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Piers Plowman the A Version: Passus 1, lines 56-84

Abstract

I translated Passus One Lines 56-84, in which Holy Church explains the Castle of Care, as well as reveals to Will her own identity. In the Prologue, Will sees a tower on the hill, a dungeon in a dale, and a field of people in between. Passus One begins with a frighteningly beautiful woman appearing to Will. She questions him for sleeping; meanwhile people are busy in a maze. Just preceding the section of Passus One that I translate, Holy Church begins explaining to Will what is meant by all that he sees. She begins by telling him of the Tower of Truth, which holds the father of faith. Will receives the message of God, who formed us all and demands proper worship. In my selected passage, Will learns of Wrong, the father of falsehood. I composed a critical translation, rather than a rhetorical adaptation, to emphasize the interconnectedness between Middle English and modern English and showcase that even with a direct translation, the language is similar, and the material is relevant.

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KELY TAYLOR

Piers Plowman the A Version: Passus 1, lines 56-84

I translated Passus One Lines 56-84, in which Holy Church explains the Castle of Care, as well as reveals to Will her own identity. In the Prologue, Will sees a tower on the hill, a dungeon in a dale, and a field of people in between. Passus One begins with a frighteningly beautiful woman appearing to Will. She questions him for sleeping; meanwhile people are busy in a maze. Will manages to ask her what is meant by everything he sees. Just preceding the section of Passus One that I translated, Holy Church begins explaining to Will what is meant by all that he sees. She begins by telling him of the Tower of Truth, which holds the father of faith. Will receives the message of God, who formed us all and demands proper worship. In my selected passage, Will learns of Wrong, the father of falsehood.

I composed a critical translation, rather than a rhetorical adaptation, to emphasize the interconnectedness between Middle English and modern English and showcase that even with a direct translation, the language is similar, and the material is relevant. Studying the text alongside the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)* showcased *Piers Plowman* as especially unique in translation since it employs a variety of definitions for the same word throughout the poem, changing when used in different contexts. I wanted to be true to the text and preserve Langland's style of alliteration and original message, so my translation very closely aligns with the original language, at times changing only word order or selecting a synonym to maintain alliteration.

I make only a few substantial translation choices which slightly modernize the text, including referencing Milton John's *Paradise Lost*, in which Pandemonium is the capital of hell, I translated "Adam and Eve he heggede hem to helle" (63), into "Adam and Eve he pointed from Paradise to Pandemonium dragging them down to Damnation" (63). I made this translation choice as tribute to Langland's style of contrasting two opposing forces, in this case of Paradise, both the book and the concept, and Pandemonium, both as the place and the definition of chaos. I intended to emphasize the religious elements of the text while simultaneously modernizing it for today's audience. I also added the idiom "Dance with the Devil" (67) to Holy Church's speech, which is not in the original text, to emphasize the themes of sin, pleasure, and the over-indulgence of vices displayed throughout the poem. Part of my inspiration for this idiom included Gucci Mane's song "Dance with the Devil," in which he refers to himself, playfully, as the Devil and emphasizes the allure of his wealth and lavish appearance, explaining his allure as irresistible and his ability to make women do anything. This embodiment that Gucci Mane plays in his song parallels the character Lady Meed from *Piers Plowman*, specifically her representation as the vicious misuse of reward. Holy Church tells Will of Lady Meed, who is identified as the daughter of Wrong, in the next passus.

As a student of the humanities, I valued this assignment, and it remains to be one of the most exciting experiences that I have had, not only in my English major courses, but also within my entire experience as a college student. Researching the complex meanings of words with the *MED* nurtured my curiosity and stimulated deep critical thinking around both the

text and language itself. The ability to engage with the text and the process of translation at this level, using only the Middle English text by Vaughan and the *MED*, bridged the gap of time and eliminated the language barrier of our ancestor English language. Whether committing to a rhetorical adaptation or taking a critical approach, as I did, the process of translation fosters innovative methods of critical thinking in ways that stretch beyond a contemporary literature or writing course.

Then I pleaded to her pitifully, with grace for the good God that made her:¹
“The dungeon in the dale, that is so dreadful of sight,
I beg you, madame, please tell me what it signifies?²
“That is the Castle of Care: whoever wanders there ³
May bawl and bellow that he was born to both body and soul. ⁴
Inside dwells a creature that is called
Father of falsehood—in fact he founded it himself. ⁵
Adam and Eve he pointed from Paradise to Pandemonium dragging them down to
Damnation ⁶
And counseled Cain to kill his brother;
Judas he jipped with Jewish silver ⁷
And then on an elder he hung himself after.
He is hinderer of love, and drags all down with him;
You know the saying, “Dance with the devil and damn us all” ⁸
Those who trust in his treasure are betrayed before two shakes of the lamb’s tail.”⁹

1 I translated “frayned hure fayre,” which would translate more roughly into “asked her graciously,” into *pleaded* to her *pitifully*” to maintain alliteration. This passage follows Will’s initial fear of Holy Church, despite her beauty, as he recognized her divinity; for this reason I translated “hym” into “good God.”

2 “Byseche” I translated into *beg* to emphasize Will’s meekness towards Holy Church. For this same reason, I added the word *please*, which is not in the original text.

3 I translated “cometh therto,” which would roughly translate into “come inside” or “goes inside,” into *wanders* to align with Will’s wandering and feeling of being lost throughout the poem.

4 While the original text says, “body *or* soul,” I used the word *both* to emphasize the conception that we are born with both body and soul. The word *both* also emphasizes the idea that body and soul can be tortured or suffer in different ways.

5 The addition of *in fact* is a play on Holy Church’s characterization of being a sassy and prideful character. My goal is to suggest this passage as gossip, since Holy Church will boast about her good deeds later in the passus.

6 This is both a reference to Milton John’s *Paradise Lost* as well as a play on Langland’s style of contrasting two opposing forces or concepts to illuminate his message. Damnation, refers to Christian thought of spending eternity in hell, which aligns with the Christian thought that appears throughout the poem.

7 The *MED* defines japede as “To deceive (sb.), trick, jilt; *fig.* beat (sb.); ~ **with**, make a fool of (sb.)” (*MED*, s.v. *japen* Def. 1.a.). I used the word *jipped* to maintain alliteration.

8 *Seyneth* has the phrase “put his mark on” (Vaughan 55) in the margins, which I translated into *drags all down with him* to represent the domino effect that comes with associating with the wrong people, things, or vices. I added the idiom *Dance with the Devil*, which is not in the original text, to align with the themes of sin and over-consumption of vices as they relate to pleasure, as well as *damn us all*, which I use to refer to the saying “be careful of the company that you keep.”

9 I translated “ar sonere” into the phrase *two shakes of the lamb’s tail* to suggest that something could happen as quickly as the length of time it takes a lamb’s tail to shake one way and then the other. This line references the beginning of the poem as Will appears to be dressed as a sheep, giving the split idea of a wolf in sheep’s

Then bewildered, I wondered, what woman it were
That she cited such wise words of Holy Scripture ¹⁰
And asked her in God's name, where she had come from
Who she truly was to point me towards the proper path so politely.
"I am Holy Church," she said, "you ought to know who I am"
I received you first and introduced you to faith.
You brought me pledges, promising to perform my commands
To love me loyally, throughout the long duration of your life.
Then I kneeled on my knees and cried for her mercy,
Pleading to her piously to pray for my sins,
And to teach me truly to live my life by Christ,
That I might work his will which I was made to fulfill.
"Teach me not of treasure, but tell me this one thing:
How I may save my soul, and be regarded as righteous"
"When all treasures are tried," she said, "truth is the best:
I do it on *Dues caritas* to tell the truth.

clothing and the lost sheep that strayed from the herd, as well as emphasizing the urgency in Holy Church's message.

10 I translated Holy Church's citation of holy scripture into the allegorical character, Holy Scripture.