

Cato, Christ, and Piers:  
*The Disticha Catonis* and Christian Literacy in *Piers Plowman*

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1991

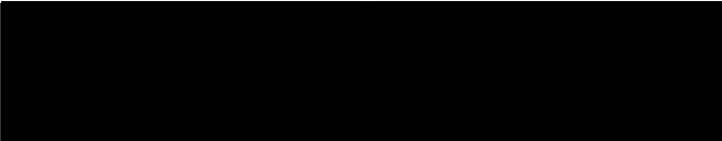
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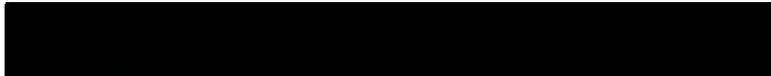
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ABSTRACT


Langland's use of moral distichs from the medieval text known as the *Disticha Catonis* has been noted but never critically examined as a whole. The figure of 'Cato' and the distichs attributed to him stand out in *Piers Plowman*. I will begin by placing both *Piers* and the *Disticha* in their medieval literary context. Questions of audience and literacy have always been central to *Piers*, and I will look at the way in which Langland's use of Latin quotations from the *Disticha* relates to these issues. I will also examine the role of 'Cato' and the distichs in *Piers* in order to dispell the prevailing critical view that 'Cato' represented a pagan authority. The medieval Christian commentaries which accompanied the *Disticha* illuminate *Piers* as well. Critics have often wondered why Langland choose to write in a mixture of languages. 'Cato' and the *Disticha* are part of the answer.

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## Chapter One:

### The 'Cato' Connection: Audience, Literacy, and *Piers Plowman*

Morton Bloomfield remarked that "Langland speaks Bible."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it might well be added to Bloomfield's observation that Langland spoke "Cato" as well as "Bible", and it is this aspect of *Piers Plowman* that I would like to explore.<sup>2</sup> Cato and the *Disticha Catonis*, which was attributed to him, stand out in *Piers* as a part of the poem's macaronic content. The composition of the poem involved the use of three languages - the clerical Latin of the medieval Church, and the Anglo-Norman and Middle English of the secular Christian. During this period, Anglo-Norman French co-existed alongside and occasionally mixed with the native Middle English, and this situation is at times reflected in *Piers*.<sup>3</sup> However, Middle English constitutes the prevailing language of the poem and

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<sup>1</sup> Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1961) 37.

<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Ages, the name "Cato" was generally accepted as that of the author of a collection of distichs. This compilation of moral advice was variously known as the *Dicta Catonis*, *Dicta M. Catonis ad filium suum*, *Libri Catonis Philosophi*, *Dionysii Catonis Disticha de Moribus ad Filium*, *Disticha Moralia D. Catonis*, *Parvus Cato et Magnus Cato*; I will refer to it as the *Disticha Catonis* and abbreviate in footnotes as *DC*. It was frequently used as a first reader for students who were learning to read Latin. See page 24 below. I will examine the issue of authorship in regard to "Cato" at the end of this chapter. Remarks concerning "Cato" generally stress the fictive quality of this pseudonymous author by referring to him as "pseudo-Cato" as John Alford does in *Piers Plowman: A Guide to the Quotations*. (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance texts and studies, 1992) on page 26, or "the supposed author" as Gerald Morgan does in "The Meaning of Kind Wit, Conscience, and Reason in the First Vision of *Piers Plowman*," *Modern Philology* 84 (1986): on page 357. However, I will refer to the author (or group of authors) responsible for the *Disticha* simply as Cato without qualifying adjectives or quotation marks.

<sup>3</sup> W. Rothwell, "The Trilingual England of Geoffrey Chaucer," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 54 n26, calls French as it was spoken in England 'Anglo-French' because he rejects "the simplistic but seductive notion that William's heterogeneous band of soldiers brought over to England a language common to them all." He also comments, on page 66, that "Two languages such as Anglo-French and Middle English, being used in one stratum of a society on a daily basis by generations of scribes, officials, and scholars, simply cannot be kept apart; the idea that such people could have in their minds neat and tidy pigeonholes for each language is a product of modern, not medieval, thinking."

Latin represents the majority of its quotations, with Cato's distichs making a noticeable contribution.<sup>4</sup> This mingling of languages in *Piers* raises many interesting questions concerning the level of education and linguistic ability of Langland's audience, and his perceptions and intentions concerning them. Scholars such as John A. Alford and Anne Wenley Quick have demonstrated that other than the Bible and biblical commentaries, Langland drew on Latin sources such as quotations from the fathers of the church and later theologians; quotations from pastoral manuals; quotations from legal texts; and quotations from school texts.<sup>5</sup> The *Disticha* was frequently included in the school texts and was ubiquitous in medieval literature in general.<sup>6</sup>

*Piers Plowman* is extant in fifty-five manuscripts which are generally accepted as representing three versions of the poem, known respectively as the A-, B-, and C-texts, likely composed between the years 1360 and 1387.<sup>7</sup> The structural divisions are indicated

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<sup>4</sup> See Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 1 n2, for a discussion on the difficulty of assigning a definitive number for the quotations in *Piers* due to the fact that "the number of quotations varies according to manuscript and edition." He also points out that "agreement is lacking in many cases on what constitutes a Latin or French borrowing." See below pages 37-40, for a discussion of the total number of distichs and references to Cato, used or suggested in *Piers*.

<sup>5</sup> See Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 16 - 30; and Anne Wenly Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*," diss., University of Toronto, 1982, 1 - 48.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Hazelton remarks, in "Chaucer and Cato," *Speculum* XXXV, No. 4 (1960): 360-361, that Chaucer would have encountered Cato in his reading of contemporary documents "for the distichs were quoted literally everywhere. When, for example, Chaucer came to translate the *Livre de Mellibee et de Prudence* he found, scattered throughout the *sententiae* of which the book is composed, no fewer than eight quotations from Cato. When he composed his *Merchant's Tale* he found the Catonian admonition he quotes there (iv, 1377) embedded in the text of Albertano's *Liber consolationis et concilii*, in a passage omitted from his own *Melibee* and its immediate source. It may be, too, that the Catonian doctrine he utilized in the *Franklin's Tale* (v, 773-777) was suggested to him by a passage in Machaut's *Dit dou Lyon*. In the *Roman de la Rose*, in the French romances, in the Latin poetry of earlier centuries, in the verse of his contemporaries Deschamps and Gower he was reminded of the advice of the venerable Cato."

<sup>7</sup> For *Piers Plowman* citations, I have used *Piers Plowman, the A Version*, ed. George Kane (London: The Athlone Press, 1960); *Piers Plowman, the B Version*, ed. George Kane and E. T. Donaldson (London: The Athlone Press, 1975); and *Piers Plowman by William Langland: An edition of the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). For the distichs I have used *Disticha Catonis*.

by the Latin term *passus*, and by a textual tradition of rubrics also in Latin. The narrative units involve a series of dream visions, which have traditionally been divided into two units designated as *Visio* (Passus C.I- C.IX) and *Vita* (Passus C.X - C.XXII). Beyond this prosaic use of Latin, Langland intimately mixes Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English in the syntax of the poem.

In chapter one I will present an overview of the macaronic nature of *Piers* and summarize the literary criticism that has focused on issues of audience and literacy. I will also briefly comment on contemporary macaronic (1) sermons, (2) pastoral manuals, (3) popular songs, and (4) literary works. These macaronic genres filled a need for an audience which ranged from those with a minimal ability to read Latin to those who “were so thoroughly bilingual, in both their written and spoken practice, that these mixed texts might have formed a natural linguistic medium for them.”<sup>8</sup> Langland used ‘tags’ from the *Disticha Catonis* to bring the commentary tradition associated with its use as a school text into the large and growing macaronic corpus. In doing so, he contributed to an ongoing Christianizing process which sought to bring the pagan distichs into accord with Christian doctrine. In order to place the *Disticha Catonis* in its medieval context, I will introduce material from the commentaries, and also look at the expository prologues from the Anglo-Norman and Middle English translations of the *Disticha*. In chapter two, I will

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*Recensuit et Apparatu Critico Instruxit*, ed Marcus Boas and Henricus Johannes Botschuyen (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1952) cited by book and number. For the translations of the distichs, I have used Ian Thomson and Louis Perraud, *Ten Latin Schooltexts of the Later Middle Ages* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990). Thomson and Perraud have based their translations on Boas’s Latin text. All other translations will be mine unless noted otherwise.

<sup>8</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994) 12. Wenzel is referring here to macaronic sermons, but I think that his statement may easily be generalized to include the entire macaronic corpus of the period.

examine the ways in which the Christianized figure of Cato and the Latin quotations from the *Disticha Catonis* function in *Piers*. I believe that Cato and the distichs attributed to him made a significant contribution to the poem, and I will present my conclusions in chapter three.

### Macaronics, Literacy, and a Medieval Audience

The macaronic content of *Piers Plowman* is remarkable largely because of the variety of techniques that Langland employed when blending Latin and Anglo-Norman with Middle English. However, his poem cannot be considered macaronic in the original sense of the term which signified the splicing of Latin inflectional endings onto vernacular words for comic effect.<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Wenzel notes that this form of comic macaronic verse is rare in Middle English. According to Wenzel, “much more frequent in medieval English literature is the use of a language mixture that combines not roots and terminations from different languages but words, phrases, or entire sentences that follow completely the grammatical rules of their respective tongue.”<sup>10</sup> It is this more recent definition that best describes Langland’s usage. Tim William Machan has examined the bilingual content of *Piers* in terms of (1) ‘borrowing’ which represents “a technique by which a linguistic item from one variety is adopted in another with varying degrees of adaptation but within the host language’s grammatical system, not its own”; (2) ‘code switching’ which “involves

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<sup>9</sup> See Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons* 2-4, and Elizabeth Archibald, “Tradition and Innovation in the Macaronic Poetry of Dunbar and Skelton,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992): 126-129, for a discussion of this term and its history.

<sup>10</sup> Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons* 4.

alteration of an entire grammatical system"; and (3) the more syntactically complex 'intrasentential code switching' which "typically requires two switches, for a speaker can begin and complete an utterance in one code but within the utterance include material realized in another code."<sup>11</sup> Langland did not simply integrate Latin quotations as repetitious refrains, or merely introduce them as thematic material for purposes of translation, and it is this fluidity of style which distinguishes his poem and challenges his audience. Some idea of the ways in which the poem engaged and held the attention of its audience may be inferred not only from Langland's manipulation of languages and his frequent use of quotations, but also from the demands which he made of his audience in the process.

Any attempt to discuss questions concerning medieval audiences in terms of readership must of course concern itself with what it meant to be considered literate in that period. Brian Stock remarks that "Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries a literate was one who could read, write, and perhaps also speak Latin."<sup>12</sup> Macaronic texts provided a bridge of sorts between Latin and the vernacular. As Eamon Duffy observes, when writing of the use of primers by the laity, "Even for those with little or no Latin, there were degrees of possible comprehensions of the texts. Much of their contents, especially those liturgical or quasi-liturgical sections which made up their central core, would have been familiar even to lay people, and their meaning well understood."<sup>13</sup> By

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<sup>11</sup> Tim William Machan, "Language Contact in *Piers Plowman*," *Speculum* 69 (1994): 364-372.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 27.

<sup>13</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars - Traditional Religion in England c.1400 - c. 1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 220.

choosing quotations which reflected the cultural literacy<sup>14</sup> of a majority of the populace and by linking the Latin quotations with the vernacular, Langland reached out to a wider audience than that composed exclusively of the literate élite who were fluent in Latin.

Part of the social tension in the poem revolves around the question of the ability of various figures such as Piers and Sloth to read Latin. Langland was well aware of a fundamental linguistic dichotomy in the structure of Christian society. His poem shares some of the anxiety of the Fourth Lateran Council<sup>15</sup> regarding clerical illiteracy and also illustrates the social strain between the literate and illiterate in matters of religion. He frequently describes and addresses his audience in terms of "lerved and lewed," but Langland's use of this phrase - which unites as well as divides the audience - is not straightforward. He uses the two terms at times to chasten his audience, as on the occasion when Imaginatif admonishes Will: "For letrede men were as lewede men 3ut, ne were þe lore of tho clerkes" (C.XIV.198). At other times he uses the same terms to flatter his audience, notably when Holy Church counsels Will concerning the fundamental importance of truth and true love: "Lere hit thus lewed men, for lettred hit knoweth" (C.I.133). On a deeper level Langland explores the semantic range and social reality of the two terms in such a way as to raise questions concerning the very hierarchy which they

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<sup>14</sup> By 'cultural literacy', I wish to indicate the texts which we might expect the average educated reader to have had contact with before reading *Piers*. I think that the reader response and reception theories of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss have interesting implications for the readership of *Piers*. See Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A critical introduction* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1984) 148 -150.

<sup>15</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council took place on 13 April 1215 at Lyons under Pope Gregory X, who in his closing address "charged the bishops to pay greater attention to their pastoral obligations, reforming themselves first, then their clergy, and ultimately the entire church." See "Western Councils (1215-1274)," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 1982 ed.

imply. An instance of this inversion of the religious hierarchy is evident in the A-text and B-texts, where as Wendy Scase observes:

It is a difficulty over the 'lewed' - 'lered' distinction which precipitates the quarrel between Piers and the Priest. The Priest must read the pardon ("Piers," quap a prest [po], "þi pardon must I rede. For I shal construe iche clause & kenne it þe on englisshe.", Q viii 89 - 90), yet in challenging the Priest, Piers seems absurdly clerical ('peter, as me pinkep, þou art le[tr]id a litel', A viii 118 - 19) and the Priest paradoxically 'lewed' ("Lewide lorel!" quap peris', A viii 124).<sup>16</sup>

For Langland, the distinction between "lernered and lewed" transcended mundane questions of mere literacy and exposed salvation anxieties fundamental to medieval Christianity:

So lewede laborers of litel vnderstondyng  
 Selde falleth so foule and so depe in synne  
 As clerkes of holy chirche þat kepe sholde and saue  
 Lewede men in good bileue and lene hem at here nede.  
 (C.XI.302 - 305)

Stock remarks that "Although Christian authors from Augustine on studied and mastered rhetoric, they were constantly reminded that Jesus and the apostles spoke in the plain language of uncultivated men."<sup>17</sup> Moreover the term *idiota* or illiterate, in the Middle Ages, "was an ambivalent notion: it harboured within its range of meaning the idea of blessed simplicity."<sup>18</sup>

Part of the tension for modern critics concerning the poem also involves the question of linguistic ability and literacy on the part of the poem's audience. Much of the work which has been done regarding audience has been aimed at trying to establish who they were in terms of social standing and what their education provided in terms of

<sup>16</sup> Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1989) 167.

<sup>17</sup> Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* 28.

<sup>18</sup> Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* 29.

cultural literacy. Critics have frequently suggested that the poem had a “mixed” audience, but they have not always been clear as to whether “mixed” refers to both the literate and illiterate or whether it merely indicates different levels of education and literacy.<sup>19</sup> A literate audience would have appreciated the deeper significance of the inter-relationship between the Latin and Middle English. An illiterate audience listening to the poem would have focussed on the vernacular. The notion of a mixed audience is intriguing because the figure of Piers Plowman was mentioned in the letters of the rebels involved in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. As Steven Justice remarks it is also an elusive possibility: “For one thing, it is not clear which of the rebels might have known Langland’s poem, or what they, or she, or he knew of it: was *Piers Plowman* (at one absurd extreme) the bedtime reading of a thousand insurgents or (at the other) John Ball’s distant memory of an evening’s conversation?”<sup>20</sup> Justice observes that the difficulty of assuming “textual consumption among the rural working classes” lies in the fact that “the ordinary empirical sources for such a history are wholly and almost by definition absent: if some of the rebels did have access to complete or partial manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*, those manuscripts - for reasons so obvious they don’t even need listing - would have been most unlikely candidates for survival.”<sup>21</sup>

The search for the audience of *Piers Plowman* has often been conducted outside the framework of the poem by scrutinizing wills or by trying to reconstruct the type of education which a literate audience would have possessed. Although these two approaches share some assumptions, they are in reality looking at different audiences.

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<sup>19</sup> A. C. Spearing in *Criticism and Medieval Poetry* (London : Edward Arnold, 1972) 125, remarks that *Piers Plowman* “seems to be directed at an audience of mixed intellectual capacity.” He believes that Langland made provision for this within the poem and cites the occasion on which the Good Samaritan gives two separate analogies to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Spearing doesn’t discuss whether an audience of “mixed intellectual capacity” would have included the literate and illiterate.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 119.

<sup>21</sup> Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* 119.

Wills and other such documents focus on a small segment of the readership which the poem achieved after it was in general circulation. Attempts to discover the educational curriculum, or to construct a corpus of contemporary literature, focus on the audience which Langland envisioned during the act of composition. In both instances the audience is assumed to be literate and therefore able to appreciate the Latin within the poem.

Anne Middleton is careful to distinguish between the intended and the achieved audience in her article "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*." She refers to the author's intended audience as his "public" which she defines as "the readership imagined and posited by the composer as a necessary postulate in the practical process of bringing the work into being, for a certain effect within certain perceived historical conditions."<sup>22</sup> By "audience," she means the "readership actually achieved by the work."<sup>23</sup> Middleton believes that public and audience were virtually synonymous in *Piers Plowman*, and she sets out to demonstrate that it "was received as a work of literature by a heterogeneous and attentive readership, and that this was the kind of reception it actively and consciously sought by its choices of genre and form, and by the manner in which its intentions are declared."<sup>24</sup> For Middleton, the heterogeneous audience of *Piers Plowman* consisted of clerical and lay readers who were united "by a common social location, and range of activities and interests. Whether laymen or ecclesiastics, their customary activities involve[d] them in counsel, policy, education, administration, pastoral care - in those tasks and offices where spiritual and temporal governance meet."<sup>25</sup> However, if the revisions to the B-text are viewed as having been politically motivated then it would seem that Langland may have reached a wider audience than he originally visualized as being his

<sup>22</sup> Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*," *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982) 102.

<sup>23</sup> Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*" 101.

<sup>24</sup> Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*" 101.

<sup>25</sup> Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*" 104.

public. Nonetheless, the audience suggested by Middleton would have been able to read a mixture of Latin and Middle English, but the question remains as to Langland's reasons for choosing a largely vernacular voice and a macaronic format for his poem.

The Latin quotations within the poem have also been studied in an effort to reconstruct Langland's own education and his method of composition, but they have seldom been examined from the audience's point of view. Langland's Latin has been used against him at times to support the notion that he was not well educated because his quotations were cited from texts which were too well known.<sup>26</sup> Anne Quick defends Langland's reputation with the suggestion that "the quotations in *Piers* show the lower and not the upper limits of the poet's learning."<sup>27</sup> She comments that "For a good writer, and particularly for so obviously didactic a writer as Langland, what determines the level of difficulty at which he writes is his intended audience."<sup>28</sup> Quick has tried to attain a clearer notion of Langland's 'public' and its level of literacy by closely examining the quotations within the poem. She comes to the conclusion that Langland's 'public' was "one which could understand Latin and knew the Bible."<sup>29</sup> Quick envisions this readership as a homogeneous group which likely was comprised of "the higher clergy: benefice-holders in major orders who had studied at a university or *studium generale*, for instance, monks and friars whose orders funded their education there, teachers at the same institutions, men who had access to the libraries of cathedrals and religious houses, and so on."<sup>30</sup> She believes that *Piers Plowman* likely reached a wider audience than this highly literate group but is confident that the poem "though it can be appreciated and understood in part by

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<sup>26</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 38.

<sup>27</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 40.

<sup>28</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 38.

<sup>29</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 38.

<sup>30</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 41.

people who cannot read Latin, was aimed at those who could.”<sup>31</sup> Quick's efforts are largely concentrated on identifying the possible sources of the quotations, and she also attempts to establish their cultural currency. Quick uses the quotations in an attempt to establish the boundaries of Langland's education and his expectations concerning the capabilities of his 'public,' but she does not examine the purpose or the role of the quotations within the poem.

John Alford, who has extensively studied the quotations, acknowledges that “*Piers Plowman* is more than the sum of its borrowings,” and that “no study of the poem - whether of its author, its audience, or its art - can afford to ignore them.”<sup>32</sup> However, Alford has little to say concerning the audience of the poem and the dynamics of readership. He sees the quotations as providing the structure for the poem and asserts that:

In the process of composition, they served as topoi, generating hundreds of lines in the form of translation, commentary, and narrative; in the finished work, they served as *confirmations*, compelling assent from readers nourished by grammar, law, and the language of holy church.<sup>33</sup>

Alford's view assigns the quotations a generative function in the process of composition but essentially reduces them to the status of static authoritative props in the finished work.<sup>34</sup>

Alford contends that the poem was constructed slowly and tediously by a poet “poring over a variety of commentaries and preacher's aids”; however, he does concede

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<sup>31</sup> Quick, “The Sources of the Quotations” 40.

<sup>32</sup> John Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 30.

<sup>33</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 30.

<sup>34</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 5. Despite his desire to liberate the quotations by establishing their independence and essential continuity, Alford does acknowledge the integrity of their relationship with the English lines. He questions the editorial practice of assigning line numbers to the quotations on the basis of their syntactic relationship with the surrounding English lines.

that Langland “adapted an old technique, moribund by the late fourteenth century, and infused it with a life and energy it rarely had in any medieval sermon and was never to have again.”<sup>35</sup> Part of that life and energy are due to Langland's habit of providing macaronic dialogue for his characters, as well as his proclivity for using other macaronic strategies which demanded and held the attention of the audience. Alford gives little thought as to how such lines function in the poem, and none to the possibility that the two languages might work synergistically rather than independently.

Despite disagreement as to its size and composition, an audience obviously existed which was accustomed to being both instructed and entertained by the mixed syntax of macaronic composition. Macaronic composition in the Middle Ages runs the gamut from the predictable patterns of quotation followed by translation or paraphrase, theme followed by sermon, vernacular lines of poetry followed by Latin refrains, to the unpredictable give and take of bilingual code switching. Some idea of Langland's audience may be gained by looking at the range and variety of contemporary composition and its settings. Sermons, pastoral manuals, popular songs, and other literature may be used to explore the boundaries of the “fair feld ful of folk” that contained both Langland's public and audience.

### Contemporary Sermons

The echoes and influences of medieval sermons have often been noted in *Piers*, but usually are thought to have provided structural considerations, such as quotations introduced to provide a theme, or single words used to trigger the associations suggested by verbal concordances. Siegfried Wenzel has observed the extensive use of intrasentential code-switching in manuscripts which contain Middle English macaronic sermons. He comments that “Their linguistic switching displays the same randomness

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<sup>35</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 97.

which modern studies have shown to be characteristic of bilingual speakers.”<sup>36</sup> The sermons which Wenzel examined were written primarily in Latin with English as the intrusive language, but the situation in *Piers Plowman* is the reverse with the vernacular functioning as the narrative voice.<sup>37</sup> Wenzel has some doubts as to whether macaronic sermons were preached as written; however, he observes that “there are some indications that preachers used Latin in sermons *ad populum* beyond the theme and an occasional authoritative quotation.”<sup>38</sup> Presumably the Latin in such sermons functioned on different levels corresponding to the education of the individual members of the audience - the theme would have been explicated for the benefit of all - while the authoritative quotations must have resounded with the untranslated voice of clerical authority for the uneducated and with reiterative assurance for the literate. Wenzel does not consider the switching from Latin to English and back - within the boundaries of a sentence - to have served the same function in sermons as other macaronic insertions (such as sermon divisions, proverbs, translations of Latin authorities, message verses and so on), although he does not speculate as to their purpose.<sup>39</sup> However, Langland must have been convinced of the inherent usefulness of such lines because - despite extensive revisions - he utilized macaronics in general, and the pattern of intrasentential code-switching in particular, in all three versions of his poem.

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<sup>36</sup> Siegfried Wenzel, “Macaronic Sermons in Medieval England - Some Observations,” *Report, Medieval Sermon Studies Symposium*, ed. Gloria Cigman, (University of Warwick, 1982): 4.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, in “Tradition and Innovation in the Macaronic Poetry of Dunbar and Skelton” 129, has called attention to Paul Zumthor’s comments on the bilingual aspects of macaronics: “Perhaps we should follow the example of Paul Zumthor and use bilingual rather than macaronic. Zumthor calls the Latin-vernacular mixture ‘le bilinguisme vertical’ and purely vernacular macaronics ‘le bilinguisme horizontal’ (he is of course mainly concerned with poems in which French is mixed with another language, usually - though not always - Latin).”

<sup>38</sup> Wenzel, “Macaronic Sermons in Medieval England” 4.

<sup>39</sup> Wenzel, “Macaronic Sermons in Medieval England” 3 - 4.

Roy M. Haines and Patrick J. Horner have transcribed macaronic sermons which were written shortly after the C-text of *Piers*, and they each demonstrate the phenomenon of intrasentential code-switching in a public setting. Haines' transcription is of a sermon which "has every appearance of being a valedictory address" on the occasion of Henry V's "final departure for France 10 June 1421."<sup>40</sup> The sermon proceeds in an erratic mixture of Latin and English which only those knowledgeable in both languages could have followed. The sermon contains a few sentences written completely in English, and occasionally presents long sections of Latin, but a macaronic mixing of languages predominates:

*Dum tempus durat erige in te ipso malum constantis fidei  
et credulitatis, tackle yt to þe schip sacre conversacionis  
funibus bone spei et compuncionis cordialis, wynd up  
þe sail perfecti amoris et caritatis, set on þe bonettes  
penitencie et elemosine, quod possitis a ful blower of  
grace et quod possimus þe more savelich oversaile  
pericula huius maris.<sup>41</sup>*

*(While the time remains erect in yourself a mast of steadfast  
faith and credulity, tackle it to the ship of sacred conversation by  
the ropes of good hope and by compunction of the heart, wind up the sail  
of perfect love and charity, set on the bonnets of penitence and pity, so that  
you will possess a sufficient wind of grace and so that we will be able the more  
safely to cross over the dangers of this sea.)*

The use of abstract nouns in Latin as tangible objects may also be found in *Piers*; for example in C.XVIII25-51, the tree of charity is propped up with planks named "*Potencia-dei-patris*" ('the power of God the Father'), "*Sapiencia-dei-patris*" ('the wisdom of God the Father'), and "*Spiritus-sanctus*" ('the Holy Spirit'). Similarly, Christ on the cross thirsts for a "riht rype must, *resureccio mortuorum*" ('the resurrection of the dead') C.XX.412.

<sup>40</sup> Roy M. Haines, "Our Master Mariner, Our Sovereign Lord: A Contemporary Preacher's View of King Henry V," *Mediaeval Studies* XXXVIII (1976): 87.

<sup>41</sup> Haines, "Our Master Mariner, Our Sovereign Lord" 88.

Horner's transcription is of a *'sermo obiti'* for Thomas Beauchamp (who died in 1401) which may have been delivered at St. Mary's Collegiate church in Warwick.<sup>42</sup> Horner comments that "the text moves from one language to the other without any apparent disruption in syntax or meaning".<sup>43</sup> A typical sentence may be demonstrated by the following:

*Quia Adam et Eua* hadde not hem fulliche half a day yn is worde but at the tisinge and the steryng of the false iorour the deuel, *inimici tocius generis humani, comedit de fructu quod erat sibi prohibitus* and so as sory hosbonde *pro pomo* lost is innocense *et radebat cartam suam*.<sup>44</sup>

(*Because Adam and Eve* had not for themselves fully half a day in this world but at the enticing and directing of the false slanderer, the devil, *the enemy of the whole race of mankind, he ate of the fruit that was prohibited to him* and so as a sorry husband *through the fruit* lost his innocence *and erased his charter*.)

The switching back and forth from one language to the other within the syntactic boundaries of a sentence shows no trace of a discernible pattern to aid those who were not fluent in Latin. For the sophisticated reader, the Middle English provides the 'domestic' and visual imagery, while the Latin provides the 'symbolic' and didactic content. There are many instances of the same phenomenon in *Piers*, such as the description of Christ prior to raising Lazarus: "Ac ar he made þat miracle *mestus cepit esse* / And wepte watur with yes, the why weten fewe" ( But before he made that miracle *he began to be sorrowful* / and wept tears from his eyes though few know why) C.XVIII.146- 147; and also when the "lewed vicory" describes the outcry of common people for clerical reform "The comune *clamat cotidie, vch a man to oþer*" (The community *cries out daily, each man to*

<sup>42</sup> Patrick J. Horner, "A Sermon on the Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick," *Traditio* XXXIV (1978): 383. (Siegfried Wenzel recommended this article to me, but cautioned that the transcription is not trustworthy.

<sup>43</sup> Horner, "A Sermon on the Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Beauchamp," 383 n.14.

<sup>44</sup> Horner, "A Sermon On the Anniversary of the Death of Thomas Beauchamp" 386 - 387.

the other) C.XXI.416. The Latin phrases were likely common quotes, whether from the Bible or of unknown provenance, but in these contexts they contribute to a sense of immediacy. The quality of the Latin, both in the sermons and in *Piers*, is not sophisticated and could easily be understood by those with a minimum of Latin literacy.

### Contemporary Pastoral Manuals

The didactic nature of *Piers Plowman* has sometimes led to the idea that it was composed at least in part as a means of instructing the illiterate clergy.<sup>45</sup> However the use of Latin in *Piers*, especially in the mixed lines, is significantly different from the manuals of pastoral instruction which were expressly written for the benefit of such clergy. Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, for example, was composed in English couplets with Latin rubrics to provide subject divisions. Mirk's book assumes that the priests were literate in English but not necessarily in Latin, and his primary concern is to aid them in carrying out their duties to their parishioners. He reassures midwives, who have baptized a child in the absence of a priest, that bad Latin does not spoil the sacrament of baptism so long as:

Ay whyle þey holde þe fyrste sylabul,  
þe folghþe ys gode wythouten fabul, As þus,  
Pa of *patris*. fi of *fili*j. spi of *spiritus sancti*. Amen.<sup>46</sup>  
(ll. 577 - 579)

However, when Mirk touches on the subject "Of neclygens, more & lasse, þat may be-falle in þe masse" (ll. 1751 - 1752), he cautions that everything must be in order, and that the priest must:

Sey þe wordes of þat seruyse  
Deuowtely wyth gode a-vyse;  
Cotte þow not þe wordes tayle,

<sup>45</sup> See Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 21 -33, for a discussion of the pastoral manuals which Langland was familiar with, and likely drew upon for his non-Biblical quotations.

<sup>46</sup> John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, 2nd rev. ed. (Millwood: Kraus Reprint Co., 1975) 18.

But sey hem oute wypowte fayle  
(ll. 1775 - 1778).

Mirk's instructions relate to the pragmatic use of clerical Latin. He does not indulge in sophisticated word play such as Langland's "elaborate verbal and theological pun" of the type noted by Helen Barr in the line "'*Consummatum est,*' quod Crist, and comsed for to swoene" (C.XX.58):

Through the alliteration and aural similarity of words *Consummatum* and *comsede*, the poet captures in miniature some of the paradoxical magnitude of Christ's great sacrifice. The aural similarity between two words of different languages and with opposite senses emphasizes the fact that Christ's death is both the end and the beginning.<sup>47</sup>

Nor does Mirk challenge his audience with the intricacies of bilingual syntax. However, despite the impression which *Instructions for Parish Priests* might make, Mirk's abilities as a writer were not limited to the uncomplicated confines of the vernacular augmented with the occasional Latin quote. He also wrote the *Manuale Sacerdotis*, "a work much longer and more difficult than the *Instructions*, besides being written in Latin."<sup>48</sup> The author's choice of language reflected his vision of his intended audience and their linguistic abilities rather than his own limitations.

### Contemporary Popular Songs

Popular songs of Langland's era also employed macaronics and the technique of language switching in mid-sentence. Thomas Wright remarks that the late thirteenth-century "Song against the King's Taxes" is interesting because here "we have the first specimen of that kind of song wherein each line began in one language and ended in another; and which, generally written in hexameters, seems to have been extremely

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<sup>47</sup> Helen Barr, "The Use of Latin Quotations in *Piers Plowman* with Special Reference to Passus XVIII of the 'B' Text," *Note and Queries* CCXXXI (1986): 447.

<sup>48</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 39.

popular during the two centuries following.”<sup>49</sup> He also mentions that the “Song on the Times,” composed during the reign of Edward II, “presents in alternate succession all the three languages which were then in use.”<sup>50</sup> Wright does not address the question of audience and leaves one wondering exactly what he meant by the term ‘popular.’

Frederick J. Furnivall's *Political, Religious and Love Poems* contains a macaronic poem called *The Virgin's Complaint and Comfort*, which occurs in Bodleian Library, Harleian MS. 3954 between copies of *Mandevill's Voiage* and *Piers Plowman*.<sup>51</sup> The poem's first stanza is reminiscent of the context of *Piers*. The narrator describes himself as wandering “as reson hath rulyd my recles mynde” (l. 1) until he sees a city in the distance and meets a lovely lady. The poet employs a macaronic refrain which carries the theme of the poem - evolving from the lament “And seyde *Filius regis mortuus est*” (And said “*The son of the king is dead.*” l. 12) to the triumphant “For *resurrexit! non mortuus est!*” (“For he has risen! He is not dead!” l. 96). English is the dominant language of the poem and the poet calls attention to his bilingual composition when Christ greets Mary:

He salutyd his moder with gret worchepe,  
 Dat salutacion I herd neuere are,  
 “*Salue! sancta parens!*” I trowe it ware,-  
 In latyne is wretyn fulle honest, -  
 “My blissid moder for euer-mare!  
 For *resurrexit! non mortuus est!*”  
 (ll. 115 -120)

The salutation “*Salue! sancta parens!*” (*Greetings! Blessed parent!*) is the incipit of a hymn<sup>52</sup> which the poet presents as if he had never heard it before, thereby giving an

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Political Songs of England* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1839) xii. The song is on page 182.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *The Political Songs of England* xii. The song is on page 251.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick J. Furnivall, *Political, Religious, and Love Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1886) x - xi. The poem is on pages 191 -192.

<sup>52</sup> John Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1907) 554.

immediacy to the moment. Langland also uses hymn lines for similar effect throughout

*Piers*, especially at the end of Passus XX, "The Crucifixion and Harrowing of Hell":

Many hundret of angels harpeden tho and songen,  
*Culpat caro, purgat caro, regnat deus dei caro.*

.....  
 Treuth trompede tho and song *Te deum laudamus.*  
 (C.XX.450 - 468)

The line that the angels sing in *Piers* is from the hymn *Aeterne rex altissime*, and Truth sings a line from the Breviary sung at matins on Sundays. The line which most recalls the fluidity of Langland's style occurs near the end of *The Virgin's Complaint and Comfort*:

"Nowe is sayd *hec dies* for ioye, I wene,  
 That *resurrexit! non mortuus est!*"  
 (ll. 132 - 133).

The decision to render 'this day' as "*hec dies*" elevates the phrase from a simple description to a symbol of the irrevocable change which has taken place. *Piers Plowman* is of course a much longer and more complex poem, but even this brief example in a short poem of 144 lines demonstrates a contemporary poetic awareness of the potential force of mixing languages for poetic effect.<sup>53</sup>

## Contemporary Literary Works

The writings of Richard Rolle, a fourteenth century religious hermit and mystic, demonstrate the flexibility of medieval authors and their audiences. Rolle's "voluminous and equally unconventional writings, in Latin and in English, made him one of the most

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<sup>53</sup> Carleton Brown, in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, 2nd edition, ed. G. V. Smithers (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) xxii, comments that the poem *Esto Memor Mortis* on pages 239 - 240 "offers a conspicuous example of the ingenuity which often characterized macaronic verse. The English and Latin phrases, arranged antiphonally, produce a pleasing contrast of directness and sonorosity." The poem is fascinating in that, although intrasentential code-switching is employed throughout, the English and Latin portions could be read as two separate poems.

widely read of English authors in the century-and-a-half after his death in 1349.”<sup>54</sup>

However, Rolle shows none of Langland's proclivity for intimately mingling the syntax of Latin and English; he translates Latin themes in his vernacular writings and he interjects Latin devotional phrases, but he never mixes the two languages in a fluid manner to maximize the bilingual reality of his audience's religion and education. At one extreme is Rolle's Latin composition in *Melos Amoris*, which Nicholas Watson describes as:

writing in a style which suits the subject and the occasion, not writing primarily designed to communicate. Indeed, the rarefied atmosphere of *Melos Amoris* and the difficulties it creates even for the competently Latinate reader may be intended to capture the 'specialness', the spiritual abstruseness, of *canor*, by absorbing all the reader's attention, and turning all but a chosen few away from the work altogether.<sup>55</sup>

And yet, Rolle's vernacular writings, which he composed late in his life for his women disciples, were so accessible that they can easily be read today. John A. Alford remarks that Rolle's style has not been studied because “we do not see it. Its affinities with modern English have blinded us to its distinctively medieval qualities.”<sup>56</sup>

Langland's contemporary, John Gower, was also versatile in his ability to compose in English, French and Latin. Siân Echard and Claire Fanger among others note that Gower wrote in a variety of languages in an attempt to insure the longevity of his works in a literary world whose linguistic boundaries were in a state of flux:

Faced with a choice of three languages, each with an equal chance of success, Gower played safe and wrote in all three. He used English for the *Confessio Amantis* (and defended his choice

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Watson, “Translation and Self-Canonization in Richard Rolle's *Melos Amoris*,” *The Medieval Translator*, ed. Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989) 168.

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Watson, “Translation and Self-Canonization” 177. Rolle used the term ‘*canor*’ meaning ‘song’ or ‘the act of singing’ to indicate the spiritual state of continuous participation in a heavenly choir while still inhabiting a mortal body.

<sup>56</sup> John A. Alford, “Biblical Imitatio in the Writings of Richard Rolle,” *English Literary History* 40.1 (1973): 2.

of the vernacular), French for the *Speculum Meditantis* (*Mirour de l'Omme*), and Latin for the *Vox Clamantis* and *Cronica Tripertita*.<sup>57</sup>

Along with *Piers Plowman*, the *Confessio Amantis* is categorized as a vernacular work, but this label is misleading because Gower supplied the *Confessio* with an elaborate Latin apparatus. Although critics agree that the Latin apparatus of the *Confessio* is authorial and accept it as integral to the poem, they do not agree as to its purpose.<sup>58</sup> Echard and Fanger acknowledge that Gower likely saw “the Latin language itself as in some way necessary to the act of writing,” but they also believe that Gower intended his use of Latin not merely as a means of authorizing his poem but “as an important aid to reading, even as a primary means of entry, for the reader no less than for himself, into the larger poem.”<sup>59</sup> Echard and Fanger examine the *Confessio* with a view to demonstrating “the coherence of the entire text, and the ways in which the Latin and English work together.”<sup>60</sup>

Among Langland's contemporaries, it is surprising that Geoffrey Chaucer's work contains remarkably little in the way of macaronics. He occasionally uses mixed lines to portray his characters' foibles. For example, he mockingly describes the Summoner in the General Prologue as one who parrots Latin legal phrases whenever he is inebriated: “Ay *Questio quid iuris*’ wolde he crie” (*The question is what point of the law (applies)*)’ he

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<sup>57</sup> Siân Echard and Claire Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the Confessio Amantis: an annotated translation* (East Lansing: Colleagues Press 1991) xv.

<sup>58</sup> Critics such as Derek Pearsall, Alistair Minnis, and R. F. Yeager believe that Gower provided the apparatus to give his work status in order to compensate for its vernacular nature. Pearsall, in “Gower's Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*,” *Latin and the Vernacular*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989) 23, remarks that “The poem comes ‘cased’ or ‘boxed’ in Latin,” and that “Latin is the means by which Gower's poem is turned into a Book.” Yeager, in “Oure englisshē” and Everyone's Latin: *The Fasciculus Morum* and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *South Atlantic Review* 46 (1981): 50, contends that Gower was “a careful worker” who was “selective of his language at all levels” and used Latin “as a means of lending elegance, and solidity, to English verse.” Minnis, in *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar, 1984) 275, observes “It would seem that Gower attempted to provide for his own works that apparatus which medieval readers believed to be appropriate to an auctor.”

<sup>59</sup> Echard and Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the Confessio Amantis* xxviii.

<sup>60</sup> Echard and Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the Confessio Amantis* xxxi.

would cry. 1.646).<sup>61</sup> The Summoner's Tale itself includes a sprinkling of religious phrases plus the opening of Psalm 45 used jokingly after an interjection meant to suggest the sound of a belch: "Lo, 'buf!' they seye, '*cor meum eructavit!*'" (my heart has uttered [a word] l.1934). Another bit of comedy presents itself in The Nun's Priest's Tale, when Chanticleer deliberately mistranslates "*In principio, / Mulier est hominis confusio*" as "Womman is mannes joye and al his blis" rather than "In the beginning, / Woman is man's confusion" (ll.3163-3164). In general, however, Chaucer makes little use of Latin (or French) throughout the tales except for the occasional exclamation ('*benedicitee!*') and oath ('*depardieux!*'). He also uses religious terms when appropriate, and on one occasion inappropriately - when the Reeve's wife exclaims "*In manus tuas!* Lord, to thee I calle!" (*Into your hands!* Lord to you I call! 1.4287) during the general melee at the end of the Reeve's Tale.

When compared to the output of his contemporaries Rolle, Gower, and Chaucer, Langland's writing is distinctively different. Langland's Latin differs from Rolle's in that Langland preferred to manipulate quotations rather than generate original lines. It differs from Gower's in that Langland did not segregate the two languages by using one for text and the other for apparatus. Where Chaucer used Latin phrases primarily for comic effect (or minimally for characterization), Langland employed such lines for more serious purposes intended to inspire religious introspection. Langland's use of languages appears to have been calculated to encompass as wide an audience as possible. He did not cater exclusively to the literate elite but sought instead to intrigue them with word play and unexpected juxtapositions of language and quotation. Langland's rejection of paradigms which were available to him from the religious compendiums and his decision to compose in the unpredictable rhythms of bilingual syntax resulted in a vitality which animated his

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<sup>61</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987) 33. All Chaucer citations and translations of Chaucer's Latin will be from this edition.

poem and drew the reader into his vision. The fluidity of the movement between the vernacular of their mother tongue and the language of the Scriptures would initially have served to engage the literate audience's attention and would also have assured their participation as readers by engaging them with the puns and word play of the poem. The Latin in *Piers Plowman* is used at times as an authoritative prop for the vernacular text but more often than not it works with the vernacular to engage the audience in the poem's dramatization of issues central to their religion and to their society. Langland may have provided the paraphrases and translations which are scattered throughout the poem as an aid for the illiterate portion of the audience, but their usefulness is undermined by a lack of a systematic format to guide such an audience. Indeed, Langland's use of sentences which mix the two languages has a deliberate casualness which suggests confidence in the audience's ability to follow his discourse. The level at which he pitches his Latin and chooses his quotations suggests that Langland was writing for as wide a literate audience as possible. Even those readers with only a modicum of Latin literacy would have encountered the *Disticha Catonis* while learning Latin, and the *Disticha* is one of the few classical sources Langland drew from.

### Cato in the Middle Ages

Langland's use of maxims from the medieval school text known as the *Disticha Catonis* has been noted but never critically examined. The *Disticha* and Cato, who was generally accepted as having been its author, stand out in *Piers* because of their frequent appearances in all three versions of the poem.<sup>62</sup> In Alford's estimation, Langland uses quotes from the *Disticha* more frequently than from any of the other seven works which

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<sup>62</sup> See below pages 37-40 for a discussion of the occurrences of the distichs in the three versions of *Piers*.

were often bound with it in a volume known as the *Auctores Octo*.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Alford suggests that aside from providing a source of moral quotations, the *Auctores Octo* and especially the *Disticha* “might have influenced the invention of Langland’s poem in other ways.”<sup>64</sup> He notes that “The proem to the *Distichs* derives the ‘cardinal’ virtues from *cardo* (hinge), as does *Piers* B.Prol.103-4; and, more, it identifies these four virtues as ‘the material cause’ of the work, just as *truth*, sown from the four ‘seeds’ of the cardinal virtues by *Piers the Plowman* (B.19.274ff.), is the material cause of Langland’s poem.”<sup>65</sup> Alford’s introduction to the sources of the quotations does not allow him the space to go beyond the introductory proem of the *Disticha*. A survey of Langland’s use of the actual distichs will not only give us some idea of the contribution which the *Disticha* made to *Piers* but also will help illuminate the audience’s expectations when reminded of the school text of their youth. *Cato* and the *Disticha* no longer enjoy the status accorded to them in Langland’s era so I will begin by reviewing what is known about the *Disticha Catonis* and its reputed author.

The collection of moral maxims known as the *Disticha Catonis*, or often more simply as *Cato*, was “usually the first continuous reader given to medieval schoolboys”<sup>66</sup>;

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<sup>63</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations*, 26. See Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London, Methuen, 1973) 103 - 4 and 126, for a discussion of the *Sex Auctores* and the *Auctores Octo*, both of which contain the *Disticha*. He notes that the *Sex Auctores*, which was popular until the thirteenth century, was comprised of *Cato*, *Theodius*, *Avianus*, *Maximian*, *Claudian* and *Statius*. However after 1300, the *Sex Auctores* was replaced by the *Auctores Octo* as a school text, and only *Cato* and *Theodulus* were retained from the earlier volume while the other *auctores* were replaced with poems from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

<sup>64</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 26.

<sup>65</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 27.

<sup>66</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin School Texts* 3.

and was “perhaps the most used Latin primer of the Middle Ages.”<sup>67</sup> The *Disticha* “begins with a prose preface and fifty seven prose sayings, each a sentence long. These are followed by four books of hexameter couplets. Books II, III, and IV of the couplets are preceded by hexameter prefaces of four, ten, and ten lines respectively” and “in the manuscripts and early printed editions the work is sometimes divided into the ‘parvus Cato’ (prose) and the ‘magnus Cato’ (poetry).”<sup>68</sup> Technically the single line maxims are known as monostichs, although they are sometimes referred to by their manuscript rubric as *breves sententiae* (short sentences);<sup>69</sup> and the two line maxims, which comprise the bulk of the *Disticha*, are the distichs proper. However, the term distich is often indiscriminately applied to both the one and two line maxims, as for example in the title *Disticha Catonis*. According to Ingrid Arvide Brunner there is evidence of the *Distichs* as early as A.D. 200, but “it is probable that the *Distichs* as they now exist, and as they existed in the earliest manuscripts now extant, form a composite work which reached its final form during Charlemagne’s days.”<sup>70</sup>

The association of the historical figure of M. Porcius Cato (the “Censor” or the “Elder,” 234-149 B.C.) with the anonymous author of the *Disticha* came about as early as 375 A.D.<sup>71</sup> The image of the author composing the moral distichs for the benefit of his

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<sup>67</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin School Texts* 53.

<sup>68</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin School Texts* 49 - 51

<sup>69</sup> The majority of the *breves sententiae* are so short that they often consist of only two or three words.

<sup>70</sup> Ingrid Arvide Brunner, “The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*: A Critical Edition,” diss., Columbia University, 1965, 14 -15.

<sup>71</sup> R.S. Cox, “The Old English *Dicts of Cato*,” *Anglia* 90.1/2 (1972): 2.

son was a credible supposition due to “the fact that the old Cato was associated with wisdom and wisdom literature in the form of practical rules of life which he had written for his son, and of a poem on manners.”<sup>72</sup> Brunner comments that, despite the fact that the “*nunc te, fili karissime, docebo*” in the prologue or preface to the monostichs is the only mention of this idea in the *Distichs* themselves, and this prologue may have been added in Carolingian France ... many of the manuscripts mention *ad filium* in the title.”<sup>73</sup> Another possible contender for the mantle of authorship was Cato the Censor’s great-grandson, Cato the Younger, who was also known as Cato of Utica (95-49 B.C.). However, Brunner makes the point that although Cato the Younger was associated with steadfast virtue and morality, in that he is portrayed as giving “laws to the departed spirits in the sixth book of the Aeneid,” as being “a sage in Lucan,” and as “being the custodian of Purgatory” in the Divine Comedy, he was not a writer and so is an unlikely candidate.<sup>74</sup>

The vexed issue of the authorship of the *Disticha* did not go unnoticed in the Middle Ages. Medieval scholars expressed their reservations concerning either of the historical Catos as the authentic author:

John of Salisbury, for example, in his *Polycraticus* VII 9 cites one of the distichs, with the remark, “Cato or some other says this, for the author is uncertain.” Similarly, the author of the Tegernsee

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<sup>72</sup> Wayland Johnson Chase, *The Distichs of Cato* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1922) 2, notes that “Good authority supports the opinion that between 117 and 324 this collection of apothegms was made by an unknown writer living in the western part of the Roman Empire, and that by the close of the fifth century the name of Cato had come to be attached to it.” R. S. Cox, 2, notes that: “The *Disticha* were first attributed to M. Porcius Cato (the ‘Censor’, 234 - 149 BC.) about 375 A.D. His reputation for wisdom and virtue of a practical nature explains the association. Plutarch’s account of how carefully Cato taught his son also brings to mind the *Disticha*, which are in the form of admonitions to a young man. ‘Dionysius Cato’, to whom the disticha are attributed after the Renaissance, seems to have been invented by Scaliger.”

<sup>73</sup> Brunner, “The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*” 7.

<sup>74</sup> Brunner, “The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*” 17 - 19.

*accessus* names Cato the Censor and Cato of Utica as possible authors, and reports that some take "Cato" in the title simply to mean "wise man." Conrad of Hirsau in his *Dialogus super auctores*, and Hugh of Trimberg in his *Registrum multorum auctorum* betray a similar confusion.<sup>75</sup>

Brunner also suggests that perhaps "it is even possible that the adjective *catus*, meaning 'clear-sighted, intelligent, sagacious, wise,' was merely appended to the title but became confused with the name Cato."<sup>76</sup> There was definitely a reluctance during the Middle Ages and the age that followed them to disassociate the name of Cato from the *Disticha* - "As Erasmus said, even if the *Distichs* are not by Cato, they are worthy of him."<sup>77</sup> It would seem that the need to confer authority on the text necessitated the crowning of a historical figure renowned for his wisdom as its author, even if the evidence was circumstantial.

The designation of the *Disticha* as a 'reader' or 'primer' suggests unfortunate connotations in our era, although the terms are technically correct. As Hazelton has pointed out, "however unsophisticated the text of Cato may be, and despite the fact that the book was utilized as a first reader, it is not by any means to be thought of as a child's book."<sup>78</sup> The act of reading and memorizing the *Disticha Catonis* would have had a long lasting effect on its students: "Here in their first reader the *scholarii* encountered for the first time the amalgamation of classical and Scriptural lore that is characteristic of mediaeval literature. Here, perhaps, they first learned man verses from the pagan poets

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<sup>75</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin School Texts* 52.

<sup>76</sup> Brunner, "The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*" 20.

<sup>77</sup> Brunner, "The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*" 22.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Hazelton, "Chaucer and Cato" 357.

that memory would retain as tenaciously as it retained popular Scriptural quotations.”<sup>79</sup> Medieval pedagogues, such as John of Salisbury, were optimistic that “young people using the *Distichs* for their first lessons became so imbued with the virtuous principles that these would linger with them just as an earthenware vase is long redolent of the perfume of the first liquid it contains.”<sup>80</sup>

### The *Disticha Catonis* in England

The *Disticha Catonis* does not appear to have been available in England until the ninth century, although it was known in continental Europe from the fourth century on and frequently made mention of after the fifth century.<sup>81</sup> Latin manuscripts of the *Disticha* of English provenance are extant from the ninth century on and there are many such manuscripts dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>82</sup> The vernacular tradition of *Disticha* manuscripts begins in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries with three Anglo-Saxon manuscripts followed by a series of Anglo-Norman and Middle English manuscripts dating from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. The Latin manuscripts and their commentary illustrate the Christianizing process which made the

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<sup>79</sup> Hazelton in “The Christianization of ‘Cato’: The *Disticha Catonis* in the Light of Late Medieval Commentaries,” *Medieval Studies*, (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1957): 173.

<sup>80</sup> Ingrid Arvide Brunner “The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*” 26.

<sup>81</sup> According to Brunner, in “The Anglo-Saxon Translations of the *Distichs of Cato*” 35, the first English scholar to make use of the *Disticha* was Alcuin (735-804), who likely encountered it in Carolingian France. J.D.A. Ogilvy, in *Books Known to the English* (Ann Arbor: Edward Brothers, 1967) 109, considers that the *Disticha* was known in England from the ninth century on because the earliest English manuscripts date from that period.

<sup>82</sup> See Hazelton, “Chaucer and Cato” 359 n7, for a list of medieval Latin mss.

*Disticha* acceptable to the clergy and others literate in Latin. The vernacular manuscripts demonstrate the manner in which the Christianized Cato was presented to a lay audience. Taken together as complimentary sides of the same coin, the two manuscript traditions offer a comprehensive view of how the *Disticha* and Cato, its supposed author, were perceived in medieval England.

The Latin manuscripts often include an introduction which deals with the uncertainty of identifying Cato as the author of the *Disticha*; and while acknowledging the pagan origin of the material, assert that it is fundamentally valuable as a guide for moral behaviour:

Materia huius libri est boni mores et collectio preceptorum ut proprios filios et adoptivos instrueret. Materia Cathonis in hoc opere sunt quatuor virtutes principales, scilicet, iusticia, prudentia, fortitudo, temperencia. Alie virtutes sunt spirituales, qui sub eis continentur.<sup>83</sup>

(The subject of this book is good morals and a collection of precepts in order to instruct sons and adopted sons. Cato's subjects in this work are the four principal virtues, namely, justice, prudence, fortitude, [and] temperance. The other virtues are spiritual, which are contained under them.)

The thirteenth century Lincoln Cathedral MS 132 does not have a prologue, but makes up for the lack of one in its gloss to the first distich, which concerns the necessity of worshipping God with a pure mind, by elaborating:

Nota quod de bonis moribus hic tractat. Mores vero boni sunt virtutes et bona vita. Sed quia virtus bona est et omne bonum a

<sup>83</sup> Richard M. Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis* and Its Commentary, with Special Reference to Chaucer, Langland, and Gower," diss., Rutgers University, 1956, 2. The two texts which Hazelton transcribes are the *Bodleian Library, Canonici Latin Classical MS. 72*, fol. 60r-82r (saec. xiii) and the *Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS. 132*, fol 20r-37r (saec. xiii-xiv). Due to the idiosyncrasies of Medieval Latin, the commentaries proved difficult to translate satisfactorily at times. The legibility of the reprint of Hazelton's dissertation was also extremely poor at times, so I have sometimes used quotations from his article "The Christianization of Cato," which draws upon the same two manuscripts.

Deo procedit, id certo primum preceptum ponit de cultura Dei tanquam de digniori incipiens. Hanc ergo doctrinam ponit ethicam theologis satis concordans Scripturis que instruunt mores, sicut Proverbia Salomonis vel Liber Sapiencie, qui ad instruendum bonos et malos corrigendum sunt compositi.<sup>84</sup>

(Note that this [book] discusses good morals. In truth good morals are virtues and a virtuous life. But because virtue is good and all good proceeds from God, this first precept surely concerns the worship of God thus beginning with the more worthy. So it therefore concerns the ethical doctrine of theology which is adequately in accordance with theological Scriptures that teach morals, like The Proverbs of Solomon or The Book of Wisdom, which were composed for the teaching of the good and the correcting of the wicked.

Hazelton remarks that during his research "All of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century commentaries examined contain in the prefatory remarks a statement that the book deals with the *quatuor virtutes cardinales* or *principales*."<sup>85</sup>

The first Anglo-Norman translation of the *Disticha* was by "Everard le moine" who was likely a monk named Everard of Kirkham residing in Yorkshire. Everard's Anglo-Norman version of the *Disticha* is preserved in five manuscripts.<sup>86</sup> Everard's version was so popular that it rather than the Latin version was used for Middle English translations, and even after Middle English "gained ascendancy at the end of the thirteenth century, the translations of the *Distichs* were still based on Everard's Anglo-Norman."<sup>87</sup> Everard's opening stanzas attempt to reconcile the pagan Cato's distichs with the precepts of the Christian faith.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 140.

<sup>85</sup> Hazelton, "The Christianization of Cato" 167 n41.

<sup>86</sup> Sarah M. Horrall "An Unknown Middle English Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*" in *Anglia* Band 99, Heft 1/2 (1981): 26.

<sup>87</sup> Ingrid Arvide Brunner, "On Some of the Vernacular Translations of *Cato's Distichs*," *Helen Adolf Festschrift*, ed. Sheema Z. Buehne (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1968): 114-15.

<sup>88</sup> Brunner, "On Some of the Vernacular Translations of *Cato's Distichs*" 114.

Catun estoit payen  
 E ne sauoyt rien  
 De cristiene ley  
 E ne-pur-quaunt ne dist  
 Rien en soun escrist  
 En-countre nostre fey.

Cato was a pagan  
 and knew nothing  
 of Christian doctrine  
 and nevertheless he does not say  
 anything in his writing  
 against our faith.

Kar tut se encord,  
 E ren ne se descord,  
 Al seynt escripture;  
 Amender len porrat  
 Cely qui vodrat  
 Mettre [i] sa cure.

For everything fits,  
 nothing disagrees,  
 with Holy Scripture;  
 one who wanted to give  
 his attention to it  
 could improve it.

Issi cum ieo quit,  
 Del seynt esprit  
 La grace en ly estoit;  
 Kar ne sen ne sauer  
 Nul nest pur veir  
 Ky de deu ne seyt.

As I believe,  
 the grace of the Holy Spirit  
 was in him;  
 because sense and understanding  
 which are not from God  
 are not in any way the pure truth.

Kar len-seignement  
 Ke danz Catun despent  
 En soun fi3 aprendre,  
 Me semble ke il aprent  
 Moy e tote gent,  
 Si le volum entendre.<sup>89</sup>

For the teaching  
 which Master Cato expended  
 in teaching his son,  
 I think that it teaches  
 me and everyone,  
 If we are willing to listen.

Everard's prologue retains the notion of Cato writing the distichs for the benefit of his son and yet generalizes the utility of that wisdom as being universally beneficial.

The text of the *Disticha* contained in the fourteenth century Bodleian Vernon MS begins with an introductory prologue which starts with a supplication for God's help; follows this with a defence of the Middle English vernacular as a suitable vehicle for

<sup>89</sup> For a complete text of Everard's *Disticha* with a Middle English paraphrase, see *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS*, ed F. J. Furnivall, EETS (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, 1901) 553-609.

hearing God's will; and ends with the suggestion that the *Disticha* was written for the instruction of the very young:

Almihti god in Trinite  
 leeuve vs wel to spede  
 Send vs of his holy grace  
 And help vs at vr nede.  
 Now hose wole, he may here  
 In Englisch langage  
 How þe wyse mon tauhte his sone,  
 þat was of tendre age.

It is only after this introductory prologue that the Middle English translator goes on to paraphrase Everard's prologue:

Catun was an heþene mon,  
 Christned was he nouht:  
 In word ne in werk a3eynes vr fey  
 No techyng he non tauht

To holy writ al in his bok  
 A-cording was he euere;  
 Of god of heuene com his wit,  
 Of oþer com hit neuere.

þe lore þat he tau3te his sone,  
 Is needful to vs all;  
 Vnderstond hose wole,  
 ffor caas þat may be-falle.  
     Whon þat he sau3 eny mon  
 Out of rihtful weye,  
 Hem to teche as hit was best  
 He letted for non ei3e,  
 þat þei mihte lerne and here  
 Siker heore lyf to lede  
 And gedre wit in heore 3ouþe  
 And God to loue and drede.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS, 533-535.*

The Middle English translator retains Everard's Christianizing impetus and reinforces the educational and paternalistic quality of Cato's effort by mentioning Cato's son twice. However, the translator also expands the boundaries of the potential audience with the observation that we are all in need of the wisdom embodied in the distichs and reassures us of Cato's concern to help anyone in need.

The Middle English version of the *Disticha* preserved in Fairfax MS. 14, circa 1400, is also clearly based on Everard, although in this manuscript, the prologue is utilized as a closing prayer:

Catoun was a paynym  
 and na-þing knew him  
 in þe cristin fay.  
 in his worde ne writte  
 fande we him neuer 3itte.  
 againis our lay.  
     In alle he accordis.  
 and na-þing discordis  
 tille goddis hali writte  
 efter goddis awen rede.  
 he mai his life lede.  
 þat wille folowe hit  
     þe hali gaste be resoun  
 semid in catoun  
 queþer sa he was.  
 for na gode kunning  
 is in man coming.  
 wip-out goddis grace.  
     gode grante vs grace.  
 to folow catouns trace.  
 in his teyching.  
 in gode maneris.  
 to be his feris.  
 In his wonyng   AMEN

(355 - 378)<sup>91</sup>

This translator also stresses that Cato's wisdom ultimately emanated from God and recommends him as a worthy role model for Christians. Indeed this version of the *Disticha* is to be found in pious company itself, for it is located at the end of Fairfax MS 14 which also contains *Cursor Mundi*, as well as eleven other religious poems: *A Prayer to Our Lady*, *The Sorrows of Mary*, *Apostrophe to Saint John*, *the Founding of the Feast of the Conception of the Virgin*, *Exposition of the Creed*, *Pater Noster and Its Exposition*, *Prayer to the Trinity*, *Hours of the Cross*, *Song of the Five Joys of Our Lady*, and *Book of Penance*. Cato's medieval literary "wonyng" places him in the company of illustrious Christian companions.

The use of Cato in Christian contexts during the Middle Ages is not surprising. The study of Latin was seen as a necessary first step in preparation for reading Scripture. Moreover, the pagan roots of didactic texts such as the *Disticha Catonis*, were often obscured by a process, first sanctioned by St. Augustine, of using "Egyptian gold" for Christian purposes. In Cato's case, the Christianization was so effective that a few educated readers even thought that Cato had been a Christian.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, even when

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<sup>91</sup> *Cursor Mundi A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century*, ed. Richard Morris, Part V (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966) 1669 - 1674. The *Disticha* is included with six other additional pieces at the end of the manuscript containing the *Cursor Mundi*.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Hazelton in "The Christianization of 'Cato'" 167 n27, remarks that "The *expositio Remigii super Catonem* in MS 1433 (saec xi) of the Public Library of Lucca contains the following curious remark in reference to the author of the *Disticha*: "*quidem eum christianum esse profitentur, alii vero paganum testantur*" (Mancini, op. cit., p 179) It was generally known of course that 'Cato' was a pagan, but the scholiast's comment here is an indication that a few, at least, believed that he was literally a Christian." Brunner notes in her dissertation, "The Anglo Saxon Translation of the *Distichs of Cato*," 32, that "certain manuscripts indicate the ultimately close connection in the minds of medieval people between the originally pagan *Distichs* and Christianity. An edition of the *Latin Distichs* published in 1500 has a woodcut showing Christ on the Cross."

Cato was acknowledged to have been a heathen, his distichs were viewed as being compatible with Christian virtues and morals.

In modern academic literature where his name appears most frequently in footnotes, the name "Cato" no longer commands the respect it once did. With the exception of John Alford and Richard Hazelton, modern literary critics appear consistently either to have overlooked or else misconstrued the role of Cato and the *Disticha Catonis* within *Piers Plowman*. Recent criticism has unfortunately been biased by the presentation of the *Disticha Catonis* as a classical pagan text represented by "purified" renaissance and modern editions" which have been stripped of their medieval commentary and glosses.<sup>93</sup> In order to assess how Langland employs Cato, we must first make the effort to see the figure of Cato through medieval eyes and to hear his voice filtered through a Christian and Christianizing mentality. It is only by making such an effort that we can avoid creating dichotomies where they likely did not exist. For example, Steven Justice creates just such a Christian/pagan dichotomy when he suggests that Langland, in the B-text, uses Gregory the Great to oppose the classical authority of Cato,<sup>94</sup> and David Aers says that, in this instance, Gregory has been "submerged in the ethos expressed by the non-Christian Cato."<sup>95</sup> We will not be free to consider the ways in which Cato and the *Disticha Catonis* function within *Piers* until we are rid of the notion that Langland's audience viewed Cato

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<sup>93</sup> Richard Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" I.

<sup>94</sup> Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion - England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 242.

<sup>95</sup> David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360 - 1430* (London: Routledge, 1988) 53.

first and foremost as a pagan, and the *Disticha Catonis* merely as a collection of simplistic maxims primarily valued for teaching children Latin.

## Chapter Two: Langland's Cato

When we first encounter Cato in *Piers Plowman*, he is introduced as a servant of Reason and described simply as "Caton hus knaue corneys of speche" (C.IV.17). Cato's place in the moral hierarchy of the poem is indicated not only by his master's name, but also by that of his companion, "Tomme Trewe-tonge-telle-me-no-tales-ne-lesynges-to-lauhe-of-for-y-louede-hit-neuere." Throughout *Piers* there is a distinction made between those who speak 'truth' and those who speak 'lies.' The former are seen as servants of God, while the latter serve the devil and are especially associated with minstrels, beggars, and vagrants. These miscreants are clearly labeled early in the poem by Will's paraphrase of St. Paul: "*Qui turpiloquium loquitur* is Luciferes knaue' (*He who speaks filth is Lucifer's knave*). As a defining characteristic 'corneys' speech would indicate that Cato is to be numbered among those who speak 'truth.' Indeed, the adjective 'corneys' beyond merely suggesting a courtly politeness, indicates a character or speech which is perceived to be "gracious, benevolent, generous, merciful" as well as "respectful, deferential," or "meek."<sup>96</sup> To illustrate this now obsolete usage, the OED cites a line from one of Wycliff's sermons: "Crist of his curtasie interpretip þer wordis to goode."<sup>97</sup> Langland employs a similar usage in the last passus of *Piers*, when the parish priest exclaims "And Crist of his cortesy þe cardinals saue / And turne here wit to wisdoem and to wele for þe soule" (C.XXI.449-450). Aside from the fact that their names alliterate with each other as well as with 'corneys', it may seem rather tenuous to suggest similarities between Christ

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<sup>96</sup> "courteis," *Middle English Dictionary*, 1959 ed.

<sup>97</sup> "courteous," *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1979 ed.

and Cato; and yet Everard's prologue to the *Disticha*, as well as the many Middle English translations based on his work, portray Cato as eager to help anyone who had strayed "out of rihtful weye" (see page 32).<sup>98</sup> Cato must surely be seen not only to serve Reason, but to serve Reason's God as well. To dismiss Cato as a pagan is to ignore his proper place in medieval literature. Therefore it will increase our understanding of Langland's poem and its audience to examine how a Christianized Cato and the distichs function in *Piers Plowman*.

Cato and the *Disticha* stand out in *Piers* due to the fact that they are quoted or referred to more often than any other single secular authority but scholars differ in their tallies as to the number of quotations contained in the poem.<sup>99</sup> John Alford cites *Piers* as containing ten quotations from the *Disticha*,<sup>100</sup> but Nicholas Orme cites *Piers* as containing twelve references because he is also counting allusions to Cato in which there is no direct quotation.<sup>101</sup> However, Orme appears to have counted a distich twice if his reference to A.XI.45 (where there is not a quote from the *Disticha* or mention of Cato) is a typographical error and should read A.XI.145,<sup>102</sup> since A.XI.145 refers to the same

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<sup>98</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin Schooltexts* 54, remark that the "Accessus Catonis," in *Accessus ad auctores, Gernard d'Utrecht, Conrad d'Hirsau*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, 21, implies that the ethics of Cato and Christians are identical: "[Cato's] intention is to show us by what road we can strive for true salvation."

<sup>99</sup> See Appendix A for a list of all the distichs which have been identified as playing a role (in whole or in part) in *Piers*. See Appendix B for a list of the references to Cato where a distich is not directly quoted or paraphrased.

<sup>100</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 26 n51.

<sup>101</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1989) 251.

<sup>102</sup> Orme uses Skeat's edition, *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman, in Three Parallel Texts, together with Richard the Redeless, by William Langland*, ed. W. W. Skeat, 2 vols. (Vol I: Text, Vol. II: Introduction, Notes and Glossary, Oxford, 1886). Reprinted, with addition of Bibliography by J.

distich as B.X.189.<sup>103</sup> Orme's count likely should stand at eleven and it should be noted that he misses C.XIII.223a, a distich which Alford lists.<sup>104</sup> In summary, Alford's estimation that there are ten quotations in total from the *Disticha* used in the three versions of *Piers* is accurate. However, Quick identifies a distich unmentioned by Alford, as lying behind the Latin quotation of B.XI.416a and C.XIII.223a.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, both Skeat and Jill Mann consider that the proverb "*Pacientes vincunt*", which is quoted on six occasions in the B-text, and on three occasions in the C-text, appears to have originated from a distich.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, it is likely that not all of the distichs represented in *Piers* are quoted in Latin. R.M. Hazelton estimates that eleven distichs are represented in *Piers* because Reason's vernacular lines of B.XI.378ff (C.XIII.207ff) may have brought distich I.3 to mind.<sup>107</sup> J. A. Burrow associates yet another distich with the vernacular description

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A. W. Bennett (1954). (In Kane and Donaldson, A.XI.145 would be A.XI.146.) Emphasis of the arabic numerals is mine.

<sup>103</sup> In Kane and Donaldson, B.X.189 would be B.X.195.

<sup>104</sup> For the A- and B- texts, Alford uses the Athlone editions of the poem: *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: Athlone, 1975), and for the C-text, he uses *Piers Plowman: The C Version*, ed. George Russell (in press). In Pearsall's edition of the C-text, C.XIII.220 would be line C.XIII.223a.

<sup>105</sup> Quick, "The Sources of the Quotations" 451.

<sup>106</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotation* 145, does not acknowledge the source of the proverb as Cato. See Alford's alphabetical index for the proverb's occurrences in the poem. Skeat, *Piers Plowman* 138 n195, suggests Langland was thinking of Cato's Sententia xl, and/or distich I.38. 195. Jill Mann in "Proverbial Wisdom in the Ysengrimus," *New Literary History* (1984): 108 n5, cites only the distich (I.38).

<sup>107</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" xxxix - xl. Hazelton uses Skeat's edition for his line numbers, B.XI.378f (C.XIII.207ff) would be B.XI.376ff in Kane and Donaldson (C.XIII.207ff would be C.XIII.204ff in Pearsall). Andrew Galloway in "Two notes on Langland's Cato: *Piers Plowman* B I.88-91; IV.20-23," *English Language Notes* XXV (1987) on page 10 suggests that the same distich is "a plausible source" for Holy Church's lines in A.86-89, B.I.88-91, and C.I.84-87, because "The echoes in '*compescere linguam*' to Langland's 'trewe of his tonge' and '*proximus ille deo*' to 'He is a god' suggest that the distich's words have risen to Langland's concordance-trained mind, conflating with and altering similar passages from Luke."

of the belly-band which girds Reason's horse in the C-text.<sup>108</sup> Burrow's contribution, along with that of Skeat and Mann, and Hazelton would bring the total number of quotations used in *Piers* to thirteen. Possibly there are also other instances in *Piers* where the vernacular, or Latin for that matter, would have suggested the echo of a distich to the audience.

These statistics are of interest due to Andrew Galloway's contention that there appears to have been a "seemingly programmatic excision of Cato from the final C-text."<sup>109</sup> I have sorted out the quotations from the *Disticha* and references to Cato as follows: the A-text has one reference to Cato, and three quotations where Cato is cited; the B-text has one reference to Cato, eight quotations where he is cited, and nine where he is not (six of the latter are repetitions of the same quote "*Pacientes vincunt*"); the C-text has three references to Cato, four quotations where he is cited, and nine where he is not (three of the latter are repetitions of the aforementioned "*Pacientes vincunt*"). Of all of these quotations, the distich used in A.X.98 does not occur in the other versions of *Piers*; B.X.343a and B.XII.22a do not occur in the A- or C-texts; and C.XIII.223a-b and C.IV.21 do not occur in the earlier versions of the poem. In the final tally, the C-text includes all the distichs that the B-text does except for two (and it quotes "*Pacientes vincunt*" three times as opposed to B's six). In the C-text, Langland has changed B.VII.148-51 from a direct quote to a mention, added a new quotation in C.XIII.220, and suggested another quotation by an added vernacular phrase in C.IV.21. Taken altogether

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<sup>108</sup> J. A. Burrow, "Reason's Horse," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 4 (1990): 141.

<sup>109</sup> Galloway, "Two Notes on Langland's Cato" 11.

the references to Cato and quotations from the *Disticha* stand at thirty-eight if all three versions of *Piers* are taken into account; at four if we are only looking at the A-text; at eighteen if we are only looking at the B-text; and at sixteen if we are only looking at the C-text. The repetitions of "*Pacientes vincunt*" skew the totals somewhat in the B- and C-texts. Moreover, distich I.26 also affects the total numbers because the B-text quotes it as a whole in B.X.195-196 and in part as a portion of the Redemption hymn in B.VIII.162a. Contrary to Galloway's reckoning, the frequency of Langland's use of Cato and the distichs attributed to him is scarcely diminished in the transition from the B- to the C-text. Throughout all three versions of *Piers*, Cato is secure in his position as Reason's knave and despite revisions his influence remains intact in the C-text.

In order to come to terms with Cato's role in *Piers*, I will first examine his vocation as Reason's knave and then his various roles in the poem as (1) an authority figure representing Christian literacy, (2) an aspect of the voice of conscience at key moments, and (3) as the voice of Christian stoicism when Holy Church is established near the end of the poem. Throughout all three texts of *Piers*, the episode involving the saddling of Reason's horse is the only consistent portrayal of Cato as a character, but Langland does not take the opportunity to describe him or his actions in any detail. In fact, despite revisions, the scene remains confusing. When Reason calls for his servants Cato and Tommy True-tongue and orders his horse to be saddled, the text is vague as to who saddles the horse and even what the horse's name is. Perhaps because of its ambiguities, J.A. Burrow refers to this passage as "a rather unattractive allegorical episode."<sup>110</sup> Does the unnamed groom, as the B-text suggests, saddle a horse named

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<sup>110</sup> J.A. Burrow, "Reason's Horse" 138.

Patience (Soffre-tyl-y-se-my-tyme) “with a girth of prudent foresight to curb his will”; or does he, as Burrow reads the C-text, place a saddle named Patience on an unruly horse named Will, which he also girds with prudence and harnesses with “painted wits”?<sup>111</sup> Cato was generally associated with prudence and this aspect is emphasized in the change from the B-text’s restraining the horse “wiþ wit[ful] gerþes” (B.IV.21) to that of the C-text’s “with Auyseth-þe-byfore.” Burrow observes that the essence of ‘Auyseth-þe-byfore’ is also featured in distich 2.24, “*Prospice qui veniant casus: hos esse ferendos; / nam leuius laedit quidquid praevidimus ante*” (“Foresee future misfortunes and the need to bear them; for what we have foreseen harms us less”).<sup>112</sup> Morgan considers that the entire scene involving saddling the horse was “evidently intended as a significant part of the definition of Reason,” and it is clear that Cato was a component of that definition.<sup>113</sup>

What it meant to be Reason’s knave obviously depended in a large part on how Reason himself was perceived. Reason or *ratio* had two meanings, and John A. Alford makes the point that:

In identifying the eternal law as *ratio summa*, the Stoics (and through Augustine, medieval writers in general) were thinking of an objective order that would exist even if there were no creatures to perceive it. It is the ‘reason behind’ all things. However, a partial image of *ratio* in this sense of the word has been imprinted on the minds of all rational beings. It is ours by nature. Hence that part of the intellect by which this order is apprehended is called ‘natural reason.’ As the representative of divine *ratio* in man, it hands down those first principles of thought which the lower faculties (conscience, for example) then apply to particular circumstances.... These two meanings of *ratio* explain the authority of reason in *Piers Plowman*

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<sup>111</sup> Burrow, “Reason’s Horse” 139-144.

<sup>112</sup> Burrow, “Reason’s Horse” 141 n9.

<sup>113</sup> Gerald Morgan, “The Meaning of Kind Wit, Conscience, and Reason in the First Vision of *Piers Plowman*,” *Modern Philology* 84 (1987): 335.

and its relation to the central concept of truth.<sup>114</sup>

However, Gerald Morgan remarks that "Reason is identified by Dunning with the practical intellect or the moral faculty, and such an identification is accepted by Pearsall who defines Reason as 'the whole moral faculty as it participates in God's truth'."<sup>115</sup> It is Morgan's opinion that:

Reason stands in Langland's allegory not for the faculty of intellect but for the intellectual virtue of prudence or practical wisdom....The nature of Reason is also clarified in the account of the preparations for the journey to the King, for Cato, Tom True-tongue, the horse, and girths are to be understood as four of the eight integral parts of prudence....Cato is understood, therefore, to be the integral part of prudence called by Aquinas *docilitas*, that is, a receptiveness to teaching.<sup>116</sup>

Nonetheless, the manner in which the distichs are employed in *Piers* suggests that Langland did not view Cato's role as illustrating a passive 'receptiveness to teaching' but something far more active employed as a servant of reason in both of its senses - secular and divine.

### Authority Figure

Langland's metaphor designating Cato as Reason's knave must have seemed extremely apt to his audience and may well have called to mind Cato's association with literacy and learning. Galloway remarks that in saddling Reason's horse, Cato is "made responsible for 'the instruction and ornamenting of the soul,' an appropriate preliminary

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<sup>114</sup> John A. Alford, "The Idea of Reason in *Piers Plowman*," *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988) 204.

<sup>115</sup> Morgan, "The Meaning of Kind Wit" 356.

<sup>116</sup> Morgan, "The Meaning of Kind Wit" 356-357.

for carrying Christian Reason, as well as providing the eloquence to help deploy that weighty baggage ('Curteis of speche')."<sup>117</sup> Galloway sees Cato's action in this context, as being parallel to the use of apostles' garments as a saddle in Saint Jerome's exegesis "of the saddling of the ass on which Christ rides into Jerusalem."<sup>118</sup> According to Jerome "the apostolic garments can be understood as the teachings of virtues, the exposition of the scriptures, and the various opinions about ecclesiastical dogma, by which if the soul is not instructed and adorned it will not merit having the Lord as its rider." Galloway is somewhat nonchalant concerning 'curteis of speche'; Cato, after all was not used to teach rhetoric but basic grammar for the purpose of fostering literacy in Latin. By using the *Disticha* as a first reader, the student began the lengthy process of clothing his soul with the 'apostolic garments.' The *Disticha* itself taught virtues, and to some extent the commentaries associated with it taught the exposition of scriptures as well as the exposition of ecclesiastical dogma. At the very least, the *Disticha* helped prepare the students to read the scriptures for themselves. Thus, Cato was associated not only with literacy in general but specifically with Christian literacy, and this made him a natural figure to serve as an authority figure in *Piers* and elsewhere.

Cato is always treated with respect in *Piers*, although sometimes his inclusion seems somewhat perfunctory. Such is the case when Will wakes and muses on the validity of dreams in relation to his vision of the pardon sent from Truth. In this instance,

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<sup>117</sup> Galloway, "Two notes on Langland's Cato" 11-12.

<sup>118</sup> Galloway, "Two Notes on Langland's Cato" 12. The translation of St. Jerome's commentary on Matt.21:6-7, *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Commentariorum in Matheum*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 77 (Turnholt, 1969) 183, is Galloway's.

Langland links the name of Cato with canon lawyers “canonistres” in the A- and B-texts (A.VIII.134; B.VII.155) and uses a popular proverbial phrase from the *Disticha* -

“*sompnia ne cures*” (take no heed of dreams).<sup>119</sup> No doubt an educated audience could easily have supplied the rest of the distich “*Somnia ne cures nam mens humana quod optat,/ Dum uigilat, sperat, per somnum cernit id ipsum*” (Do not worry about dreams, for what the human mind desires it hopes for when awake, but actually sees in sleep).<sup>120</sup>

In the C-text, however, Langland does not quote the distich at all but is content with

“Caton counteth hit at nauht and cononistres at lass” (C.IX.305). Likely the mere mention of Cato in the context of dreams would have been enough to bring the relevant distich to mind. Langland could have supported Cato’s opinion with other Christian authorities such as Gregory who is cited in the commentaries on this distich. The commentaries note that

Gregory listed four possible causes of dreams:

Quedam enim veniunt per nimiam voluntatem, et illa speranda sunt; alia ex illusionem fantastica, alia ex cogitatione, alia ex revelatione divina, que sperni non debent. <sup>121</sup>

(For instance a certain type will come through too much desiring, and those are to be hoped for; others will come out of imaginative illusions, others out of thought, some out of divine revelation, which should not be scorned.)

Will’s dilemma briefly highlights the vexed issue of dreams in the Middle Ages and the standard concerns as to their sources and reliability: “Ac men setteth nat by sowngewarie

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<sup>119</sup>*Disticha Catonis* (hereafter abbreviated DC) II.31.

<sup>120</sup> Quick, “The Sources of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*” 108, notes that the “verse is widely known and quoted by, e.g., Vincent of Beauvais and the compiler of the *Florilegium Morale Oxoniense*. Walther, *Prov.* 300028, lists a number of occurrences. Chaucer translates the phrase in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*; it is also translated in *Handlyng Synne*.”

<sup>121</sup> Hazelton, “Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*” 183.

for me seth hit often fayle" (C.IX.304).<sup>122</sup> However, in all three texts of *Piers* the line "Ac for þe boek-bible bereth witness" (C.IX.306) cites a greater authority and downplays the conventional wisdom of Cato by noting biblical dreams which were fulfilled. Thus Will has made the obligatory mention of the standard literary authorities, and is able to proceed with his narrative without the necessity of dismissing his dream as an 'imaginative illusion.'

Aside from his role as a quotable literary figure, Cato was also a representative of Christian literacy in general. Latin literacy was an issue of concern in the fourteenth century because of the growing suspicion that many priests were so illiterate that they could not properly minister to the needs of their parishioners. Significantly, in the B-text, the priest, Sloth, confesses: "Ac in canoun ñe in the decretales I can nou3te rede a lyne," which in the C-text appears as "Ac y can nat construe Catoun ne clericaliche reden" (B.5.428, C.7.34). Galloway notes that the "line is textually vexed in many mss of both B and C," and somewhat precipitously, he considers the change in this line from what Sloth cannot read (from 'canoun' to 'Catoun') as an "instance of the doubt surrounding Cato's authority, not just in Langland's mind but also in the minds of his contemporary readers and scribes."<sup>123</sup> It is possible that the change from 'n' to 't' might merely have been an

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<sup>122</sup> See Pearsall's note in *Piers Plowman* (C-text) on the interpretation of dreams on page 175 n304: "The usual conclusion, much influenced by the commentary of Macrobius on the *Dream of Scipio*, attributed to Cicero, is that there are different kinds of dream, with different values for interpretation, ranging from divinely-inspired prophetic visions down to fantasies due to digestive disorder. Popular dream lore was simpler, especially in so far as it derived from a widely-known manual called the 'Pseudo-Daniel' (a version in MS Harley 2253 is printed by M. Förster in *Archiv* 127, 1911, 36)." See also Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) 193 -231, for an overview of the Christian attitude towards dreams.

<sup>123</sup> Galloway, "Two Notes on Langland's Cato" 11 n11.

instance of scribal misreading which crept into the received C-text. However, it is also possible that Langland intended to highlight the inadequacy of Sloth's abilities to read a simple school text, let alone the more sophisticated canon laws and the papal decrees concerning them.<sup>124</sup> Therefore in the C-text "what Sloth cannot read" makes him truly illiterate and this revision does not cast the slightest aspersion on Cato, but rather points to him as a remedy for Sloth's deficiencies.

To be merely literate in the sense of simply reading the words of a text was, of course, not the major goal of Christian literacy. The reader was expected to look for underlying meanings when reading pagan texts in order to discern the basic wisdom that God had bestowed on pagan and Christian alike. Ironically it is Dame Study, in the A- and B-texts, who has difficulty reconciling the secular nature of the distichs with Christian theology. When attempting to explain to Will the essence of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest as aspects of Love, Dame Study suddenly asserts:

In ooper science it seyþ I sei3 it in Catoun,  
*Qui simulat verbis, [nec] corde est fidus amicus,*  
*Tu quoque fac simile, sic, ars deluditur arte.*  
 Whoso gløseþ as gylours doon go me to þe same,  
 And so shaltow fals folke and fayþlees bigile:  
 This is Catones kennyng to clerkes that he lereþ.  
 Ac Theologye techet nou3t so, who-so takeþ yerne;  
 He kenneþ vs þe contrarie ayein Catons wordes,  
 [And] biddeþ vs be as breþeren and [blissen] owre enemys  
 And louen hem þat lyen on vs and lene hem [at hir nede]  
 And do good a[g]ein yuel; god hym-self hotetþ:  
 (B.X.194-204)

<sup>124</sup> Galloway, "Two Notes on Langland's Cato" 11 n11, considers "canon" as referring to "the part of the Mass before Communion," but due to its pairing with decretals it must surely refer to canon laws.

Dame Study's literal reading of the distich (He who simulates friendship with words but is not a true friend at heart - you do the same to him, thus, art is tricked by art)<sup>125</sup> makes her a better candidate than Sloth to illustrate the ambivalence which the Christians of the Middle Ages may have felt towards classical pagan authors. She does indeed place Cato in opposition to the teachings of Theology rather than finding a way to reconcile the two.

Hazelton notes that, despite a thorough attempt at Christianization, "the morality of the *Disticha Catonis* is a morality of *huius mundi*"<sup>126</sup> and the vernacular rendition of the same distich which troubled Dame Study does not transcend its secular sentiments:

If men þe speke faire speche softeli  
 And are nout þi frende al hertli  
 Do þou riht so, I counsel þe;  
 So gile with gile schal giled be.<sup>127</sup>

Even the commentator of the text of the *Disticha* preserved in Lincoln Cathedral MS 132 felt obliged to point out in a reference to this particular distich:

Hac scientia est secularis, non perfectorum, testante salomone, qui ait,  
 'Simulato ore non decipias amicum' et ducas eum in spem vanum.  
 [Prov. 11, 9]<sup>128</sup>

(This knowledge is of secular men, not of the perfect, with Solomon as witness, who says, 'You should not deceive a friend by means of a deceitful mouth' and lead him into empty hope. [Prov. 11, 9])

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<sup>125</sup> DC I.26.

<sup>126</sup> Hazelton, "The Christianization of Cato" 172.

<sup>127</sup> Max von Förster, "Eine nordenglische Cato-version," *Englische Studien* 36 (1906): 14. This Middle English paraphrase of DC I.26 is from Sidney Sussex College MS. ΔIV.i.

<sup>128</sup> Hazelton, "The Christianization of Cato" 170.

Despite his reservations, the commentator goes on to point out that the distich is nonetheless of divine origin, and attempts to reconcile the secular with the divine by observing that one may use words to correct a friend and thus repel his vices:

Vel aliter et est preceptum divinum. Qui simulat verbis, id est qui simulatoriis utitur verbis reprehendendo amicum propter eius vicium corrigendum, nec corde, id est non est natus corde, talis inquam est fidus amicus. Si ita inquam facit aliquis, tu quoque fac simile, id est similiter castiges amicum tuum amaris verbis et non corde, et sic ars, id est mala operatio illius vel vicium, deluditur, id est repellitur, arte tua, id est artificiosa corectione tua.<sup>129</sup>

(For instance, in another manner it is also a divine precept. He who deceives by means of words, that is he who makes use of deceitful words for the purpose of restraining a friend because of the necessity of setting right his vices and not from the heart, that is not born in the heart, such I say is a faithful friend. I say if someone does thus, you should also do the same, that is in like manner ... you should chastise your friend with bitter words and not from your heart, and thus art, that is his bad deeds or vices, is deluded, that is repelled, by your art, that is by your skillful correction.)

Dame Study's reaction to the distich, on the other hand, is to reject Cato's 'eye for an eye' style advice and oppose it with Galatians 5.14: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."<sup>130</sup> She reads the distich strictly in the sense of the letters of the text and does not make the Christian leap of faith which looked for the kernel of God's truth concealed beneath the surface of the words of a righteous heathen. It is a curious oversight on the part of Dame Study that, despite her pedagogical position, she appears to overlook the standard commentaries on the *Disticha* which would have helped to put the distich in a Christian context.

<sup>129</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 156. In Hazelton's "The Christianization of Cato" 171, the word "natus" appears as "iratus"; he is citing the same manuscript so one reading must be a misreading.

<sup>130</sup> *The Holy Bible: Old and New Testaments in the King James Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1976) 1711-12.

When revising the B-text, Langland omitted Cato and the “*ars deluditur arte*” passage from Dame Study’s speech, but retained the “*Ars ut artem falleret*” section when Mercy foreshadows Christ’s harrowing of hell with the comment:

And riht as the gylour thorw gyle bigiled man formost,  
 So shal grace, þat bigan al, maken a goed ende  
 And bigile þe gilour, and þat is a goed sleythe:  
*Ars ut artem falleret.*

(C.20.163 - 16)

Here the focus of the distich is no longer on the issue of coping with devious friends, but concentrates squarely on the “goed sleythe” of Christ deluding the devil in order to redeem mankind. As Jill Mann notes “The finding of the right context can bestow on the most apparently extreme of cynical recommendations a transfiguring depth of meaning.”<sup>131</sup> In this context the Latin does not immediately bring Cato to mind but rather the hymn sung on Passion Sunday and Good Friday ~ *Pange Lingua Gloriosi*:

Hoc opus nostrae salutis	Symmetry required the
Ordo depoposcerat	achievement of our salvation;
Multiformis proditoris	that the craft [of God] might
ars ut artem falleret	deceive the craft of the many-shaped
et medelam ferret inde	betrayer, and might bring healing in
hostis unde laeserat.	the place the enemy had wounded. <sup>132</sup>

It is interesting that neither Alford nor Quick appear to consider that the hymn line may have originated with the distich.<sup>133</sup> And yet, an association between the two was often made in the Middle Ages. Galloway remarks that “Cato's distich was in fact typically glossed with the Redemption hymn.”<sup>134</sup> In any case, Langland's use of the quote still

<sup>131</sup> Mann, “Proverbial Wisdom” 106.

<sup>132</sup> Quick, “The Sources of the Quotations” 389 n515.

<sup>133</sup> The composer of the hymn “*Pange Lingua Gloriosi*,” Venantius Fortunatus, lived circa 530-600 A.D.

<sup>134</sup> Galloway, “Two Notes on Langland’s Cato” 11.

focuses on the propriety of tricking a false friend (or in this case, fiend), but in using the phrasing of the hymn, he has shifted its focus so that it is strongly associated with salvation paradoxes rather than secular trickery. If the words of the hymn were to bring the distich to mind, in the C-text it is what Christ does out of love rather than spite that shines as an example.

In Galloway's estimation "the Easter Passus marks a reconciliation of authorities especially important to Dame Study and probably important to Langland himself" - a statement which gives autonomy to a fictional character and minimizes the authority of the poet. It is after all Langland who reconciles the authorities for the benefit of himself and his audience. In the B-text, Langland may have expected the audience to remember the two quotes used by Dame Study and Mercy, respectively "*sic ars deluditur arte*" and "*ars ut artem falleret*", which occur in Passus X and XX, and so preserve a Christianized understanding of Cato's words. However, in the C-text, Langland eliminates Dame Study's diatribe against Cato, and leaves Mercy's commentary on the Easter hymn and, by association, a Christianized version of the distich to linger in his audience's mind.<sup>135</sup>

Modern critics, when reading *Piers*, sometimes have trouble disassociating Cato and the distichs from their classical origins, essentially taking the same attitude as Dame Study. In B.VII.72-77b, when Truth ponders whether charity should be discriminatory or unconditional, he cites Cato, Peter Comestor, and St. Gregory as evidence for both sides of the question. David Aers considers that Langland places the pagan views of Cato in

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<sup>135</sup> Bartlett Jere Whiting in *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases* (Cambridge: The Belnap Press, 1968) cites Langland's B-text as the earliest use of the proverb "The Guiler is beguiled (varied)" with Chaucer, Gower, and many others following him: see G491 on page 255.

opposition to the "impeccable orthodoxy" of St. Gregory.<sup>136</sup> However, Cato does not stand alone but is paired with Peter Comestor, the so-called 'clerke of stories,' who can by no means be considered a pagan or unorthodox.<sup>137</sup> Cato and Comestor are presented as being in such accord that the syntax makes it difficult to disentangle them, partly because Comestor is not named explicitly:

Catoun kenneþ me þus and þe clerke of stories.  
*Cui des videto* is Catons techynge,  
 And in þe stories he techep to bistowe þyn almesse:  
*Sit elemosina tua in manu tua donec studes cui des.*  
 (B. VII.72 - 75)

There is nothing patently pagan concerning these injunctions "Look to whom you give"<sup>138</sup> and "Let your alms be in your hand while you study to whom you should give."<sup>139</sup> Aers himself points out that they represent a newër Christian ethos brought about by changing social conditions and "encouraged by convenient glossing of Jesus's hard sayings."<sup>140</sup>

The influence of glossing is especially pertinent in regard to *Cui des, videto* because most of the quotations from the *Disticha* in *Piers* are short phrases extracted from two line distichs, but this quote is a monostich and is given in its entirety. In classical

<sup>136</sup> David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* 50. However, it should be noted that Gregory and Cato were often quoted as being in agreement. For example the fourteenth-century preacher's handbook, the *Fasciculus Morum*, ed. and trans. by Siegfried Wenzel, (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), cites Gregory and Cato concerning the sins of Wrath and Envy: see especially pages 118 and 171.

<sup>137</sup> Skeat, *Piers Plowman B-text* 121, describes Peter Comestor as the author of the *Historia Scholastica* which is "an account of all the chief events recorded in the Old and New Testaments."

<sup>138</sup> DC Brevia Sententia 17.

<sup>139</sup> This is an abridged version of Tobit iv.7-11

<sup>140</sup> Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* 50. Also see pages 34-35 for examples of Richard FitzRalph's glosses, as for example, Luke 14.12-14: "pore men þat beþ stalworþe and stronge schulde nou3t be cleped to þe feeste of beggers, for þei mowe quyte hit wiþ her travail."

times this brief sentence likely referred to the need for caution when currying favour in the process of forging business or political alliances. However, in the Christian commentary of the thirteenth century, these three simple words yield:

Cui des videto. Dico quod tu des mutuum, sed videto cui des.  
 Cum aliquis habet vicissitudinem, dandi videas si sit gratus aut non.  
 Vel cui des bona tua, videto utrum sit dignum vel non. Unde scriptum  
 est omnipotentis Dei: "Et retribue affectionis illius dignis, tunc precipit  
 largiri et non dignis," quia "qui dat nimis et hystrionibus sacrificat  
 demonibus."<sup>141</sup>

(Look to whom you should give. I say that you should give money, but you should look to whom you give. When someone has trouble, thereupon you should look to see whether it is appropriate to give or not. For example to whom you should give your goods, look to see whether he is worthy or not. Whence it is written by God Almighty: "And give as due to those worthy of good will, then he admonishes to give abundantly also to the unworthy" because "he who gives to mimes and actors sacrifices to demons.")

The gloss reveals the tendency of thirteenth-century Christians to see Cato's simple secular maxim in terms of a complex Christian moral dilemma which is in accord with Comestor's judgemental "*Sit elemosina tua in manu tua, donec studes cui des*" (Let your alms be in your hand, while you study to whom you should give). The gloss also highlights the concern that the giver will be defrauded by undeserving beggars feigning misfortune.

The so-called "older Christian ethos" in the B-text is represented by St. Gregory, who reminds us once again not only of the debt we owe to Christ, but also of the limitations and fallibility of human knowledge:

*Ac Gregori was a good man and bad vs gyuen alle  
 That askep, for his loue þat vs al lenep:  
 Non eligas cui miser[e]aris, ne forte pretereas illum qui  
 meretur accipere,  
 Quia incertum est pro quo Deo magis placeas.  
 For wite ye neuere who is worþi ac god wote who hæp nede.*

<sup>141</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 10.

## (B.VII.76 -78)

Gregory cites St. Jerome's commentary on Eccles.XI.6 (Do not choose whom you will pity, lest by chance you pass over the one who deserves to receive. Because it is uncertain by which deed you will please God more.) In Aers' opinion, "The tradition represented by Gregory in Passus VII is submerged in the ethos expressed by the non-Christian Cato."<sup>142</sup> And yet, Aers also considers that this passage represents a crucial turning point in the poem signaling "a dramatic disengagement from the newer ethos."<sup>143</sup> Unfortunately, Aers focuses exclusively on the B-text so he does not comment on the C-text revisions where, as Steven Justice notes, "Cato stays, Gregory disappears, but Gregory's conclusion remains, underwritten no longer by an authoritative text but by an extraordinary and compelling description of suffering poverty."<sup>144</sup>

The most striking aspect of this passage in the C-text, which replaces Gregory's mini-sermon and is introduced by the "*Cui des videto*" quotation preceding it, resides in its personal tone and in the vivid depiction of the contemporary social conditions. Gregory's observation "For wite ye neuere who is worþi, ac god woote who haþ nede" (B.VII.78) is replaced with "Woet no man, as y wene, who is worthy to haue; / Ac þat most neden aren oure neyhebores" (C.IX.70 -161). In an authorial voice suggesting *propria persona*, Langland examines "*Cui des videto*" in Christian terms and pays special attention to the difficulty of assessing accurately who is truly deserving of charity. He

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<sup>142</sup> Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* 53.

<sup>143</sup> Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity* 53.

<sup>144</sup> Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* 242.

moves from the plight of those who suffer “bothe afyngred and afurste” but are “abashed for to begge” (C.IX.85-86), to the undeserving able-bodied beggars “þe whiche brewhous ben here churches” (C.IX.98), to feeble-minded beggars who may be “in hele, as hit semeth,” but lack the wits to care for themselves and so exemplify the spiritual ideal of Matt.6.25 “*ne solliciti sitis*” (do not be concerned).<sup>145</sup> His main concern is to distinguish those who are truly needy and “bereth none bagges ne boteles vnder clokes” (C.IX.139) from those who take more than they need and wear “an hater to hele with his bonis” (C.IX.157).

Pearsall notes that these lines and the rest of the passage which Langland added in the C- text (C.IX.70 - 161) represent:

... a prolonged meditation upon the opposed injunctions of Cato and the gospels in relation to almsgiving. Having spoken earlier of a discriminating charity, L now makes it clear that charity must positively seek out the truly needy in order to fulfil the promise that God will provide whilst accepting the ban on beggary. Those who have must give so that those who have not need not ask.<sup>146</sup>

And yet the task of seeking out the ‘truly needy’ remains a discriminatory task and the basic fear of being swindled by devious able-bodied beggars remains. The rhetoric denying alms to the fraudulent beggar betrays its anxiety by its self-righteous and defensive tone:

Ac Beggares with bagges, þe whiche brewhous ben here churches,  
But they be blynde or tobroke or elles be syke,  
Thouh he falle for defaute þat fayteth for his lyflode,

<sup>145</sup> Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 57, directs us to R. W. Frank, Jr., *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957) 31-33; and Wendy Scace, *Piers Plowman and the New Anti-clericalism* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1989) 61-64 and passim, for medieval interpretations of this important verse.

<sup>146</sup> Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* 163 n61.

Reche 3e neuere, 3e riche, thow suche lollares sterue.

(C.IX.98 -101)

J.A. Burrow reacts strongly to this recommendation of a callous charity that would turn a blind eye while able-bodied beggars starved:

Here the B Text cites authorities on both sides of the question: Cato and Comestor are in favour of discrimination in the dispensing of charity, but (*ac*) Gregory is against. B inclines to the latter view, with the proviso that the bogus poor who enjoy the benefits of indiscriminate charity will be held to account by God. The C Text quotes only Cato (*Cui des, videto*, IX. 69) and favours his view, even suggesting at one point that malingerers may be left to starve (IX. 101).<sup>147</sup>

The lines counseling a hard-hearted attitude towards such malingerers sound unduly harsh when they are taken out of the context of the poem as a whole; however, they should be read with the preceding passus, the Ploughing of the Half Acre, in mind. The swiftness with which Hunger drove able-bodied beggars to work suggests that it is unlikely that such scoundrels would actually “sterve” to death. Moreover, the C-text addition reiterates that a beggar of this variety “can eny craft in caes he wolde hit vse, / Thorw which craft a couthe come to bred and to ale” (C.IX.155 - 156). Thus rich men need not worry because such beggars will find a way to provide for themselves if necessity drives them to it. Instead the rich are advised to save their charity for the “lunatyk lollares,” or as Langland identifies them, “Godes munstrals and his mesagers and his mery bordiours” (C.IX.135), for “to vnderfongen hem fayre byfalleth for þe ryche” (C.IX.128). Langland’s concern is not mean-spirited but rather a fervent desire to help the genuinely needy, and “*Cui des videto*” precipitates a soul-searching response. The discriminatory advice which remains at the heart of Cato’s monostich does not automatically brand it as pagan or non-

<sup>147</sup> J.A. Burrow, *Langland's Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 42 n27.

Christian. The fact that Cato's name remains while others were dropped in the process of revision does not suggest the triumph of pagan ideals, but rather the power of the *Disticha* to stimulate debate and the expectation that his wisdom was worthy of consideration in such matters. Cato had become an authority whose opinion could not be overlooked.

Hazelton notes that "As one of the auctores Cato spoke with auctoritas, and we need not wonder at finding him, without prejudice, in the company of Salomon, St. Paul, or the Fathers."<sup>148</sup> Moreover, Cato is cited in *Piers* to support these very authorities in the B-text, where Scripture cites St. Paul, Solomon, and Cato as being in accord:

Poule preueþ it impossible, riche men [in] heuene;  
 Salomon seiþ also þat siluer is worst to louye:  
*Nichil iniquius quam amare peccuniam;*  
 And Caton kenneth vs to coueiten it nau3t but as nede techep:  
*Dilige denarium set parce dilige for̄mam.*  
 And patriarkes and prophetes and poetes boþe  
 Writen to wissen vs to wilne no ricchesse,  
 And preiseden pouerte with pacience; þe Apostles bereþ  
witnessse,  
 That þei han Eritage in heuene, and bi trewe ri3te,  
 Ther riche men no ri3te may clayme but of ruþe and grace.  
 (B.X.341-348)

In this instance the first line of Cato's distich "*Dilige denarium, sed parce dilige formam* (Love money, but have little affection for outward form,) would have brought to mind the second line, "*quam nemo sanctus nec honestus captat habere*" (which no holy or honorable man strains to have).<sup>149</sup> The commentators had no difficulty Christianizing this distich by taking the first line as a warning against hoarding and possibly also as a reminder of one's obligation to pay a tithe, or tenth of one's wealth, to the Church:

<sup>148</sup> Hazelton, "The Christianization of *Cato*" 171.

<sup>149</sup> DC IV.4.

Ille vero denarium non diligit qui expendit, sed ille diligit qui nummos  
 agregat et congregatos nescit expendere, sicut ille qui sumptum factum  
 veneratur et servat. "Denarius" apud antiquos pro "decem" accipiebatur,  
 unde "denarius" dicitur a "decem," quasi "denarius," quia proprie erat  
 decima ponderis, vel a "decem," quia valebat decem nummos.<sup>150</sup>

(Indeed he does not love silver coins who spends them, but he loves coins  
 who collects and does not know how to spend the hoard, just as the man  
 venerates and guards the hoard he has accumulated. Among the ancients it was  
 customary to portion a "silver coin" into ten, whence a "denarius"  
 was said to be "ten", just as a "coin containing ten," because it was proper to  
 weigh out by tenths, or by "ten," because it was valued as ten coins.)

In the commentary, the second half of the distich elicits a straightforward reference to  
 Scripture, "*Qui dives est non sanctificabitur vel iustificabitur*" (The rich man will not be  
 sanctified or forgiven). The commentary reveals that the distich has been Christianized to  
 the point that rather than merely counseling the avoidance of ostentation it now  
 encompasses abstinence from accumulating more than one needs; and beyond that, in  
*Piers*, it has become compatible with the ideal of patient poverty as well. The authority of  
 Cato had been Christianized to the point where it was possible to mingle the distichs with  
 the words of authorities of the Church without creating pagan/Christian oppositions.

### An Aspect of the Voice of Conscience

The moral authority of the distichs in their Christianized context made them a  
 suitable text for teaching Christian ethics, and it is possible to see them as functioning in  
*Piers* as an aspect of the voice of conscience, but not of the character Conscience. Before  
 proceeding, it should be noted that the figure of Conscience does not cite Cato within the

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<sup>150</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 106-107.

poem, although Langland could easily have supplied Conscience with suitable distichs at appropriate moments. And yet, an admonishing and critical aspect of the voice of conscience would have come quite naturally to be associated with the *Disticha*, due to its moral subject matter and authoritative tone. Thomson and Perraud remark that “the exhortation ‘remember’ (*memento*) appears twenty-one times” in the *Disticha*; thirty-three couplets begin with a negative imperative; and “in fifty of the couplets a circumstantial clause introduced by ‘when’ (*cum*), ‘since’ (*cum*), ‘while’ (*dum*), or ‘if’ (*si*) is combined with a clause that gives advice, often in the imperative.”<sup>151</sup> Thomson and Perraud emphasize that although the grammatical structure has a deadening effect “the simplicity of the saws made them suitable for beginners, and the very repetitiveness of the vocabulary and sentence structure would reinforce them in the minds of students.”<sup>152</sup> Beyond the expedient utility of learning Latin, the act of internalizing the distichs by memorizing them insured that they would function for the individual as part of the voice of conscience. Thus, whenever a distich was called to mind, whether by circumstance or by quotation, it likely would have been recalled with an admonitory or critical emphasis.

Langland made use of this potentially chastising aspect of the distichs by incorporating two distichs into the dialogue as rebukes directed at Will. These reprimands are appropriate due to Will’s ill advised attempt not only to argue with Reason, but also to question Reason’s sense of fairness. Roused to anger, Reason reprimands him “Man was made of such matere he may nat wel asterte / That some tyme hym bitit to folewen his

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<sup>151</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin Schooltexts* 52-53.

<sup>152</sup> Thomson and Perraud, *Ten Latin Schooltexts* 53.

kynde" (C.XIII.209-10) and ends by quoting Cato "*nemo sine crimine vivit*" (no one lives a blameless life).<sup>153</sup> In a Christian context both the phrase and the distich whence it originates serve to stress the foolishness of Will's question in a postlapsarian world, as the commentary on this phrase illustrates:

Nemo sine crimine vivit: etiam infans unius diei non ducit vitam super terram sine peccato, quia in iniquitatibus conceptus est, testante Psalmista, qui dicit: "Ecce enim iniquitatibus conceptus sum et in peccatis," et cetera.<sup>154</sup>

(No one lives without fault: even the day old infant does not lead a life on earth without sin, because he was conceived in iniquity, according to the testament of the Psalmist, who says: "Behold for I was conceived in iniquity and in sin," etc.)

Gillian Rudd notes that:

Reson's use of this phrase from Cato's Distichs (I,5) serves the double purpose of asserting that it is beyond the bounds of common sense to expect reason to be able to order any being to live contrary to its nature, which is in fact what Wil is demanding when he asks why Reson cannot make mankind live without sin, and also shames Wil by pointing out that he is just as sinful as the rest. Indeed Wil is in the act of falling prey to the sin of vain curiosity by wanting to know more than it falls to mankind to know.<sup>155</sup>

The phrase's effect on Will is dramatic "Tho cauhte y colour anoen and comesede to ben aschamed, / And awakede þerwith" (C.XIII.212-13).

Will's response is significant because he had previously fallen into a dream within a dream precipitated by a crisis of faith versus reason. On that occasion, Clergie had

<sup>153</sup> DC I.5. "*Si vitam inspicias hominum, si denique mores, / Cum culpant alios: nemo sine crimine vivit.*" (Look into the lives and characters of people, when they find fault with others: no one lives a blameless life).

<sup>154</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 30.

<sup>155</sup> Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language in Piers Plowman* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1994) 131.

reprimanded him with the observation from Gregory's Homilies "*Fides non habet meritum vbi humana racio prebet experimentum*" (There is no merit in faith where human reason supplies proof, C.XI.160a), and Scripture had further scolded him with the opening pronouncement from Pseudo-Bernard "*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt*" (Many know many things and do not know themselves, C.XI.166). Now the words of Cato bring him a small degree of self-knowledge, and he awakes from the inner dream.

On 'waking' Will is not given any respite, but is immediately confronted with Imaginatif who continues the scolding with another phrase from Cato, "*Locutum me aliquando penituit, tacuisse nunquam*"<sup>156</sup> (Occasionally I have regretted having spoken, never regretted having kept silent, C.XIII.223a). Imaginatif uses the story of Adam to illustrate the danger of wanting to know more than is proper, and the metaphor of a drunk lying in a ditch to show that self-knowledge can be brought about by the force of shame.

Rudd remarks that:

As Richard of St Victor says, reason cannot function without imagination since without imagination reason knows nothing ... So it is in keeping with the role of imagination that Ymaginatif should both illustrate and reinforce what [sic] Reason's views.<sup>157</sup>

Thus Imaginatif refuses to let Will forget the matter until he has acknowledged his culpability: "Why 3e worden to me thus was for y aresonede Resoun" (C.XIII.243). It is fitting that the words of 'Reason's knave' delivered in tandem by the partners Reason and Imaginatif have resolved the crisis of faith versus reason by bringing Will to this moment of insight. At last, Will is prepared to leave behind Recklessness and 'the londe of

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<sup>156</sup> DC I.12.

<sup>157</sup> Rudd, *Managing Language* 63.

longyng,' and is ready to continue his journey by following Imaginatif who works in conjunction with Reason. The distichs functioning as part of the dialogue have allowed the voice of Cato to address Will directly and to remind him of his failings. When used in this manner, they directly affect the action of the poem with their perceived ability to activate conscience and to affect contrition.

The distichs however, are not always integrated into the fictive action and at times seem to address the audience directly rather than the characters. On these occasions, the admonishing force of the distichs often serves not only to comment on the events of the poem, but also to signal the direction in which events are heading. Such is the case in Passus VIII, The Ploughing of the Half-Acre, when Wastor, whose hunger has been momentarily satisfied, becomes belligerent and demanding:

And tho wolde Wastor nat worche bote wandren aboute,  
 Ne no beggare eten bred þat benes in were,  
 Bote of cler-matyn and coket and of clene whete,  
 Ne noon halpenny ale in none wyse drynke  
 Bote of the beste and of þe brouneste þat brewestares  
 sullen.

Laborers þat han no lond to lyve on but here handes  
 Deynede no3t to dyne a-day of nyhte-olde wortes;  
 May no peny-ale hem pay ne no pece of bacoun  
 But hit be fresh flesch or fisch, yfried or ybake,  
 And þat *chaut* or *pluchaut* for chillyng of his mawe  
 And but yf he be heyliche yhuyred elles wol he chydde  
 And þat he was werkeman ywrouhte warien þe tyme.  
 A3enes Catones consayle comseth he to gruche:  
*Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento.*  
 And thenne a corseth þe kyng and alle þe kynges iustices,  
 Such lawes to lerne, laboreres to greue.

(C. VIII.325- 340)

The phrase from the distich concerning poverty (Remember to bear patiently the burden of poverty)<sup>158</sup> is sandwiched between the sarcastic tone of the lines describing Wastor's swaggering rebelliousness and the shocking description of his treasonous cursing.

"A3enes Catones consayle comseth he to gruche" comes as a disparaging comment on Wastor's behaviour. There is no indication that Wastor actually hears the distich being spoken and it certainly is not translated for him, let alone glossed. The effect of the Latin lines suddenly situated amidst the vernacular, and introduced with a citation, is such that it seems to be an aside to the audience. The distich sets the mood for the apocalyptic prophecy which concludes the passus and prepares the way for the pardon.

The prophecy's warning is directed at those workmen whose actions mirror Wastor's, and indeed in the next passus those of Wastor's ilk are excluded from the pardon and classified as being among the damned unless they mend their errant ways. For those who were familiar with the vernacular version of the distich, the sense that the burden of poverty signified a spiritual as well as a secular onus would have been clear:

Sethe kinde al naked childe þe wrout  
And bare-bouke Gode to þe erþe þe brout,  
With pacience vmbethenke þe  
To bere þe charge of pouerte.<sup>159</sup>

Here the word 'charge' is used for burden and carries with it suggestions of duty or responsibility, which in this case has been assigned by God. The notion that the poor must be thankful for what little they have is suggested by the image of totally unaccommodated

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<sup>158</sup> DC I.21.

<sup>159</sup> Max Förster, "Eine nordenglische Cato-version" 14. This Middle English paraphrase of DC I.21 is from the Sidney Sussex College MS. ΔIV.i.

man who is born 'naked' and 'bare-bouke." It is another of the many Christian salvation paradoxes that, in the pardon which Truth sends to Piers, it is the patient poor who will most easily gain entry into the kingdom of heaven.

The portion of the audience who were familiar with the distich in Latin would have known its first line "*Infantem nudum cum te natura creari*" (Since nature created you a naked infant) and associated it with its second line quoted in *Piers*, "*Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento*" (remember to bear the burden of poverty patiently). The commentaries on the distich illustrate that Wastor's actions are not only socially objectionable but spiritually reprehensible as well:

Infantem nudum id est nichil habentem. Unde versus:  
Essens inops natus quisquam pauperque creatus,  
Pauperiem grandem vincat<sup>160</sup> paciencia tandem.

Unde Iob: "Nudus egressus sum de utero matris mee et nudus revertar illuc." [Job 1, 21] Com ergo ita sit quod de ventre matris mee egressus fuerim vel processerim et nichil actulerim, non debeo irasci si nichil in hoc mundo possiderim. Unde com nichil autulimus, paupertatem benigniter paciamur. Com natura, id est divina dispositio, id est Deus. Et notandum quod duplex est natura: natura naturans et natura natura; natura naturans est deus, natura natura est homo. Memento dico pati, quia paciencia pauperum non peribit in finem, quia dicit dominus: "Beati pauperes spiritum quoniam ipsorum est regnum celorum." [Mat. 5, 3] Paupertas autem est donum dei odibile,<sup>160</sup> possessio sine calumpnia, mater sanitatis<sup>161</sup>, curarum remocic, sapiencie reparatrix, negocium sine causa, perditio sine dampno, et cetera.<sup>162</sup>

(A naked infant that is having nothing. Whence the line:  
Anyone having been born poor and begotten as a pauper,  
In the end by patience he will overcome great poverty.

<sup>160</sup> Whiting, *Proverbs* 469, notes in P340 that the notion of poverty as a "hateful good" appears in "c1378 *Piers B* xiv 274: 'Pauperitas,' quod Paciencie, 'est odibile bonum.' c1395 Chaucer CT III[D] 1195: Poverté is hateful good. Also see Robinson, page 704."

<sup>161</sup> Whiting, *Proverbs* 469, notes in P341 that "Poverty is mother of health. c1378 *Piers B* xiv 298: (Poverté) is moder of helthe. Apperson 508; Oxford 514; Tilley P528."

<sup>162</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 43-44.

Whence Job: "Naked I emerged from my mother's womb and naked I will return there." [Job 1,21] Thus since it is in this fashion that I emerged or proceeded from my mother's stomach. Since I might have done nothing, I should not be angry if I possessed nothing in this world. Whence since we bring nothing, we should suffer poverty willingly. Since nature, that divine arrangement, that is God. And it should be noted that nature is twofold: creating nature and created nature: creating nature is God, created nature is man. Remember I say to suffer, because patient poverty will not perish in the end, because the Lord says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [Matt. 5,3] For poverty is a hateful gift of God, a possession without trickery, the mother of health, a putting away of cares, a restorer of wisdom, a labour without inducement, a perdition without harm, etc.)

The commentary draws upon Neoplatonist theories of creation, in order to associate God with "*natura*" and to stress the debt of the created to the Creator. The gloss also converts the burden of poverty into a gift of salvation for those who stoically accept it, which supports the notion, in *Piers*, of poverty as a state of earthly purgatory. In the context of Wastor's outburst, the line from the distich does not reveal how very Christianized the distich had become for an audience which was also familiar with the commentaries.

The contradictory attributes of poverty with which the commentary concludes are striking because the same phrasing appears later in *Piers* (B.XIV.275f, C.XVI.114f). In the *Visio*, Actif's confrontational tone recalls Wastor's belligerent mood in the earlier passus and harkens back to the commentary on the distich:

Quod Actif tho al angryliche and arguinge as hit were:  
 'What is pouerte, Pacience?' quod he, "y preye þat thow telle hit.'  
 '*Paupertas*,' quod Pacience, '*est odibile bonum, remocio curarum,*  
*possessio sine calumpnia, donum dei, sanitatis mater, absque*  
*solicitudine semita, sapiencie temperatrix, negocium sine dampno,*  
*incerta fortuna, absque solitudine felicitas.*

(C.XVI.114 - 115d)

However, unlike Wastor, Actif participates in the dialogue of the poem and when

Pacience's definition of poverty proves incomprehensible to him, he is able to respond:

'Y can nat construe al this,' quod *Activa Vita*.  
 'Parfay,' quod Pacience, 'proprelliche to telle hit,  
 Al this in Engelysch, hit is ful hard, ac sumdel y shal telle the.'  
 (C.XVI.117-119)

Pacience goes on to gloss the passage, and the commentary connected with the phrase from the distich is at last explicit within the poem. Langland used the distich to heighten the apocalyptic sense of foreboding during a period of perceived societal breakdown. He reserved the commentary on the distich until it could effectively contribute to the reassuring message of eternal salvation once the pardon had been received. Pearsall remarks concerning this passus that "It may often seem that L is returning to themes he has already fully discussed. But the ruminative processes of the poem are extraordinarily rich and productive ... It is interesting to see that poverty, which was the worst of the world's problems in the *Visio*, is now the solution to them."<sup>163</sup> Cato's distich "*Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento*" has provided a bridge in *Piers* from the *Visio* to the *Vita*. Pearsall points out that Langland was unflinching in his willingness to portray the social reality of poverty in all of its aspects, but that "the scrupulousness of Langland's record of reality can end only, for him, in the necessity of raising the eyes to a higher reality."<sup>164</sup> Significantly on this occasion, it is one of Cato's distichs which directs the eyes in that celestial direction.

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<sup>163</sup> Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* 261 n1.

<sup>164</sup> Derek Pearsall, "Poverty and Poor People in *Piers Plowman*" in *Medieval English Studies presented to George Kane* ed. Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron and Joseph S. Wittig (Wolfeboro: D S Brewer, 1988) 185.

The distichs of Cato and the commentaries that Christianized them participated in “the ruminative process” of reading *Piers* on many levels. Individual Christians may have felt themselves to have been chastised by the distichs along with Will for the times when their faith looked for proofs, and criticized along with Wastor for the moments when they were not satisfied with what God had given them. Langland’s audience would likely have felt a sense of participatory satisfaction in anticipating the distichs that comment on Will and Wastor’s arrogant foolishness. Having learned the distichs in a Christian context reinforced by the extensive commentaries and glosses, the educated audience would have been predisposed to view the *Disticha Catonis* as an authority to be used for critical comment.

### Cato and Holy Church

The commentaries that Christianized the *Disticha* essentially treated it as a text to be explicated word by word, and the associative mode of thought that characterized this approach looked for Christian similarities rather than pagan differences. The success of this assimilative process is evident throughout *Piers Plowman*; the Christianized sentiments of the distichs participate in the moral dialogues and spiritual dilemmas of the poem. Langland himself furthered this Christianizing process by linking the distichs with Christ, and with the Founding of Holy Church. For Langland and his audience, the spiritual values discernible in the distichs represented truths integral to the very beginnings of Christianity. In the C-text, at the Feast of Patience and at the Founding of Holy Church, phrases from the distichs are presented as embodying ideals fundamental to the

New Testament and are closely associated with Piers who is present as the incarnate Christ. If we accept the C-text as the final revision of the poem, then it is difficult to view Langland's opinion of Cato as ambivalent, or his use of the *Disticha Catonis* as contrary to the basic tenets of Christianity. Indeed, Langland uses the distichs in their Christianized context to support and reinforce the fundamental morals associated with the cardinal virtues essential to the Christian faith.

Langland prepares us earlier in the B- and C-texts for the inclusion of Cato's words at the founding of Holy Church by using a paraphrase from a distich in a key context. At the Feast of Pacience in the B-text, Conscience quotes Christ as speaking or possibly exemplifying the sentiments of a distich:

'I kan no3t her-on,' quod Conscience 'ac I knowe wel Piers;  
 He wol nou3t ayein holy writ speken, I dar vndertake,'  
 'Thanne passe we ouer til Piers come and preue þis in dede.  
 Pacience haþ be in many place, and paraunter [knoweþ]  
 That no clerke ne kan as crist bereþ witnesse:  
*Pacientes vincunt, &c.*'

(B.XIII.131-135a)

Along with Skeat, Jill Mann identifies the source of the proverb "*Pacientes vincunt*" as the distich "*Quem superare potes, interdum vince ferendo; / maxima enim morum semper patientia virtus*"<sup>165</sup> (From time to time, conquer one who is no match for you by bearing with him; for patience is always the greatest moral virtue").<sup>166</sup> In *Piers*, the distich is

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<sup>165</sup> DC I.38.

<sup>166</sup> Mann, in "Proverbial Wisdom" 108 n5, states that this proverb is "no. 20833f in the comprehensive reference work by Hans Walther, *Proverbia Sententiaeque Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, 5 vols; cf. also no. 2081a". The proverb may also be found in Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases* in P58 and P61. Alford, *A Guide to the Quotations* 84, notes that the phrase was proverbial "in the singular form, ... but L offers the only example in the plural."

presented as being compatible with “holy writ” with no sense of a pagan/Christian dichotomy. Skeat suggests that the immediate gospel reference is to Matt. X.22 where Jesus informs his disciples that they will be persecuted for his sake, “*qui autem perseuerauerit usque in finem, hic saluus erit*” (but he who will have perserved until the end, this man will be saved). The phrase used in *Piers* does not contain the same wording as the distich or the gospels, but the Christological essence of the two is clearly conveyed.

Indeed, the Latin commentary on the distich that gave rise to “*patientes vincunt*” had no difficulty transforming Cato’s wily advice into a Christian virtue:

Docet nos per patientiam inimiciciam fortiter sustinere, et in futuro vindictam non querere, scilicet, ex corde ignoscere. Unde: Vince ferendo, id est compaciendo, interdum, id est aliquando, illum quem potes superare. Gregorius: “Gloriosius est iniuriam tacendo fugere quam respondendo superare.” Etenim (pro “quia”) patientia est semper maxima virtus morum, id est intus mores. Omnes enim alie virtutes temperantur patientia.

Nam virtus vidua quam non patientia firmat.

Item: ‘Nobile vincendi genus est patientia. Vincit, qui patitur. Si vis vincere, disce pati.’<sup>167</sup>

(He teaches us to endure enmity bravely through patience, and not to seek revenge in the future, namely, to forgive from the heart. Whence: conquer by enduring, that is by sympathizing, from time to time, that is sometimes, the one whom you are able to overcome. Gregory: “It is more glorious to flee from injury by being silent rather than to overcome by responding.” For indeed (in place of “because”) patience is always the greatest strength of morals, that it is within morals. For all other virtues are tempered by patience.

For how destitute is a virtue, not strengthened by patience.

Likewise: “Patience is a noble kind of conquering. He, who is patient, conquers. If you wish to conquer, learn to be patient.)

The inclusion of Gregory’s words in a commentary reconciling Cato and Christianity once more illustrates that to medieval scholars Cato and Gregory were seen to be compatible

<sup>167</sup> Hazelton, “Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*” 163.

rather than confrontational. The commentary also introduces the notion of patience as encompassing a capacity for Christian stoicism in the face of adversity, as well as including the virtue of forgiving one's enemies. For Christians, Christ himself was the ultimate exemplar of "*pacientes vincunt.*"

Skeat remarks that by comparing the Feast of Patience in the B- and C-texts "we can see that Piers the Plowman is already, at this point, identified with Christ; and the reader should bear in mind that this identification is adhered to, for the most part, throughout nearly all the remainder of the poem."<sup>168</sup> In the C-text, it is Piers who suddenly appears and makes a speech which begins with the proverb "*pacientes vincunt.*" Pearsall notes that "The mysterious and dramatic appearance of Piers Plowman is an important innovation in C. He speaks now as Christ in his life upon earth, verifying in the presence of his Father his own words in the gospels, concerning the charity which grows out of patience."<sup>169</sup> Piers' speech emphasizes the revolutionary injunction to "love one's enemies" from Christ's Sermon on the Mount:

Quod Peres the ploughman: '*Pacientes vincunt.*  
 Byfore perpetuel pees y shal preue þat y saide  
 And avowe before god, and forsaken hit neuere,  
 That *disce, doce, dilige deum*  
 And thyn enemy helpe emforth thy myhte.  
 Caste hote coles on his heued of alle kyn speche,  
 Fond thorw wit and word his loue to wynne,  
 3ef hym eft and eft, euere at his nede,  
 Conforte hym with thy catel and with thy kynde speche,  
 And ley on hym thus with loue til he lauhe on þe;  
 And bote he bowe for this betynge, blynde mote he worthen!  
 (C.XV.137-148)

<sup>168</sup> Skeat, *Piers Plowman* 195 n131.

<sup>169</sup> Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* 252 n138.

Piers/Christ disappears as suddenly as he came and Reason runs after him. Pearsall comments that once he leaves "Reason does not appear again in the poem, and Conscience has to work alone."<sup>170</sup> Conscience, however, is not alone if we consider that Reason leaves behind his knave, Cato, as a representative to speak in his stead. Alternatively, Reason's entourage, including Cato, can be seen to have followed Piers/Christ and to be present when they appear again at the Founding of Holy Church.

Galloway's assertion that part of Langland's agenda in revising the B-text was to excise Cato does not appear accurate if we pause here to examine the occurrences of "*pacientes vincunt*" in the B- and C-texts. The fact that the B-text contains six citations of this proverb as opposed to three in the C-text is misleading if we assume that the statistics indicate an antipathy towards Cato. In order to understand Langland's attitude towards Cato during the act of revising the B-text, we must look at the changes he made when he kept "*pacientes vincunt*," because these revisions are more important than the instances where he excised it.<sup>171</sup> Pearsall comments that "the reshaping of B XIII-XV as

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<sup>170</sup> Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* 253 n151.

<sup>171</sup> In passus B.XIV the effect of the revisions concerning Cato are minimal. Patience's assertion that he will provide the necessities for those who are not preoccupied with their own needs (B.XIV.27-33a) is effectively shortened to three lines with the added reminder that he will do so "Thorgh the heye helpe of hym that me hyder sente." In the process, the litany of tags "*Ne solliciti sitis, etc.: volucres celi deus pascit, etc.: pacientes vincunt, etc.*" (B.XIV.33a) disappears, but the loss does not suggest a vendetta against Cato. Originally, the list of tags may have been a scribal addition since it is not integral to the line which precedes it. In the same passus, Langland keeps the more forceful use of the phrase essentially unchanged from the B- to the C-text: "Shal neuere gyues the greue ne grete lordes wrath,/ Prisone ne peyne for - *pacientes vincunt*" (B.XIV.51-52 / C.XV.253). Moreover, the fact that this latter occurrence of the phrase is integrated into the syntax frees it from any suggestion that it found its way into the text by the process of scribal redaction.

In the process of revising B.XV, the penultimate and last citations of "*pacientes vincunt*" were expunged. The loss of the lines B.XV.253-262 carries the proverb with it, along with the sufferings of Christ, and the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. It seems unlikely that the presence of "*pacientes vincunt*" prompted such a change. The final occurrence of the proverb in the B-text is redundant because it is preceded by the vernacular "And throw his pacyence her powere to pure nou3t he brou3te" (B.XV.588), which is echoed in the C-text "And here power thourh hus pacience to pure nouht brouhte" (C.XVII.308).

C XV-XVIII is partly mechanical ... But the detail of reshaping ... suggests a desire to emphasize significant stages in the argument ...."<sup>172</sup> In the B-text the citations of "*pacientes vincunt*" are scattered over three passus, whereas in the C-text they are concentrated in one. In the process Langland intensified rather than diminished the voice of Cato in the poem and used the proverb derived from the distich to greater effect. The reduction of the occurrences of "*pacientes vincunt*" from the B- to the C-text can in no way be perceived as being motivated by an antipathy towards Cato as a pagan. Indeed, the greatest changes to this section of the poem occur in two of the three instances where Langland has kept the proverb, but reshaped its context to further dramatize its acquired Christian connotations.

Christ's example is effective in the B-text, but in the C-text, Piers' sudden intrusion and short speech followed by his and Reason's disappearance from the scene is startling and indicates the new status which Piers has taken on. Surely it must also indicate a change in Reason, previously portrayed as a stern judge and not given to mercy. Earlier in the poem, when Wrong's supporters "radden Reson tho to haue reuthe vppon þat shrewe," he replies conditionally: "Rede me nou3te, quod Resoun 'no reuthe to haue, / Til lordes and ladies louen alle treuthe" (C.IV.131-132). Alford discusses "the three major appearances of Reason, first as an adviser to the king in the trial of Wrong and Lady Meed, next as a preacher on the field of folk, and finally as Will's instructor on 'a mountaigne þat myddelerþe hi3te,'" but he does not mention Reason's sudden decision to

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The loss of the Latin in this last instance is slight and the original inclusion of the Latin in the B-text may have been scribal rather than authorial.

<sup>172</sup> Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* 278 n1.

follow Piers/Christ at the conclusion of the unconditional 'love thine enemies' speech.<sup>173</sup> If Reason does represent "the invincible workings of retributive justice"<sup>174</sup> then his action in following Christ at this point represents the change from the old law to the new. Now Reason is ready to follow Christ and all that he stands for, and Cato as Reason's knave would also be included in Christ's entourage.

The range of advice presented in the *Disticha* made it possible to associate Cato with all four of the cardinal Christian virtues represented at the founding of Holy Church: (1) *Spiritus prudencie*, (2) *Spiritus temperancie*, (3) *Spiritus fortitudinis*, and (4) *Spiritus iustici*.<sup>175</sup> Ultimately, however, for Langland, Cato's major contribution to *Piers* lay in the association of the Christian brand of stoicism, *Spiritus fortitudinis*, with the passive ideal of patient poverty and the spiritually triumphant proverb "*pacientes vincunt*":

The thridde seed that Peres sewe was *Spiritus fortitudinis*  
 And ho- so ete of þat seed hardy was euere  
 To soffre al þat god sente, seeknesse and angeres.  
 Myhte no lyare with lesynges ne losse of worldly catel  
 Makyn hym, for eny mornynge, þat he ne was murye in  
 soule,

And bold and abidyng busmares to soffre;  
 And pleded al with pacience and *Parce michi, domine*,  
 And keuered hym vnder consayl of Caton the wyse:  
*Esto forti animo cum sis dampnatus inique.*

(C.XXI.289-297) (B.XIX.289-296a)

The passage describing the 'thridde seed' shows the influence of three distichs united at the founding of the Church and soon to be sowed by Piers. Distich I.21 has already been

<sup>173</sup> Alford, "The Idea of Reason" 206-215.

<sup>174</sup> Alford, "The Idea of Reason" 210.

<sup>175</sup> See pages 29-35 for the association of the distichs with Christian morals.

used in the poem to illustrate patient poverty; distich I.38 has made frequent appearances to illustrate "*pacientes vincunt*"; and distich II.14 completes the trio by illustrating "*Spiritus Fortitudinis*." This is the last time that Cato is either mentioned or quoted in *Piers*: his final epithet is 'Caton the wyse,' and he is associated with the efficacy of prayer in that his counsel acts as a form of consolation in an imperfect world.

At the Founding of Holy Church, Langland has quoted only the first line of the distich *Esto forti animo cum sis dampnatus inique*<sup>176</sup> (Be of strong spirit when you are wrongly judged) which appears initially to be of little consolation. However, the unstated second line, *Nemo diu gaudet, qui iudice vincit iniquo* (No one rejoices long, who overcomes by means of an unfair judge), in a Christian context suggests the final 'judgment day' when all earthly victories will be seen to be ultimately transitory. The commentary on the second line of the distich emphasizes that God as the final judge will reward the faithful and condemn the wicked whose mundane victory will prove to have been spiritually hollow:

quia nemo gaudet diu qui vincit aliquem iniquo iudice; quasi diceret, adversarius tuus qui vincit, in iudicio Deo ille non gaudebit.<sup>177</sup>

(because no one rejoices long who overcomes anyone by means of an unfair judge, that is to say, your adversary who overcomes, will not rejoice in the judgement of God.)

The patient will at last have their day and their victory.

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<sup>176</sup> DC II.14.

<sup>177</sup> Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" 175.

Although the Founding of Holy Church represents the last time that Cato is heard from either directly or indirectly in *Piers*, all that he had come to stand for is implicitly involved in the struggle which ensues with Antichrist and his followers. The followers of Antichrist are portrayed as the seven vices, and they represent a formidable enemy in the guise of "seuene grete geauntes." The conflict is realized essentially in terms of the individual Christian, and the representative voice of the brewer recalls that of Wastor:

'3e? bawe' quod a breware, 'y woi not be yruled,  
 By Iesu! for al 3oure iangelyng, aftur *Spiritus iusticie*  
 Ne aftur Consience, bi Christ, while y can sulle  
 Bothe dregges and draf and drawe at on hole  
 Thikke ale or thynne ale; and þat is my kynde  
 And nat to hacky aftur holinesse - hold thy tonge, Consience!  
 Of *Spiritus iusticie* thow spekest moche an ydel.'

(C.XXI.396-4)

Antichrist's assault is initiated by Pride and is played out in terms of an undermining of Christian morals or cardinal virtues essential to the founding of the Church, and associated with the *Disticha*. Antichrist attacks "al the crop of treuthe" (C.XXII.53) and Consience stands in defense "þat kepar was and gyour / Ouer kynde cristene and cardinale vertues" (C.XXII.72-73). The epidemic quality of the disrespect for Christian virtues is described by the uneducated parish priest:

'For the commune,' quod this curator, 'counteth ful litel  
 The conseyl of Consience or cardinals vertues  
 Bote hit sowne, as bi sihte, somewhat to wynnynge.  
 Of gyle ne of gabbynges gyueth they neuer tale  
 For *Spiritus prudencie* among þe peple is gyle  
 And al tho fayre vertues as vises thei semeth.  
 For vch man sotleth a sleythe, synne to huyde.  
 And coloureth hit for a connyng and a clene lyuyng.'

(C.XXI.451-458)

The virtue of prudence with which Cato was most closely associated in his role as Reason's knave has degenerated into a self-serving cunning, and it is but one indication that the moral virtues are in a sorry state.

The confrontation has apocalyptic overtones, but it is difficult to establish its time frame in the context of the poem. It can be seen as the very beginnings of the struggle with Antichrist at the moment when the Church was founded; it can be seen as the contemporary quotidian struggles of the fourteenth-century Church; or it can also be seen as an impending sign of Doomsday itself.<sup>178</sup> Conscience and Christians are so beleaguered by Antichrist and the vices that Conscience in desperation goes off in search of Piers/Christ. As Pearsall observes, this is an indication that "the Church's strength can only be restored by a return to the principles on which it was founded."<sup>179</sup> Langland has demonstrated at the Founding of Holy Church that Cato and his distichs were perceived to be compatible with those principles. When Piers was last seen in the poem, he was going off to sow the seeds of Truth, and those seeds were both implicitly and explicitly associated with the distichs and Cato. The scene at the end of the poem recalls a popular proverb of the period, "Where as wyse reasone canne nat be herde, than pride muste

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<sup>178</sup> In this instance, I disagree somewhat with Robert Worth Frank, Jr. *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) 112, who suggests that "by the fourteenth century 'Antichrist' had become a mere term of abuse. That is how the poet uses Antichrist here. He says nothing about Doomsday. Antichrist suggests an enemy within the Church, and the poet's Antichrist heads an army composed of the sins allied with evil churchmen, religious, and the friars. ... Antichrist is the human ally of sin, not the precursor of Judgment Day. His appearance is an indictment and a warning against present evils, not a sign of the Second Coming." Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990) 10 - 11, also disagrees somewhat with Frank's suggestion that Antichrist represents a "general polemic," but agrees with his view that the Doomsday scenario is not acceptable at the end of the poem because it leaves "Conscience's pilgrimage without any meaningful purpose." Conscience has gone off to find "the friars a 'fyndyng,' which would not be of much use to them at the End of the World."

<sup>179</sup> Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* 376 n382.

reyngē."<sup>180</sup> When Conscience finds Piers/Christ he will also find their entourage, and the voices of Reason and his knave, Cato, will once again be heard instructing and guiding those who had strayed "out of rihtful weye."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Whiting, *Proverbs*, R59, *Berners' Froissart* 483.

<sup>181</sup> See the Middle English prologue to the *Disticha* on pages 32.

## Conclusion: Cato's 'Trace'

One of the Middle English paraphrases of the *Disticha Catonis* opens with a prologue which, although it acknowledges that Cato was a pagan, still offers the prayer: "gode grante vs grace. / to folow catouns trace." The 'trace' that the *Disticha* itself left from its undeniably pagan origins, through to the determinedly Christianized editions of the Middle Ages, to the purified classical editions of the Renaissance, is indeed an interesting literary trail. One short segment of Cato's metamorphosis can be seen in the three versions of *Piers*, and the process can perhaps shed some light on the evolution of *Piers* itself as well as revealing something of the nature of the audience of *Piers*. The progression of composition in *Piers* from the A- to B- to C-texts, from the shortest text to the longest, from the text with the least Latin to that with the most, has been generally but not universally accepted by scholars. Jill Mann is among the latest to challenge this 'alphabetical' sequence, and she does so on the grounds that Langland successively abridged the longer poem from C to B to A in an effort to achieve a "wider circulation among the laity, especially among the young."<sup>182</sup> Mann envisions this audience as being "non-Latinate (or perhaps in the very elementary stages of education)." She contends that Langland systematically cut out passages containing Latin lines and phrases, and sporadically provided translations of the remaining Latin content, in deference to a perceived lack of Latin literacy in this youthful group. Moreover, she also believes that Langland excised vernacular passages on the basis of a desire to "tone down sexual content," to eliminate social criticism of the status quo, to exclude "undesirable criticism"

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<sup>182</sup> Jill Mann, "The Power of the Alphabet: A Reassessment of the Relation between the A and the B Versions of *Piers Plowman*," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 8 (1995): 46.

of the Church, and to remove other miscellaneous lines “not directly relevant to the laity.”<sup>183</sup> However, it seems strange that in addressing such an audience, Langland would choose to keep the content from the *Disticha* relatively unchanged from the C to the B-text, and then cut it so drastically in the A-text. After all, the *Disticha* was used, both before and after Langland’s day, specifically to teach those ‘of tender age’ not only the fundamentals of Latin grammar, but also the fundamental Christian virtues.

Mann is at somewhat of a loss to explain why in the process of revision, as she sees it, Langland did not simply stick to removing Latin but instead at times inserted new Latin content. This question is especially pertinent to Langland’s use of the *Disticha* in *Piers*. Although the distichs comprise only a small part of the revising process throughout the three texts, nonetheless, they offer a useful sampling for the purpose of examining Mann’s proposed revision sequence. For example, the A-text includes the full quotation of Dame Study’s use of distich I.26, which is also present in the B-text, but completely missing from the C-text. Similarly, the A-text contains the first line of distich II.31 concerning dreams just as the B-text does, but the C-text merely alludes to the subject without supplying the actual quotation. Lacking in both the B- and C-texts, and present only in A, is Wit’s use of the first line of distich III.2:

Ac 3if þou werchist be godis word I warne þe þe beste,  
 Whatso men worden of þe wrappe þe never;  
 Catoun counseillip - tak kep of his teching -  
*Cum recte viuas ne cures verba malorum,*  
 But suffre & sit stille & sek þou no ferþere,  
 And be glad of þe grace þat god hap Isent þe.

(A.X.95 - 100)

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<sup>183</sup> Mann, “The Power of the Alphabet,” see pages 28, 34, 36-37, 40, and 41.

The basic sense of the quotation is paraphrased in the lines preceding it, but it is obviously not a clearly signaled translation aimed at a barely literate audience.<sup>184</sup> What is evident in this instance is the Christianized context of the distich in its compatibility with “godis word.” If the momentum of composition and revision, as I think it more likely, moves from A to B to C, then this is an example of a distich which was omitted from the B- and of course the C-text. A possible reason for the excision of this particular distich, and the vernacular lines supporting it, is that Langland replaced it with distich II.14, which expresses similar sentiments concerning spiritual fortitude, at a more momentous occasion in the poem, the Founding of Holy Church. Mann’s suggestion would make the revising of *Piers* into a haphazard paring down rather than a process of eclectic creative growth. I think that the distichs in *Piers* offer support for the latter view.

Despite the fact that there is very little change in number of quotations and references to Cato from the B- to the C-texts, there is a change in the perception of Cato. One of the names for the *Disticha* in the Middle Ages was *Disticha de Moribus ad Filium*, and in the B-text, Langland appears to have been aware of this traditional view of Cato.

Chagrined by Imaginatif’s criticism concerning his way of life, Will responds:

I sei3 wel he seide me soop, and somwhat me to excuse  
 Seide, ‘Caton conforted his sone þat, clerk þou3 he were,  
 To solacen hym som tyme; [so] I do whan I make:  
*Interpone tuis interdum gaudia curis.*<sup>185</sup>

(B.XII.20-22a)

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<sup>184</sup> Mann, in “The Power of the Alphabet” on page 34, passes over the fact that not all of the Latin is translated with the comment that it is “partly as if the redactor was tiring of his task or finding it too difficult.”

<sup>185</sup> DC III.6.

When Langland revised this section of the B-text and deleted these lines, he omitted the only portrait of Cato as a quasi-historical figure contained in *Piers*. Middle English paraphrases of the *Disticha*, such as those found in Rawlinson MS. G.59 and Sidney MS. ΔIV.i, frequently address the reader in terms of “mi swete sone dere,” “my fayre sone,” and so on. Langland, however, chose not to utilize this aspect of the conventional characterization of Cato in the C-text. By casting Cato as Reason’s knave, Langland portrayed him as a personification of wisdom whose words were directed to an entire society and not merely to the young.

The image of Cato as a teacher first appears in the A-text, when Wit admonishes Will: “Catoun counseillip - tak kep of his teching” (A.X.97); and in the B-text, the verbs ‘kennyng,’ ‘techyng,’ and ‘lereþ’ are used to convey the pedagogical tradition identified with Cato’s advice. Both the A- and B-texts introduce distich I.26 with the pedantic comment “I sai3 it in Catoun” (A.XI.146/B.X.194), but only the B-text adds “This is Catons kennyng to clerkes þat he lereþ” (B.X.199).<sup>186</sup> The B-text is alone in including distich IV.4, which is also introduced with a teaching metaphor:

And Caton kenneþ vs to coueiten it nau3t but as nede techep:  
*dilige denarium set parce dilige formam.*<sup>187</sup>

(B.X.343-343a).

Both the B- and C-texts include distich Sententia 17, but the C-text merely notes “Catoun acordeth therwith: *Cui des videto*” (C.IX.69); while the B-text offers:

Caton kenneþ me þus and þe clerke of stories  
*Cui des videto* is Catons techyng,

<sup>186</sup> Emphasis throughout this paragraph will be mine.

<sup>187</sup> DC IV.4.

## (B.VII.72-73).

The C-text does not use 'kenyng,' 'techyng,' or 'lereþ' in connection with Cato, and in this instance changes the B-text "Caton kenneþ me þus" to "Catoun acordeth therwith" (C.IX. 69). The last image of Cato in the C-text, as in the B-text, is that of the stoical Christian covering himself "vnder consayl of Caton the wyse" (C.XXI.296), an aspect which Langland chose to focus on in the C-text.

The change in emphasis in the C-text from Cato's advice as curriculum to that of counsel does not negate the use of the *Disticha* as a school text but rather affirms its status as a spiritual guide. Langland could easily have quoted Cato in the vernacular rather than Latin; vernacular translations and paraphrases of the *Disticha* were current; moreover, Chaucer's extensive use of material from the *Disticha* for the purpose of entertaining an educated audience was in the vernacular.<sup>188</sup> By choosing to quote the *Disticha* in Latin, Langland retained its association with the Christianizing commentaries which accompanied it, and with Scripture. Hazelton has noted the similarities between the *Disticha* and the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus:

and anyone familiar with the *sententiae* of 'Salomon' could not fail to recognize in the *Disticha* of Cato analogous and even identical ideas and sentiments....But Proverbs was not the only Scriptural book that had affinities with Cato....Ecclesiasticus ... contains a significant number of sentences that in thought and tone are strikingly parallel to Cato's. The heavy emphasis on the quotidian in these Scriptural books, the admonishing tone, the use of the vocative formulae 'Fili, ...,' 'Audi, fili, ...,' and 'Audite, fili, ...,' and the gnomic style were all to be found in the *Disticha Catonis*.<sup>189</sup>

<sup>188</sup> See Hazelton, "Chaucer and Cato" 357-380.

<sup>189</sup> Hazelton, "The Christianization of 'Cato'" 163-164.

Cato's position in *Piers* is such that Langland did not even feel it necessary to rationalize or justify his presence as a 'righteous heathen', as he so obviously did for Trajan (B.XI.140-156 / C.XII.54-86). For Langland, as for many others in the Middle Ages, Cato's 'trace' was a worthy path or example to follow in the company of Christ and Piers.

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## Appendix A

Distichs which are quoted (in whole or in part) or paraphrased in *Piers Plowman*.

1) Sententia 17

*cui des videto*

“Watch to whom you give.”

- used in *Piers* in B.VII.73, C.IX.69.

2) DC I.3

*Virtutem primam esse puta conpescere linguam;  
proximus ille deo est, qui scit ratione tacere.*

“Consider control of your tongue the prime virtue; he who knows how to keep quiet at reason’s call is very close to a god.”

- suggested by the use in *Piers* of the phrase “*Philosophus esses si tacuisses*” in B.XI.416a and in C.XIII.223a; or by Reason’s vernacular lines in B.XI.378f and in C.XIII.207f.

3) DC I.5

*Si vitiam inspicias hominum, si denique mores,  
cum culpant alios: nemo sine crimine vivit.*

“Look into the lives and characters of people, when they find fault with others: no one lives a blameless life.”

- used in *Piers* in B.XI.404, C.XIII.211.

4) DC I.12

*Rumores fuge, ne incipias novus auctor haberi,  
nam nulli tacuisse nocet, nocet esse locutum.*

“Shun rumors, lest you begin to be considered another rumor-monger, for silence never hurt anyone, but talk is harmful.”

- suggested in *Piers* by the use of the phrase “*Locutum me aliquando penituit, tacuisse nunquam*” in C.XIII.223a-b.

5) DC I.21

*Infantem nudum cum te natura creavit,  
paupertatis onus patienter ferre memento.*

“Since nature created you a naked infant, remember to bear the burden of poverty patiently.”

- used in *Piers I* in B.VI.315, C.VIII.338.

## 6) DC I.26

*Qui simulat verbis nec corde est fidus amicus,  
tu qui fac simile: sic ars deluditur acte.*<sup>190</sup>

"He who simulates friendship with words but is not a true friend at heart - you do the same to him; thus art is tricked by art."

- used in *Piers* in A.XI.147-148, B.X.195-196, B.XVIII.162a, C.XX.165a.

## 7) DC I.38

*Quem superare potes, interdum vince ferendo,  
maxima enim morum semper patientia virtus.*

"From time to time, conquer one who is no match for you by bearing with him for patience is always the greatest moral virtue.

- suggested in *Piers* by the use of the proverb "*pacientes vincunt*" in B.XIII.135a, BXIII.171a, B.XIV.33c, B.XIV.54, BXV.268, B.XV598a, C.XV.138, C.XV.157a, C.XV.254.

## 8) DC II.14

*Forti animo esto libens, cum sis damnatus inique:  
nemo diu gaudet, qui iudice vincit iniquo.*

"Keep a brave and cheerful spirit, when you have been unjustly condemned: nobody who has won through a corrupt judge is happy for long."

- used in *Piers* in B.XIX.296a, C.XXI.297.

## 9) DC II.24

*Prospice qui veniant casus: hos esse ferendos;  
nam levius laedit quidquid praevidimus ante.*

"Foresee future misfortunes and the need to bear them; for what we have foreseen harms us less."

- suggested in *Piers* by the use of the phrase "Auyseth-be-byfore" in C.IV.21.

## 10) DC II.31

*Somnia ne cures, nam mens humana quod optat,  
dum vigilat, sperat, per somnum cernit id ipsum.*

"Do not worry about dreams, for what the human mind desires it hopes for when awake, but actually sees in sleep."

- used in *Piers* in A.VIII.134a, B.VII.156.

- alluded to in *Piers* C.IX.304-305.

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<sup>190</sup> Boas uses "qui" in this line although "quoque" as in the commentaries transcribed in Hazelton, "Two Texts of the *Disticha Catonis*" pages 48 and 155, makes better sense grammatically. Similarly "acte" should likely read "arte."

## 11) DC III.2

*Cum recte vivas, ne cures verba malorum,  
arbitri non est nostri, quid quisque loquatur.*

“When you are living right, do not worry what bad men say; we have no control over what individuals say.”

- used in *Piers* in A.X.98.

## 12) DC III.6

*Interpone tuis interdum gaudia curis,  
ut possis animo quemvis sufferre laborem.*

“Mix your business with occasional pleasure, so you can endure any labor with good cheer.”

- used in *Piers* in B.XII.22a.

## 13) DC IV.4

*Dilige denarium, sed parce dilige formam.  
quam nemo sanctus nec honestus captat habere.*

“Love money, but have little affection for outward form, which no holy and honorable man strains to have.”

- used in *Piers* in B.X.343a.

## Appendix B

Lines in *Piers Plowman* in which Cato is referred to but not quoted.

- 1) Cato referred to as Reason's knave - A.IV.17, B.IV.17, C.IV.17 (with a possible reference in the C-text to DC II.24).
- 2) Sloth's reference to Cato - C.VII.34.
- 3) Cato referred to as an authority on dreams - C.IX.305 (in reference to DC II.31).

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