Icelandic pilgrim, Nicholas of Thvevra,

visiting Jerusalem in the twelfth century, wrote of the Holy Sepulcher: "The Center of the

World is there; there, on the day of the summer solstice, the light of the Sun falls

perpendicularly from Heaven."[57]

As noted earlier, St. Augustine's *City of God* describes the two poles of human

existence in the allegorical City of God and the Earthly city. Because of Augustine's

rejection of the primacy and ultimacy placed on earthly experience, the earthly city was

the place where events and history unfolded, adding to the movement of Christian

experience. But because earthly life was a part of the Divine plan, for Augustine, it could

not be thought of as evil or detrimental. What Augustine warned Christians was not to

lose sight of the progress the soul must make to the City of God in favor of the transient

and temporal delights of the Earthly City.

Despite Augustine's firm distinctions between earthly and spiritual, place's

sacredness remained tied to the holiness of acts, especially former acts. The further the

gap between the acts of the place and the visit to the place, the more a place's

significance lessened, until that meaning eventually became lost.[58] Heidegger's remark,

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[57] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p 40.
[58] This problem can be seen in the *Interlude* and *Tale of Beryn*, as the pilgrims once reaching Canterbury do not engage in veneration at the shrine; rather, the pilgrims engage in activities that best suit their wants and desires.

which occurred during a discussion on the nature of temples in religious practice, highlights this problem: "Once the historical people disappears, the temple ceases to be sacred." Because of this problem, certain medieval theologians seem to impart a kind of blind faith in the existence of sacredness and its relationship to place. Meister Eckhart thus noted that "life lives out of its own ground and springs forth out of its own: therefore it loves without why, simply living itself."[59] While medieval writers might be able to perceive certain ideas and states, the answers were not nearly important as simply living within those ideas and states.

I would argue that medievals attempt to secure place's importance and sacredness in a few manageable ways, which are of supreme importance when considering how medieval authors would come to depict otherworldly places and spaces in literature. First, place becomes tied to identity. Duns Scotus invokes the particularity of identity and the particular impact of certain ideas with his concept of *haeccitas*, or "thisness." In other words, certain places more accurately and completely help define a single person's or an entire culture's identity. Heidegger understood this concern when he would later posit that place gives meaning to people.

Second, a particular place must contain something special. For the purposes of this study, we will say that place must be sacred or holy. There is a self-fulfilling aspect to sacredness, since approval of the divine grants sacredness. In other words, we must assert that the "sacred precinct would not be sacred unless the divinity consented to be present, and so its presence 'is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as a

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[59] L. Michael Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p.165.

holy precinct.'"[60] But even the sacredness was often taken to a further level, as sacredness became a means of communication with and vitality to the divine. In this idea, we see the readiness to label places as centers of the world or Jacob's ladders.

Thirdly, place only has importance because people can have emotional connections to place. This concept would not have been widely recognized or even acknowledged in the Medieval period, as singular experiences were often negated for larger communal needs. But without the personal, emotional addition, the previous two ideas seem not to hold the same weight. For example, while a typical English merchant might take great pride in and identity from Canterbury, knowing that is a holy place because of the sacrifice of Beckett, such recognition might not have made the place sacred to the merchant. The initial arbor of *Pearl* highlights the need for this emotional quality, as that small plot has become the only world for the bereaved Jeweler. Two modern notions of place help us with this concept: "The proper place of a thing is now determined not only by the natural organization of the cosmos, but by contexts supplied exclusively by human beings"[61] and ""Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning."[62]

The process of creating a place was discussed in the first pages of this chapter, namely the need to re-enact the creation story of Genesis. Through a process of working with already present materials, writers define and differentiate various elements to create place and space within a text. This dissertation examines a series of places in the texts, primarily of *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, but also examples from *Paradiso*, *The Vision of*

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[60] Ibid., p. 29.
[61] Ibid., p. 18.
[62] Tuan, *Space and Place,* p. 136.

Tnugdal, and episodes from the writings of Hadewijch. These texts represent the larger

medieval cultural and literary engagements with heaven, so by examining these texts and

architectural forms via the various critical lens noted in this opening chapter, we can

come to a proper sense of how these authors created heaven—not creation *ex nihilo* but

creation grounded in the wants and needs of a particular author and audience.

II

Finding the Places of Heaven

For things are not to be loved for the sake of a place, but places are to be loved for the sake of their good things.—Gregory the Great
[1]

There are critics who think that medieval writers should not have their work set against certain aspects of theories of space and place. They will point to the fact that the Middle English word "space" refers not to our conception of space, and that "our modern abstract notion of space, which is a postmedieval category" is an anachronistic experience placed on medieval life.[2] Such an impulse is not a rebuke of theory as such, but the goal is to focus on criticism, not of abstract ideas, but of the lived experiences of medieval life. While the medieval audience might not have understood space as an abstraction, they did comprehend what space represented. As Laura Howes notes, "Surely medieval men who designed and built cathedrals were also engaged in 'shaping space' to produce certain effects on the people who would encounter those buildings, even though they did not articulate it in exactly the way we do."[3] In fact, the medieval mind thought in ways of extending concepts of place and space, for example: the King's Peace. Initially, breaking the King's Peace meant simply invading the particular, personal space of the monarch, but that concept was extended to mean breaking any law

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[1] Quoted in Stacy S. Klein, "Gender and the Nature of Exile in Old English Elegies," *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, eds. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2006), pp. 113-131, at p. 113.

[2] Michael Camille, "Signs of the City," *Medieval Practices of Space*," eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michael Kobialka (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), pp. 1-36, at p. 8.

[3] Laura Howes, "Introduction," *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2007), pp. vii-xiv, at p. vii.

anywhere in the kingdom.[4] In addition, the Mystery Plays superimpose the geography of

the Holy Land onto their own city, creating a landscape where actions take on extended

meaning because of the superimposed landscape of past Christian narratives.[5] But

ultimately, as Howes notes, one can examine the great architectural reminders of the

Middle Ages—the vast cathedrals—that demonstrate interest by medieval institutions to

create certain effects on viewers.

These effects are varied, of course, but generally, we might think of place as

offering a sense of security and familiarity; on the other hand, space offers a sense of

freedom, which can be liberating and oppressive.[6] In fact, even scenes in books have the

same ability to elicit emotional and physical responses that one might experience from

everyday life.[7] And so place must not be thought of as staid, static experience, but it

should be "construed as dynamic, lived experience—or, put in another way, as a window

onto human activity."[8] But most importantly, space offers the imagination the possibility

for creation, and yet, such ideas are hardly fixed. For example, a crowded room, which is

filled with reminders of a well-lived life can be comforting, while the night sky might

seem oppressive. And so while one encounters these places with a cultural memory, one

must recognize that these places are a "coming together of phenomena, perceptions,

histories, and lives, which is to say that we are located in various places even as those

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[4] Barbara Hanawalt and Michael Kobialka, "Introduction," *Medieval Practices of Space*," (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), pp. ix-xviii, at p. x.

[5] John N. Ganim, "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature: A Critical Geography," *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2007), pp. xx-xxix, at pp. xxi & xvii.

[6] Tuan, *Space and Place*, pp.3 &136.

[7] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

[8] Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, "Anglo-Saxon Horizons: Places of the Mind in the Northumbrian Landscape," *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, eds. Lee and Overing (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2006), pp. 1-26, at p. 1.

places locate us."[9] In other words, places are not simply a physical construction one

comes across in daily life; rather, humans in not only a physical but also an emotional

and intellectual manner experience places.

While critics have long discussed the places of a text, as I will point out with

Pearl specifically, a definite change in appreciation of those medieval places occurred

with the publication of Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter's *Landscapes and Seasons of

the Medieval World* in 1973, which sought to offer "a series of approaches to the subject

of medieval landscape, and some tentative notions about the interrelationships of art,

literature, life, and the life of the intellect."[10] This study "argued for a kind of semiotics

of medieval landscape, an iconographic language, in literature and in art," and its

influence can be seen in most studies of medieval places today.[11] Adding to this general

movement towards space and place in literary studies were the works of Michel Foucault

and Michel de Certeau. Foucault believed that "space itself has a history in Western

experience," which makes it "not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with

space,"[12] and de Certeau believed that space could not be defined but by its movement

and human experience.[13] Of course, most current work in medieval space and place owes

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[9] Ibid., p. 7.

[10] Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1973), p. 1.

[11] Howes, "Introduction," *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narratives*, p. ix. John Ganim in his overview of medieval critical tradition of place and space in the same text sees this as a fundamental change in the way landscape was approached: "Landscape in medieval literature and art was not a product of observation or invention. Rather, details of background and representations of space were designed to further the rhetorical purpose of the text or the image, to be "read" as a clearly understood sign. Even the lusher profusion of background and setting in later medieval literature and art served the purpose of a theological purpose, included not for their own sake but for what they reveal about the larger spiritual significance of the created world. Pearsall and Salter implicitly argued against a romantic understanding of the medieval literature and art at the same time that they evocatively explicated the very different visual and poetic effects of a system of enclosed references" (xvi).

[12] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1986), pp. 22-27, at p. 22.

[13] Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: U California P, 1984), pp. 91-110 at p. 97.

some debt to the publication of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* in English in

1991, which delineated how humans manipulate space into three categories: spatial

practice (perceived), representations of space (conceived), and representational spaces

(lived).[14] In addition, the work of Edward Casey, which looks at how people have

represented places but also how people have understood their relationships with place

throughout history, has contributed to the increased status of the theory.[15] Such an

emphasis on theories of place can be seen in the recent publications of *Medieval*

Practices of Place; *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narratives*; *A Place to*

Believe in; *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages*; and *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle*

Ages, to name a few examples. This impulse to examine the places and spaces of

medieval culture and literary production seems to be partly driven to reclaim something

that has been overlooked or lost in certain studies.[16] And such a process seems natural to

medievalists who "have much to gain from a thoroughgoing contemplation of place, an

ever more layered and complex understanding of landscapes in and through time."[17]

So when we must ask if it is it correct to consider a fourteenth-century poem in

terms of modern philosophies of "space" and "place," the very design and construction of

the poems seems to offer an answer. For example, *Pearl* is a poem that is well versed in

construction and architecture. With the exception of section XV, the poem has twenty

sections, each section consisting of five twelve-lined stanzas, adding up to 101 stanzas,

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[14] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 38-41.

[15] Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: U California P, 1998) and *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Place-World* (Bloomington: U Indiana P, 1988). Casey's thoughts and readings of Genesis were valuable in helping me understand what happens with the void of creation.

[16] Howe, "Introduction," *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narratives*, p. viii.

[17] Lees and Overing, "Anglo Saxon Horizons," *A Place to Believe In*, p. 2.

distancing *Pearl* from the seemingly perfect number of 100. Yet, 101 stanzas are more appropriate and perfect; for the number of "religious consolation" and heavenly reward is, in fact, 101.[18] This "imperfect" number of stanzas almost might be "viewed in relation to the poems' large-scale recapitulative structure, this feature suggests that the ending of one cycle ('100,' with its connotations of completeness) which the narrative has tracked is to be understood as precipitating the beginning of another that will have many of the same properties."[19] The physical construction of the poem, the five stanzas per section, also signifies a connection to humanity: five is the number of the senses, five is the number of appendages that touch the unifying circle for the Vitruvian man; five is the human number.[20] In sum, *Pearl* has 1212 lines, which invokes the medieval numerology of four (the physical elements) and three (the divine number). Then, the number twelve reappears through the poem: "Its stanzas are 12 lines in length; the poem is 1212 lines long; 12 multiplied by 12 comes to 144 and the number of the elect in the Apocalypse and in Pearl is 144,000; in the heavenly Jerusalem there are 12 foundations of stones, 12 gates of pearl and the sides of the squares are 12 furlongs long."[21] Such precision of

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[18] John V. Fleming, "The Centuple Structure of the *Pearl,*" *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, eds. Bernard Levy and Paul Szarmach (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1981), pp. 81-98, at p.88. Also, see Edward I. Condren, *The Numerical Universe of the* Gawain-Pearl *Poet* (Gainesville: U Florida P, 2002), pp. 49-68, which offers a slightly different reading than Fleming's well-known understanding of the structure of *Pearl*. Condren believes that the structure of *Pearl*, both in number and stanza creates a dodecahedron, a structure most fitting for *Pearl* because of its relationship to philosophy and religious inquiry. Also, P.M. Kean, "Numerical Composition in *Pearl*," *Notes & Queries*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1965), pp. 49-51.
[19] Nick Davis, "Narrative Form and Insight," *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, Arthurian Studies XXXVIII, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, (Cambridge, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 1997/2007), pp. 329-349, at p. 338.
[20] Fleming, "The Centuple Structure of *Pearl*," p.94.
[21] Priscilla Martin, "Allegory and Symbolism," *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, Arthurian Studies XXXVIII, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, (Cambridge, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 1997/2007), pp. 315-328, at p. 319. This echoes an earlier thought by A.R. Heiserman, "The Plot of *Pearl*," *PMLA,* Vol. 80, No. 3 (1965), pp. 164-177: "Twenty-one stanzas, one-fifth of the poem, describe the heavenly Jerusalem in John's dimensions: 12 foundations of precious stones, 12 tiers, squares 12 furlongs to the side, 12 gates of pearl. We are now reminded that all these stanzas have been 12 lines in length, that the poem consists of

design leads any reader to understand that the poet was quite consciously crafting a poem built around spatial and temporal constructs modeled after the human body and those places it occupies. The poem's physical and thematic structures, which are intimately concerned with humanity, allow for inquiry into the process of creation, a method that "can be decoded, can be read . . . [implying] a process of signification."[22] In addition to *Pearl*, Langland's *Piers Plowman* places such emphasis on the construction of both landscape and poem that seems to argue for an understanding of the Christian afterlife as being indistinguishable from the places one either journeys to or resides in within that conception of the afterlife.

So while critics might bemoan the use of space because of its abstract quality, I would rightly point to the concept of heaven. Taking the above notions of space, then I think one can envision heaven as an abstract quality, which cannot be known by the human mind, but the human mind consistently has sought to colonize and integrate that abstract idea with the wants of an audience. The medieval people, perhaps more than others before and after, engaged with ideas of heaven. There are a number of reasons for this, and a sketch of those ideas can be found in the first chapter, but let me highlight two ideas. For people interested in God and theology, heaven offered a way to discuss both, as "[s]peaking of heaven is really a way of speaking about God insofar as human beings can experience him, and thus presses against the limits of language and thought" and "[t]o imagine heaven, it is not enough to extrapolate from earthly pleasures. We need to think about the very nature of happiness—which means, in Christian terms, to do

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1212 lines, that 12 times 12 is 144, and that 144,000 is the number of the elect according to John and the Pearl-maiden" (170).

[22] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.17.

theology."[23] Pearsall and Salter discuss this engagement with heaven, noting that it partly

sprang from the multitude of ways heaven was presented during the Middle Ages and the

lure that created:

> Many versions of paradise were offered to medieval man; its landscape
> was variously described by theologians, poets, artists and travel writers.
> Lying so provocatively between fact and concept, religious and secular
> experience, the real and the ideal, it focused quite naturally both faith and
> imagination. By turns, it engaged, transmuted and rejected the evidence of
> the senses. As the beginning and the end of man's quest for perfection, as
> Eden as the Celestial Paradise, it spanned all human history. In more
> limited forms, tangible or intangible, it measured man's constant desire to
> approximate to perfection.[24]

Engagement with heaven was not indicative of a fallen nature; rather, imagining heaven

confirmed "that benediction had not been quite withdrawn from created things, that man

and his dying world were ultimately redeemable."[25]

In this chapter, I will examine how heaven is treated in two touchstones of

medieval literature—*Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, which both feature created landscapes

that not only modify the traditional views of Christian places but also increase the

emotional and spiritual significance attached to those places.[26] While there are

similarities between the two texts, each text offers a striking vision of the afterlife; and

while one might think that a cityscape, and a besieged church and tower evoke distinct

impressions of heaven, I will point to the fact that each of these visions, in fact, forces the

reader and the characters of the text to wonder if heaven might be a viable end. In fact,

landscapes and buildings that have long been pointed to as promoting safety and

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[23] Barbara Newman, "The Artifice of Eternity," *Religion & Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-24, at pp. 1 & 2.

[24] Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*, p. 56.

[25] Ibid., p. 58.

[26] Besides *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, I will make mention of some other examples—*Paradiso*, etc.—to highlight the various ways that authors approached heaven.

enclosure actually serve to alienate those who attempt to gain entrance into heaven. For while place "holds together in a unity whatever it contains . . . it also isolates its contents from all other things,"[27] and I think that the isolating aspect of place—and consequently heaven—has been overlooked in favor of the traditional note of protection.

In the *Pearl* section, I will examine how three distinct landscapes—arbor, forest, and city—promise safety and bliss, but function more to divide the Jeweler further from both reality and eternal reward. For Langland's *Piers Plowman*, a constant deferral of joining with God in heaven might suffice to point to this idea of exclusion, but the poem's landscapes and buildings—specifically, the landscape of the Ten Commandments, the Tower of Truth, and the Barn of Unity—create an image of a landscape that cannot be mastered and a union with God that is forever deferred.

Pearl

Any discussion of *Pearl* will eventually, however briefly, make mention of the places of the poem. I believe this to be true for two key reasons: 1) the very construction of the poem clearly illustrates a poet interested in how construction influences meaning and 2) the places of the poem—especially the "erber grene" and the Celestial City of New Jerusalem—influence both the action of the poem and consequently how critics read the poem. Even as I argue that point, the places of the poem are still often overlooked as the focus of scholarship, being considered simply sites of action. This neglect has been noted by most critics who discuss the landscapes of *Pearl*.[28] So while many critics have

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[27] Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, p. 51.

[28] Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*," *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (1986), pp. 7-17, at p. 7: "But the vision of the City in *Pearl* has either been the subject of critical neglect, or been dismissed as derivative commonplace and paraphrase." John Finlayson, "*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 71. No. 3 (1974), pp. 314-340, at p. 314: "While most attention in *Pearl*-studies

made mention of the places of *Pearl* and I will engage with a variety of them,[29] I want to

point out the most recent and best study of the group, Ann R. Meyer's *Medieval Allegory*

and the Building of the New Jerusalem. Meyer traces how theology and architecture

intersect in *Pearl*, as she sees the poet "as a master-builder, a literary architect whose aim

was to create, in poetry, a late fourteenth-century expression of the Church as a figure of

the New Jerusalem."[30] Her work is notable for the discussion of the chantry architecture,

and how the development of architectural elements combines to create the image of the

medieval church via the three landscapes of the poem. Ultimately where I disagree with

Meyer is both in the overall effect of the poem and how those landscapes are read, as she

sees it as a metaphor for the fourteenth-century church; I do not see the poem as

recreating the church, but I see the poem as calling into question that institution, creating

an afterlife and places that seem to alienate the Jeweler and the audience from attaining

the final goal of heaven.

 While in the above section I point to the physical structure of *Pearl* as indicative

of the poet's interest in construction, I believe it vital to examine the initial section of

Pearl because those first stanzas in the "erbere grene" initiate a usage of landscape and

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has been directed to what the pearl stands for and, hence, what the meaning of the dreamer's total
experience is, some attention has quite naturally been focused on the three *loci operandi* of the poem." Ann
R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2003),
p. 156: "Neither Bowers nor other recent scholars who have sought to understand the social and political
context of *Pearl*, however, have made use of late medieval architecture for assistance, even though the poet
displays an explicit interest in his architectural environment."

[29] Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*"; Finlayson. "*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision"; S.L. Clark and
Julian N. Wasserman "The Pearl Poet's City Imagery," *The Southern Quarterly*, Vol XVI (1978), pp. 297-
309; and Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (Philadelphia: U
Pennsylvania P, 1991) and "The Body and City in *Pearl*" in *Representations*, No. 48 (1994). While I could
certainly go further back, looking at the studies from the first half of the twentieth century, these are the
studies that focus primarily on the visual landscapes of the poem and are still most cited in the discussions
of the places and spaces in *Pearl*.

[30] Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem*, p. 157.

place that alienates the Jeweler from all experience. In the very first stanza, the poem initiates a "consuming preoccupation with the spatial disposition of persons or objects."[31]

The Jeweler attempts to locate meaning within the garden, and the description is heavily inscribed with the word "spot"; however, the use of spot wants for specificity. The poet offers readers a seemingly serene landscape of a small arbor, and that arbor, ostensibly, fits into long-established modes of geographical description. The poem, however, never gives full weight to descriptions of place and space, relying rather on "topographical formulae and enumeration," which is a by-product of the metrical construction of the poem, resulting in "traditional *description loci*."[32]

Spot, with respect to place, seems to refer to the very place where the pearl was initially lost. Aiding the view of spot as place marker is spot's accompaniment by the qualifying "þat." Spot and "that" are inexorably intertwined, and translations of line 61, "Fro spot . . ." remarry spot and that.[33] Joined by the demonstrative pronoun "that," spot is a deictic gesture, pointing to the place where the Pearl was lost. In addition, the use of the demonstrative that "in the first stanza grouping adds concreteness to 'spot.'"[34] But the use of "that" also denotes the speaker's spatial separation from the spot. Furthering this disconnect from the spot and the speaker, all actions that take place at the "spot" occurred in the past, which is noted by the use of the preterite. The speaker is removed from the spot by not only location but by time. How is it that he can refer to that spot

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[31] S.L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman, "The Spatial Argument of *Pearl*: Perspectives on a Venerable Bead," *Interpretations*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1979), pp. 1-12, at p. 2.
[32] Ralph Elliot, "Landscape and Geography," *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, Arthurian Studies XXXVIII, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, (Cambridge, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 1997/2007), pp. 105-117, at p. 111.
[33] Marie Boroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl: Verse Translations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 111-165 at p. 127: "My soul forsook that spot in space."
[34] Clark and Wasserman, "The Spatial Argument of *Pearl*," p. 5.

when he is no longer there? His presence at the spot assures a proper description of the place, and yet his very description of the place promotes the idea that he is truly absent. Through his description and his feelings, readers can sense that he is emotionally tied to the place though not corporeally present.

The suspicion that the Jeweler is no longer at the spot has greater implications than scholars have considered previously. The acceptance of "spot" as marker of place and morality signals an understandable recognition of "that spot" being that spot within the arbor—that arbor where Pearl is buried. If that spot is indeed "the spot," then one can refer to it as a fixed temporal-spatial point of both physical and emotional importance. But what if spot cannot be fixed? What if, as noted above, the Jeweler appears to be removed from that spot? If this is the case, then this not only establishes the problematic use of landscape in the poem, but this use also points to the fact that places might be readily and easily misread within the poem.

In the first six stanzas of the poem, the *Pearl*-poet uses "spot," "spote," or "spotte" on ten separate occasions that fall into two categories: construction of interiority and construction of moral landscape. Line twelve, the first appearance of spot, reads: "Of þat pryuy perle wythouten spot"; a use repeated in line 24, "My privy perle wythouten spotte."[35] "Privy," whose meaning is best approximated to the modern word "private," establishes a concept of possession and ownership; not only a physical ownership, but one that is internalized by the emotional and alliterative connection to Pearl. The uses of "privy" in Middle English vary: secret, concealed, confidential; private, personal,

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[35] All quotes from *Pearl* are taken from *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds. Malcom Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: Exeter UP, 2002).

peculiar; unseen, invisible, imperceptible; and having to do with sex or procreation.[36] This use of "privy" in *Pearl* sets up a dichotomy between that which is personal and that which is public. The Jeweler's Pearl is not open for public consumption; it is only to be found in a kind of "domestic space," circumscribed by what readers imagine to be ivy covered trellises or walls of the arbor.[37] This idea of private consumption, however, calls into question if the Jeweler is even qualified to understand fully the complexities of the Pearl. "Privy" also relates to the most intimate of human connections: the family, which strengthens the idea of a father-daughter relationship. The first section also contains the construction of a moral landscape: "Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange" (ln. 13); "Þat spot of spysez mot nedez sprede" (ln. 25). This use of "privy" establishes a moral sphere of action; here, moral is used in the sense of perceptual or psychological. It is only in this spot, that of the arbor, where the Jeweler feels at peace, and it is only in this spot where he feels he can do anything. It is a landscape that allows him to live, though the Jeweler's life does not appear to extend further than this arbor.

The concept of "spot," for many critics, is quite clear. Spot is used with regards to blemishing and morality.[38] Critics maintain that the poem contains an intricate play "on *spot*, or *withouten spot*" to indicate Pearl's purity as well as a marker of the place of loss.[39] But there is a fundamental paradox in discussing a "spot with a spot" and a "spot without a spot." "Spot" is but a deictic placeholder. It is a word that asks to have other words and concepts substituted for it. If taken in a strictly geometrical perspective, spot

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[36] *Middle English Dictionary,* Ed. Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1983), s.v. "privy."
[37] Georges Duby, ed., *A History of Private Life*, Vol. 2, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1988), p.7.
[38] David DeVries, "*Unde Dictur*: Observations on the Poetic *Distinctiones* of the *Pearl*-poet," *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000), pp. 115-132, at p. 128.
[39] Sarah Stanbury, "The Body and City in *Pearl*," p. 39.

lacks dimension and so how can there be two spots together or a spot without a spot? And the spot they are most often referring to the pearl, which is itself, the poet claims, without a spot.

Of course, this usage has been seen as a "wholly semantic" dualism of "spot," which simply refer to "defect" or "place,"[40] which marks spot firmly as a "place of stain and morality."[41] Then for some critics "spot" loses that semantic word play and becomes only the linking word that joins together those first stanzas. These approaches, however, effectively limit the meaning of "spot," and these approaches display a confidence in the fixed meaning attributed to "spot." This very duality, in addition, "implies the impossibility of making any physical discovery of it—the instability of the term 'spot' becomes a way of capturing important aspects of the human for thought."[42] *Pearl*, I would like to suggest, manipulates the very language of space and place to construct and visualize an eschatological architecture, both the formation of an afterlife but also an architecture that promotes thoughts of the afterlife. Those architectures, both heavenly and earthly, relate to the tangible restraints of ineffability in terms of creation of a divine landscape. And while one can certainly point to the issue of language and the difficulty of language to grasp the very nature of creation, I would suggest another thought. Instead of focusing on the limitations of language, I believe an examination of the effects of the choices of landscape brings to light a poem filled not with protective enclosures but with alienating landscapes and strongholds.

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[40] Morton Donner, "Word Play and Word Form in *Pearl*," *The Chaucer Review*, Vol 24, No. 4 (1989), pp 322-321.

[41] W.A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain Poet*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), p.11.

[42] Davis, "Narrative Form and Insight," p. 337.

The problem with *Pearl*'s use of landscape is one of confusion. As noted above, the Jeweler attempts to locate meaning using "spot"; however, the use of spot leads the reader to question the reliability of both the word and the speaker. For example, the Jeweler speaks of spots as if he is there. He speaks of spot as if he is truly there, but the reader can easily note that he is removed from the "spot" by distance and time. And because of his bereaved state, his mind is firmly placed on Heaven when he is stuck on earth. Such an idea is not so dissimilar to many critics who view the Jeweler as being stuck in an earthly (and even literal) mode of thought and understanding while he is confronted by the theological import of the heavenly landscape of New Jerusalem and doctrine of the Pearl Maiden.[43] This duality of being and difficulty of locating the "spot" leads to the question of how we as emotional beings construct and try to make sense of our environments. How is the world viewed when faced with moments of loss and love? How are we to make sense of the construction of the scenes of a poem? How does the poet use the very language of space and place to make emotional, spiritual, existential, rhetorical points? Moreover, a substantial element to this exercise of distinguishing between space and place is to find out the *why* behind the creation of the places and spaces of the poem. The production of place is but another way of control. It is perhaps

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[43]Katherine Terrell, "Rethinking the 'Corse in clot': Cleanness, Filth, and Bodily Decay in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 105, Iss. 4 (2008), pp. 429-447, who sees the Jeweler's "obsession with location [as] a symptom of his earthbound spirituality" (435). Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2010) who claims that the Jeweler's "preoccupation with visual details demonstrates that he is unprepared to turn way from the physical" (143). J. Allan Mitchell, "The Middle English *Pearl*: Figuring the Unfigurable," *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2000), pp. 86-111, who claims that "There are moments, for example, when the dreamer says too much and thus fails to take into account the liabilities and limitations of his perspective" (93). And one might also see similar thought in Theodre Bogdanos, *Pearl: Image of the Ineffable* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State UP, 1983) and Josephine Bloomfield, "Aristotelian Luminescence, Thomistic Charity: Vision, Reflection, and Self-Love in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 108, Iss. 2 (2011), pp. 165-188 to name but a few.

an illusory control but control nevertheless. So by analyzing space and place those

spaces and places of the poem that might initially be considered simple now materialize

as "full of complexities."[44] This is partly due to the idea that a "specific location,

particularly the built environment, gains significance and meaning from the lives lived

within it."[45] The natural world does not prompt the writer with such difficulties; rather it

is the human mind. Our minds create our spaces and places, and during that process

these spaces are transformed into places during the process of acquiring "definition and

meaning."[46] For the *Pearl*-poet, the difficulties are an inability to overcome loss, but

more importantly for that of space and place, the inability to describe this new life

without his beloved Pearl becomes an ineffective mode of reading the landscape as one of

control and enclosure. The Jeweler's *modus operandi* is to place strictures of control on

the environment, giving not only the illusion of control but also of comfort. Specifically,

the use of a garden proves to be problematic because of the medieval associations with

Paradise and the Garden of Eden. To those associations, the idea of a cemetery further

complicates the garden due to the true nature and intended use of the "erber grene."

    The initial "erber grene" of Pearl, as noted above, demonstrates an awareness of

how the language of space and place can be deployed to create effect. Beyond the

difficulties of "spot," the "erber grene" depends upon multiple traditions that

problematize the concept of gardens and the ability of the Jewler to maintain control of

meaning. The Jeweler's arbor is remarkable for many traits, not least of which, is the

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[44] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.226.

[45] Stephanie Hollis, "Strategies of Emplacement and Displacement: St. Edith and the Wilton Community in Goscelin's Legend of Edith and *Liber Confortatorious," A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, eds. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2006), pp. 150-169, at p. 152.

[46] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 136.

order it demonstrates. During the opening lines of the poem, the Jeweler recounts the

unrivaled qualities of Pearl:

> Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.
> So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
> So smal, so smoþe her sydez were,
> Quere-so-euer I jugged gemmez gaye,
> I sette hyr sengeley in synglure. (ll. 4-8)

This specific use of language, the idea of "precios pere" and "sette . . . sengeley in

synglure," enforces the Pearl's image as a transcendent being, as she was without equal

and was set apart from the finest jewels. Her uniqueness calls then for an equally

transcendent resting place. Building establishes a bulwark in the midst of a "primeval

disorder."[47] The act of building, in essence, attempts to establish order in an entropic

setting. Nature, that is, true nature, retains the notion of the uncontrollable: forests, at the

beginning of the Middle Ages, "were especially dense, large or remote were regard[ed]

with mistrust and were...lonely places entered only by the occasional undaunted hermit,

brigand or bandit, or intrepid hunter."[48] But by the later Middle Ages, large forests were

few and far between, as most land had been cleared for both timber and agriculture,

prompting "strict regulations . . . to safeguard the remaining forests."[49] But it is

interesting to note that the "struggle to impose order on nature and to control it" caused

the disappearance of forests and threw certain sections of Europe into a precarious

ecological balance.[50] *Pearl* engages in this activity of taking a piece of land—however

wild—and cultivating it for a specific purpose, here emotional not agricultural. While

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[47] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 104.
[48] Vito Fumagalli, *Landscapes of Fear: Perceptions of Nature and the City in the Middle Ages*, trans, Shayne Mitchell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 15.
[49] Ibid., p. 88.
[50] Ibid.

this arbor lacks a grand scale, it seems the most important part of the Jeweler's life. If

one looks at the first section of the poem, there is little mention of anything outside of the

arbor experience. When the Jeweler recounts his trade, it is in the preterite tense. The

past is but a memory, the world has faded away, and all that remains to the Jeweler is a

small, green arbor where he lost his Pearl.

The initial scene in the "erber grene" occurs during the harvest: "In Auguste in a

hyȝ seysoun, /Quen corne is coruen wyth crokez kene" (ll. 39-40). This mention of the

harvest leads to a serious question as to what the function of this garden is, as it produces

no tangible crop. What is certain about this scene is that it creates an immediate contrast:

"the intense, and even unnatural luxuriance of the garden—its Maytime peonies scenting

the August air, its flowers and spice plants as thickly spread as in a tapestry—with the

viguor and fruitfulness of the agricultural scene. The very sound of the alliterative

language, sharp and incisive for dry stalk and keen blade, soft and dense for crowded

flower bed reinforces this contrast."[51] A very real contrast that the scene calls to mind is

that between life and death, and critics have questioned the relation between life and

death in the arbor, whether one springs from the other.[52] However important that

question is, the important fact of the debate is that the two are quite evidently related, and

leads us to ask what the interplay of these two apparently disparate concepts appears to

say about nature, about the nature of creation, and about the nature of this particular

sacred place. Additionally, the coincidence of both life and death reinforces the

ambivalent nature of the Jeweler's new world. He cannot escape death in the arbor,

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[51] Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*, p. 103.
[52] Edward Vasta, "*Pearl*: Immortal Flowers and the Pearl's Decay," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (1967), pp. 519-531.

because even there death and life are so interlaced that the one must, and does, proceed from the other, which calls to mind the ever-present expression of obsequies, or funeral rites, which stems from the creation narrative in Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

The obsequies serve as an illustration of the continuity of life and death, and yet, that continuity serves as comfort, a comfort lacking for the Jeweler. As noted above, the Jeweler remains outside of the scope of real life. His world is contained in the arbor. The arbor provides for him an altar, as it were, to uphold the memory of his departed Pearl. The narrator describes his expectations for that place, as "Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele, / Þat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange / And heuen my happe and al my hele" (ll. 14-16). Upon initial viewing, this arbor serves the same function as a church, a place where one goes for comfort. This place serves as his altar, but it also serves as a symbol of his hope, of longing for his precious pearl to be returned to him. The Jeweler's arbor fails him, as it does not bring the Pearl back in a real and tangible way; rather, the arbor serves as the starting point for his ethereal journey to the very gates of Heaven, separated from Pearl by the river of Heaven. It is because of the arbor, because of the love of the Jeweler for Pearl, that this journey takes place; the arbor becomes a sacred place, joining in that tradition with the Gardens of Eden and the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs, and cemetery culture. There are many things that the arbor might be for a reader: "Can this herber, this huyle, also be a grave? a convent-garden? Eden? Calvary? the enclosed garden which is the Blessed Virgin Mary?"[53] In other words, "the 'erber'

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[53] Heiserman, "The Plot of *Pearl*," p. 166.

itself 'does not exist in isolation,' since it is a prefiguration of both the Paradise garden and the New Jerusalem."[54] These various traditions force the reader to engage with a solitary arbor, which is not simply an arbor; however, these various traditions and prefigurations speak to the inadequacy of an arbor to represent heaven, because these forms lack the perfection required of heaven.

For medieval Christians, human existence began in the Garden of Eden: "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2:9). It is not surprising, then, that the journey of the Jeweler should begin in this small garden, this arbor, as the poem and the Jeweler attempt to mimic the creative and generative powers of the Divine by creating an afterlife from various traditions and modes of thought. Even though Eden was the terrestrial paradise, it is still that place of mischance, the place where humanity lost its initial luster. It is, forever more, associated with error, specifically an error of judgment and perception. Original sin occurred when Eve, and then Adam, allowed themselves to be swept up in the idea that they were on par with God. This great loss "in the Garden of Eden was the supernatural life of man, or sanctifying grace, and that included the gift of life eternal or beatitude."[55] Eden, for a skeptical audience, is a place of beauty and peace, but not a place that is within reach. The medieval audience believed, however, that Eden was real. Eden was but a place waiting to be found. When one crossed over a mountain, there Eden might be found waiting.[56] The idea of finding Eden, and recapturing what

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[54] Meyer, *The Building of New Jerusalem*, p. 171.
[55] Marie Padgett Hamilton, "The Meaning of the Middle English *Pearl*," *PMLA*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (1955), pp. 805-824, at p. 809.
[56] Elizabeth A. Augspach, *The Garden as Woman's Space in Twelfth- and Thirteenth- Century Literature* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2004), p. 12.

humanity lost seems to be filled with many questions and issues. How can humans, once expelled, cross back into this place? Is there not still an angel who bars humanity's entrance? Could Christ's redemptive sacrifice allow people to cross into that forbidden garden? Even though these seem strange concepts to a modern audience, medieval readers would associate the arbor with the Garden of Eden.[57] And it is not only the Garden of Eden, the initial Paradise but also the Eternal Paradise that is invoked by garden imagery: "The garden was an approximation to Heaven, with its constant striving to improve upon nature—palm trees plated in gilt copper, exotic graftings of rose upon almond—but Heaven itself could be expressed as a concentration of all sensuous delights in a perpetual garden."[58] But no matter how beautiful the arbor is or how tempting Eden may be, no audience can forget that it was humanity who lost that beauty, and it was humanity who lost innocence and brought death and suffering into the world. Humanity effectively transformed the Garden of Eden into the Garden of Error. This belief in the failure of humanity is not felt only on Earth but also in Heaven:

> Þy corse in clot mot calder keue.
> For hit watz forgarte at Paradys greue;
> Oure ȝorefader hit con mysseȝeme.
> Þurȝ drwry deth boȝ vch man dreue,
> Er ouer þys dam hym Dryȝtyn deme. (ll. 321-324)

Pearl mentions this to the Jeweler to answer his question if he might be able to join her there in Heaven, but this quotation seems to speak of the enormity of the fall of Adam and Eve. This quote is filled with images of overwhelming dread, from the idea of the corpse sinking into cold dirt, to the idea of abuse of forfeiture at the hands of Adam, and

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[57] Hamilton, "The Meaning of the Middle English *Pearl*": "Competent fourteenth-century reads must have recognized the erber(e) as the Garden of Eden, where the maiden soul of man fell to earth and was lost, with her potential endowment of everlasting life and blessedness" (807).
[58] Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*, p. 80.

finally to this image of the weary path through death that humanity must travel. The Jeweler suffers from the inability to approach the language of the Divine, but there is the suggestion in this quote that Adam's actions of "mysseʒeme" and "forgarte" not only separate humanity from the Garden but also separate humanity from any understanding of the divine until death. The poet's inclusion of "deme" emphasizes the trial nature of life, as the word implies a judgment of action. The Garden of Eden was, once, paradise, but its memory and legacy removes humanity from a connection to the ethereal, locating humanity's concern to the earth. In that place where life is perfect, the saved must still remember the inequity of humanity, furthering the implications of the use of garden imagery. So while the Jeweler views the "erber grene" as a place of comfort, the very notion of the garden, because of its connection to Eden, disrupts his vision of control. Eden, despite the redemptive hope, remains closed off from humanity, still guarded by the angel's flaming sword. A place of comfort, for the Jeweler, becomes a place of ultimate alienation, as a human cannot step foot back within the garden. And while Plotinus believed that every garden allowed for the experience of the sublime, this garden seems to exist outside of sublimity.[59] This garden is a container and a form of isolation, seeking to enclose meaning. Critics have seen it as a "jewel box,"[60] working like the other jeweled images of the poem to over-stimulate the mind.[61] The garden is also the "locus in which the jeweler's bereavement and longing for the pearl are isolated and concentrated."[62]

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[59] Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, p. 68.
[60] Newman, "The Artifice of Eternity," p. 17.
[61] Meyer, *The Building of the New Jerusalem*, p. 141.
[62] Ibid., p. 171. A similar idea is held by Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*, p. 103.

When speaking of gardens and the associated imagery, one must think of the first garden in Paradise, but one's thoughts must also travel to the garden from the Song of Solomon, which early became "the specific and dominant variety of the paradise garden of profane as well as divine love."[63] While aroma might entice one into the garden, this fragrance may also act as a form of entrapment. A major concept of the *hortus conclusus* relates to the possessive nature of the garden, i.e., who controls the door of the garden. If the lock of the door is on the inside of the garden, then the woman's mastery supersedes that of the man. However, if the lock is located on the outside wall of the garden, the man then controls who the woman sees, when she may leave the garden, and what she is allowed to do. The locked gate allows control even during absence, but it also allows a false confidence in control. In absence the locked gate can be overcome, and absence allows for freedom from oppression. The arbor of *Pearl*, however, lacks the very tangible lock and key; rather, the arbor provides a perhaps weightier concept of control: life and death. Whereas the medieval romances emphasize control of every aspect of life, the Jeweler's weightier concerns show how illusory the control of the *hortus conclusus* is. The Jeweler understands how death's, in fact God's, mastery supplants any idea of dominance that humanity can try to display. The Jeweler is not actively participating in the world; rather he is removed from all life. He seems to defy the logic that an individual cannot "be a subject of an environment . . . [only] a participant."[64]

While the Jeweler appears to be subject to the environment, he reminds readers that the Pearl is truly subject to her surroundings, because this arbor is also a grave; the Jeweler laments this fact, noting how the dirt mars the beauty of Pearl: "To þenke hir

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[63] Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*, p. 76.
[64] W.H. Ittelson, *Environment and Cognition* (New York: Seminar P, 1973), p.13.

color so clad in clot. / O moul, þou marrez a myry iuele, / My priuy perle wythouten spotte." All those past events were never truly past, as the Church made "past things present by constant and vivid re-enactment."[65] When the death of Christ and His ascension are constant reminders of life, then how can one not become so enraptured with the idea of everlasting life for one and one's family? The Jeweler does think of death quite often, and the fact that the only place he considers himself at peace is the flowery grave of his daughter speaks volumes to that concept. Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden allowed for the formation of people around the world; yet, humanity would be marked thereafter as sinful, the repercussion of the fall and of the original sin. Original sin, though the cause of the expulsion from Paradise, allows for the cycle of life, birth and death.

Pearl's short life never achieved the ability to take her part in the continuation of life. She dies too young, still a virgin; and yet, she displays a fruitfulness. Her virginity actually attracts Christ's attention to her: "In hys blod he wesch my wede on dese, / And coronde clene in vergynté, / And pyȝt me in perlez maskellez" (ll. 766-768). Her life, though cut short, ensures her status as a favored subject in the kingdom of Heaven. Even though Pearl never reached sexual maturity, she still is able to give life, and the Jeweler misattributes her ability as a life-giver:

> Of goud vche goude is ay bygonne;
> So semly a sede moȝt fayly not,
> Þat spryngande spycez vp ne sponne
> Of þat precios perle wythouten spotte. (ll. 32-35)

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[65] Clive Burgess, "'Longing to be prayed for': Death and Commemoration in an English Parish," *The Place of the Dead*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), pp. 44-65, at p. 48.

Even though Pearl never reached maturity, her lifeless body provides the Earth with the necessities to perpetuate that beautiful spot of land. She is the source of happiness for the Jeweler, and she also guarantees the existence of life at that spot, as the beauty of the spices and flowers spring from her funeral mound, that small hill. The Jeweler points to a maxim "Of goud vche goude is ay bygone," and he believes that the beauty and life of the arbor stems from Pearl. Life does stem from Pearl, but it is not life. It is, once more, an imitating of life. This body in the ground does not give rise to fruit to sustain life, rather flowers and spices that promote fantasies of life. Even though the Jeweler claims that seeds could not fail to sprout from her body, the spice has gone to rot. These rotten spices and the aroma of flowers mask the death of the arbor, giving hope for life where none might exist. Though her virginity remains intact, she still bears the mark of original sin, and that mark thrusts her into the life cycle. Only two humans have ever escaped the mark of original sin, Christ and his mother, the Virgin Mary.[66] And so even the Pearl fits into this world of simultaneous being, retaining her purity but still marked with sin. Her simultaneity seems especially paradoxical, as how can a young child not but three be involved in such processes of life and death? She suffers the consequence of original sin, and to be exempt requires an intervention beyond the skills of a Jeweler and beyond the protection of an "erber grene." But it is the arbor that holds the key to existence for both the Jeweler and the Pearl, and it is there where he first lost her and where she first departed from Earth that all action should begin, just as it began ages before in a garden somewhere beyond the reach of humanity.

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[66] Mary's birth by her mother Anna is known as the Immaculate Conception, commonly misattributed to the birth of Christ, however. The idea, which was long held in Catholicism, but only made official by Pius IX in 1854, states that Mary was spared the mark of original sin at the time of her conception, and was filled with the grace of God so that she could become the untainted vessel in which to carry Christ.

These various garden tropes and traditions that inform the *Pearl*-poet's treatment of the arbor, and consequently affect our reading of the arbor, speak to the problem of simultaneous being. Earlier in this study, I noted how the Jeweler's actions and thoughts left him in a state of flux, a world in-between modes of thought. When the Jeweler was stuck on Earth, his thoughts were on Heaven. When he should be focused on life, he could not escape thoughts of death. This theory of simultaneous being relates to the larger issue of language, and the difficulty of language to capture concrete moments and to encapsulate the primal power and scope of the Divine. Yet, here the poet offers readers more moments when our thoughts must not be solely fixed on one idea. When we read any kind of garden imagery, the text and the poet require us to think of all those form and tropes that inform that tradition. We must simultaneously think of the Garden of Eden or Error, the *hortus conclusus*, and grave imagery. Those past ideologies are fused with our present thoughts and ideas, forming a chronotope, which can be found to varying degrees "in all realms of the life of the world."[67] So while we can clearly recognize that the Jeweler is stuck in-between modes of thought, we must conjure up those same thoughts and forms so that these places of meaning are not lost upon us.

The endowment of place with significance fits into the program of Christianity, especially early Christianity, as Christians came to identify specific places as being sacred. What makes these places unique and sacred seems to be that they are commonplace and places also associated with nature, which calls to mind the idea, as emphasized in Acts 7:48 "God does not dwell in houses made with human hands." Christianity also emphasized the lack of specified places; one can see this clearly when

[67] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, (Austin: U Texas P, 1981), p.284.

noting that Paul's conversion happened on the road to Tarsus, or the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. These places, these non-descript roads and those places in-between destinations, are those places where the formative events in early Christianity occurred. God's life, according to Duns Scotus, seeks revelation in the "particularities of the created order."[68] This idea of particularity essentially argues that because of the 'thisness' of items they "participate directly in the life of the Creator."[69] Things, in other words, directly share in the beauty of life and the beauty of creation because of their connection to the Creator. This association with the interplay between things and God only adds to the idea of place being significant. The significance of places is greater than other association because places "frequently provide greatest range of long-lasting associations."[70]

These ideas of particularity, appropriateness, and significance all seem to point to the possibility that the arbor could be considered as a sacred place. However, there needs to be something more to elevate this simple arbor to a place of sacredness. The absent quantity is love; the ability to transcend the everyday, the human, can only be granted by love. Dante understood this when he wrote:

> S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti
> novellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi,
> tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.. (*Paradiso* I, ll. 73-75)[71]

As Dante watches Beatrice bask in the cascading light of the eternal beauty of Heaven, his love for her allows him to transcend the limitations of mortality to travel to that

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[68] Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p.23.
[69] Ibid., p.24.
[70] Canter, *The Psychology of Place*, p. 9.
[71] All quotes from *Paradiso* come Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso,* trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor, 2007).

sanctum sanctorum of heaven. And for the bereaved Jeweler, it is love that transforms

the arbor, and it is love that grants him his longing to see Pearl. Though we can say that

it is the Jeweler's love that allows the transcendence of time and space, it is truly the

work of God: "Bot of þe Lombe I haue þe aquylde / For a syȝt þerof þurȝ gret fauor" (ll.

967-968). Yes, the Jeweler loves the Pearl, and yes, that love allows his journey; but it is

mercy, love for the unlovable, displayed through the grace of God that truly allows for

this journey.

Through the love of father for daughter and Christ for the Jeweler, a simple arbor

has been transformed from a figuring of the primal power of nature to a Jacob's ladder,

becoming an example of an "*axis mundi* . . . with boundaries separating it from

surrounding secular or profane space."[72] Of course, graves and the connection to the

departed certainly increase the pressure of control over someone, but this arbor goes

beyond that connection. It is no longer just an arbor, and it is no longer just a grave.

This small plot of land has become the whole world for the Jeweler. The boundaries of

this garden not only circumscribe the sacred from the profane, but the boundaries of the

garden also circumscribes the Jeweler from life. The Jeweler's life is one of

simultaneous being, which is given full weight in the arbor, his home. The arbor, for the

Jeweler, has replaced the outside world. As opposed to the continuous sensory input

from the physical and social objects of communal living, the Jeweler has only the arbor.

Without these hallmarks of interaction, the Jeweler has only his memories and

associations of his former life with Pearl. He is unable to negotiate everyday concerns,

throwing himself into a world of silence and a world with the constant interaction

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[72] Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p.5.

between life and death. Unable to grasp Pearl physically, the Jeweler still cannot let her go. The building of the arbor, the waiting for Pearl, the search for Pearl are all that the Jeweler's life is, and his seeing her is the culmination of his life: "Wel watz me þat euer I watz bore / To sware þat swete in perlez pyȝte!" (ll. 239-240). The Jeweler provides a faithful vigil for the second coming of Pearl, and this idea of a second coming relates directly to the promise of Christianity. A constant concern of *Pearl* is the treatment of the afterlife. If not dealing specifically with the arbor, the terrestrial Paradise, or New Jerusalem, the poem still impels the reader to think about the afterlife. The arbor is an example of eschatological architecture. Eschatology refers to the ultimate end of humanity, be that an afterlife or the second coming, or Judgment Day. Eschatological architecture, I propose, refers not only to the physical arrangement of an afterlife, or even to how the events leading to the afterlife are constructed, but also to any earthly architecture that promotes thought of or about the afterlife. The arbor performs this second task.

When we view the arbor, as did medieval audiences before us, and even the Jeweler before us, we view the arbor as it relates to life, death, and the afterlife. We are initially reminded that this arbor is the place where a pearl of great price was lost: "Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere; / Þurȝ gresse to grounde hit fro me yot" (ll. 9-10). And those initial stanzas also force the reader to view how that loss has affected not only the Jeweler but also the physical landscape of the poem. The Jeweler can never remember a sweeter song than those of the past, those songs with Pearl. Those songs ring still in his head, as the whole world, the world outside of the arbor, has gone quiet. This stillness causes the Jeweler to hearken back to memories and to those moments when he was most happy.

And this arbor, which is between the poles of life and death, is the initial vision of the afterlife for the Jeweler. This is the place where he longs to be with his Pearl, and this is the place where he attempts to commune with her body and spirit. So while the arbor is not properly heaven, it becomes heaven for the Jeweler. Heaven, I believe, responds to the wants and desires of the audience, fitting however neatly or not with theological underpinnings. And so what the Jeweler attempts to do is create a place where he can reside with the one he most loves, and he attempts to view both the landscape and his life in terms of that wish. And so he attempts to create a landscape that is a temporary heaven, which also calls to mind heaven, but is not heaven. So this arbor displays how one creates an afterlife, how that afterlife calls to mind the platonic ideal of the afterlife, and how even the creator can misunderstand an afterlife.

I believe that this impulse to create an earthly form of heaven relates to larger forces within the medieval Church. From the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, all laypeople were required to perform "auricular confession once a year on the part of the laypeople to a priest, and the performance of penance on pain of excommunication and the deprivation of Christian burial and resurrection."[73] Besides this main act of worship: "the laity had to acquire a basic knowledge of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, the Seven Acts of Mercy and Seven Sacraments, and so on, just as, eventually they had to have some practical ability to prognosticate through knowledge of the Four Last Things (Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell)."[74] But what the church truly offered the laity was the basic tenet "that one should approach life with 'cunnynge', or

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[73] Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum P, 1996), p. 37.
[74] Ibid.

practical wisdom."[75] Of course, how much the average English layperson knew cannot

be accurately determined; however, I think that the requirements of 1215 point to a need

in educating the laity. An educated laity would be able to understand these tenets,

avoiding the traps of heterodoxy. But even with this educational streak in the church, the

ideas were "only words."[76] Churches and other Christian places of worship provided

symbols for those words. When Heaven and God could not come down to the hopeful

worshipers, churches provided formulations of those concepts "as the forecourt to

paradise," which were beautiful in their own right but "revelatory of a far more exalted

realm."[77] Architectural structures, unless specifically intended, lack cosmic or

transcendental significance. And yet, this simple structure, an arbor, is elevated to the

cosmic and transcendental. Such a place "does not arise from qualities intrinsic to the

place itself. It requires some special interaction between a human being and the gods."[78]

But what occurs when a place becomes sacred is fairly remarkable, as it is not simply a

place any longer. Rather, the place "reproduces the act of creation, and so the sacred

place itself takes on the characteristics of the total cosmos. It is, in Eliade's words, an

imago mundi, or 'image of the world.'"[79] A serious architect must always consult nature

before any undertaking. The architectural project must take into consideration the

surrounding environment and the light. *Pearl*'s arbor is a point of reclamation in the

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[75] Ibid., p. 39.

[76] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.116. I think we might point to Chaucer's pilgrims as prime examples of both the successes and failures of an educated laity and clergy. While one can judge the sincerity of their beliefs, readers can note that these pilgrims all have familiarity with the tenets of the church. But what seems most important from the pilgrims is that they all have their own set pieces when it comes to religion. Each focuses on one aspect of religion, using that narrow plot for best advantage. With perhaps the exception of the Parson, these pilgrims are unable to see how the various pieces of religion fit together.

[77] Ibid., p.117.

[78] Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, p. 38.

[79] Ibid., p. 37.

surrounding area. It is a moment and place of caring in a world that seems to have forgotten her, and the only person who continues to place her memory at the foreground of his life's energy is the Jeweler.

Heaven, at its very core, is an example of mythical space, a concept that flourishes in the "absence of precise knowledge."[80] But this mythical place is not so remote as humanity might imagine; rather it is a necessary rejoinder to the human experience, "a response of feeling and imagination to fundamental human needs."[81] Creating heaven is an attempt to answer those fundamental questions of humanity, yet most importantly, there is no authority to define or describe what Heaven is or is not. And it is in that absence of precise knowledge that the Jeweler creates a world, and an afterlife, that attempts to confront the difficulties of his world, most importantly the loss of Pearl. The Jeweler's heaven is a miniature of a physical city, conforming to the Jeweler's trade and his inability to see and read anagogically, but in the process of creating his heaven, the Jeweler once again isolates himself from attaining any real comfort or joy.

Our Jeweler, Pearl's father, has spent an unknown amount of time in the arbor, hoping for freedom from his grief:

> Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange,
> Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele,
> Þat wont watʒ whyle deuoyde my wrange
> And heuen my happe and al my hele.
> Þat dotʒ bot þrych my hert þrange,
> My breste in bale bot bolne and bele;
> ʒet þoʒt me neuer so swete a sange
> As stylle stounde let to me stele. (ll. 13-20)

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80 Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 85.
81 Ibid., p. 99.

The profundity of his grief causes the Jeweler to want to give up on his life, to, quite

literally, lie down and die.   Once the Jeweler has fallen asleep, his soul transcends his

mortal frame, transporting him into a different garden, a place that he cannot initially

recognize:

> I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace,
> Bot I knew me keste þer klyfez cleuen;
> Towarde a foreste I bere þe face,
> Where rych rokkez wer to dyscreuen. (ll. 65-68)

 Even though he does not know where he now is, he still recognizes that he has been

transported elsewhere. The rocks were, according to the Jeweler, "to dyscreuen." The

word can be translated as "discern," "describe," and "descry." The problem is that each

of these words has a decreasing knowledge of intimacy. The Jeweler presents a scene

where he is removed from this forest yet knows of the rich rocks contained therein,

noting the fineness of the jewels yet not the meaning of the jewels. As a tradesman, a

jeweler is accustomed to looking at the world through a loupe, seeing the minute details

of stones; but this particular jeweler's inability to see the larger, anagogic fact of this

world speaks to his further isolation from heaven, since the poem implies that admittance

relies on an ability to recognize the true nature of the human experience.

Not only is this new landscape outside the scope of human understanding, it is a

place of greatness: "Þe grauayl þat on grounde con grynde / Wern precious perlez of

oryente" (ll. 81-82). Adding to the splendor of these priceless oriental pearls are the

"crystal klyffez so cler of kynde" (ln. 74). The repetition of light imagery and diction

clearly evokes the light of the Eternal, a light that suffuses all of Heaven. But the effect

of the scenery and the gleaming lights do not remind the Jeweler of God; rather the

Jeweler begins to forget, losing the burden that had weighed on his heart and soul: "The

adubbemente of þo downez dere / Garten my goste al greffe forȝete" (ll. 85-86). In fact, this new concept of bliss is further intensified a few stanzas later: "Doun after a strem þat dryȝly halez / I bowed in blys, bredful my braynez" (ll.125-126). These extraordinary incidents extend past the relief of a bereaved father, providing even sustenance through the nose's detection of pleasant smells: "So frech flauorez of frytez were, / As fode hit con me fayre refete" (ll. 87-88). No longer does fragrance entice the Jeweler into oblivion; he has already forgotten his woe. The Jeweler, now in this new place and new state of emotional being, can enjoy song, noting "Swangeande swete þe water con swepe, / Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryȝt" (ll. 111-112). What the stream filled with jewels offers the Jeweler is an opportunity to view himself and the location in a self-critical light; however, he misses that opportunity, just as he will not be able to use the Pearl Maiden as a mirror for both his thoughts and actions later in the poem.[82]

This moment of bliss, of misplaced joy, could not last. The true nature of the Jeweler, and the true nature of the landscape, shows quickly, overshadowing the momentary relief from grief. The appearance of a young maiden instantly reminds the Jeweler of his past:

> At þe fote þerof þer sete a faunt,
> A mayden of menske, ful debonere;
> Blysnande whyt watz hyr bleaunt.
> I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere. (ll. 161-164)

While this quotation has an interesting quality, it marks a fundamental change in how the Jeweler will approach the landscape, as he will now gain the didactic voice of the Pearl Maiden. So I think it important to consider how this landscape has worked as an isolating principle to this point in the text.

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[82] Bloomfield, "Aristotelian Luminescence."

No longer can the gleaming jewels and shimmering cliffs beguile grief into happiness. Gone is the sweet song of the river running over rocks. Nature, now, proves to be a foe, keeping the Jeweler from his beloved Pearl. Here, nature does not bend to the emotional longing of the Jeweler, becoming instead space that oppresses. The river, which earlier had sweetly sung to the Jeweler, becomes a divide between father and daughter. The Jeweler looks to cross the river, "Bot þe water watz depe, I dorst not wade, / And euer me longed ay more and more" (ll. 143-144). Again, the Jeweler's skills of perception allow him to plumb the depths of the river, yet he cannot recognize the necessity of the divide. Space can be associated with freedom, but one can have fear of space, which deals with the "fear of solitude."[83] The very word "space" denotes that oppression and that fear of loneliness in lines 437 and 438: "Þenne ros ho vp and con restay, / And speke me towarde in þat space." Space does not promote freedom and individuality; rather, this space prevents connection, causing distress and leaving people far from each other.

While the forest transforms the Jeweler's emotional status, ineffability and simultaneous being follow him into this forest, causing the Jeweler to question his own ability as narrator and causing him to assess incorrectly his current location and state. The reader understands that the narrator finds himself in a forest figuration of the afterlife. But the narrator does not seem to notice this, despite even the promptings of his emotional resurrection from a previous state of grief. When the Jeweler remarks on the "water were a deuyse," his words are an inability to recognize the metaphysical realm.[84] Rather, he mistakenly believes that he finds himself either in that lost garden of

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[83] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 59.
[84] Ibid., p. 61.

humanity, the Garden of Eden, or an ordered estate containing fantastical woods. This association of earthly forms speaks not only to his problem of simultaneous being, in this case being in Heaven but thinking of Earthly constructs, but also to his inability to grasp the creative force of the Divine. He is literally ensconced in the warmth of creation, which emanates from God on the eternal throne, but he cannot recognize the hand of the Eternal at work.

After the Jeweler's brief moment of happiness and his subsequent meeting with the Pearl Maiden, God grants the Jeweler permission to see the Heavenly City of New Jerusalem. This is but another example of the intercession on the Jeweler's behalf.

The Jeweler asks for a favor, "I wolde þe aske a þynge expresse" (ln. 910). He requests to see the place where Pearl and her fellow brides of Christ dwell, "If þou hatz oþer bygyngez stoute, / Now tech me to þat myry mote" (ll. 935-936). This request is granted, but, nevertheless, it seems to be a strange request. Why should he want to see where the Pearl maiden lives, especially when he knows she is well provided for? And secondly, why is it that these Pearl maidens would have to dwell anywhere? This request is another example of the confused thinking, of the simultaneous being, displayed by the Jeweler throughout the poem. He can clearly see that the Pearl Maiden is no longer a child, and yet, his parental instincts continue to treat her as such. Furthermore, he continues to think of everything from an Earthly perspective, even though it should be clear that this is no longer Earth. The Pearl Maiden recognizes his error in thought, and attempts to clarify *terra firma* beliefs; she explains that her home is not "in Judy londe" (ln. 937), but "þe nwe, þat lyȝt of Godez sonde" (ln. 943). This simple explanation does not completely correct the Jeweler's preoccupation with humanity, and it also shows how

others may recognize this faulty line of thought but the Jeweler cannot acknowledge that failing.

Despite his inattention to ethereal thought, the Jeweler continues on his journey to New Jerusalem. After a short journey up a hill, the Jeweler spies that place, "Jerusalem so nwe and ryally dyȝt, / As hit was lyȝt fro þe heuen adoun" (ll. 987-988). These two lines are supremely important, as they reinforce the concept that God sent this city down from Heaven, and that it is quite literally a city. The Jeweler sees forest and city; he does not see something beyond the human experience and imagination. This heavenly city is, admittedly beautiful and awe inspiring, but it is still, in fact, a city. It is a city, with the exception of materials and denizens, not unlike other cities:

> Þe cyté stod abof ful sware,
> As longe as brode as hyȝe ful fayre;
> Þe stretez of golde as glasse al bare,
> Þe wal of jasper þat glent as glayre;
> Þe wonez wythinne enurned ware
> Wyth alle kynnez perré þat moȝt repayre. (ll. 1023-1028)

Heaven, then, as presented in *Pearl* is not too dissimilar from Earth, with notable exceptions of immortality and eternal bliss. There are streets, houses, and an abundance of light. Even though the New Jerusalem bears resemblance to life on Earth, the Jeweler cannot cross the water to reach the city and, more importantly, to reach Pearl. He is alone on the other side of the river, longing to be a part of that which escapes his imagination and his grasp. New Jerusalem is the home of life eternal, but it is also the home of Pearl, and the only place where the Jeweler can hope to be. Now that he has seen Pearl and knows where she lives, how can a father be asked to leave his daughter once more? It does not seem possible, and it is an event the Jeweler looks to prevent at every turn. But what is interesting, I believe, is that in the face of emotional upheaval, the Jeweler's

heaven is a city that limits his ability both to communicate and interact with the Pearl maiden.

Dante Alighieri's *Il Paradiso*, on the other hand, offers a marked departure from earthly restrictions and the heaven of *Pearl*. Whereas *Pearl*'s narrator longs to hold onto Earth, and all those associations which were most pleasing to him, Dante's Pilgrim sloughs off the conventions that hold him to the ground, journeying into the cosmos with the love of his life. *Pearl* offers a great paradox in regards to Heaven. God sends a city down so that these saved individuals may have a place to live. In fact, it is strange to write, "a place to live." For what is life in Heaven? For the Jeweler heaven seems to be but a more glorious and splendid version of life on Earth. There are streets and there are houses, and there is Pearl. Heaven comes down to man in *Pearl*, reversing the natural order. Whereas man has long been taught to elevate life to a level nearest perfection, this becomes inverted in the afterlife. God's imagining of the afterlife becomes riddled with pot holes and weighted down with buildings with cornerstones made of precious gems. This New Jerusalem is beautiful, but this beautiful city is still a city.

A city is the formulation easiest and most closely associated with humans. Cities are "pre-eminently human in conception and construction," shaping the way in which people understand their environments and also define themselves.[85] Humanity is furthest removed from metaphysical constructs when in a city, as it is the construction that best defines humanity. Yes, building is a religious act because it creates order in the disorder of life. But that order can never approach true construction and true architecture: the language of the Divine. God, according to Genesis, created harmony in the disquiet of

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[85] Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, p. 147.

emptiness by speaking a succession of commands, a process that took no more than a week. People, on the other hand, plan. People, on the other hand, dawdle. People, on the other hand, fail. As there is no true understanding of Heaven, we are forced to create and invent our own heaven. The Heaven of a Jeweler would be a world dotted and bejeweled by the most precious stones that a mind could imagine. That particular Heaven would be but an excuse to display his most valuable possession: his own privy pearl without a spot. The Jeweler's heaven is limited by his own fixation on the Earth.

Dante, though, supersedes the limitations of Earth, and transforms the everyday into the ethereal. His Heaven is not that of a city but of the beauty of creation, and the highest form of Heaven is in the form of a rose: "In forma dunque di candida rosa / mi si mostrava la milizia santa / che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa" (XXXI, ll. 1- 3) Not only does Dante's Heaven most nearly mirror creation, but it is also light. *Pearl*'s figuration of Christ has him still in human form, and light emanates from Him; but, Dante goes further than that, calling into importance that holy light, as he envisions the Triune God as pure light.

But even though the various landscapes might fall short of Dante, many critics have seen the created landscapes of *Pearl* in a favorable light. The city, for Clark and Wasserman, serves as the ultimate image of the protection and enclosure that can be offered only in the heavenly city of Jerusalem.[86] And not only can this city protect, it is the source of sublimity of all the surrounding areas, and if one extends that line of reasoning, all the sublimity of the created universe.[87] Then, of course, the city offers the location where most of the complex ideas of the poem are presented, giving it greater

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[86] Clark and Wasserman, "The *Pearl* Poet's City Imagery," pp. 299 & 301.
[87] Field, "The Heavenly City in Jerusalem," pp. 9 & 16.

importance than the arbor.[88] The problem, though, as I see it is that these images are not those of enclosure or protection but that of isolation. For example, the issue of a walled city must be confronted. While a walled city can surely be looked as enclosure and protective, I must ask from whom are the citizens of the New Jerusalem being protected?[89] And if this is truly heaven and the place of complex ideas, then why does the New Jerusalem not need a church but it needs dormitories? Ultimately, the New Jerusalem of the poem provides the reader with an image of a walled city that is protected by rivers, which cannot be crossed without the explicit permission of God. So every single element is seemingly designed to prevent the Jeweler from joining with the Pearl Maiden, and the accumulation of isolating elements leaves one with questions if heaven might ever be approached. So what the reader is confronted with is a poem that opens and closes with a Jeweler trapped in an arbor, hoping to be reunited with a long-lost daughter, moving to a fantastical landscape that serves to isolate the Jeweler from the Pearl maiden and a walled New Jerusalem, which cannot be entered without explicit permission from God. In other words, this is a landscape that isolates the Jeweler in the micro-world of the arbor and from the eternal landscape of New Jerusalem.

Piers Plowman

While *Pearl* establishes a series of landscapes and places that alienate and isolate the Jeweler both from Pearl and heaven, *Piers Plowman* looks at places and landscapes in a vastly different light. While the landscapes of the poem are not terribly well-described, the effect of landscape is to promote a specific, theological program that will push the

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[88] Meyer, *The Building of the New Jerusalem*, p. 148.

[89] There is no mention of any on-going war with Satan in this formulation of Heaven, so I am not sure that we can point to Milton's idea of heaven.

reader and Will to the ultimate joining with God. But with actual buildings, I would

argue that the poem establishes a theme of alienation from God, which can be seen in the

closest images of heaven in the poem in both the Tower of Truth and the Barn of Unity.

The opening line of *Piers Plowman* establishes not only the season, a "somer

seson, whan softe was the sonne" (Prologue, ln. 1) and the particular outfit of our

traveler, "shroudes as I a sheep were, / In habite as an heremite unholy of werkes" (P. 2-

3); but, most importantly, it establishes that the journey begins not in an otherworldly

place but that the traveler "Wente wide in this world" (P. 4).[90] The inclusion of the

deictic "this" proclaims a certainty with which the poet points to his surroundings as this

world, that is, the real world. While these lines focus the reader's attention on

particulars, namely the what, when, and where; for the purposes of this inquiry, it is the

where that needs further attention. *Piers Plowman* opens with a standard dream vision

poetic landscape:

> Ac on a May morwenynge on Malverne hilles
> Me bifel a ferly, of Fairye me thoghte.
> I was wery forwandred and wente me to reste
> Under a brood bank by a bourne syde;
> And as I lay and lenede and loked on the watres,
> I slombred into a slepyng, it sweyed so murye. (P. 5-10)

There is a world-weary traveler who falls asleep under the influence of a stream, and that

dream transports the dreamer to a place of wonders, a land of "Fairye." But what I would

like to focus on is not that Langland checks off all the necessary and various dream vision

tropes but that he includes a place marker, "Malverne hilles." What, readers are forced to

ask, is particularly striking or special about Malvern Hills? We might speculate that the

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[90] All quotes from *Piers Plowman* come from William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 2nd ed., Ed.
A.V.C. Schmidt (London: Everyman, 1995).

inclusion of this particular place shows the writer's familiarity with the landscape, either because he was raised there or employed in the region, or its inclusion might be a nod to the writer's own understanding of the natural beauty of that region. Of course, readers from at least the mid-sixteenth century held that this inclusion of Malvern Hills relates directly to the fact that Langland was from the area; according to Robert Crowley, who declared in the printed edition of *Piers Plowman* in 1550, that Langland was a "Shropshere man borned in Cleybire . . . aboute viii myles from Malueren hilles."[91] Whether or not Langland was or was not from the area seems immaterial; rather, I think the inclusion of the place seems to say for the concepts of space and place in the poem. It has been noted that Malvern Hills works as a kind of surveying and literary vantage point, because Malvern Hills are "hills so abruptly high that being on them is like being in a box seat with a view of the social world staged below, like occupying a real Archimedean point."[92] Malvern Hills *is* a beautiful place, and one could do much worse than spending time there; however, Malvern Hills is not striking. Malvern Hills' inclusion forces the reader to realize that there is nothing particularly special about its location. Rather, Langland attempts to place the reader and the poem in a landscape of no particular importance, because the remainder of the poem is intimately entangled in places that have spiritual, allegorical, and anagogical importance. The created places of the poem must be contrasted from the ordinary experience of Malvern Hills. In other words, Langland must start the reader off with a place that would be familiar, if not

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[91] Quoted in C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2005), p. 4.
[92] Elizabeth Fowler, "Civil Death and the Maiden: Agency and the Conditions of Contract in *Piers Plowman*," *Speculum*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (1995), pp. 760-792, at p. 765.

altogether mundane, because it is the departure point for the poem. The grounding of the poem in this place allows the reader to understand how landscape is treated and viewed differently in the poem. Malvern Hills will serve as the standard of the ordinary experience from which all landscapes and places will be measured in the poem. But just as the experience of Malvern Hills provides the reader with a formulation of the everyday, it also sets the poet on that looking point noted above. He is removed from the experience, isolated from the world below; to join this dreamscape world requires a concerted effort, but it is interesting to note that he begins firmly entrenched outside of the experience of the dream world. But to note that the poem opens with this scene and that the dreamer Will had a clear, topographic, almost panoramic view speaks to the importance of landscape in defining the journey of the poem.

Moving from the opening lines of the poem, the traveler remarks about the landscape that he immediately perceives in his dream:

> I was in a wildernesse, wiste I nevere where.
> A[c] as I biheeld into the eest an heigh to the sonne,
> I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked,
> A deep dale bynethe, a dongeon therinne,
> With depe diches and derke and dredfulle of sighte. (ll. 12-16)

This landscape is not only different, but it is a place "wiste I never where." So the traveler's assertion that he knew not where he was forces the reader to understand that we are no longer in the familiar places of Malvern Hill. In addition, the placement of a type of tower—"a tour on a toft treliche ymaked"—to the "eest" calls to mind the biblical idea of Eden. The idea of a tower is quite interesting, and I will speak later in this chapter as to what I see as the effect of this particular tower, but for the moment its relationship to Eden is intriguing. Genesis 2:8 asserts Eden's location as being in the East: "Now the

Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed." So while placing the tower in the Edenic cardinal direction resonates in a specific manner, the inclusion of a tower that sits on an elegantly made hill forces all to view the scene. Also, this hill's height and prominence is only increased by the fact that it is surrounded by a deep dale, emphasizing the disconnect between the tower and the dungeon placed in the deep dale. Such a disconnect is underscored by the cacophonous alliterative stresses of "deep dale," "dongeon," "depe diches," "derke," and "dredfulle."

A number of interesting ideas stems from these first sixteen lines of *Piers Plowman*, including the connection between dungeon and tower and the interplay between garden and wilderness. As noted above, Eden is explicitly referred to as a garden within the biblical account. However, there is no garden to be found within these opening lines; rather, there is a specific mention of a wilderness. Wilderness and gardens promote differing ideas on the role of humanity within the natural sphere. Eden as garden portrays a fundamental truth of the ability of humanity to control and cultivate within nature. Of course, what are gardens truly? Gardens offer a modicum of order, but can nature be placed within finely measured plots? What gardens truly offer is an experience that requires patience and effort, working order within a system that tends to disorder. On the other hand, wilderness requires no such effort. Wilderness has no strictures, allowing the true quality of nature to be unloosed. But perhaps more importantly is to note what modern readers thought of wilderness and forests: "Wilderness is thus the region of wild animals over which human beings have no control" and "Forests aroused fear partly because of their wild animals, which pressed close to the

settlements throughout the medieval period and beyond."[93] But as noted in the *Pearl*

section, by Langland's time, forests were heavily protected to prevent depletion of

resources. So while this opening section invokes Eden, this section does not place Eden

as the be all end all of heavenly locales. By noting that there is wilderness to be found in

the vision, one can see that control of nature is not placed in the hands of humanity;

rather, wilderness has been cordoned off from human control because the potential for

creation and power can still be found there.

     With respect to these opening lines, human constructions—dungeon and tower—

dominate the landscape. While these human constructs are a part of the landscape, a fact

that is stressed in their descriptions, they are still apart from the action of the poem. The

tower must be on that hill, and the dungeon must be placed within the dale, because those

are the landscapes that can best contain and emphasize their respective features. But it is

not left for nature to stand alone in these lines; rather, nature needs and, it would seem,

requires adornment by the human hand. Towers and dungeons are not just respective

stand-ins for theological concerns; they represent huge achievements of human physical

and intellectual activity. And these buildings serve as reminders of human power, and so

while the poem does not go into detail as to what exactly occurs in this particular

dungeon, the collective imaginations of both medieval and modern readers are guided by

experiential knowledge of power and can accurately summon effective representations.

As others have noted, though, is that while the poem "demonstrates such little regard for

the form of buildings, it seems quite concerned with the physical relationship of people to

each other, in particular with the limitations and dangers of interior spaces, withdrawn

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[93] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1979), pp. 82 & 83.

from more open places in which a community can work, learn, eat, and pray together as a group."[94] In other words, the reason that the poem relies on open spaces as the loci of interaction is because there seems to be something limiting and repressive in the interiors of buildings. But even though these buildings might be the sites of limitations on action, they also act as a reminder of the difficulties of representing the afterlife. On one hand, the highest architectural achievements of an age do not reflect poorly on the afterlife, but these buildings contain such a wealth of cultural and political connotations that whatever theological connotations needed might be drowned out. In other words, buildings and the places that they occupy cannot remove the cultural attachments. So when the poet deploys any type of building in the poem, the reader must attach their own cultural memories of similar buildings, which further complicates how to approximate heaven through the use of buildings.

Moving from the notion of buildings momentarily, Langland's use of landscape requires some thought, as landscape takes on a moralizing principle, which finds a perfect example in Langland's treatment of general moral principles that should guide a Christian's journey. For many readers, these landscapes could easily be seen as unimportant because they might serve "only to identify a figure or explain an action, as a tree, for instance, indicates an outdoor scene."[95] While I believe the poem is playing with this concept of landscape, the poem pushes the notion further. On his journey to find Truth, Will is given directions, and in the directions, he is given the names of the various landmarks that will guide this particular journey.   These place markers, those words used

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[94] Kari Kalve, "'Truthe is thereinne': The Places of Truth and Community in *Piers Plowman B," Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2007), pp. 141-154, at p. 142.

[95] Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons*, p. 26.

to describe landscape, are curiously familiar to a Christian audience. There is a brook, "Beth-buxom-of-speche" (ln. 566); then there is a ford, "Youre-fadres-honoureth" (ln. 577); and a place by the name of "Swere-noght-but-if-it-be-for-nede-And-nameliche-on-ydel-the-name-of-God-almyghty" (ll. 570-571). There is a field referred to as "Coveite-noght-mennes-catel-ne-hire-wyves- Ne-noon-of-hire-servaunts-that-noyen-hem-myghte,"(ll. 573-574) and in that field, there are two stumps: "stele-nogh" and "sle-noght" (ln. 577). And there is the bridge that finally leads one to this end goal of Truth, and that bridge is called, "Bidde-wel-the-bet-may-thow-spede" (ln. 592). Of course, these place names refer to the lessons that one receives upon the journey, but as they are place names, they are the guides for the journey as well. It is this landscape that reminds the pilgrim of the right way. As well, these places help orient the pilgrim and the reader, so that the journey, which is long and difficult, does not fail to reach an end goal, and that immediate end goal is finding Truth's home, but for the general poem, that end goal is to find the nature of faith and salvation; these principles contained in place names must be enacted, these places must be visited for that end goal to be accomplished and that end place to be found. Places, for humans, have the longest lasting associations, and it is also true that emotion becomes tied to these places, serving as reminders of past events and past principles.[96] These places, however, do not stand out in the mind through their descriptions. They are just places. There is a brook, but we hear not the sounds of the running brook. There is a ford, and though Will is told to bathe in that ford, we know not

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[96] Canter, *The Psychology of Place*, p. 9. Canter's book is intriguing as it displays how easily the human mind uses places to serve as a kind of condensing of emotional ties. For example, when one refers to a place, it is not simply the physical place that is being recalled, it is every emotion and every experience that has ever occurred at that place. And after a while, the place becomes less important, in the mind of that person, than the emotions and the memories. Places become, in effect, subservient to the human experience.

how deep or how cold the water is. And the field has no dimensions, and we know not

what might be grown there; of course, there are the two stumps, but are they particularly

large or small, Langland does not say. Again, this is a landscape that is unremarkable.

Langland appears to inundate the reader with the everyday experience that borders on

monotony, endowing places only with moralizing names or allusions to gardens with

religious significance. Such usage of landscape is reminiscent of the Old Testament, in

which the places were stand-ins for the theological lessons and concerns of the writers

and people. This usage of the Bible was forced upon the Crusaders who soon came to

recognize that description of the Land of Milk and Honey had to be for theological

reasons because they found nothing but rocky, dry wilderness in the Holy Land.[97]

But what is most intriguing from Langland's usage is the idea that places can serve as a

visual or auditory cue, that the place becomes the embodiment of some principle. In

Langland, this landscape becomes not a landscape, as these are not real places, as they

lack true description, but it becomes a landscape that loses natural intent and is consumed

by moral lessons. The place names and the lessons they contain overcome the natural

phenomenon, so that the reader and the pilgrim cannot distinguish trees from "sle-noght"

and bridges from "Bidde-wel-the-bet-may-thow-spede." Langland's world must serve a

function of religion, as religion dominates all thought and emotion in this world. Without

Christianity, and here I refer to the Christianity that resides outside of the corruption of

the Church, Langland's world loses structure and meaning.

     I would also argue that this use of landscape relates back to an older form of

knowledge, one that the Anglo-Saxons would have used:

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[97] Chris Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape: Toward a New Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 47.

> This specificity, based on particular shapes, derives from need. No visual maps existed for this landscape for most of the Anglo-Saxon period and peoples; maps were verbal instead. Even when recorded in written charters, the place-names and features listed are a sequence, each item encountered in the order in which a walker would meet it. To name the boundaries, one named the notable features of the environment as one walked them: discussion of legal issues, such as ownerships, required a shared terminology. Thus, to walk the bounds by naming the map both marked it and made memory the map, transferring man's vision and judgment to the landscape in words even as the landscape itself took up residence in the mind's eye.[98]

This very much fits the project of Langland in this section, as he is attempting to describe the landscape through the shared community of Christianity, moving through the Ten Commandments to the ultimate resting place of heaven. Ultimately, this landscape and the directions fits into the tradition of medieval Europe, as most maps were not graphic until the seventeenth century,[99] but it also gets to the larger project of the poem: Langland composes a poem that "might provide spiritual maps, not geographic ones"; because in this conception of medieval Christianity, "One need not be able to find Jerusalem on a map, but it was absolutely crucial to understand the particular spiritual practices and habits of living that might allow one ultimately to get there."[100] Ultimately, this landscape is one that prompts not only the walker to remember the commandments, but there seems to be an implicit challenge—one cannot continue on the way without a full and complete adherence to these central tenets of Christianity, "As in the landscapes of quest romance,

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[98] Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*: The Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts," *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes,* eds. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2006), pp. 85-110, at p. 89.
[99] Daniel Lord Small, "The Linguistic Cartography of Property and Power in Late Medieval Marseille," *Medieval Practices of Space*, eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michael Kobialka (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 200), pp. 37-63, at p. 37.
[100] Klein, "Gender and the Nature of Exile in Old English Elegies," pp. 114-115.

the scenery along the way represents challenges and obstacles to a final goal."[101] But this landscape does not disappear completely, because it seems to serve a real function:

> Where landscape has no symbolic purpose to fulfill, it hardly exists, except as a series of glimpses caught by the knight from the road, or the lady from the castle window—mown meadows, or a neat beech grove with greensward beneath. The view is arcaded, distanced, as remote from the realities of the romance situation as the occupation of the peasants in earlier Calendar pictures of the labours of the months. Landscape features are called into existence from nowhere to provide occasions for romantic action, and are as indefinite as the article which designates them—a forest, a fountain, a meadow.[102]

So unlike the problem with buildings, this kind of landscape is not overwhelmed with tangential cultural echoes. Rather, this landscape has a fundamentally didactic and theological discourse explicitly attached to it. Working as an over-determined subject, these landscapes do not allow Will either to stray from the path set forth nor from the discourse if he wishes to reach Truth. With such a vague treatment of the identifying features, these places are not recognizable as proper trees or proper bridges or proper paths.[103] Their entire identity has been consumed by the theological imperative of the poem.

Christian tradition, Christian history has shown an interest in places. This is a religion, especially during the medieval period, which contained specific places that were endowed with a transcendent spirituality, sparking the booming business of Pilgrimage. These places, however, were remarkably unremarkable. They contained no great beauty or wonders; their importance depended on the people who were born, died, or buried there, or even that place's relation to an event that took place there. For example, the

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[101]Ganim, "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature: A Critical Geography," p. xxi.
[102] Pearsall and Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons*, p. 52.
[103] Kalve, "The Truthe Thereinne," p. 142.

Holy Land is not a place of great beauty; yet, for thousands of years, pilgrims have flocked there to join with the people and events who once sojourned there. That lonely, barren hilltop near Jerusalem is transformed into a place of spiritual consolation because Christ was crucified there. And the Church of the Nativity inspires such awe and longing in visitors because it is the launching point for Christ's journey on Earth. These places, in effect, only become important, only become sacred, because of the significance we attach to them. So while pilgrims may not have known, as we still do not know today, that Christ was born at the very spot where the Church of the Nativity now stands, that does not matter. It matters only that the pilgrims believe that Christ was born there, that he cried there, that he was visited by the Magi there. The predominance of pilgrimage narratives to the Holy Land—526 accounts of journeys to Jerusalem survived from the period 1100 to 1500[104]—offers insight into how important medieval Christians viewed both the sites of pilgrimage and the pilgrimage itself. This mental willing of belief is another act of creation. It is perhaps a more powerful act of creation, moving beyond words into the experiential world of emotion. Without the emotional capital invested in those places, without the hope that there is something more to a place, these places would not become sacred. In the world of *Piers Plowman*, the places are unremarkable, yet they communicate with something beyond the human experience. These are places that are named after Christian morals and lessons. These are places built from the elemental fabric of a Christian life.

Echoing the construction of a castle out of the very real life forces in Passus IX, Langland goes further into this form of construction with the Holy Church in Passus XIX.

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[104] Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-poet*, p. 12.

This scene is often overlooked because it follows the powerful harrowing of Hell, which some critics describe as "the true end of the poem,"[105] while others have looked past the harrowing, noting that without "passus xix and xx, it seems the identity of 'the B version,' its place in history, and much of that history itself might look far different, if not disappear altogether."[106] This lack of discussion is evidenced by the fact that there are only three texts cited in the Penn Commentary on *Piers Plowman* for that particular scene.[107] Of course, the fact that this has been overlooked might be related to the fact that "Scholars tend to ignore the spatial relationships throughout the poem, doubtless in part because the setting for the poem's actions is so much less prominent that the actions themselves."[108]

But the scene in the Barn of Unity brings together both place and action. As Piers is thought suited for the task of bringing order to the world, he must have a building to protect his newly sown crops, as Grace implores him to "Ordeigne thee an hous, Piers, to herberwe inne this cornes" (XX. 321). But in a world that cannot elevate the earthly experience to Heaven, Heaven must become more earthly, and so the place of sanctuary, the place of storage is built out of the cross and the blood of Christ:

> And Grace gaf hym the cros, with the croune of thornes,
> That Crist upon Calvarie for mankynde on pyned;
> And of his baptisme and blood that he bledde on roode
> He made a manere morter, and mercy it highte.
> And therwith Grace bigan to make a good foundement,
> And watlede it and walled it with hise peynes and his passion,
> And of al Holy Writ he made a roof after,
> And called that hous Unite -- Holy Chirche on Englissh. (XX. 324-331)

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[105] Douglas Bertz, "Prophecy and Apocalypse in Langland's Piers Plowman, B-Text, Passūs XVI to XIX," The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Vol. 84, No. 3 (1985), pp. 313-327, at p. 318.

[106] Lawrence Warner, "The Ending, and End, of *Piers Plowman* B: The C-Version Origins" in *Medium Aevum*: 76 (2007), pp. 225-250, at p. 225.

[107] Stephen A. Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman,* Vol. 5: C Passus 20-22; B Passus 18-20: (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2006).

[108] Kalve, "The Truthe Thereinne," p. 141.

Now, obviously, this barn is not only of Christ but is Christ, endowing it doubly with sacred intent. While it would be easy to dismiss such construction as an overplayed metaphor of how Christianity, and the Church, is built out of the experiences of Christ, and they are the living remnant of Christ on Earth, Langland complicates this view. Instead of plying readers with a general idea that the Church is Christ on Earth, Langland shows us how Christ remains in the very fabric of the buildings that carry out his work. The timbers are that of the true Cross and the crown of thorns, stretching these small pieces of wood to erect a massive structure, reminiscent of God removing Adam's rib to construct Eve. Then there is the stirring image of Grace working the blood into a mortar to set the stones for the foundation. Now while this building obviously is one of human scale, it supersedes the earthly as a place of spiritual fulfillment. The building is infused with Christ's blood and bones, and it would seem that such a building cannot ostensibly be turned from its innate holiness. Though the Antichrist may knock on the door and be let in through the guise of a friar, the building does not change. It will always be a Church. It will always be a part of Christ.

Langland's great masterpiece, the building erected from the frame that crucified Christ and held together with his very life blood, is not a participation in the unknowable. It is not to bathe one in the beauty of luminosity. It is visceral, it is immediate, and it is above all a place of order. To this end of order, Langland conflates the church with a castle, combining the great physical reminders of order in the Middle Ages. By digging a ditch and creating a moat around the church, Langland has conflated castle and church. A place of refuge and sanctuary has become thrust into the world of warfare. This inherent paradox strengthens the notion of an entropic world. One place of order, one

building of order is not enough, ideas must be combined to form what is supposed to be an unassailable location, combining the protective sanctity of Christ's body with the defensive posturing of a moat and barred gate. There seems to be real trepidation and concern that the Barn of Unity will fall, though there seems to be a lack of recognition as to what this church, this temple stands for in the world: "The temple serves as such a stationary thing: 'standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence.'"[109] But it is also a paradox that defense is needed at all.

Obviously, the choice of a barn is provocative, not because it draws on imagery from the Bible, including Joel 3:12-15, Apoc. 14:14-15, Mark 4:29, John 4:35-38, Matt.3:12, which draw on "the gathering and sifting of people for divine judgments as the harvesting and storing of grain."[110] The fascinating aspect is that this image has no literary antecedent.[111] So we must ask what does the Barn offer Langland. Of course, Gothic barns relate only to our modern conceptions of barns in use only. Gothic barns had "cathedral-like proportions and layout . . . [and] are a fine monument to the skilled designers and masons employed in its building."[112] And such a monument to craftsmanship would cost on average £100, which would be double the annual manorial income.[113] And while the average association with barns was and still is one of storage, this does not alter their secondary function: "The primary storage purpose of a barn does not preclude other functions related to their costly and imposing character. In recent

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[109] Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, p. 29.
[110] Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, p. 154.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Niall Brady, "The Gothic Barn of England: Icon of Prestige and Authority," *Technology and Resource Use in Medieval Europe: Cathedrals, Mills, and Mines*, eds. Elizabeth Smith and Michael Wolfe (Hampshire: Variorum, 1997), pp. 76-108, at p. 80.
[113] Ibid., p. 83.

years, researchers have begun to change their understanding of the rationale behind the

largesse and ostentatious lifestyle of the secular aristocracy and ecclesiastical

landowners." [114] So Langland's choice not only evokes biblical passages but it speaks to

the culture of largesse and labor. And while Niall Brady's reading has been dismissed by

some critics,[115] I believe it worth noting, as it fits into my larger notions of isolation:

Langland opted for the barn as a readily identifiable symbol of oppression in the

landscape. His closing scene repeats one of the poem's central themes by contrasting a

bygone utopia with the turbulent impoverished world of the late fourteenth century which

he depicts. For him, the spiritual idealism of Piers' barn has been destroyed and replaced

by a structure that symbolizes the widespread corruption of the prevailing social

institutions. The barn thus epitomizes social evil and is itself an impediment to progress.

This episode gives a curious twist to the accepted view of technological development as a

process of continual advancement by asking who specifically benefits from development

and change.[116]

In other words, the barn does not just simply evoke the biblical images of storing

and threshing to winnow Christian souls for entry into heaven. It is fundamentally

calling to question what are the purposes of these institutions and who controls them.

When Langland has Piers exit the barn prior to the siege, he seems to be explicitly

questioning why anyone would associate with both the building and the organization that

sanctions such a place. Taking Brady's idea further, because we are offered this building,

the reader must question who should want to stay in such a place. Ultimately, the exit of

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[114] Ibid., p. 95.
[115] Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, p. 155.
[116] Brady, "The Gothic Barn," p. 104.

Piers and Will from it point to the notion that this vision of heaven is both wrong and isolates the true Christian—for Langland—from attaining the goal of Truth's tower.

Yet for all of the inherent holiness of the building, chaos reigns. A doctor, a friar with an unyielding libido, Frere Flaterere, works his way into the church, bringing the disorder of the world into the overly ordered world of religion and politics. And it soon becomes clear that nothing can prevent even the dream world of Piers Plowman descending into a vision of the entropic. This hybrid church/castle is an example of eschatological architecture. The initial scene of the poem takes place in a landscape that calls to mind Eden, a paradise which most people would associate with the promised paradise of Heaven. Then there is the moralizing landscape; not only does Will need to follow these lessons and visit these places to find Truth, he must do so for the ultimate end of Heaven. And then there is the Tree of Charity that when fully grown and in full bloom creates a spiritual state that all true believers must hold to attain the consolation of Heaven.

The various landscapes and places of *Piers Plowman* promote the distinction between order and disorder. But what becomes of this dream world when those distinctions appear to vanish, and the place of best construction, the place of best intention, the place of best order cannot stand against the disorder that is promoted by an earthly experience and the agents of Satan? *Piers Plowman* is essentially a poem about the indeterminacy of a Christian journey, be that the pilgrimage of a supplicant or the pilgrimage all souls take to the journey of New Jerusalem. This journey is not filled with easy answers, and Will faces challenges to his search for meaning at nearly every turn. When he feels closest to an answer, he is pressed to journey farther for one more

consultation. This is a journey that leaves Will to beat against the doors of apocalyptic certainty "with his head and with his pen."[117] And this is a journey that appears unsanctioned and unwarranted in the minds of some of Will's interlocutors; perhaps the most stirring of examples is when Ymaginatif goes so far as to tell Will that his writing is a waste of time and to put down his pen.

And so when the journey is thought to be done, the world reverts to chaos, invading the sacred place that Piers and Christ have made for humanity. But though this church, this last bastion of refuge, is overthrown it does not alter the fundamental facts of the creation. This is a place that is made from the very words of God, if we extend John's analogy, and so the fundamental fabric of creation, this creation, is endowed with a sacred power that cannot be undone via chaos or the misguiding of the Antichrist. And so this barn, this church, remains true to eschatological architecture. This barn, surrounded and invaded, by chaos reminds readers of the promise of an end; this end, however, escapes our understanding. For Langland, these buildings are but temporary way-stations on the journey of the soul to ultimate peace. Despite the poem's seeming lack of interest in creating a vivid landscape for the reader, Langland reminds readers of the importance of place, both as the location of final rest (heaven) and its impact on the reader's everyday life. Without the everyday reminders to "sle-noght," these places might become not simply way-stations but permanent resting places. So the message is not to look at any place—either natural landscape or created building—and to forget the

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[117] Claudia Ratazzi Papka, "The Limits of Apocalypse: Eschatology, Epistemology, and Textuality in the *Commedia* and *Piers Plowman,*" *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2000), pp. 233-256, at p. 239.

ever-present message of *Piers Plowman* of constant vigilance and constant journey to find Truth; a journey, Langland intimates, that will take one's whole life to complete.

While the deferred nature of the journey complicates how the poem is read, the poem offers the reader a final resting place in the Tower of Truth, which is only glimpsed at in the initial scene of the poem. The tower is the "only desirable inside space in PP" and "appears to be heaven."[118] And that notion of appearance is quite important, because much is left out of the poem, because "The home of Truth, presumably heaven, is closed off from humans. It seems to have a distinct inside, since "Truthe is therinne" (1.12), but that may be only from the desiring vantage point of fallen, living humans—Will and the readers."[119] And the notion of a tower "was not only an imposing structure from which one could see the landscape for miles, but also a strong fortress against enemies . . . [and] especially in border country, was intended for the purpose of defense . . . therefore, a tower might suggest 'spatial enclosure,' the security of a position of impregnable power or supremacy."[120] In fact, the use of towers and castles "was commonplace in sermons and homilies, a universal metaphor for faith."[121] And it was also "an aristocratic image, evoking authority and power as well as strength."[122] While these are images of protection and a promised safety in an interiority—an interiority that the reader is never privileged to see—they are removed and difficult places to attain. The tower is a guardian, and the other images of protection and holiness in the poem invoke the tabernacle; but much like the tower, the tabernacle is the holiest of holies and is cut off

[118] Kalve, "The Truthe Thereinne," p. 141.
[119] Ibid., p. 143.
[120] Mary Clemente Davlin, "Tower and Tabernacle: The Architecture of Heaven and the Language of Dwelling with/in God in the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*," *Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (Morgantown: U West Virginia P, 1993), pp. 99-110, at p. 101.
[121] Nicola Coldstream, *Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), p. 165.
[122] Ibid.

from the everyday experience. So when the poem relies on these images, the effect is not ultimately of one of protection and security. The effect is to remove the reader and the dreamer further from the solidity and protection offered from these places, because they cannot ultimately relate to these images because they are necessarily tied to the aristocratic and powerful.

Both *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* attempt to locate heaven for their readers. The process of locating the afterlife proves quite difficult. This difficulty, I believe, stems from a use of forms that question the very protection they appear to offer both reader and pilgrims. Our minds engage with landscapes and buildings, questioning both production and significance, and this seems particularly strong when engaging with heavenly locales. Ultimately, I believe, that these poems cause one to wonder if heaven can be approached, and if those heavens are approached, why they are so removed from those who wish to be there.

III

The Aesthetics of Heaven

Almost any modern depiction of the Middle Ages finds a world dulled to color

and life, underscoring a contemporary narrative that perpetuates the concept that these are

a people who have not only lost the great knowledge of the classical world, but are also

confined to a monochromatic world of illness and destitution. Umberto Eco accurately

appraises this sentiment when he writes, "To this day, many people, victims of the

conventional 'Dark Ages' image, think of the Medieval period as a somber epoch, even

as far as color was concerned."[1] Despite this popular conception of the Middle Ages,[2]

medieval people did not view their lives in such stark terms. Undoubtedly, life was not

easy for the great majority of people, as death was a constant companion even to the very

wealthy of society. And yet, "Medieval people, however, saw themselves (or at least

portrayed themselves in poetry and painting) as living in extremely bright surroundings."[3]

For example, the depiction of manual labor and agriculture might be commonly

conceived as being drab and dull; however, various illuminations in a Book of Hours sees

striking coloring of both the people and the surroundings. Such a worldview led medieval

society to wonder on the nature of beauty—what was beautiful? What colors are

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[1] Eco, *History of Beauty*, p. 99.

[2] For example, the recent films *Robin Hood* and *Kingdom of Heaven* depict medieval life as not only harsh but lacking color. The clothing is generally depicted as tattered and fall along a spectrum of dirt brown to faded grey, the actors are uniformly dirty and have the whitest of complexions (when washed), and the scenes set in Europe (specifically, England and France) seem to have been dyed in faded browns and grays. For *Kingdom of Heaven,* this is manifestly different than scenes set in Palestine, which feature vibrant colors and exotic fabrics. Perhaps this might be associated with a kind of historical realism from filmmakers; but for anyone who saw *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Ivanhoe* (1952), and *The Knights of the Round Table* (1953), these films would hardly be thought to represent the same time period and characters.

[3] Eco, *History of Beauty*, p. 99.

beautiful? How might proportion play into beauty? These questions did not lead

medieval thinkers to create their own theories; the medieval engagement with ideas of

beauty did not force medieval thinkers to "expect to find new and original definitions in

the Middle Ages, for the medieval thinkers sought neither to discover nor to defend such

definitions."[4] The medieval thinkers, however, sought to mine those sources that were

readily available to them, namely the Bible, works of philosophers, technical books, and

the writings of the Greek and Latin Fathers.[5]

Such a melding of traditions underscores a central argument of this project,

because it asserts the need to work within already present forms, the approach that

medieval authors—I have asserted—take to create their own visions of heaven. This

melding of traditions presented a number of issues, including how thinkers and artists of

the Middle Ages approached issues of aesthetics. While the Classical world looked to

nature to draw inspiration on ideas of beauty, the medieval world looked to the Classical

world for ideas on beauty. But even by looking to classical sources for inspiration, the

medieval thinkers, however consciously or unconsciously, rejected the classical approach

to aesthetics. First and foremost, issues of beauty for classical thinkers were abstract

ideas to be considered, moving then to practical applications. But "beauty for the

Medievals did not refer first to something abstract and conceptual," it referred more "to

everyday feelings, to lived experience."[6] So for the medieval aestheticians, it was not

simply enough to categorize and define the beauty in the world; "they also sought to

discover the reasons why lines and colors are considered beautiful."[7] So we have an

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[4] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages,* p. 1.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*,p. 4.
[7] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages,* p. 10.

immediate contradiction within the medieval form of aesthetic theory. The medieval

thinkers did not see the need to found a radical approach to beauty and its appreciation;

the search was done and generally made sense—but they sensed an absence in the

answers to how lines and forms were beautiful. Yes, forms could be beautiful because of

color or proportion or size; however, there was a missing element.

Despite the debt owed to classical aesthetics for medieval thinkers, the greatest

disjoint between these periods and their approaches to aesthetics was the overwhelming

concern of the medieval mind for assigning these concepts to God and God's work within

the created universe. So while medieval aesthetic theory began with an uncritical and

wholesale appropriation of classical theory, gradually "there developed a metaphysics

and epistemology of the beautiful, and eventually an idea of beauty as an organic value."[8]

In other words, what distinguished the two systems was not "the subjects treated in its art

. . . [but] the profound influence of Christianity on its very heart and soul."[9] Beauty and

life were not separate notions, and God and beauty and life were not separate notions.

This sentiment is highlighted by Honorious of Autun's thoughts on the threefold goals of

painting: "one was 'that the House of God should be thus beautified'; a second was that it

should recall to mind the lives of the Saints; and finally, 'Painting is the literature of the

laity.'"[10] But what Honorious' thought does not emphasize is the overwhelming

medieval understanding of where beauty truly originates: "Of all the beauties of creation

pride of place must go to the world . . . It is the image of the beauty of God . . . If the

world possesses incomparable beauty, as indeed it does, the fact that it reflects the highest

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[8] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 2.
[9] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, p. 45.
[10] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p.16.

workmanship."[11] Summarizing this idea was Allan of Lille when he wrote that God was "an elegant architect of the world, like a goldsmith in his workshop."[12] And so the immutable principle of medieval aesthetic theory was "since God created objects in His likeness--in fact, in His image--it is natural that when we gaze upon forms we discover 'traces' in them of the Divine Beauty, Wisdom, and Art."[13]

In other words, contemplation and study of beauty gave humanity another avenue to approach the divine. While the divine might imbue beauty in certain scenes, that beauty fell short of the splendor present in heaven. But, as understood by St. Isidore, earthly beauty could help instruct the medieval mind, as "It is from finite beauty that God gives us an understanding of infinite beauty." [14] And so medieval artists used the finite materials of their day to create art that would not only speak to the beauty of the infinite but also inspire their viewers into contemplating on the goodness of God for creating such forms and for allowing them to view such forms.

The conception of infinite beauty leads directly to heaven, as there would be no place that a divine creator would be less encumbered by the limitations of earthly, finite beauty. While viewing heavenly scenes, readers are meant to be struck by the overwhelming beauty and detail provided by the author. Medieval aesthetic theory provides another framework for the author to provide greater detail and specificity to the creation of heaven. Heaven cannot be ordinary. As the above quotes attest, medievals understood that Earth was a beautiful place, populated by God with wonders and sights

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[11] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, p. 6.
[12] Joseph Margolis, "Medieval Aesthetics," *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics,* eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 27-36 at p. 29.
[13] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, pp. 67-8.
[14] Ibid., p. 7.

for the enjoyment of humanity. And if Earth is beautiful, the thought must be that

heaven, where some supposed God lived, would be all the more beautiful, because all the

goodness of a benevolent creator would be manifested within heaven. In other words, a

place designed by God, unencumbered by the strictures of earthly life, would shine

radiantly with the glory assigned to God. This question of beauty and aesthetics relates, I

believe, to the previous chapter's discussion of place and space. Heaven's beauty and

Earth's beauty, in addition, is experienced as tied to a place. Beauty needs materials from

which we can extrapolate and interpret the issues of aesthetics. So while we modify our

discussion of heaven now to consider how we might engage with its beauty, we continue

to think of the ways in which beauty is tied to specific descriptions of place; places

crafted for effect—rhetorically, spiritually, and aesthetically.

A fundamental issue, of course, is that heaven's beauty was thought to exist

beyond all superlatives, and so the goal of writers is to engage in a depiction that can do

justice to such a place. But how can we make sense of something that exists beyond our

comprehension, especially when human forms seem unable to meet the challenge? For

St. Augustine, "God's creation was utterly unlike human art, in the sense that God's art

proceeds, *ex nihilo*. But though he was influenced by Platonic and Roman notions of

mimesis, he construed the significative import of human art as symbolic of the higher

meaning of God's art: that is, as exceeding mimesis."[15] In other words, art should inspire

and refer to the higher meaning—the anagogic truth—of beauty, but such ideas

necessitate a series of questions with reference to considering heaven and beauty.

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[15] Margolis, "Medieval Aesethetics," p. 31.

So if heaven is to be beautiful, how can authors describe that beauty? Will that beauty simply remind the reader that the writer cannot do justice to the supposed beauty of heaven?[16] These questions underscore the difficulty of dealing with heaven and the notions of beauty. By examining the choices of the author with respect to beauty, we might better understand how aesthetics and the dominant forms of art influenced authorial decisions of creating heavenly visions. Of course, a natural distinction should be made between beauty and aesthetics; though the two concepts seem interchangeable, they are distinct commodities. Denis Donoghue in his article, "Speaking of Beauty," defines this difference: "Beauty is a value, to be perceived in its diverse manifestations. Aesthetics is the theory of such perception. Aesthetics and the theory of beauty are not the same, because the theory of beauty may be concentrated on objects and appearances but aesthetics is concerned with perceptions and perceivers."[17] So what I am attempting to do is to focus not on simply appreciating beauty and pointing out beautiful scenes of heaven, but the focus is on how those scenes—however beautiful—point to authors using aesthetic theories to create specific appeals to the reader. In other words, the idea is that beauty with respect to heaven is the given, but questions must be asked of the means by which these medieval authors create beauty within heaven and what those aesthetic choices mean for the reader and the text.

Because heaven is meant to be beautiful, though that beauty might not always conform to medieval notions of beauty, aesthetics provides a framework to see how an author might conform or modify the various notions of beauty that were held during the

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[16] Please note the comment in footnote 103 from Umberto Eco about the ineffectualness of most authors to do justice not only of describing heaven in terms of beauty but in terms of extending the conversation about issues of aesthetics.

[17] Denis Donoghue, "Speaking of Beauty," *Daedalus*, Vol. 131, No. 4 (2002), pp. 11-20, at p.17.

Middle Ages. By examining the visions via aesthetic theory, readers are able to view

"the ways in which a given epoch solved for itself aesthetic problems as they presented

themselves at the time to the sensibilities and the culture of its people."[18] Medieval

aesthetic theory will not change the effects of certain choices made by authors, but this

aesthetic framework aids in understanding what the medieval audience would have

associated with the various choices made by the author. Naturally, included within the

discussion of medieval aesthetics are notions of light, numbers, and jewels (drawing on

medieval lapidaries).[19] Using the theories of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard, Hugh of

St. Victor and others, this chapter's discussion of *Pearl* and *Pier's Plowman* and their

various elements attempts to construct meaning out of aesthetic scenes. Such discussion,

I believe, furthers our ability to locate the meanings of heaven within the Middle Ages,

giving us an expanded notion of a central image and concept of the period.

A prominent, and potentially frustrating, feature of medieval reception of art,

especially for medievalists, is the lack of documented discussion from the Middle Ages

of specific pieces of art:

> We lack a significant body of contemporary writings –what would today
> be called art criticism—directed toward painting. From the modern art
> historian's perspective, interpretive problems include the distortion and
> reduction of forms, and the consistent absence of realism in medieval
> painting. In addition, there does not seem to be any medieval, articulated
> sets of well-defined decorative/design principles, including the use of
> color and line. It is possible, however, to derive important information
> from the images themselves, which often embody aesthetic concepts that

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[18] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 2.

[19] Of course, music might be considered one of the avenues that a writer might engage with aesthetic conceptions of the afterlife. But for the purpose of this study, music will not be included, because there is a noticeable absence of music within the landscapes of *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*, Hadewijch's Visions, and *The Vision of Tnugdal.*

are not discussed in the surviving texts, and that in some cases even contradict the principles outlined therein.[20]

While critics have access to a fair amount of medieval discussion of the general principles of aesthetics, especially with respect to how aesthetic ideals conform to Christian metaphysics, there is little to no discussion that highlights how these aesthetic ideals might be applicable to actual works of art. Though this absence of engagement with genuine works of art does not impede our ability to understand the medieval appreciation of art and beauty, this absence creates a series of questions regarding the nature of medieval ardor for art. How much art was available to the medieval scholars? Or even more broadly, how much art was generally available for consumption during the Middle Ages? Was art considered less serious to scholars? What were the most dominant art forms during the late Middle Ages?

Now while these questions might take several lengthy volumes to answer completely, I would like to focus on the questions of dominance and availability briefly, as these concerns specifically speak to the general trends in medieval art and aesthetics, and these notions also directly tie to the issues of heaven. While there is evidence, both surviving and historical, of non-religious art, such evidence suggests that non-religious art accounted for a relatively small fraction of the total oeuvre of the period. In other words, religious art dominated the minds and works of the Middle Ages, leading to the easy conclusion that if someone—scholarly, religious, lay, or noble—did chance upon a work of art, that piece of art was most certainly religious in character and intent. More to the point, even the most available of secular art would be found in churches. I refer to

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[20] Debra Hassig, "Beauty in the Beasts: a Study of Medieval Aesthetics," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 19/20 (1990/1991), pp. 137-161, at p. 137.

depictions of royalty, heraldry, and patrons that would be found both in sculpture or
stained-glass windows that would accompany the various religious arts of the churches.
So while it was not traditionally religious art, these secular pieces, due to their placement
within holy realms of influence, might well be considered alongside the more traditional
forms of religious art. The most prominent works of art, either religious or not, were the
grand cathedrals of Europe, which included a whole subset of medieval art: stained-glass
windows, statuary, devotional objects, vestments, and liturgical items. Because
cathedrals became the dominant form of medieval devotional art, God became analogized
with the work of the cathedral builders: Allan of Lille referred to God as "an elegant
architect of the world."[21] Following the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, church edicts
maintained that all Christians were required to confess to a priest in the sacrament of
confession and participate in the sacrament of communion annually. Of course, what was
heard, seen, and learned inside of those churches varied widely, which is one of the
concerns of *Piers Plowman*,[22] but once a year, for however long it took to perform their
doctrinal obligations, all medievals were inside of a church. In that church, there was
some art, even something as simple as a fresco or as marvelous as rose windows;
however, there was some piece of art to reinforce to the congregation the power of Christ

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[21] Margolis, "Medieval Aesthetics," p. 29.

[22] Andrew Cole, "Trifunctionality and the Tree of Charity: Literary and Social Practice in *Piers Plowman*," *ELH*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1995): 1-27; "The quality of the clergy's preaching affects the quality of the tree's fruit, "the people." Bad preaching is barren in its effects. Good preaching yields bountiful blooms" (4). Rosanne Gasse's "Langland's 'Lewed Victory' Reconsidered," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (1996), pp. 322-335 discusses how the critiques of the friars and clerics within *Piers Plowman* offer not simply a critique of their practices and their ineffective methods but an opportunity for consideration of life and purpose with respect to the four cardinal virtues, which should be at the heart of all their instruction. See also Penn R. Szittya, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986).

and his earthly Church, the role of the Church in the everyday, and how the congregation fit into the grand scheme of both actual and theological history.

Most interesting I believe for the sake of the discussion of heaven are stained-glass windows and devotional objects. It is my contention that these examples provide the most conspicuous forms of medieval religious art, a form that was constantly engaging and modifying the audience's views on the afterlife. As I have pointed to in earlier chapters, heaven was a dominant theme of the medieval everyday existence and the writings of medieval theologians and scholars. In other words, what art provided, much like actual construction and even theology, was another site through which the Church and artists could influence and shape how heaven would be viewed within particular communities and times, emphasizing one of the central arguments of this study—the near impossibility of separating heaven from its particular setting, as heaven is fundamentally a culturally and historically motivated concept.

When examining medieval ideas of beauty, we must acknowledge how art plays into literary representations of the afterlife. The reason for acknowledging this inclusion of art and architecture into literature is that "[a]ll things, like and unlike, forms and genera, the different orders of substantial and accidental causes, combined together in a marvelous unity. There was not a single medieval writer who did not turn to this theme of the polyphony of the universe."[23] As I mentioned above, we must view these writers as engaging with a multiplicity of forms—the polyphony noted in the above quotation. Wolfgang Kemp emphasizes this idea, not simply as a way of grounding our

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[23] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 18.

understanding of the medieval, authorial project but as a way of viewing these texts,

emphasizing the intertextuality of texts—literary, artistic, and aural:

> So the medieval author is a copier, not an originator—an *augere*, in the sense of copying or multiplying, is an activity practiced by many people, including poets, prose writers, singers, and actors, 'program' makers and artists, and last but not least the commissioning patrons. If we think of medieval culture as based on this concept of intertextuality, the question about the relation between text and image must also be put differently. We are then released from the obligation to describe visual art according to its adherence or to deviations from the text, unless the text be seminal, in which case it is usually the Word itself, or unless one is concerned with the principle of the text, the priority of the text that for many medievalists went without saying. Intertextuality—which also embraces art and the spoken word—means movement back and forth in all directions, it means drift, it means transformation as a principle and text as a process.[24]

So to that polyphony, to that process of copying, to that process of modifying, medieval

writers engaged with issues of how beauty might be found in everyday experience.

Perhaps the most striking examples of beauty in the everyday medieval experience were

the architecture and ornamentation of medieval cathedrals.

Over a brief period of time, not exactly overnight, massive building campaigns

throughout Europe began, replacing existing cathedrals with the newer building styles.[25]

What can be ascertained from archeological studies and excavations of these cathedral

sites is that these massive building projects were not responding to what might be seen as

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[24] Wolfgang Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, trans. Caroline Dobson Saltzwedel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), p. 129. Edgar De Bruyne in *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages* echoes this concept when he writes, "The conclusion is that the artist is human, all too human. He is not God. He cannot create new substances out of nothing; he can only compose new arrangements of objects already in existence" (144-5).

[25] I use Gothic to designate the specific period of art and architecture of the late Middle Ages. Such a designation should not be confused with the idea that all art of the Gothic period was monolithic, as there were variations between and even in regions; as well such a designation gives rise to the notion that there was a well-defined leader and manifesto for this style. No such leader existed, and no such manifesto exists. The term, though, is used to classify art and architecture from mid-twelfth century until late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century art. The key concepts were the management of building and a style of architecture that allowed for greater weight distribution through the addition of vaulting and buttressing, which allowed for taller buildings and the inclusion of more massive stained-glass windows.

the natural reason for renovation and new construction. The great majority of these new, Gothic cathedrals, in fact, replaced functional and well-maintained cathedrals; however, this lack of structural necessity did not slow the massive building projects that would occur throughout Europe. Such massive edifices were built because the lords believed, rightly or wrongly, that all those engaged in God's mission in the church held sway with God, and so the temporal lords feared how the Church would use such influence against them not only in this world but the next. To placate the clerics, resources increased for arts.[26] At that time, however, there was no greater art than sacred art, and the highest form of sacred art was a church. But the sacred art of Christianity could not remove itself from the overt displays of temporality and wealth, and so all art became infused with ornamentation.

As the church authorities gained more power and wealth, construction projects increased in earnest. Between 1045 and 1220, construction began on over twenty-eight cathedrals in England, including Durham and Ely Cathedrals. Elsewhere in Europe, construction began on Notre Dame de Paris, Speyer Cathedral, the churches in Puglia, St. Patrick's Cathedral Dublin, St. Michael and St. Gudula Cathedrals in Brussels, the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, Cologne Cathedral, and the Cathedral of Toledo during that same period.

It is, of course, important to recall that these undertakings required decades of labor, huge influxes of capital, and the temporary loss of the spiritual and ecclesiastical seat of power for both the populace and the clergy. The very facts of construction point to the immensity of the undertaking, which has often been misunderstood and tied "to a

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[26] Duby, *The Age of Cathedrals,* p. 38.

spontaneous upsurge of popular energy, of sufficient strength both to inaugurate and to see through such a project."[27] But no amount of popular energy could be sustained for the amount of time, or raise the sufficient capital, to be the real reason behind these projects. But at the same time, it would be just as mistaken to imagine that these were simply building projects: "Much was at stake in the building of the Gothic cathedrals. The violent uprisings of townspeople that opposed their costly construction testify to this."[28]

So while the number of Gothic cathedrals did not represent a need because of dilapidated buildings, these cathedrals represented a need because of the changing conceptions for what a church could be in architectural, doctrinal, ecclesiastical, political, and cultural terms. The medieval establishment realized that churches, in all aspects, could be used to push ideas and doctrines, including "every part of a church from the floor to the roof could be used for public display, to illustrate Christian philosophy and dogma, its literature, and its hierarchy of revered saints and heroes."[29] This included English churches, and in England "the idea of the church vault or roof as symbolic of heaven was very widespread. Angels appear ubiquitously on church roofs. The churches of East Anglia are especially rich in this symbolism, with the church at March having over a hundred such figures."[30] These churches could not be understood as simply places of worship but places of exchange and representation; spaces where activities took place that mimicked the activities of heaven and prepared the populace for entry to heaven,

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[27] Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, *The Cathedral: The Social and Architectural Dynamics of Construction*, trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), p. 230.

[28] Gerald Guest, "Narrative Cartographies: Mapping the Sacred in Gothic Stained Glass," *RES: Anthropology and Aesethetics*, No. 53/54 (2008), pp. 121-142 at p.124.

[29] Veronica Sekules, *Medieval Art*, Oxford History of Art Series (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), p. 2.

[30] Clifford Davidson, "Of Saints and Angels," *The Iconography of Heaven*, ed. Clifford Davidson, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 21 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1994), pp. 1-39, at p. 7.

including access to any named or patron saint.[31] Such activities, places, and ideas fully

informed the visions of the afterlife that I will examine shortly, grounding these

depictions within a movement of art that was noticeable for its engagement with the

thoughts of the afterlife. A church is not simply a church in these poems; it is a testament

to the concerted effort of a society to come together for the common good of spiritual

salvation, functioning as both a reminder of the physical toil and a promise of the

community of heaven.

To accommodate such a program, fundamental alterations were necessary,

beginning with the removal of churches still in use, so as to inaugurate an architectural

style with notable changes "in construction, engineering, materials, design concepts,

spatial planning, scale, decoration, manipulation of light, and expressive effect."[32] So

these great cathedrals, through a series of invention and progress, altered perceptions of

architecture, allowing the buildings to speak to the medieval audience of "truths ramified,

disruptive and many-layered."[33]

One of the more interesting ways that these buildings gave voice to those truths

was by featuring medieval devotional art, including the deployment and prominence of

reliquaries, ossuaries, and monstrances within church buildings. As I noted earlier, the

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[31] Sverrir Jakobsson, "Heaven is a Place on Earth: Church and Sacred Space in Thirteenth-Century Iceland," *Scandinavian Studies* Vol. 82. No. 1 (2010), pp.1-20: "The significance of churches as spaces of representation can hardly be overstated. They served as a conceptual link between this world and eternity, between the mundane and the holy, between the present time and the sacred time of Christ and the saints. A church dedicated to Saint Peter had a typological connection with the Holy Land or the See of St. Peter in Rome. It also had a typological link with the era of Christ and the Apostles, a link that transcended the intervening centuries. The cultural capital enjoyed by individual parish churches, and the Church as an institution, was enormous. It provided links that connected space with hallowed human experience, ancient and new" (12).

[32] Madeline Caviness, "'The Simple Perception of Matter' and the Representation of Narrative, ca. 1180-1280," *Art in the Medieval West and its Audience* (Aldershot Hampshire: Ashgate Variorum, 2001) III, pp.1-19 at p. 1.

[33] Paul Crossley, "Medieval Architecture and Meaning: The Limits of Iconography," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1019, Special Issues on English Gothic Art (1988), pp. 116-21 at p.121.

medieval culture showed a great interest in devotional worship, especially to the sacrifice

and suffering of Christ on the cross. This increase in devotional worship has many

influences, but one that is important to this dissertation's study is the notion of

participation in the divine. Such a discussion grounds our understanding of the ways in

which *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* engage with the forms of worship within the poems.

How does the suffering of Christ, the reliquaries of saints' bones impact visions of

heaven? Does this specific, participatory and visceral form of worship—included in the

material art of reliquaries, ossuaries, and monstrances—have parallels within the

heavenly landscape?

Because Christianity was the dominant cultural, religious, and political force in

medieval Europe, Christian communities lost their connection with the martyrs of early

Christian history. The martyr experience was not simply one of suffering and death;

rather, the martyr experience was one of real faith, as these were men and women who

lived and died for their faith, testing the resolve and commitment to the mission and

theology of the Church.[34] Medieval Christians were not hunted for their beliefs.[35]

Christians now lacked the transformative experience of the martyrs, and so new forms of

worship that gained credibility and popularity transformed worship from a passive

experience into an active, emotional encounter that focused on the suffering and passion

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[34] Esther Cohen, "Sacred, Secular, and Impure: The Contextuality of Sensations," *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 123-133, "For most of the following millennium, martyrs were held up as the epitome of heroism. For twelfth-century writers, they belonged firmly in the heroic past, and imitating them usually meant fighting pagans in distant lands. In a world of triumphant and dominant Christianity, it was impossible for Christians to emulate the courage of a persecuted minority. From the late eleventh century onward, however, the wish to identify with Christ's death became dominant in both lay and ecclesiastical Christian spirituality" (126).
[35] Obviously, I am not referring to the numerous examples of heretical groups. I am referring to the vast majority of Christians who did not stray in any significant direction from the orthodoxy as handed down from the Holy See.

of Christ's final hours. Though this transformation cannot be located to a specific event or historical moment, at the close of the twelfth century Western Christendom "witnessed a fundamentally new conception of the act of sacrifice that was at the heart of their faith, according to which Christ's passion established the model of martyrdom by which future saints could achieve their bliss."[36] Not only did this new emphasis offer a potential model for future saints, but the entire church underwent this transformation also: "Many feasts and cults of the late medieval Church took as a starting point empathy with Christ's suffering at the Crucifixion, isolating poignant images in order to evoke emotion. The appearance of the stigmata on the body of St. Francis had been one manifestation of the extreme visual signs that mystics in the thirteenth century were appropriating to themselves in identifying with Christ's passion. The 'reinvention' of the crucifix to suit new expressions of piety was one example among many of new kinds of monument that redirected devotions to the body of Christ and the Resurrection."[37] In other words, art did not simply work in an abstract quality; art worked because there was a mimetic, realism to the suffering of Christ. That suffering transported viewers from their immediate surroundings into a participatory and eternal worship: "As in so many other aspects of thirteenth-century devotional culture, seeing was a vital part of lay piety at Mass. Whereas receiving communion was mandated only once a year and generally recommended for the laity on no more than three occasions, viewing the host at its elevation during Mass was a more accessible and frequent devotional experience."[38]

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[36] Lawrence Warner, "Adenturous Custance: St. Thomas of Acre and Chaucer's Man of Law Tale," *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2007), pp. 43-59, at p. 43.

[37] Sekules, *Medieval Art*, p. 98

[38] Michael W. Cothren, *Picturing the Celestial City* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), p. 17.

Such worship, in fact, led Hadewijch to many of her visions, as the worship and

veneration of the Eucharist upon the altar became the generative point of access to

visions of heaven.

By focusing on the emotional and physical toll of Christ's passion and suffering,

the worshipers altered the purview of worship. Worship became a physical and an

emotional experience, one that required worshipers to engage not simply with the abstract

truths of Christ's life but the visceral and immediate experience of his suffering. A vocal

proponent of this affective form of worship, Peter Damian encouraged extreme forms of

worship, including flagellation. He argued that imitating Christ and the wounds and scars

from that imitation was how Christians paid their overwhelming debt to Christ. Beyond

an increase in self-flagellation and denial, this transformation can be noted in the change

of crucifixes, from those that simply noted the facts of Christ on the cross to those that

embellished his suffering with streaks of blood pouring from his five wounds, to the

sinewy depictions of his form, and to the agony etched upon his face. The message could

not be lost on a viewer—this is the price Christ paid for your sins, freeing you to join him

one day in eternal bosom of heaven. To underscore this style of depicting Christ, one

must simply contrast the representations of Christ's sufferings with those of the martyrs.

While Christ is depicted in stark and bloody forms, the martyrs fates—equally brutal and

often more perverse—are met with a serenity that belies the awfulness of their conditions.

Again, the message seems fairly clear to any worshipers—Christ's own suffering brings

comfort to those who participate in that passion and suffering. Of course, by engaging art

in the suffering of Christ and the saints and martyrs, there is a clear message being sent.

On one hand, we can see that "it was the saint's body itself and not its surrogate metallic

skin that became the focus of display" and that "[b]odies permeated medieval Christianity . . . [they] were objects of veneration and sites of access to the everlasting."[39] On the other hand, the message seems to focus on Christ's suffering and how each individual's actions and failings contribute to that suffering, a suffering that was not a one-off. Rather, that suffering lives in perpetuity, as each action—according to the medieval concept—re-crucified Christ. But what is vital is to see how these ideas of suffering, bodily attention, and heaven comingled within the spaces of medieval churches. In other words, medieval churches' art balanced ideas of suffering and heaven to instruct on the pathways to eternal salvation. The aesthetics of the church provides for the framework by which these poems seek to engage readers with concepts of heaven. Heaven is beautiful, with the medieval conception, but beautiful only in that it is the promise guaranteed through the physical suffering of Christ. Aesthetics cannot be disassociated from the moral underpinnings that sought to engage with viewers and their instruction of correct action, allowing for eventual access to the afterlife.

We can clearly see the interest in both the suffering and passion of Christ in medieval visions of heaven. In *Pearl*, the experience of Christ is contrasted quite clearly with that of the Jeweler. In effect, what the Jeweler's experience does is bring into sharp relief how the sufferings of the everyday are poor substitutes for the immense and sacrificial nature of Christ. Though this comparison, the Jeweler confronts the value and real worth of the loss of his Pearl. Can his loss truly compare to that of Christ's suffering on behalf of humanity? Can the experience of loss give the Jeweler access to heaven?

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[39] Stefania Rosenstein, "Bodies of Heaven and Earth: Christ and the Saints in Medieval Art and Devotion," *Pious Journeys: Christian Devotional Art and Practice in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Linda Seidel (Chicago: U Chicago P., 2001), pp. 21-41, at pp. 29 and 37.

How are those who have lost and have suffered treated within heaven? Of course, heaven is a place that removes the suffering of people, and so suffering within heaven should not be seen or experienced. This removal troubles our Jeweler, which causes him not to comprehend fully the instruction of the Pearl Maiden and misunderstand the blood of the enthroned Lamb.

But this desire for participation in the suffering and divinity of Christ extended even to the saints. By shifting focus onto the body and suffering of Christ, worshipers were able to engage other bodies and other sufferings. This interest brought reliquaries and ossuaries into greater demand, as the populace attempted to connect their locales and their forms of worship with the divine bodies of martyrs and saints.[40] On a very basic level, these saintly relics—especially bone, either whole or fragmented—situated an in-between place, which is between heaven and earth.[41] These saints, because of their lives and the miracles attested to them, were assuredly in heaven, enjoying the fullness of joy attested to by Christ in the Gospels. At the same time, pieces of these saints remained on Earth. These pieces were able to sanctify the places where they resided, becoming a type of Jacob's ladder for contact with the divine and heaven. In effect, the relics ensured not only the holiness of the church but that the people of that church were further invested in saintly qualities and protected from vice in an immediate way; coming into "contact with a source of sacredness was considered to have the opportunity to appropriate its energy-

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[40] Of course, the worship of saints' body parts brings up a multitude of issues, including veracity and the status of these body parts. Now while I cannot guarantee the veracity of these pieces, no more than could the medieval churches that possessed them, I do know they were treated as being authentic, which seems most important.

[41] For more on the nature of bodies within medieval worship and the role of hagiographic relics, Caroline Walker Bynum's *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (1995); *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages,* eds. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (2000); and Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (1996).

there was no firm dichotomy between heaven and earth in this respect."[42] By bringing

these relics to the populace away from major centers of worship (Rome, Jerusalem, etc.),

"there was an extent to which a really important but intangible center, such as Jerusalem,

could be strategically echoed and duplicated to make it more powerfully intelligible. . .

[and] that extreme holiness could be disseminated to centers of local importance, so that

pilgrims did not have so far to travel."[43] And this was not an isolated project, as no one

"in the Middle Ages would have been skeptical about the authenticity of a relic as

important as the Scalia Pilati[44] and no one would have been immune from the extreme

rush of devotional feeling and reinforcement of faith that making obeisance at these steps

would have given them."[45] Of course, the appreciation and engagement with these relics

provided access to the afterlife, because these items were connected to people whose

bones (the fact of their death) and lives (the fact of their spiritual fidelity) guaranteed

their place within heaven. So these bones allowed an immediate access to heaven, giving

physical reminders that the earthly would eventually become heavenly.

Considering the medieval church and its impact on the culture, both socially and

religiously, one of the inescapable reminders of the form are the great stained-glassed

images that adorned the church windows. Stained-glass windows varied in shape, size,

placement, materials, and subject matter.[46] But what does not vary between stained-glass

windows was that each iteration of the form was deployed to best amplify and manipulate

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[42]Jakobsson, "Heaven is a Place on Earth," p. 9.

[43] Sekules, *Medieval Art*, pp. 17-18

[44] These are the steps that led to Pilate's balcony, which Christ ascended during his Passion, that were brought to Rome in the fourth century by Constantine's mother.

[45] Sekules, *Medieval Art*, p.15

[46] For a discussion of the materials and production of stained-glass windows, see Caviness' *Stained Glass Windows*, pp. 45-57 and Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1993), pp. 28-58.

light, which emphasizes how the Gothic architectural form, especially in a time often referred to as the Dark Ages, used the natural light of the world. The walls of these cathedrals were seemingly stretched to the very reaches of heaven, due to the use of the arc-boutant or flying buttress.[47] These massive walls allowed for greater impact of light and greater surface area, and so the medieval architect was able to strategically place stained-glass windows to maximize the effect of light: "Light, through presence or absence, sets apart the sacred from the profane and, in its cognitive, aesthetic, and symbolic forms, reveals and delineates the world, fosters sensual and emotional awareness, and gives life a literal focus and meaning."[48]   Light, as all accounts of heaven accentuated, signifies God's essence and can be found inundating all aspects and materials in Paradise. Applying light in this manner, made light "integral to sacred landscapes: as the sun or some other celestial body; as fire, the sun on earth; as light rays or beams and color; and as an attribute of sacred beings and places."[49] In addition, such light "could pass through the physical matter of glass, leaving it intact constituted a miracle comparable to Christ being conceived and born by the Virgin."[50] This light was the source of everything, "at once the source of beauty and of beauty."[51] By examining light and harnessing light, the medieval made physical their appreciation of the beauty of the natural world, but such beauty and appreciation speaks to something greater than oneself.[52] These buildings, through their use of light and stained-glass windows, were able to convey a new sense of energy and upward striving towards heaven and God.

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[47] Barbara A. Weightman, "Sacred Landscapes and the Phenomenon of Light," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (1996), pp. 59-71 at p. 63.

[48] Ibid., p. 59.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Madeline H. Caviness, *Stained Glass Windows* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1996), p. 58.

[51] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 49.

[52] Cowen, *Rose Windows*, p. 7.

Since these buildings were designed to accommodate these massive windows, artisans and clergy attempted to manipulate the windows for certain effects. On the one hand, "stained glass of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries transformed the Gothic cathedral into a vision of heaven, a place of retreat from the noise of the city. But it also absorbed and ventriloquized the city's diverse voices, both sacred and profane. This is an art that attempted to sanctify its surroundings but also had to appropriate and reckon with them in order to do it."[53] But turning cathedrals into the forecourts of paradise did not complete transformation of a medieval Christian into a doctrinally aware member of the church, so this art had to transform the viewers, and the "use of religious images to educate Christians (both the modestly learned as well as the illiterate) and to rouse them to religious devotion—or as they frequently say, to make *invisibilia* know and felt by means of *visibilia*—was sanctioned by authoritative Western churchmen from Gregory the Great, through Peter Lombard, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others of similar stature and influence well into the seventeenth century."[54] Gregory the Great believed that these images had the potential to speak truths to those who could not directly access the truth through literacy: "For it is one thing to venerate a picture and another to learn the story it depicts, which is to be venerated. The picture is for simple men . . . what writing is for those who can read, for those who cannot read see and learn from the picture the model which they should follow. Thus pictures are, above all, for the instruction of the people."[55]

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[53] Guest, "Narrative Cartographies," p. 123.
[54] Lawrence Besserman, "Introduction—Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: Issues and Approaches," *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 1-15 at p.11.
[55] Gregory the Great quoted in Michael Camille, "Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Art History*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (1995), pp. 26-49 at p. 26.

Of course, a "persistent misconception has long cast its distorting shadow over the historiography of medieval painted windows: the notion that stained-glass, indeed monumental medieval pictorial art in general, was conceived and produced as a substitute text for ignorant, illiterate folks, providing them a so-called Bible of the Poor. . . But instead of offering a more widely accessible parallel to written scripture, stained-glassed windows offered theological extrapolations, and exemplary role models, frequently rooted in scriptural traditions. Sermon rather than scripture is the proper analogy for these pictorial texts."[56] This idea of education through image presents a series of issues. Of concern when thinking about *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* is the type of access and placement of images. Whether or not stained-glass windows were biblical or sermon, it is clear that the church engaged in an active "campaign to educate the people by appealing to their delight"[57] by "pictorializing biblical and hagiographical cycles in a vivid way; even so, the pictorial narrative was structured so that it provided allegories and moral emphases."[58] Another misconception is that all of these stained-glass windows offered a consistent and coherent set of windows. In fact, deviation from biblical chronology was common and these "illogical sequences occur with enough frequency that they represent pictorial practice"[59] ; in addition, churches rarely "present a coherent iconographical" set of windows.[60] But the great majority of these windows reflected the idea that "the medieval world sees this world as a reflection of another, higher world,"[61] and so the images had to balance these various impulses and directions.

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[56] Cothren, *Picturing the Celestial City*, p. 3.
[57] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 54.
[58] Caviness, *Stained Glass Window*, p. 59.
[59] Cothren, *Picturing the Celestial City*, p. 14.
[60] Marks, *Stained Glass in England during the Middle Ages*, p. 64.
[61] Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, p. 88.

To enact this system of education, stained-glass windows dominated the walls of Western European cathedrals; however, I think it important to distinguish between stained-glass windows and the more specific form of rose windows. While rose windows are a subspecies of stained-glass windows, their design promotes a different aesthetic and didactic and theological program than other forms of stained-glass windows. Normally, stained-glass images dealt with specific scenes, allowing the viewer to engage in the specifics of that moment, coming to some truth and understanding directly tied to that one scene. Rose windows, on the other hand, were multi-faceted, promoting many different ideas and disparate concepts. This difference is fundamental, as it is my contention that each of these iterations of the form find its parallel in literature, specifically in *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, as the scenes of the poems work in remarkably similar fashion. It would be profitable to define these terms more definitively, so that we can have both examples of the actual form that will explain their correspondent uses within the poems.

For example, a stained glass window that comes from York Minster's Great East Window, which is currently under restoration by the York Minster Glazier's Trust, is entitled "The Harvest of the Earth and the Vintage of the Wrath of God."[62] This image depicts the harvesting of the Earth by God and his attendant angels: "Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's

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[62] There were images of both the stained-glass window from York Minster and a Rose Window from Chartres; however, these images had to be cut due to copyright. I contacted the churches; however, I did not receive any response in time for submission.

vine, because its grapes are ripe.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its

grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath" (Rev. 14:17-9). This

window engages a number of the concerns that were raised earlier. The first concern of

any piece of art is accessibility; traditional stained-glass windows would be closer to the

viewer, somewhere along fifteen to thirty feet off the ground for most images. But where

in the church would these images be placed? Were they in areas accessible to

parishioners or only to celebrants or clergy? We must assume that a stained-glass window

would be within sight and accessibility of a viewer. Second, we must engage with

questions of interpretation. As noted above, the traditional view of stained-glass

windows being the bible of the illiterate encounters fundamental issues with this

particular scene. Who is the seated figure? What are the angels doing within the frame?

What is the writing in the scrolls? Who are the figures along the ornamental column

breaks on either side of the frame? The curators of York Minster and the glaziers believe

that this imagery comes from the cited lines of Revelation. But how would a typical

viewer know this? How would the scene be understood? A reasonable translation would

be that this depicts God the father as providing wheat to humanity—an image of spiritual

sustenance. Such a reading would be vastly dissimilar to the scene in Revelation. More

intriguing is the idea that God here holds the implements of harvest, not the angels as

described in the biblical passage. So here we can see an example of license taken with

these biblical texts. Such stained-glass windows can be both a part of a series or stand-

alone pieces, but these windows have definite borders—either from embellishments of

columns seen in fig. 1 or with the leaded bars needed for the support of the windows. If

they are a part of a narrative series or a stand-alone piece would also affect the ability of

the viewer to proffer an appropriate—and church sanctioned—reading. Of course, then

there is the interplay between image, narrative, and argument, "the student of stained

glass has to concentrate on the narrative that transcends the image, the narrative logics of

many images, as a sequence and as an argumentative device."[63] Stained-glass windows, I

believe, are complicated pieces of art that draw on a series of cultural, biblical, and

artistic traditions that require advanced learning and understanding not only to interpret

correctly but even to identify central elements and figures. In other words, any viewer—

however learned—would depend upon a mentor to provide the needed glosses on the

material. In other words, a typical medieval viewer was "the person who must have

relied on the literacy of another for access to pictorial art. This group before the mosaic,

wall painting or stained glass would have perceived these works of art, not in terms of

individual response, but as a choric or mass one."[64] This ubiquitous form of Gothic art

could not be presented to the vast majority of viewers without a specific interpretative

intervention from someone with specific knowledge of the intersections between art,

theology, and narrative. Those three elements combine to create meaning and effect

within the realm of church art, just as I believe these same processes occur within *Pearl*.

Just as with the viewer of a stained-glass image, the Jeweler has direct access to scenes

within the poem—the arbor, the river of jewels, the New Jerusalem, and the Pearl Maiden

Procession. But without the interpretative assistance of the Pearl Maiden, the Jeweler

would misinterpret the scenes without regard to their actual meaning. Of course, the

Jeweler still misinterprets the images in front of his eyes, but it is not because of the

glosses provided by his heavenly instruction. There is an inherent difficulty, perhaps

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[63] Kemp, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, p. 4.
[64] Camille, "Seeing and Reading," p. 32.

even danger to this instruction, namely the concepts of tradition within instruction. The instruction "of interpreting signs and emblems in the way that tradition had determined, of translating images into their spiritual equivalents"[65] presents concerns of retention and modification. But again, we must not simply consider this as instruction or simply as an aesthetic experience. The two were interdependent within the medieval mind; beauty could not be truly beautiful, or even completely intelligible and consumable, unless it voiced an elevating quality to the experience.

Spanning some forty feet across, seventy-five feet from the ground, the north Rose Window of Chartres Cathedral establishes the magnificence and awe of this specific stained-glass window form. The fundamental aspects of rose windows versus traditional stained-glass windows are size and location. Rose windows present massive interconnected windows built primarily over doorways and altars into the stone of the edifice, meaning that the division of rose windows is less embellishment and actual stonework and lead bars. So when viewing this window, questions must be answered to accessibility and knowledge, much like with standard stained-glass windows. But unlike the previous form, there is little opportunity for close scrutiny of the forms. There is no opportunity to see the major and minor prophets who surround the center image of the Virgin and infant Christ enthroned. This window, even more so than God's harvesting of humanity, needs critical and intelligent glossing. Rose window depend upon their size and location to let in light to illuminate the parishioners and the proceedings. But on a more fundamental level, the connection with window and stone has a grounding effect perhaps lost when viewing a traditional stained-glass window. A rose window would

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[65] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, pp. 61-2.

"becomes a steadying influence, gathering the aesthetic energy generated by all the other facade members into one focal point. Inside the church, this effect is strengthened by the fact that the rose is a window; like a great visual center of gravity, it suspends our gaze, as it were, midway between Heaven and Earth."[66] This rose window does not proceed along the same institutional edifying of Fig. 1; this window clearly speaks to the beauty of creation, highlighting the fact that earthly beauty is but a poor substitute of heaven.

Rose windows appeared seemingly overnight at the beginning of the 13th century, but within fifty years, nearly all major cathedrals across Europe contained at least one rose window. It is not that this form had no predecessors, as art historians clearly point to the influence of the wheel windows of earlier churches. The architecture and rose windows installed by Abbot Suger at St. Denis were novel because they employed typological iconography, which would become the standard for nearly all succeeding cathedrals and rose windows. The churches were no longer divided between the poles of North and South, but those geographical terms become associated with the Old and New Testaments. Churches were, in effect, not divided by geography and time but by the history of Christianity. With the rose windows, dimension and measure seem to disappear, as they could be infinitely large or small, representing the eternal truth of the divine Logos.[67] So by viewing the Rose Window, someone would be able to experience light in a mediated, but similar, fashion as would be experienced within heaven, a light that is transcendent and edifying. Those individual panes stood in for the edification of divine light, as natural light could not transmit spiritual truths without a medium through

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[66] Helen Dow, "The Rose Window," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 20, No. 3/4 (1957), pp. 248-297 at p. 248.
[67] Cowen, *Rose Windows*, p.10.

which to work. Divine light, on the other hand, needs no mediums, working directly onto the souls of those residing in heaven.

These rose windows, with their use of symbolism and geometry, spoke to each person, reminding them of the individual paths that all Christians take; however, at the end of the path, one finds Christ, always found in the center of the rose. Rose windows use geometry in three ways: manifest, hidden, and symbolic. When all three connect, they form the created order of the Logos.[68]   This tripartite geometric system allowed for the artisans and clergy to place disparate elements in rose windows, because those elements found harmony within the foldings of the rose window. Composed of both theological subject matter and the workings of human hands, the rose windows demonstrate how the temporal and eternal might mix to make a statement on the aesthetics and ethics of Christianity. Ultimately, the essence of Christianity is a hidden truth, 'the pearl of great price' that cannot be imparted in words but must be approached by allusion, allegory, and symbol.[69] So the rose window is one attempt to approach that hidden truth, and the goal is to transport the viewer into a transcendent vision of Christianity. Such a program underscores the mission of *Piers Plowman*. This is a poem with a central vision on the center of the rose—Christ. This is a poem that forces the dreamer Will forward, mimicking the wheel patterns of the rose, to different stops. But there is a single goal to such wandering—the search for the Christ figure—Piers Plowman. It is a journey that cannot be fulfilled, just as the Tower of Truth, the heaven of the poem, is always in the distance—removed from the everyday experience of the church. To exchange Christ and Piers and rose window and heaven can easily be

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[68] Ibid., p. 92.
[69] Ibid., p. 99.

accomplished, giving the reader a sense of how these images and foundations could become not simply ways of imagining God and heaven but the very forms of coming to understand God and heaven. Churches and poems engage in a process "structured around a cluster of interconnected sacred sites made or transformed through human action."[70] This transformation marks the world as different; here is a place that can be enlightening, engaging, and illuminating to the medieval soul. Churches, windows, poems, and narratives do not attempt to justify the ways of God to man; these medieval institutions and cultural touchstones provide opportunities for study to understand how "interweave[e] social norms and subjective experience, about the ways in which meaning is created by ritual and performance in space, and how these concerns get bound up with individual and collective memory."[71]

I believe that the goals of the various stained-glass windows reflect the projects of *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. The scenes and discussions in *Pearl* conform to a set understanding of theology, attempting to instruct the Jeweler—a Cheshire man—through the desired theological teachings to accept God's will within his own life. *Piers Plowman* conforms to the patterns and goals of the rose windows; the aesthetics and teachings are winding—often dead ends—but the center of the poem, and the center of the search is always Jesus.

Pearl

> *"The sky was clear—remarkably clear—and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse."[72]*

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[70] Gerald Guest, "Space," *Studies in Iconography*, Vol. 33 (2012), pp. 219-30 at pp. 224-5.
[71] Ibid., p. 220.
[72] Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (New York, 1918), p. 9.

The various scenes of *Pearl* can be viewed from various differing critical perspectives, prompting the often disparate interpretations of the poem. The multiplicity of perspective is an aesthetic concept with which the medieval audience was quite familiar. The stained-glass windows of churches, for example, accomplish this effect. Designed to illuminate and instruct, the light reflected through stained-glass windows provided depictions of scenes from Christ's life and other stories from hagiography, as well as an experience of radiant transcendence. Light in *Pearl* is similarly edifying, transcendental, and transformative. But while light is important, it cannot work unless there is a medium through which to pass. In *Pearl* light works not through glass but upon precious gems—a "mixture of 'material' and symbolic" jewels—leading the poem to deal with "gems of spiritual value."[73] The light of Heaven, for many critics, is rightly described as the "essence of the heavenly city," which figures the "essential, hidden, divine reality."[74] Yet it is the relationship, and the interdependence of light and jewel that create meaning in *Pearl*. While the mythic place of the Jeweler's heaven shines and gleams with light, the Jeweler cannot recognize the meaning of light, that of emanation from and to the Divine. The poem's use of light and medium ultimately leads to the communal nature of stars and salvation and the continued inability of the Jeweler to recognize his surroundings and his own salvation.

The Aesthetics of Light

The light of the Jeweler's heaven stems from the eternal source of life, endowing it with a divine presence. Light within *Pearl*, either earthly or heavenly, appears to make

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[73] Colin Manlove, *Christian Fantasy* (South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 1992), p. 49.
[74] Louis Blenker, "The Theological Structure of *Pearl*," *The Middle English* Pearl, ed. John Conley (South Bend: Notre Dame UP, 1970), p. 256.

beauty known. Light, the poem offers to make beauty possible for the Jeweler, the poet,

and the reader. A diamond is beautiful, but its beauty stems from the way light bounces

off and through the various facets of the stone, dazzling the eyes. Color and brilliance

formed the heart of beauty in the Middle Ages, and light makes these qualities known.

According to Ulric of Strasbourg, light is, more formally, the efficient and formal cause

of beauty. This efficient quality stems from the idea of color, as color is but a collection

of different lights. And so from this idea, Robert Grossetette held that the "more

luminous and brightly colored" an item, the more beautiful it was.[75] The reverse was also

considered true; the more darkly colored an item, the more distasteful it was. The heaven

of the Jeweler is beautiful, and it is beautiful for many reasons. For the Jeweler it is

beautiful because it is the place where he finds his Pearl, and it is the place where he

hopes to reside with his precious child. For audiences, both modern and medieval,

heaven is beautiful because of the reunion of Pearl and the Jeweler. Yet heaven is

beautiful for readers for more than that reason alone; heaven's beauty can be best

attributed to light. The use of light in *Pearl* speaks to the medieval connection between

light and sacredness: "Manifestations or evocations of light in particular may be

associated with holiness and are critical aspects of sacred place."[76] This light, however, is

not simply reserved only for heaven; rather, it is a shared experience between God and

humanity. Light allowed the medieval to participate simultaneously in both the earthly

experience and the heavenly.

   To separate God from light seems an arduous task, as estheticians looking into

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[75] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, p. 58.
[76] Weightman, "Sacred Landscapes and the Phenomenon of Light," p. 59.

matters of luminosity and color can "imagine Divinity only in the guise of light."[77] Can

there be a divine without light? Medieval church construction's insistence on large

windows offers one answer. And if we are left to imagine, as have those who came

before us, that the Divine's cloak is one light then we must take that further step to

understand that luminous objects are not only noble but also divine. This relationship of

divinity and nobility caused St. Bonaventure to conclude, "Souls are beautiful, because

they are luminous substances."[78] Souls are ethereal and constructed of pure light. This

luminosity of the soul is seen throughout *Pearl* in various forms, most frequently as the

image of the pearl. Of course, the use of a pearl can bring up issues of nobility, which

will be discussed in the next chapter, but the opening description of the pearl seems not to

offer much beyond "very general terms, *clos in gold* and *sette*; the virtue of the pearl as a

stone is described only in aesthetic and moral terms."[79] What color is a pearl? Pearls, one

might answer, are an off-white color, something like ecru. But a pearl's color is just a

reflection, as pearls are composed of layers of a translucent compound that reflect all the

spectrum's colors. A pearl, in essence, contains all colors, just like white light, and

reflects those colors back to the eyes. By containing all the colors, the pearl is pure light,

and, by the criteria of St. Bonaventure, a perfect symbol for a soul. The use of a pearl in

this context offers layered meaning, "pearls also existed as the common property of the

iconography of heaven . . . [and] Pearls were always already traditional point of

commerce between the earthly and the heavenly."[80] As both God and the soul are pure

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[77] Ibid., p. 60.
[78] Ibid., p. 61.
[79] Tony Davenport, "Jewels and Jewelers in *Pearl*," *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 59, No. 241 (2008), pp 508-520, at p. 511 (author's emphasis).
[80] Allen J. Fletcher, "Reading Radical Metonymy in *Pearl*," *Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, ed. Lawrence Besserman (New York: Palgrave, 2006) pp. 47-61 at p.55.

light, what is their relationship? Is there a relationship?

It takes a very small logical step to say that the soul, due to its composition and formation, is related to God. Since both lights are pure and derive from the same source, we can also say that they are the same. The Bible asserts that God created man "in his *own* image" (Genesis 1:27). This has led to the idea of anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics or qualities to God. But as human souls are composed of pure light, and God himself is pure light, then it is much more reliable to say that humanity's resemblance to God is in the shared experience of the eternal light, not a similar nose or the ability to walk on two feet. Light transcends the human experience. Of course, humans create light in laboratories and by the flick of a switch, but that light, as understood in the Middle Ages, is a facsimile to the beauty of the divine illumination. *Pearl'*s light is that of the Divine, a luminosity that glimmers, shines, and dances to the eyes of the Jeweler.[81]

Light, though an incontrovertible physical actuality, is "primarily and fundamentally a metaphysical reality."[82] And once humans have ascended into heaven, they lose corporeality with bodies dissolved into "pure effulgence."[83] This complete ambience of light finds expression in flashes of existence, which relates to the idea of emanation. The philosophy of emanation, as proposed by Plotinus, is a unity of being through emanation from and returning to the Divine.[84] When light falters, either intentionally or not, it appears to pulsate or emanate from that being. But even more to

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[81] Josephine Bloomfield, "Aristotelian Luminescence, Thomistic Charity: Vision, Reflection, and Self-Love in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology* Vol. 108, Iss. 2 (2011), pp. 165-189 believes that this use of light and a pearl refers to a kind of unseen mirror for the Jeweler by which he could judge his actions and theology.
[82] Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 50.
[83] Ibid., p. 51.
[84] William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*, Vol. 1: Classical & Neo-classical Criticism (Chicago: Routledge, 1957), p. 113.

this idea of emanation is the Plotinian concept that "The places that are sacred to the soul are within it, in its own parts, and afford the place of interaction even with the One, a good that is higher than soul and intellect themselves."[85] So as the Jeweler walks along in heaven, objects appear to emanate light in the form of gleaming or shining. These objects are in direct contact with this eternal light of the Divine, and they are emanating light back to the source, in a kind of metaphysical communion. These are inanimate objects, rocks, jewels that one can see this in daily life. But it is the procession of the virgins that this concept of emanation is best exemplified:

> Þis noble cité of ryche enpryse
> Watz sodanly ful wythouten sommoun
> Of such vergynez in þe same gyse
> Þat watz my blysful an-vnder croun:
> And coronde wern alle of þe same fasoun,
> Depaynt in perlez and wedez qwyte;
> In vchonez breste watz bounden boun
> Þe blysful perle wyth gret delyt. (ll. 1097-1104)

Here is this large procession of the virgin brides of Christ, 144,000 all told, and they march together through the streets of New Jerusalem. The Jeweler's most extravagant dreams would pale at this sight. In the fashion of the Pearl maiden, each maid wore dresses covered in pearls, which at the center was the large pearl of great price. They radiated light as they walked, reflecting the joy and love of Christ who led the station to the throne of God. This procession mimics the journey that Christ endured as he labored under the weight of the cross, facing taunts, scorn, and compassion along the way. These brides, however, present a unified front, taking part in the triumph of Christ's crucifixion, which allowed these women to become elevated to their status. This unanimity in thought stems from the emanation of light between maids and the Triune God. As the

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[85] Harrington, *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, p. 73.

light shines off of the maid, it returns to God, turning a simple act of reflection into a way of bringing together the entire corps of Heaven. While the Jeweler witnesses this marvelous procession, he focuses on the whiteness of the dresses and the beauty of the fixed pearls yet the true meaning of the beauty escapes the Jeweler. While focusing on the apparent beauty of the march, the Jeweler cannot grasp the beauty of the cohesive form, moving by one hand as their shining light returns to the source, becoming one with the Lantern and the Lamp.

The Uses of Light in *Pearl*

Whereas other sections of the poem are filled to excess with luminous images and diction, the first five stanzas display a conspicuous absence of lambency. The only example of light imagery is displayed with regards to the flowers in the arbor: "Blomez blayke and blwe and rede / Þer schynez ful schyr agayn þe sunne" (ll. 27-28). The pall that hangs over the arbor, relieved momentarily by the ephemeral radiance of the flowers, gives way quickly to the imagery of "moldez dunne" and "graynez dede" (ll. 30-31). This quick transition from life into death points to the instability of the arbor, a place where light cannot transform. In fact, the flower's color is not attributed to the sun and the working of nature but to the power of Pearl; it is her body covered in the dark earth from which all life springs in the arbor. The irrepressible connection between light, death, and heaven is furthered when the Jeweler mentions that this action takes place in August, during the harvest, "Quen corne is coruen wyth crokez kene" (ln. 40). Furthermore, shadow consumes the small hill where the Jeweler lost grasp of Pearl (her grave) "Schadowed þis wortez ful schyre and schen" (ln. 42). Plants, quite obviously, need light for photosynthesis and other necessary functions, which ultimately leads to

growth and flowering. Yet this arbor's particular construction appears to stifle the

interplay between the sun and chlorophyll. Where then do these plants gather the proper

source of life? Pearl. The body of Pearl offers nutrients and light, allowing these flowers

and spices to bloom and to give hope to the Jeweler. In this sense, Pearl could also be

viewed as a symbol for a medieval church. She gives hope to the Jeweler and she is the

source of light and life, performing the same functions as the medieval church. Whereas

the arbor is filled with this shadowy light, the true luminosity lies in the interior of the

garden: Pearl.

This connection of light contained within *Pearl* establishes a line of thought of

interiority and exteriority. A person's true nature cannot always be told by one's

appearance. A gregarious personality may belie false and devious intent. This dual

nature of existence does not affect the ethereal residents of the Jeweler's paradise. Their

souls, Pearl and her companions, are laid bare, shining, outward examples of the beauty

and purity of their inward countenance. This connection between Pearl and the ability for

a body to give off light leads to the issue of the soul's connection to light and the soul's

ability to reflect brilliance, which ultimately brings the reader and the Jeweler to the

original source of luminosity: God.

Whereas the opening of *Pearl* is noticeably bereft of light, effulgence flows over

in the remaining sections. The reader immediately recognizes this excess: "Þe lyʒt of

hem myʒt no mon leuen, / Þe glemande glory þat of hem glent" (ll. 69-70). This

particular line displays this new quality of light, but it also reminds the reader of how

unnatural the light is. It is the unnatural quality that the Jeweler cannot come to

understand or come to use, and it is that reason why he is trapped by his own ineffability.

The first section of the poem, that is the first five stanzas of the poem, had at most three examples of light. The second stanza, on the other-hand, contains nearly twenty examples of light or light-related diction. To be specific though, this light imagery relates most specifically to gleaming or shining light: "Þe glemande glory þat of hem glent" (ln. 70), "Quen glem of glodez agaynz hem glydez, / Wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle þay schynde" (ll. 79-80), and "In þe founce þer stonden stonez stepe, / As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt, / As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe" (ll. 114-116). As the *Pearl*-poet was quite conscious of his diction, the reader then must be able to recognize the significance of this quality of light, the transient and quick reflections of light off of stones, gems, and cliffs. This fleeting characteristic of light relates to the previously noted idea of emanation and the connection of light to objects and the divine.

While light glistened and gleamed in medieval churches, light and space commingled to "produce effects of mystical beauty," which would become an "enduring concept of space."[86] Light also is a very natural phenomenon, and its incorporation into architecture is humanity's attempt to blend the natural with its own works. But light, for the purposes of Christianity and for the purposes of this inquiry, is far greater than just a naturally occurring experience. Viewing the beauty of light is the most pleasurable and enlightening experiences, as sight is but the "harmonious meeting" of two lights, "that of the physical world and that of the consciousness" (*I*, 98).[87] In terms of purity and essence, light is "the purest . . . the most sublime beauty," which ultimately gives the greatest joy.[88] Then it must stand that the creator of light had the joy of humanity at the

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[86] Tuan, *Space and Place,* p. 110.
[87] Marcus Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975).
[88] de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, p. 57.

heart of that specific generation. The connection of God and light has been shown by the

effulgence of light in heaven, but Dante takes this connection further, turning God into

pure radiance:

> Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza
> de l'alto lume parvermi tre giri
> di tre colori e d'una contenenza;
> e l'un da l'altro come iri da iri
> parea reflesso, e 'l terzo parea foco
> che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri. (XXXIII, ll. 115-120)

Dante also writes, "O luce etterna che sola in te sidi" (XXXIII, ln. 124). The claim is that

this light, that is the light of God, is eternal and is found only in God. If God is the

creator of light, He is also the source of light. But it is not simply that there is light but

also the Empyrean in the form of a rose:

> sì, soprastando al lume intorno intorno,
> vidi specchiarsi in più di mille soglie
> quanto di noi là sù fatto ha ritorno.
> E se l'infimo grado in sé raccoglie
> sì grande lume, quanta è la larghezza
> di questa rosa ne l'estreme foglie! (XXX, ll. 112-7)

The light, geometry, and rose combine "to respond to the miraculous; one index of the

fatal limitation on the spiritual vision of the damned was their differing inability to

recognize and understand the miraculous nature of the Pilgrims journey through hell, and

the grace that enabled it."[89] By combining the elements that dominate the architecture of

the medieval church—light and a geometric rose—the poem "transcends the sensible and

can thus be a gateway to mystery."[90] Such an image of the rose continues Dante's

imagery that figures the "importance of light which floods the celestial rose as the

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[89] James T. Chiampi, "Dante's *Paradiso* from Number to Mysterium," *Dante Studies*, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, No. 110 (1992), pp. 255-278 at p. 266.
[90] Daniel M. Murtaugh, "'Figurando il paradiso': The Signs That Render Dante's Heaven," *PMLA,* Vol. 90, No. 2 (1975), pp. 277-84, at p. 277.

primary aspect of God's presence and love."[91] But it is not simply image and ideas

presented to the reader but an invitation to join the members of the Empyrean: "There are

still places left to be filled up—but not very many." [92]

The *Pearl*-poet also equates God as the source of light, but he does not take that

further step in claiming that God is light: "Þe self God watz her lombe-lyȝt, / Þe Lombe

her lantyrne, wythouten drede" (ll. 1046-1047). Though Christ is still in human form, He

radiates light from His throne. By equating God with light, then it is with that original,

perfect, and uncreated light that all life began, and it is also true then that God not only

created life but life is a part of God. The very universe was a type of "explosion of light

and the divine light," which came to unify everything in the heavens under the heading of

God's creation.[93] As light is so intertwined with the three persons of the Trinity, then

light is divine and has greater significance than normally attributed to it by modern

audiences. What can one do then with the everyday lights of the night sky? Are those

blinking lights emanating to and from God?

Jewels Into Stars: Issues of Crowding and Salvation

There are no stars in the Jeweler's Heaven. The sky lacks even a moon and a sun.

Yet there is no want for light with God the father as a lamp and Christ as her lantern. The

Jeweler takes this cosmic absence further, chiding the sun and moon for not being worthy

to cast light upon the holy city: "Sunne ne mone schon neuer so swete / As þat foysoun

flode out of þat flet" [(ll. 1056-1057), and "The mone may þerof acroche no myȝte; / To

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[91] John Leyerle, "The Rose-Wheel Design and Dante's *Paradiso*," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1977), pp. 280-307 at p. 300.

[92] John Casey, *After Lives: A Guide to Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), p. 287.

[93] Sheldrake, *Space for the Sacred*, p. 57.

spotty ho is, of body to grym, / And also þer ne is neuer nyȝt" (ll. 1069-71). Even though

the Jeweler's critique of the sun and moon seems to imply an inherent understanding of

the limitations of Earthly light, he never explicitly states this. Rather, this appears to be

another moment when he is faced with the overwhelming certainty of ethereal life, and he

continues to be focused on that which he best understands—Earth. With a moon replaced

by God, what then replaces the stars? The brightly colored jewels. The Jeweler makes

this connection himself when he notes how the jewels on the bottom of the river shine,

"As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe, / Staren in welkyn in wynter nyȝt" (ll.

114-116). The Jeweler presents a peaceful and tender image with the stars as protecting

parents watching over humanity as they sleep through the cold nights of winter. This

quotation also shows the comfort that stars bring to humanity, which contributes to an

interesting characteristic of stars.

When anyone views the night sky, one is immediately struck by the immensity of

the scene. There is also amazement as to the number of stars and how they fill the whole

sky. Yet, the night sky never seems crowded; there is always room, it seems, for one

more. The night sky may shimmer and shine; yet "such a sky is not viewed as

oppressive."[94] The same can be said about salvation. When we think of Heaven and

eternal life, there must be some thought given to family and friends. To spend an

eternity, even in Heaven, without them would be a private Hell. Salvation is not anything

without being a part of the many who had been saved before and those yet to be saved. It

is not enough to be saved, we must be, as Chaucer reminds us in his "Retraction," "oon of

hem at the day of doome that shulle be saved" (ll. 29-30). The Jeweler notices the

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[94] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 61.

multitude of maidens crowded into the street, yet it is a perfect, tranquil scene: "Þaȝ þay wern fele, no pres in plyt, / Bot mylde as maydenez seme at mas, / So droȝ þay forth wyth gret delyt" (ll. 1114-6). He needs to be a part of that crowd, which is not even a crowd, and we long with him. As he reaches out to grasp Pearl, to cross the river he cannot cross, his mind fixes on joining the Pearl maiden, even though there is the sad realization he will not. Salvation must be achieved with others, but it is a status that cannot be asked for or attained too early; rather, salvation comes when appropriate. Yet the Jeweler cannot reach his precious Pearl, and so he reaches out still to her.

Pearl presents a series of scenes that engage the reader's aesthetic sensibilities. As I outline above, these beautiful scenes have a purpose. Returning to the above notion of the function of stained-glass windows, I would like to consider the overall effect of these scenes on the poem.

Pearl begins in the falling light of August, as the Jeweler reminisces about his life with his beloved Pearl. As he falls down into a stupor, and as his spirit ascends to heaven, he appears to be a person outside of the knowledge of Christian theology. He cannot fathom the reason for his losing his precious daughter. It is not that she died, it is not that God took her from him; rather, it is that he lost her; she trundled down from him, and she became lost in the dead grass and dark dirt of the arbor. This personal connection, in my opinion, relates to an inability to sense his place within the Christian worldview, let alone within the larger Christian, historical framework.

Piers Plowman

Despite the continued insistence that Christianity presented a cohesive and unified set of beliefs and values, the actual on-the-ground reality paints a contradictory picture.

In addition to the many heretical scares and crises of the Middle Ages, the period was remarkable for continuing tension on the role of the church in state affairs and vice-versa, the influence of religion on everyday life, and general concern for what it meant to be a "good" Christian. Aesthetics, in its own fashion, elided these differences to point to a system that allowed for clergy, scholars, and lay people alike to engage with the divine. Each moment, each object had the opportunity to inspire thoughts of the divine in the viewer. If a meadow were beautiful, that green grass and rolling hills reminded the viewer that there was a hand behind that landscape. If a church building were beautiful, the organization and symmetry of the building reminded the viewer of the importance of harmony within the universe. If a song were beautiful, the diverse parts and sections came together to form a cohesive form reminded the viewer of the music that rang out from the heavenly host. All of these items, all of the beauty of the world could be directly tied to God. Unlike standard stained-glass windows, which partially depended on surrounding pieces for context, rose windows were able to contain enough information to allow for multiple interpretations and paths. Of course, those interpretations and paths led to the same center and conclusion—Christ. But what this particular form of stained-glass window allowed for was a visual representation of the manifold influences, opinions, concerns, and beliefs of the Middle Ages.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, readers do not get a sustained visual image of heaven within *Piers Plowman*. The poem opens up on a world located within the two poles of the human existence: "a tour on a toft tieliche ymaked" and a "deep dale bynethe, a dongeon therinne." The poem does not engage these localities with full-throated description, leaving readers with questions as to their composition, purpose, true

location, and populace. Of course, a tower on a hill and a deep dale with a dungeon can be easily read as heaven and hell—the ultimate ending places for a medieval life. These initial locations, including "Malverne Hilles," initiate a series of landscapes and buildings that force readers to consider right and wrong actions, allowing those readers to question whether or not they will end up in the "tour" or "dongeon." This is an eschatological architecture, focusing attention on places and spaces that inspire thoughts of the afterlife. In the same way, I believe that *Piers Plowman* deploys various scenes with images that present potential aesthetic responses, highlighting the kind of critical judgment needed for a Christian to attain the ultimate end of the "tour."

In contrast to the brilliance of *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman* does not engage the visual effects of the sun in the text. "Sonne" appears twenty-two times in the text, varying in usage from orientating actions in the poem, to defining the scope of Nature, to contrasting current conditions to the horrors of the Last Judgment, and to pointing to the transformative quality of Christianity. The sun is an immediate presence in the poem, initially orienting the reader to geographic and seasonal markers—"In a somer seson, when softe was the sonne (P.1) and "A[c] as I biheeld into the eest an heigh to the sonne" (P.13). The sun's orienting function continues in *Passus* VII: "The preest and Perkyn apposeden either oother--/And I thorugh hir wordes awook, and waited aboute,/ And seigh the sonne in the south sitte that tyme" (VII.139-41). Not only does the sun orient the reader, the sun functions as a catch-all for the vastness of the earth and the human experience, which Langland employs by noting that "For is no science under sonne so sovereyn for the soule" (X.206) and "Alle the sciences under sonne and alle the sotile craftes / I wolde I knewe and kouthe kyndely in myn herte!" (XV.48-9). In Will's dream

world, the sun also stands as a perfect foil for the darkness that will descend on the world

on that day of doom: "The lord of lif and of light tho leide hise eighen togideres. / The

day for drede withdrough and derk bicam the sonne" (XVIII.59-60), "Lif and Deeth in

this derknesse, hir oon fordeoth hir oother. / Shal no wight wite witterly who shal have

the maistrie/ Er Sonday aboute sonne rising" (XVIII.65-7), and "Sith this barn was ybore

ben thritti wynter passed, / Which deide and deeth tholed this day aboute mydday-- /And

that is cause of this clips that closeth now the sonne, /In menynge that man shal fro

merknesse be drawe/The while this light and this leme shal Lucifer ablende" (XVIII.133-

37). Despite the fact that the sun's presence will not be felt during Satan's rule, the sun

retains a transformative quality: "'After sharpest shoures,' quod Pees, 'moost shene is the

sonne'" (XVIII.411) and "And sent the sonne to save a cursed mannes tilthe /As brighte

as to the beste man or to the beste woman" (XIX.435-6).

For an approximately 7,300-lined poem about medieval existence, the fact that the

sun makes only twenty-two appearances might point to a fundamental issue as to why

there are so few examples of the sun and what those examples mean for the poem. The

sun in *Pearl* is non-existent, but there is no lack of light—Christ becomes the source of

all life and light in the poem, working upon various highly ornate and spiritually valuable

jewels. But there are no such ornate and valuable jewels in *Piers Plowman*. In fact,

Langland uses the world jewel only once in the poem:

> Ther she is wel with the kyng, wo is the reaume--
> For she is favorable to Fals and defouleth truthe ofte.
> By Jesus! with hire jeweles youre justice she shendeth
> And lith ayein the lawe and letteth hym the gate,
> That feith may noght have his forth, hire floryns go so thinke. (III.153-7)

If only one incidence of jewel was not striking enough, the fact that jewels are associated

with Mede, a character whose actions are questioned and scrutinized in the poem, but that

with "hire jeweles youre justice she shendeth." In other words, these jewels corrupt the

natural order and purpose of a society, meaning that laws and justice can be bought.

Langland clearly distrusts the influence of jewels with connection to institutions meant to

protect a Christian from immoral influences. But such criticism of Mede and her jewels

also attempts to locate the aesthetic quality within the human body. Mede is not simply a

figure, she is an aesthetic experience herself, allowing those who view her to become lost

within the aesthetic appraisal of her and her jewel's beauty. By appraising Mede and her

jewels, readers (here represented by Conscience) must be aware of what occurs when we

engage with items of beauty. Can we be distracted by things that glitter? Or can we

understand what values beautiful items really represent? In other words, can something

be beautiful and be morally wrong? Part of the discussion must be the fear associated

with these types of bodily charms; St. Bernard, writing in *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, noted

that members of his orders must turn away from such delights: "We who have turned

aside from society, relinquishing for Christ's sake all the precious and beautiful things in

the world, its wondrous light and color, its sweet sounds and odors, the pleasures of taste

and touch, for us all bodily delights are nothing but dung."[95] Such an acetic approach

might easily be discounted for its extreme disavowal; however, St. Bernard points rightly

to the fears of many, which Langland seems to give voice to through Conscience's

critique of Mede's value within the court. But such discussion, I believe, underscores the

need for an appraisal of aesthetics—the power such a force can have on the minds of

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[95] Quoted in Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 7.

people. Why is St. Bernard ridding himself of such beautiful sights? Why is Conscience so afraid of Mede and her beauty? These fears are not because of simply the corrupting value of immoral or unethical displays of beauty; these fears allow us to recognize that aesthetics has power. Our responses to items of beauty—that aesthetic response—moves humans to respond in a variety of directions, allowing each person to become a bodily reminder of the potential of aesthetic response and each person as critic of such sights, sounds, and pleasures. The Middle Ages promoted a vision of aesthetics that was tied to a moral and ethical approach; "For the Medievals, a thing was ugly if it did not relate to a hierarchy of ends centered on man and his supernatural destiny; and this in turn was because of a structural imperfection which rendered it inadequate for its function. It was a type of sensibility which made it hard for the Medieval to experience aesthetic pleasure in anything which fell short of their ethical ideals; and conversely, whatever gave aesthetic pleasure was also morally justified, in cases where this was relevant."[96] What *Piers Plowman* offers is a move away from the images that would elicit uncritical approaches; rather, the poem forces the reader to view each scene and wonder what value might be assigned to the image—either good or bad.

Instead of those ornately described and highly polished jewels of *Pearl* and the corrupting jewels that Conscience decries, the sun of *Piers Plowman* works upon the actual landscape of the poem, more specifically, the sun works on what God has created. As pointed to in the *Pearl* section, light was acutely defined and associated with the Divine for a medieval Christian audience, and so Langland's poem cannot escape that meaning and those associations. But Langland's poem does not engage those concepts in

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[96] Ibid., p. 80.

an artificial framework. Langland's poem, as I illustrated earlier, forces the reader to engage with activities germane to the everyday life of medieval England. This emphasis of the quotidian obligates the audience to recognize how commonplace experience does not only matter now; this daily existence marks one for eternity. Langland's audience, assuming for the wide-ranging possibilities of a 14th century English literary culture, specifically the oral transmission associated with the poem, would know about stained-glass windows. Even beyond that experience, some in the audience would have seen or possibly owned jewelry. But every single member of the medieval audience would know the experience of darkness. They would know what it feels like to be cold. They would probably know how to gauge location and season and time by the sun. In a very common pedagogical maneuver, he does not try to immediately thrust his readership to unfamiliar places and experiences; rather, he engages them in that diurnal reality. This process speaks not only to his practical theological approach, but I believe this relates specifically to his aesthetic program. Beauty and aesthetics are not simply meant to awe; beauty and aesthetics are meant to overwhelm with spiritual truth. For the medieval theorists and writers, this aesthetic principle meant that beauty must only originate from God, and so all beauty must bring humanity's attention to that fact. So it is unsurprising that a poem so engaged in the day-to-day existence would point constantly and consistently to a recognition that humanity's existence, however dreary that might be, is only made possible by God. This is a world that exists outside of the majesty of the grand cathedrals of Europe. The light cannot work on the stained-glass windows of those cathedrals, because those stained-glass windows are not the true mark of spiritual development; the

stained-glass windows work not to raise the viewer to heaven or to spiritual truth but

speak more to wealth and prestige of the donors:

> Thanne he assoiled hire soone and sithen he seide,
> "We have a wyndow in werchynge, wole stonden us ful hye;
> Woldestow glaze that gable and grave therinne thy name,
> Sykir sholde thi soule be hevene to have."
> "Wiste I that," quod the womman, - I wolde noght spare
> For to be youre frend, frere, and faile yow nevere
> While ye love lordes that lecherie haunten
> And lakketh noght ladies that loven wel the same.
> lt is a freletee of flessh--ye fynden it in bokes--
> And a cours of kynde. wherof we comen alle.
> Who may scape the sclaundre, the scathe is soone amended;
> It is synne of the sevene sonnest relessed.
> Have mercy," quod Mede, of men that it haunteth
> And I shal covere youre kirk, youre cloistre do maken,
> Wowes do whiten and wyndowes glazen. (III.047-3.061)

These windows, *Piers Plowman* indicates, are not to reach heaven by any means other

than by purchase. The goal of the window is to gain entrance via donation and not

through the faith and sacrifices that a rose window demonstrates through its center focal

point of Christ. That is the way, the poem asks us to engage with, to find the true

meaning of life. Again, this critique of the windows and a blinding aesthetic finds

resonance in the words of St. Bernard commenting on the excesses of medieval churches:

"Everything else is covered with gold, gorging the eyes and opening the purse strings.

Some saint or other is depicted as a figure of beauty, as in the belief that the more highly

colored something is, the holier it is."[97] Simply because an item is beautiful, as noted in

both the critique of Mede and the stained-glass windows, does not provide a direct link to

its value within the Christian worldview. Again, the poem offers readers the ability to

evaluate the immediate, uncritical responses one might normally associate with the act of

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[97] Ibid.

walking into a cathedral and viewing the sacred art. A church is not heaven, but what a church might offer is a place for a body chance to lose oneself in an experience of transcendent beauty. A church might offer a body opportunity to engage with deep contemplation of the truth of the sacraments. A church might offer a body occasion to reflect on one's own spiritual well-being. All of these opportunities allow for an aesthetic response to locate one's body within the framework of a moral, Christian world, which Abbot Suger articulates: "[Being in church] induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner."[98] What is vital in such a report is that the transcendent, aesthetic experience can transport one from the terrestrial unto the ethereal because of the surroundings. A church allows for the joining of place and aesthetics in such a way as to remind the medieval of the truth of existence—life, beauty, place all depend upon a relationship to, from, and with God. Abbot Suger's conception of aesthetics and medieval churches differs greatly than Langland's conceptions that he promotes in *Piers Plowman*. From the splendid and glittering world of Suger, we must ask if such an experience can be found in the bloody and sinewy representations of the church in *Piers Plowman*.

The world of *Piers Plowman* emphasizes the visceral qualities of existence; this may be seen in the Barn of Unity description:

> And Grace gaf hym the cros, with the croune of thornes,

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[98] Ibid.

> That Crist upon Calvarie for mankynde on pyned;
> And of his baptisme and blood that he bledde on roode
> He made a manere morter, and mercy it highte.
> And therwith Grace bigan to make a good foundement,
> And watlede it and walled it with hise peynes and his passion,
> And of al Holy Writ he made a roof after,
> And called that hous Unite -- Holy Chirche on Englissh. (XX.324-31)

While the poem has previously presented questions as to how to view the stained-glass windows of the great cathedrals and the jewels that might normally be associated with beauty, the poem offers a final church that removes all of the splendor that might be associated with a proper, Christian church. Can this place serve the same function as Suger's beautifully decorated and appointed churches? By refusing to present a series of images that question the spiritual or economic values of jewels, the poem locates the aesthetic response within the physical, bodily terms of Christ. This is a sanctuary made of the very physical being and means of torture of Christ. This is where the poem's final scene takes place, and it is literally placing Christ at the center of the vision. The dreamer Will has wound his way from the Field of Folk to the Trial of Mede to the Harrowing of Hell to the Ploughing of the Field to the Tree of Charity—these scenes have offered a series of advices; however, each piece of advice is clear—put your faith in God. Each item directs in a pattern—however winding to this locale--to this final aesthetic scene. This is a world fixed on the immediate appraisal of life, getting the most out of this life because it is hard and it is real. Such a sentiment is echoed by the closing remarks of the Prologue:

> Cokes and hire knaves cryden, "Hote pies, hote!
> Goode gees and grys! Go we dyne, go we!"
> Taverners until hem tolden the same:
> "Whit wyn of Oseye and wyn of Gascoigne,
> Of the Ryn and of the Rochel, the roost to defie!" (P. 226-30)

To eat the pies when they are hot and to drink the wine when it is available is the ethic

proposed of a daily existence—it is the conception of beauty of the poem. It is fleeting,

but it can be understood. However, any real sense of beauty must be understood to stem

from God. Christ is the center of all things, and it is the search for Christ—depicted in

Rose Windows and *Piers Plowman*—that should dominate life:

> "By Crist!" quod Conscience tho, "I wole bicome a pilgrym,
> And walken as wide as the world lasteth,
> To seken Piers the Plowman, that Pryde myghte destruye,
> And that freres hadde a fyndyng, that for nede flateren
> And countrepledeth me, Conscience. Now Kynde me avenge,
> And sende me hap and heele, til I have Piers the Plowman!" (XX.381-6)

But these ideas of fleeting beauty and depictions of Christ as physical means of holding

together the church also emphasize the aesthetic need of grounding responses within a

particular, physical framework. These medieval theories of aesthetic responses must be

grounded within the framework of Christ. For Langland, for the *Pearl*-poet, for Abbot

Suger, for St. Bernard even, these responses to various items—highly colored or woefully

drab—cannot have any value or meaning without recognition of why they are beautiful or

for what purpose they are beautiful. Medieval aesthetics might be viewed as naïve or

backwards because of the insistence of tying beauty to the divine; however, we might

view the theories as making clear the relationship of aesthetics and morality. Such a

relationship seems clear within the scenes of *Piers Plowman*, the heart of the poem is the

search for meaning within the world, a search that can only makes sense if it is tied to the

person of Christ. The entirety of the poem depends on the search, on the stability offered

by the search for the Christ figure: "The rose-window magnificently demonstrates that

the mainspring of the medieval outlook was Christian doctrine, the focal point of thought, as it also became in the rose-window the focal point of the church façade."[99]

Tnugdal and Hadewijch

Pearl and *Pier's Plowman* offer distinct visions of the afterlife. While the one vision is of a neatly manicured jewelry box, the other is an expansive and visceral landscape with a distant ivory tower. These visions, however, point to two distinct aesthetic choices in creating an afterlife, and the visions of Hadewijch and *The Vision of Tnugdal* offer complementary aesthetic approaches. Langland focuses his vision on the potentiality of creation and the journey of mankind to engage in the Christian tradition. To this end, one might rightly point to the work of Hadewijch as fitting in that same program. Between her poetry, letters, and visions, Hadewijch offers views of the afterlife dominated by the potential of humanity and humanity's role in the afterlife:

> There I saw a very deep whirlpool, wide and exceedingly dark; in this abyss all beings were included, crowded together, and compressed. The darkness illuminated and penetrated everything. The unfathomable depth of the abyss was so high that no one could reach it. I will not attempt now to describe how it was formed, for there is no time now to speak of it; and I cannot put it in words since it is unspeakable. Second, this is not a convenient time for it, because much pertains to what I saw. It was the entire omnipotence of our Beloved. In it I saw the Lamb take possession of our Beloved. In the vast space I saw festivities, such as David playing the harp, and he struck the harp strings. Then I perceived an Infant being born in the souls who love in secret, the souls hidden from their own eyes in the deep abyss of which I speak, and to whom nothing is lacking but that they should lose themselves in it. I saw the forms of many different souls, according to what each one's life had been. Of those whom I saw, the ones whom I already knew remained known to me; and those I did not know became known to me; I received interior knowledge about some, and also exterior knowledge about many. And certain ones I knew interiorly, having never seen them exteriorly.[100]

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[99] Dow, "The Rose Window," p. 297.

[100] Hadewijch, "Vision 11," *The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columbia Hart, O.S.B. (New York: Paulist, 1980), p. 289.

As a Beguine, Hadewijch's community attempted to parcel out a small amount of order in their lives, living in countries and a time that severely limited opportunities for controlling their own lives. Beguines worshiped in a church that sought to limit their ability to worship and take part within that same church. Beguine writings, including those of Hadewijch, assert the necessity of a female presence within the church.

Hadewicjh's vision is a remarkable scene. It seems, at first glance, to be the least heavenly scene with respect to medieval Christian expectations of heaven. Where are the angels? Where is the beautiful music? Where is the Plotinian notion of emanating life? She describes heaven as an "unfathomable" and "very deep whirlpool, wide and exceedingly dark" with "souls hidden" and "crowded together, and compressed" in a "deep abyss." Such a description inverts expectations of heaven, and so Hadewijch's description of heaven fits better with concepts of hell, a place of great depth and darkness with an indistinguishable mass of humanity, calling to mind *The Vision of Tnugdal* who asks his guide: "Can you please tell me where such a long journey down the abyss can lead us, after all the evil things we have seen, so evil that it would be impossible not only to see but even to think of anything worse?"[101] The abyss of Tnugdal does not bear much resemblance to Hadewijch's abyss, though she modifies this concept of abyss elsewhere, describing abyss in terms of love and privation: "O beloved, why has not Love sufficiently overwhelmed you and engulfed you in her abyss? Alas! when Love is so sweet, why do you not fall deep into her? And why do you not touch God deeply enough in the abyss of his Nature, which is so unfathomable?"[102] and "For [God] is just in

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[101] *The Vision of Tnugdal*, trans. Jean-Nichel Picard, (Dublin: Four Court, 1989), p. 133.
[102] Hadewijch, "Letter Five," *The Complete Works*, p. 56.

himself, and it lies in his power to take and give what is right: For he is in the height of his fruition, and we are in the abyss of our privation. I mean you and I, who have not yet become what we are, and have not grasped what we have, and still remain so far from what is ours."[103] While these three separate concepts of abyss are distinct, I believe that they all conform to a fundamental concept of medieval aesthetics, namely that all beauty stems from the creative powers of the divine.

Building off this medieval conception, Hadewijch's depiction counters the aesthetic sensibilities of *Pearl*'s New Jerusalem, embracing the very root of the Christian tradition: the creation story. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep." Both the Genesis creation story and Hadewijch's vision ask for the reader to understand that darkness and abyss are not simply the absence of God's creative power, these are the root of God's creative powers, specifically God's ability to create beauty via order. From the undifferentiated form of the Earth, God moves through a series of voiced commands that sets into motion the differentiation of complementary elements: land from water, sky from land, darkness from light. Hadewijch, in her description, recognizes that no human constructions of order can approach the natural order of the creative power of the divine, but the divine's power to create beauty, and order for that matter, is not always evident. The capacity for order and the power to create beauty reside in this potentiality. It is that potential for change and differentiation that Hadewijch sees in the great mass of humanity lodged within the walls of this great abyss.

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[103] Ibid., "Letter Six," p. 57.

An abyss as a marker of aesthetic potential, specifically spiritual aesthetics, invokes issues of boundaries and limits. Borders are natural phenomena; every place has a border, ranging from well-defined, to understood, and to fluid. Hadewicjh eschews that choice of border building. My contention is that she does so, because she recognizes the inherent problem with borders. Once we have established a border, we have forced ourselves to confront the problem. We are now forced to stay within the confines of this border. We may seek to redefine the border, and the quickest means of redefinition is to cross the border, violating its purpose of establishing order. If Hadewicjh describes the outline of a wall that surrounds the abyss, the reader's attention must be to that wall, peering over into the unseen and the unimagined. Why would God place a wall there? What is being kept out? What is being kept in? Boundaries, in other words, would serve only to distract the reader's attention from the all-encompassing grandeur of the abyss.

Borders, as well, limit the scope of heaven. Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with saying that heaven is only twenty miles wide and another twenty miles deep. Four hundred square miles of heaven would be a beautiful and awe inspiring sight. But what does it say that heaven is only the walled city of New Jerusalem? What does it say that heaven may only be found in the Garden of Eden? Is heaven less majestic because it is only this or only that? Heaven does not lose its luster because humanity can only imagine it as a city or a garden. No, heaven does not lose stature because humanity cannot duplicate God's ability to create beauty via creation. Heaven suffers because humanity refuses to look outside and see the beauty that resides in the potential of creation. Hadewijch sees the inherent beauty in nature, the potential of beauty in the

moment before creation, and she employs that potentiality within her vision.[104] This is

evident in the fact that she chooses not to comment on the vision. This is evident in the

fact that she notes that her words will always fall short; she writes, "I will not attempt

now to describe how it was formed, for there is no time now to speak of it; and I cannot

put it in words, since it is unspeakable." Now, such a trope is common in writings of the

afterlife, Dante is encouraged to write despite his protests, the Pearl-poet claims unable to

speak the beauty of the place but then launches into a rapturous account of New

Jerusalem. In fact, only Langland is met with approval of this posture, as he is told that it

is for the best that he puts down his pen since he is not a very good poet. But Hadewijch

holds to this pose. Yes, she does have a discussion of some of events unfolding before

her eyes, but she does not describe the formation of the abyss. She has, in effect,

partitioned off heaven into that what she can know and say and that what she cannot

know and cannot say. The borders of aesthetics are set around her, not around

heaven. She is the being who is limited, not the divine. More specifically to the idea of

beauty, any description of heaven defines and limits beauty. Nothing can be more

beautiful than heaven, since it is a perfect place designed by a perfect being, and so

Hadewijch's description must be taken as beauty *par excellence*.

In addition, Hadewijch further engages the notions of purpose and harmony, ideas

prevalent in medieval aesthetic notions, writing: "I saw the forms of many different souls,

according to what each one's life had been." As Hadewicjh's depiction of the afterlife

removes the artifices of order and earthly concepts of beauty, what remains is the

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[104] Such potential is a trait that later poets would not forget, including the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley
Hopkins who noted that there "lives the dearest freshness deep down things," which is a marker of the great
potential for beauty in the world.

potential of the first creation and the promise of beauty that resides in creation. By so

doing, Hadewicjh asks the reader not to focus on the beauty of the place of eternal

salvation but what humanity's connection to that place means.[105] She returns the focus to

the larger significance of heaven in the Christian tradition—a place of promise, a place of

fulfillment.

In direct contrast to Hadewijch's beauty that is found in the potential of creation,

The Vision of Tnugdal takes beauty to be literal appreciation and formations of jewels and

the gleaming lights of heaven. Presenting a series of walls and buildings for Tnugdal, an

Irish knight, to overcome during his journey through the streets and landscapes of

heaven, one wall was "as high as the first one and made of the purest and brightest gold

so that all the souls who saw it found more pleasure in the brightness of the metal alone

that in the entire glory they had previously,"[106] and another "wall whose height beauty

and brightness were unlike the others . . . strongly built from all the precious stones of

various colours with metal set in between, so that it appeared to have gold for mortar. Its

stones were crystal, chrysolite,[107] beryl, jasper, hyacinth, emerald, sapphire, onyx, topaz,

sard,[108] chyrsopase,[109] amethyst, turquoise and garnet . . .glittering with all these and

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[105] Hadewijch was not unique in discussing heaven and fulfillment with ideas of the abyss. As Eco writes in *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*: "Suso wrote about a bottomless abyss of all things that give delight. Eckhart also spoke of an abyss, in which there was no sense or form of divinity; the soul was silent and alone. The soul, he claimed, strains to the highest beatitude by casting itself into the secrecy of God, where there is neither doing nor imagining. And Tauler also talks about this abyss, where the soul loses itself, loses even its self-consciousness, together with the consciousness of God, of distinctions, of identity, and of everything. In union with God, all distinctions vanish. There are neither doings nor imaginings nor distinctions nor relations nor knowledge's. The last of the medieval mystics had nothing to say about beauty, nothing whatsoever" (91). Obviously, I do not agree with his assertion that medieval mystics have nothing to say; rather, I believe that the abyss offers something more complete about the aesthetic vision of the afterlife.

[106] *Vision of Tnugdal*, p. 148.

[107] Also known as olivine, which is yellow-yellow green in color.

[108] Similar to carnelian, a brownish-red mineral.

[109] A gemstone varying from apple-green to dark green.

similar stones, aroused great love for it in the minds of those who saw it."[110] And there

are the heavenly residences, referred to as encampments, "with many pavilions made of

purple and batiste,[111] of gold and silver, and of silver, and of silk of wonderful variety . . .

[with music of] stringed instruments, pipes, tambourines and citharas resounding together

with organs and cymbals and producing in unison all kinds of music with the most

delightful sounds."[112] Such a litany of overtly descriptive sights and sounds conforms to

the thematic and stylistic programs of a vision that relishes in the graphic torments of

suffering in hell. But what is most important, I believe, is the idea that these walls and

camps engage both Tnugdal and the reader. These walls and camps clearly demarcate

space in heaven, from where one belongs to where one does not belong; however, at the

same time, these sights and sounds inspire contemplation of God:

> It is obvious to everyone how pleasant, charming, dignified and sublime it is to be among the choirs of holy angels, to contemplate the laudable number of patriarchs and prophets, to see the white host of the martyrs, to hear the new song of the virgins, to look at the glorious choir of the apostles and, what exceeds all joy, to behold the clement and benevolent One who is the bread of angels and the life of all. From the place where they stood they could see not only all the glory they had already seen but the tortures of the punishments we have previously described and, what is even more wonderful, they were able to contemplate the whole earth as if under a single ray of sun. For nothing could weaken one's view of creation once one has been granted to see the Creator of all. And in a marvelous way, while they stood in the same place without turning in another direction, they saw from this very same place everything that was both in front of and behind them. He was also given not only vision but extraordinary knowledge, so that he had no more need to inquire about anything but knew clearly and fully everything he wanted.[113]

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[110]*Vision of Tnugdal*, p.152

[111] A fine, light fabric made out of cotton and linen.

[112] *Vision of Tnugdal,* p. 149.

[113] Ibid., pp. 152-153.

The beauty of heaven is not simply found in walls and jewels and finely constructed camp tents, though readers and viewers will most often associate that as the beauty of heaven. Heavenly beauty depends, rather, on the viewer and the process of recognizing—and understand—the limits of beauty. While earthly beauty brings the viewer to potential distraction, heavenly beauty calls to mind the source of beauty—God. This contemplation clearly invokes the program of medieval aesthetics—recognizing that God creates all beautiful objects and leads the medieval audience back to an unfettered appreciation of God. Such a contemplation of beauty, leading to the recognition of God's design, previews the most vaulted of all heavenly pleasures, the Visio Dei.

Medieval aesthetics seen through *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*, Hadewijch, and the *Vision of Tnugdal* offer glimpses into the afterlife through landscapes and imagery that will engage the readers in discussion of beauty. The scenes ground the reader into specific localities of reference—spatializing heaven with respect to beauty. In other words these poems must orient the readers into a specific frame of reference—beauty needs materials to work upon and locations to be admired within. These activities, though, must be considered in terms of what aesthetics might offer discussions of heaven. These visions of heaven force readers to confront notions of beauty—what can be beautiful after seeing the truth and splendor of heaven? These poems do not assert that earth cannot retain beauty in its own right but that earthly beauty must be considered in spiritual terms. Medieval aesthetics allows us to understand that earthly beauty's role is not to dazzle but to inspire. Such inspiration can lead to heaven, but that inspiration needs grounding—learning—that will instruct readers and pilgrims as to how to work

within places of beauty. Only with that knowledge can the pilgrim move closer to the

ultimate vision of the *visio dei*.

IV
The Politics of Salvation

As has been noted in the previous chapters, and as I will emphasize in this

chapter, the various medieval portraits and accounts of heaven cannot be removed from

their historical time periods and moments. Such an approach is not to deny any power of

literature to speak to current audiences and the human condition,[1] but this approach

recognizes the fundamental truth of literature—writers are historical people.[2] Of course,

by recognizing the historical nature of the writer, we must be critically aware that these

writers were influenced by their time and that those same historical writers were also

responding to their time. The first chapter established the notion that heaven, though

thought of as eternal, was a shifting concept for the Abrahamic faiths, only becoming a

definite idea in the first century B.C.E. Once the concept of heaven had been fixed as a

key component of faith, conceptions of heaven were adapted for the needs of the various

groups that sought to define and encapsulate the heavenly experience. The previous

chapters dealing with place and space, and art and aesthetics begin the work of explaining

how writers in the Middle Ages shaped contemporary attitudes and theories to mold

visions of the afterlife that could respond to the challenges and more profound wishes of

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[1] Though not as much an issue, having read Barbara Nolan's review of Aers' *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* in *Speculum*, Vol. 58. No 1 (1983), pp. 139-41, which accuses Aers of missing the point of the medieval texts because he "fails to consider the specifically literary complexity of the works he discusses" (139); and in addition, having read *The New Historicism,* ed. H. Aram Vesser (New York: Routledge, 1989), I was unaware of the cries that this critical approach removed a text from its literary roots or that history was a move away from theory. To me, a new historical or a grounding of a text within a historical movement seems a natural move, as it helps to contextualize the ways in which a text responded to its milieu.

[2] Derek Pearsall described the interplay between history and literature, noting that to recognize that "the study of history and the study of literature have much in common is not to consume the objectivity of the former in the subjectivity of the latter, but to insist on the importance of both recognizing the shaping power of interpretative models" (69). "Interpretative Models for the Peasant's Revolt" in *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, eds. Patrick J. Gallacher and Helen Damico (Albany: SUNY Press,1989), pp. 63-70

a medieval life and audience. This chapter continues that discussion, focusing our attention on the medieval engagement with politics.

Politics, of course, has very definite meanings for the hyper-partisan twenty-first century, but I want to define politics broadly so as to encapsulate how politics impacted people on a daily basis. So for the purpose of this discussion, politics will be thought of as a series of organizing principles that sought to codify and regulate the interactions and roles of citizens. Of course, any organizing principle—be it in written form or simply verbal commands—stems from an authoritative voice. That authority in fourteenth-century England was the king's voice in conjunction with the advice of various Parliaments and advisory councils. Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV held the seat of power during that century.[3] For the purposes of this study, I will focus primarily on the rule of Richard II, as both *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* were products of the Ricardian age. While the focus of the chapter is Richard II,[4] that is not to say that certain issues could not be traced back to Edward II and Edward III, as those figures influenced Richard II's style of rule and sense of monarchial authority more than the brief life of his father, Edward of Woodstock, the Prince of Wales, who was affectionately known as the Black Prince.

Before I sketch the reign of Richard II, I want to consider briefly the importance of politics in the context of visions of the afterlife, especially heaven. As I stated above, I

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[3] Edward I (Longshanks) ruled from 1272 until his death in 1307. Edward II ruled until his murder in 1327 at Berkely Castle, which would impact both his son and great-grandson's rules. Edward III ruled until his death in 1377. Richard II was deposed from the throne on September 29, 1399, leading to the reign of his cousin, Henry IV (Bolingbroke) the son of John of Gaunt.

[4] I am interested in Richard II for a number of reasons, and I believe that this chapter can springboard into a larger project on how literature might offer advice to a monarch. Of course, this project would include discussion of Gower and lesser-examined works such as *Richard the Redeless* and *Concordia: The Reconciliation of Richard II with London*.

want to view politics as the organizing principle of a society. And so with respect to heaven, what do these texts tell readers about how people understand their roles within the afterlife? Do people perform specific roles? Are they placed within certain categories? And if there are roles, how are they assigned? How does one's earthly existence shape roles in heaven? And what is the relationship of God to people in heaven? How are the people in heaven thought of? Are they citizens? Parishioners? Denizens? Penitents? In addition, how does a political institution express itself within heaven? Is there a series of heavenly bureaucracies? Is there a system of checks and balances? Is there a perfect order? Adding to this discussion of politics is a continuing concern with space and place. Politics is an organizing system, but such a system extends into questions of spatiality. We must be aware of how a political access allows for a physical connection or proximity. As noted in Chapter Two, the medievals understood the connection between politics and space, noting that the concept of king's peace also related to breaking the immediate, physical surroundings of the monarch that eventually became associated with infractions anywhere in the kingdom. Of course, these concerns pose a number of issues, but the central issue is, what happens when a human construction of monarchy is imposed on the eternal city of heaven?

Ultimately, I believe that the two poems offer distinct answers to that central concern. I will argue that *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* are both didactic and practical poems; however, the scope and audience of that didacticism differ. *Piers Plowman* is a didactic and practical poem for those that are governed, and *Pearl* is a didactic and practical poem for the governors. The discussion, however, of those poems must be grounded within the historical frame of Richard II's reign.

Richard was born on Epiphany, January 6, 1367 in the abbey of St. Andrew in

Bordeaux, with his baptism being of such note that his godparents were "two aspirant

kings who were visiting the [Prince Edward's] court at the time . . . Jaime IV, titular king

of Majorca, while his main supporter was Richard, king of Armenia."[5] The deposed king

of Castille, Pedro, was also likely there, as he was in exile at Bordeaux at the time.[6]

Richard was the second born son of Edward of Woodstock and Joan, Countess of Kent,[7]

with an older brother Edward of Angoulême who was born two years earlier in 1365 but

would die at the age of six.[8] Very few details remain of either Richard or Edward of

Angoulême's early childhoods. What is known, specifically of Richard, is that his wet-

nurse was Mundina Danos and that he was provided with a "rocker" to tend to his

cradle's rocking by the name of Eliona de France. [9]   His birth was, perhaps, not well

received; at the time of his deposition in 1399, people recalled a "prophecy of Merlin

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[5] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), p. 12. Saul makes a connection between this event and the participants with the later depiction of Richard II in the Wilton Diptych, featuring the saints Edward the Confessor, Edmund the Martyr, and John the Baptist (two of whom were kings) at the presentation of Richard to the Virgin and Child on the opposite panel. Of course, such an item would speak to the piety of the king; however, there is also an inherent notion that connects the king as a Christ-figure with his birth on the Epiphany and the presence of at least two kings at his baptism.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Joan is an interesting figure on a number of levels. First, she is cousin to Edward of Woodstock, as she is the daughter of Edmund of Woodstock, 1st Earl of Kent, who was younger son to Edward I. Secondly, she is an example of the value attributed to women. Because of her relative wealth, she was pursued by many suitors, eventually marrying Thomas Holland clandestinely. While Holland was abroad, she was forced to marry William Montacute. Though eventually, Joan was allowed to continue her marriage to Holland, giving him four children who survived infancy. And so when she eventually married Edward, she came with four children, land, and fortune. But the most interesting aspect to her is the role she would play as intermediary, both for her son and John of Gaunt. It is that role that I will make mention of later in this chapter as a connection to the role both Mede and the Pearl Maiden play as intercessors..

[8] According to Michael Bennett, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399* (Thrupp: Sutton, 1999), Edward "cannot have been more than a shadowy memory. Still Richard recalled him with pious affection twenty years later, taking pains to have his body brought home to England and reinterred in the Dominican friary at Kin's Langley, Edward II's foundation and the burial-place of the latter's favorite Piers Gaveston" (14).

[9] Saul, *Richard II,* pp. 12-13. Danos appears to have been a favorite of Richard, as he would later marry her to his tailor Walter Rauf and grant her a pension. Both women were of Aquitanian-extraction, and so it is fairly reasonable to assume that Richard's nursery was filled with French and that would be his first tongue. Of course, we know that Richard not only spoke English well but that he championed the language at court and in literature.

indicating that neither the prince nor any of his issue would ever succeed to the throne,

but that the crown would pass instead to the house of Lancaster. In a speech, attributed to

Bolingbrook, Froissart recalled, too, innuendos about the chastity of Joan of Kent, the

prince's wife, and thus about the paternity of Richard. It all seemed to reflect the

degeneracy of the times."[10] While it would be easy to dismiss such notions of paternity

as simply Lancastrian propaganda to bolster Henry's claims to the throne, such notions

also speak to the rampant use of prophecies and signs at the court, phenomena with which

Richard held great stock. These rumors, though, were not exclusive to Richard's birth, as

"noble births outside the country had been the subject of special legislation, and seem

often to have fed rumors about true paternity."[11] Adding to the rumors surrounding his

birth, the very marriage of Joan and Edward required special papal dispensation, as the

two "were related in the third degree."[12]

While there is little known about Richard II's early years, we know quite a bit

about the world into which he was born. England, under the rule of Richard's

grandfather Edward III, was at the height of its powers in the fourteenth century. Though

relatively small in population, England was the great power, as no "other power of

significance could match England in the quality and effectiveness of her fighting men."[13]

Though at the height of its powers, England's power and prestige would wane as Edward

III's reign continued. The successes that Edward III had found on the battlefield were

slowly returning to French control, as the cost of keeping English fortresses in Normandy

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[10] Bennett, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399,* 4.

[11] Ibid., 14.

[12] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 11.

[13] Ibid., p. 6. While England's population had risen to roughly 6-7 million prior to the Black Death in 1348-1349, at the time of Richard II's birth that number was only at 2-3 million, as opposed to France with a population somewhere between 5 and 7 million. Of course these numbers are but approximations; however, they give a fair sense of what the English accomplished with fewer men.

and France became prohibitive. Such diminishment of power was further aided by Edward III's own court becoming embroiled in controversy, including the figure of Alice Perrers, which would necessitate the Good Parliament of 1376. In addition to the questions of influence at court with the roles of Perrers and John of Gaunt raising concerns, the ailing health of the popular Black Prince cost England a charismatic and successful battlefield commander. The Black Prince's greatest victory came against the French at Poitiers in 1356, surprising the French and capturing the French king; he was a solider "through and through."[14] The death of the Black Prince was accompanied by his commending his son and wife to his ailing father and brother:

> Each one swore it on the book
> And promised to deliver this:
> They would give comfort to the child
> And would maintain his rights.
> All the princes, all the barons
> Standing round them swore this too.[15]

I end the sketch here, with the moment that seals Richard's fate as the heir of England. *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman,* written sometime after the assumption of the throne by Richard in 1377, speak to the issues that would surround his rule, and these poems, furthermore, complicate an understanding of how kings should rule.

The Kingdom of Heaven in *Pearl*

As has been noted by John M. Bowers in *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II*, *Pearl* is a poem that cannot be removed from the structures and concerns of the political machinations of late-fourteenth century England. But, how far

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[14] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 7.
[15] *Life of the Black Prince by the Herald of Sir John Chandos*, ed. M.K. Pope and E.C. Lodge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), p. 129.

that interest goes, and how far that influences the *Pearl*-poet, still remains an important and unanswered issue. Bowers views the poem, ultimately, not as a court poem; A.C. Spearing shares that concept, noting that the poetry of the *Pearl*-poet "originate[s] in an area remote from the metropolis and from the cultural influences which, especially under Richard II, radiated from the royal court."[16] While the poem may not have been written for the court, Bowers maintains that this poet is "steadily and specifically royalist, revealing a concern for the precise practice of kingship by his obsessive recourse to regalia images."[17]

Such interest can be found in the use of pearls as a type of badge, as a type fitting with the use of the White Hart in the 1390s, and the use of pearls, more generally. The use of pearls hearkens back to Queen Anne's crown, which Bowers attributes to a reading that places Queen Anne as the beloved and deceased Pearl Maiden. Bowers' reading relies on the interpretative stance that the relationship believed to be one of family blood in line 233—"Ho watz me nere þen aunte or nece"—"might equally be well taken to describe the physical closeness or spatial proximity of the two figures."[18] To extend this reading, Bowers believes that this poem does not speak to a personal grief but a "public grief," and, because Anne's funeral was held until August 3rd for her name saint's day, that it gives connection to the poem's opening scene set during "Auguste in a hyȝ seysoun" (ln. 39).[19] While I believe that his reading of this poem as a fundamentally royalist poem is correct, especially considering Richard's connections to Cheshire, the interpretive dexterity required to view the Pearl Maiden as the deceased queen of

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[16] Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl*, p. 8.
[17] Ibid., p. 16.
[18] Ibid., p. 153.
[19] Ibid., pp.156 and 166.

England is not supported by the interactions of the characters or the logical leap needing to dismiss the stated, however obliquely, relationship of the Jeweler to the Maiden. Rather, as I wrote above, *Pearl* is ultimately a poem about how to be amongst the elites of government, teaching an outsider—a Cheshire man—about the importance of understanding how and why a ruler acts.

The connection to Chester, specifically viewing this poem as advice to a Cheshire man, has great historical plausibility, as Richard had multiple connections to Cheshire. Following the expulsion of his favorites and trials at the hands of the Appellates, Richard became disconnected to the city of London—despite his reconciliation—finding himself more at home in Cheshire. In fact, on "25 September 1397, the county palatine of Chester was raised to the status of a principality by parliamentary statue; and thereby it enjoyed—albeit for only two years—a unique position in the history of the counties of England," placing "Chester clearly above the rank of the county palatines of Lancaster and Durham and of the duchies of Cornwall and Aquitaine; its princely status was shared only with the principality of Wales."[20] By creating Chester as a new principality, it "was no more than the 'inner citadel' of a potentially immense provincial power-base, embracing the principality of Wales, a cluster of Marcher lordships under royal control, and ultimately, the vast Lancastrian inheritance."[21] This was the place from which Richard's favorite, Robert de Vere, would attempt to launch attacks to save Richard during the crisis of 1387.[22] But perhaps most striking for the connection of *Pearl* and

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[20] R.R. Davies, "Richard II and the Principality of Chester 1397-9," *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, eds. F.R.H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London: U of London, Athlone, 1971), pp. 256-279, at p. 256.

[21] Michael J. Bennett, "Richard II and the Wider Realm," *Richard II: The Art of Kingship*, eds. Anthony Goodman and James Gillespie, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), pp. 187-204, at p. 188.

[22] Richard would never forget the fidelity displayed by the Cheshire men during his time of crisis, and so Davies notes in "Richard II and the Principality of Chester" that in late 1398 "4000 marks were deposited

Cheshire was the language used by the Cheshire bodyguard employed by Richard: "The *maternal lingua* or provincial dialect which the Kenilworth chronicler records the Cheshire guards speaking—and which Richard apparently had no trouble understanding—was also the *Pearl* Poet's language, which scholars have previously tended to consider too provincial for anyone but a Cheshire native to comprehend."[23] So clearly *Pearl* is written in a dialect specific to a region, but the poem also is crafted in a region that claims specific ties to the king. So as this study continues, the question becomes, how does courtly instruction of a Cheshire man influence concepts of heaven?

The most striking discussion of kingship and rule comes with the insertion of Matthew's Parable of the Vineyards, beginning at line 497, when the Maiden attempts to teach the Jeweler the prerogative of God.[24] This lesson corresponds with the debates, not only within society as to how to consider the plights of workers but also the ability of the

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at Chester abbey for distribution to the men of the country who had suffered in the debacle of December 1387. Petitions and claims were submitted by the victims and the full sum was scrupulously distributed throughout the county in December 1398. This retrospective act of largesse was only the most measurable token of Richard's unbounded generosity to his beloved subjects of Chester. Favors of every kind were showered upon them: pardons, offices, lands, and confiscated goods were bestowed with careless liberality; general pardons were granted to the counties of Flint and Chester; and the charter of the city of Chester was exemplified and its judicial liberties extended. Just as the seventeen counties were punished for failing to show 'constant good affection' to their king, so the men of Chester were continuously pampered for showing precisely that quality and showing it in good measure" (261).

[23] Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl*, p. 75.

[24] "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? [14]Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

king to dispense rewards and titles to his favorites. What is remarkable about this scene, and the use of the parable, is how it relates to issues of heaven. The scene is immediately about how the Pearl Maiden ranks so highly within the hierarchy of heaven, though she died at such a young age:

> That cortaysé is to fre of dede
> Yf hyt be soth that thou cones saye.
> Thou lyfed not two yer in oure thede;
> Thou cowthes never God nauther plese ne pray
> Ne never nawther Pater ne Crede -
> And quen mad on the fyrste day!
> I may not traw, so God me spede,
> That God wolde wrythe so wrange away.
> Of countes, damysel, par ma fay,
> Wer fayr in heven to halde asstate
> Other elles a lady of lasse aray -
> Bot a quene! Hit is to dere a date. (ll. 481-492)

The Jeweler is quite incredulous at the heavenly schemata for favoritism, and his question does not seem terribly illogical or heretical. The answer is, quite simply, that God may dispense his blessings and gifts upon whomever God deems worthy. Such a claim works because this ruler is an infallible judge, with not only the access to the hearts and souls of all people but a ruler who transcends time and as such has access to the entirety of human history. In other words, no one can fault the decisions of a ruler who not only writes the rule but is the embodiment of the rule and understands how the rule plays out throughout the scope of all history.

And so if we take this poem, as I suggest, as a poem concerning the mechanisms of rule, then there is necessary conflation of Richard II with God, leading to a number of concerns and questions that must be addressed. Of course, there is a legitimate concern with the notion of placing a human on the same level as the divine; however, such a comparison had long been the rhetoric and program of Richard's court. Born on the

Epiphany, having three kings present at his baptism, Richard's birth seemed to embody

the promise of a sanctified second coming: "The chancellor, Bishop Houghton, caught

the national mood of anticipation in an address to parliament in January: Richard, he said,

had been sent to England by God in the same way that God had sent his only Son into the

world for the redemption of his people."[25] Taking this connection even further is the

Wilton Diptych, which many scholars consider to be commissioned by Richard.[26] Here

is the young Richard, kneeling, flanked by the standing saints John the Baptist, Edward

the Confessor, and Edmund the Martyr, presented to the Virgin Mother and Child, who

are attended themselves by a host of angels that proudly wear his White Hart badge. As a

representation of devotional art, it is a striking example of the importance of placing

oneself within the narrative of Christian history, especially when that history can be

framed as a particularly English history. But as a demonstration of political power and

propaganda, the Diptych establishes both Richard's claim to power and holiness. It is, in

addition, a piece of remarkable hubris. One might read the text as simply Richard as

favored son of Albion, being nominated to continue on the legacy of Christian piety for

his people. One might also read this as a piece of aspirational piety, so that by placing

oneself within the same frame as these holy personas, one might eventually become such

a figure. But ultimately, the Wilton Diptych was commissioned by Richard, and so the

rhetoric and impact must be read through that historical lens. The piece, with that view,

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[25] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 18.

[26] Dillian Gordon, "A New Discovery in the Wilton Diptych," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 134, No. 1075 (Oct. 1992), pp. 662-667. Gordon's article remarks about a small island, which critics had previously missed, that would have only been noticeable if one knew it was there, which gives credence to the idea that Richard had personally commissioned the piece. Ruth Wilkins Sullivan, "The Wilton Diptych: Mysteries, Majesty, and A Complex Exchange of Faith and Power," *Gazette Des Beaux Arts* (1997): 1-20. Sullivan maintains that items such as the White Hart and the impalement of Richard's coat of arms with those of the Confessor's speak to a private devotional item.

places a young Richard (not yet thirty) as the equal of the saints and holy family. It is

Richard, not John or Edward or Edmund who kneels in proper obeisance to the Madonna

and Child, so one might see this as a recognition of his humility before his Christian

betters; however, it might be read more cynically as Richard being the only one who

recognizes that he is unworthy to be in the presence. In other words, it is affected piety

that serves only to boost Richard's esteem and place within the Christian historical

framework. But perhaps more importantly, the angels wear his badge of the White Hart.

These are not given easily or indiscriminately; these are the marks of the true believers,

those who recognize Richard's kingship and power, the true believers and followers. So

it is not Richard distributing the badges to the Angels; the Angels come bearing the mark,

and so the whole army of Heaven works towards the ends and goals of this particular

king; this imagery provides "the implicit linkage between the young king wearing his

earthly crown and the Christ Child with his Crown of Thorns. The powerful patronage of

his three sainted advocates seems to have mediated Richard's access to heaven; indeed,

the presence of his white hart badge already marks heaven as his own."[27]   He is the one

who commands not only the forces of the English army but the eternal army. In addition,

this type of imagery not only strengthens concepts of linking the divine with the

monarchial but it presents a connection between Richard's person and the kingdom of

heaven. Richard appears to call forth the heavenly host, and so to be in his presence

might be considered a foretaste of the afterlife. This connection strengthens not only the

divine rhetoric attached to Richard, but we must also consider how this alters our

understanding of approaching a figure. Not only must the language approximate the

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[27] Sullivan, "The Wilton Diptych," p. 5.

divine with Richard but the landscape and presentation must approximate the divine. So

imagery and spectacle for his benefit necessitate an approach that attends to his near

divinity.

For kingship to have validity within an earthly or heavenly realm, the rule must be

marked by symbols of wealth and power. Our Jeweler encounters the finest jewels—

crafted by God—as was noted in the previous chapter, and the vast wealth of these

disposable goods clearly marks this place as being apart from the everyday experience,

not simply because of the finery—which he can recognize thanks to his profession—but

also through the sheer number of jewels shimmering in the streams, glimmering in the

clothing, dotting the buildings, and lining the streets. But it is not simply wealth that

distinguishes the ruler from the ruled but the ability to inspire (however coerced) displays

of power. These displays might range from initiating a tournament to celebrate an

anniversary or a victory processional. In *Pearl*, as the Jeweler looks upon the New

Jersualem, he is struck by the magnificence of the pearl maidens parading through the

streets, moving as if by a single purpose and thought:

> Ryght as the maynful mone con rys
> Er thenne the day-glem dryve al doun,
> So sodanly on a wonder wyse
> I was war of a prosessyoun.
> This noble cité of ryche enpryse
> Was sodanly ful, wythouten sommoun,
> Of such vergynes in the same gyse
> That was my blysful anunder croun.
> And coronde wern alle of the same fasoun,
> Depaynt in perles and wedes qwyte.
> In uchones breste was bounden boun
> The blysfyl perle with gret delyt. (ll. 1093-1104)

Such a display, though of a different degree, are not unknown to Londoners during the

Ricardian Age. First, there was the great procession held for his coronation in July of

1377: "In Cheapside the conduit flowed with wine for the duration of the procession--for three hours. Further west in the same thoroughfare a mock castle was built. In its turrets were positioned girls of the king's own age, dressed in white, who showered him with gilt scrolls, as he approached and then descended to offer him wine in gilt cups."[28]   His reconciliation with the city in 1392 used more elaborate scenes, bringing to mind not only the procession of the maidens in heaven but of heaven itself, as Maidstone depicts the lengths taken to present a divine spectacle to the aggrieved ruler:

> He saw a castle there: he stopped and was amazed.
> The total structure and its tower hung from ropes,
> And occupied a space suspended in the air;
> Within the tower stood a youth in angel form,
> A girl beside him, beautiful, who wore a crown.
> Whoever saw their forms, I think, would have no doubt
> That nothing underneath the sun could please him more.
> The king and queen then paused, reflecting on this sight
> And what the tower means and who the young ones were.
> They now descend, the young man and the girl as well;
> There was no ladder, nor could any steps be seen.
> They came enwrapped in clouds, suspended in the air,
> But what device was used, believe me, I don't know!
> The young man holds a cup; the girl extends two crowns. (ll. 276-89)[29]

Such processions not only proclaimed the affection of the citizens for their lord, but it also speaks to the ability of the lord to inspire these productions that point to the power that the king holds over his people. And so while these processions and tournaments might be dismissed as simply *pro forma*, they are required to validate power and without such validation and affection, there are serious questions raised as to the effectiveness and ability of the ruler. What these two passages indicate are not simply a similarity in

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[28] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 24.

[29] Richard Maidstone, *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)*, ed. David R. Carlson, trans. A.G. Rigg (Kalamazoo: TEAMS Medieval Text Series, Medieval Institute Publications, 2003). All quotes come from Rigg's translation unless noted otherwise.

approach with respect to depictions of heavenly cities but the fact that heavenly cities can become interposed upon the London environment with relative ease and speed. Obviously, Richard's sense of kingship required such displays but there is no hesitation in the idea that these two cities could be interchanged. London is not simply the seat of power, it is the natural setting for evoking the heavenly city. So we must note that a city is not simply a city when in the presence of Richard here, the city becomes transformed through the presence of the ruler. Of course, the citizenry did not much care for Richard, but these actions—both his insistence and their acquiescence—endow the city with qualities that transport the citizenry, the king, and readers to a place that transcends the quotidian experience of late-fourteenth century London.

So if the discussion between the Pearl Maiden and the Jeweler echoes discussions of Richard's ability to dispense with favors and titles as he pleases, then again there is the problem of placing Richard alongside the enthroned Lamb. Richard falls short of infallibility, but it also seems that he falls short in recognizing value in his retainers. Richard's rule initially began with the aid of continual councils, which allowed the country to benefit from the steadying hand and influence of more seasoned and experienced counselors. But when Richard became the sole executor of his kingly prerogative, he surrounded himself with unwise and inexperienced counselors. By rejecting those who were deemed the wise, old, and experienced counselors of Edward III's reign, "Richard II instead—according to the major chroniclers—surrounded himself with young and frivolous men . . . [who] were considered dangerous to the king and the realm."[30] This is not a king who recognized the best and the brightest; rather, the

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[30] Sylvia Federio, "Queer Times: Richard II in the Poems and Chronicles of Late Fourteenth-Century England," *Medium Aevum*, Vol. 79, Issue 1 (2010), pp. 25-46 at p. 28. Federico traces the use of language

recognition seemed to fall on associations from his childhood. And so the companions of his youth become the companions of his rule, meaning that Richard surrounded himself with persons who owed their existence and means to his beneficence. This was not then a meritocracy where lords and barons who succeeded on the field or through wise management were recognized for those deeds. But perhaps even more disturbing for those who remained on the outside was how easily the counselors seemed to figure into the ruling process. The most striking example is Robert de Vere. Richard promoted him to the "marquisate of Dublin, giving him the dignity hitherto unknown in England and precedence over all the other earls" and in January 1386 granted de Vere "the right to bear the arms of St. Edmund King and Martyr."[31] But most problematic was the granting de Vere, "the grand title of Duke of Ireland with vice-regal powers."[32] This unprecedented step seemingly undermined the power of the king, but it was also a direct rebuke to parliament who had previously asked that Richard remove his officers and counselors. Robert de Vere was not a man whose family had long been known for excellence but a family who looked to be on the verge of financial collapse. And so when Richard recognizes this man, people looked for greatness but saw only conceit and arrogance. So the issue becomes not simply that the lord may grant dispensations to whomever and through whatever means, but how do these special personas who owe everything to the ruler (be it Richard or God) respond to the great trust and wealth placed

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that describes the king's relationships in highly charged terms that imply that the king had "strange, perverse habits, and was perhaps homosexual" (25). This idea has historical precedent, as Adam of Usk, referred to the sodomies of Richard as one of the reasons for his deposition. Federico does not flatly claim that Richard was gay, as she wonders as to the validity of the evidence and the need for Lancastrian chroniclers and supporters to initiate a period of new governance with a smear campaign to delegitimize Richard's claim to kingship and rule.

[31] Bennett, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399*, pp. 22 and 26.

[32] Ibid., p. 27.

at their disposals? If the ruler is good and worthy, then such retainers will aspire to become the faithful servants of that just king, which in turn will lift the kingdom as a whole. This is the argument, I believe, of *Pearl*. The king will pick out the best and most deserving of people, no matter whence they came or how long they have served. Those people will recognize their great fortune and do great credit to the institution from which they have gained their positions. Again, the Pearl Maiden makes a great argument for this symbiotic relationship. And in the world of *Pearl*, this relationship, at worst, becomes a mutual admiration society with overt and unnecessary praising and fawning. Such a position is understandable considering the potential program of the poem to explain the mechanism of rule to the uninitiated of Cheshire. This poem, for that audience, must speak to the ability of a ruler, a ruler with great affection for their region, to make effective choices.

But the actual world of fourteenth-century England reflects the danger of this mode of patronage. Simply trusting that the ruler understood the merits and benefits of patronage did not extend very long into the reign of Richard II, and so it is not surprising that his continual negligence of the great majority of the aristocracy led to his brief imprisonment, and supposed deposal in 1387 and his actual deposition in 1399. Richard demonstrated the inability to recognize actual deeds and action with appropriate titles and rewards, favoring childhood companions without distinction.[33]

But if we view this text, as I posit earlier, as a way to consider how one should rule, then the poem becomes quite instructive. The ruler should not be beholden to the

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[33] Sylvia Federico, "The Place of Chivalry in the New Trojan Court: Gawain, Troilus, and Richard II," *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2007), pp. 171-180.

whims of the masses or disaffected aristocracy, *Pearl* clearly instructs. But what is it that the poem says about consequences and poor decisions? There are no questions as to how the ruler should overcome his own failings, because the ruler does not have failings. If this poem can be considered as the guide for the rulers and not the ruled, then the Pearl Maiden appears to offer advice. First, one must loosen the old ties that bind people together, namely affection and family. This seems to contradict the notion that "In the Middle Ages, access to an earthly monarch may sometimes have been expedited by bribing court officials, or through possessing genuine friends at court. But the most enviable position was that of the man whose own family was represented there."[34] I would counter that these examples do not provide either material benefit or relief. One could certainly argue that these familiar ties allow for unprecedented access, and such an idea seems sound considering the relationship of the Maiden and Jeweler, including her intercession to allow his vision of the landscapes of Heaven. And yet, such a view does not account for the facts of the poem; how does this access materially better the Jeweler's situation? Yes, he can see that his daughter leads a happy and important existence at the court of Heaven, but what does that offer him truly? She recognizes him as something more than a stranger, because there are no more familial ties that influence the overall direction of heaven. His daughter is no longer his daughter; she is the Pearl Maiden. And this relationship does not grant him the peace that he so longs for and begs for, i.e., to be with her. In fact, by seeing her and not being able to touch her or reside with her,

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[34] Ian Bishop, "Relatives at the Court of Heaven: Contrasted Treatments of an Idea in *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*," *Medieval Literature and Antiquities: Studies in Honour of Basil Cottle*, ed. M. Stokes and T.l. Burton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), pp. 111-118, at p. 116. Bishop, indeed, sees a problem with this kind of relationship, as when there is this kind of access at the court of Heaven, anyone can skip the needed penance, and much like a prostitute with a pardoner, to claim kinship as more important than true penance.

he is driven to a kind of madness when after watching the rapture of the Pearl maiden as she basks in the loving light of the Lamb, the Jeweler's mind seizes upon the thought of crossing the river:

> Delyt me drof in yȝe and ere,
> My manez mynde to maddyng malte;
> Quen I seȝ my frely, I wolde be þere,
> Byȝonde þe water þaȝ ho were walte.
> I þoȝt þat noþyng myȝt me dere
> To fech me bur and take me halte,
> And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,
> To swymme þe remnaunt, þaȝ I þer swalte. (ll. 1153-1160).

The frenzied nature of the Jeweler is quite evident in these lines, and this frenzy relates more nearly to thought than action. He has "delyt" pouring into his ear, a soothing and suggestive image of how the Jeweler does not seem either aware or in control of his emotions, as they can simply appear in his mind. This delight soon turns, however, into madness. This vacillation of emotions is reminiscent of previous arguments for the theory of simultaneous being, in that the Jeweler appears to be thinking of delight but the delight is truly madness. The immediate nature of the transformation also causes one to ask if there was ever delight, or if madness was only mistaken as delight. The Jeweler also believes that no one might prevent him from crossing the river to be with Pearl; this is an interesting turn. Throughout the poem, the Jeweler has noted that Fortune has brought him to this place, that he cannot cross the river, and that the scenery and beauty are beyond his comprehension and his ability as a writer. But now, inexplicably, he feels that he can cross the river. His emboldened claim mimics his lack of understanding throughout the poem; when he should recognize his limitations, the Jeweler attempts to exceed his abilities. Adding to this limitation is the fact that these final stanzas bring full

voice to the "bitterness of his loss rather the joy of consolation."[35] Returning to issues of

politics and spatiality, the concern that these actions suggest for the poem is that political

actions cannot be translated from the earthly realm to the heavenly realm. These ideas

are localized within their milieu to the detriment of translation; no matter how decorative

London will be embellished, it will always be London. No matter the amount of poetic

dexterity, a monarch will always be judged via the actions of the earthly realm, not the

heavenly realm.

Even though there is little doubt in the reader's mind that the Jeweler's journey

will fail, one cannot help but hope for success; the Jeweler has traveled beyond the

physical into a metaphysical realm, but he does not appear to have accrued any

knowledge along the way. The reader's hope for the Jeweler does not end in fruition:

> For, ryʒt as I sparred vnto þe bonc,
> Þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde.
> Þen wakned I in þat erber wlonk;
> My hede vpon þat hylle watz layde
> Þer as my perle to grounde strayd. (ll. 1169-1173)

When one combines words from the preceding lines, such as "rasch and ronk" [rash and

rank] (ln. 1167), "mad arayde" [in a state of frenzy] (ln. 1166), and "rapely" [quickly] (ln.

1168), Heaven loses a peaceful state. Even though "rapely" is rightly translated as

quickly, it still contains the connotation of a violent act. This is not a man crossing a

river; this is a man who is in a violent struggle. "Sparred" relates to the act of fighting, as

well. This violence contained in Heaven is even more striking when contrasted with the

image of the Jeweler waking up in the "erber wlonk," sleeping peacefully with his head

on his daughter's grave. This final section contains violence—violence not found

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[35] Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet*, p. 24.

elsewhere in *Pearl*. But it is a violence, nonetheless, that is implicitly present in every action of the Jeweler.

Despite the Jeweler's misunderstandings, the Pearl Maiden encourages the Jeweler to view the world through an objective lens of political calculus. How do the decisions that I make now impact my standing at court? While the discussion of fathers and daughters in a courtly setting offers some potential insight into the poem's apparent program, the world of Richard II might further increase our ability to come to conclusions regarding these various relationships. Coming to the throne at the age of ten, he was surrounded by the most illustrious of relatives. His uncle, John of Gaunt, was easily the most powerful man in the kingdom, having been the political, social, and cultural center of the last years of Edward III's rule. There were his uncles the dukes of Clarence, Gloucester, and York, not discounting his cousin Henry Bolingbroke. These were not absentee members of the royal family but vital and active participants in courtly life. These are the people who feared for their lives during the capricious and petulant years of Richard's reign, and these are people who were killed and stripped of titles and properties by their nephew and cousin. So it is not simply enough to hold membership in the court, because access does not account for any real benefits. Their standing, which was the very ancient line from which Richard claimed power, could not prevail upon the king to spare their lives or property from his insatiable desire for power and wealth.

So what *Pearl* and the actual life of Richard II both point to is the fact that relatives at the court, either on earth or in heaven, do not account for much tangible good. There has to be a recognition that these people are no longer able to accomplish things for you, besides attaining the initial access needed for further goods or benefits. These

people cannot be counted as family. These are people who must be flattered, bribed, and cajoled into action. These are people who might be usurped for the benefit of self and country. And so when Henry Bolingbroke is stripped of his titles and inheritance by Richard, it cannot be considered so far afield from the actions of *Pearl*, where the Jeweler cannot claim his family and he cannot become a part of the heavenly host, leading him to attempt a rash invasion of heaven. Family, by this calculus, may be viewed as a necessary but disposable entanglement, and so family bonds must be viewed warily for the relative benefits they offer in the political world.

But the relationship between the Pearl Maiden and the Jeweler goes beyond the need for a family member who can influence the direction of the king; rather their relationship returns to the earlier notion of inner circles and favorites. The Maiden's advice is consistently accurate and directed to the larger purpose of aiding the Jeweler in a better understanding of the role of loss in human existence and the importance of placing one's whole self, being, and trust in God. For the moment, let us not consider the doctrinal importance of her words, but the fact that she provides such counsel to the Jeweler. Here is the younger voice, experienced in a way that the Jeweler cannot comprehend, a voice that not only understands the larger importance and significance of this vision but that she has a definite purpose in engaging the Jeweler. She must mold his views so that he can remove his faulty vision and understanding to appreciate God's plan.

During the Jeweler's first encounter with the maiden, he claims that "Now were I at yow byȝonde þise wawez, / I were a ioyful jueler" (ll. 287-288). These lines come immediately after the Jeweler says that he will "loue my Lorde and al his lawez / Þat hatz me broȝt þys blys ner" (ll. 286-285). These four lines set up an uncomfortable paradox in

Pearl, that of understanding and ineffability. In fact, the Jeweler embodies this paradox. His mind is filled with love and desire, both in direction to the Pearl Maiden and to God. The Jeweler's main enterprise is to be next to the maiden, as that would be the fulfillment of all his desires; but he cannot. The very laws and God that he claims he will love stand in the way of his true happiness, and the Pearl chides him for this disconnect between his words and his desires, between his understanding and his wanting:

> 'Jueler', sayde þat gemme clene,
> 'Wy borde ȝe men? So madde ȝe be!
> Þre wordez hatz þou spoken at ene:
> Vnavysed, for soþe, wern alle þre.
> Þou ne woste in worlde quat on dotz mene;
> Þy worde byfore þy wytte con fle. (ll. 289-94)

This quotation points out the primary failing of the Jeweler, his inability to match up words with the proper meaning—words that can encapsulate his understanding, words that can overcome the ineffability of grief and the Divine. Pearl points to the defectiveness of his thoughts: "unaysed" and "Þy worde byfore þy wytte con fle." She is quite directly pointing to his mind's inability to capture words. These words fly out, though they are wrong, because his mind cannot properly grasp them, just as he was unable to grasp the Pearl when she trundled down into the ground. This rebuking from Pearl does not dissuade the Jeweler from his purpose, as he continues to press both his descriptions and his desire to cross canonical, theological, and ethereal boundaries. In other words, the Maiden has consistently given the Jeweler the advice that he needs to cross the river one day. But he cannot keep his promise to the Maiden to "loue my Lorde and al his lawez / Þat hatz me broȝt þys blys ner" (ll. 285-6), because that love refers to the long view of history. His existence is bound into the momentary existence, and to remove him from that long view, the Maiden must critique his narrow vision and

misunderstanding. In other words, he must make choices that bind him to deferred

benefit. Her advice would eventually lead to his salvation and his place within the

walled, New Jerusalem; but that does not provide instruction for his immediate benefit of

being with her. So we have a series of conversations that rely primarily on the instruction

that anyone would need to understand the intricacies of heaven. But because the Jeweler

does not heed the advice of the Maiden—which is not simply correct within the

boundaries of heaven or theological discussions but is also accompanied by the actual

sights and sounds of heaven, including God enthroned last majesty—the poem ends with

him returned to the arbor: "Þen wakned I in þat erber wlonk; / My hede vpon þat hylle

watz layde / Þer as my perle to grounde strayd" (ll. 1171-1173). In the immediate action

of the poem, the Jeweler fails to heed the doctrinally grounded advice of the maiden,

which leaves him grasping at the very dirt in which he formerly lost his precious Pearl.

But in the long view, the Maiden's advice appears to have worked upon the thinking of

the Jeweler, as he notes in the final stanza:

> To pay the Prince other sete saghte,
> Hit is ful ethe to the god Krystyin.
> For I haf founden Hym, bothe day and naghte,
> A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.
> Over this hyul this lote I laghte
> For pyty of my perle enclyin;
> And sythen to God I hit bytaghte
> In Krystes dere blessyng and myn,
> That in the forme of bred and wyn
> The preste uus schewes uch a daye.
> He gef uus to be His homly hyne
> And precious perles unto His pay. (1201-12)

This ending has always puzzled me, in part, because it comes on the heel of the violence

that I note above. To this point, I agree with Sarah Stanbury when she writes that the

final stanza "fails to be fully convincing, for up to the last stanza the poem's brilliantly

focalized descriptions have embodied desire and loss, even as the poem has posed

mystical union as an eschatological ideas for the human pilgrimage."[36] Further

complicating the issue is the fact that the words of the Maiden did not work, and so

readers must ask what the ending of the poem contributes to the discussion of wise

counselors and politics within the context of the afterlife. Of concern is that the poem

conflates the beliefs of the earthly court onto the heavenly retinue. The politics of

Richard's court do not approximate the needs of heaven and vice-versa. Their visions

cannot coalesce into a unifying themes, because an allegory of kingship within the

framework of heaven misses the point of a vision of heaven. Richard's allegorical status

as the enthroned Christ cannot approach spiritual comforts or truths.

But returning to counselors and advisors, *Pearl* does not dismiss them because

they are unnecessary or immoral; rather, these individuals struggle with a common

approach to the same concern. And because the facts of their existence and their frames

of reference divide the Jeweler and the Maiden, their communication cannot coalesce

around a mutually understood discourse. They represent, for Allen J. Fletcher, two

modes of understanding and signification—the sacred and the secular—as "the value

systems of earth contend with those of Heaven, the spokesperson for each system . . .

trying to control metyonymic consequences of the figuration of the other."[37] But it is not

simply a process of figuration; their discourses constitute their identities, and so they are

unable to remove their mode of interpretation from their own persons. It is a common

view of *Pearl* that the poem offers a fundamental opposition between reasoned theology

and affective humanity, but this divide is not so great that the Jeweler cannot overcome

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[36] Stanbury, *Seeing the* Gawain-*Poet*, p. 32.
[37] Fletcher, "Reading Radical Metonymy in *Pearl*," p. 52.

his reliance on his affective humanity to reconcile himself with his condition and the

Maiden's transformation after the dream has ended. But, in the end has that conversation

been a success? An argument should be forwarded that their

discussion/conversation/debate is not a success and the lack of communication is

mutual.[38] This failure is so complete that the Pearl Maiden cannot change the terms of

the discourse, because the Jeweler cannot recognize that the terms of their relationship

have changed; and yet, the failure is mutual, as the Maiden seems no more effective at

understanding the Jeweler than he understands her.[39] In fact, it may even be said that the

Jeweler is so "intent upon 'catching out' the maiden in what he fancies to be an academic

disputation that he misses the lesson in humility that is embodied in her recounting, and

in her interpretation of, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard."[40] There is, as these

critics rightly note, disconnect between the Jeweler and the Maiden. This material fact

appears because one is earth bound and the other is heavenly informed, but there has to

be a further recognition of the limitation of this form of discourse. While it is true that

the divine is as obscure and incomprehensible to humans as humans are to the divine,[41]

the issue is one of location. Heaven and London are not analogous, and so we must any

activity that blurs their distinctions to demonstrate traces of their actual forms. Simply

looking at the frame narrative of *Pearl* as a father who longs for the departed daughter,

his grief is consistently framed within the terms of not only Christian history and doctrine

but the specific suffering and patience of Christ. As I note above, we cannot equate the

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[38] T.W. Machan, "Writing the Failure of Speech in *Pearl*," *New Directions in Oral Theory*, ed. Mark C. Amodio (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 279-305, at p. 283.
[39] Ibid., 286 and 291.
[40] Bishop, "Relatives at the Court of Heaven," p. 117.
[41] Machan, "Writing the Failure of Speech in *Pearl*," p. 301.

ruler of Heaven with the ruler of England, as the ruler of England will never match the criteria of heavenly perfection, and in turn, such a comparison might be a denigration of the ethereal majesty of God. Extending that note, we cannot then use the life of Christ, as laid out in the Gospels, as the natural marker of action. When the Jeweler is faced with the death of a beloved daughter, it is not simply enough to claim that Christ suffered, and so one should not seek to remove oneself from the world, as that human suffering cannot approach the suffering endured by Christ. This, I believe, is the false equivalency and false analogy, perpetuated by the discourse of the Pearl Maiden. Her strategy to convince the Jeweler to trust in God's plan and forget his own grief is simple: Trust God. Her words are doctrinally unassailable and her theology unimpeachable, but her speech throughout the poem must be termed as unsympathetic. And so when the Jeweler blames himself for his expulsion from heaven, this is a fundamental rebuke of what has just been presented to his disbelieving, and uncomprehending, eyes. So while the Jeweler is exhorted to trust in God's providential plan, he cannot, as he cannot remove the fundamental impediment that is the human experience. The experience that transports him to the sight of the eternal city cannot be the future definition of his life—his life must be ruled by the discursive stop of "trust God." This is the ultimate message of the poem, to trust God. It is the advice to a Cheshire man seeking to understand a king—trust. As I have argued above, such advice cannot be taken at mere face value. As a work of advice for Cheshire luminaries to understand the ways of a ruler, the poem blurs distinctions between heaven and earth, and king and God. The Cheshire community greatly benefited from their association with Richard II, and so the poem's rhetorical intention can be placed within the larger historical framework of fourteenth-century England. The issue,

as I argue above, resides in the actions needed to remove the distinctions between heaven and earth, and king and God. The poem's attempt to justify the ways of kingship to a Cheshire man works within the historical moment of 1398 England. But in terms of post-1399 England issues of space and place, the poem cannot cover the various historical facts and cracking facades that occur when using the New Jerusalem to double for London and the enthroned son of God for the enthroned son of the Black Prince.

Working Within the Structure of *Piers Plowman*

The question we must interrogate within *Piers Plowman* is, how do subjects understand their roles within the larger kingdom? And I purposely use the idea of subjects, as the estates survey of the Prologue allows readers to see, quite clearly, that this poem must be viewed within the context of the whole of society, not solely in the halls of Westminster:

> I seigh in this assemblee, as ye shul here after;
> Baksteres and brewesteres and bochiers manye,
> Wollen webbesters and weveres of lynnen,
> Taillours and tynkers and tollers in markettes,
> Masons and mynours and many othere craftes:
> Of alle kynne lybbynge laborers lopen forth somme-
> As dykeres and delveres that doon hire dedes ille
> And dryveth forth the longe day with "Dieu save Dame Emme!'
> Cokes and hire knaves cryden, " Hote pies, hote!
> Goode gees and grys! Go we dyne, go we!'
> Taverners until hem tolden the same:
> "Whit wyn of Oseye and wyn of Gascoigne,
> Of the Ryn and of the Rochel, the roost to defie!' (P. 218-30)[42]

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[42] This overview of estates can also be seen in not only in *The Canterbury Tales* but Maidstone's *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)*, ll. 81-95, which recounts the various professions and guilds that welcomed the return of Richard into London. Not only are the professions and guilds listed, Maidstone writes, "From each one's suit of clothes, his craft was clear to see" (ln. 95).

This poem "proposes that a totality, the social real or *universitas civium*, is constituted by variety in multiplicity and, more specifically, by a diversity of functions, estates, and crafts (labor being for Langland the basic unit of function). It proposes that the view of a whole, the totality in its immediacy and entirety, depends upon the fact of dissimilarity (as opposed to similarity, for example, or geography). It depends, in other words, on whether we visualize the whole comprising or broken down into preachers, tailors, cardinals, minstrels, merchants, and bakers."[43] In other words, this is not a poem simply about the difficulties of remaining a faithful Christian within the medieval world; this poem touches on the "time of especial trouble in all domains of English communities, including the Church."[44]

Langland's world is "a community with no boundaries…[and] there can be no common project to foster institutions, relations, and laws that could help people cultivate the virtues in pursuit of their final good."[45] The world has become a place of upheaval—politically with the ascension of Richard II to the throne, culturally with the aftermath of the Plague, religiously with the influence of Wycliffe. And so his poem must respond to that social world, offering a response "to the perceived effects of natural, demographic, and economic changes that greatly stressed and altered class relations, intensifying the decline of feudalism and the severance of customary bonds."[46] This kind of poetry joins in a tradition that "presented theories about community through the invention of new

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[43] Emily Steiner, "*Piers Plowman*, Diversity, and the Medieval Political Aesthetic," *Representations*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-25, at p. 13.
[44] David Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England, 1360-1409* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), p. 14.
[45] Ibid., p. 66.
[46] Cole, "Trifunctionality and the Tree of Charity," p. 7.

forms with which to conceptualize and represent the social real."[47] In fact, one of the

first approaches to *Piers Plowman* centered on the political aspect of the poem: "J.J.

Jusserand made parliamentary allusions and Langland's supposed 'passionate adherence'

to the parliamentary Commons a cornerstone of his reading of the poem, going so far as

to say that *Piers Plowman* 'would almost seem a commentary on the Rolls of

Parliament.'"[48]

   But how exactly does this political world work in terms of literary production?[49]

This was a period when the fundamental groundwork of political oversight and

governance had been laid; however, due to the series of crises presented in the fourteenth

century, the political framework grew to encompass new powers and responsibilities to

address issues of taxation, war, and succession—however legal or illegal that succession

proved to be. The world of law and parliament contained "obvious affinities to other

recognizable tropes and literary forms that it frequently draws from and recombines:

debate poetry, estates satire, romance, courtly lyric, and drama."[50] Of course, this is also

a period of religious upheaval; and even something as central as religion could lead to

structural reforms of society; for example, Wycliff believed that "The imitation of Christ

was to involve social engagement, an attempt by laity as well as clerics to reform not

only the inner self by the church, through mobile preaching, through teaching and

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[47] Steiner, "*Piers Plowman*, Diversity, and the Medieval Political Aesthetic," pp. 1-2. Steiner believes that *Piers Plowman* situates a debate between the importance of diversity and unity within the community, leading her to believe that Langland offers a poem that "mediates between politics and poetics" and "posits a theory about the political community through abstract constructs, which in terms of poetic art, are nothing less than formal inventions." (19)

[48] Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p. 180.

[49] In fact, Bruce Holsinger's newest book *A Burnable Book* envisions Gower and Chaucer, and even Strode, at a center of political and civil period of unrest. It is left to Gower to solve a mystery, at the bidding of Chaucer, to prevent the usurpation of Richard II's throne by the English mercenary John Hawkwood.

[50] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 9.

through making the Scriptures accessible to all in the vernacular. Such an imitation of Christ would encourage challenges to the authority and power of the church in many domains: legal, political, economic, military, and theological."[51] For Matthew Giancarlo, the wrong question has been asked: "From a specifically literary point of view, the question thus is not, why would artists be influenced by all of this?, but rather, how could they not be influenced, given the ubiquity of these parliamentary [and political] matters in both intellectual and political life."[52] William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, then, must respond to the medieval world of late-fourteenth-century England. This is a world of the monarchy of Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV. England, at the same time, depended not simply on the role of the monarchy, enabling the rise of powerful aristocrats who filled voids of responsibility due to the de-centralized nature of the monarchy. So like Gower, the *Pearl*/*Gawain*-poet, and Chaucer, Langland has deep interest "in good governance, monarchical power, and the role of counsel."[53] The fear of these political institutions and figures responded to the structural excesses of the system. Excess, of course, can be seen throughout the poem, and there could possibly be a connection between the "intimate relation between power and extravagant spending and lavish displays."[54] In fact, during one meeting between the respective monarchs of England and France, the English nobility were shocked by the lack of sumptuous clothing and wealth surrounding the French monarch. Nigel Saul reminds readers "In the Middle Ages it was common for the power of kings to be measured by reference to the size and splendor of

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[51] David Aers, "The Humanity of Christ: Representations in Wycliffite Text and *Piers Plowman*," Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP: 1996), p. 45.

[52] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 9.

[53] Steiner, "*Piers Plowman*: Diversity and the Medieval Political Aesthetic," p. 17.

[54] Margaret Kim, "The Politics of Consuming Worldly Goods: Negotiating Christian Discipline and Feudal Power in *Piers Plowman*," *Traditio*, Vol. 59 (2004), pp. 339-368, at p. 340.

their courts. Kings with poor or inadequate courts were considered impotent, while those with rich and impressive ones elicited respect. Appearances mattered in politics."[55]

For Richard II, appearances truly mattered; however, he took his concern for splendor further, incorporating language that might best represent his power and place within the world: "The king was referred to as a 'prince' and addressed as 'your majesty' and 'your highness.' And early example of the new style is found in the roll of the parliament of 1391. The heading of the commons' petitions reads, 'To the most excellent and most renowned and most excellent prince, and most gracious lord, our lord the king, pray your humble lieges the commons of your realm of England, that it should please your highness and royal majesty . . .to grant the petition which follows.'"[56] Formerly, subjects addressed the monarch in the everyday language of lordship, which did not necessitate great differences between the ranks of the aristocracy. The effect of Richard's language program was to distance the king further from both the everyday and his subjects, complementing bowing and averting the gaze within the presence of the king.

While not just a fear of the excess, many medievals feared who had the ear of those in control of the excess. Such fears can be seen in the proceedings of the "Good" Parliament of 1376 that sought to preclude people, such as Alice Perrers, from court. The problem, as Ian Bishop sees it, is that any kind of relationship when added to the complex modes of interaction both within the court and in the church allows for confusion of actual value and earned favors and penance. Such access to figures of power was further complicated, as access was known to "have been expedited by bribing court officials, or

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[55] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 305.
[56] Ibid., p. 340.

through possessing genuine friends at court. But the most enviable position was that of the man whose own family was represented there."[57]

These inter-related concepts of access to power, excess and its relationship to power, and response to power dominate the conversation of *Piers Plowman* and politics. The issue is dealt with almost immediately in the poem, as in the Prologue the reader confronts the Rat Parliament. Though this allegory does not occur within the A-text of *Piers Plowman*, Langland's use of the Rat Parliament is not exclusive to *Piers Plowman*. In fact, Bishop Brunton "the ecclesiastical leader of the reform party, had also used the Fable to warn the Good Parliament against enacting without teeth."[58] Huppé sees this use of the fable as "clearly ironic," especially in light of the failure of the Good Parliament to enact real change, as John of Gaunt filled the 1377 Parliament with allies who nullified the progressive actions of the 1376 Parliament.[59] Whether or not this fable solely references Richard II and the Parliaments of 1376 and 1377 must be complicated by the fact that the C-Text retains this fable. So while the B-Text could be read in light of these actions, the fable and the subsequent discussion of the fable must take into consideration larger problems of how to engage with persons of power and consequence.

Ultimately, I believe that this fable, perceived in light of the overall trajectory of the poem, speaks to the conservative strain of the poem, inviting readers to proceed with caution in dealings with magnates. The fable, in itself, is remarkable as there are no other beast fables of consequence within the meandering and repetitious structure of *Piers Plowman*. The basic idea is that a Parliament of Rats confronts the idea of how to limit

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[57] Bishop, "Relatives at the Court of Heaven," p. 116.

[58] Bernard F. Huppé, "The Date of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*," *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 38 (1941), pp. 34-44, at p. 35.

[59] Ibid., p. 36.

the power of the stronger Cat, coming to the conclusion—through the guidance of the Rat of Renoun—not to take any action that might endanger their own health and the health of the commonwealth. This is not, as I mention above, simply an ironic retelling of Bishop Brunton's fable, and I do not believe that we can stop discussion by simply noting direct parallels to the Parliaments of 1376 and 1377. This fable, as I will demonstrate, fits into a program that seeks to appeal to working within existing structures for the betterment of all. *Piers Plowman* consistently speaks to the larger desire of including the entirety of society on the road to salvation. A salvation, the poem also consistently reminds readers, is not exclusively dependent on a religious vocation and a religious perspective but a journey that extends into all moments of life. Parliament, in this sense, is a space of interaction. But the form of the space clearly delineates a hierarchy of access to the king, allowing certain counselors to have unmediated access and other officials, usually the elected officers, to remain furthest from the monarch. Akin to the earlier discussion of *Pearl* and the parable of the workers of the vineyard, medieval political concerns centered on questions of access—to whom was it given and what arose from that acess?

As a discussion of parliamentary action, for Huppé, the fable of the rats has clear, historical antecedents. His dating of the B-Text is central to his understanding of the poem, and building off Skeat's dating of 1377 to 1388, Huppé writes, "The poet, in the Spring or early Summer of 1377, began to revise the A-Text . . . The B-Text, then could not have been completed until the Autumn of 1378 at the earliest; on the other hand, the lack of any reference to the Peasant's Revolt gives strong presumption that it was completed before 1381."[60] This dating system allows him to point to Peter de la Mare,

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[60] Ibid., p. 44.

the Speaker of the Good Parliament, "who gained wide reputation by his outspoken attack on the administration of the king's government,"[61] as the rat of renown. This rat of renown, in the text, is "moost renable of tonge" (P. 158), articulating an appropriate solution to the problem of the Cat. The rats and mice of the court are good servants, described as "a route of ratons at ones/ And small mees with hem: mo than a thousand/ Comen to a counseil for commune profit" (P. 146-8). These creatures are there—we are clearly told—to govern for the "commune profit" or the public good. The entrance of this parliamentary scene falls directly after a mini-debate between a king, a goliard— referred to as a "lunatik"—and an angel. The nature of their disagreement is the role of the king. Can the king be constrained? Should the king be constrained? How can the king be constrained? An angel appears to answer these questions:

> "Sum Rex, sum Princeps",- neutrum fortasse deinceps!
> O qui iura regis Christi specialia regis,
> Hoc qiiod agas nielius--iustus es, esto pius!
> Nudum ius a te vestiri vult pietate.
> Qualia vis nietere, talia grana sere:
> Si ius nudatur, nudo de iure metatur;
> Si seritur pietas, de pietate metas'. (P. 132-8)

> [(You say) 'I am King, I am ruler'; you may perhaps be neither in the future. O you who administer the sublime laws of Christ the King, in order to do better what you do, as you are just, be godly! Naked law requires to be clothed by you with a sense of your duty to God. Sow such grain as you wish to reap. If the law is nakedly administered by you, then let (judgment) be measured out (to you) according to the letter. If goodness is sown, may you reap goodness.]

These lines promote an image of a king who could be constrained; however, that constraint comes from God,[62] which does not offer much in terms of real world solutions to monarchical overreach. The angel's speech, in addition, invokes Fortune's Wheel and

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[61] Ibid., p. 35.
[62] Anna Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1981), p. 16.

fall of princes' literature. With the inclusion of an angel, especially as the mouthpiece of

law, a range of Christian associations can be made. But what is particularly striking is

the direct connection with good kingship and heavenly reward. Prior to the angel's

speech, the lunatik emphasizes this connection, speaking to the king: '"Crist kepe thee,

sire Kyng, and thi kyngryche,/ And lene thee lede thi lond so leaute thee lovye,/ And for

thi rightful rulyng be rewardid in hevne"' (P. 125-7). Because of the varying speakers

and changing topics, the Prologue "suggests both a perpetual condition of surprising

arrivals or unpredictable changes of topic, and a continuous processional movement to

the whole, in keeping with the principle of a passus as a continuous 'pace' or 'step.'"[63]

Despite the frenetic pace and shifting speakers, this section clearly voices concerns over

kingly power, and this lunatic's speech "is humble in its assumption that the king will

live up [to] these standards and be 'rewardid in hevne.'"[64] It is clear that the lunatic's

speech calls forth the angel, as the text reads, "And sithen in the eyr on heigh an aungel

of hevene" (P. 128). Because of the call and response nature of this section, not only will

the lunatic reply to the Latin wisdom of the angel, but also the poem makes a clear

association between the concepts of law and justice with heaven. Justice on earth cannot

be overlooked, because it leads to eternal reward in heaven. So readers must be

conscious that this poem establishes a direct relationship between earthly conceptions of

justice with how such efforts merit response from God. While the angel and the lunatic

establish this mutual interest/concern for justice, the notion that God's reward or

punishment will eventually address, or redress, earthly concerns presents a sense of

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[63] Andrew Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2006), p. 115.
[64] Ibid., p. 123.

deferral for those wronged or persecuted. And so after the angel's sententious

commentary on kingship, the lunatic becomes transformed into a golliard:[65]

> Thanne greved hym a goliardeis, a gloton of wordes,
> And to the aungel an heigh answerde after:
> " Dum " rex" a " regere " dicatur nomen habere,
> Nomen habet sine re nisi studet iura tenere'.
> Thanne [c]an al the commune crye in vers of Latyn
> To the Kynges counseil--construe whoso wolde--
> "Precepta Regis sunt nobis vincula legis'" (P. 136-44)

The goliard, in effect, claims that a king's title depends upon the fact that he actually

rules, which is even more important as the king's bidding is accompanied by the power of

law. For the commune, the king's words are enough to compel loyalty. So the goliard's

complaint of the previous discussion seems to rely on a fundamental shift in perspective

of justice and law. If the frame of reference is heaven, then the impartial and infallible

monarch of heaven will amend crimes and lapses. However, such a frame does not allow

the actual victims and subjects any real satisfaction. So the goliard's claim is that the

power of a monarch is too great to defer judgment until one accounts for actions and

deeds before God on the Day of Judgement. The fact that there are consequences to poor

ruling necessitates earthly institutions to protect the interests of those without recourse.

Despite the fact that the commune disagrees with his assessment of kingship, the

goliard's ideas have long standing in both political and religious contexts: the laws of

Edward the Confessor (11th century) note the same connection: "you will be king so long

as you rule well; since if you will not, the name of king will not remain unmoving in you,

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[65] Of course, the golliard could be a separate character; goliards were initially stock figures of wandering religious clerics, who would critique power through satire. But due to the lunatic's fairly lucid understanding of kingly duty and heavenly reward, it would not be terribly difficult to conceive as a lunatic to become a more learned satirist of power structures. For more discussion of golliards and their roles in medieval literature, see Jill Mann, "Satiric Subject and Satiric Object in Goliardic Literature," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbruch: Internationale Zeitschrift fur Medieavistik*, Vol. 15 (1980): 63-86.

and you will lose the name of king"[66]; and John Bromyard in his *Summa Praeidcantium* claims "that is, by doing this [governing himself] he keeps the name 'king,' namely by protecting himself and others as much as he can from sins. And by not doing this he loses the name 'king' and truly is a slave."[67] The concepts, then, were firmly fixed in both political and religious thought, and so the use here in *Piers Plowman* reminds readers of the commonplace aspect of that thought. When everyone seems to forget the duty owed by a sovereign to his people, it is not the commune, angel, or parliament who reinforces that truth but a lunatic or goliard, assuming an authoritative voice to critique power. So the fable of the rats and the cat does not occur in a vacuum, either historically or within the text. The reading of the fable depends upon its location historically and textually. In fact, if we consider the concept of king at the time, Richard's own coronation speaks to the desire of connecting right rule and kingship; first used for Edward II, the oath Richard swore was to "uphold the laws which the people would 'justly and reasonably' choose."[68]

This fable should, therefore, be the answer to the debate between the angel and lunatic/goliard as to the nature of the king's power and duty—is the king's very name and title tied to proper performance of justice, or is the king's word enough to bind subjects? Or is their recourse for the king's actions on earth, or does all judgement of those actions defer to God? And so in the context of this debate, the fable provides a more interesting light on how *Piers Plowman* seeks to inform a readership about how they should respond

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[66] Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on PP*, p. 128.
[67] Ibid., p. 129.
[68] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 25.

to power structures—however legal or just. This fable might simply concern "the truth of subjects of subjects and their obligation to obey."[69]

As noted above, this fable's historical content is fairly clear. Huppé believes that readers can confidently fix the characters in the fable to real historical figures: the rat of renown is Peter de la Mare and that it "may be granted that *cat from the court* cannot with absolute assurance be shown to refer to [John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster], but it can be shown that the cat clearly suggests Gaunt."[70] Gaunt's identity as the cat relies not only on his role in undoing the work of the Good Parliament in overturning many of the statues directed towards limiting his own power but because of "the counsels of violence aimed . . . [at] Gaunt, the king's Lieutenant."[71] But because of Gaunt's power, any criticism, however moderate, would have been dangerous, and so "the poet made sure that the authorities could not pin him down—if they penetrated the veil of his anonymity—to an exact interpretation of his Fable. But, at the same time, the attentive reader would have had no trouble in understanding the general drift of the poet's references: he criticized Gaunt's arbitrary administration of the King's power but deplored recourse to violent measures since they did not cure the basic evil—there was always another tyrannous lord to fill the place of the one slain."[72] John of Gaunt served as the Commons' constant enemy throughout the reign of his nephew, beginning at the death of the Black Prince: "Almost immediately there was pressure from the parliamentary commons for the boy to be recognized as the new Prince of Wales.

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[69] John A. Alford, "The Design of the Poem," *A Companion to* Piers Plowman, ed. John A. Alford (Berekely: U California P, 1988), pp. 29-66, at p. 33.
[70] Huppé, "The Date of the B-Text," p. 38 This view is shared with Anna P. Baldwin, "The Historical Context," *A Companion to* Piers Plowman, ed. John A. Alford (Berekely: U California P, 1988), pp. 67-86, at pp. 78-9.
[71] Ibid., p. 37.
[72] Ibid., p. 38

Something that lent urgency to the request was the commons' fear—which was almost
certainly unjustified—that the boy's uncle, John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, had designs
on the crown himself."[73]

If the goliard serves as a stock figure to critique the power structures of the
Middle Ages, then John Gaunt was the stock figure of the late fourteenth century for the
excesses of power and manipulation. As Saul notes, there were never any fixed reports
or evidence to tie Gaunt to any machinations for the throne; however, he would always
serve as the internal threat, even as he lay dying with his son in exile. So on one hand,
Piers Plowman speaks perhaps to a specific threat of 1377 but it also speaks to the
general, internal threat of counselors. The threat of counselors, noted in *Pearl*, was of
grave concern, not least of which because a king's word carried with it the weight of law,
and the violence attached to that word. What, then, does this fable instruct readers as
how to handle both the threat of power and how to counsel the king?

To mitigate the threat posed by the cat, the rat of renown offers a solution of
defining and controlling:

> . . . quod that raton, "reson me sheweth
> To bugge a belle of bras or of bright silver
> And knytten it on a coler for oure commune profit
> And hangen it upon the cattes hals--thanne here we mowen
> Wher he ryt or rest or rometh to pleye;
> And if hym list for to laike, thanne loke we mowen
> And peeren in his presence the while hym pleye liketh,
> And if hym wratheth, be war and his wey shonye." (P. 167-74)

The plan is to bell the cat, so that the cat's movements will be heard before seen,
allowing the rats and mice to avoid being surprised or attacked by the cat, who was
previously described as "And overleep hem lightliche and laughte hem at his wille,/ And

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[73] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 17.

pleide with hem perillousli and possed aboute" (P. 150-1) and "And if we grucche of his

gamen he wol greven us alle--/ Cracchen us or clawen us and in hise clouches holde./

That us lotheth the lif er he late us passe" (P. 153-5). The fear of physical violence

disturbs this body of rodents, but it is that they cannot predict or comprehend the violence

that seems most troubling. The cat's actions speak of a capricious character, and because

the other animals pale in strength, there is no way to combat force with force. This

action, as outlined by the Rat of Renown, seems a cautious but rational step in dealing

with the crisis. And yet, when the bell was brought and action was needed to bell the cat,

"Ther ne was raton in al the route, for al the reaume of France, / That dorste have

bounden the belle aboute the cattes nekke,/ Ne hangen it aboute his hals al Engelond to

wynne" (P. 177-9). The issue, of course, is the imbalance of power. No rat, or mouse,

could properly enact their plan, and so "[Ac] helden hem unhardy and hir counseil feble, /

And leten hire laboure lost and al hire longe studie" (P. 180-1).

     Not only do none of the rodents rise to the occasion, fear and prevarication

become the dominant thought: "Forthi I counseille al the commune to late the cat worthe,

/And be we nevere so bolde the belle hym to shewe" (P. 187-8). Not only should the rats

and mice not show the cat the bell, they should forget the matter completely:

> "I seye for me," quod the mous, "I se so muchel after,
> Shal nevere the cat ne the kiton by my counseil be greved,
> Ne carpynge of this coler that costed me nevere.
> And though it costned me catel, biknowen it I nolde,
> But suffren as hymself wolde [s]o doon as hym liketh—
> Coupled and uncoupled to cacche what thei mowe.
> Forthi ech a wis wight I warne--wite wel his owene!" (P. 202-8)

The moment of the goliard, giving voice to the fears of monarchical overrule and abuse,

passes quickly, becoming a spirit of pacification. This scene, initially clear, becomes

muddied, as the narrator claims, "What this metels bymeneth, ye men that ben murye, /Devyne ye--for I ne dar, by deere God in hevene!" (P. 209-10). Of course, this line may speak to the difficulties of interpretation, or this line voices the above notion of not wanting to provide specific interpretations that might lead to crossing paths with authority. So in a moment when the fable speaks to the abuse of power from illegitimate sources of power,[74] the poem defers action and defers judgement and interpretation to the reader.

Other examples of the fable can be found in the fourteenth century in the works of the Franciscan Nicholas Bozon and in John Bromyard's *Summa Praedicantium*, who as chancellor of the University of Cambridge in the 1380s would have been a known figure in the kingdom.[75] But most interestingly for the historical argument, a version appears in "Bishop Thomas Brinton's sermon preached to a convocation of clerics during the Good Parliament on 18 May 1376."[76] Brinton explicitly references the fable, calling on parliament to be active members: "Do not do so, reverend lords, lest our parliament be compared to the fabled parliament of the mice and the rats . . . [with an action that] was useless and empty."[77] Brinton's sermon focused on action, as fear swept the pulpits "since many of them in the past, when preaching at St. Paul's Cross touched on lords' sins, are immediately arrested like criminals and hauled before the king's council, where they are examined, condemned, and banished or have their rights to preach permanently suspended."[78] *Piers Plowman* presents a series of discussions about the nature of kingly

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[74] Baldwin, "The Historical Context," pp. 78-9.
[75] Galloway, *The Penn Commentary*, p. 133.
[76] Ibid., p. 133.
[77] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature,* p. 182.
[78] Galloway, *The Penn Commentary*, p. 134.

power from a lunatic, an angel, and a goliard, and through a rat and mouse in a beast

fable. These conversations and images have clear historical antecedents, referencing long

held beliefs and ongoing concerns. The Prologue of *Piers Plowman* offers a series of

disparate images and exchanges, presenting the reader with a difficult interpretative task,

which the text further complicates when Will proclaims that only heaven may know what

this all might mean.

I believe that *Piers Plowman* seeks to question authority and power dynamics in

subtle manners; and when dilemmas are presented in the text, the poem moves forward to

other concerns. The poem's practical concerns force engagement with difficult ideas, and

yet the answers can be read as underwhelming. If one looks at each situation and

concern, the poem does not present an answer for each. In fact, Matthew Giancarlo

considers Langland, in light of Chaucer and Gower, as presenting different concerns and

"in many ways more real-world and policy-oriented than either of his contemporaries."[79]

While these debates are firmly rooted in real concerns, the poem recognizes that answers

cannot exist for all problems. Rather, the poem offers advice on how best to navigate the

complex network of associations of medieval England.   The overriding concern of *Piers

Plowman* is how to reach societal salvation. But that societal salvation depends upon a

worldview that recognizes differences in class and status, and yet, the societal differences

do not dismiss the fact that the poem seeks to guide every citizen and every Christian to

eternal salvation. So while lunatics and goliards can address the king, the king's words

carry the force of law and violence, and the other voices can be readily dismissed as

bearing no relationship to reality. So what we as readers have to comprehend is that the

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[79] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 183.

poem wants us to work within the framework, work within the real world. For Cole, this lack of viable solutions can be found in a fundamental Christian framework, which I have sketched above: "Langland never offers up an alternative to feudalism as a productive mode, since he presents a crisis in Christianity solvable only on Christian terms. Thus Langland offers no material recourse for peasants. They should work productively and in good faith for all, a point made time and again in the poem. Lords must simply act compassionately to the poor and not take more from their tenants 'than trouthe wolde' (15.310)."[80] But this poem's framework must be considered in terms of locating the spaces and places of engagement within the political sphere. Because of the poem's popularity with Wycliffite and Lollard circles, the poem's advice was applicable to working outside of the spaces of power. These groups saw the machinations of the palace and Westminster as antithetical to their systems of beliefs. *Piers Plowman* does not dispute that corruption could be found within the systems of medieval English power. But the poem advocates focusing the attention on structures that supersede the local—the divine justice promised to true Christians.

We cannot, the mouse tells us, simply kill the cat, because another will take his place, perhaps causing more suffering and pain. Our job, as rats and mice, is not to interfere with the business of the cat and the young kitten, leaving them to eat venison and allowing us not to cower under benches listening for bells and screams. This answer is quite disappointing, but again, I think that the answer fits with the program. It is a practical solution; the rats and the mice do not hold enough power to enact actual change over the cat and the young kitten. So they must seek to appease these figures. Such

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[80] Cole, "Trifunctionality and the Tree of Charity," p. 18.

appeasement, I would argue, is not an action of cowardice but a recognition of the function of counsel and governance. If governance, as the poem articulates, is one of justice, those with less power cannot define that justice. That process of definition and control will always fall to the powerful persons of the kingdom. The job of the mice and the rats, and the entire field of folk, is to live a life that will not cause unrest within that system.

This system of placement can be further evidenced by the interrogation of Mede, which concerns not simply her actions but her choice of spouse. From the Breton lai of "Sir Launval" by Marie de France to "Havelok the Dane," marriage agreements are explicitly seen in terms of parliamentary concerns.[81] During the medieval period, "the rules of inheritance were comparatively generous under English common law, unmarried women could control substantial amounts of land. Their marriages and remarriages were therefore of paramount political concern."[82] This concern over movements of vast swaths of land and fortune informs the "'Marriage of Meed' episode in Passus 2-4 [which] reveals a strikingly accurate working knowledge of the processes and discourse of parliament" and offers "a pattern in which the bureaucratic parameters of parliamentary assembly are exploited as a way to investigate the particularly representative dynamics of social conflict."[83] Mede's marriage allows the king to adopt the persona of protector, "But, when [Mede] arrives at Westminster, the king seems to regard her as a ward of court who is in danger of being 'disparaged' through marriage to

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[81] This notion of marriage and government is an intriguing line of scholarship that I would like to pursue in my next project. Continuing the concern in the various medieval romances and *Piers Plowman* about marriage contracts, I would like to consider how in Chaucer and Gower explore the difficulties of familial integration. Specifically, I think that the various tales in both *The Canterbury Tales* and *Confessio Amantis* regarding in-laws speak to a fear of nation building.

[82] Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, p. 132.

[83] Ibid., p. 183.

the undesirable Fals Fikel-Tonge."[84] So not only will Mede's reputation be disparaged

through her unfortunate union, her connection to the king—as a type of royal ward—

besmirches the king's character. She, in turn, allows access to the king through her

unworthy spouse. So the Mede episode further complicates the issue of counselors and

their access to the monarch. As discussed in the *Pearl* section, questions of familial ties

provides an added context of political relationships, and a real fear existed that anyone

can skip actual needed penance, and claim kinship as more important than true penance.

In other words, kinship to a ruler removes barriers and actual need from the earthly or

heavenly court system. It is, of course, striking that both poems speak to the desire of

defining a woman's access to a monarch. Mede represents the dangers of unfettered

access to the monarchy, and the Pearl-Maiden represents access to the monarchy that

does not seem merited. During this period, "thirteenth –and fourteenth-century queens

were celebrated as passive contributors to royal dignity" and this "new form of queenly

influence was *petitionary*, in the sense that it cast the queen as one seeking redress rather

than one able to institute redress in her own right, and *intercessory,* in that it limited its

objectives to the modification of a previously determined male resolve."[85] Despite this

notion of limited access and limited power, *Piers Plowman* speaks very clearly to the

distrust attached to feminine influence at court. Of course, medieval English court drama

and history speaks to the positive influence that a female voice could add to a courtly

setting. Princess Joan, Richard's mother, served as mediator on two occasions: between

Londoners and John of Gaunt (1377) and between Richard and John of Gaunt (1385).

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[84] Bishop, "Relatives at the Court of Heaven," p. 111.

[85] Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), p. 95. His emphasis.

Anne of Bohemia, Richard's first queen, would also fill such a role. This role seems

perfunctorily thrust on her initially, due to the fact that her arrival "seems to have aroused

little interest in England. None of the chroniclers bothered to give detailed accounts of

the celebrations in London, as they did of Richard's coronation in 1377, and most

contented themselves with a few lines noting her arrival and subsequent marriage in the

abbey. Such comments as were offered were for the most part mildly critical, as Anne

was referred to as "this little scrap of humanity."[86] Despite that underwhelming reception,

either on the day of her marriage or on the day of her reception by the citizens of London

(again, the chronicles do not offer much), she received a "bill by the citizens, soliciting

her support for the city's liberties," with the task to be "mediatrix between your most

illustrious prince and most powerful lord and our lord the king . . . to mediate with our

lord the King in such wise with gracious words and deeds."[87] Women, therefore, have a

definite and impressive history of properly engaging monarchs for the betterment of

society. Unfortunately, Mede is not that strong, female voice in the poem. She is

ultimately a problem, seeking to overturn the fabric of the court in terms of monetary

compensation versus the heavenly compensation that Conscience articulates as having the

real impact. For Conscience, Mede's danger is not in her womanhood but in "her

irresistible power to corrupt."[88]

    Mede, in my understanding of the poem, does not serve as a rebuke of women;

rather, she stands in as the personification of greed. The poem ultimately directs readers

to forsake concerns that interfere with the ultimate pursuit of heaven, and so the poem

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[86] Saul, *Richard II*, p. 90.

[87] Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 105.

[88] Alford, "The Design of the Poem," p. 37.

offers "little patience for wealth and choose to emphasize how fallen humanity seems horribly disposed to corrupt wealth and to be corrupted by it (thus we see Mede both seduced and seducing)."[89] If the Fable of the Rats is, as Huppe and Robertson contend, an exemplary vision of the overwhelming preoccupation with temporal concerns,[90] then the two visions may contribute to the conversation of how to maneuver within the world.

Langland's *Piers Plowman* sets the reader on an interpretive journey. There are allegorical figures, stock characters, apocalyptic strains, unfulfilled desires, and unanswered questions. One reading of the poem, both in practice and in interpretation, cannot fully satisfy the various demands the poem tasks of its readers. This is a poem that requires multiple interpretive lenses to engage potential meanings. For the purpose of this inquiry, I believe that Langland's poem articulates a position of working within the framework of an unequal society. For *Piers Plowman* describes how people without power may be overwhelmed by the political machinations of the social elite. Even when the characters are described in less than flattering terms, for example Mede, the poem does not condemn her natural right to be in position of power—she is a noble woman and entitled to such benefits. The poem seeks answers to troubling questions: what are the safeguards to the monarchy? Can faith alone—faith in God and faith in the goodness of humanity—prevent abuses? For Mede's marriage, the safeguard is Conscience. He is there, unwillingly asked to be her bridegroom by the king, to provide the sagacious counsel to the king, noting that Mede's interest in wealth and goods undermines the goal of a king—true justice and pious leadership.

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[89] Joseph S. Wittig, *William Langland Revisited* (New York: Twyane, 1997), p. 73.
[90] D.W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppe, *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951), pp. 30-32.

Pearl and *Piers Plowman*, however removed—physically or ideologically—from the actual court of Richard II, speak to the possibilities of rule on earth and in heaven. Both poems cannot offer clearly defined ideals of leadership, as the standard to which they refer is unattainable. No earthly king, however mythologized, can provide the faithful and unerring leadership of God. So what the poems depict, instead, is how to remain faithful to the ideals that will allow one to join with the heavenly king. The solution embodied by Will is that the systems in place on earth cannot offer true protection. Those systems rely upon ineffective action (the Fable of the Rats) or uncommon virtue (Conscience), and so those systems cannot be the ultimate guarantors of freedom or justice. So when the Barn of Unity is turned into a parliamentary scene, with debate and counter debate, Will does not seek to cleanse the place in the style of Jesus' expelling the money lenders from the Temple. He chooses to leave the scene, seeking for salvation in the world, because no earthly solution can offer the unmediated grace of true faith. The systems of earthly governance will fail, will be rebuilt, and will fail again; and yet, the focus must be on how to attain salvation within that frame.

Postscript: Heaven's Modern Afterlife

Having researched, considered, and written about heaven for these many years, I have had many interactions with people curious about this line of study. When people hear that you are writing about heaven, the reactions are fairly typical. They either inquire if you have read the latest book that describes how someone went to heaven during a botched surgery, plane crash, nearly freezing in a lake, or whatever malady might have struck, or they want to know if I believe in God.[1] These questions point to some interesting ways in which our present society views the afterlife.

This dissertation questions the common conception of the afterlife. By evaluating the afterlife via the scenes in *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*, *Paradiso*, *The Vision of Tnugdal*, and Hadewijch's vision, this study asks readers to evaluate the ways heaven has been traditionally considered and how it might be considered. Heaven, I have argued, should not simply be viewed as the place of eternal rest, everlasting reward, and perpetual light—the terms by which we only seem to consider heaven. Heaven should be examined like any cultural product, as a series of interconnected and competing discourses that look to engage an audience. The ways in which culture can be analyzed speak to the ways by which we view the world. The more complex our world view, the more complex should be our view of the afterlife. Heaven cannot be divorced from the expectations of the human beings that aspire to join those already there. In sum, heaven must be considered as a means to interrogate the ways people live on earth, allowing us to view heaven as a reflection of the earthly expectations and wishes of modern society.

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[1] My answers, to those who might be interested, are "no" and "does it matter?"

Turning to our modern culture, the market for books on visions of heaven is astounding. The books range from the more emotional to the more matter-of-fact, and from the accounts of children to the accounts of doctors. If the numbers presented on the covers of the books and sales figures are indeed accurate, there are millions of copies of these books to be found in the homes, schools, and libraries across society. The titles are instructive of this genre: *Heaven is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back*; *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*; *To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story*; *Flight to Heaven: A Plane Crash…A Lone Survivor…A Journey to Heaven-and Back*; and *My Journey to Heaven: What I Saw and How it Changed My Life*. A simple search will present more such accounts, with even more explicit titles. One might even go as far as to connect these books to the success of the *Left Behind* series of books that considered what occurs when modern-day society is the setting for the end times. Generally, I do not believe that these books represent a passing fad, but these books respond to a real interest in the topic, as many of these books were *New York Times' Bestsellers* and the sales' figures clearly indicate an interest. Clearly, there is a fertile market for books that describe the afterlife. These books detail a variety of near-death experiences that allow someone access to the afterlife, however briefly. What is remarkable about these books is the consistent messaging: truth. All of these texts speak to the veracity of their accounts, and how such accounts will astound and convince the readers. Astound them from what state? Convince them of what?

But even a cursory engagement with these texts can reveal the desires and thoughts of our modern society on the afterlife. These accounts desperately inform the

reader that these accounts are real. Such veracity can be attested to by the details that these narratives provide of the afterlife. The details, we are told, guarantee the truth of these accounts. There is no way that a young boy could know what his grandfather's nickname was, or if that his mother had a miscarriage with a baby girl before he was born. There is no explanation for how a patient on the operating table could know exactly what was said at the very moment his heart stopped, causing his spirit to hover over his body. These details are touchstones, allowing readers to gauge the truthfulness of the experience. There are, we believe, no reasonable reasons for these parties to have their knowledge, and so we must attribute it, right according to the texts, to something greater. That greater aspect, of course, is a divine being who allows people to view the afterlife and return with knowledge to impart. But why do we need this knowledge? Why do we need to have proof of heaven? Why are we interested in these accounts? Despite the fact that atheism and secular attitudes continue to grow in Western society, there will always be a fear of the unknown death. If we knew what came after, we might alter our behavior, try to be different, attempt to be kinder, or even not undertake to change. But that fear of the unknown appears to haunt society, providing a well-attuned audience for these afterlife narratives and descriptions of near-death experiences. Societal pressures to plan for the unknown can be seen in commercials for life insurance or funeral planning; we are constantly reminded that death is not simply a certainty but a constant companion. These narratives offer the opportunity for a reader, perhaps harried by the pressures of everyday life, to reflect on the ultimate unknown.

Today's society is greatly interested in the topic of heaven, but it is also a point of confusion. Heaven, despite all of our technological growth, remains outside of our grasp;

it is still the "mythical place" that I articulated on the first page of this dissertation. So how can we know about a place that exists beyond all human experience? How can we know about a place where access depends upon dying and never returning? But most importantly, how can we know that it is true? As a society, we seek knowledge of a place—or a state of being—that cannot be truly known; however, these books all promise accounts that cannot be questioned. A child cannot be questioned, can he? A neurosurgeon is a person of science who believes in real data, real consequences, and real experiences—how can that person be questioned? But what is it that we are questioning? We question the very existence of heaven, and that is an answer that no amount of best-selling books can truly answer.

The other aspect of my experience is that people like to know about my faith. By asking about my faith, these people want to establish my *bona fides* on heaven. My credibility and authority on the subject do not depend upon anything more than articulating an allegiance to a particular theological background. My faith, it seems, provides access for me to speak on the matter. But such a question also seems to point to the hope for truth; my identification as Christian guarantees a true interest in the topic, not a cynical or analytical interest. But this experience also points to a modern audience who is skeptical of outsiders, which can be seen more acutely in the furor of Reza Aslan's book on the historical Jesus. Why would someone outside of a particular faith, a particular group, or a particular identity study something that is inherently tied to those identifying categories? But what must be understood is that we cannot affix Christian and heaven, or even Western and heaven only. Heaven's history began through the interactions of various cultures—Greek, Jewish, Egyptian, and other Near-Eastern

groups. Its provenance cannot be ascribed solely to Christianity. Moreover, the ways in which we casually use the word heaven might add weight to the shifting cultural understanding of the afterlife. We think of heaven in terms of some divine will—a match made in heaven—and we think of heaven as the whole of the sky—move heaven and earth. Heaven is also invoked for protection and approbation—heaven help us and in heaven's name. Then we might consider the ways in which heaven is thrust into the everyday—heaven on earth, the heavens opened up, in hog's heaven, and stink to high heaven. These examples force us to recognize that we do not think or speak of heaven in only one manner; its use must be considered within specific cultural moments and uses.

Part of my interest in offering this postscript is not only to consider how we might consider heaven within a modern context, but how our views on the afterlife might not be too dissimilar from those held by a medieval audience. The Middle Ages represents the nadir of human existence, especially within our collective understanding of history, and so modern society must have progressed, must have improved over the centuries. We refer to ISIS and other terrorist groups as being "medieval." Any torture technique is "medieval," and we can very much count on the easy category of the "Dark Ages." Such views were expressed in *Lucky Jim*:

> As he approached the Common Room he thought briefly about the Middle Ages. Those who professed themselves unable to believe the reality of human progress ought to cheer themselves up, as the student under examination had conceivably been cheered up, by a short study of the Middle Ages. The hydrogen bomb, the South African Government, Chiang Kai-shek, Senator McCarthy himself, would then seem a light price to pay for no longer being in the Middle Ages. Had people ever been as nasty, as self-indulgent, as dull, as miserable, as cocksure, as bad at art, as dismally ludicrous or as wrong a they'd been in the Middle Ages.[2]

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[2] Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2012), p. 87.

And yet, the same concerns that the medieval audience pondered over, are the same concerns that the modern audience has: endless war, religious conflict, political instability, and global climate shifts. Heaven became a way of hoping for something greater than the everyday, allowing the medieval audience the ultimate wish fulfillment in a time of great uncertainty. Nearly fifteen hundred years have passed, heaven remains the ultimate wish fulfillment, allowing an uncertain and nervous populace the ability to hope for something greater than the everyday existence.

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