

FITT X – MORE

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Introduction

Fitt X concludes the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20: 1-16) begun in Fitt IX. The Fitt begins in the middle of a fairly close translation of the gospel text including Christ's aphoristic moralization of the parable (541-572). The Maiden, identifying herself with the last laborers to arrive in the vineyard, explains that the parable demonstrates how grace has granted her more reward in Heaven than could have been expected through a judgment of justice (577-588). The Dreamer responds to the Maiden, mimicking the complaint of the first workers in the vineyard and suggesting a Scriptural precedent for expecting Heavenly reward to be determined in some measure by earthly merit (589-600). Fitt X concludes with the Dreamer's insistence that the parable – and by extension the Maiden's status in Heaven – represents an excessively unjust system of payment.

The Dreamer's response to the Maiden's explication of the parable has often been presented as evidence for his theological simplicity, his intellectual solipsism, or an outright act of resistance.¹ Closer attention to other contemporary references to the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, however, reveals that the Dreamer

¹ Lynn Staley, *The Voice of the Gawain Poet* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), and Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Pearl Poet Revisited* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan, 1994). Both David Aers and Jim Rhodes have proposed slightly different readings, arguing that the Dreamer is neither naïve nor ignorant but simply representative of alternative theological positions. For Rhodes, the Dreamer and Maiden engage in a Bakhtinian dialogic in which each has authoritative though contrastive positions. For Aers, the Dreamer's resistances to the Maiden's instruction mark him as a figure of heterodoxy. See Jim Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology: Chaucer, Grosseteste, and the Pearl-Poet* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 126-128; David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 54-73.

may, in fact, be giving voice to a commonly held interpretation of the text – one that recognized the importance of worldly works within the economy of spiritual reward. The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard appears in a number of other Middle English texts. These works often incorporate materials from the rich traditions of exegetical and homiletic comment on the parable, including Origen, Augustine, Gregory the Great, the *Glossa Ordinaria*, and Nicholas of Lyra.² The parable makes regular appearances as the gospel reading for Suptuagesima Sunday in surviving Middle English sermon collections.³ While these sermons often make explicit references to the traditions established by Origen, Augustine, Gregory, and others, they often betray the particular concerns of their late-medieval English lay communities in interpreting and applying the scriptural text. Drawing from a variety of contemporary Middle English sermons, Mary Raschko's recent work has shown a prevalent emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between earthly works and heavenly reward in vernacular preaching.⁴ Perhaps the most famous insistence that the parable demonstrates such a relationship is Thomas Wimbledon's *Redde rationem villicacionis tue*

² For an extensive listing of the available sources on the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard see Wailes, 138.

³ For the best and most recent treatment of the parables within vernacular English writings of the period, see Mary Raschko, "Rendering the Word: Vernacular Accounts of the Parables in Late Medieval England." PhD Dissertation (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009). Important foundational treatments are offered in G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933) and Stephen L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Middle English sermons touching on the parable can be found in the following collections: Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons, Edited from British Museum MS Royal 18 B. xxiii*, EETS o.s. 209 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 40; Anne Hudson, ed., *English Wycliffite Sermons, Vol I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 37/378-383; Anne B. Thompson, ed., *The Northern Homily Cycle*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), 14/83-93; Cigman, ed., *Lollard Sermons*, EETS o.s. 294 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8/80-92; and Susan Powell, ed., *John Mirk's Festial, Edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II*, EETS o.s. 334 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15/60-66.

⁴ Raschko, 86-87.

preached at Paul's Cross in 1388.⁵ Wimbledon's sermon, which takes the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard as its protheme, mobilizes the text in a defense of the tri-partite organization of labor among priests, secular rulers, and laborers. The sermon draws on the Matthew text to show how all will be called on the day of judgment to render an account of how they have lived: "And so euery man trauayle in his degre; for whanne þe euen is come þat is þe ende of þe world, 'þanne euery man shal take reward, good oþer euyl aftir þat he haþ trauayled here.' Prima Corinthios iij."⁶ A so-called Lollard sermon makes the connection more explicitly:

Dis gospel techep vs to wirche faste and be not idel while we been here wandrynge in þis wei, for þe hure of þe hiȝe blisse of heuene þat God haþ bihiȝte to alle suche; and also to haue a tristi hope: þouȝ we haue misspendid oure tyme, ȝet naþeles, and we ben founde his trewe seruantes in oure laste age, we schullen haue þe same reward of euerlastyng blisse.⁷

The relationship between earthly work and spiritual reward is made clear here: in order to hope for a reward that has already been promised (bihiȝte), the faithful must demonstrate themselves to have been true servants through diligent work.⁸

The reference to the labor in the vineyard also crops up in Middle English poetry to emphasize the place of earthly works in determining divine judgment. In *Dives and Pauper*, for example, Pauper quotes from the parable in order to explain how all will be asked to account for their lives on the day of judgment:

⁵ Thomas Wimbledon, Wimbledon's Sermon: Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue: A Middle English Sermon of the Fourteenth Century. Ed. Ione Kemp Knight (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967).

⁶ Wimbledon, 68/114-118.

⁷ Cigman, ed., 80/5-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 92/411-415. The sermon offers a detailed schematic of a tripartite workforce beset by three enemies, each with three corresponding attributes, who try to spoil the vineyard by catching the workers in idleness. It concludes with a final exhortation that God may help the workers: "to wirche so wiseli in þis world oure werkis in þis vyne, eche man in his estaat þat he stant inne, þat we moun like þe Lord þerwiþ and be alowed [þ]e peny" (88-92/283-415; 92/428-431).

For þan Christ schal seyn to euery man & woman: Tolle
quod tuum est et uade [Mt. 20: 14], Tac þat is þin and þat
þu hast deseruyd & go þin way, to heuene zif þu haue do
wel & to helle zif þu haue don omys and nout amendyt
þe.⁹

What is interesting here is how the storyworld of the parable has been subsumed into the words spoken by the lord of the vineyard. Pauper does away with the need to interpret the parable allegorically or to parse the meaning from Christ's aphoristic morals. Rather, he takes seriously the simile that begins the parabolic exploration of how the kingdom of heaven is like a man who hires laborers to work in his vineyard and renders the parable as the spoken words of Christ. Stripped of its integumental vehicle in this way, the parable offers Pauper a straightforward gloss of the Book of Daniel and a prophecy of what Christ will say on the day of judgment.

This context of contemporary engagement with the parable in Matthew is crucial to a reading of the exchange between the Dreamer and the Maiden at the structural center of the *Pearl*-poem. Far from Pauper's straightforward adoption of the Matthew text as a gloss for the operations of divine judgment, the *Pearl*-poet's attention to the parable underscores what some have read as the central crux of the poem: "a direct confrontation between earthly and heavenly values."¹⁰ The *Pearl*-poet neither glosses over the literal level of the story nor allows the literal to be entirely subsumed into a moral or analogical reading. Rather, the *Pearl*-poet distends the parable, adds to it, and dwells on its potential to produce more than one reading. The combination of structural and verbal repetitions aligning the two interlocutors with characters from the parable brings the tension between the desire for just reward and the superfluity of divine grace into confrontation with each other not only within the storyworld of the parable but also within the dream vision itself. The concatenation of the word *more* in Fitt X further underscores this tension, suggesting something larger, greater, additional, longer in duration, stronger, more complete, or more important within and

⁹ Priscilla Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper*, Vol I, Part II. EETS o.s. 280 (OUP, 1980), 250.

¹⁰ Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, ed., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 4th ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 79.

simultaneously beyond both the parable and the exchange in Fitt X.¹¹ Through the repetition of *more* and its verbal variants in addition to the structural repetitions of the relations between lord and laborer, God and Maiden, Maiden and Dreamer, and God and Dreamer, Fitt X discloses more and more within the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard and in the parable's relation to its readers.

541-542: The date of þe daye þe lorde con know / Called to þe reue: Lede, pay þe meyny / Gyf hem þe hyre þat I hem owe

The concatenated word of Fitt IX, *date*, begins Fitt X as the object of the periphrastic verbal construction, *con know* (began to know or recognize), which takes *þe lorde* as its subject. The centrality of *þe lorde* at the outset of Fitt X is suggestive. It is *þe lorde* who determines when the time is right for settling accounts at the end of the day, who summons the reeve to gather the laborers, who owes the laborers their recompense, who worries about being reproached, who pronounces that the wage for each will be a penny, and who asserts that the penny is simultaneously the prerogative of their covenant (562) and what pleases him to offer as a gift (565-6). As in the Matthew account, Christ identifies himself with *þe lorde* from the parable (569). Medieval readings of the parable interpret the householder as both Christ and God. In Wimbledon's sermon, the householder is glossed as Christ, himself: "To spiritual undirstondyng þis housholdere is oure lord Iesu Crist, þat is heed of þe houshold of holi chirch."¹² The sermon in BL Additional 41321 seems to have the Godhead in mind as the figural householder: "Þis housholder þat þis gospel spekeþ of is oure Lord God, whiche haþ an housold of þre stagis – þat is heuene, erþe, and helle."¹³

544: And fyrre, þat non me may reprené

The *fyrre* (furthermore, MED 6d) of this line evinces the excess of this moment in the Maiden's recounting of the parable. While the *Pearl*-poet's account of the Matthew text cannot be called a literal translation of the Vulgate, it remains a fairly close paraphrase of the

¹¹ Middle English Dictionary (MED), "more" definitions 1a, 2a, 3b, 4b, 5a, 6a, 7a, and 8a.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61/13-15.

¹³ Cigman, 81/11-13.

scriptural text. This line, however, seems to emerge *ex nihilo* and draw particular attention to the *pleny* of line 549.

545-548: Set hem alle vpon a rawe / And gyf vchon inlyche a peny. / Bygyn at þe laste þat standez lowe, / Tyl to þe fyrste þat þou atteny.

The word “peny” was a common Middle English translation for biblical and classical monetary units, here rendering the Latin *denarius*.¹⁴ John Bowers, who reads the *Pearl*’s distention of the parable as a comment on late fourteenth century English labor practices and economic realities, suggests that a penny a day would have been in accordance with the legal requirement of a just wage established by the 1388 Statute of Laborers.¹⁵ Bowers sees the *Pearl*-poet’s treatment of the parable as a fantasy wish-fulfillment of the English landed gentry, who would have envied the householder’s ability to rigorously enforce the terms of a labor contract and maintain the final word over negotiations while still seeming benevolent and generous to last laborers. He suggests that *Pearl* be read within the context of “a traditional literary disdain toward *vileins*” that “unanimously took the part of the landed gentry in these social contests.”¹⁶ The Maiden’s gloss (573-588), which I treat below, offers an alternative to the literal reading of the penny, suggesting that it signifies another system in which “vch mon payed inlyche” (603). For now, though, it suffices to note that the language of the parable – here, *gyf vchon inlyche* – will be repeated by one of the interlocutors of the dream vision.

That the first shall be last and the last shall be first is one of the aphoristic morals attached to the parable by Christ (Matthew 20:16). As the final part of the instructions given by the owner of the vineyard to his reeve, this utterance has not yet gained the force of prophecy, but it will be repeated again in *Pearl* at lines 570-572 and reiterated by the Maiden as both the lesson of the parable and a justification for her position in Heaven.

¹⁴ Middle English Dictionary (MED), “peni” definition 2a.

¹⁵ John Bowers, *Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44. He adds further, “At immediate issue here is the lord’s absolute right to enforce labor contracts and to determine the wage-level for the laborers hired for the summer harvest” (46).

549-554: And þenne þe fyrst bygonne to pleny / And sayden
þat þay hade trauayled sore / Þese bot on oure hem con
streny / Vus þynk vus oʒe to take more. / More haf we served,
vus þynk so, / Þat suffred han þe dayez hete,

The first laborers complain that they have worked longer and therefore deserve more recompense than the last laborers to arrive. They suggest that just payment might be proportional to the relative difficulty of the laboring or to the time spent in the vineyard (“þat þay hade trauayled sore” (550) and “suffred han þe dayez hete” (554)). The *Pearl*-poet draws particular attention to the division among the workers by inserting the householder’s concern that he might be reproached (544), offering a lengthier account of the laborer’s complaints than is attested in the Matthew text, and repeating the structure of the complaint in the Dreamer’s response to the Maiden’s gloss of the parable (589-600). Unlike the author of *Pearl*, though, medieval sermons on the parable attempt to obscure any potential for reading discord among the laborers. The prothème to Wimbledon’s sermon concludes with a paraphrase of the lines that open Fitt X, rendering the Matthew text: “Whanne þe day was ago, he clepid his styward and heet to ʒeue eche man a peny.”¹⁷ Wimbledon’s sermon does not continue the parable beyond these lines, avoiding the complaint of the workers and the aphorisms offered at the conclusion of Matthew’s account. This seems like a good strategy considering that Wimbledon’s sermon is largely a defense of the divisions of feudal labor along a tripartite model.

Other medieval sermons, however, retain the complaint of the laborers and work hard to account for it within a moral and analogical reading of the parable. The sermon for Septuagesima Sunday in Anne Hudson’s collection of English sermons follows the example offered by Gregory the Great’s homily on the parable by insisting that the *grucchyng*e of the laborers be understood as a “wondryng in sowle, and þanking of Godis grace þat he ʒaf so myche ioye to men for so luytel traueyle.”¹⁸ The sermon transforms the complaint of the laborers into a moment of joy and appreciation for the householder’s magnanimity, but it proves difficult for even so short a sermon as this one to maintain in the face of the parable’s closing exchanges. Only a few lines later, continuing its explanation of the parable’s closing moments, the text defends the response of

¹⁷ Wimbledon, 61/13-15.

¹⁸ Hudson, 382/105-106.

the vineyard owner by reproving the *grucchyng*e of the laborers: “Ne non of hem schulde grucen a3eynes goodnesse of þis iuste Fadir, for he may 3yuen of his owne more þan any man may disserue by mannys ri3twisnesse, or euenhed of any chaffare.”¹⁹ It is clear that *grucchyng*e has returned to its more common sense in this defense of the lord’s magnanimity, but it is unclear how the two readings of the *grucchyng*e are meant to relate to one another. The Septuagesima sermon in BL Additional 41321 also strains to give a positive reading of the laborer’s complaint and, like the sermon in Hudson’s collection, relies on Gregory’s transformation of the worker’s complaint to do so: “þis grucchyng is not ellis but a wonderful merveilyng in mannes soule or mannes þou3t of þe grete mercy, bounte, and grace of oure Lord, þat rewardeþ eche man iliche.”²⁰ Unlike the sermon in Hudson’s collection, however, the BL Additional 41321 sermon has room to entertain alternative readings. Suggesting, “Or ellis it mai be vnderstonde þus, as anoþer glose seiþ”, the sermon interprets the complaint of the laborers again, but this time it declares that the laborers unjustly reproach the owner of the vineyard.²¹ The text reads, “For to him þat cam first, hee quytt him his couenaunt, and more my3te he not axe, bi lawe ne bi resoun; and him þat came laste, he rewardeþ him of his grace.”²² Not only is the complaint of the first laborers unreasonable, it is unlawful. Clearly, the laborer’s *grucchyng*e has returned no longer as the marvelous wondering of its earlier transformation but as the envious and covetous moaning that, as the sermon reminds its audience, has no place among the blessed.

555-556: Þenn þyse þat wro3t not hourez two, / And þou dotz hem vus to conterfete.

The complaint that the last laborers worked only one hour in the vineyard (551) is amended here to two hours. This divergence from the Matthew text, where Matthew 20:12 has the last laborers working only one hour, recalls that the Maiden “lyfed not two 3er in oure þede” (483).

In line 556, the confrontation between earthly and heavenly values takes on the language of counterfeiting: “and you do

¹⁹ Ibid., 382/109-112.

²⁰ Cigman, 84/159-162.

²¹ Ibid., 85/173; 173-185.

²² Ibid., 85/176-179.

counterfeit us to them.” The MED identifies this passage as the sole exemplar of definition 1c for *countrefeten*, “to be like (sb.), be equal to”, but the tone of this moment in the parable suggests that *conterfete* carries the connotative weight of its other denotations as well.²³ At the very least, there is a sense of false simulation or the attempt to pass off an inferior object as more worthy or valuable.²⁴ I would suggest, as well, that the *Pearl*-poet might have been calling to mind the legal sense of *countrefeten*, which denoted contrivances in plots of deception, murder, and treason.²⁵

**557-8: Penne sayde þe lorde to on of þo / ʹFrende, no waning
I wyl þe ʒete**

The Lord’s response to the complaining workers is difficult to parse from the outset. Both the language and syntax of his initial utterance has proven difficult for editors of the poem, who have relied on the *Pearl*-poet’s fidelity to the text in Matthew to justify their respective interpretations. The difficulty resides in line 558 with the word *waning*, which appears in the manuscript as *wanig*. The word has commonly been understood as a noun from the verb *wane* (OE *wanian*), meaning “grow less” or “decrease.” Andrew and Waldron suggest that the line be read as, “Friend, I do not wish to make any reduction (of what is due) to you.”²⁶ Citing both the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (Mark 5:38) and *Owl and the Nightingale* (line 311), David Fowler proposes that the word be read instead as a form of the Old English *wānung*, meaning “lamentation.” Thus, Fowler has proposed that the line be rendered: “Friend, I will allow thee no lamentation.”²⁷ While Fowler’s reading makes sense of the line without the supplementation Andrew and Waldron provide and without stretching the obvious connotation of *ʒete* (to permit, to allow), even Fowler concedes that his reading diverges from the Vulgate line: *Amice, non facio tibi injuriam*, which finds a closer parallel in Andrew and Waldron’s translation.

²³ MED, “*countrefeten*” definition 1c.

²⁴ MED, “*countrefeten*” definitions 4 and 5.

²⁵ MED, “*countrefeten*” definition 6. See also the definitions for *countrefeten* and *contreven* in John A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), 36 & 38.

²⁶ Andrew and Waldron, note to lines 553-9, pg. 79.

²⁷ David C. Fowler, *MLN*, 74 (1959), 582.

**559-564: Take þat is þyn owne, and go. / And I hyred þe for
a peny agrete, / Quy bygynnez þou now to þrete? / Watz not
a pené þy couenaunt þore? / Fyrre þen couenaunde is noȝt to
plete; / Wy shalte þou þenne ask more?**

The householder's response to the worker's complaint insists on the terms of their agreement at the time he hired each group of workers. According to the owner of the vineyard, to ask for more than the agreed-upon penny would be to claim more than was stipulated in their agreement of a penny in exchange for a day's labor (509-510). The repetition of the word *couenaunt* in consecutive lines reinforces not only the conditional terms of the workers' agreements with the vineyard owner but also the legal force of their contract.²⁸

**565-566: More, weþer loulyly is me my gyfte / To do wyth myn
quatso me lykez**

If the payment of a penny to the first workers is justified by the terms of their agreement, the payment of a penny to the last workers is justified by what pleases the vineyard owner to offer as a gift. Howard H. Schless and Richard Firth Green have suggested that this appeal to "quatso me lykez" echoes the attention given to the "princes paye" in the poem's opening and closing lines, which invoke an absolutist legal maxim *quod principi placet, habet legis vigorem* (the prince's pleasure has the force of law).²⁹

**567-568: Oþer ellez þyn yȝe to lyþer is lyfte / For I am goude
and non byswykez**

The Gollancz edition of the poem notes that lines 565-568 echo the Wycliffite Bible "Whether it is not leueful to me to do that that

²⁸ For a discussion of the language of contracts and covenants in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that has much to recommend for the reader of *Pearl*, see Robert J. Blanch and Julian N. Wasserman, "Medieval Contracts and Covenants: The Legal Coloring of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Neophilologus* 68 (1984): 598-610. For a more general introduction to English contracts, see chapters 18-21 in John Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 4th Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁹ Howard H. Schless, "Pearl's 'Princes Paye' and the Law," *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall, 1989), 183-85; Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 373-374.

Y wole? Whether thin i3e is wicked, for Y am good?”³⁰ The parallels are certainly striking since the lines from *Pearl* read, “or else your eye is lifted to evil (*luper/lyper*) / For I am good and not a cheat.” The line in the parable seems to recall an earlier moment in Matthew describing the eye as the lamp of the body, warning that “if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness” (KJV Matthew 6:24). *Pearl*’s addition of “and non byswykez” to the simple Latin, *ego bonus sum*, from Matthew 20:15 seems to have a dual function. Primarily, the verb *biswiken*, seems to be used here in its primary sense meaning to cheat, deceive, or mislead and its closely overlapping denotation of being misled by the devil, the world, or the flesh.³¹ These two definitions seem apropos to the Matthew text’s reading of the eye as a lamp of the body as well as the householder’s assertion that he is not defrauding the workers. Additionally, the word *biswiken* denotes the taking away or withholding of what is owed, which echoes the householder’s insistence of treating his agreement with the workers as a covenant or contract.³² When read concurrently, the literal, theological, and quasi-legal denotations of *biswiken* provide the range of the householder’s defense of his actions.

569-572: Pus schal I, quop Kryste, hit skyfte / Þe laste schal be þe fyrst þat strykez, / And þe fyrst þe laste, be he neuer so swyft, / For mony ben called, þa3 fewe be mykez.

Having concluded the parable in the gospel of Matthew, Christ offers two aphoristic statements by way of explanation. As so often happens in the gospel accounts, the narrative quickly moves from Christ’s speech to the next narrative moment without anymore of a transition than the simple particle, *and* (*kai/et*). The word signals the end of one narrative moment and links it to the next, but the precise nature of their contiguity is never quite clear in Matthew’s account. Often the particle functions merely to mark sequence; sometimes Matthew employs it to evoke the poetry of the Hebrew Scripture by rhythmically punctuating the prose; and at other times the particle suggests a more nuanced relationship between what comes before

³⁰ Gollancz, Sir Israel, ed. And trans., *Pearl, Edited with Modern Rendering, Together with Boccaccio’s Olympia*, 2nd Ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921), 144.

³¹ MED, “*biswiken*” definition 1 & 2.

³² MED, “*biswiken*” definition 4.

and what follows: causal, logical, ascensive, or adversative.³³ In this case, what follows is a short narrative scene in which Jesus takes the twelve disciples to Jerusalem and prophesies his betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection (Matthew 20: 17-19).³⁴ The sequence from parable to the salvific moment of Christian theology is mirrored in the medieval homiletic tradition, where the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard prompts two seemingly paradoxical lines of doctrine. On the one hand, medieval audiences were reminded that God offers the penny of eternal bliss equally to all. On the other hand, medieval preachers and exegetes stressed that this penny could not be gained by idleness: while the gift of grace could not be earned, work – both of the spiritual and bodily variety – was the surest path into the vineyard where the penny could be given.

The two moral statements Christ offers for the parable appear in the Vulgate and throughout English Bible translations through the seventeenth century, but a number of modern English translations based on Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* omit the final clause of Matthew 20:16 (*multi sunt enim vocati pauci autem electi*), citing a more reliable manuscript tradition.³⁵ While some modern editions may no longer include this second aphorism, it is clear that the status of the *electi* in Matthew 20:16 was a concern for the *Pearl*-poet and his contemporaries. The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22: 1-14; Luke 14:16-24), recounted in *Cleanness*, provides

³³ Stephanie Black argues that the basic function of kai in Matthew is continuative, but she allows that other low level semantic values remain possible. Stephanie Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Mathew: Kai, De, Tote, Gar, Oun, and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse*, Library of New Testament Studies, Book 216 (NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2002), esp. 111-113. See also A.T. Robertson's treatment of Greek particles in Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914).

³⁴ This is Christ's third prediction of his crucifixion in each of the synoptic gospel accounts (Mark 10:32-34 and Luke 18:31-34). The first appears at Matthew 16:13-23, Mark 8:27-33, Luke 9:18-22, and John 6:67-71; the second occurs at Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:30-32, and Luke 9:43-45.

³⁵ I discovered this difference when investigating the conjunction (*For*), which translates the *enim* of the Latin Vulgate and is consistent with the Wycliffite Bible, the Douay-Rheims Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the King James Version of the Bible. The American Standard Version, the New International Version, and the Revised Standard Version follow Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* in omitting the second aphorism.

a much bleaker lesson that “fele arn to called” (162) while the *Northern Homily Cycle* glosses the two aphoristic morals separately so that the Parable of the Vineyard seems to offer two distinct opportunities for instruction.³⁶

573-576: Þus pore men her part ay pykez, / Þa3 þay com late and lyttel wore, / And þa3 her sweng wyth lyttel atslykez, / Þe merci of God is much þe more.

The final lines of this stanza offer one more explanation for the parable but this time through the words of the Pearl Maiden herself. The Maiden’s explanation seems superfluous if not altogether redundant, but A.C. Spearing has argued that the Pearl-poet consistently offers explicit exegesis for the audience so that they might experience a similar process of symbolic interpretation that the Dreamer undergoes.³⁷ For Spearing, the poem presents a lesson of how to read medieval symbolism by interpreting its figural meaning for the reader as the Dreamer moves through his vision. Here, the Maiden makes more explicit the connection between the vineyard and the reward of everlasting bliss: the kingdom of Heaven is like a vineyard in that even poor men may receive their part of the compensation though they arrive late and are little or unimportant. Even should they be spent (*atslykez*, OE *æt* + *slican*,) with little labor (*sweng*), they receive the lord’s mercy. The repetition of *lyttel* in the Maiden’s gloss is yet another reminder of the small pearl lost by the jeweler in Fitt I.

577-584: More haf I of joye and blysse hereinne, / Of ladyschyp gret and lyuez blom, / Þen alle þe wyzen in þe worlde myzt wynne/ By þe way of ryzt to aske dome. / Wheper welnygh now I con bygynne / In euentyde into þe vyne I come / Fyrst of my hyre my Lorde con mynne / I watz payed anon of al and sum.

The Maiden’s explanation likens her queenship in Heaven to the rewards given to the laborers who entered so lately into the vineyard and looks ahead to the concatenated line of Fitt XII. In explaining her status in Heaven, the Maiden returns once more to the language of the parable. She explicitly identifies herself with the

³⁶ *Northern Homily Cycle*, 84/60-79 and 90/331-432.

³⁷ A.C. Spearing, “Symbolic and Dramatic Development in *Pearl*”, *Modern Philology* 60, no. 1 (Aug. 1962): 12.

laborers hired at *euensonge* (529), recalling not only the group of laborers to enter the vineyard last and receive their payment first but also the youth of the Jeweler's child (483). The Maiden's interpretation of the parable as an explanation for her own position in Heaven deviates from the two dominant threads of interpreting the hours of the day within the parable as either the ages of man or the ages of the world, but D. W. Robertson has identified a precedent in the twelfth century exegete Bruno Astensis for the Maiden's explanation.³⁸

The Maiden identifies the penny given to the workers of the vineyard as the eternal reward of heavenly bliss. In the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the penny of the parable is glossed in a way that directs attention toward the reward in Heaven awaiting those who have worked towards God's will on Earth: "That es the joye that lastis aye./ For a peny es rounde and hase nane ende/ Swa es the blisse where we sall lende/ If we be lymes of Hali Kirk/ And Goddes will therin will wirke."³⁹ For the Maiden, however, the penny represents a pure and absolute gift of grace that permits her more bliss and joy than could be won or earned through a judgment of *ryȝt*, which encompasses not merely legal justice but also moral right, desert, entitlement or prerogative, as well as duty and obligation.⁴⁰ The image of the penny evokes a series of iconic resonances, most notably the gift of the Host at Mass. At the center of the poem, though, the penny juxtaposed with the repetitions of the first who are last and the last who are first also recalls both the structure of the poem, where the last line echoes its first, and the central image of the pearl, so small and so round (5/6).

**585-588: ȝet oþer þer werne þat toke more tom, / Pat swange
and swat for long ȝore, / Pat ȝet of hyre nobynk þay nom, /
Paraunter noȝt schal to-ȝere more.**

The Maiden recognizes that there are others who spent more time or did more labor in the vineyard. Her perspective here at the end of her explanation of the parable contributes one more layer of

³⁸ For an account of the traditional interpretation of the hours in the parable, see J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), esp. 59-66. D. W. Robertson, "The 'Heresy' of the *Pearl*," *Modern Language Notes* 65, no. 3 (1959): 152-155.

³⁹ *Northern Homily Cycle*, 88/222-226.

⁴⁰ MED "right" definitions 3, 5, 4b, 6a, 7.

interpretation to the story in Matthew: namely, how the last workers in the vineyard would have experienced the householder's magnificence. The Maiden's recognizes that others labor more to receive what she was given "anon of al and sum" (584). The last workers in the vineyard may also have shared this recognition, and perhaps they, like the Maiden in these lines, would have shown sympathy for those who receive nothing for their additional work (*hyre*) and may not for a long time (*to-3ere more*).

**589-594: Then more I meled and sayde apert / ʹMe þynk þy
tale vnresounable / Goddez ryȝt is redy and euermore rert, /
Oþer holy wryt is bot a fable. / In sauter is sayd a verce ouerte
/ Pat spekez a poynt determynable**

Both the parable and the Maiden's explanation present a difficult response to the Dreamer's questions posed at the end of Fitt VIII: "What more honour moȝte he acheue / þat hade endured in worlde stronge, / And lyued in penaunce hys lyuez longe...?" (475-477). While his response to the Maiden attests that by the middle of the poem the Dreamer is not quite prepared for the revelation of divine magnanimity, the reader has good cause to sympathize with him. Andrew and Waldron note, "[His] failure to understand derives partly from the difficulty of the concepts involved, but mainly from the intensity with which the Dreamer grieves for loss and desires its restoration. The immediate effectiveness of logical argument when set against the intensity of deep feeling is limited, even when the logic has divine authority."⁴¹ As the Dreamer's response recalls the objection of the first laborers in the vineyard, the reader is reminded not merely of the language of the parable but also of the extreme weight of the Dreamer's earthly attachments and his desire to make more meaning out of them in the concluding stanza of Fitt X.

The Dreamer asserts that the Maiden's tale is unreasonable because it renders Holy Scripture a mere fable. While the parable is, in fact, a fable in the sense that it presents "a short fictitious narrative meant to convey a moral," it is clear that the Dreamer has the word's other denotations in mind.⁴² In part, his response is a reaction to the structure and function of parables as forms of

⁴¹ Andrew and Waldron, 35.

⁴² MED "fable" definition 1b. Fable is also defined as "a false statement intended to deceive" and "an idle or foolish tale." MED definitions 2a and 3a.

narrative that rely on excesses, superfluity, and slippage thereby requiring elaboration, explication, or glossing. Jesus explains that his parables are offered to listeners so that “seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand” (Mark 4:12). Stephen Wailes notes the wide range of meanings that the Greek loan word *parabola* can take in its Scriptural associations – particularly through the Vulgate’s use of *parabola* for a variety of figurative expressions, and in his treatment of medieval exemplarity, J. Allan Mitchell suggests that patristic and medieval readers would have understood parables as belonging to part of the tradition of classical rhetoric typified by Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, which distinguished the parable from the paradigm.⁴³ Mitchell writes, “The success of paradigms typically depends on their simplicity – brevity, clarity, and plausibility. The parable, by contrast, differs in that it compares things whose likeness is ‘far less obvious.’ An enigmatic figure, the parable is more provocative than directly persuasive because it challenges an audience to think through the terms of the comparison being made rather than to apply it immediately in action without reflection.”⁴⁴ This description seems appropriate to the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, which proposes at its outset that the Kingdom of Heaven “is lyk on hy3t / to a lorde þat hade a uyne” (501-502). What the terms of that comparison are seem, at least from the outset, to be as obscure and arbitrary as the householder’s equation of the first workers with the last. Rather than the mysterious mechanisms of the parable, the Dreamer prefers the “verce ouerte” (593), that is clear, manifest, revealed.⁴⁵

**595-600: Pou quytez vchon as hys desserte, / Pou hy3e Kyng
ay pertermynable. / Now he þat stod þe long day stable, / And
þou to payment com hym byfore, / Penne þe lasse in werke
to take more able, / And euer þe lenger þe lasse þe more.**

The Dreamer provides a quotation from the Psalter to demonstrate both his preference for overt Biblical authority and his insistence that Divine reward takes account of earthly works. His invocation recalls once more the inversion of the relationship

⁴³ Wailes, 3-4; J. Allen Mitchell. *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2004), 118.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, 118.

⁴⁵ MED “overt” definition 1b and 1c.

between the Jeweler and his Pearl, who “cowþez neuer God nauþer plese ne pray, / Ne neuer nauþer Pater ne Crede – / And quen mad on þe fyrst day!” (484-486). Now, speaking to the lost child made queen, the Dreamer appeals to the very Psalter his child had never been old enough to read in order to reply to her Scriptural glossing. *Pearl*'s translation of is quite close to the Psalm: “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. / And unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work” [*semel locutus est Deus duo haec audiui quia potestas Dei et tibi Domine misericordia quia tu redes unicuique iuxta opera sua*] (Psalm 62:11-12 / V Psalm 61:12-13).

The Dreamer's opening, “Then more I meled and sayde apert” (589), suggests a tension in his relationshi to both the Maiden and her revealed authority over Scriptural interpretation. On the one hand, his preference for clear and open speech is reflected in his quotation of the Psalter and the claim that his speech in these final lines is plain, uncovered, overt, frank, or open.⁴⁶ On the other hand, closer attention to the language of his speech reveals the kind of quasi-legal discourse that the householder had invoked when defending his reward to the laborers in the vineyard. Spencer has been the most recent scholar to draw close attention to the difficulties presented by “pertermynable” (596), a word that seems only to survive in this one iteration.⁴⁷ Gordon's edition of the poem amends the word to *pretermynable* and suggests that it could be an abbreviation for *praeterminabilis*. His note explains, “it is usually interpreted as ‘pre-ordaining,’ and assumed to represent a scholastic Latin *praeterminabilis*, rendering Greek προοριζειν, the usual word in the New Testament for ‘pre-ordain.’”⁴⁸ Andrew and Waldron follow P.M. Kean's suggestion that *per* is an intensifying prefix and declare that the emendation to *pretermynable* is unnecessary and does not correspond to the meaning of the Psalm text.⁴⁹ Spencer reads the latinate vocabulary of the Dreamer's response at the end of Fitt X – “ry3t”, “determynable”, “quytez”, and “pertermynable” – as

⁴⁶ MED “apert” definitions 1a, 2, 3a, 3b, and 4a.

⁴⁷ H. Leith Spencer, “*Pearl*: ‘God's Law’ and ‘Man's Law,’” *Review of English Studies* 59, no. 240 (2008): 317-341.

⁴⁸ E.V. Gordon, ed., *Pearl* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953), 65-66.

⁴⁹ M.P. Kean, *The Pearl: An Interpretation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 191; Andrew and Waldron, note to line 596, pg. 81.

bombastic and an attempt to assert clerkly authority.⁵⁰ From the combination of the approximately synonymous verbs in line 589 to the precise terminology with which he frames his response, the Dreamer seems to stage one final attempt to assert the authority of his experience and learning over the Maiden. In so doing, he turns to a Latinate vocabulary to argue for a reward that accounts for earthly works. It is an appeal that recalls both the workers of the parable and the Maiden's statement that she enjoys more bliss than any might win "By þe way of ryzt to aske dome" (580).

The Dreamer's response, especially his final insistence that those who worked for the shortest time seemed to earn more in proportion than those who worked longer, finds an analogue in an anonymous lyric in Harley MS. 2253. The lyric paraphrases the parable in four twelve-line stanzas before offering a final 12-line gloss:

Pis world me wurcheþ wo;
rooles ase þe roo,
y sike for vnsete,
ant mourne ase men doþ mo
for doute of foule fo,
hou y my sunne may bete.
Pis mon þat Matheu zef
A peny þat was so bref,
Pis frely folk vnfete,
zet he zyrnden more,
ant saide he come wel zore,
ant gonne is loue forlete.⁵¹

The Harleian narrator's grief for the man who worked more is analogous to the *Pearl* Dreamer's desire for a payment that "quytez vchon as hys desserte" (595). But as the Maiden shows, the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard reveals that the grace of God promises so much more.

⁵⁰ Spencer, 323.

⁵¹ G.L. Brook, ed., *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS. Harley 2253* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1948), 43/49-60. A more recent edition and translation is available in Susanna Greer Fein, ed., *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, Vol 2, Translated by Fein, David Raybin, and Jan Ziolkowski, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2014).

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