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### **Piers Plowman the C Version: Passus 10, lines 23-48**

#### **Abstract**

The passage I translated emerges from Passus 10 of William Langland's *Piers Plowman C-text*. This passage takes place in the real world as opposed to the oneiric landscapes and personifications prominently featured in the previous passus. Here, Will is in desperate need of direction after receiving a pardon from God in his dreams, featuring important knowledge on how to live righteously and honestly. Incredulous, Will wanders the waking world searching for clarification and finds it in the unlikeliest of individuals: Franciscan friars. Passus 10 is the longest waking episode, and the metaphor the friars bestow upon readers reminded me of my father and his love of the sea. The metaphor depicts a sinning man on a boat trying to overcome the difficulties of navigating the world through human will. My translation is an effort to channel my father's wisdom into the language of the fraternal order, mirroring this conversation as a reflection of his teachings, similar to how a professor might instruct their students when in dire need of direction.

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CESAR ERHARD

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*Piers Plowman the C Version: Passus 10, lines 23-48*

The passage I translated emerges from passus 10 of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, C-text. This passage takes place in the real world as opposed to the oneiric landscapes and personifications prominently featured in the previous passus. Here, Will is in desperate need of direction after receiving a pardon from God in his dreams, featuring important knowledge on how to live righteously and honestly. Incredulous, Will wanders the waking world searching for clarification and finds it in the unlikeliest of individuals: Franciscan friars. Passus 10 is the longest waking episode, and the metaphor the friars bestow upon readers reminded me of my father and his love of the sea. The metaphor depicts a sinning man on a boat trying to overcome the difficulties of navigating the world through human will. Will searches for meaning in a world full of corruption, violence, and brutality, while asking what it means to have faith and hope. My translation is an effort to channel my father's wisdom into the language of the fraternal order, mirroring this conversation as a reflection of his teachings, similar to how a professor might instruct their students when in dire need of direction.

I couldn't help but translate my first word, "sadde," as "honest." Through investigation in the *MED* I found that it meant various things: "of a person: firm, steadfast; constant; faithful, righteous" (*MED*, s.v., sadde, 2E). My father prided himself on his honesty and always instructed me to tell the truth no matter the consequences. Honesty necessitates a confession and admittance to one's sins, a form of repentance that the real world is desperately in need of.

Repentance is an essential feature of Catholicism and indicates another crucial characteristic of my father's paternal philosophy: a social responsibility to the world. Yes, a man may sin seven times throughout a day, but it takes vigorous exercise on the part of the sinner to recognize how their actions affect everything, and I believe it is the job of mankind to ease the suffering and tension around the world. This ties into my translation of the line "so him behoves," which I've written as "his sole responsibility." The man who exists in a world of unknowns can, at the very least, control *this* moment not only for himself but the boat at large and the people upon it. It is through "responsibility" that the other individuals on the boat are saved, just as in the world when a man sins dishonestly, and fails to repent, then he in turn encourages corruptible behaviors unfit for the world.

Will is in search of a character who will show him how to live and act in the world named "Dowel," or "doing well," and the friars proclaim that "Dowel" resides within humanity, thus social "responsibility" is predicated on "doing well." My father believed in action, in human intervention within the divine order, as well as *caritas* and faith, and in order to respond in the real world one must recognize how their steering of fragile bodies like the ship in the friar's metaphor, requires consistent attention and "willpower." There is nothing external that provokes one into action, but our inherent "willpower" encourages challenging indifference and inaction for the sake of the whole. The passage is also a "reflection" on how to conduct oneself in the world. In humanity's stumbling, under assault by undulating trials,

Langland's poetry is a consistent reminder to return to the living world. It's not enough to ponder, to wonder and wander, for safely do our feet land in the boat of assurance and with desperate need is our steering to safer, calmer waters.

“My son, now I shall tell you,” said the friar then,  
“How seven times a day an honest man sins.  
Attend to this reflection and I shall adequately show thee:  
Imagine if you will a man on a boat, sailing into deep water,  
Rocking in the waves the boat is assailed by water and wind,  
Compelling the man of sure foot to fall and stand back up,  
For no matter how sure his stiff foot is  
He stumbles for the rocking.  
And though he is soundly safe on the deck, his sole responsibility  
Is to arise once again and render the rudder in his hand,  
Fore’ the winds and waves topple the boat over.  
The sea would make dreams of living men  
If he were to be remiss of his entrusted duty.  
Rightly is this the same with folk here on Earth:  
The sea is the world which waxes and wanes,  
And our earthly desires are akin to the waves  
Throwing us about in the deep windy waters of life.  
Like the rocking boat our bodies are crafted so brittly,  
And through the fiend, the flesh, and the false world,  
Seven times a day an honest man sins.  
Yet he does no deadly sin, for Dowel assists him,  
Charity the Champion that is, chief assistant to us all.  
He urges you to stand and steers your soul,  
Even if your brittle body dips down in water like a boat,  
Your soul is kept safe through your honest actions.  
Should you give way to your fleshy will, and the fiend’s desires,  
Drenching your soul in deadly sin,  
It is God who will suffer not the dishonest to live  
For they have lost their inherent willpower.”