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### **Piers Plowman the A Version: Passus 1, lines 129-158**

#### **Abstract**

My selected passage resides in passus one, lines 129-158. Will, still in his dream state, basks in the uncertainty of the landscape he sees in the prologue, the field of folk between the tower on the hill and the prison-like setting. The scenery produces a sense of anxiety for him, but luckily enough, he is awoken by his first teacher, Holy Church. Will asks her what to make of scenery, to which she responds that the people in between are everyday people whose actions on Earth are scrutinized and influenced by Truth (God), in the tower on the hill, and by Wrong (likely Satan or the devil), in the Castle of Care. The information brings Will to reflect on what will guarantee his salvation, and he looks to Holy Church for advice. She advises him to love Truth, practice His doctrine, and habitually commit to the dual responsibility of loving and learning. Ultimately, Holy Church reaffirms to Will that knowledge resides intangibly within us and must be kept alive through our constant and consistent commitment to learn and practice communal love and care until our final days.

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KATIE ROCIO LUNA

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*Piers Plowman the A Version: Passus 1, lines 129-158*

My selected passage resides in passus one, lines 129-158. Will, still in his dream state, basks in the uncertainty of the landscape he sees in the prologue, the field of folk between the tower on the hill and the prison-like setting. The scenery produces a sense of anxiety for him, but luckily enough, he is awoken by his first teacher, Holy Church. Will asks her what to make of the scenery, to which she responds that the people in between are everyday people whose actions on Earth are scrutinized and influenced by Truth (God), in the tower on the hill, and by Wrong (likely Satan or the devil), in the Castle of Care. The information brings Will to reflect on what will guarantee his salvation, and he looks to Holy Church for advice. She advises him to love Truth, practice His doctrine, and habitually commit to the dual responsibility of loving and learning to guarantee his salvation. However, Will remains perplexed and asks her where exactly he can locate all this knowledge she has just provided him with. While she responds in frustration, she ultimately reaffirms that that knowledge resides intangibly within us and must be kept alive through our constant and consistent commitment to learn and practice communal love and care until our final days.

While at surface level this passage may seem restricted to religious knowledge, Holy Church's lessons remain relevant regardless of religious affiliation. Will's confused reaction holds up a mirror to our modern life in which people continuously struggle with the same obsession to find overnight and/or onetime solutions to what are, in actuality, macro-level issues. Like Will, I wonder how we can, as moderns, internalize the necessary knowledge and enact the crucial praxis of forging community and genuine care in times of such greed, precarity, and individualism. Thus, rather than create a completely reimagined translation, I opted to produce a critical translation by looking into Will's mirror and teasing out the lessons.

By looking into this mirror that Will provides for me, I reflected on my lived experience as a young, queer, Latine/x and trans masculine first-generation college student, looking to my parents for guidance. Thus, as I've revisited this project beyond my initial class submission, I decided to include more Spanish in order to mimic the endless lectures that my parents have provided me with. Notably, the original passage that commences with "You stupid idiot!" I have now translated as "*Ay tonto!*" in order to capture the endearing, yet frustrating, commitment of teaching communal love and care that my parents have often demonstrated. Additionally, as Holy Church's lecture continues, she informs Will that love is the "levyste" thing that our Lord asks of us. According to the *MED*, "lever" is an adverb that refers to a "comparative degree," in this case meaning "more dearly" (*MED*, s.v. *lef* adv. def 6b (a)). I chose to render it as "*preciosa*," meaning "precious" in Spanish to capture the rareness of this invaluable sentiment. Simultaneously, the term at once echoes the imperative to habitually enact this rare sentiment and also indicates the practices of communal love and care in a world where greedy individualism is devouring our humanity and social responsibilities to one another—a lesson that has consistently arisen from my parents' lectures. This very consistency between poem and family echoes Holy Church's own claim that our practice of

loving and learning is not simply a onetime achievement but an eternal commitment to ourselves and the greater social web we exist within.

The *MED* and this project have empowered me to interact with canonical literature in a manner that had been so alien for me, as a queer kid whose critical readings were always dismissed. The reflections that this project stirred within me not only enabled me to mend academic wounds, but also allowed me to collide my “non-academic” knowledge with my academic and humanitarian literary efforts. As a future educator, I know that this assignment will make its way into my classroom, helping me demonstrate to students that the barriers between our lives and canonical literature are not set in stone, but rather constitute some of the many challenges, like Will’s, that will be only resolved when we habitually commit to elevating, empowering, and appreciating communal knowledge, love, and care.

‘*Ay tonto!*’<sup>1</sup> she said, ‘You’re so slow!’  
It is inborn knowledge that comes from your heart  
to love your Lord more deeply than yourself;  
And to do no deadly sin, *seria mejor morirte*<sup>2</sup>.  
This, I believe, is Truth, who can teach it better,  
Allow him to tell you, and learn thereafter.  
So, witness God’s word and work in accord with it:  
That love is *la cosa mas preciosa*<sup>3</sup> that our Lord asks,  
And to preach the sprout of peace with your *guitarra*<sup>4</sup>  
Next time you’re at a *pachanga*<sup>5</sup>, and someone shouts “*que chille!*”<sup>6</sup>  
For from inborn knowledge in the heart comes happiness  
And that comes from the father that formed us all,

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<sup>1</sup> “*Ay tonto*” would translate to “oh stupid” or “oh dummy.” It’s usually used in a lighthearted manner, and it is less rude than “idiot,” which is what Holy Church actually tells Will.

<sup>2</sup> “*Seria mejor morirte*” simply translates to “It would be better to die.” Arguably, it can be translated into Modern English, but English doesn’t depict the seriousness of this claim. Spanish harbors an emotion that Modern English can only dream of achieving.

<sup>3</sup> “*La cosa mas preciosa*” translates to “the most precious thing.” Because the following line continues this thought and depicts peace as a “sprout,” I decided to go for “*preciosa*” as you would typically hear someone say this about a baby. At this point in the poem, much of Will’s understanding of what he needs to do to obtain salvation is infantile. Thus, I think “*preciosa/o*” depicts this nascence.

<sup>4</sup> The poet originally says “harp,” but “*guitarra*” is a string instrument as well, a guitar. Guitars are the string instruments that most effectively communicate the knowledge and emotions of the human, heart, and soul in my Latinx household. You can best believe Christan Nodal would be delivering this message in my family’s home.

<sup>5</sup> The term “*pachanga*” is a colloquial Mexican Spanish term, and it is usually used when referring to a party. There are many other ways to refer to a party, but I chose “*pachanga*” since it is a term that my family (especially my mom) regularly uses. I could imagine my mother and my father giving me a similar lecture to the one that Holy Church is giving to Will and using the word “*pachanga*” to get the lesson across.

<sup>6</sup> “*Que chille!*” is a colloquial phrase in Spanish that simply means “let it cry!” I chose to use this phrase rather than sing because it feels more emotional and intimate. In Spanish, it is usually used as a cue to a musician—typically a guitar player—so that they can begin to play a song. It has emotional connotations, as being told “*que chille!*” will usually mean to play an emotional song that refers to loss, heartbreak, love, etc.

Looked on us with love, and let his son die  
Meekly for our misdeeds, to save us all;  
And yet wished no evil to those who brought him suffer,  
But meekly by mouth he begged for mercy,  
To have pity on the people that tormented him to die.  
'Here you see mighty examples, in he himself,  
That he was merciful and meek, and mercy did he grant  
To them that hanged him, and deeply affected his heart.  
'Therefore I counsel you *ricos*<sup>7</sup>, have mercy *con los pobrecitos*<sup>8</sup>;  
*Aunque te creas muy muy*<sup>9</sup>, be benevolent in your actions.  
For what you give, wrongfully or otherwise,  
You will be weighed accordingly, when you leave from here.  
Even though you are true of your tongue, *y ganas tu sueldo honestamente*<sup>10</sup>,  
And are as chaste as *un niño que chilla en la iglesia*<sup>11</sup>;  
Unless you love whole-heartedly and give to *los pobrecitos*  
Of the wealth that God virtuously bestowed,  
You have no more merit in mass or in hours  
Than Malkin and her virginity, that no man desires.

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<sup>7</sup> The poet originally writes “rich men,” but I say “*ricos*.” Personally, Spanish terms typically communicate the directness message more effectively. Thus, I decided to utilize “*ricos*” rather than “rich men” for the message that Holy Church is trying to send.

<sup>8</sup> The poet originally writes “the poor,” but I think “*pobrecitos*” communicates the sympathy that Holy Church attempts to instill in a much more effective manner.

<sup>9</sup> I’ve opted for Spanish in this line, as I think it has an effective balance between seriousness and fun. Typically, to tell someone they think they’re “*muy muy*” is a manner of telling them to get off their high horse while making a light-hearted joke. Rich men typically exploit these manmade hierarchies and binaries of rich/poor to excuse themselves from truly exercising the doctrine. Therefore, I opt for “*muy muy*” to depict how language can counter these seemingly naturalized hierarchies that are not divine and/or set in stone.

<sup>10</sup> The poem originally states, “win truly” I’ve translated into “*y ganas tu sueldo honestamente*,” which simply means “and you earn your salary/pay honestly,” as I think it communicates the sincerity that Holy Church speaks with. It is also a phrase I heard from my Peruvian coworker when discussing the difference in work ethic in the U.S and in the Global South.

<sup>11</sup> The poet originally writes, “remain as chaste as a child crying in the church;” but I opt for a Spanish translation to emphasize the emotion embedded in this statement.