ABSTRACT

SWAREY, APRIL REID. *Pearl’s Middle Class Mourner.* (Under the direction of Dr. Charlotte Gross.)

This thesis is an historical examination of the jeweler’s mourning in *Pearl.* I view the mourner as a middle class tradesman situated within a late fourteenth-century English culture. I argue that his religious beliefs reflect his status within that society and guide his actions while mourning. While the jeweler’s grief leads to a crisis of faith, the *Pearl*-poet seeks to comfort his pain through instruction in biblical text. As the *Pearl*-maiden educates the mourner in biblical knowledge, she contradicts his traditional understanding of the Christian afterlife. His responsibilities as mourner are simplified and his relationship to the dead is redefined by the maiden.

The middle class mourner is also found to be lacking in courtesy, which is defined by the *Pearl*-maiden as a metaphor for the grace of God. A comparison of the uncourteous jeweler with the courtly Black Knight in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* reveals how a rejection of courtesy disempowers the tradesman throughout the mourning process. Although the jeweler’s grief is painful, the *Pearl*-maiden’s instruction offers hope. The poet suggests that if he will obey God’s will and conform to the ways of courtesy, the mourner may yet reunite with his beloved in Paradise.
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mother, Lettie Reid.
Thank you for giving me life so many times.
April Reid Swarey was born to Reo and Lettie Reid in Winston-Salem, NC. She grew up near Dobson, NC, and as an undergraduate attended the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, double majoring in history and English. She also has an associate’s degree in computer programming from Surry Community College. Her greatest joy is her son, Caleb.
I owe my deepest gratitude to my director, Dr. Charlotte Gross. Her kindness and generous advice made this project possible. I would also like to thank Dr. John Morillo for always searching for the best in me, and in my writing. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sidney Johnson, my advocate and friend. His unwavering support and belief in me made all the difference.
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INTRODUCTION

In the fourteenth-century poem by an anonymous author, the *Pearl*-maiden chides the dreamer for his “madde” (“mad” 290) behavior. More recently, modern critic John Bowers describes the dreamer as “conspicuously stupid” (53). Clearly, the jeweler receives no flattery from either his dead beloved or from literary critics. The kindest interpretations of the dreamer view him as a father or lover, and he has often been seen as a fallen Adam who may never come to understand the mysteries of salvation. Rarely do critical discussions of *Pearl* focus on the dreamer as a middle class mourner, with a culture and belief system defining that identity. In this study, I want to argue that the mourner is a middle class tradesman situated within a late fourteenth-century English culture. His thoughts do not depict a stupid man, nor one gone mad, but one who is wrestling with a crisis of faith in the midst of tremendous emotional pain. Throughout the course of the poem, he reveals that his religious beliefs are based on traditional customs, whereas the maiden offers him an alternate view of salvation that is based on the Bible. She offers a startling new perspective of the Christian afterlife that contradicts nearly everything he understands concerning the afterlife and his duties as a mourner. Her teaching offers comfort, but before he can embrace her teachings, he must first confront his own confusion and disbelief.

In taking this view, I enter the current strand of *Pearl* scholarship that interprets the poem literally instead of metaphorically. Most *Pearl* criticism has been directed toward allegorical and metaphorical questions, and few scholars have engaged the cultural context of the poem or its characters. That trend is shifting, possibly due to a plethora of metaphorical readings, and *Pearl* has recently been the subject of a few widely-cited cultural studies. The poem itself has been placed in its late fourteenth-century historical context by John Bowers, and Helen Barr has studied the jeweler in his social context as a middle class tradesman. Those works viewing *Pearl* through a cultural lens have offered valuable insights into the poem, but neither the
jeweler’s mourning nor his religious beliefs have been placed within their late fourteenth-century historical context.

As critic Helen Barr observes in her article, “Pearl – Or The Jeweler’s Tale,” *Pearl* is typically viewed “transhistorically,” with its interpretation being “grounded in an antagonistic polarity between the earthly and heavenly” (1). Barr attempts to challenge that traditional view of the poem by examining the jeweler in his social context as a middle class tradesman. Her purpose is not to discredit metaphorical interpretations, but instead to “break out of a closed hermeneutic system of juxtaposing the heavenly and the earthly [. . . .] in order to show how the narrative strategies and verbal texture of *Pearl* are embedded in late fourteenth-century social concerns and practices” (2). Other scholars briefly mention the jeweler’s occupation as being influential to the formation of his character, but Barr’s article is valuable to my study because she investigates in detail how the jeweler’s social status influences his dialogue and choices throughout the poem. In particular, she discusses his relationship with the *Pearl*-maiden, his use of language and his views of time in order to define him as a member of the middle class. In a departure from allegorical readings, she views the jeweler not as a representative of fallen humanity, but rather as “representative of a newly emergent social group” (3). She still views *Pearl* as primarily concerned with issues of spiritual enquiry, but sees the figuring of a middle class jeweler by the poet as embedding a specific “commercial and social outlook” within the work (3). Specifically, Barr argues that his mercantile status is a crucial and pervasive factor in shaping his dialogue. According to Barr, *Pearl* refuses to “separate the spiritual and the emotional from the social [. . . . as ] theological discussion and human mourning are embedded in historically resonant social issues” (26).

Barr’s study led me to question why the jeweler may have behaved and spoke as he did within the poem because she examines the jeweler as more than merely a supporting character.
She argues that the mourner is struggling to find his way within a society that did not necessarily welcome his efforts and this view also offers a fresh perspective in which to consider the entire poem. Barr’s article, however, does not explain the importance of viewing the jeweler as a middle class figure, other than to say that he is a stereotypical representation of the medieval middle class. It is necessary to turn to other critics in order to consider how the mourner’s role as medieval tradesman shaped his interaction with religious issues.

John Bowers considers cultural issues within Pearl; in his 2001 book, The Politics of Pearl, he places the poem primarily within an historical context. He dates Pearl to 1395, during the reign of Richard II, and explores the poem as a reflection of that particular monarch’s court (22). Most importantly for my study, Bowers views the Pearl-poet as an orthodox defender of the Catholic Church who would certainly have been aware of the battles against atheism and other heresies, most notably Lollardy, that plagued the Church in the later half of the fourteenth century. According to Bowers, the poet’s close adherence to the Bible in the Pearl-maiden’s discourse is necessary because the jeweler displays heretical notions that must be refuted by orthodox biblical teaching. Bowers views the poet as orthodox Christian and the jeweler as a misguided member of the middle class who must be instructed in the word of God to prevent his becoming a full-blown heretic.

What is most interesting about Bower’s study is the view that the jeweler has heretical tendencies. I disagree with that argument because the jeweler does not propose any views that were opposed to traditional, Church-supported doctrine in the late fourteenth century. As mentioned earlier, Bowers also refers to the jeweler’s stupidity, but a low intelligence level and the willful choice to oppose the orthodox Church are separate problems. Ignorance or inability to process information in a rational manner did not qualify one for the designation of heretic. Bowers also overlooks the fact that many traditions, such as prayer for the dead, were supported
by the church and orthodox, although not biblically based. Upon closer inspection, the jeweler’s understanding of the afterlife and a Christian’s responsibilities are just as orthodox as the maiden’s. Although Bowers sees the mourner as a rather dim-witted heretic, his book is important to my study because he makes an attempt to categorize the actual religious views presented in *Pearl* as either heretical or orthodox.

Another commentator, David Aers, also examined the religious views found in *Pearl* in his 1993 article, “The Self Mourning: Reflections on Pearl.” In his essay he compared mourning, melancholy and suicide in *Pearl* to similar emotional states in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. Aers comments that he found surprising similarities in how mourning is conducted in both works, even though *Troilus* features pagan characters and *Pearl* is thoroughly Christian. Both offer an isolated male central figure who is tormented by grief and blames the lost love object. Aers mentions early in the article that the mourner in *Pearl* does not turn to God as a Christian may be expected to do, but instead relies on his own judgement, much like the pagan Troilus. Aers questions whether the mourner is aware he is on a spiritual quest of any kind since the jeweler remains convinced his competitive individualism will win his desires. At the end of the article, Aers views the mourner as someone who has not been converted to a Christian view of the world at all, but is still “unaffected” by the maiden’s arguments (68).

For Aers, the jeweler in *Pearl* has more in common with his pagan contemporaries than any Christian counterpart, but, most importantly for my study, Aers sees the poet as merely individualistic, rather than an overt rebel reformer. Like Bowers, Aers notes that the poet is careful to skirt overt declarations of heretical doctrine that may have cost him his life. Aers, however, is in direct contrast with Bowers in considering the poet rather than the jeweler as a possible heretic. The contradiction provided between Aers’ view of the *Pearl*-poet as individualistic and Bowers’ view of him as completely orthodox indicates a fascinating topic for
further investigation. Aers had also raised the question of whether the mourner was more pagan than Christian, which suggests that although the mourner believed himself to be Christian, his dialogue with the maiden did not necessarily reflect what Aers expected from a medieval Christian mourner. That raises the question of what exactly was expected from a medieval Christian mourner. How does the maiden’s portrayal of the Christian afterlife differ from the mourner’s expectations? As the maiden corrects the jeweler, does she provide any information as to what he should be doing as a mourner? How does the mourner’s social class affect his perception of the afterlife and the maiden’s interaction with him? Research into these issues produced some interesting reading about medieval burial, death, and the Christian afterlife.

Several historical accounts proved invaluable in the investigation of the questions arising from critical studies. Christopher Daniell’s book, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550*, extensively researches the traditions of medieval burial and the afterlife, focusing on archaeological data and medieval church records. Patrick Geary’s book, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, explores values and attitudes about death and burial from a social perspective. Both books focus primarily on attitudes toward death rather than on mourning because most of the details of medieval bereavement for any class have been lost to time. Royal biographers mention acts of grief occasionally, but it is difficult to determine if those accounts are political propaganda or social reality. Personal letters and wills offer a promising field of information for bereavement study, but those are usually pragmatic documents with few personal details. Individual deaths of family and acquaintances are certainly mentioned, but as many historians lament, the authors usually do not reveal internal emotion or turmoil. Jean Froissart has a cryptic notation about the 1361 death of Henry, Duke of Lancaster: “all the barones, knightes, and squyers, were ryght sorrowful, but they coude nat remedy it” (89). This is a typical medieval description of death and mourning. In usual fashion, the passage relates necessary information,
but little else.

Because of a dearth of detailed accounts regarding medieval mourning, it is difficult to know to what extent the grieving jeweler in *Pearl* reflects social realities. What can be drawn from the poem is an understanding of the needs of the middle class mourner from the poet’s perspective. In particular, the *Pearl*-poet addresses the jeweler’s lack of biblical knowledge and a lack of courtesy as two of his greatest challenges in mourning. In Chapter One of this study, I examine how the *Pearl*-poet offers an education in biblical texts as comfort to the middle class mourner. Biblical literacy was an issue restricted to the lower classes in the late fourteenth century because many in the aristocracy could afford to buy books like Bibles, but tradesmen typically could not. The jeweler would have had little opportunity to access a Bible in its entirety, thus the maiden educates him in the texts he needs to understand salvation. His new biblical knowledge surprisingly simplifies his responsibilities as mourner and redefines his relationship to the dead. In Chapter Two, I contrast the tradesman’s uncourteous mourning in *Pearl* with that of the aristocratic Black Knight in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* in order to examine how the advantages of courtly education assisted the knight in the mourning process. Although the differing treatment received by the two characters suggests the experience of mourning was shaped a great deal by social class, what remains clear is that the pain of grief transcended socioeconomic status. As seen in the next chapters, grief afflicted the middle class tradesman as sorely as it did the aristocrat, but the wealthy memorialized their loss more publicly. The face of sorrow did not change among diverse people; only the methods of coping and goods available to spend on its expression varied.
CHAPTER 1: THE CONSOLATION OF BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

*Pearl* offers a rare view of a medieval middle class mourner struggling in an agony of loss. Because of the continuing ravages of disease, war, and famine, mourning was a common sorrow in the late fourteenth century, but *Pearl* is remarkable for depicting a tradesman actively engaged in the grieving process. The mourner’s character is not drawn as a static portrait, but as a man who poignantly expresses his deep emotional turmoil, and experiences radical shifts in his understanding of the Christian afterlife.

The mourner is at first confident in his understanding of Christianity, and through his conversation with the *Pearl*-maiden, he reveals his personal beliefs regarding salvation to be a mixture of biblical account and tradition. In an interesting turn, the *Pearl*-maiden disagrees with his views and attempts to educate him by offering paraphrases from the New Testament. As the debate progresses, it becomes apparent that his departed is describing an afterlife that is quite different from his traditional understanding of heaven. The duties of the medieval mourner are redefined as the maiden demonstrates that prayer and earthly rank or wealth have no bearing on heavenly status. These are unsettling revelations to a tradesman whose concept of heaven has been shaped through the traditions of a competitive, class-conscious society, but the maiden’s view of heaven is biblical, and he cannot successfully dispute such an authority. By the end of the poem, the jeweler accepts the maiden’s urging to obey God in the hopes he may yet achieve his desires of reunification with his beloved. His traditional view of salvation led only to frustration, but his beloved’s biblical instruction offers a route to achieving his desires. In that way, the *Pearl*-poet offers the Bible itself as comfort to the tortured mourner.

Although *Pearl* offers few details that identify the mourner, it is clear that he endures tremendous emotional pain and is struggling with his Christian faith. Themes of human suffering and religion entwine throughout the poem as the mourner claims to understand Christianity, but
suffers nevertheless: “Paȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned / My wreched wylle in wo ay
wraȝte” (“Although the nature of Christ taught me comfort, my wretched will was always
pained in woe,” 55-56). He feels he should take comfort in his religion, but he continues to yearn
for his pearl while enduring “fyrte skylleȝ ğat faste fȝȝt” (“fierce contentions that fought in me,”
54). Although aware of the solace offered in Christianity, his own will continues to rebel against
the loss he has suffered. He longs for his pearl even as his own reason counsels peace (53). His
grief continues to defy reason and the result is tremendous pain.

Wracked with sorrow while visiting the “huyle” (“hill” 41), or grave, on a holy day in
August, he falls asleep. He is then taken on a dream vision by God’s grace (63), to a marvelous
place with crystal cliffs and trees as “blew as ble of Ynde” (“blue as indigo” 76). Pearls are the
gravel under his feet and the stream beds are of emerald and sapphire (118). It is all so beautiful
that he thinks he must be in “Paradyse” (“Paradise” 137) or heaven, but a brook prevents him
from exploring any further. His heart lightened by the extravagant beauty, he continues to search
for a point of crossing, but then sees a “mayden of menske ful debonere” (“graceful young
woman” 162). He knows her to be his lost pearl and is delighted, but amazed. She is a bride of
Christ now, transformed from the two-year-old child he remembers (483), and wearing a gown
encrusted with perfect pearls (199). He intends to remain with her in Paradise, but she calls him
“madde” (“mad” 290) and proceeds to correct his misapprehension of the situation. He cannot
remain with her as a physical being, but must experience death and be chosen by God to enter
heaven (323). The mourner is incredulous and does not accept the argument that he must again
give her up. He questions the value of their reunion, if he must part from her and return to
suffering (326). A debate ensues in which he attempts to find errors in her argument that he must
obey and conform to the will of God before he may remain with her. The mourner finds it
difficult to believe his pearl is a queen in heaven, that she was given the position due to the grace
of God, and that he must wait for permission to enter the Holy City. Despite her admonitions, he attempts to cross the separating brook and is snapped back to wakefulness on the grave where his dream began. In a rather abrupt ending, he regards conformity and obedience to God’s will as the only profitable way to regain his pearl. His loss still haunts him, but he hopes to eventually return to Paradise where he knows his pearl awaits. Throughout the poem, the mourner remains a conflicted Christian, and the depth of his conversion is uncertain even in the end.

One of the few explicit details offered regarding the mourner is his vocation as “jeweler” (“jeweler” 252). The mourner refers to himself with that title and the maiden addresses him as “jeweler” in line 313. The designation of jeweler is important because that occupation situates the character within his society as a tradesman belonging to the middle class. The middle class represented tradesman, merchants and artisans, and according to medieval estates theory, was a part of the third estate. Historian Lillian Bisson explains that the first estate contained those who prayed, such as clerics or priests; the second those who fought, or the aristocracy; and the third, commoners who worked such as tradesmen and farmers (143). Those classifications mattered in a society where each facet of life was guided by social grouping.

Medieval courtesy books encouraged the rules of deference to be observed even in the most mundane of circumstance. It was improper, for instance, to seat a cleric above a king at meal times or for a person of lesser rank to address a superior first (Courtesy 14). Everyone had a specific place in society and was expected to maintain that order. It is unexpected then to see a middle class tradesman like a jeweler figuring prominently in an elaborate and courtly poem like Pearl, but his character’s quest to achieve acceptance reflects the struggles of late medieval society with a social hierarchy under considerable challenge. Like so many other tradesman and merchants, he ambitiously hopes to improve his standard of living and challenges the aristocratic maiden to deny him entrance into Paradise itself.
A jeweler made a particularly good character to explore themes of alienation and conflict in mourning because his socioeconomic position in reality was in a state of transition. Jewelers were artisans, and artisans were valuable members of late medieval society. According to historian Frances Rogers, a tradesman designated as a “jeweler” was expected to be “goldsmith, designer, sculptor, smelter, enameler inlay-worker, and an expert in the cutting and mounting of gemstones” (71). Other merchants also sold pearls, but only a jeweler made them into wearable adornments (79). His profession required him to create original works of art which were in great demand in the late fourteenth century, creating new wealth and independence which had rapidly raised him out of the peasant life. His skills made him essential to his society, but also potentially dangerous since his new wealth brought with it an interest in moving socially and economically into the aristocratic class. As many historians argue, the artisan’s new social mobility created tension and uncertainty in a society keenly interested in maintaining the established order.

Although the artisan’s upward mobility was often resisted by the aristocracy, the jeweler could have hope that his socioeconomic standing would only improve. What had seemed impossible achievements a few decades before, such as land ownership and marriage into aristocratic families, had become somewhat likely middle class attainments by the late middle ages. As R. B. Dobson explains, most of the revolts of the late fourteenth century did not occur because of abject misery, but because the middle class had won a little freedom and hoped to gain yet more (xl). The hope for yet more privilege and autonomy that Dobson describes is reflected in the jeweler of Pearl who attains a view of Paradise and longs to remain. That class struggle is featured in Pearl as the maiden, already having attained the status of “quen” (“queen” 486) resists the jeweler’s independent and ill-advised attempts to seize his desires. He clearly yearns to improve his lot by remaining in Paradise, but tension arises when his desires conflict with the
requirements of the aristocratic maiden. Specifically, she finds he lacks “courtaysye” (“courtesy” 457), a system of learned aristocratic behaviors, and he has only a partial knowledge and understanding of biblical texts, knowledge that those outside of the aristocracy or clergy rarely attained.

The tradesman’s level of knowledge reflects his social class because many merchants and tradesmen were beginning to value education “as a means of social advancement,” but usually did not have access to higher education as fully as the aristocracy (Bisson 146). The jeweler is not completely ignorant in a number of subjects and the maiden’s attempts to educate the jeweler are complicated by the fact he is not completely unlearned. Through his conversation with the maiden he reveals his knowledge of subjects such as nature (749), the art of Pygmalion (750), the literature of Aristotle (751), and even the Psalter (593). While he has education in those areas, the maiden rebukes him for leaning on his own judgements instead of the word of God: “Ye setten hys worde ful westernays / Pat leue nothynk bo the hit sye” (“You interpret His words incorrectly, / Believing in nothing but what you see” 307-308). The mourner also consistently demonstrates that he has some understanding of the Christian route to salvation, but what he knows is not sufficient by the maiden’s standards. For instance, he comprehends he is in the Christian “Paradise” (“Paradise” 248) without being told, but also thinks he may remain with his beloved without adhering to the Christian requirements of death and judgement. The maiden describes his words as “vnavysed” (“ill-advised ” 292), and tells him “ne woste in worlde quat on dot3 mene” (“you do not know what you mean,” 293). Later in the poem, he also reveals he is somewhat familiar with Old Testament text because he knows where the geographical city of David is located, but is unacquainted with the New Testament verses describing the Holy City cited by the maiden (912-936). The jeweler, like many others of his class, clearly has gained some literacy and knowledge, but he only has a partial knowledge of biblical texts.
In order to educate the jeweler, the maiden seeks to acquaint him with scripture in a direct and personal manner by offering biblical paraphrase throughout *Pearl* and repetitively reminds the audience of the source of her authority. In describing the Holy City, she names as the “Apostle John” (984), or “John the Apostle” (985) as her source and cites the Book of Apocalypse 17 times (787, 790, 819, 834, 836, 866, 944, 983, 985, 998, 1008, 1009, 1020, 1021, 1032, 1033, 1053). Although her biblical references are concentrated in her account of the Holy City, she is no less careful throughout the remainder of the poem to cite explicitly the source of her paraphrasing. Whether the Parable of the Vineyard taken from Matthew 20 in lines 505-576 or her explanation of heavenly courtesy taken from I Corinthians 12 in lines 458-468, without exception, her accounts are drawn from the Bible.

The *Pearl*-poet would have taken an interest in educating a middle class jeweler through paraphrasing biblical texts because few middle class people had opportunities to actually read a Bible in particular. Even if a lay person were literate in Latin, and that was rare among commoners, it was difficult to gain access to a copy of the Bible since books were so expensive. According to historian J. C. Dickinson, at the time *Pearl* was composed, around 1390, a book cost nearly the value of a peasant’s yearly wages (383). As a result, they were considered precious and rarely circulated. Even if one could acquire a copy of the Bible, it was usually not contained within one volume, but would have been separated into three volumes, with the Old Testament being two volumes, and the New Testament comprising a third. Both the maiden and jeweler mention the Psalter as source and Psalters, selected Psalms copied onto illuminated pages, were often substituted for the Bible. They too, however, were expensive and rare (Dickinson 383). That meant that whatever actual biblical instruction a lay person gained was usually a product of sermons offered by the clergy in churches, or the depictions of holy figures in art work (384). The typical person’s understanding of scripture was then open to the interpretation
of the individual who happened to be preaching and the comprehension and literacy of priests varied widely.

The *Pearl*-poet obviously did have access to biblical texts and demonstrates a keen interest in sharing that knowledge not only in *Pearl*, but also in most of his other poems. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is primarily secular in nature, but *Patience* and *Cleanness* are usually attributed to the *Pearl*-poet as well and both contain large portions of biblical paraphrasing. *Cleanness* paraphrases the stories of Noah, Abraham, Lot and Daniel and *Patience* is devoted to the story of Jonah. It is in *Pearl* particularly, though, that the poet exhorts his readers to “loke on bok & be awayed / How Jesus hym welke in areþede” (“Read the Book and learn / How Jesus lived his life” 710-711), and challenges readers to view the Psalter in order to see for themselves if his words are true (698). He encourages his audience to read the Bible and to shape their religious beliefs based on that text. Since so many of the medieval beliefs surrounding the Christian afterlife were based on tradition, not biblical texts, any depiction of Paradise based on the Bible would be radically different from what the ordinary jeweler understood. It is that biblical rather than traditional depiction that confronts and confounds the jeweler.

Mourning provided an ideal occasion to educate the jeweler in religious scripture because the death of a loved one brought a mourner into direct contact with Church doctrine and officials more so than any other event in a person’s life. According to Christopher Daniell, the Church determined who could receive the last rites, who could be buried in consecrated ground, the exact location of burial, the fee for burial and prayer masses, and in large part, ecclesiastical courts governed the economic prospects of the surviving spouse (88-115). A couple did not necessarily have to consult the Church to be married, or to have children. A person could also certainly die without Church sanction, but if a person were Christian, the Church was the gatekeeper to the next life. The Church also instructed the mourner in the rituals that would assist the dead to a
comfortable afterlife. Daniell also claims that prayers for the dead was the most important duty of the medieval mourner, because the speed of the dead’s acceptance into Paradise was proportional to the number of prayers specifically said for the departed (12). That meant that mourners were motivated to spend as much wealth as possible in order to assure that their loved ones were accepted by God quickly. King Henry VII certainly considered prayers to be a worthy investment as he requested 10,000 masses to be said for his soul (Colvin 174). Even those of lesser status, like the widow Lady Alice West, also left bequests for prayers after death. Her will, dated 1395, specifically requests that money be set aside for to “synge and seye” (“sing and say”) 4400 masses for her late husband’s “soule” [soul] and for hers (Wills 6). In the Book of Margery Kempe, Kempe herself mentions advising a widow to give alms for her deceased husband, “three pownd er four in messys and almesgevyng to powyr folke, ye schal hyly plesyn God and don the sowle gret esse” [three pounds or four in masses and almsgiving to poor folk–you shall highly please God and give the soul great ease] (Kempe 57). For those who could not afford such gestures of support for the dead, however, the Church offered little in the way of comfort. Although generic masses were said on All Soul’s Day in remembrance of the poor, it was understood that those were not as effective as prayers specifically naming the deceased repeatedly to God (Daniell 12).

Given the importance of prayer for the Christian mourner, it is fitting that the maiden begins the jeweler’s education by addressing prayer. While the maiden does not completely dismiss the value of prayer, she advises the mourner to “sech hys blype ful swefte & swype” (“fervently pray for his favor” 354). She explains that his “prayer may hys pyte byte / Pat mercy schal hyr crafte3 kyþe” (“prayer may his pity invite / That mercy will its power display” 355-356). For the maiden, the purpose of prayer is to seek pity (355) and comfort (357) from God, but salvation is not dependent on the act itself. It is notable that she only instructs the
jeweler to pray for himself, and she never requests that he pray for her, the deceased. The jeweler, however, is dumbfounded that the maiden could be his dead beloved in heaven since she was too young to know the “Pater ne Crede” (“Pater nor Creed” 485), memorized prayers which were encouraged by the church and used throughout a Christian’s life (Daniell 78). Most importantly, he notes that she did not yet pray at all, but she has already been accepted into Paradise (484). The jeweler expresses his disbelief clearly as he exclaims, “I may not traw so God me spede / Pat God wolde wryþe so wrange away” (“I cannot believe, so help me God, / That He would turn to so wrong a way” 487-488). In response she repeatedly explains to him, “þe grace of God is gret innogh” (“the grace of God is great enough” 660). Throughout their debate, her salvation rests solidly on her innocence and the grace of God, not on her own prayers in life nor those said by others for her after death.

Encouraging the jeweler to pray for himself instead of the deceased redefines his duties as a mourner because his focus is shifted toward his own individual welfare. Prayer is described in the poem as a tool to use primarily for one’s own comfort, and that view is a stark contrast to medieval custom. At the time Pearl was written in the late fourteenth century, Purgatory was an incredibly influential Christian doctrine. Prayers by the living were necessary to raise the dead out of the profound suffering occurring between death and ascension to heaven. Even if the mourner’s beloved is interpreted to be his toddler daughter, orthodox Christian belief held that dead infants, including those who were baptized, went to “Limbo” for an unspecified time (Daniell 10). They did not suffer such torments as those in Purgatory, but neither were they accepted immediately into Heaven. The fastest way to escape either torment rested on the frequency of prayers by those still living. In exchange for the living assisting the dead out of Purgatory, the dead who then ascended to heaven would intercede for those still living (Daniell 76). The maiden, however, circumvents that tradition of intercessory prayer as she suggests
prayer as a source of comfort for the individual, not as a tool in assisting the dead.

Given the poet’s insistence on biblical paraphrase, it is not surprising that he does not consider prayers for the dead necessary because both Limbo and Purgatory share the distinction of being non-biblical traditions. Neither is mentioned in the Bible, and Purgatory did not officially exist in Church doctrine before 1254 when Pope Innocent IV defined it as a “temporary fire, [where]... not of course crimes or capital errors, which could not have been forgiven through penance, but slight and minor sins, are purged; if they had not been forgiven during existence, they weigh down the soul after death” (Le Goff 283-4). After Purgatory became official doctrine in 1254, Christopher Daniell describes the acceptance of Purgatory as having an immense impact on the beliefs of Christians (178). In fact, he argues that it would be difficult to “over-emphasize” the effect of Purgatory on Christian customs before the Reformation (179). He explains that the living became gradually responsible for the welfare of the dead as the prayers of the living were responsible for rescuing the departed soul from the torments of Purgatory. To neglect praying for the dead meant they were abandoned to prolonged and unimaginined pain (179). Prayer for the dead then became an essential act of mercy for the deceased.

Contrary to traditional teachings regarding prayer, the maiden’s path to salvation is formed through a direct relationship with Christ by the grace of God. The abandonment of prayers for the dead is a weighty shift of responsibility for the mourner because if prayer is to be used for individual comfort and is not the key to salvation, it is unnecessary to pray for the dead. In effect, the mourner has no responsibility toward the dead after burial has taken place. As those still living are removed from the process of salvation, the relationship between the dead and Christ also shifts into a personal and individual interaction. The maiden repeatedly tells the mourner that it was Christ who chose her (Pearl 759), crowned her (767), and it will be Christ himself who allows the mourner a glimpse of the New Jerusalem (967-968). In response to so
many of the jeweler’s objections, she simply answers, “pe grace of God is gret enogh” (“the grace of God is great enough” 636). That is a startling revelation to a man steeped in traditional beliefs, understanding that the prayers of the living were necessary to speed the pain of Purgatory or Limbo for the dead.

Another traditional understanding confronted in *Pearl* concerns the dead’s burial location. The medieval concern with social status influenced many of the beliefs surrounding the dead and engendered the belief that burial location influenced rank in eternity. Helen Barr points out that the jeweler’s interest in his surroundings is evidence of his mercantile fascination with wealth (6), but it may also be an indication of his surprise in discovering that the death shelter he provided has nothing to do with where his lost beloved will live in eternity. Traditionally, grave location was thought to influence the proximity to Christ and dwelling location in heaven (Daniell 101). Therefore, it is understandable that the mourner maintains a strong interest in his dead’s dwelling place throughout the poem. Although grave location is not explicitly discussed by the jeweler and maiden, it figures prominently in the opening scene of *Pearl* as the jeweler falls down on the grave in the flowery garden (41). It is clearly an outdoor burial and does offer insight into the jeweler’s low expectations for his beloved’s shelter. During their conversation, he does not see her home, and questions whether she has a dwelling at all. He asks the *Pearl*-maiden,

> “Haf ȝe no woneȝ in castel walle Ne maner þer ȝe may mete & won? Þou tellez me of Jerusalem þe riche ryalle, Þer Dauïd dere wateȝ dyȝt on trone, Bot by þyse holteȝ hit con no hone, Bot in Judee hit is, þat noble note”

> (“Do you not have a home within castle walls, / No structure for meeting, anywhere? / You tell me of the royal realm of Jerusalem, / Where David sat on a throne, / But that is another place; / That noble place is in Judea” 917-922).

He goes on to add that “I trowe alone ȝe lenge & loute” (“I believe you are alone and homeless”
The maiden explains that there are two Jerusalems. While the jeweler is familiar with the earthly version where Christ was sacrificed, the other is a heavenly city where there is “noȝt bot pes to glene / Pat ay schal laste wythouten reles” (“nothing but peace there / That shall last forever without end” 956). Following her explanation, the jeweler immediately requests to see her home (964).

The jeweler’s interest in the maiden’s dwelling may spring from a voyeuristic curiosity, but also may have been rooted in the traditional understanding that the position of earthly burial influenced heavenly status. Historian Paul Binski explains that “in reality the location of the dead either inside or outside [the church] mapped the order of the social elite as, in effect, a supernatural elite” (56). The position of the maiden’s grave site in the “erber grene” (“arbor green” 38) is made clear at the beginning of the poem, and she states clearly that she has been taken for a bride of Christ. Clearly, her burial location did not prevent her from attaining high status in Paradise, but that depiction is opposed to long-standing customs attached to grave location.

The image of the mourner swooning over the grave mound in a flowery garden provides great drama in lines 49-60, but also reveals that he was not a wealthy man, or at least did not possess the funds necessary to purchase a prime grave site for his beloved. Her grave is located outside the church, but those who could afford a higher fee typically had their dead buried within the church building itself (Daniell 97). Christopher Daniell explains that inside the church was considered far more prestigious, with the goal being to get as close to the high altar at the east end as possible (95). That space was the location for the performance of the Eucharist and therefore, the dead would have reposed closest to the body of Christ. Those buried closest to Christ were considered more likely to dwell near to him in the afterlife. The graves inside the Church closest to the altar came at a premium cost, however, and were typically reserved for those individuals
who would promote the reputation of the church, or simply had the funds to pay for the best location. Daniell explains that the plot directly in front of the altar was the most sought after, and usually contained a noteworthy male individual, such as an ecclesiastic or noble (95). The best candidates were individuals who could be sainted at some point, who would draw pilgrims and, thus, additional funds for the Church.

According to Daniell, the estimation of grave value faded as the location moved toward the back of the Church away from the altar, with those least esteemed being outside the building (95). The ground outside the Church was usually consecrated by a priest to be considered a fitting place for burial and was respected by the community as a place of some reverence. It was an open-air space and could be used for preaching sermons or meeting friends. Those graves outside the Church, however, were also usually unmarked and would be emptied when the space was needed at a later date. Unmarked graves were the least favored, because medieval mourners feared anonymity for their dead, believing the more reminders God received of a person’s existence and desire to dwell in heaven, the better (13). As a solution to that problem, bede rolls containing the dead’s name could be read on appointed days aloud in the church by a priest paid for the service (17). It is important to note that even though his pearl was buried in a grave that may one day be emptied of her bones, she still keeps her identity in Paradise. Her welfare was not dependent on prayers, nor was it necessary for the mourner to purchase a prime location for burial to ensure her salvation.

The importance of grave location, like Purgatory, was notbiblically supported, but was an ancient Christian tradition. According to historian Patrick Geary, one of the earliest accounts of burial preference involve Harold Bluetooth, a Danish king, who converted to Christianity in 960 A. D. Bluetooth insisted on having his parents exhumed and placed under the floor when a Christian church was built (38). Although his parents were never converted to Christianity, he
apparently believed proximity to the church itself would include them into the Christian fold. According to Geary, Bluetooth was only one of many converted pagans who insisted on re-burying their dead within Christian churches. The traditional belief had survived to late fourteenth century England, based on the number of parishioners who requested burial within church buildings. Daniell notes that between 1389 and 1475, 36 percent of parishioners in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire specified position of burial in wills (97). Of the 4,700 wills Daniell examined, 1,065 documents requested burial in the churchyard. Even those requests for outdoor burial often specified positions closest to the cross or church building (99).

Location of burial mattered so greatly because factors such as grave location were believed to influence not only social rank in Paradise, but also to speed the release from Purgatory (80). In that way, the traditions of burial location and Purgatory were intertwined and it was considered a work of mercy to provide as good a burial location as possible for the deceased. Most adults provided for their own burial sites and explicitly stated those wishes in their wills, but children were buried based on what their parents could afford. If the jeweler’s beloved is interpreted to be his daughter, then he would have been responsible for choosing and paying for her grave. Children were usually not buried at the high altar regardless of their socioeconomic standing, but were often included within the group under the floor pavers toward the back of the church if their parents could afford to pay the fees.

The fees for any burial included payment for masses on the day of burial, the ceremony itself, grave preparation and mortuary gifts to the church (Daniell 58). All those fees were expensive and a middle class mourner would have been at a disadvantage in paying for the required rituals while also obtaining the better burial sites. The only circumstance when money could not buy a better burial location involved a child who had not been baptized and those were not allowed within cemeteries of consecrated ground under any circumstance. Daniell notes that
the tendency to deny church burials for unbaptized infants caused such anguish among parents
that they often buried children in unmarked graves on the edge of the cemetery secretly (127).

The poet does not reveal if the infant has been baptized or not and simply describes the
location of the grave as in an “erber grene” (“arbor green” 38), with no connotation of
consecration. If the child had not been included within the holy ground of the church, then her
father would indeed be tortured for the welfare of her soul. She is excluded from Paradise, just as
the mourner is an isolated figure, excluding himself from participation in life. As a medieval
Christian, the jeweler understands that the suffering of his lost child is dependent on his ability to
provide for her, even in death. As the *Pearl*-maiden describes her close relationship with Christ
despite her inability to pray and her outdoor burial, she greatly lightens the responsibility of her
mourner. He is shown that salvation is her individual concern, one that is resolved without his
assistance.

The influence of earthly rank and wealth on heavenly status is yet another traditional
belief that is confronted in *Pearl*. Commentators have often criticized the mourner for his
astonishment that his beloved should be a “quen mad on þe fy rst day” (“made a queen on the
very first day” 486) as a sign of his ignorance, but his amazement is understandable considering
that his own rank was that of a tradesman and to assume a higher rank in heaven would have been
presumptuous. The belief that worldly rank translated into heavenly stature was traditional and
evidenced by the fact that ecclesiastics and wealthy nobility usually requested burial in their
finest clothing (Daniell 156). Daniell explains that they apparently expected to enter heaven in
that clothing, having it serve as an indicator of their deserved rank. Persons appearing in clothing
denoting status in Paradise are found in visions such as those by the monk who saw deceased
Bishop Dunstan in heaven, dressed in “outstanding splendor . . . in full pontifical robes”
(Southern 155). In contrast to aristocratic burial, those of the peasant and middle classes were
usually buried naked and simply wrapped in clean cloth wound around the body (Daniell 156). The middle class jeweler’s dead buried in the garden would most likely have been laid to rest without fine clothing, but she is still transformed into a heavenly queen. Most importantly, as the beloved of a jeweler, “nerre þen aunte or nece” (“nearer to me than aunt or neice” 233), it is unlikely she held a prestigious position in life, but her earthly status has nothing to do with her rank after death. As a bride of Christ, she is clothed in pearls solely because of her innocence and the grace of God. Elevated by Christ himself, she is untouched by earthly custom or tradition.

Raising the maiden to queenly status without the assistance of tradition is a stark contrast to orthodox Christian belief, but historian R.N. Swanson points out that medieval Christian faith was not a “monolith” (42). There were wide variations in depth of commitment to religion and the Church also allowed some variation in basic doctrinal convictions. Although the Pearl-poet deviates from orthodox depictions of salvation, that does not mean he was heretical. Historian Ann Hudson paraphrases the definition of heresy by thirteenth century Bishop Robert Grosseteste as “an opinion chosen by human perception, contrary to holy scripture, publicly avowed and obstinately defended” (42). According to that definition, the poet is not a heretic because above all, he adheres to holy scripture. Throughout Pearl, the poet makes it clear that while salvation is a personal endeavor, its depiction should be based on scripture alone. The poet expresses no explicit antagonism toward the Church itself and he also includes the orthodox ritual of the Eucharist at the end of the poem. In particular, the jeweler is willing to consign his lost one to Christ as he declares: “Krysteȝ dere blessyng & myn, / Pat in þe forme of bred & wyn / þe prest vus scheweȝ vch a daye” (“Christ’s dear blessing, I resign / That in the form of bread and wine / Each day our priests reveal and bring” 1208-1210). The verse makes clear that the poet supports the doctrine of transubstantiation.

It is worth noting that the Eucharist was biblically based and transubstantiation was at
the heart of a Christian's communion with God. As a result, the Church was particularly sensitive to heresies that attacked the Eucharist, while often overlooking other individual views that did not overtly challenge ecclesiastical authority (McFarlane 96). Historian K. B. McFarlane points out that in the late fourteenth century, the Church tolerated even vociferous heretics like John Wyclif to continue preaching and teaching at Oxford while condemning Purgatory and child baptism (97). Wyclif was branded an heretic and dismissed from Oxford only after he spoke out against transubstantiation (97).

Unlike Wyclif, the *Pearl*-poet skirts the realm of heretic by supporting transubstantiation. His consistent teaching from biblical texts, and avoidance of traditional beliefs, however, all reflect his view of salvation as an individual quest. David Aers describes the *Pearl*-poet as "individualistic" (71), but he may also reflect a late fourteenth century interest described by historian Jeffrey Richards as an "individual search for redemption and the desire of the ordinary lay Christian for a more direct and personal relationship with God" (42). In *Pearl*, that individual search is represented by the solitary mourner struggling to understand his loss, but the poet ends the mourner's solitude by a return to Church participation. For the *Pearl*-poet, a productive Christian is clearly situated within the church. His views of salvation are personal and Christ-centered, but not heretical.

Many critics, such as Aers and J. J. Anderson, have also commented on the jeweler's apparent lack of complete conversion and joy in the end of the poem. Aers views the jeweler's lack of enthusiasm for his fate as evidence that he was not completely converted to Christianity. That view, however, overlooks the fact that the mourner's attitude is vastly improved from the beginning of the poem. After the mourner's mind "to maddyng malte" ("to madness gave way" 1154), and he attempts to jump the stream dividing him from his pearl, he returns to reality willing to conform to what is required of a "god Krystyin" ("good Christian" 1202). Although
the mourner is downcast upon his return to reality, he is healed enough to leave the grave and
begin to function within medieval life again. He claims to have a relationship with Christ, calling
him a “frende ful fyin,” (“friend, noble and fine” 1204-1205) and he believes he has learned his
destiny. Based on those lines, he has healed a great deal since the beginning of the poem when he
was wrestling with his wretched will (56). Even if he finds his participation in Christian life
somewhat painful, it is apparent that he has rejoined his community. The maiden’s instruction
was at least successful in bringing him back to the routines of Christian life and he now has a
sense of direction. Most importantly, since he can do nothing to influence the welfare of his dead
loved one, his primary responsibility is to draw close to Christ, guided by such spiritual
activities as the Eucharist. The comfort offered to the dreamer is that the route to Paradise is not
a cutthroat competition for property and status, but rather an individual gift of God as described
in the Bible. The duties of traditional mourning are lifted from him and heaven is more attainable
than he had realized. If the middle class jeweler will apply himself to conform and obey as the
maiden advises, he will attain not only his pearl, but Paradise itself.
CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF COURTESY

“Though cortaysly 3e carp con / I am bot mol & mare mysse” (Though so courteously you speak / I am but dust and lack manners” 381-382) laments the jeweler in Pearl. The maiden not only speaks courteously, but she also speaks of the value and meaning of courtesy. The jeweler is found not only to be lacking in biblical literacy discussed in the previous chapter, but also in the skill of courteous behavior. The tradesman views courtesy as a matter of little value in salvation, but the maiden describes “courtaysye” as an external expression of God’s grace necessary for those who wish to remain in Paradise (457-468). She describes heaven metaphorically as a noble court populated exclusively by royalty who function according to the rules of courtesy (445-448). This idea of a heavenly hierarchy, however, conflicts with the middle class jeweler’s understanding of reward based on hard labor and penance. Throughout Pearl, the mourner struggles with the concept of courtesy as a metaphor for grace and beatitude, and the maiden insists he must accept it as an accurate metaphor for salvation.

The Pearl-poet was not the only medieval author to consider courtesy highly valuable behavior. Geoffrey Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess also explores the value of courtesy, but within the context of aristocratic mourning. The poem features a grieving knight who has mastered the intricacies of courtly behavior and offers a comparison to the middle class jeweler’s stumbling efforts to negotiate courtesy. In contrast to the jeweler, Chaucer’s Black Knight is noble, erudite, and respected by the narrator. The knight reveals the advantages of courtesy in mourning as he distracts himself with poetry and politely converses with a narrator who encourages his healing. Unlike the jeweler’s grief, his grief is characterized by a mastery of courtesy coupled with a strong sense of autonomy, both of which are marks of his superior status in medieval society. The differences depicted in their mourning suggest that the aristocratic privileges of courtly education and autonomy offered the knight advantages in grief resolution unavailable to
the middle class jeweler.

*Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess* offer fertile ground in which to explore the class differences depicted in mourning because in several aspects they are remarkably similar. Both are dream visions by middle class characters who venture into unknown territory to confront the intricacies of loss and grief. Both works also feature a dialogue in which the mourner is consoled by an application of reason to will, with varying degrees of success.

Like *Pearl*, the *Book of the Duchess* begins with a narrator’s relating his own emotional pain and struggle with sleep: “I have gret wonder, be this lyght, / How that I lyve, for day ne nyght / I may nat slepe wel nygh noght” (“I have great wonder, by this light / How I continue to live, for in day or night / I may not sleep at all” 1-3). In an attempt to endure the night (49), he reads the story of pagan king Seys and his queen Alcyone. Although various critics consider the tale a digression, it is still relevant to the remainder of the poem because it is a story of unresolved grief. King Seys dies and is summoned by his queen from the dead because she cannot accept his demise. Alcyone is uncomforted by the vision of her dead husband and dies herself shortly thereafter. The reading of the tale apparently causes the narrator finally to nod off, only to be taken into a dream hunt where he discovers the “man in blak” (“man in black” 445), the mourner, who sits beneath an oak tree talking to himself about his sorrow (462-464).

Like the jeweler, the knight has drawn apart from society as he dwells on the emotional pain of loss and is consumed by his suffering. His idolization of the departed also echoes descriptions of the *Pearl*-maiden, since the duchess is “whit, rody, fressh, and lyvely hewed, / And every day hir beaute newed” (“white, ruddy, fresh, and lively hued / And every day her beauty renewed” 905-906). The narrator resolves to assist the knight in healing his pain.¹ As in

¹ Lyman Kittredge described the dreamer as “naïve” in a 1915 study and that view prevailed until the 1950s when James R. Kreuzer (1951) and Bertrand H. Bronson (1952) argued the dreamer was instead rhetorically and consciously enticing the knight to talk through his grief. William A. Quinn, ed. *Chaucer’s Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1999, pp. 113-115, offers further discussion.
Pearl, a dialogue ensues in which the mourner reiterates his pain and the narrator attempts to save him from a state of emotional despair and spiritual endangerment. The narrator does not understand exactly how the knight lost his lover and it is the narrator who repeatedly asks questions concerning the lost beloved. Finally, in the last lines of the poem, the mourner reveals that he has lost his loved one to death. The narrator accepts that understanding with little fanfare, saying simply, “Be God, hyt ys routhe” (“By God, it is a pity” 1310). The horn sounds, the hunt ends, and the narrator returns to reality determined to preserve his experience in writing.

While both poems share many similarities, they are also a study in contrasts and especially differ in the consolation provided in mourning. Pearl is a poem filled with spiritual discourse and Christian in theme. Most of the action of the poem occurs in an otherworldly setting with the mourner surrounded by supernatural beings dressed in spectacular opulence. The mourner is also consumed with questions concerning Christianity (55-56) and his quest remains one of the soul; his body is left lying on the grave while his spirit soars to heaven. The mourner is unattached to this world for much of the poem and remains anonymous except for his designation of “jeweler” (252). His consolation is that of religion and hope in the future when he may enter the Christian afterlife.

The Book of the Duchess is just as earthly in theme as Pearl is heavenly. It is the narrator who travels to the mourner and the mourner remains stationary under an ordinary oak tree throughout the vision. As several critics point out, the primary consolation in the Book of the Duchess is the recollection of memory that brings comfort. Religion never plays a significant role in the poem, except for the narrator’s reminder that suicide is a sin (BD 725). The mourner remains concerned with the events of this earthly life and his greatest hurdle in mourning is the fact he cannot accept his own powerlessness in the face of loss. Many accounts of aristocratic
mourning were produced in the patronage system, and the *Book of the Duchess*, if not commissioned by the Duke of Lancaster, was still an elegy to his wife, Blanche of Lancaster (*Riverside* 329). It follows that the Black Knight was probably based on the Duke, John of Gaunt, third son of Edward III. Memorializing Blanche was the occasion of the poem, and Chaucer wisely avoids counseling the powerful noble in religious consolation. The *Book of the Duchess* remains focused on the earthly consolations available to human sorrow.

Although *Pearl* is a spiritual discourse and the *Book of the Duchess* secular, both use courtly language or rhetoric to express their themes. Philip Boardman describes courtly literature as a literary style using “eloquent language” developed in the love poetry of medieval court society and concerned with the topics of “romantic love, courtesy and chivalry” (568). It is not surprising then that both the *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl* place a great deal of emphasis on the value of courtesy. Although the meaning of courtesy changes according to period and context, historian Nicholas Orme offers a definition when he writes that the “manners and accomplishments which children learnt and adults practised at [the king’s] courts made up a code of behavior, ‘courtesy,’ which formed a model for the aristocracy as a whole” (62). The courtesy described by Orme is a set of behaviors cultivated by humans in an earthly setting, and the *Pearl*-maiden explains the meaning of courtesy found in heaven:

> “Of courtaysye, as saytʒ saynt Poule,  
> Al arn we membreʒ of Jesu Kryst  
> As heued & arme & legg & naule  
> Temen to hys body ful trwe & tryste  
> Ryʒt so is vch a Krysten sawle  
> A longande lym to þe mayster of myste”

(“Due to courtesy, as St. Paul says, / We are all members of Jesus Christ, / As a head, arm, leg, or other part / Bound to his body steadfastly, / Just as every Christian soul is / A limb of the master of mystery” 457-462).

*Pearl* editor E.V. Gordon explains that the “cortaysye” described by the maiden is not just
earthly courtesy transferred to heaven, but is instead the “spirit uniting all Christians in one body” (xx). In other words, the Pearl-maiden offers courtesy as a metaphor for the ineffable grace of God. This heavenly courtesy allows humans to become part of the body of Christ, so that they may function in harmony, or as “kyng & quene by cortayse” (“king and queen by courtesy” 468). While the earthly courtesy defined by Orme and the heavenly courtesy described by the maiden carry somewhat different connotations, they are still closely related in meaning. In preparation for an eternity guided by God’s grace, the exercise of earthly courtesy offers humans a means to cultivate godly characteristics, such as cooperation and generosity. In that way, God’s grace is prefigured here on earth through learned courtly behaviors.

The exercise of earthly courtesy was, therefore, an important medieval Christian tenet because the external manifestation of good manners was considered indicative of spiritual excellence. According to commentator D. S. Brewer, in a society concerned with courtesy, “external cleanliness signifies inner purity, good manners are a sign of moral goodness” (61). Based on that understanding, the jeweler’s uncourteous behavior does not signify a mere lack of manners, but also his current state of spiritual distress. Pearl reflects that concept when the maiden instructs the jeweler that a place would be reserved for him in Paradise, if he were a “gentyl jueler” (“noble jeweler” 264). The jeweler, however, is not “gentyl” and that reality greatly complicates his mourning.

Given the importance of courtesy in medieval secular and spiritual life, it is understandable that the jeweler’s greatest challenge in mourning rests on his rejection of the spiritual truths signified by courtesy. He is aware of the existence of courtesy, but he does not accept its efficacy or importance. He struggles with the concept because while the maiden’s view of courtesy mentioned earlier embodies generosity and fellowship, it also eliminates the competition so essential to the tradesman’s perception of survival. As critic Helen Barr argues,
social or economic advancement is earned in the jeweler’s view, not given as a gift (15). His view of heaven as a competitive society is seen in his assumption that his pearl has usurped the position of Mary, Christ’s mother, whom he refers to as the “quen of cortaysye” (“queen of courtesy” 432). The maiden denies his misinterpretation of her status and attempts to enlighten him by describing the government of heaven:

“The court of þe kyndom of God alyue
Hatþ a property in hyt self beyng:
Alle þat may þerinne aryué
Of alle þe reme is quen ŵer kyng,
& neuer ŵer þet schal depréuye,
Bot vchon ſayn of ſherenceȝ hafyng,
& wolde her corouneȝ wern worþe þo fyue,
If possyble were her mendiȝng.
Bot my lady of quom Jesu con spryng,
Ho haldeȝ the empyre ouer vus ful hyȝe;
& þat dyspleseȝ non of oure gyng,
Forho is quene of cortaysye

(“The court of the Kingdom of the living God / Has a special virtue in itself: / Each one that arrives / Of all the realm is queen or king. / No one shall ever another deprive, / But each one joys in the other’s having. / They would that another’s crown were five, / If it were possible by their improvement. / But Christ’s mother / Holds empire over us so high, / Which displeases none of us, / For she is the Queen of Courtesy” 445-456.)

The system described here clearly stresses kindness and good manners among the blessed as metaphors for their heavenly state, but such a system is an alien concept to a jeweler who functions in a world of trade and business. He survives based on the products of his labor, not on the generosity of others. He expresses disbelief, wondering, “what more worschyp moȝt he fonge
/ Pen corounde be kyng by cortayse” (“What greater honor might one receive, / than to be crowned king by courtesy?” 479-480). He believes those having endured in the world, or those having dedicated their lives to long penance, should have the greater reward (476-477). His view of heaven is based on the culture of production and labor he inhabits, and that world has no place
for courtesy such as the maiden describes.

The depiction of heaven as a royal court governed by the rules of courtesy places the middle class tradesman at a distinct disadvantage because his contact with royal courts of any kind was limited. Although the behaviors of courtesy could certainly be learned, instruction in the rules of courtly behavior was not an integral part of middle class education. As a boy, he was probably taught to read and write, settle business accounts; he was probably apprenticed as soon as possible in his teens to a master jeweler (Rogers 70). He would have learned how to create artistic pieces of jewelry, and also functional pieces such as buckles and fasteners (70). He would have learned how to bargain and manage business affairs, but learning courtly manners was not a priority. Courtesy books like the Generall Rule were widely circulated long before the advent of the printing press, but Nicholas Orme explains that aristocratic courtesy was not formally taught even to the nobility. It was typically learned through social contact with those who had mastered the craft. “Educationists approved the sending of children away from home” in order to learn in the company of other nobility (72).

Experience with the dominant aristocratic culture did make social mobility possible and that is why wealthy gentry began to send their young sons and daughters to court in order to learn the manners required to advance socially and economically (73). As those young people worked in the king’s household, they hopefully developed the finer points of courtesy. One of the more famous examples of that endeavor is Chaucer himself, who was sent to court by his vintner father as a page (Riverside xvii). Chaucer not only developed a successful diplomatic career that spanned three kingships, but he secured a marriage with Phillipa de Roet, a knight’s daughter (xviii). His experience suggests that an acceptance of courtly culture clearly influenced a middle class person’s ability to advance in society or career. The jeweler’s rejection of courtesy reduces his ability to function in Paradise just as it would have lessened the likelihood
he could have negotiated the relationships in an earthly court.

The jeweler’s rejection of courtesy springs from his position in society as a member of the middle class. He claims it would be reasonable for his pearl to have risen to the rank of countess, but the position of queen seems presumptuous:

“Of countes damysel par ma fay,
Wer fayr in heauen to halde asstate,
Oþer elleȝ a lady of lasse aray;
Bot a quene hit is to dere a date”

(“A countess, young lady, by my understanding, / Would be a fair status for you in heaven, / Or else a lady of lesser rank, / But a queen—it is too exalted a place” 489-492).

His concept of heavenly hierarchy is drawn according to an understanding of his current social status as a middle class tradesman and he has no expectations in Paradise above what someone of that social status may achieve. He feels the position of queen is too exalted a status merely to be given away and his pearl has not had time to earn the title. As historian J. L. Bolton explains, there were opportunities in the late fourteenth century for “men of ambition in all walks of life to improve their lot,” but doing so took time and labor (346). The jeweler’s pearl was not yet two years old when she died; she had never done works to please God nor had she prayed (483-484). She had neither lived nor labored long enough to warrant such a great status according to his understanding of social mobility, and he remains unimpressed: “cortayse is to fre of dede / ȝyt be soth þat þou coneȝ saye” (“courtesy is too free indeed, / If what you say is true” 481-482). Ironically, God’s grace remains too generous for him to comprehend.

The jeweler not only rejects the culture of heavenly courtesy, but he reveals he is unskilled in the exercise of earthly courtesy, particularly in courteous speech. Like many others of his social class, he is aware of the use of courteous speech, but struggles to negotiate the nuances of execution. Mark Addison Amos points out that the “newly empowered urban elite
were seeking a recognition hitherto reserved for the noble class, and in pursuit of this honor were
acquiring [ . . . ] behaviors that were traditionally noble” (26). Courtesy books were a tool in
learning aristocratic social conventions and were distributed among ambitious middle class readers
who wanted to hone their skills in courtly manners. For instance, the fifteenth century *Book of
Courtesy* describes in detail the habits expected of a serving man when serving in his master’s
household. The rules prohibit quarreling of any kind, loud teasing, or arguments (15). In
particular, conversation should be comprised of “honest chere wyth softe speche” (“honest cheer
with soft speech” 15). Should a servant choose to ignore the rules, he could be chastised or
rightfully fired by his employer (15). Amos explains that although much of courtesy literature
was addressed primarily to serving folk, the same general rules applied to those who wanted to
have any contact with social superiors.

Based on the courtesy books, the jeweler bungles the rules of acceptable speech as he
argues and questions the maiden concerning courtesy itself, thereby causing considerable trouble
for her (469-480). He also remains morose and disagrees openly with his social superior. He
continues to view the maiden as his child and, therefore, ignores the rules of courtesy governing
the discourse of aristocrat and commoner. Although he learns she is a queen, and therefore of a
much higher social rank than himself, he continues to doubt her knowledge and credibility (589-
600). As a result, the dialogue between maiden and jeweler is not a conversation, but rather a
painful argument. The maiden advises him early in the poem to cease struggling (344), but he
continues the debate in order to regain his pearl. As in an earthly royal court, contentious
argument by a commoner does not sway the nobility.

Although the jeweler challenges the maiden to defend her position on several points, he
still desperately hopes to gain her acceptance. The jeweler hopes a subservient stance will
advance his cause and that becomes clear through his apologetic language. He apologizes for his
hasty words on several occasions and asks for mercy: “Rebuke me neuer wyth wordeʒ felle / Paʒ
I forloyne my dere endorde” (“Rebuke me not in cruel phrases / My dear, I spoke mistakenly” 367-368). Finally, the maiden praises him for his good attitude: “For now þy speche is to me dere” (“For now your speech is dear to me” 400). Realizing that he gains praise and acceptance only when he surrenders his individual will, he denigrates himself repeatedly, describing himself as “mokke & mul” (“muck and mold” 905) and “bustwys as a blose” (“crude as a churl,” 911).

He sacrifices his own sense of self-worth in order to remain with his pearl, but, interestingly enough, his pearl has not asked that of him. She requires him instead to assume an attitude of conformity to the courteous behaviors of heaven. The jeweler, however, cannot yet see how those habits will gain his desires.

In contrast to the jeweler, the Black Knight is shown to be accomplished in courtly discourse from his first contact with the narrator. His success may be partly the result of his education as the observance of courtesy was an important part of a knight’s training. According to Nicholas Orme, many aristocratic families boarded their sons, as early as the age of seven or eight, with other noble families so they could form social networks and receive education in the skills of warfare as well as courtly behavior (72). Parents and guardians impressed upon aristocratic children the value of good manners and they typically learned the rules of courtesy by living and working with others of their class (72). The process of learning by observation Orme describes is found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, when Bercilak’s entire household gathers around Gawain to witness his speech and manners:

> “Vch segge ful softly sayde to his fere,
> Now schal we semlych se sleʒtez of peweʒ
> And þe teccheles termes of talkyng noble.
> Wich spede is in speche vnspurd may we lerne,
> Syn we haf fonged þat fyne fader of nurture”
(“Each knight very softly said to his companion, / ‘Now we shall see displayed the
seemliest manners / And the faultless terms of noble discourse. / Without asking we may
learn how to hold conversation / Since we have encountered the fine father of good
breeding” 915-919).

Clearly, Bercilak’s household considered the skills of courtly conversation highly valuable and
best learned through direct social contact.

As in any communication, courtly speech is most effective when both parties speak the
same language. Critic Michael St. John argues it is the successful observance of the rules
governing courtly discourse that “enables people of different rank to come together” (39). That
cooperation is apparent in the Book of the Duchess as the narrator is shown to be as fully aware
of courteous behavior as the knight. Since both knight and narrator observe the rules, their
conversation is a carefully orchestrated dance of verbal discourse in which the aristocratic knight
remains in a dominate role, but the subordinate narrator also has an opportunity to satisfy his
curiosity. As evidence of the narrator’s awareness of courtly etiquette, he approaches the knight
prepared to offer the deferential treatment he must pay to someone of a higher social rank. He
first waits for the knight to acknowledge his presence and attempts to speak “debonayrly, and
noghyng lowde” (“debonairly, and not loud” 518). He expects courteous treatment from the
knight in return and he is not disappointed as the knight graciously explains he did not at first see
the narrator: “’I prey the, be not wroth. / I herde the not, to seyn the soth, / Ne I sawgh the not,
syr, trewely’” (“’Please, do not be angry / I did not hear you, to be truthful / Neither did I see
you, sir, truly’” 519-521). The knight is not offended by the presence of an eavesdropping
stranger, but also kindly accepts the apologies of the man who has crept upon him from behind:
“’Yis, th’amendes is lyght to make,’ / Quod he, ‘for ther lyeth noon therto; / There ys nothyng
myssayd nor do’” (“’It is easy to forgive / He said, for you have done nothing wrong; / There
was nothing missspoken nor done poorly’” 526-528). The knight could have become angry when
faced with a stranger who disturbed his solitude; instead he extends graceful forgiveness.

The narrator further establishes the knight as an admirable character through his praise. He describes him as “nought towgh ne quenynte” (“neither tough nor quaint” 531) and “so tretable, / Ryght wonder skylful and resonable [. . . .] for al hys bale” (“so approachable, / Rightly skillful and reasonable [. . . .] in spite of his sadness” 531-535). He is, however, so sorrowful he has nearly lost his mind (511). Even in the midst of profound suffering, the knight is neither haughty nor standoffish, but gracious and intelligent. The narrator presents a portrait of the knight as a man of good manners and courtesy, even when placed under considerable stress.

The knight’s display of courtly eloquence aids in his mourning process so greatly because it draws closer another human who sympathetically offers assistance. In this case, it is the narrator who listens patiently and gently steers the knight away from self-destruction. The knight considers suicide, but the narrator reminds him tactfully to “have som pitee on your nature / That formed yow to creature” (“have some pity on your nature / That formed you as a created being” 715-716). In contrast to the debate in Pearl, the mourner is not criticized, but rather encouraged to continue sharing his memories. The narrator functions to lighten the burden of sorrow because he offers companionship during what had been a solitary grieving. The knight, like the jeweler, had retreated into isolation, but the narrator reunites him with humanity by offering sympathy and acceptance. The narrator asks the knight, “[T]elleth me of your sorwes smerte / Paraunter hyt may ese youre herte” (“tell me of your sore sorrows / Maybe it will ease your heart” 555-556). Unlike the jeweler in Pearl who struggles through rejection and frustration, the knight has attracted a friend and companion who sympathetically listens.

Mastering the art of attractive speech was an important aspect of courteous behavior and the narrator is certainly impressed with the conversational skills of the knight (529). That concern with speech is reflected throughout courtesy books and also in the Knight of La-Tour
Landry’s advice to his daughters: “[A]ll gentilwomen and nobill maydenes comen of good kyn ought to [have] . . . maners, litell softe and esy in speche, And in ansuere curteys and gentill” (“all gentlewomen and noble maidens who come of good kind ought to have . . . manners, softly-spoken and easy in speech, And in answer courteous and gentle” 18). The Black Knight’s speech fulfills the requirements of courteous speech because it is not only well-mannered, but poetic. When the narrator first comes upon him sitting under a tree, the knight is making a rhyme:

“I have of sorwe so gret won
That joye gete I never non,
Now that I see my lady bryght,
Which I have loved with al my myght,
Is fro me ded and ys agoon”

(“I possess a sorrow so great / That joy I never get / Now that I see my lady bright, / Which I have loved with all my might, / Is from me dead and is gone” 475-479).

Clearly, this mourner is familiar with verse, and is sophisticated enough to compose his own. His mastery of courtly speech allows for a creative expression of his pain that not only temporarily distracts him from his suffering, but also creates an image of elegance and control. His words are not angry or accusatory, but rather serve as an artistic expression that frees him from the silence and isolation seen in the jeweler, alone and asleep on the grave.

The knight’s privileged background empowers him through skills in courteous speech, and also allows him to assume a position of superiority in his conversation with the narrator. Unlike the jeweler who is expected to defer to one of superior rank, the knight is allowed to express his autonomy freely. The knight’s sense of personal power is expressed most obviously in his proclamation that “y am sorwe and sorwe ys y” (“I am sorrow and sorrow is I” 597). The phrase captures the profound agony of his loss, but also reveals his perception of himself as something more than a mere mortal. In personifying sorrow he absorbs its power, becoming a force that can neither be captured nor defeated. The knight is confident in his knowledge of loss
and presents himself as an authority on the subject. The narrator repeatedly questions the knight concerning the source of his misery, and the knight responds saying, “Thou wost ful lytel what thou menest; / I have lost more than thou wenest” (“You understand very little of what you say; / I have lost more than you know” 743-744). In contrast to the jeweler’s experience, it is the narrator who is educated by the mourner and the knight’s assumption of authority allows him to protect his experience from criticism. As the narrator continues to observe the rules of courtly discourse, he must avoid criticism or correction of his social superior. As a result, the knight maintains a position of power in the conversation.

A powerful sense of autonomy also assists the knight as he freely moves into memory, describing his dead beloved named “White” (948). The knight spends the majority of his lines in the poem speaking about past events with his love and is encouraged to do so by the narrator. He crosses the boundaries between past and present with ease, guided by the narrator’s interested questions: “Good sir, telle me al hooly / In what wyse, how, why, and wherfore/ That ye have thus youre blysse lore” (“Good sir, tell me truthfully / In what way, how, why, and where / That you have lost your bliss” 748). The Black Knight accepts the invitation to talk and moves freely into the past to remember life with his dead beloved. He remembers his good, fair wife (948) as first in “beaute, / Of maner, and of comlynesse, / Of stature, and of wel set gladnesse, / Of goodlyhede so wel beseye” (“beauty, / Of manner, and of physical attractiveness, / Of stature, and of well set gladness, / Of goodliness so well formed” 829). He does honor to their relationship when he describes her as

“my suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf,
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my blesse,
My worldes welfare, and my goddesse,
And I hooly hires and everydel”

(“my sustenance, my pleasure, my life, / My happiness, my health, and all my bliss, /
My world’s welfare, and my goddess, / And I wholly hers in everything” (1038-1041).

His praise of White is extensive and no less detailed than the jeweler’s description of his idealized pearl, but a difference emerges when the knight explains, “Nay, while I am alyve her, / I nyl foryte hir never moo” (“No, while I am alive, / I will never forget her” 1124-1125). Memories of his dead wife are a part of his life experience, a part of him that he refuses to surrender. Unlike the jeweler who is forced to view his pearl in her transformed image, the knight clings to the comfort of the past as he remembers his wife in her earthly form. The narrator responds to the knight by encouraging him to continue speaking of his beloved, this time concerning how he told her he loved her (1134). As the knight shares the details of his life with White, he relives those experiences and draws comfort from reminiscence.

The interest in memorializing the dead was prevalent among all medieval social classes, but only the wealthy had the resources to build monuments or provide markers. The Black Knight’s interest in remembering White echoes John of Gaunt’s annual observance of the Duchess Blanche’s death day. Historian Sydney Armitage-Smith explains that the Duchess Blanche was buried in the cathedral of St. Paul in London near the high altar under a “costly tomb of alabaster” (77). A painted effigy of her likeness in marble was placed on the tomb and each day of the year two priests chanted masses for her soul at an altar beside her, furnished with rich missal and chalice (77). In addition to the daily masses, each year on September 12, the anniversary of her death, a separate mass was held in St. Paul’s to remember the Duchess. The yearly observance was taken seriously as the “Duke and his household attended, or if the Duke were out of England his high officers took his place” (77). The comfort of public remembrance was an important aspect of grief for the nobility, pursued by John of Gaunt as well as the fictional Black Knight. It was another advantage enjoyed by the aristocracy, but unavailable to the middle class mourner.
The knight revives his love through memories, but the tradesman does not enjoy the same freedom. The jeweler’s disempowerment is apparent from the first encounter with him, as he sleeps on the flowery plot (*Pearl* 57-59). The jeweler passively falls asleep, in an outdoor setting during daylight hours. He is unable to control his own bodily functions any longer and is taken unbidden to an unknown landscape in the dream vision. He suffers disequilibrium because of his travels, and is not sure as to where his vision has brought him (65). Most importantly, the jeweler is confronted by the transformed, adult form of his pearl who restricts him from dwelling on memories of a past life with her. He briefly describes his pearl in the opening of the poem as:

“So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
So smal, so smœpe her sydeȝ were,
Quere-so-euer I juged gemmeȝ gaye,
I sette hyr sengely in synglure”

(“So round, so rare, / so small, so smooth her sides were, / Wherever I judged gems glimmering / I set her apart, her price untold” 5-8).

The description is metaphorical and there is no explicit description of her as a physical person nor is there any portrayal of his life with her in the past. The jeweler remains faceless himself and never moves into the comfort of memory which had comprised such a large portion of the knight’s mourning. Throughout his dream vision, he journeys forward and the old is made new. His toddler is transformed into a bride, the sun sets in the vineyard, he approaches the city of God and in the end, he is a changed man. He moves perpetually toward the future, toward eternity, and he has little choice in the direction of the journey.

Although he is rarely allowed to assert his will, the jeweler is granted one request as he receives a view of the Holy City (*Pearl* 985-1080). Even then, the jeweler is kept at a distance from his beloved and Paradise while he peers beyond the brook separating them. The sense of personal conversation so present in the *Book of the Duchess* is absent in *Pearl* as the maiden and
jeweler maintain a distance at all times. As many critics point out, they speak over the dividing water on opposing sides figuratively and literally. Christ grants the jeweler a conditional view of the Holy City, but does not allow him to enter (968-971). The jeweler’s distant position from his ultimate goal is a reminder that he is not yet considered worthy enough to enter sanctified space. Throughout *Pearl*, his acceptance is conditional and he has limited freedom to move, to verbalize his emotions, or to pursue comfort. He is ultimately disempowered by his lack of courtesy.

Those differing levels of autonomy in the mourners contribute to contrasting attitudes concerning loss. The jeweler feels powerless and frustrated while holding an attitude of victimization. He tells the maiden that his pearl was taken away from him, that they were “town & twayned” (“torn and constrained” 251). She, of course, rebukes him for that belief, explaining that “3e haf your tale mysetente / To say your perle is al awaye” (“you have wrongly expressed / Your tale to say your pearl was taken away” 257-258). He, however, maintains a sense of unfairness in the entire affair, and unfairness in compensation is what he complains about most loudly concerning her rank and youth. For the jeweler, fate and God take things away unfairly while he must suffer and yearn for what is lost. Obedience and repentance are, however, required of him and the maiden states that clearly: “loue ay God & wele & wo / For anger gayne\3e not a cresse” (“love God always in times of plenty and sorrow, / For anger will gain you nothing” 342-343).

Obedience does not come easily to the jeweler and he is guided by his own passion to act rather than by the rules of courtesy. The jeweler still rejects the idea that he is not welcome in heaven and takes action to remove the barrier of water separating him from his pearl. As he rushes the water his vision ends and he wakes in the “erber wlonk” (“the garden” 1171). Through his actions to force admittance to Paradise, it is clear that his understanding remains that of the middle class tradesman who must take from life what he wants. His inability to accept
courteously the maiden’s advice, especially to have patience and belief, results in his being soundly rejected from Paradise. He awakes to find himself on the grave where he fell asleep, separated once more from his pearl (1171). His rejection of courtly habits, and the spiritual truths they figure forth, have resulted in a failure to achieve his fondest desires.

In contrast to the jeweler, the knight’s courteousness and sense of personal power contribute to a controlled mourning process. As sorrow itself, he establishes himself on the same plane of existence of Fate and therefore, the chess game he lost with her was a contest between equals. He is not a victim of Fate, but rather a combatant who lost due to the vagaries of chance. As he describes it, “fals Fortune hath pleyd a game / Atte ches with me” (“false Fortune has played a game / At chess with me” 618-619). Blaming Fate for his loss also removes God or religion as the source of his suffering. Fate is a faceless adversary who plays cruel tricks on humanity and anger towards her is justified. The narrator has no responsibility to correct the knight for his animosity toward Fate and the focus of the poem remains simply secular. Rather than God’s controlling the course of his life, the knight maintains that privilege for himself, even in the depths of mourning. It is also worth noting that although isolated under a tree, the knight is still capable of creating poetry and drawing an audience for public spectacle. Always aware of himself as a public leadership figure, he is not self-deprecating, nor does he apologize for his actions. When the narrator suggests the knight has loved well and probably has nothing of which to repent, the knight vehemently denies any regret in his love: “Repentaunce? Nay, fy!” (“Repentance? No, fie!” 1115). The knight clings to the validity of his emotions, exuding an air of confidence and authority even in the depths of grief. He soundly refuses to repent of any aspect of his relationship with White, including his remembrance of her. The knight remains confident in his own efficacy and his station in life, and it is others, like the narrator, who must conform to his values and culture.
As the dream ends, the narrator in the *Book of the Duchess* rejoins the hunt and returns to wakefulness. He assumes the knight will journey on toward the “long castel with walls white / Be Seynt Johan, on a rych hill” (“long castle with white walls / By Saint John, on a rich hill,” 1318-1319). Usually critics argue the description of place is a play on John of Gaunt’s title as Earl of Richmond, or it could simply describe a well-appointed castle situated on a rise. Whether taken to be a specific or general location, the knight is assumed to be welcomed. The dream vision ends before the narrator witnesses the knight’s exit, but he expects the knight to journey toward an elite and comfortable existence, symbolized by the castle on the hill. While *Pearl* ends with the jeweler still facing mixed emotions, the knight concludes his story with calm finality: “She ys ded” (“She is dead” 1309). Although Chaucer does not typically provide closure at the end of his poems, the *Book of the Duchess* offers some sense of finality, probably because it would have been unwise to leave a figure representing John of Gaunt dangling and conflicted at the end of a poem. As a result, the knight gains closure as he calmly faces his wife’s death and continues on toward a secure and privileged earthly life.

The Black Knight’s higher social status and mastery of courtesy clearly attract sympathy and companionship in mourning, but the jeweler is not without some advantages of his own. In particular, the jeweler’s engagement with religion provides the hope of reunification with his beloved that is absent from the knight’s experience. As the *Book of the Duchess* draws to a close, the knight is healed enough to face the reality of his beloved’s death, but he moves toward a physical castle on a hill, not toward Paradise itself, nor his beloved. His mourning is depicted as a thoroughly secular experience, one that alternates between the past and present. It also comes to an abrupt end with the narrator’s question, “Where is she now?” (1298). The knight does not answer that she is in heaven, but only that “[s]he ys ded” (“She is dead” 1309). In contrast, the jeweler looks toward eternity, and his grief is tempered by a sense of purpose at the end of *Pearl*. 
Although mourning is a difficult experience for him, the jeweler can achieve his beloved through learning the habits of courtesy and manifesting those behaviors in service to Christ. Should the jeweler choose to obey, he has the comfort of knowing he may reunite with his pearl in Paradise, where “mys ne mornying com neuer” (“loss nor mourning never were” 262).
CONCLUSION

The existence of poems such as *Pearl* and the *Book of the Duchess* bears witness to the fact that grief was a shared and painful issue in medieval life. Otherwise, there would have been no audience for the poems and little need to write them. The poems also reflect a great deal more about medieval life than suffering because they provide evidence of the unbreakable bonds of devotion and love that existed between fathers and children or husbands and wives. The loss of his wife was painful to the knight only because he placed value upon her. His love for her brought pain, but his memories of her also provide the means for him to heal and continue living.

The jeweler’s love for his child brought terrible suffering as well, but that same connection led him on a journey to Paradise. Although according to some critics, the jeweler’s fixation on his pearl precludes any real change of heart at the end of the poem, his dead beloved is now a part of Christ’s body as she explained to the mourner (ll. 457-468). As the jeweler continues to yearn for her presence, he hungers for a part of Christ Himself. At the same moment he longs for unity with his pearl, he longs for Paradise itself, which is the ultimate goal of a Christian. Margery Kempe had a vision of Christ who told her that “ther is no gyft so holy as is the gyft of love, ne nothing to be so mech desyred as lofe, for lofe may purchasyn what it can desyren” [there is no gift so holy as is the gift of love, nor nothing to be so much desired as love, for love may purchase what it can desire] (Kempe 1121-1122). Love is a holy gift in *Pearl*, as it leads the mourner to seek his daughter who educates him in biblical knowledge and reminds him of the value of courtesy of spirit, offering a clear path to hope and salvation. Although the middle class mourner struggles to understand the new depiction of heaven, his love for the deceased remains his most powerful asset. It leads him not only back into productive earthly life, but also toward life eternal.
WORKS CITED


