

Paradise, pleasure and desire: Edenic delight in some late-medieval dramatic fragments

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Review

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3 **Paradise, pleasure and desire: Edenic delight in some late-medieval dramatic fragments**
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10 DUBIUS Lorde, syr, what thyng is paradyse,

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12 and what place may it be?
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14 LUCIDUS Syr, a place of al delyte it is.

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17 Herkene and y wyl tellen the.¹
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22 In the beginning, God created heaven and earth, as all medieval Christians knew; they knew,
23 too, that the first man and woman were placed by their maker in Paradise, an idyllic Garden
24 created for them as their home, but from which they and all future generations were
25 excluded following the Fall.² This exclusion aroused a curiosity to know more about the
26 earthly Paradise, a curiosity satisfied by a series of theological speculations and literary
27 conventions about its appearance and qualities which were developed from the earliest
28 Christian centuries and throughout the Middle Ages.
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40 Existing scholarship on the subject of medieval ideas of Paradise is extensive, and there is
41 space here to consider only a few recent examples. Jean Delumeau's engaging study takes a
42 relatively 'popular' approach, providing a broad historicized account of the concept of
43 Paradise and of its interpretation.³ By contrast, Guy Geltner provides an erudite and very
44 focused discussion of the idea of the Garden of Eden in Franciscan discourse, where it is
45 employed in support of poverty and the apostolic life.⁴ Alessandro Scafi's 2006
46 cartographical study is focused primarily on the location of the earthly Paradise as it appears
47 in medieval maps, although he provides some useful insights into the topographical
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3 terminology employed to describe it.⁵ In his unpublished PhD thesis, Robert Brandon II
4
5 situates the concept of Paradise in relation to contemporary cultural values and social
6
7 practices, examined through the lens of three Middle English literary texts.⁶ Most recently,
8
9 Winston Black's thought-provoking *Traditio* article explores William of Auvergne's rejection
10
11 of the earthly delights of Paradise in the context of his wider rejection of Islam, explaining
12
13 William's 'delight-less theology' as a response to his misreading of the Muslim physical
14
15 paradise.⁷ Black's focus is very much upon William's reception and legacy among an
16
17 academic, theologically trained elite, and the physical delights that William scorns are
18
19 grossly appetitive. My concerns in this essay are rather different; I am interested in
20
21 exploring the ways in which the ideas of pleasure and delight, with a specific emphasis on
22
23 physical, sensory and affective experiences, are, in the later Middle Ages, increasingly
24
25 brought to the fore in descriptions of Paradise; and how this trend is noticeably manifested
26
27 in three late-medieval dramatic texts. I first discuss some early descriptions of Paradise, and
28
29 go on to explore the concepts of pleasure and delight as developed in the work of St
30
31 Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. Finally I turn to the dramatic texts themselves,
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33 considering how they employ the idea of Paradise to further their didactic purposes.
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43 *Early descriptions of Paradise*

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45 The biblical description of Eden is simultaneously evocative and strangely elusive:
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50 And the Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning: wherein he
51
52 placed man whom he had formed. And the Lord God brought forth of the ground all
53
54 manner of trees, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of: the tree of life also in the
55
56 midst of paradise: and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out
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3 of the place of pleasure to water paradise, which from thence is divided into four
4
5 heads. The name of the one is Phison: that is it which compasseth all the land of
6
7 Hevilath, where gold groweth. And the gold of that land is very good: there is found
8
9 bdellium, and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gehon: the same
10
11 is it that compasseth all the land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Tigris:
12
13 the same passeth along by the Assyrians. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the
14
15 Lord God took man, and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it, and to
16
17 keep it.⁸
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24 It is easy to be stirred by the idea of a 'paradise of pleasure' (*paradisum voluptatis*), but
25
26 more difficult to crystallize the concept; the various trees are, we are told, 'fair to behold,
27
28 and pleasant to eat of', but the lack of detailed physical description leaves much to the
29
30 imagination. What description there is focuses on the four rivers which flow out of Paradise,
31
32 rather than on the interior scene, suggesting perhaps the ineffable nature of the garden
33
34 itself, and seeking to draw our gaze away from it. Nevertheless, as Delumeau points out, the
35
36 biblical account tells us enough to reveal its indebtedness to descriptions of other sacred
37
38 gardens in ancient Eastern religions, while early Christian commentators such as St Justin
39
40 Martyr, Tertullian and Basil the Great synthesized the scriptural depiction with earlier
41
42 Greco-Roman traditions of the Golden Age and the Elysian Fields.⁹ This synthesizing work
43
44 raises the question of whether the biblical Paradise was to be interpreted literally or
45
46 allegorically, and Augustine, in his *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, acknowledges three possible
47
48 ways of reading the text: literally; spiritually; or as a combination of the two.¹⁰ Having
49
50 previously drifted in the direction of a purely symbolic interpretation in *On Genesis: A*
51
52 *Refutation of the Manichees*, Augustine here declares his support for the third option, in
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3 which the literal meaning is to be adhered to as far as possible, with allegorical readings
4 added as and when appropriate.¹¹ Thus he asserts that Paradise is a real place, 'shady with
5 groves of fruit trees and extensive too and rendered fertile by a huge spring' (VIII,1,4), and
6 the trees and rivers therein are also to be understood literally, although without denying
7 their capacity to stand figuratively as well (VIII,4,8-7,14). 'All these things', he explains,
8 'stood for something other than what they were, but at the same time they were
9 themselves bodily realities.' The tree of life, for example, should be understood as a bodily
10 tree and simultaneously as a sacramental sign of Christ as Wisdom, the source of eternal life
11 (VIII,4,8).¹² Such a dual concept of the earthly Paradise, at once material and spiritually
12 significant, remained highly influential throughout the later Middle Ages, being taken up by
13 Isidore of Seville, Bede and Peter Lombard, among others.¹³
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31 Alongside these theologically sophisticated texts we see the growth of a parallel and more
32 popular tradition, which sought to elucidate the concept of Paradise in terms which were
33 less speculative, and which focused much more on providing both a physical description and
34 an enumeration of its practical human benefits. For example, in the Latin *Elucidarium*, a
35 quasi-catechetical text in dialogue form written in around 1090 by Ps.-Honorius, the
36 questioning disciple asks his master what and where Paradise is; the master's response is
37 clearly indebted to scripture, but offers some additional information:
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50 Locus amoenissimus in Oriente, in quo arbores diversi generis contra varios defectus
51 erant consitae Verbi gratia, ut, si homo congruo tempore de uno comederet,
52 nunquam amplius esuriret, congruo tempore de alio, et nunquam sitiret, de alio
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3 vero, et nunquam lassaretur; ad ultimum, ligno vitae uteretur et amplius non
4
5 senesceret, non infirmaretur, nunquam moreretur.¹⁴
6

7 [The most beautiful place in the east, in which were planted trees of diverse kinds
8
9 against various defects by grace of the Word, so that, if a man ate of one at a fitting
10
11 time, he would hunger no more; at a fitting time, of another, and he would thirst no
12
13 more; of another, and he would be weary no more; at last, enjoy the tree of life and
14
15 no more grow old, nor sicken, nor die.]
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22 The biblical paradise of pleasure is transformed in the *Elucidarium* into a *locus*
23
24 *amoenissimus*, a very beautiful place, while the description of the trees, 'pleasant to eat of',
25
26 is elaborated by a detailed explanation of their beneficial effects. The various trees,
27
28 described without comment in the biblical account, are here subject to an exegetical
29
30 approach which endows them with specific virtues which protect against the human ills of
31
32 hunger, thirst and weariness. The sacramental nature of the tree of life, elaborated by
33
34 Augustine, is eliminated in favour of a more prosaic account of its therapeutic properties,
35
36 warding off age, sickness and even death. Such an emphasis on the practical benefits of
37
38 Paradise, benefits irretrievably lost to mankind after the Fall, surely reflects the increased
39
40 emphasis on pastoral care brought about by the eleventh-century reform movement; the
41
42 *Elucidarium's* propaedeutic nature inevitably results in a focus upon explanations which are
43
44 framed in human and quotidian terms, and which privilege a literal rather than an
45
46 allegorical interpretation.
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55 Less than a hundred years later we see this concept of the literal, humanised Paradise
56
57 extended to the wider created world, and given a rather different emphasis. In the twelfth-
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2
3 century *Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, the Cistercian Walter Daniel describes the moment when
4
5 Aelred, then still in secular service, is first told about the community of monks at Rievaulx:
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9
10 High hills surround the valley, encircling it like a crown. These are clothed by trees of
11
12 various sorts and maintain in pleasant retreats the privacy of the vale, providing for
13
14 the monks a kind of second paradise of wooded delight.¹⁵
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16

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18
19 The sylvan location of the new Cistercian abbey is a 'second paradise' (*alterum paradisum*)
20
21 in which the trees offer private retreats for the enjoyment of the monks. These wooded
22
23 groves may well be intended to assist in divine meditations, but Daniel does not make this
24
25 point explicitly, nor does he draw any overt parallel between the retreat into tree-lined
26
27 privacy in the valley and the much more significant retreat, undertaken by all Cistercians,
28
29 from the secular to the spiritual world.¹⁶ Instead this second paradise, like that described by
30
31 Ps.-Honorius, is an entirely material one, but in a further development it is a paradise in
32
33 which the pleasure of those within it acquires a new significance:
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40 From the loftiest rocks the waters wind and tumble down to the valley below, and as
41
42 they make their hasty way through the lesser passages and narrower beds and
43
44 spread themselves in wider rills, they give out a gentle murmur of soft sound and
45
46 join together in the sweet notes of a delicious melody. And when the branches of
47
48 lovely trees rustle and sing together and the leaves flutter gently to the earth, the
49
50 happy listener is filled increasingly with a glad jubilee of harmonious sound, as so
51
52 many various things conspire together in such a sweet consent, in music whose
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3 every diverse note is equal to the rest. His ears drink in the feast prepared for them,
4
5 and are satisfied.¹⁷
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10 Daniel's account revels in the sounds of water and trees, combining in their 'glad jubilee of
11
12 harmonious sound' (*iocundum iubilum tam concordantis armonie*) to produce a feast for the
13
14 ears, a sensory cocktail which satisfies the 'happy listener' who drinks it in. By emphasizing
15
16 the pleasure to be enjoyed in this environment, Daniel's description foregrounds affect; but
17
18 it is affect constructed with particular literary skill. Of the listening monk he merely tells us
19
20 that he is 'happy' and his ears are 'satisfied'; the affective power of this passage is created
21
22 by the agency with which he imbues the natural world. The waters are 'hasty', their
23
24 murmuring 'gentle' and 'soft', while the 'lovely trees rustle and sing'; together they
25
26 'conspire' in 'sweet consent' to prepare a feast for the monk, and, it should be added, for
27
28 the reader of, or listener to, Daniel's text. This is truly a paradise of delights (*delicie*
29
30 *paradisum*) which brings happiness to the monks therein, and to those who hear or read
31
32 about it. The Vulgate's 'paradise of pleasure' is, in Daniel's hands, a literal and sensuous
33
34 one, treated in a manner which initially might seem to owe more to eastern Islamic than to
35
36 western Christian traditions;¹⁸ but the careful displacement of affect from the human
37
38 listener onto nature itself keeps this text delicately poised between spiritual and physical
39
40 enjoyment, in a manner which becomes an increasingly important strand of medieval piety
41
42 both within and outside the cloister, in Latin and in the vernacular.¹⁹
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52 A later example of this trend appears in the *Cursor Mundi* (c.1300), in which we find a
53
54 description of Paradise which again highlights its effect on the senses and the pleasure this
55
56 arouses:
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 3
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 5 Paradis is a priue stedd,
 6
 7 þar mani mirthes er e-medd,
 8
 9 þe leueleist [loveliest] of all landes;
 10
 11 In erth toward þe est it standes,
 12
 13 land o liue, o ro [peace], and rest,
 14
 15 Wit blis and beild [protection] broiden best,
 16
 17 þar neuer neghes nede ne night,
 18
 19 Bot euer vmlaid wit lem [brightness] and light.
 20
 21
 22 O selenes [happiness] es it wel sene,
 23
 24 þe gresse es euer ilik grene,
 25
 26 Wit alkin blis þat þar es elles;
 27
 28 Flour þar es wit suete smelles;
 29
 30
 31 [...]

32
 33
 34
 35 It es a yard cald o delites
 36
 37
 38 Wit all maner o suet spices.
 39
 40
 41 Qua lenges þar thar þam noght lang,
 42
 43 þar sune es soft and suet sang,
 44
 45 Sune of sautes [saints] þat þar singes.²⁰
 46
 47
 48
 49

50 Paradise here is filled with mirth and woven about with bliss and happiness; the scent of
 51
 52 sweet flowers and spices combines with the warmth of the sun and the sounds of singing to
 53
 54 produce a garden ('yard') of delights. Once again the senses are quickened and satisfied,
 55
 56 and if the *Cursor Mundi* does not attain the degree of sensuous indulgence offered by
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3 Daniel's text, it nevertheless suggests a pleasure which is firmly focused on the physical. We
4
5 might conjecture that the increasing emphasis upon the sensory pleasures of Paradise in the
6
7 accounts of Walter Daniel and the *Cursor Mundi* is evidence of a desire among writers and
8
9 their audiences for particular attention to be given to the notion of sensory enjoyment, and
10
11 it is to this that I now turn.
12
13

14 15 16 17 *Pleasure and delight*

18
19 The term delight (*delectatio*) is employed frequently by Augustine, who understands it to be
20
21 essential to the functioning of the human will, the motivating force which drives all human
22
23 behaviour; our actions give us delight, or serve the purpose of bringing us closer to those
24
25 things in which we take delight.²¹ Delight is thus intimately connected with desire, and
26
27 hence with seeking its own satisfaction; we desire that which delights us, and the more
28
29 delight we experience, the more we want. Augustine's philosophy of delight goes much
30
31 further than this, however; it is not simply an aspect of the human will, but should be
32
33 regarded as 'first and foremost the affective element of God's love'.²² Thus delight is central
34
35 to human psychology and behaviour because it connects us directly, even quasi-
36
37 sacramentally, with God; 'God is all our joy', Augustine asserts, and hence is the source of all
38
39 mankind's delight.²³ God is thus the proper object of human delight, and for those who wish
40
41 to come closer to him, delight necessarily inclines them to God. However, this proper
42
43 functioning of delight can be and is subject to corruption as a result of original sin; our own
44
45 sins, therefore, are also accompanied by pleasure. As Augustine points out in the
46
47 *Confessions*, when discussing his theft of some pears with a number of juvenile companions,
48
49 it was not the fruit which they sought: 'our real pleasure consisted in doing something that
50
51 was forbidden'.²⁴ Just as with uncorrupted delight, if the pleasure of sinning is great, people
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1
2
3 will incline themselves more and more towards sin in order to increase the pleasure they
4
5 experience.²⁵
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9
10 Because pleasure accompanies both virtuous and vicious acts, Augustine develops a
11
12 taxonomy of delight which includes both temporal and spiritual strands. The temporal is
13
14 divided into two separate elements: the carnal and the worldly. Carnal delight is always evil,
15
16 since it has as its object the active enjoyment of sin; by contrast worldly delight, consisting
17
18 of the enjoyment of the perceptions of the senses, is not bad in itself, providing those
19
20 perceptions are not relished for their own sake, but as a means of moving closer to God.²⁶
21
22 Finally, delight may be spiritual, having as its object God and those spiritual things
23
24 emanating from him, and as such it is inherently good. Mark Clavier identifies the crucial
25
26 distinction between worldly and spiritual delight in Augustine's thought; in the former,
27
28 'delight is situated in the subject, who experiences pleasure through his or her various
29
30 senses [...] Spiritual delight, on the other hand, exists most fully in God: indeed, is God. God
31
32 does not use delight but is delight.'²⁷
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40 Like Augustine, Aquinas acknowledges that delight is instinctive; it arises, he says, from
41
42 objects and activities which are 'naturally congenial' to man.²⁸ He also identifies a taxonomy
43
44 of pleasures, ranging from the physical and sensory to the rational or intellectual, in which
45
46 there is an implicit but not unproblematic hierarchy.' 'The higher pleasures', he asserts,
47
48 'have as their object things that do not change'; on the other hand, 'the *greatest* pleasure is
49
50 that which comes through the senses and requires the actual presence of a sense-object'.²⁹
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54
55 Aquinas, as we might expect, follows Augustine in situating the *highest* pleasures in the
56
57 immutable sphere; but these are carefully distinguished from those from which humans
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1
2
3 derive *more* pleasure, and which arise from their senses. Of course this would not be a
4
5 problem in the pre-lapsarian Paradise, which, being eternal in God's creation, can be the
6
7 source of both the greatest and the highest delights simultaneously. However, in the post-
8
9 lapsarian world the objects of the senses decay and die as a matter of necessity, leading to a
10
11 disjunction between the two; and it is likewise a sign of man's fallen state that he should
12
13 prefer the lower ranked pleasure over the higher. Having established this hierarchy, Aquinas
14
15 also identifies the role of 'wondering' (*admiratio*) in the experience of delight, explaining
16
17 that wonder is aroused by that which we do not fully understand, and results in pleasure if
18
19 we are able to arrive at comprehension: 'this is why anything that arouses wonder can give
20
21 pleasure'.³⁰ This heuristic account is akin to, though not identical with, Augustine's emphasis
22
23 on desire, and again underlines the active aspect of delight, a point to which I shall return.
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31 *Paradisum voluptatis*

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33 I now turn to consider the concept of the paradise of pleasure in three anonymous dramatic
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35 texts or fragments of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the Cornish play *Origo*
36
37 *Mundi*; the dialogue *Lucidus and Dubius*, which is loosely based on the Latin *Elucidarium*;
38
39 and the 'Speech of Delight' from the so-called Reynes Extracts.³¹ *Origo Mundi* is the first in
40
41 the trilogy of plays known as the *Ordinalia*, and the manuscript contains both detailed stage
42
43 directions and staging plans suggesting performance in open-air amphitheatres or rounds.³²
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47 *Lucidus and Dubius* takes the form of a dramatic dialogue, and while its tone is didactic, its
48
49 subject matter largely catechetical, and there is little in the way of 'action' as traditionally
50
51 conceived, the manuscript's mise-en-page is consistent with the usual presentation of
52
53 dramatic texts, with bracketed rhymes and lines separating each speech, suggesting that it
54
55 was intended for performance. The 'Speech of Delight' is described in the printed catalogue
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1
2
3 of the Tanner manuscripts as 'A poem on delight', but as Iris Calderhead rightly notes, it is in
4
5 fact a speech by a character named Delight, and is presumably part of a text for a morality
6
7 play, a view with which Richard Rastall concurs.³³ The content and purpose of each of these
8
9 texts varies considerably, from a fully dramatized account of the creation of the world, to an
10
11 exposition of Christian faith for the neophyte, to a single disembodied speech. Yet they are
12
13 united in containing an account, however brief, of a created paradise and of its sensory
14
15 delights, and the similarity is not merely of content; at the linguistic level, too, there are
16
17 parallels which suggest that each of these texts is drawing on a shared tradition, shaping the
18
19 way in which the biblical Paradise, and indeed the wider created world, is perceived and
20
21 described.
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29 About a third of the way into *Lucidus and Dubius*, Dubius, the self-confessed sower of
30
31 doubts and heresies, raises the subject of Paradise and Lucidus is quick to respond:
32
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34
35

36 LUCIDUS It is a place grene and swete,
37
38 of spysis, trees, and of flouris,
39
40 with-oute hungere, colde, or hete,
41
42 with-oute tempest or shouris;
43
44
45
46
47 ryveris rennynge, songe ful swete,
48
49 mirthe, ioy with-oute ende,
50
51 lyf and helthe shul euer mete,
52
53 age and seeknes shul thennys wende.
54
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3 There is froyt folke with to fede,
4
5 lusty to mete for all seeknes;
6
7 þere is no sorowe, doute, ne drede;
8
9 euerlastynge lyf and all goodnes. (202-17)
10
11
12
13
14

15 The Latin source of this text, as I have described above, addresses this question by
16
17 explaining the advantages of remaining in Paradise and enjoying the fruits therein, but the
18
19 emphasis in *Lucidus and Dubius* is considerably more sensuous. The *locus amoenissimus*
20
21 with its practical human benefits is elaborated as a garden of sensory delights, a sweet
22
23 green place in which objects can be discerned, odours detected, the temperate climate felt,
24
25 sounds heard, and fruit consumed. The ‘ryveris rennynge’ can be both seen and heard, and
26
27 presumably also felt, if one wishes to dip a toe in or bathe; the flowers can be seen, and
28
29 their sweet and spicy aromas inhaled; the fruit can be seen, smelled and tasted. Thus each
30
31 of the senses is fully employed as Paradise, epitome of God’s superabundant grace,
32
33 explodes upon them with divine force. The result of this sensory overload is not confusion,
34
35 however, but ‘mirthe, ioy with-oute ende’, as Paradise is transformed into a locus of
36
37 specifically physical human delight. The indebtedness of this account to the earlier tradition,
38
39 as we have seen it developed in the *Cursor Mundi* and especially Walter Daniel, cannot be
40
41 doubted. The passage is unique within this particular text; nowhere else does the playwright
42
43 feel it necessary to employ such vivid description in the service of his didactic message. This
44
45 might suggest that the conventions which shaped fifteenth-century literary descriptions of
46
47 Paradise were too strong to be ignored; the playwright knew that his audience would expect
48
49 such language, and did not wish to disappoint them. We might take this further, however.
50
51 The account of Paradise and its overwhelming sensory pleasures must surely be a source of
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3 wonder and delight to the audience and, if Augustine is correct, will stimulate the desire for
4
5 further delight. That desire should, if the didactic purpose of this text is fulfilled, galvanise
6
7 the will of the listeners to act in order to ensure the salvation of their souls.
8
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11
12 A similarly extravagant sensory view of Paradise is encountered in *Origo Mundi*. This play
13
14 includes the non-biblical but highly popular episode of Seth, the son of Adam, sent by his
15
16 dying father to Paradise in search of holy oil. When he reaches Paradise he encounters a
17
18 cherub who permits him to look inside the gates; Seth then tells him (and the play's
19
20 audience) what he has seen within:
21
22

23
24
25
26 All the beauty that I saw

27
28 The tongue of no man in the world can

29
30 Tell it ever.

31
32
33 Of good fruit, and fair flowers,

34
35 Minstrels and sweet song,

36
37 A fountain bright as silver;

38
39 And four springs, large indeed,

40
41 Flowing from it,

42
43 That there is a desire to look at them. (766-74)
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48

49
50 Again we have flowers, fruit and sweet song, and the 'ryveris rennynge' are also present,
51
52 this time in the form of 'A fountain, bright as silver; And four springs', which correspond to
53
54 the biblical river which waters Paradise before dividing into four streams. Here, as in *Lucidus*
55
56 and *Dubius*, the senses are fully represented, but Seth's speech merits further
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58
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60

1
2
3 consideration. What he sees stimulates his 'desire to look' – that is, the delight he
4
5 experiences through his senses increases his desire to experience more pleasure. The
6
7 staging of this scene provokes a similar desire in the audience; Seth pokes his head into a
8
9 Paradise which is invisible to everyone but himself, and returns to entice us with his
10
11 description of what he has seen, and to which we cannot gain access. His words thus
12
13 stimulate our desire to look and see, in a vivid demonstration of Augustine's understanding
14
15 of the psychology of desire in relation to delight; the more we have, the more we want.
16
17 Such psychology might place Seth in danger of falling into the trap of sensory delights, being
18
19 so struck with them that he risks failing to see beyond them, but he is rescued from that
20
21 risk because his glimpse into Paradise has also revealed something else:
22
23
24
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29 In it there is a tree,

30 High with many boughs;

31
32 But they are all bare, without leaves.

33
34 And around it, bark

35
36 There was none, from the stem to the head.

37
38 All its boughs are bare. (775-80)
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 This is, of course, the tree of knowledge, blasted by its role in the Fall. Its presence in
46
47 Paradise acts as a permanent reminder of man's disobedience, but in Seth's speech it
48
49 performs the salutary function of drawing his mind back to his father's sin, rather than being
50
51 carried away by the beauty of the garden. Thus his sensory experiences are interrupted by
52
53 an object – the withered tree – that requires his interpretation, hence the engagement of
54
55 his intellect; and it is this which serves to gather up purely sensuous impressions and
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1
2
3 redirect them towards matters of the intellect and spirit. That this should be so is entirely to
4
5 be expected, since it is the very function of the tree of knowledge to lead post-lapsarian
6
7 man back to God; as Sivert Hagan points out, in the earliest versions of the Seth legend, the
8
9 blasted tree of knowledge is transformed before his eyes into the fertile tree of life, in the
10
11 boughs of which rests the infant Jesus, exemplifying the necessary connection between the
12
13 apprehension of sin and the recognition of Christ as the source of salvation.³⁴ In the *Origo*
14
15 *Mundi* version the connection is internalised but is no less explicit: in the taxonomy of
16
17 Augustine, Seth has progressed from sensory to spiritual delights; in Thomist terms he has
18
19 ascended from taking pleasure in sense-objects to the pursuit of the higher pleasures of the
20
21 intellect.
22
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29 The last of the three texts, the speech of 'Delight' from the commonplace book of Robert
30
31 Reynes of Acle, at first glance appears to be only tangentially related to the others. Here the
32
33 speaker, a character named Delight, is not describing Paradise at all; instead he is
34
35 celebrating the whole created world, in a tone which is not overtly didactic but joyful,
36
37 playful and even mischievous. Nevertheless, even a cursory comparison reveals linguistic
38
39 echoes which suggest participation in a shared literary tradition. The speech might best be
40
41 regarded as a literary cornucopia of created delights, and its capaciousness certainly allows
42
43 us to think of it in terms of the Creation, especially at the opening; after a brief preamble,
44
45 Delight begins with a stanza which must surely be heard in the light of the fourth day of
46
47 Creation in Genesis:
48
49
50
51

52
53
54
55 For me semet it is to delyght
56
57 To behelde þe firmament lyght,
58
59
60

1
2
3 The cours of sterrys to kenne,
4

5 The sunne with his bemys bryght,
6

7 þe mone how he refulsyth þe nyght,
8

9
10 The planetys in her circumferens renne. (13-18)
11
12
13

14
15 From the astronomical, Delight's attention moves gradually downwards, from sky and
16
17 clouds to the leaves of the trees and running waters.
18
19

20
21
22 Than of the erthe delyght I take
23

24 To see the florent wodys þer leves shake,
25

26
27 The ryverys rennyng by þerinne dyuers fysshes move. (22-24)
28
29
30

31 We might almost be back in Walter Daniel's 'second paradise of delight', with rustling
32
33 branches and fluttering leaves alongside the tumbling waters, and Delight's 'ryverys
34
35 rennyng' (24) also echo those of Lucidus's description. Just a few lines further on he
36
37 mentions 'dyuers fowlys [...] swetly syngang' (29-30), and again we think of Lucidus and the
38
39 'songe ful swete' that pervades his version of Paradise, as well as the 'sweet song' that Seth
40
41 reports hearing. These verbal echoes are of course unsurprising, since they reflect the
42
43 shared literary tradition of describing Paradise already discussed. However, much more
44
45 suggestive for me is the expression of the pleasure experienced by Delight and reiterated
46
47 throughout his speech. 'This reiocyeth me'; 'delyght I take'; 'I am gretly delyghtand'; 'that
48
49 plesyth me gretly': again and again we are reminded of *delectatio*, alongside constant
50
51 mention of the bodily senses. The major emphasis is on sight, but hearing is also mentioned,
52
53 and the senses of taste, smell and touch are implied, if not overtly invoked. Like Seth,
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1
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3 Delight experiences such pleasure from his senses that he cannot help but keep indulging
4
5 them, to feed his desire for further pleasure. Unlike Seth, however, Delight has no salutary
6
7 turning away from sensation to intellect; on the contrary, his pleasures incline in the
8
9 opposite direction, as becomes clear when the list of things in which he takes delight
10
11 reaches its culmination:
12
13

14
15
16
17 And þe bewté of women specyaly,

18
19 With ther whyte pappys poppyd vp prately –

20
21 þat passeth al other, as me semet in sure. (52-54)
22
23

24
25
26 Augustine would surely place this last example in his category of carnal delights, since the
27
28 object of delight – female beauty, in the particular form of pert breasts – is one which he
29
30 would, one feels, regard as inherently sinful. Indeed, Delight's speech in its entirety can be
31
32 read as a cautionary example of the dangers of pleasure in Augustinian terms. His opening
33
34 celebration of the firmament, while strictly worldly, is one which has clear potential to be
35
36 transformed into a spiritual delight, one which seeks to move towards a closer
37
38 understanding of God the Creator. Instead, Delight finds himself increasingly distracted by
39
40 sensory objects, and falls prey to the pleasures they offer. It is perhaps no coincidence that
41
42 as his speech proceeds the objects of his delight change; from the cosmic they shift to the
43
44 natural world, thence to cultivated nature in the form of gardens, then to the outdoor
45
46 pursuits of hunting, and finally, by way of objects of merely human creation, such as houses,
47
48 fine clothing and music, to the frankly sensual. Thus once again a clear didactic message is
49
50 built into the text, in a manner which is familiar from other morality plays; one can only
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1
2
3 speculate on how the play might have ended, but some recognition of the delights of the
4
5 spirit would surely have been called for.
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9

10 While it seems clear that these authors are writing within a tradition that Augustine and
11
12 Aquinas would have recognised, it is less certain how far this reflects direct engagement
13
14 with the work of these great authority figures, rather than a more general cultural
15
16 pervasiveness of their ideas; nevertheless, some speculation is possible. The reception of
17
18 Augustine's writings has been the subject of a comprehensive research project, culminating
19
20 in the publication of a substantial volume which includes a lengthy chapter by Eric Saak on
21
22 Augustine in the later Middle Ages; Saak and Karla Pollman have also discussed the issue in
23
24 two shorter contributions to recently-published companion volumes.³⁵ Both Saak and
25
26 Pollman note the widespread adoption of Augustinian and pseudo-Augustinian material in
27
28 the period, disseminated at least initially through the religious orders, and particularly (and
29
30 predictably) the Augustinians themselves. The authors of the three texts under discussion
31
32 are unknown, but it seems likely, given both the subject-matter and the evidence of other
33
34 dramatic works from the Middle Ages, that they were clerics; while it is not possible to be
35
36 more specific, this alone might account for a knowledge of some aspects of Augustine's
37
38 thought. There is, however, a more substantive connection to be made in the case of
39
40 *Lucidus and Dubius*. Augustine is second only to Gregory the Great as a source for the
41
42 *Elucidarium*, the Latin text from which *Lucidus and Dubius* is derived, and the sections in the
43
44 Latin dealing with Paradise can be related directly back to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*
45
46 and other Augustinian writings.³⁶ The influence of Aquinas was probably less widespread in
47
48 the centuries immediately after his death, at least outside the universities. However,
49
50 Mishtooni Bose has demonstrated the indebtedness of at least one fifteenth-century writer
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3 and thinker to the methods, if not the substantive thought, of the Angelic Doctor, indicating
4
5 that, if Thomist philosophical theology was not ubiquitous, it was at any rate available.³⁷ We
6
7 can therefore speak with a degree of confidence about the general indebtedness of these
8
9 texts to the theologians, although evidence of more direct influence is limited.
10
11
12

13
14 Each of the three dramatic texts I have discussed is, I suggest, performing hard theological
15
16 work through drama, the most widely accessible of genres. Each text shares in a vocabulary
17
18 of Paradise which, in the late Middle Ages, was conventional; however, each of them uses
19
20 this vocabulary to stimulate delight and thereby exploit the psychology of their audiences
21
22 just as Augustine and Aquinas describe: the experience of pleasure simply increases the
23
24 desire for further satisfactions, satisfactions which are embedded in the messages of the
25
26 texts themselves. This knitting together of theology and literature is not, of course, unique
27
28 to dramatic texts; the late-medieval rise in lay literacy, and the subsequent demand for
29
30 more sophisticated vernacular theology, generated a large number of literary engagements
31
32 with difficult theological concerns.³⁸ The immersive experience of witnessing drama,
33
34 however, may be particularly well situated to the exploration of pleasure and delight, which
35
36 are frequently neglected by other discourses.³⁹ Late-
37
38 medieval affective devotion, with its attendant focus on the suffering humanity of Christ,
39
40 may well have stimulated interest in other forms of human feeling, including physical
41
42 pleasure, and dramatic texts such as those discussed here offer a way of understanding and
43
44 legitimizing such pleasure in theological terms. The audience of *Lucidus and Dubius* is left in
45
46 no doubt that it is only by attending closely to its content that the delights of Paradise can
47
48 be attained. *Origo Mundi* makes this point even more explicitly, inviting us to follow Seth's
49
50 on-stage transition from delight in the sensory pleasures of Paradise to a grasp of the
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3 spiritual delight which inheres in our recognition of Christ as redeemer of mankind's sin.
4
5
6 And the joys of listening to the personified Delight are an object lesson to the audience,
7
8 demonstrating how easily our pleasures can be transformed from the spiritual and
9
10 praiseworthy to the carnal and wicked.
11
12
13
14

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16 ¹ *Lucidus and Dubius in Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogues*, intro. Norman Davis, Leeds Texts and
17 Monographs: Medieval Drama Facsimiles V (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1979), ll.202-05. Further references
18 will be by line number from this edition.

19 ² Genesis 1-2. All biblical quotations are from the Douay-Rheims edition: <http://www.drbo.org>.

20 ³ Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, trans. Matthew O'Connell
21 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2000; first published as *Un Histoire du Paradis: Le Jardin des Délices*,
22 1992).

23 ⁴ Guy Geltner, 'Eden Regained: William of Ockham and the Franciscan return to Terrestrial Paradise',
24 *Franciscan Studies*, 59 (2001), 63-89.

25 ⁵ Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (London: British Library, 2006); the
26 terminological discussion is on pp.34-35.

27 ⁶ Robert Richard Brandon II, *Place, paradise, and perfection: The narrative function of three Middle English*
28 *versions of paradise*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Carolina, 2010.

29 ⁷ Winston Black, 'William of Auvergne on the Dangers of Paradise: Biblical Exegesis Between Natural
30 Philosophy and Anti-Islamic Polemic', *Traditio*, 68 (2013), 233-58 (p.248).

31 ⁸ Genesis 2:8-15.

32 ⁹ Delumeau, Chapter 1.

33 ¹⁰ St Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill OP (New York: New City
34 Press, 2006), Book VIII,1,1. Further references will be to this edition.

35 ¹¹ St Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, in *On Genesis*, Book II, 9,12.

36 ¹² I return to this point in my discussion of the Seth legend below.

37 ¹³ See Delumeau, pp.19-21, for Augustine's influence on later commentators.

38 ¹⁴ *L'Elucidarium et Les Lucidaires*, ed. Yves Lefèvre (Paris: Boccard, 1954), Book 1, qu.69. All future references
39 will be by book and question number from this edition. Translations from the Latin are my own. In referring to
40 the Latin author as Ps.-Honorius I have followed Stephen Morrison's suggestion: *The Late Middle English*
41 *Lucydarye*, ed. Stephen Morrison (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), p. XI, n. 1.

42 ¹⁵ Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, trans. Maurice Powicke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978;
43 first published Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1950), p.12. The manuscript upon which this edition is based is now
44 Manchester, Rylands Library Latin MS 196. I am indebted to Karen Brett for this reference.

45 ¹⁶ As Powicke notes (p.13), Daniel may well have been drawing upon the letter of Bernard of Clairvaux to
46 Aelred prefixed to the *Speculum Caritatis*, but while Bernard regards the natural world as a possible source of
47 spiritual insight, Daniel seems to regard it as a good in itself. For Bernard's letter, see Aelred of Rievaulx, *The*
48 *Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth O'Connor OCSO (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), pp.69-72. The
49 passage which appears to have influenced Daniel is on p.70.

50 ¹⁷ Daniel, pp.12-13.

51 ¹⁸ See *Qur'an*, sura 56 'The Inevitable', 1-40, for a description of the pleasures of the paradise to be enjoyed in
52 the Islamic after-life.

53 ¹⁹ See, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons sur le Cantique*, intro. and trans. Paul Verdeyen and Raffaele
54 Fassetta (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996-2007).

55 ²⁰ *Cursor Mundi*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS o.s.57 (London: Oxford University Press, 1874), ll.1003-14, 1027-31.
56 The quotation is from London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian A III, which is dated to the mid/late
57 fourteenth century; the word 'sautes' in the last line appears as 'foulis' in some other manuscripts.
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59
60

²¹ Augustine explores *delectatio* and related concepts across a number of works and only a brief summary is offered here: for a much more comprehensive treatment, to which my own discussion is deeply indebted, see Mark Forbes Moreton Clavier, 'Eloquent Wisdom: The Role of Rhetoric and Delight in the Theology of Saint Augustine of Hippo', unpublished PhD thesis, Durham University (2011).

²² Clavier, pp.24-25.

²³ St Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), Psalm 85:6.

²⁴ St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), Book II, 4. All future references are to this edition.

²⁵ Clavier, p.25.

²⁶ *Confessions*, Book IV, 12.

²⁷ Clavier, p.215; see *Confessions*, Book VIII, 3.

²⁸ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, 32, 1 and 2.

²⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae,32,2 and 3: my emphasis.

³⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae,32,8.

³¹ Each of these texts is extant in a single manuscript dated to the fifteenth century, although it seems likely that the *Origo Mundi* was composed slightly earlier: *Lucidus and Dubius*, Winchester, Winchester College MS 33; *Origo Mundi*, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 791; 'Speech of Delight', Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Tanner 407. Printed texts are as follows: *Lucidus and Dubius* (see note 1 above); *Origo Mundi* in *The Ancient Cornish Drama*, ed. and trans. Edwin Norris, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859); 'Speech of Delight' in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS ss 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). Further references will be by line number from these editions.

³² For a useful summary see Brian O. Murdoch, 'The cornish medieval drama' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.211-39.

³³ Iris G. Calderhead, 'Morality Fragments from Norfolk', *Modern Philology*, 14 (1916), pp.1-9; Richard Rastall, *Minstrels Playing: Music in Early Religious Drama* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), pp.484-85.

³⁴ See the discussion in Sivert N. Hagan, 'The Origin and Meaning of the Name Yggdrasill', *Modern Philology*, 1.1 (1903), 57-69 (pp. 62-64).

³⁵ Eric Saak. 'The Augustinian Renaissance: Textual Scholarship and Religious Identity in the Later Middle Ages (1200-1500)', in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.blah; see also Saak, 'Augustine in the Western Middle Ages to the Reformation', in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 465-77, and Karla Pollman, 'Augustine's legacy: success or failure?' in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 331-48.

³⁶ *L'Elucidarium et Les Lucidaires*, Book 1, qus 65-69; and see Lefèvre's notes on p. 117.

³⁷ Mishtooni Bose, 'Two Phases of Scholastic Self-Consciousness: Reflections on Method in Aquinas and Peock', in *Aquinas as Authority*, ed. Paul van Geest, Harm Goris and Carlo Leget (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 87-108.

³⁸ See, for example, the religious exempla included in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; William Langland's *Piers Plowman*; and John Capgrave's *Life of St Katherine of Alexandria*.

³⁹ I am thinking here particularly of texts in the Ps.-Bonaventuran tradition, such as Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, and other related texts.