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The Process of Salvation in *Pearl* and *The Great Divorce*

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Abstract

Analyzes the structural, aesthetic, and thematic parallels between C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* and the Middle English dream vision *Pearl*. By exploring the tension between worldly and heavenly conceptions of justice, value, and possession in *The Great Divorce* and *Pearl*, this study demonstrates Lewis's skill at utilizing and updating medieval source material in order to respond to twentieth-century problems.

Additional Keywords

Pearl (poem)—Characters—The Jeweler; Dream visions; Medieval dream vision—Relation to *The Great Divorce*; Lewis, C.S. *The Great Divorce*; Lewis, C.S. *The Great Divorce*—Sources

Cover Page Footnote

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THE PROCESS OF SALVATION IN
PEARL AND THE GREAT DIVORCE

ACOMBER DUNAI

*The Happy Trinity is her home: nothing can trouble her joy.
She is the bird that evades every net: the wild deer that leaps every pitfall.
Like the mother bird to its chickens or a shield to the arm'd knight: so is the Lord
to her mind, in His unchanging lucidity.
Bogies will not scare her in the dark: bullets will not frighten her in the day.
Falsehoods tricked out as truths assail her in vain: she sees through the lie as if
it were glass.
The invisible germ will not harm her: nor yet the glittering sun-stroke.
A thousand fail to solve the problem, ten thousand choose the wrong turning:
but she passes safely through.
He details immortal gods to attend her: upon every road where she must travel.
They take her hand at hard places: she will not stub her toes in the dark.
She may walk among Lions and rattlesnakes: among dinosaurs and nurseries of
lionets.
He fills her brim-full with immensity of life: he leads her to see the world's desire.
(The Great Divorce 134)*

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ADAPT MEDIEVAL LITERARY FORMS to the modern world? How can poetry centuries old reflect modern values, problems, or desires? The passage above, featured in C.S. Lewis's visionary fantasy novel, *The Great Divorce*, approaches these questions by infusing lyrical structure with modern references, at points to disorienting and even comical effect. As the song progresses, the tonally discordant references to threats rendered somewhat absurd through their familiarity, such as rattlesnakes and stubbed toes, multiply, reminding the audience that despite the medieval flavor of the novel's dream setting, the cast of characters is very much of the same world as the reader. Knights with their arms are juxtaposed with bullets, fierce lions with dinosaurs. That modern source of fright, the invisible germ, is rendered equally powerless to harm the Lady. These eccentric lines are sung by the retinue of a twentieth-century Beatrice in her honor; this Beatrice, however, is marked not by her sublime beauty, but by her ability to show extraordinary measures of love in the midst of everyday tasks. The familiar and yet frightening bullets of the song are evoked once again in the dream vision narrator's waking moments

as the visionary sequence fades from view: "I awoke in a cold room, hunched on the floor beside a black and empty grate, the clock striking three, and the siren howling overhead" (146). The supernatural dread summoned by the dream's apocalyptic conclusion is replaced by fear of becoming a casualty of war. The modern world haunts Lewis's novel, peeking out at the corners and startling the reader out of a sense of comfort or distance precisely through its incongruity with the visionary setting.

This essay will discuss Lewis's use of the medieval dream vision as a device for his exploration of the choices which he argues determine each soul's eternal destination. In the preface to *The Great Divorce*, Lewis presents these choices in terms of an inevitable "either/or": a series of decisions in favor of good or evil, heaven or hell (vii-viii). I will argue that through his adoption of the dream vision structure and through his pointed allusions to the fourteenth-century dream vision *Pearl*, Lewis is able to harness the genre's device of presenting visitors to visionary realms with instruction relevant to philosophical or spiritual problems that they face in the waking world. Furthermore, through direct allusion to the obstacles which *Pearl*'s narrator faces in his own visionary journey to the shores of New Jerusalem, Lewis is able to tease out spiritual struggles which likewise haunt his twentieth-century readers while incorporating "updates," like those in the lyrics cited above, to guide his readers to recognize the forms that modern stumbling blocks to salvation take. Lewis thus simultaneously utilizes the medieval dream vision structure while adapting its contents to twentieth-century problems.

A good many studies of Lewis's fantasy novels analyze them in terms of their considerable debts to and engagement with the medieval. Much work has been done identifying and analyzing *The Great Divorce*'s allusions to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.¹ Joe R. Christopher's "Considering *The Great Divorce*" is one such early study of medieval sources which establishes many important allusions to Dante in Lewis's novel, including the similarities between Dante's Beatrice and the *Divorce* narrator's guide figure, George MacDonald; parallels between Dante's guides and the Bright People, as well as between Dante's souls and Lewis's ghosts; and similarities between Sarah Smith (the subject of the song discussed above) and Beatrice (40-42). Other studies, such as Darlene Gonzalez's

¹ Lewis himself acknowledged the influence of *The Divine Comedy* on his novel. In two letters to William L. Kinter, Lewis discusses specific debts to Dante in *The Great Divorce*. In the March 28, 1953 letter, he mentions that the bus driver is modeled after the angel at the gates of Dis, and that the meeting between the Tragedian and Sarah Smith is modeled after the meeting of Dante with Beatrice (*Collected Letters* 313-314). The July 30, 1954 letter names the Dantean influence on the depiction of the bus driver as the "closest conscious debt to Dante" and also repeats the parallel between the Tragedian/Sarah Smith meeting and the Dante/Beatrice meeting (498).

“A Comparison of *The Divine Comedy* and *The Great Divorce*,” have continued to draw out and explore Dantean analogues for events and characters in Lewis’s novel. Christopher’s more recent article, “The Dantean Structure of *The Great Divorce*,” performs a structural analysis of the novel which analyzes its organization of events and themes in relation to those of *The Divine Comedy*. This study concludes that Lewis’s representation of Dante’s structure in *The Great Divorce* is complex and “clever, enhancing the content but not overwhelming it, revealing the dream-vision tradition but not turning it into mechanical imitation, paying homage to Dante’s great work without requiring readers to know it” (94). Thus, Lewis’s debt to Dante is recognized alongside his innovations to the source material.

Robert Boenig’s approach to *The Great Divorce*’s engagement with medieval sources diverges from those which focus chiefly on Dante’s influence on the novel. In his 1983 *Mythlore* article,² revisited in his 2012 monograph, *C.S. Lewis and the Middle Ages*, Boenig identifies the structural, aesthetic, and thematic elements of the medieval dream vision in *The Great Divorce*. Boenig, rather than centering his analysis on Dante, contends that Lewis is “consciously appropriating the whole genre of the dream vision for his prior texts, not just Dante’s *Divine Comedy*” (99).³ *The Great Divorce*, he points out, follows the structure of the medieval dream vision thus: “a first-person persona of the author falls asleep and finds himself in a springtime garden where he meets a guide who points out the garden’s wonders and reveals, often through allegory, some kind of wisdom, usually somehow associated with love” (102). Accordingly, *The Great Divorce* follows its narrator on a voyage out of a grim city—as it turns out, hell—and into a beautiful natural landscape, where he and his travelling companions are met by brilliant guide figures who immediately set to work providing spiritual instruction to their former friends and family in hopes of acclimating them to the paradisaic setting. Lewis’s descriptions of nature and of the Bright People who inhabit it, Boenig demonstrates, are evocative of passages from *The Romance of the Rose* and the dream vision literature of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Lydgate. Boenig’s analysis of *The Great Divorce* does drive home an essential connection between Lewis’s novel and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; like Dante, Lewis deviates from centering his dream vision around romantic love, and instead directs its focus on divine love,

² “C.S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce* and the Medieval Dream Vision.”

³ I would be remiss here not to note that Joe R. Christopher also draws attention to the resemblance between *The Great Divorce* and non-Dantean dream visions, including *The Romance of the Rose* and Chaucer’s dream vision literature, in “Considering *The Great Divorce*.” However, Christopher’s study contends that Dante is Lewis’s primary source, and also argues that the qualities of the non-Dantean sources “must be taken as typical of their genre rather than as direct influences” (40).

agape. But this observation is tied to another, equally-important one: that Lewis does *not* join Dante in ejecting the more agreeable elements of the dream vision and its springtime garden “because the longings that this garden engenders in us amount to Joy. As such, it is redeemable” (110). It is these qualities which point away from Dante and toward more conventional dream vision literature, while also drawing out the ways in which Lewis both borrows from and alters his medieval sources.

In this study, I will follow Boenig’s lead by considering the ways in which a specific non-Dantean source, the fourteenth-century, Middle English dream vision, *Pearl*, bears on Lewis’s venture into visionary fantasy. I will argue that the events and theological conversations in *Pearl* bear a striking resemblance to those featured in *The Great Divorce*, and that reading the two works in dialogue with one another showcases Lewis’s skill in adapting medieval genres and content in complex and productive ways which serve the central message laid out in the preface to the novel. Thus, like Boenig and Christopher, I will focus on how Lewis’s allusions to this medieval source is marked not by simple imitation, but by complex representation which draws out the dream vision’s relevance to a twentieth-century readership. While Lewis follows Dante’s pattern of surrounding the narrator with spirits whose life experiences serve to illustrate moral truths, he departs from Dante by presenting both the narrator and his fellow ghosts with a looming “either/or”: the necessity of choosing to reside either in heaven or in hell (vii-ix). The ghosts, like the dreamer, are paired up with guide figures who present their charges with instruction designed to help the ghosts retrace their spiritual paths and set their courses for heaven, if they choose to do so. As Boenig demonstrates in *C.S. Lewis and the Middle Ages*, the need to make a moral choice is one of the main aspects of the dream vision adapted by Lewis, and, in *The Great Divorce*, this choice is linked directly to eternal judgment (106-108). Lewis’s allusions to and departures from *Pearl* serve to guide the novel’s readers in their approach to the modern problems tied up in their own “either/or” decisions.

Let us begin with a medieval visitor to the heavenly realm, rather lesser-known than Dante: the *Pearl*-poet’s Jeweler. *Pearl* opens with the narrator’s grief; despite its harvest setting and proximity to the feast day of the Assumption of Mary,⁴ the Jeweler has secluded himself in a garden, where he mourns his lost pearl. The “pearl” is a reference to a maiden, with whom the Jeweler is temporarily reunited after falling asleep on her grave. Although *Pearl* leaves some ambiguity as to the Jeweler’s relationship with the Pearl Maiden, she is usually taken to represent the narrator’s deceased daughter. The Jeweler’s grief makes it clear that she was very dear to him, and that their separation

⁴ See Petroff, “Landscape in *Pearl*: The Transformation of Nature.”

through her untimely death has brought him a great deal of pain. And while his temporary reunion with the Maiden brings him some comfort, it also exacerbates his suffering. The Maiden's appearance has changed; the Jeweler does not recognize her at first. Her transformation into one of the one hundred forty-four virgins of the Apocalypse has elevated her to a queen among queens in heaven. As if all this were not enough, she is physically separated from the Jeweler by a river which sunders the living from the dead. The pearl that the Jeweler had lost, now found, is scarcely recognizable. She cannot be returned to him, for he no longer has any claim on her. As a citizen of New Jerusalem, she is now beholden to its ruler, the Lamb, alone.

These sources of alienation and distress lead to a series of theological debates between the Jeweler and the Pearl Maiden which culminate in an act of desperation. After being granted a view of New Jerusalem, its citizens, and the Lamb in all their splendor, the Jeweler plunges into the river which separates him from the Maiden. This act is not an attempt to embrace the heavenly kingdom and its ruler; rather, the Jeweler admits to an overwhelming desire to force a reunion with the Maiden which he has been warned is impossible. He freely admits that he knows that his behavior is contrary to the Lamb's wishes, but he acts in a nearly suicidal state of mind, determined to follow through on his desire for the Maiden or perish in the attempt. While a good deal of willful behavior had been tolerated up to this point in the poem (namely, the Jeweler's repeated contradiction of the Pearl Maiden's theological arguments and his rejection of the heavenly order which has allowed her to claim the status of a queen despite her apparent youth), the Jeweler's failed attempt to cross the river abruptly ends his dream sequence. He is forced out of the dream and into a state of waking regret and contemplation. He understands now that true reunion with the Pearl Maiden can only occur after death, and so he penitently prepares for the journey to his eternal home.

That Lewis was familiar with *Pearl* is certain. He quotes it at the start of the eighth chapter of *Surprised by Joy*: "As Fortune is wont, at her chosen hour, / Whether she sends us solace or sore, / The wight to whom she shows her power / Will find that he gets still more and more" (143). Additionally, not only did his friend and colleague, J.R.R. Tolkien, produce his own translation of the poem, but Tolkien's appreciation of *Pearl* and Lewis's alleged antipathy toward it was apparently one of many sources of resentment stored up by Tolkien and recounted bitterly long after their friendship had cooled. Tolkien, in an account of Lewis's habitual bigotry toward and alienating comments about Catholicism, makes the claim that Lewis disliked *Pearl*. Further, he ties this dislike directly to Lewis's anti-Catholic sentiments, which make it impossible for Tolkien (according to Tolkien) to recite in Lewis's presence two lines of *Pearl*: "Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon, / Thise arn the grounde of alle my blysse"

(Carpenter 52). As noted above, the palpable resentment in this account makes it difficult to assess whether Lewis really was prejudiced against the poem. The presence of the quotation in *Surprised by Joy*, as Humphrey Carpenter suggests, would indicate otherwise. Furthermore, his use of the excerpt to head a chapter (appropriately titled "Release") which sees Lewis's "escape" from the detested Wyvern and from his troubled relationship with his father, and which sets the stage for the introduction of Lewis's own hugely-influential guide figure, William T. Kirkpatrick ("the Great Knock"), undermines the idea that Lewis detested *Pearl*.

Indeed, *The Great Divorce* includes many moments of aesthetic and thematic commonality with *Pearl*, which suggests a more direct connection than that which would naturally arise from their shared participation in the dream vision genre. Lewis's description of his paradise is dominated by references to its hardness and solidity. The landscape is a beautiful and inviting one, but it is simultaneously inhospitable to its ghostly visitors, who lack the corporeal form needed in order to interact with their environs.⁵ The grass is sharp as needles, the water a slick and formidable path. Lewis's narrator describes his struggle to walk on the water, which results in slips and discomfort: "Great flakes or islands of foam came swirling down towards me, bruising my shins like stones if I did not get out of their way" (45). Ironically, stones themselves prove the most comfortable walking surface for the ghostly narrator. Barbara Kowalik notes that Lewis's representation of nature, particularly his focus on its "hardness and brilliancy," resembles the jewel-dominated aesthetic of *Pearl* (85). The Jeweler's paradise is similarly marked by its gorgeous solidity. Besides the crystal cliffs "so cler of kynde" (line 74)⁶ ["so clear of hue"] (Tolkien 126) that he views upon "waking" into the dreamscape, he also encounters a hard walking surface worthy of Lewis's solid lands: "Pe grauayl pat on grounde con grynde / Wern precious perlez of oryente" (81-82) ["The gravel on ground that I trod with shoe / Was of precious pearls of the Orient"] (Tolkien 126). Leaves are described in terms of "burnished silver" (Tolkien 126), the river adorned with "banks of beryl bright" (127) through whose clear water pebbles of emerald, sapphire, and other gems can be glimpsed. This paradise does not only surpass those of the typical

⁵ Lewis names a forgotten science fiction story as the inspiration for this unbreakable landscape in the preface to *The Great Divorce*, and Douglas A. Anderson identifies this story as Charles F. Hall's "The Man Who Lived Backwards" in *Tales Before Narnia: The Roots of Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction* (283-84). While Hall's story is the conscious influence on this aspect of the setting, I would contend that *Pearl* can be read as an unconscious one.

⁶ All *Pearl* quotations in the original Middle English are taken from the fourth edition of Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron's *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (U of Exeter P, 2002).

courtly dream vision in splendor and riches (in addition to contrasting with the comparably mundane garden in which the Jeweler slumbers); it surpasses any feasible landscape of the natural world. Its hard and impossible beauty not only distinguishes it, but also suggests that mortal beings are not its natural inhabitants. Even the birds mentioned in lines 89-96 produce songs that defy compare. The Jeweler's inability to remain in such a setting is quickly confirmed through his conversation with the Pearl Maiden; her repeated corrections to his limited understanding drive home the fact that he is still too steeped in earthly concerns and customs to cross over to the heavenly side of the river which separates them. The threshold on which he stands cannot become a home; it is a liminal space between heaven and earth, and he has not yet experienced death. His side of the river is a temporary space for instruction which will lead to later contemplation.

In *Pearl*, three barriers to acceptance of the heavenly order characterize the Jeweler's disruptive behavior in his dream: his possessiveness of the Pearl Maiden, his rejection of her teaching in favor of his own understanding, and his firm adherence to earthly systems of justice and reward. While no one of Lewis's ghosts manifests all of the Jeweler's own spiritual and intellectual objections, these three characteristics are dominant in several of the visitors to Lewis's purgatory-paradise. Taken together, they help to construct a representation of salvation—the journey marked with “either/or” crossroads—as a work in progress: a gradual and often painful process of acquiring self-awareness and achieving true repentance. We rarely witness any one of the ghosts experiencing a truly radical change in behavior or outlook. We leave many in the throes of rebellion. While it may be easy to read the hostile ghosts as lost causes, however, Lewis, like the *Pearl*-poet, does not insist upon closure or finality in his representation of his unruly guests to paradise.

One of the chief problems that faces the heavenly guests in both *Pearl* and *The Great Divorce* is that of just desserts. The Jeweler's Maiden has become one of the one hundred forty-four virgins of the Apocalypse; she is, accordingly, clad in the fine array which draws the rather worldly Jeweler's attention at several points in the poem. Interestingly, one of these meditations on her splendid adornment (lines 745-55) leads swiftly to a concern about the Maiden's possible usurpation of other, more worthy Christians' heavenly rewards; learning that the Lamb has taken her as a bride, the Jeweler voices his concern:

Quat kyn þyng may be þat Lambe
þat þe wolde wedde vnto Hys vyf?
[...]
So mony a comly onvunder cambe
For Kryst han lyued in much stryf,

And þou con alle þo dere outdryf,
And fro þat maryag al oþer depres,
Al only þyself so stout and styf,
A makelez may and maskellez. (771-72, 775-80)
[Of what kind can He be, the Lamb you name,
Who would you His wedded wife declare?
[...]
For Christ have lived in care and blame
Many comely maids with comb in hair;
Yet the prize from all those brave you bear,
And all debar from bridal state,
All save yourself so proud and fair,
A matchless maid immaculate.] (Tolkien 151-152)

Earlier, the Jeweler also noted that the Maiden had “lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede” and “cowþez neuer God nauþer plese ne pray, / Ne neuer nawþer Pater ne Crede” (483-85) [“Two years you lived not on earth with me, / And God you could not please, nor pray / With Pater and Creed upon your knee”] (Tolkien 141). These lines can be taken to suggest the Pearl Maiden’s extreme youth at the time of her death. They also indicate that the Jeweler reads a troubling mismatch between the Maiden’s earthly deeds and her heavenly rewards. Why should such a youthful person (whether literally young or young in the ways of the Christian church) receive such honors? Surely there must be many more deserving individuals, particularly those who have suffered martyrdom in the name of Christ. The Maiden’s elevation has thrown both earthly and heavenly hierarchies out of balance. If what she says is true, why make any particular sacrifices in the cause of Christ? Why become a religious professional, or embrace martyrdom? Apparently, happening to die in a state of purity (perhaps as an infant) is all which is required to attain special heavenly privileges.⁷

Lewis’s ghosts face a similar reality to that of the Jeweler; there is a general sense of confusion and even dismay at the elevation of their former friends and family. The disorienting nature of the heavenly order is also emphasized through the lack of prestige associated with earthly fame. This general disregard for celebrity comes out in the encounter between the artist Ghost and his spirit-guide when the latter informs the former that Claude and Cézanne, if they are among the heavenly host, are no more distinguished than any other of the Bright People; earthly fame simply does not translate into any

⁷ See Nicholas Watson’s “The Gawain-Poet as a Vernacular Theologian,” which addresses the challenges which the works of the *Pearl*-poet pose to individuals invested in worldly hierarchies (including the prestige gained through asceticism and other feats of religious devotion).

heavenly currency. Even the narrator of *The Great Divorce* is caught up in worldly assumptions about the Bright People; upon seeing the spirit of Sarah Smith, whom he seems to mistake either for Mary or Beatrice, he is surprised to learn that in life she was an uncelebrated wife who happened to love every person or animal she encountered, and is thus surrounded by the recipients of her affection after life. The narrator is also redirected from his gushing admiration of his guide George Macdonald's biography to "something more profitable" (67): the significance of his journey to the Solid Lands. In the land of the Bright People, the deeds of the past are only significant insofar as they pertain to the ghosts' struggle for salvation.

The blatant and bewildering disregard for earthly systems of value is a stumbling block to many visitors to the Bright Lands. The first of the ghost-guide confrontations described by the *Divorce*-narrator showcases the resentment elicited by the guides' good fortunes. In this meeting, the Big Ghost is stunned by the glorified state of Len, a former murderer. Upon being assured that Len's victim, Jack, is in heaven, too, and is apparently content to let bygones be bygones, the Big Ghost explodes in anger: "'What I'd like to understand,' said the Ghost, 'is what you're here for, pleased as Punch, you, a bloody murderer, while I've been walking the streets down there and living in a place like a pigstye all these years'" (26). The fact that a murderer enjoys better fortunes than he does is unfathomable to the Big Ghost, who believes firmly that "you and I ought to be the other way round" (27), even though, as Len points out, the Big Ghost was far from perfect himself. For the Big Ghost, adherence to worldly conceptions of decent behavior, right and wrong, is much more important than theological questions of grace and forgiveness (or, as he calls it, "bleeding charity" [28]): "I done my best by everyone, that's the sort of chap I was. I never asked for anything that wasn't mine by rights. If I wanted a drink I paid for it and if I took my wages I done my job, see? That's the sort I was and I don't care who knows it" (27). Here we see the same demand for hierarchy based on works as in *Pearl*; in fact, the Big Ghost's talk of fair wages for work draws to mind the first-hour workers of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard with whom the *Pearl*-dreamer sympathizes.⁸ The Big Ghost sees the rewards of the afterlife specifically in terms of rights which have been denied him. The "Bleeding Charity" to which Len appeals is, in the Big Ghost's mind, in direct opposition to the ledger of rights and penalties he has kept in his head. In his mind, he has

⁸ See *Pearl* 590-600, in which the Jeweler insists that the workers who labored all day in the vineyard deserve greater pay than those hired later in the day. While Lewis would, of course, have been familiar with the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard outside of its appearance in *Pearl*, the evocation of the parable, when taken together with the novel's other aesthetic and thematic similarities with the Middle English dream vision, is suggestive of *Pearl*'s influence on *The Great Divorce*.

done good work, and he expects to receive his wages, which by his reckoning should be equal to, if not greater than, Len's. To see the former murderer not only forgiven, but also rewarded, offends the Big Ghost's sense of justice just as the Pearl Maiden's promotion from dead child to heavenly queen upsets the Pearl-narrator's conception of order in the world.

The Big Ghost's attitude, of course, is expressed in terms of common, "secular" beliefs about fairness rather than in terms of theology. He does not express his concerns, as the *Pearl*-narrator does, by making reference to Christian service and just rewards for spiritual labor. The point of view that drives The Big Ghost's assessment of Len's fortune and his own misfortune is encapsulated in the thesis of the demon Screwtape's address in Lewis's short follow-up to *The Screwtape Letters*, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." In the twentieth century, the sin of envy, Screwtape contends, is not just elicited but also pardoned and elevated as a virtue through the perversion of the term Democracy. This term, Screwtape advises his audience, can be used

to sanction in [a human's] thought the most degrading (and also the least enjoyable) of all human feelings. You can get him to practise, not only without shame but with a positive glow of self-approval, conduct which, if undefended by the magic word, would be universally derided.

The feeling I mean is of course that which prompts a man to say *I'm as good as you*. (203-204)

For the Big Ghost, Len's offense is that he has been treated differently than the Big Ghost despite being no better than his former acquaintance (at least, from the Big Ghost's point of view). Repentance and salvation have preserved Len from the dreary city of the novel's opening and allowed him to live in a splendid, paradisaical garden, and the Big Ghost openly envies Len his good fortune. From the Big Ghost's point of view, the "Bleeding Charity" is not a gift to be desired, but a dishonest and shameful means of cheating, unjustly allowing the recipient to claim rewards that are withheld from others. As Screwtape would observe, a lifetime of indulgence in envy has turned the Big Ghost away from "humility, charity, contentment, and all the pleasures of gratitude or admiration," the result of which "turns a human being away from almost every road which might finally lead him to Heaven" (Screwtape 215). Indeed, the ghost's contemptuous reference to salvation as "bleeding charity" is suggestive of the extent to which envy has blotted out the virtues enumerated by Screwtape and turned him away from the path to paradise. The casual and habitual celebration of envy which Lewis believes has pervaded modern society is thus presented to the audience as a dangerous barrier to salvation.

The *Pearl*-narrator's obstinate resistance to the Maiden's instruction—exemplified in his bold statement that her telling of the Parable of the Laborers

in the Vineyard is “unreasonable” because he finds its earthly justice-defying moral objectionable—is matched by nearly all of Lewis’s ghosts. Not only do they cling to earthly ideals about just rewards, but they also keep a firm grip on the imperfections which prevent them from escaping the dreary, hellish city in the story’s opening. A ghost named Dick’s unorthodox theology comes closest to paralleling the *Pearl*-dreamer’s limited scriptural understanding, and his conversation with his spirit-guide is similarly thwarted by his refusal to receive instruction with humility. While the Jeweler chooses to reject scriptural interpretations which do not suit his beliefs about cosmic justice, Dick chooses to embrace *every* conceivable interpretation of scripture, rejecting the possibility that any one reading is true or false. “Ah, but we must all interpret these beautiful words in our own way!” (40) is his response to his guide, a fellow theologian in life, who urges him to turn from his apostasy and embrace an orthodox theology of heaven and hell. Dick’s obstinacy is most apparent in his view that the hell-scape of the dreary city is, in fact, replete with hope, its utter lack of cheer and goodness making it into a “field for indefinite progress” (35). His philosophy is summed up in the statement “For me there is no such thing as a final answer. The free wind of inquiry must always continue to blow through the mind, must it not?” (40) Despite his outwardly pious manner and appearance, Dick is unwilling to abandon his own approach to scripture in favor of his guide’s teaching.

Dick’s resistance to Lewis’s “either/or” proposition is represented as a grave danger to the twentieth-century Christian. The Jeweler may quibble over how Christians ought to be rewarded upon arriving at New Jerusalem, but he does not discount the existence of the heavenly city and the earthly choices which afford humans entrance to it. Dick’s form of apostasy has a modern flavor to it; additionally, his cheerful observation that “to travel hopefully is better than to arrive” (40) points evocatively back to Lewis’s preface metaphor of the network of spiritual roads in which “every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision” (viii). Lewis’s “either/or” places emphasis on the final destination and requires focus on the ultimate outcomes of spiritual decisions. Dick’s fixation on spiritual/intellectual journeys as ends in themselves rather than means to eternal fulfillment is presented as a perversion which does not nullify the necessity of reaching a final destination, but which will almost certainly result in arrival at an unpleasant one.

One of the most strikingly similar analogues to *Pearl*’s Jeweler is found in the ghost of the bereaved mother, Pam, whose encounter with her guide (her brother, Reginald) is described as “[o]ne of the most painful meetings we witnessed” (97). The remarkable correspondence between the Jeweler’s desire for the Pearl Maiden and Pam’s desire for her son emerges when the two are

analyzed through the lens of René Girard's mimetic desire. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard introduces the concept of "triangular" desire through the example of Don Quixote. Quixote's admiration for Amadis of Gaul, whom Quixote recognizes as the most perfect of knights, manifests as imitation of Amadis. Any object of desire that the subject, Quixote, pursues is inspired by his mediator, Amadis. Girard reads Quixote's mimesis in terms of religious observation: "Chivalric existence is the *imitation* of Amadis in the same sense that the Christian's existence is imitation of Christ" (2). Amadis and Quixote's dynamic can be described in terms of external mediation: the two will never meet, and thus Amadis can never rival Quixote in Quixote's pursuits of objects of desire. The same cannot be said of internal mediation, which Girard introduces by way of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. In Stendhal's novel, characters do not simply imitate one another; they perceive their mediators as rivals for desired objects, and they therefore learn to envy and even hate their mediators. Thus, Stendhal's Julien recaptures Mathilde de la Mole's attention by himself courting Maréchale de Fervacques; as predicted, as soon as Mathilde perceives Maréchale as a rival, her desire for Julien is rekindled. She imitates Maréchale's desire for Julien in a competitive manner. Mathilde and Maréchale do not occupy different spheres, as Quixote and his literary idol do, and the triangle of the desire, by consequence, can take dark and toxic turns.

In *Pearl*, the Jeweler's imitation of Christ initially manifests in a material manner. The Jeweler, as his title suggests, curates and cares for precious objects. He even describes the loss of the Maiden in terms of loss of a precious pearl fallen to earth: "Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye / To clantly clos in golde so clere: / Oute of oryent, I hardyly saye, / Ne proued I neuer her precios pere [...] Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere; / Pur 3 gresse to grounde hit fro me yot" (1-4, 9-10) ["Pearl of delight that a prince doth please / To grace in gold enclosed so clear, / I vow from over orient seas / Never proved I any in price her peer [...] Alas! I lost her in garden near: / Through grass to the ground from me it shot"] (Tolkien 123). The Jeweler's keen interest in external riches and adornment, as I have noted above, is evident even in the dream setting. His breathless descriptions of New Jerusalem, too, convey not only his appreciation and awe for its splendors, but also his ability to immediately assess and describe the riches he has seen. The Lamb's kingdom and retinue far exceed that of any earthly ruler, and certainly the private holdings of any jeweler, rendering the dreamer's professional appreciation of finery a ghostly echo of much greater eternal extravagance.

It is this shared ownership of fine things (earthly and temporal on the Jeweler's side, heavenly and eternal on the Lamb's) which creates the opening for the Jeweler's imitation of Christ to become competitive as the dream setting suddenly shifts the dynamic between the narrator and his lord. The external

mediation of the dream's setting is suddenly rendered internal mediation when the Jeweler finds himself on the bank of the river opposite his lost Pearl, the Maiden. The Lamb, it seems to the Jeweler, is no longer remote and inaccessible: he has become the husband to the Pearl Maiden and occupies the same psychic space as the dreamer. The Lamb's utter possession of the Pearl Maiden is inextricably tied to the Jeweler's alienation from his beloved, who has not only been taken from him, but rendered unrecognizable and, in the many ways explored above, both emotionally inaccessible and intellectually incomprehensible to him. The more that the Jeweler desires to be reunited with the Maiden, the further she slips from his grasp.

It is in the dream's closing that this alienation from his beloved is pushed past the point of bearing. During his vision of New Jerusalem, the dreamer is granted a glimpse of the Lamb among the heavenly retinue. The Maiden suddenly and inexplicably appears among them: "þen saƷ I þer my lyttel quene / þat I wende had standen by me in sclade. / Lorde, much of mirþe watz þat ho made / Among her ferez þat watz so quyrt! / þat syƷt me gart to þenk to wade / For luf-longyng in gret delyt" (1147-1152) ["Then saw I there my little queen / That I thought stood by me in the glade! / Lord! great was the merriment she made, / Among her peers who was so white. / That vision made me think to wade / For love-longing in great delight"] (Tolkien 165). The Jeweler's need to recover the lost Maiden reaches its climax and he desperately attempts to cross the river that divides them, a river which the Maiden has clearly explained cannot be crossed while the Jeweler remains in life. Throughout the poem, the dreamer has demonstrated his resistance to the Pearl Maiden's instruction, and his final act demonstrates that a significant spiritual barrier still divides them. His desire to subvert the heavenly order by attempting to force his way across the river to join and claim the Maiden results in the Jeweler's expulsion from his visionary experience.

Likewise, Pam's desire to be reunited with Michael is hindered by her fierce need to claim the long-dead son as hers and hers alone. Her preoccupation prevents her from benefiting from Reginald's instruction, which is meant to shift the focus of her love from Michael to God; for if she does not love God, Reginald explains, her love of Michael will remain forever flawed. Pam resists Reginald's teaching, citing Mother-love as the justification for her all-consuming need to possess Michael. She agrees to follow her brother's instruction, which she interprets as "religion and all that sort of thing" (98), but only as a means to attain the object of her desire. For Pam, imitation of God manifests in her assertion that she possesses an ultimate kind of love—Mother-love—which binds Michael to her irrevocably through its sheer strength. *Storge* takes the place of *agape* in Pam's conception of the world. In this way, Pam renders God her rival, a self-defeating impulse which will deprive her of a fruitful

relationship with both God and Michael. Accordingly, Pam's visionary encounter, like that of the Jeweler, ends in a final outburst of possessiveness, and among the last words we hear her utter are that Michael belongs to her: "Mine, mine, mine, for ever and ever" (103).

Pam's cult of Mother-love draws to mind the medieval cult of courtly love. Indeed, she calls Mother-love "the highest and holiest feeling in human nature" (100), a statement whose earnest hyperbole one can imagine on the lips of a courtly lover. The Jeweler himself uses the term *luf-daungere* (11) early in *Pearl* to describe the circumstance which has prompted his feelings of grief and bereavement. This compound is glossed as "aloofness, distance of the beloved" in the glossary of Andrew and Waldron's edition of *Pearl* (331), although in their footnote to the line, they tackle the complex connotations of the term. *Daungere*, they note, is regularly used in courtly literature to signify a woman's power over her lover: specifically, her power to distance herself from him (54). Hence, the fourth entry for *daunġēr* provided by the *Middle English Dictionary* defines it as "resistance offered to a lover by his ladylove; disdain, aloofness, reluctance, reserve" or as "anything or everything that frustrates a lover."

Of course, disturbing implications hover just below the surface of the concept of *daungere*: the beloved is perceived as both the source of desire and as the withholder of pleasure. It is notable that immediately before plunging into the river at the close of the poem, the Jeweler uses a similar compound to *luf-daungere*, *luf-longyng* (1152), to describe the overwhelming feelings that possess him as he gazes upon the beautiful Maiden among her shining company. Two problems arise as a result from the Jeweler's characterization of grief in terms of *luf-daungere*: not only is the Jeweler confined within a worldly and flawed system of courtly love, which dictates the way in which he conceptualizes his love for the dead girl, but he also allows this system to pardon and even romanticize a tendency toward resentment and envy. Courtly love is quite as capable as Lewis's "Mother-love" of morphing into what MacDonald describes as a "prickly" and "astringent" state of mind (104).

Pam's Mother-love becomes a modern analogue to the courtly love which flavors the Jeweler's descriptions of his longing for the Maiden. If courtly love has become, by and large, a relic of the past—something that, "if we have not outgrown, we have at least grown away from" (*Allegory 1*)—unhealthy and even destructive feelings of ownership toward beloved family members have not. As Lewis himself notes in *The Four Loves*, "God is the great Rival, the ultimate object of human jealousy; that beauty, terrible as the Gorgon's, which may at any moment steal from me—or it seems like stealing to me—my wife's or husband's or daughter's heart" (50). Such manifestations of *storge*, Lewis suggests, turn God into an interloper, and the subject becomes an aggrieved complainant against his perceived injustice. As in courtly love, Lewis's Mother-

love is a system in which the devotee's "real enemy is the rival" (*Allegory 3*). Lewis himself conceptualized the courtly Religion of Love as "an extension of religion, an escape from religion, a rival religion," (21) and Pam's devotion brings this aspect of *fin'amor* into the twentieth century.

In the Jeweler, however, we find a prototype for the reformed "ghost." His expulsion from the dream, and with it, the return to a dynamic of external mediation with the Lamb, allows him the clarity he needs in order to realign his relationship with both the Lamb and the Maiden. His competitiveness is shed away. Admitting that his behavior at the end of the dream sequence "watz not at my Pryncez paye" (1164) ["was not as my Prince did please"] (Tolkien 166), the Jeweler nonetheless expresses hope that he will eventually cross the river to New Jerusalem, his exile finally over:

To pay þe Prince oþer sete saʒte
Hit is ful eþe to þe god Krystyin;
For I haf founden Hym, boþe day and naʒte,
A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.
Ouer þis hyul þis lote I laʒte,
For pyty of my perle enclyin,
And syþen to God I hit bytaʒte,
In Krystez dere blessing and myn,
Þat in þe forme of bred and wyn
þe preste vus schewez vch a daye.
He gef vus to be His homly hyne
Ande precious perlez vnto His pay. (1201-1211)
[To please that Prince, or be pardon shown,
May Christian good with ease design;
For day and night I have Him known
A God, a Lord, a Friend divine.
This chance I met on mound where prone
In grief for my pearl I would repine;
With Christ's sweet blessing and mine own
I then to God it did resign.
May He that in form of bread and wine
By priest upheld each day one sees,
Us inmates of His house divine
Make precious pearls Himself to please.] (Tolkien 167-68)

It is worth noting that the Jeweler's focus shifts not only from the Maiden to the Lamb, but also from earthly to spiritual riches in the conclusion. No longer does he emphasize his role as a rival keeper of pearls; rather, he *becomes* a pearl, thereby rendering himself as an object to be claimed by the Lamb alongside the Maiden. The Jeweler is ultimately convinced by the Maiden to do what many of

Lewis's ghosts apparently cannot: he puts aside his most immediate, heartfelt desires and fixes his sight on God alone. In *The Great Divorce*, Reginald tries to convince the bereaved Pam that "the whole thickening treatment consists in learning to want God for His own sake" (99). If Pam can learn to love God, to focus her desire upon him rather than positioning herself as God's rival, she will also gain her current heart's desire: to be reunited with Michael.

Lewis declines, however, to show his readers the ultimate outcomes of all the ghost-guide conversations. We do not learn whether Reginald is ever able to get through to Pam, although we leave their conversation on a sour note. MacDonald admits that the outcome, though it seems grim, is not certain, given that Pam's love is not utterly corrupted: "But there's still a wee spark of something there that's not just herself in it. That might be blown into a flame" (104). Similarly, MacDonald assures the narrator that a grumbling ghost may be redeemed from her petty sin "if there is a real woman—even the least trace of one—still there inside the grumbling" (77). Whether there is or not, we and the narrator never learn. The self-conscious female ghost who is too ashamed of her transparent appearance to engage with her guide is also left in a state of uncertainty and instability. After her guide summons a herd of unicorns to startle her out of her stubborn self-absorption, the narrator ghost reports that "I heard the Ghost scream, and I think it made a bolt away from the bushes . . . perhaps toward the Spirit, but I don't know" (63). MacDonald later confirms that the tactic may have worked, but he cannot say whether it actually has nor not (79). While a few of the ghosts appear to make their decisions in full view of the narrator—including Frank, who shrinks and shrinks with self-pity until he disappears into an invisible body which will fit back into Lewis's infinitesimal, Augustinian hell (133, 137-38)—most are simply left at junctures in their visit, some promising and some not.

Why leave the ghosts in this state of spiritual limbo? The fates of the Lewis's ghosts are certainly less resolved than those of the souls in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In this, they resemble *Pearl's* narrator to a certain degree, although by the close of the poem the Jeweler's eternal destination is implied to be much more firmly fixed than those of many of Lewis's ghosts. The purpose behind this relative lack of resolution, I think, lies in Lewis's decision to frame the narrative with war. This is hardly surprising, given that *The Great Divorce* was first published in serial form from 1944 to 1945; it shares with Lewis's satirical 1942 novel, *The Screwtape Letters*, a sense of urgency brought on by the very real and immediate possibility of finding death in one's own home, on the street, or at the office. Indeed, in Letter 5, Screwtape takes Wormwood to task over the younger demon's glee regarding the war in Europe. "One of our best weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless. In wartime not even a human can believe that he is going to live forever," Screwtape warns

Wormwood (30). The mundane, everyday vices that the demons would normally use to secure their prey are rendered less potent by the sense of *momento mori* that the Blitz has enforced. In fact, it is a bomb which ultimately robs Wormwood of his human prey, a development which sends Uncle Screwtape into a fierce and murderous diatribe in the novel's conclusion.

In this context, it is no surprise that the narrator of *The Great Divorce* wakes to an air raid siren. He finds that he is alive and not a ghost, but the siren serves as a grim reminder of the fragility of life in the midst of war. The sins and flaws that he recognized in the dream might be ever-present, but so is death itself. The contingent nature of the ghosts' destinations comes to reflect those of the dreamer and his audience. In this way, Lewis takes a genre which is already designed to apply philosophical and spiritual instruction to life, updates its moral teachings, and frames the urgency of his message in a way his audience will immediately understand. Frames to dream visions, after all, are used to contextualize the contents of the dream proper. In *Pearl*, the Jeweler's grief must be introduced before the moral instruction within the dream can be properly understood. In the same way, Lewis uses the frame of his narrator's dream as the lens through which the contents must be interpreted. In an environment where death is ever-present, he contends, spiritual choices and their eternal outcomes must be given precedence. The "either/or" may have been mercifully extended to another day, but the decision must not be put off forever. Everyday moral failings and long-held habits of thought cannot be written off or shrugged away, as they are inextricably tied to these decisions. The frame to *The Great Divorce* is not just context: it is, quite literally, a siren, calling Lewis's readers to take immediate action to safeguard their souls.

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