

Piers plowman



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Piers Plowman The life of William Langland is a mystery. There is very little known about the man who wrote the Middle English, an alliterative poem known as Piers Plowman. I did gather that he was born in the West Midlands around 1330 and may have died in 1386. Though much not can be found on Langland's life, one can infer that he had many different life experiences in which he may draw from to write Piers Plowman. Whether one looks at the elegant trial of Lady Meed at the King's court, to impoverished life lived on Piers Plowman's half-acre. Also, the narrator in Piers Plowman seems to indicate that Langland may have been exposed to higher education. There are three different versions of Piers Plowman, known as the A-text, the B-text, and the C-text The A-text is the earliest and shortest of the three versions and is about 2, 400 lines long. The B-text is a revision of the A-text in which the original 2, 400 lines are still there but turned into a 4, 000 line piece of work.

During my reading of the B-Text, I found that it was more poetic in its form. What I also found was that the C-text was almost a full revision of the B-Text with not much more added. The A-text seemed to be written in 1370 while the B-text. The C-text may have been written in 1381 during the " Peasants Revolt of 1382". The opening lines let the reader know what to expect: a man named Will on a religious quest that is set in a dream-like, vision state. He wakes up in Field Full of Folk in the opening scene. It is quite obvious to the reader that Will is a very righteous man as he is described to be wearing " shrouded as [he] a sheep were, / In habite as an eremite unholy of werkes. ". This indicates that Will is in clothes made of sheepskin, symbolic meaning to The Lamb. However, it could also make the reader conclude that he may

also be a wolf in sheep's clothing. The uncertainty is loathsome. The reader might think, " Is he good or evil? Will, he hurt or help? ".

The phrase, " unholy of werkes" seems like Will could be evil, but by the end of the poem, we see that it meant that spiritually Will was only just a child and needed to mature. In continuation of this idea, in the prologue of Piers Plowman, Will is born metaphorically into his vision and faith. In the first passus, Will is confronted by a female named, Holy Church and becomes quickly engaged in learning how to be a good Christian. Holy Church represents a holy and pure church that is uncorrupted by man. She is vital for teaching Will the basics of Christianity. I found that her presence was the best way to teach Will the holy and pure way to be a Christian untouched by the corrupt hands of man. She also teaches Will that the body and soul are in a constant struggle for power. Holy Church explains that Will must find the balance between the physical self and spiritual self-lead by the soul; what may be good for one may not be good for the other. Will must learn at this point what moderation is. Moderation is a vital step of self-control and awareness in Piers Plowman.

Will is now faced with a few new characters named, Kynde Wit, who tells him the way of common sense; Reason, who tells him what reason and moderation means; and Truth expects Will he be truthful in speech, work, and intent of the heart and soul (700-1235). Before Will could fully comprehend what Truth meant, he needs to find out what truth is not: falsity or the character " Falseness". After meeting with these characters Will had learned everything they could instill upon him. However, since Will is in a dream-like, vision state, he fears that he will not have the capability to make

the right decision with his own free will. In his early education with Holy Church, she fails to explain what Falseness means for Will. However in the story of Lady Meed, the concept is explained (line 1456- 1729), Lady Meed seems to be the bastard daughter of Falseness and about to be wed to Falls Fikel-tongue (line 1464). “ Whore of Babylon in Revelation,” she is described as, with her magnificent Scarlett, silk robes (1468). Lady Meed represents the corruptive influence of money, bribery, prostitution, and is found in every aspect of society. In this story of Lady Meed, she represents a good use of money.

However, since Lady Meed can be used by anyone, she often falls into the wrong hands and used for corrupt purposes. Lady Meed’s marriage to Falls Fikel-tongue is ceased by Theology, who pursues that the King is the one who should decide whom Lady Meed marries (1475). In the royal court, Lady Meed and her follower voyage off to London at the expense of men of legal authority. The King calls upon Conscience for his advice. At this point, he swears he will have nothing to do with the evil, wickedness of Lady Mead, and her fate is left to the courts (1509). With the advice of Conscience, the King decides to find out what kind of person Lady Mead is. The King decides that the best thing for Lady Mead was to marry Conscience to know where the line is drawn between right and wrong (1534). Though the King’s intentions were for good reason, Lady Mead was known to be easily corrupted. The King believed Conscience was the perfect mate to control Lady Mead and make her submissive to his good morals. However, Conscience explained to the King that this would not be possible because through his morals were pure and righteous, he would soon eventually be

consumed by the power of Lady Mead (1547). Since Lady Mead can be easily used by anyone, she is quickly corrupted by those around her.

She is accused of corrupting the pardoners who forgive the sins of the common (not of the clergy) people. As we recall back to Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Pardoners of this time were very ill-willed men who would only accept money and power to pardon the sins of people. This corruption is said to be the work by the hands of Lady Mead. In this part of *Piers Plowman*, it is the responsibility of the character Penance to steer Will away from the ill-will and corruption of Lady Mead's influence on the pardoners' business (1609). Before marriage with Conscience, Lady Mead discusses her character. While she shows him all the wonderful aspects of her existence, Conscience reminds her of her malevolent ways (1613). It is clear to the King that Conscience is right, however, the King is blinded by Lady Mead's conveyed character of goodwill. At this point, the King orders Conscience to give her a kiss on the forehead, which is to signify there to be peace between the two characters (1645). However, Conscience would not give her a kiss of peace unless Reason was summoned to assess the pros and cons, essentially, of the situation (1647-49). The King, a benevolent creature, decides to honor the request of Conscience and summon Reason.

The King decides to bring Wrong to the court to defend Lady Mead and convince the King his ways are correct (1664-1672). He believes he should be allowed to bribe his way out of the charges of rape, murder, and theft. Reason snaps back at this and urges for hard punishment to be inflicted on Wrong. The King, swept up by all these testimonies, decides in favor of Reason and Conscience, who were selected to be his counselors. Wrong is

punished and the King's eyes are now open to Lady Mead's benevolent aspects. He is no longer naive. At this point, the King's court has flourished since Conscience and Reason became his advisors. Holy Church explains to Will that Conscience and Reason are two things that every person has within them on some level. She also explains that the King is not a character that is based on royal heritage. The King is a being that represents the challenges that every common man faces (Burrow 318). Explained even further in an article by J. A Burrow every man faces the challenges of Right and Wrong and often seeks to find Conscience and Reason in their lives. At this point, the scene fades into the Field Full of Folk once again as Will wakes up and then falls asleep shortly after.

Next, Will is confronted with the character of Reason who fashions the wardrobe of a clergyman. He urges Will to repent (2573). After urging Will to confess his sins, he brings out the Seven Deadly Sins. This section of the story where Reason speaks to each of the seven and teaches Will that if he lives with The Seven Deadly Sins in his life, he will never find salvation. The next section starts with the Will waking up briefly from the vision and reflecting on his experience so far. However, our dreamer, Will quickly falls back into his dream. In this next part of his holy vision quest, he enters upon the Feast of Patience (2798-2906). Seven people attend the Feast, Conscience, Clergy and his wife, Scripture, Patience, Will, and The Master of Divinity. The food was simple and elegant which was to show will what penance means (Burrow 319). Later in the poem, Will is thought of as a fool (3015-3016). At this point in Will still being a foolish man, he is introduced to Anima, who tells Will the importance of putting into action all that he has

learned (3025-3120). Anima prepares Will for a vision of the Tree of Charity. In a vision conveyed to Will by Piers Plowman himself, a tree is an image of fallen humanity.

Piers Plowman is said to be represented as Jesus. There are three kinds of fruit: human souls of wedlock, widowhood, and virginity, and it is supported by three planks. The three planks have been explained to Will as the Holy Trinity. However, the Tree being threatened by Covetise, who is the Fiend of Flesh. The tree represents the tree that bore the fruit of knowledge, much like the fruit referenced in Genesis. The tree contains knowledge that is not to be consumed by man. However, in this section of Piers Plowman, The Devil is pursuing Covetise to extract the fruit from the tree for evil intentions. Toward the end of the poem, Will goes to mass on Easter Sunday and, during the middle of mass, falls asleep and dreams of Piers Plowman. Piers is identified this time as the eucharistic host at the moment of consecration during the Mass when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. The mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ is mysterious to Will as he cannot understand at what point these common items become holy. The answer has conveyed the appearance of Piers before the people. Will turns to Conscience for an explanation of the mystery. Conscience recalls the life of Jesus by explaining the sacrament. The miracle at Cana involves the changing of water into wine, a type of wine turning into the blood in the Eucharist. Thus, the Three Lives are put into the perspective of the ministry of Christ, and the message is clear: it is impossible to do well, do better, and do best without divine grace, and this grace is available to all through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and penance. If Dowel is the

sacramental wine, Dobet is the eucharistic bread, as it is paralleled to the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

That Piers is granted the power of binding and unbinding sins reflects back upon the early association of Piers and the Good Priest. Piers is a variation of Peter, suggesting the apostle and first pope. Piers remains behind after the Ascension, and it is to him that Grace gives the four evangelists and the four church leaders (3321-3364). Piers is known to be Jesus Christ who is a part of the eternal, divine Church. Noticeably, the forces of Pride wait to attack until Piers until he has featured once more at the end of Piers Plowman. By the end of the poem, there are no good clergy. (Daegman 8). The Barn of Unity that Grace tells Piers to build is another image of the whole Christian community (3433-3457). However, since the Tree of Charity is under constant threat, so is the Barn of Unity. Covets and Pride tries to confuse Conscience with their so that he can not tell the difference between a Christian and a dark worshipper. Conscience advises Christians to leave the area to find safely from the malevolent qualities (3458-3465). Events turn dark for Will and are in need of consulting needs. It can be a humbling factor, but it can also be a convenient excuse for doing what one wants to do rather than what one ought to do.

Will falls asleep after being reproached by Need and dreams of the coming of Antichrist. Conscience consults Kynde, Old Age, and Death. Though Will has become an old man, he manages to keep somewhat in good humor. His appearance has changed dramatically. He has become bald, deaf, toothless, and a bit incompetent due to his old age. During this last part of Piers Plowman, Will is confronted by the inevitable character named Death (3502-

3696). As Will's time is coming to an end, he begs Kynde for him to spare him. Kynde advises Will learn what love is (3757). This could be compared to what Holy Church told Will in the first section. Though Piers Plowman is a lengthy alliterative poem, it ends considerably curtly. Conscience vows to undertake another quest, this time to find Piers Plowman, and he calls upon Grace for help. Then the Dreamer simply wakes up and that is the end. I found that the ending lines of the poem had no emotion to it. I was not able to feel if Will felt like his total experience was positive or negative. Will's attitude does seem to show the slightest bit of positivity as he learns to find what it means to be a Christian and learns the value of good morals. Piers Plowman is a series of journeys in a dream-like vision in search of answers. The narrator named Will goes from one higher authority to another. However, as the quests move along, the main point of the journey changes. The quest was originally to find how a Christian is expected to live, however, as time goes on it becomes about finding a way to do the best and be the best one can be. When the poem finishes, Will is faced with yet another quest. This indicates to the reader that a Christian's search for salvation is eternal.

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