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Accursed Envy: An Introduction into the Reimagining of the Sin Envy from Piers Plowman the A Version: Passus 5, lines 60-96

Abstract

For my translation of Passus 5, lines 60-96, in which Will witnessed humanity's purification of sin through the allegorized confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins, my interest in the supernatural and the occult influenced a reimagining of the sin of Envy as a variant of the Wendigo from Native American folklore and the Blood-Starved Beast from FromSoftware's video game *Bloodborne*. Three years ago, I was introduced to Dr. Michael Calabrese's translation of William Langland's *Piers Plowman: the A Text*, an intelligible, insightful, and inspirational literary work that is equal parts educational, comedic, and uniquely soothing to the trinity of the mind, soul, and heart of any medieval scholar. While the text conjured feelings of hope, grace, and love, I found myself drawn to the darker aspects of Langland's fable: the depictions of negative allegorical personifications that work to infect the human psyche, the descriptions of the denizens of the Pit bent on the destruction of the soul, and the characterizations of the Seven Deadly Sins as a force driven by nature to corrupt humanity in its entirety.

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VICTOR BANEGAS

Accursed Envy: An Introduction into the Reimagining of the Sin
Envy from *Piers Plowman the A Version*: Passus 5, lines 60-96

Curse the fiends. Their children too. And their children, forever, true.
—Unknown Narrator, *Bloodborne: The Old Hunters*

Three years ago, I was introduced to Dr. Michael Calabrese’s translation of William Langland’s *Piers Plowman: the A Text*, an intelligible, insightful, and inspirational literary work that is equal parts educational, comedic, and uniquely soothing to the trinity of the mind, soul, and heart of any medieval scholar. While the text conjured feelings of hope, grace, and love, I found myself drawn to the darker aspects of Langland’s fable: the depictions of negative allegorical personifications that work to infect the human psyche, the descriptions of the denizens of the Pit bent on the destruction of the soul, and the characterizations of the Seven Deadly Sins as a force driven by nature to corrupt humanity in its entirety. Admittedly, a wave of nostalgia consumed me as my eyes and fingers traced the pages of Calabrese’s revised translation where I was reunited with my old companion: the Sin of Envy. I say “companion” as not only was the character my favorite of the sins, but having performed a recording of the character’s dialogue in the original Middle English as part of a project spearheaded by Calabrese, feelings of euphoric, awe-inspiring horror and subliminal intrigue seduced me into Envy’s embrace, heightened by the translation assignment which provided an opportunity to depict the character in a uniquely tragic and horrifyingly beautiful way that explores the repressed primal instincts “moral” individuals keep at bay.

For my translation of Passus 5, lines 60-96, in which Will witnessed humanity’s purification of sin through the allegorized confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins, my interest in the supernatural and the occult influenced a reimagining of the sin of Envy as a variant of the Wendigo from Native American folklore and the Blood-Starved Beast from FromSoftware’s videogame *Bloodborne*. All three creatures have a near-identical physical description, yet to truly inflict a horror that would capture the attention and intensify the imagination of the reader, I utilized the Middle English Dictionary’s vast lexicon to portray Envy as more beast than man; wearing the skin of a former comrade, with nails as razors, and an afflicted disposition that made the sin a victim of its own nature. This depiction becomes a relatable topic to those who have experienced or witnessed individuals become prisoners and victims of their own “curses” and “compulsions” making the afflicted monster one of our own making. Despite this, the message of hope persists as no matter how tainted or seemingly futile the situation, our salvation is dependent on our will and not of the beast that lurks within, which is at the core of the study of the humanities: becoming a better version of ourselves that fosters compassion, kindness, and interconnectivity so we may learn, grow, and support each other. This translation interacts with the reader on an intimate level, taking them on a journey into the darkness to experience the malignancy that threatens to break the surface of

our moral control, yet offers hope where one can temper their spirit and will against all odds to make the individual truly incorruptible. As a future educator, it is my desire to convey this message of hope through other works of horror.

He was blood-less as a stone, afflicted by numbness; He was enveloped in a coarse covering, I feared to describe: A coat of flesh on his back, nails like razors at his side, wearing a former comrade as a cowl and armor.

As a leek that had dwelled long in the sun,

He appeared as a rake, emaciated, and scowling miserably. His body so infected with wrath that he bit his lip, And severely wrung his clenched hands, vengeance were his thoughts with unholy deeds and words, at any opportune moment. “I am a vessel, of this acidic corruption,

It surges within me, growing more fierce, I believe. I do not function as men do day to day, For I feed on this growing sickness.

Those who dwell near me, I afflict,

And disgrace them behind their back bringing them dishonor; I followed and corrupted them repeatedly,

Slandering them to Lords and God, my lies draining them of silver,

Turning friend into foe, by my corrupted tongue;

Their good will and good fortune afflict me with pain and suffering. Within the homestead and among its inhabitants I bring forth animosity; Both life and limb succumb to my tongue.

Those I encounter in this world I must ceaselessly hate, Yet I embrace them as lovingly as a comrade.

Those worthier than I, I dare not provoke.

Yet had I the ability or power, I would destroy their souls forever!

When I enter the Cathedral of humanity’s souls, and kneel before the Cross,

to pray for God’s subjects, as the priest instructs, I shout on my knees ‘Our Lady give them infernal torment

Those that ravaged for my chalice and long cloak.’ From the altar I avert my gaze and behold

How the religious *familia* are adorned with a coat of arms—a boon I hope

To have for my own;

And all the wealth they possess enrages and torments me.

At the destruction of their souls I must smile, and rejoice in my heart; At the redemption of their souls I must weep in sorrow, and woe that time.

I judge them all for their malevolence, and yet I am more of a monster; It was ordained to me for every being to be my knave, my offspring of corrupted blood;

And I am forever wounded by those who attain a happiness I can never know.”