Truth and Tales

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The stalk is withered dry, my love,
So will our hearts decay;
So make yourself content, my love,
Till God calls you away.

So advises the Child Ballad, “The Unquiet Grave”—well known to the hon-
orand of the present volume, Richard Firth Green, a lover of popular song
and narrative. This particular song is generally classed as a “revenant” ballad,
wherein a ghost returns from the grave to terrorize the living. But, despite the
dead woman’s warning that “one kiss” from her “clay-cold lips” would prove
deadly to her lamenting lover (“Your time will not be long”), there is nothing
threatening here. The main emphasis falls on the principle that to all things
there is a season and death is inevitable; patient acceptance of the transitory
nature of all earthly things is advised, until God calls the speaker away, to his
own death.

The same advice is offered at the end of the Middle English poem *Pearl*,
a work which, moreover, denies that the hearts of men “decay.”  The earth

1. Child Ballads, 78A, in Francis James Child Francis (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popu-
2. *Pearl*, an intricately written and rhymed poem of 1,212 four-stress lines arranged in 101
twelve-line stanzas, recounts how, in a dream vision, a lamenting father encounters his dead
baby daughter in the form of a fully grown woman. Now one of the “Brides of the Lamb” of
God, she explains why she has been honored with such a high reward in heaven. The poem
climaxes with a description of the maiden’s new and true home, the Heavenly Jerusalem (based
on the vision recorded by St. John in the Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse). At which point
does not really mar the “merry jewel” who is the Pearl maiden: immortal diamond is immortal diamond. Love, in this case a bereaved father’s love of a daughter who died before she was two years old, will in some way survive the grave. However, its status is challenged in an Other World wherein the crucial relationships are those that exist between, and within, different ranks of the saintly dead. Earthly emotional ties pale when exposed to the incommensurable love of soul for soul, blessed virgin for blessed Virgin. Yet the poem values their human poignancy, dramatizes the pain of parental loss in the very act of affirming the superiority of what heaven has to offer.

In attempting to bring truth to tales of death’s divisive power, the Pearl poet draws on late-medieval Resurrection theology, which had undergone a period of transformative development within thirteenth-century scholasticism; the resultant body of doctrine was transmitted to subsequent centuries in widely disseminated reference books and religious manuals. An encounter is staged between a bereaved father and an adult female figure who turns out to be his baby daughter, envisioned in anticipation of the mature corporeal appearance that she will take on following the General Resurrection. A marvel indeed, but one quite explicable with reference to the theology of the future “time of glory”—though rarely, if ever, has such theology been presented with the emotional sensitivity and narrative power that marks this “talle farande” (“wonderful tale,” line 865).3

Peter Lombard’s Libri sententiarum, that textbook which, from the 1220s onwards, every theology student had to read, asserts that we need not doubt that a young child, “which was so small at birth,” will be “so great at the Resurrection.” For God will multiply that substance from itself, like the five loaves with which Christ fed five thousand people (Mark 6:35–44; John 6:5–13) and the rib from which Eve was made (Gen. 2:21–22).4 Further, resurrected bodies will maintain—any deformities apart—the distinguishing features they had while alive, thereby preserving their integritas (wholeness). This must mean that a child’s body in its “multiplied” form will bear some resemblance to its

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appearance at the time of its death. Therefore in *Pearl* it is quite appropriate that the bereaved father should recognize the child who died so small ("I knew hyr wel," 164), even as the wonderful *claritas* or brightness of her (future) resurrection body gladdens his spirit.

> The more I frayste hyr fayre face,
> Her fygure fyn quen I had fonte,
> Suche gladande glory con to me glace
> As lyttel byfore þerto watz wonte. (169–72)

His daughter stands before him in her glorified “fygure”: almost a heart-stopping moment ("Such a burre myȝt make myn herte blunt," 176) for a parent who has long lamented her loss.

But will their earthly relationship as father and daughter survive, in some form or other, however exalted; is there any hope of a reunion of family (and friends) beyond the grave? According to the learned and lively book *Heaven: A History*, which Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang first published in 1988, during the early modern period friends “became an important ingredient of paradise”; “the restored paradise garden, the new Jerusalem, and heavenly love were redefined and brought into a new configuration. Without losing its divine center, heaven became more worldly, more human.” Sometimes this took quite extreme forms, as when “the new theology envisioned heaven as a place of erotic human love in the bucolic setting of a comfortable natural landscape.” The “new theology” McDannell and Lang have in mind here is the counter-Reformation theology of Catholic Europe—which, it would seem, bespeaks posthumous relationships that have advanced far beyond the one Dante imagined as possible between himself and Beatrice. Indeed, the possibility of seeing dead family and friends again in heaven is an interest that runs throughout this book; the authors place considerable emphasis on the influence of Cicero’s *De Senectute* and *Somnium Scipionis*, as having popularized the classical belief in family reunions beyond the grave, featuring “the long-established dead” greeting “new arrivals in the netherworld.”

In the later Middle Ages, things were rather different; the intellectual trends are diverse, and hard to chart. A general monastic tendency to see

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6. Ibid., p. 60. It was precisely such belief that Christian theology of the afterlife sought to counter, by emphasizing conversion and individual salvation rather than lineage, thereby effecting a major disruption of kinship structures.
heaven (including the “new heaven” that, together with the “new earth,” will exist after the General Resurrection)\(^7\) as a parallel to, indeed a sort of extension of, a monastic community of spiritual brothers, was subjected to rigorous analysis within scholasticism. A good example is afforded by the passage in the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) that addresses the issue of whether friendship is an aspect of the resurrection community of blessed souls. Aquinas takes the rigorous line that in the *patria*, our future Fatherland, the fellowship of others (*societas amicorum*) will not, strictly speaking, be necessary for happiness. Man needs God alone; a human being “is wholly and completely fulfilled” in Him. But Aquinas does allow heavenly fellowship a place, albeit a secondary and circumscribed one, when he says it is certainly conducive to “the well-being of happiness” (*ad bene esse beatitudinis*).\(^8\) At which point Aquinas quotes Augustine as saying that the blessed will “see one another and rejoice in God, at their fellowship.”\(^9\)

Peter Lombard had gone further by remarking that, “through the charity which shall be perfect in each of them, each will rejoice in another’s good as much as he would rejoice if he had it in himself.”\(^10\) This statement takes us quite close to the priorities of *Pearl*. The elevated daughter tells her literalistic and earthbound father that the court of the kingdom of heaven has a special property: it is a totally uncompetitive place.

\[\ldots\] neuer oþer ȝat schal depyue,  
    But vchon fayn of operez hafyng,  
    And wolde her corounez wern worþe þo fyue,  
    If possyble\(^\text{ii}\) were her mendyng. (449–52)

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7. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth was gone” (Apoc. 21:1). Cf. Isaiah 65:17: “Behold I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be in remembrance.”


11. Of course, this is purely hypothetical. No such improvement is possible, since the hierarchical disposition of the Heavenly Paradise is fixed forever.
We are all members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, the Pearl maiden continues (457–68). Just as there is no “hate” or “gawle” (hatred or bitterness) between the members of one’s own body, so that the head does not resent the arm or finger being adorned with a ring, in the same way we all behavior “wyth luf and lyste” (with love and joy) toward our fellow queens and kings of heaven.

Augustine had used a similar body metaphor to explain how the blessed are incapable of feeling jealous of each other:

No one will wish to have what he has not received, and he will be bound in a bond of uttermost peace to one who has received it; just as, in the body, the finger does not wish to be the eye, since both members are contained within the ordered composition of the whole body.\textsuperscript{12}

A fuller, and particularly influential, formulation was produced by Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109) and his circle. Indeed, it is probably correct to say that Anselm was the thinker responsible for the single most influential account of postmortem community to have been produced in the High Middle Ages. His ideas found favor with thinkers as different as the great Franciscan master St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) and the divisive \textit{doctor evangelicus} John Wyclif (d. 1384); here is a fascinating instance of how aspects of monastic theology could be retained and redeployed within scholasticism. In the collection of Anselm’s discourses that was compiled by his secretary Alexander of Canterbury (fl. 1100–1109), it is explained that all the members of the human body “havyth bytwene hem ful gret acordynge to gadere” (here I follow the fifteenth-century Middle English translation).\textsuperscript{13} The feet continue to work for the whole body even though they may “be hurte and blede throw scharpe thornis and stonys.” Similarly, the hand will not refuse to work for the body because it is wounded, and even if “the honde make a wounde in the fote with an axe” the foot is not moved to anger against the hand,

for they beth so yknytte to gedere with acordynge of love that they may not discordye bytwene hem sif by no maner weye, for that that is do to eny of hem, hit is do to eche of hem.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 102–3.
Such superlative amity will also be a feature of our future paradise—where no lesser form of loving *concordia* is to be expected.

This schal the acordynge be in thylke blessed contrey of hevyn, where schal no filthe of dissension be founde, where God schal be sovereyn abofe al, and ilovyd most of hem alle abofe al other; for in certeyn, lasse a concorde schal nost be had amonge seyntys of God, weche beth Cristis membris, than is founde in the corruptible body of men that lyveyth here in eorthe, but hit schal be muche bettur and more precious whan hit is ste\a/bilid, for hit schal nevere have ende.\(^5\)

These Anselmian ideas feature prominently in that most popular of all Middle English poems, *The Prick of Conscience*, including its account of the second type of happiness that blessed souls and bodies (reunited after the General Resurrection) will experience, namely “frendschepe and parfyte love.” This is far superior to anything that can be experienced here on earth, and it will never fail but last forever, because

\[
\ldots \text{als ilka lym of a body} \\
\text{Lufes alle þe other lyms kyndely,} \\
\text{And yhernes, ay, grely þair hele,} \\
\text{Swa parfyte þat luf salle be and lele;} \\
\text{Ffor þai salle alle be of ane assent} \\
\text{And of a wille and of ane entent;} \\
\text{Ffor þai salle be þan alle als a body} \\
\text{In sere lyms, and als a saule anely;} \\
\text{And God þair heved salle þare,} \\
\text{þat salle þam luf als mykelle or mare,} \\
\text{Als dose þe heved of þe body þat loves} \\
\text{þe lyms kyndely þat on it moves. (8377–98)}^{16,17}
\]

However, even this forceful discourse is transcended in the claim—made in the *Dicta Anselmi* and also featuring prominently in Anselm’s *Proslogion*\(^8\)—that the *concordia sanctorum* is such that one blessed soul is gladdened by

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15. Ibid., p. 103.
the happiness experienced by another; “each will rejoice for every other as for himself” in that place “where no one will love another less than himself.”

In certeyn, ȝif hit were so, that eny man that thou lovyst as muche as thou dost thy silf had that blessidnys that is aforesaid, than thy joye schuld be dowbelyd ther throw, for thou woldist be as glad of hys joye as thou woldist of thyn owen blisse; and if hit were so, that tweyn, or thre, or many mo of thy frendys had the same joye and blisseydnys, and if thou lovedist eche of hem as muche as thy silf, thou woldys have as muche gladnys for everych of hem as thou woldist have for thyself.¹⁹

This ability to wish a friend more joy than he or she already has is quite reminiscent of the Pearl maiden’s statement that she and her heavenly companions take pleasure in other souls’ enjoyment, and indeed desire that they should have even more. (The Prick of Conscience places a somewhat different emphasis, on the notion that blessed souls will know each other and “fele other mens ioy als þair awen” in that place where “mare ioy and blys moght never be,” that is, where happiness is so great that it cannot be any better.)²⁰ And I believe it underlies Peter Lombard’s assertion (as quoted above) that “each will rejoice in another’s good as much as he would rejoice if he had it in himself.”

Powerful words indeed. However, none of these arguments may be taken as meaning that “the joy of all shall be equal,” as the Lombard makes quite clear. For such a claim would mean that “the blessedness of all is equal,” a line of reasoning that must be rejected. Peter resolves the matter by declaring that the joy of the blessed does not imply an equality of knowledge, and therefore “parity of joy will not bring about parity of blessedness.”²¹ His commentators emphasized that the Beatific Vision of God will not be experienced by all the blessed in equal measure.

In Pearl this issue is addressed in a particularly acute form, through an extensive retelling of the Parable of the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16). Here Christ likens the kingdom of heaven to the situation in which a householder gives all his laborers the same reward of one penny, even though some have “borne the burden of the day and the heats” while others have entered the vineyard only “about the eleventh hour” (20:12, 9). The Pearl maiden, who obviously belongs within the group of latecomers, ardently justifies her penny on

the grounds that there is no question of “more and lasse” in God’s kingdom (601–2). God is no niggard; so abundant is his grace that infants who die shortly after their baptism are welcomed into the vineyard and will receive their reward in full.

Some of the poem’s modern readers have wondered if, at this point, it is indeed advocating an equality of heavenly reward. Carleton Brown suspected that the Pearl poet, relying on his allegedly “evangelical” interpretation of the biblical text, ventured “to reject the casuistries of scholastic theology” and, at least in this respect, offered “a most interesting and remarkable anticipation of sixteenth-century Protestantism.”

Presumably Brown had in mind the theocentric heaven envisaged by the Protestant reformers, in accordance with which “eternal life” is seen “primarily as the individual’s unsurpassed communion with God.” Thus John Calvin read the Parable of the Vineyard in predestinarian terms, as an illustration of the way in which God awards equal reward for unequal labor, and as a refutation of any notion of the righteousness of works. Calvin remarks that each person will receive a special reward, but that does not mean that a hierarchical structure of reward (as per the Roman Catholic model) is in place. Furthermore, because heavenly reward is dependent on a direct relationship between God and each and every man, the relationship those men have with each other, whether on earth or in heaven, is of little importance.

This must suffice as an attempt to elucidate Brown’s thinking. But already it is clear that there is nothing like that in Pearl. Rather, as I now hope to show, the poem’s treatment of the Parable of the Vineyard is quite consonant with a standard late-medieval interpretation of that passage, whereby the blessed are believed to share Our Father’s house and live in blissful fellowship within it, while accepting that it contains many mansions.

Once again a useful guide may be found in Peter Lombard, who provided successive generations of commentators with a means of contextualizing Matthew 20:1–16 and reconciling it with John 14:2 (“In my Father’s house there are many mansions”). Those “many mansions” refer to differences of reward in heaven, Peter explains. And yet, on the other hand, “all the elect shall have the same coin which the Head of the household gave to all who worked in the vineyard.” Here is his deft resolution of the apparent discrepancy.

23. Calvin, Institutes, iii.18, 3. Interestingly, here Calvin places considerable weight on Prosper of Aquitaine’s De vocatione omnium gentium, i.17, applying it for his own purpose.
24. Ibid., iii.25, 10.
By this term coin is understood something which is common to all the elect, namely eternal life—God Himself, whom all will enjoy, but unequally. Indeed, just as there will be different degrees of brightness in each body, so also of glory in each soul. *For star shall differ from star*, that is, elect from elect, *in brightness* of mind and body [cf. 1 Cor. 15:41]. Indeed, some shall contemplate God’s beauty more closely and with greater clarity, and this very difference in contemplation is called a diversity of mansions. And so the house is one, that is, the coin is one, but there is a diversity of mansions in it, that is, a difference of glory [*claritas*]. The highest good, blessedness, and life of all, is one and the same—namely God Himself. All the elect shall enjoy this good, but some more fully than others.26

To draw on St. Thomas’s relevant discussion, all those who enter the kingdom of heaven share the “essential” or “common” reward, which is beatitude itself.27 But, as Aquinas emphasizes, this is quite compatible with differences in the rewards which add to the glory of beatitude—such as, we may add, the aureole of virginity with which the Pearl maiden has been crowned, this being one indicator (among many) that the poet is acutely aware of the hierarchical organization of heaven. The blessed may be equal inasmuch as all of them are beatified, but some are more equal than others in respect of higher reward and the extent to which they participate in beatitude. Being awarded the aureole of virginity, crowned a queen in heaven, does not mean that the maiden has


27. Cf. the partial summary of the Latin text by Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 70–71; the Middle English version is summarized on pp. 74–75. The tale is set in Cork, and said to be the work of one Marcus, an Irish Benedictine monk from Cashel, who had moved to the Cistercian house of St. James in Regensburg. Nigel Palmer, whose study concentrates on the Dutch and German translations, lists 154 surviving Latin manuscripts, in addition to many adaptations and extracts. Of particular importance is the abridgment by the Cistercian monk Helinand of Froidmont (c. 1160—after 1229), which was known to Vincent of Beauvais and adapted in his *Speculum historiale*. See Nigel Palmer, “*Visio Tnugdali*”: The German and Dutch Translations and Circulation in the Later Middle Ages, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 76 (Munich: Artemis, 1982), pp. 19–20. On the magnificent illuminated version of a French translation which was made c. 1470 for Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy (now Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS 30), see Thomas Kren and Roger S. Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal from the Library of Margaret of York* (Malibu, CA: Getty Museum, 1990), and Thomas Kren (ed.), *Margaret of York, Simon Marmion, and the Visions of Tondal: Papers delivered at a Symposium organized by the Department of Manuscripts of the J. Paul Getty Museum in collaboration with the Huntington Library and Art Collections, June 21–24, 1990* (Malibu, CA: Getty Museum, 1992).
usurped the position rightly occupied by the Virgin Mary—this idea, as stumblingly suggested by her father, quite horrifies her.

“Cortayse quen,” þenne sayde þat gaye,
Knelande to grounde, folde vp hyr face,
“Makelez moder and myriest may,
Blessed bygynner of vch a grace!”
Þenne ros ho vp and con restay,
And speke me towarde in þat space:
“Sire, fele here porchasez and fongez pray,
Bot supplantorez none withinne þys place;
Þat emperise al heuenz hatz—
And vrþe and helle—in her bayly;
Of erytage ȝet non wyl ho chace,
For ho is quen of cortaysye.” (433–44)

Mary is the queen of “cortaysye” (the term denoting both aristocratic courtesy and divine grace), with all earth and heaven in her dominion (433–42); no one can, or would attempt to, supplant her. Her position as “emperi se” is unchallenged. Some enjoy God more perfectly than the Pearl maiden possibly can, and she knows it—“‘makelez quene’ [matchless queen] þenne sade I not” (784). The point is rather that she is more than contented with her lot. The Virgin Mary does not begrudge the reward that the Pearl maiden is enjoying, even as she herself enjoys much more. And such is the extent of amicitia and concordia in this jewel-box of a heaven that the maiden can wish that the crowns of her familiars were five times as precious.

What, then, of the relationship between heavenly and earthly societies—indeed, is there one? In Pearl, family values are not singled out for a special merit-award in heavenly society. This is in intriguing contrast with what happens in that most popular of all late-medieval visionary texts, the Visio Tnugdali (dated 1149 by the author of the Latin original), which enjoyed a quite astonishing dissemination, both in its original form (together with several Latin adaptations) and in its many translations—at least forty-three in fifteen languages, including French, Dutch, German, Icelandic, and English. This recounts how a powerful but cruel Irish nobleman—variously named “Tnugdalus,” “Tunaldus,” or (as in the Middle English translation I will follow here) “Tundale”28—is shown the error of his ways. Having being led through the

28. The Vision of Tundale, lines 2135–48, in Three Purgatory Poems, ed. Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2004), pp. 247–48. This account goes beyond the original Latin; Visio Tnugdali: Lateinisch und Alteutsch, ed. Albrecht Wagner (Erlangen: Deichert,
pains of hell and the pleasures of heaven by an angel, finally Tundale experiences a brief glimpse of the Holy Trinity and witnesses angels basking in the radiance of the face of God, before being ejected because he—far from being a holy virgin—is unworthy to dwell there.

One of the strangest regions of the paradise visited by Tundale is protected by an elaborately adorned silver wall, which lacks any door. However, some divine power leads him beyond it, to a “full delyttabull place / fulle of murthe and solace,” where “mony a mon and woman,” wearing clothes which were “precyows and new, / As whytte as snow that ever dyd snew,” sing “muryly” in praise of God (1757–58, 1767–68). They are a quite jolly lot, “joyfull and blythe ynogh,” making merry and laughing (1769–70). Tundale’s guide identifies them as the souls of the faithfully married, who stayed true to one another without committing adultery, ruling their families well and being liberal in their almsgiving.

“This joy,” quod the angyll bryght,
“Hathe God ordeynyd for weddyd men ryght
That levon in cleyne maryage
And keputhe hor bodys from owttrage,
And for hom that hor gudds gevyn
Too the pore that in myscheff levyn,
And for hom that techon dylygenly
Hor sogettus to lovyn God allmyghty
And chastyn hom aftur hor myght
When they don wrong and lyffe not right,
And for hom that Holy Chyrche honowrys
And mayntenyth hom and sockors.” (1787–96)  

At the Last Judgment, continues the angel, God will welcome these souls into his kingdom, as a father welcomes his blessed children (1797–802). Deeply

1882), pp. 52–53. Earlier in the Latin text, it was made clear that Tundale may not be among those souls who enjoy the presence of the Holy Trinity; cf. Visio Tnugdali, ed. Wagner, p. 49. The Middle English poet does translate that passage (lines 1945–54; pp. 242–43) but subsequently seems to ignore its significance.

30. Ibid., p. 238.
31. This is a text in which a special place in paradise is set aside for the Irish kings Cantaber (Conor O’Brien) and Donatus (Donough MacCarthy), together with the renowned Cormake (Cormac MacCarthy), who is especially well known to Tundale. It is true that all of them have some suffering left to do, but their future total happiness seems assured. An instance of local nepotism, extending even up to heaven?
impressed, Tundale asks to be allowed to remain in this place, but the angel refuses; they have other places to visit and other souls to see, those of saints who are enjoying even greater rewards. But there is no doubt of the author’s high valuation of law-abiding marriage.

The many ways in which the Visio Tnugdali diverges from standard theological accounts of the Other World has often been noted; here is “vernacular theology” of a quite distinctive kind—presumably due, in some measure, to its Celtic origins. But the extent of that divergence should not be exaggerated, inasmuch as its fundamental realization of paradisal pleasures and hellish torments has obvious affinities with more traditional fare. And in a chronicle written around the middle of the fourteenth century by the Dominican Henry of Hereford, we read that Pope John XXII—who controversially claimed that blessed souls do not enjoy full Beatific Vision until they reach the patria—regarded the Visio Tnugdali as a genuine divinely sent vision, and one that (rather conveniently) confirmed his own views. Indeed, according to Henry, Pope John, on having heard of Tundale’s escapades, himself experienced in a dream the very same vision. As a record of an event in the pope’s life, this account is hardly believable, but as a record of how at least one learned friar could reconcile an eccentric, populist text with abstruse scholastic speculation, it is quite compelling. For a moment at least, the distinctions usually drawn between high-cultural intellectual analysis and the telling of tales cease to matter. But the Visio Tnugdali’s elevation of faithful marriage to a heavenly location remains unusual, to say the least, irrespective of the perspective within which it is placed.

Family values also enjoy a (brief) moment of glory in canto 14 of Dante’s Paradiso, where the General Resurrection is confidently anticipated. Solomon looks forward to the time when he, and the other souls in the sphere of the sun, will be joyously reunited with their own bodies—and also, perhaps, witness the happiness of others.

... che ben mostrar disio d’i corpi morti:
forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme,
per li padre e per li altri che fuor cari
anzi che fosser sempiterne fiamme. (Paradiso, XIV, 63–66)

[... Truly they showed desire for their dead bodies—perhaps not only for

themselves, but also for their mothers, for their fathers, and for the others who were dear before they [i.e., the saints] became eternal flames.]\textsuperscript{34}

That is to say, these saints and scholars may be envisaging the joy that their loved ones will experience when they receive their blessed bodies. The emphasis is on the shared nature of this future glorification, as parents and children are reunited, friends with friends—and they will know each other, since (in accord with standard resurrection theology) their bodies will be recognizable, their identities distinct.\textsuperscript{35} That all-important forse (“perhaps,” “maybe”) keeps this thought, precisely speaking, within the realm of the tentative. But its power is undiminished. The inconvenient truth that not all those “others who were dear” may achieve beatitude is quietly ignored, as Dante enables the future societas amicorum to be imagined as a big family get-together.\textsuperscript{36}

The contrast with \textit{Pearl} is striking. The Middle English poem follows the scholastic line that, in the land beyond death—in heaven and subsequently in the patria—familial ties and merely human affections of love (including friendship) count for little if anything in terms of status and happiness. But of course, good deeds will always be liable for reward, irrespective of the social context within which they are performed, and this principle includes the family situation. And it is important to note that our feelings for family and friends are not necessarily erased in the other world. Even though in a heaven of disembodied souls the human memory cannot function (for it needs a body to function), the intellect—where knowledge resides—will survive death intact, and preserve what we might, speaking loosely, refer to as happy memories. Separated souls have knowledge of singulars, says Aqui-


\textsuperscript{35} It would be quite reductive, and historically inaccurate, to see here a poet infusing a measure of human warmth (or whatever emotionalizing phrase one prefers to use here) into stern scholastic doctrine. For on many occasions scholastic doctrine concerning the patria itself admits a measure of human warmth, in part due to its monastic heritage (as illustrated above) but also because of the Aristotelian theories of epistemology and psychology in which the schoolmen invested so heavily, thought-systems that afforded considerable value to sense perception in the processes of gaining and using knowledge. Conversely, when writing about the other world, late-medieval poets—the \textit{Pearl} poet being an obvious example—could be as rigorous as the sternest of schoolmen. Some discussion of those large issues is included in my monograph \textit{From Eden to Eternity: Creations of Paradise in the Later Middle Ages} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

nas, “by being made somehow determinate with respect to them, whether by a vestige of previous knowledge (cognitio) or affection (affectio), or by divine dispensation”; he finds it highly unlikely that they are “ignorant of things that happen among the living on earth.” Such knowledge, one may infer, remains with those souls when, joyously reunited with their bodies, they enter the patria. Aquinas and his fellow theologians were fond of quoting Abraham’s words to Dives in Hell, “Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime” (Luke 16:25), which they took as evidence that souls were indeed aware of good (and bad) experiences from their days on earth. (One complication: as a divine kindness a saint’s memory of his sins may be obliterated, or at least removed of the power to hurt—this issue was raised by Peter Lombard, and the subject of some debate.)

All of that having been said, heaven is a foreign country, and they do things differently there. Pearl is adamant about that. When the bereaved father tries to treat his daughter as a little girl (who, he worries, cannot possibly have deserved the heavenly reward she now claims to be enjoying), she responds in a lofty manner, even evincing some surprise at her interlocutor’s earthly obtuseness. Sir, she tells him brusquely, you have “your tale mysetente,” mistold your tale (257). Quite evidently, the child is now father of the man; this precious pearl belongs with the prince of heaven, rather with her uncomprehending parent. Their communication gap marks a clear division between earth and heaven. The Pearl maiden has no special favors to offer her relative; in her heaven there is no mansion set aside for family occupation. Unlike the first-person narrators of the Visio Tnugdali and Comedia, the Dreamer remains on his side of the paradisal river, granted only a brief glimpse of his daughter’s eternal happiness rather than an extensive tour of the other world. Before he can traverse that very real barrier he must taste death. His “corse in clot mot calder keve” (his body must go down, colder than it is now, into clay),

“For hit watz forgarte at paradys greue;
Oure ȝorefader hit con mysseȝeme.”

37. Aquinas’s own discussion is at Summa theologiae, 1a, qu. 89, art. 6 (xii, 154–59).
39. That is, Adam, who in the Garden of Eden brought the human body to ruin. As a consequence, each and every man must endure dire death before the Lord will allow him to cross this water.
40. Another possible influence might be the river Acheron of pagan mythology, across which Charon transported the shades of the dead into the underworld, which medieval Christians knew about from book VI of Virgil’s Aeneid. It appears in Dante’s Inferno, Canto III, as the river across which “wicked souls” are ferried to Hell, “into eternal darkness, into fire and cold”
Þurȝ drwry deth boz vch man dreue,
Er over þys dam hym Dryȝtyn deme.” (321–24)

Having dreamed his way back into a simulacrum of that lost paradise, an Edenic garden, the bereaved father figure looks across its banks to what he actually calls a “Paradyse.” The water seems to be a “deuyse” (division) made “bytwene myrþez” (between joys), firmly separating one place of pleasure from the other (137–40).

This uncrossable stream might be intended to recall one of the rivers of Eden. Or, as is more likely, I believe, it alludes to the “river of water of life, clear as crystal,” which Apocalypse 22:1 describes as “proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (and is specifically mentioned at Pearl, 1055–60;41 this biblical passage may also lie behind the Well of Life in the Visio Tnugdali). Apocalypse continues: “on both sides of the river, was the tree of life (lignum vitae), bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month: the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations” (22:2). The Glossa ordinaria emphasizes the differences between the two sides of the riverbank,42 in terms reminiscent of the Pearl poet’s devyse. On one side of the river is this present life, where we are now—in via, on the road to glory. On the other side is the homeland of beatitude. Spiritual refreshment is available on both sides. Here we have the lignum vitae, that is, the body and blood of Christ, to revive us. There we have the presence of Christ Himself.43 This very distinction is consolidated at the end of Pearl, when the Dreamer recognizes that he does not (at least not yet) belong in the “fayre regioun” (1178) on the other side of the river, with his beloved daughter and the “Prynce” Himself. What he does have, in via, is Christ in the form of bread and wine; the everyday wonder of

(84, 86–87), this being in marked contrast with the Pearl poet’s river, which forms the border with his imaginations of the Heavenly Paradise.

41. Biblia Sacra cum Glossa ordinaria et Postilla Nicolai Lyrani (Venice: Apud Magnam Societatem, 1603), vi, cols. 1685–86. In contrast, the commentary of Nicholas of Lyre (d. 1349) stresses the similarities: the entire community of the blessed is refreshed and fed with the divine banquet on both sides of the river, and as its members come together in the middle of the street (col. 1685).

42. Here the Glossa draws on the Apocalypse commentaries of Berengaudus/Bernegaudus (fl. 840–92?) and St. Martin of Leon (d. 1203). Cf. the texts in Patrologia Latina, 17, col. 962C, and Patrologia Latina, 209, 413C–D. On the shadowy but highly influential Berengaudus, see Derk Visser, Apocalypse as Utopian Expectation (800–1500): The Apocalypse Commentary of Berengaudus of Ferrières and the Relationship between Exegesis, Liturgy, and Iconography (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Visser offers his tentative conclusion regarding his author’s dates on pp. 93–94.

43. This phrase appears frequently in addresses from parent to child in the late Middle Ages; see Norman Davis, “A Note on Pearl,” Review of English Studies, n.s., 17 (1966): 403–5, and 18 (1967): 294.
transubstantiation. The bereaved father must rest content with that and leave his precious pearl in God’s hands (literally, in God’s blessing—and indeed in his own), confident in the knowledge that God has granted us the gift of being his trusted household servants, and precious pearls to use and reward as He wishes.

... to God I hit bytaȝte,
In Krystez dere blessyng and myn,\textsuperscript{44}
Þat in þe forme of bred and wyn
Þe preste vus scheweþ vch a daye.
He gef vus to be His homly hyne
And precious perlez vnto His pay. (1207–12)

Thus Pearl, like “The Unquiet Grave,” advises patient acceptance of the transitory nature of all earthly things, until God calls the speaker away to his own death. In the meantime, the Dreamer has more life yet to live, many tests still to face. As he leaves us he seems indeed to have made himself content, to have attained a considerable measure of patience. Pleasing the heavenly prince and being reconciled to Him is, he now claims, “full ëþe”—very easy—for the good Christian. The reference is to good Christians in general. For his part, the Dreamer has found Him, “boþe day and naȝte,” “A God, A Lorde, a frenде ful fyin” [fine, perfect] (1201–4). There is no complacency, and certainly no arrogance, in those words—rather we hear the voice of a man who has well-founded faith in a “Lorde” who keeps his promises.

\textsuperscript{44} This remark has struck David Aers as “stunning” and “strange,” “theologically superficial and psychologically superficial.” Indeed, he finds here an “act of defiant rebellion” symptomatic of that “competitive individualism” endemic in earthly courts and which, throughout the poem, has served as a barrier to the Dreamer’s comprehension of the Maiden’s teaching. See “The Self Mourning: Reflections on Pearl,” Speculum 68.1 (1993): 54–73 (esp. pp. 71–73). In Aers’s reading, the Dreamer has tenaciously and aggressively asserted his memories of his daughter as a little girl, of the time when he held the dominant paternal/patriarchal position. This figure has been unable to shrug off “a fantasy of total possession,” the desire for an exclusive reunion and a life with her alone, all of which is in sharp conflict with the doctrines of Christian community and the communion of Saints. Only in the last few verses of the poem—too little too late, in Aers’s view—do we have any acknowledgment of the Church and its supreme sacrament, the Eucharist. However, it may be noted that while the heavenly community presented in Pearl is uncompetitive, it is certainly not a place of equal shares. All its inhabitants enjoy the reward of salvation but are distinguished by the various degrees of merit they have earned and the various degrees of participation in the Beatific Vision they enjoy. Here is a hierarchy far more complicated, more finely tuned in the specificity of its differentiating details, than any parallel in the present world. So, to that extent, individualism, or at least individual (and individuating) possession of merit and reward, exists in heaven as it does on earth, though the heavenly version functions more smoothly, given that it is free from aggression and rivalry, every soul accepting its rank without rancor.
Of course, others have read *Pearl*, and the significance of its unquiet grave, quite differently.

There is nothing unquiet about her [the Pearl maiden’s] death and when she returns it is not as a disturbed spirit. The Jeweller, in contrast, is a ghostly figure; unable to leave his lost pearl, he haunts her. . . . The bereft Jeweller’s existence before his death is one of aimless drifting through a world devoid, for him, of meaning and substance, a living death.45

Thus Jane Gilbert, whose response is both cogent and affecting. However, I myself would place greater emphasis on the everyday wonder of eucharistic transubstantiation, which is no small thing. Its availability on the Jeweler’s side of the river ensures that he need not suffer a living death; thus at the poem’s end there is no evidence of a world devoid of meaning and substance. Rather the Dreamer is presented as a wayfarer on the pilgrimage of life, a journey with clear directions and a known destination, the state of glory. This poem may begin with a grief-stricken father who is drifting aimlessly, but it proceeds to offer a vision of life beyond death—a life not only of the soul but also of the body, wherein flesh and spirit reunite. The grave is unquiet inasmuch as the body it holds desires to return to the soul that once animated it, even as the soul wants to rejoin its beloved body and no other (which may be likened to the way in which a man desires his beloved woman and no other, according to St. Bonaventure’s discussion of the Resurrection).46

Dante configures the future *societas amicorum* as a reunion of friends and family. The *Pearl* poet does something rather different, and more obviously in keeping with certain doctrines of the kind dismissed by Carleton Brown as “the casuistries of scholastic theology.” He dramatizes how the earthly bond of father and daughter is superseded by the generalized hierarchical relationships of the heavenly community, which cannot allow the exclusive intimacy that two people may achieve in this present life. But—according to standard resurrection theology, theology of a type which I believe permeates the poem—something much better is in prospect, the *renovatio* in the *patria* of all that is good about earthly existence. One of *Pearl*’s crucial points is that heavenly love and friendship are far superior to anything possible on the old earth—and the conviction that the resurrection body (anticipated by the mature and

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glorious appearance of the Pearl maiden) will have an ample share of such pleasures, strongly reinforces that message. The fact of the General Resurrection—a nonnegotiable tenet of Christian belief—ensures that in the final analysis we cannot speak of an “extremist Christian opposition between corporeal and spiritual life.” For in the future homeland, the paradise beyond death, the Pearl maiden will take on material form—looking not unlike she does in the Jeweler’s dream, one may imagine, but now more substantial than the stuff that dreams are made on.

*Pearl* offers a quite robust response to that desire for the postmortem persistence of family ties that has been such an abiding component of popular narrative and theological speculation alike. Yet it is movingly confident that, given the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, the Dreamer may hope that one day he will see his daughter again.

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