William Langland

complaint to his purse

To you, my pur, and to my other wight, a creature
Complain I, for ye be my lady dere,
I am so sorry now that ye be light.
For certes, but if ye make me hevy cheere?  
Me were as lie he be laid upon my beere.
For which unto youre mercy than I crye:
Behe tho hevy again, or elles must I die,

Now vouchest sauf this day er it be night
The lit of you the blisful soon may here,
Or see you dere dulcys, like the same blisful,
That of yeloynes hadde neuer pere.
Ye be my lif, ye be my hertes steeere, a creature
Queene of confort and of good companie:
Behe tho hevy again, or elles must I die.

Ye pur, that been to me my lyes light
And savour, as in this world down here,
Out of this torne" helpe me thourgh your might,
Sith that ye wel nat be my tresoure:
For, am shave as neight "as any freere.  
But ye I praye unto youre curteisy:
Behe tho hevy again, or elles must I die.

envoy to henry iv

O conquyore of Brutus Albion, a creature
Which that by line and free election,
Beere verray king, this song to you I sende:
And ye, that mowent alle oure hames amend,
Have munde upon my supplication.

William Langland

c. 1330-1381

Little is known of William Langland. On the basis of internal evidence in _Piers Plowman_, he is thought to have been a clerk in minor orders whose career in the church was curtailed by his marriage. He may have come from the Malvern Hills in the west of England, but he spent much of his professional life in London. He was clearly learned, using many Latin quotations from the Bible (given below primarily in English translation, designated by italics and _Piers Plowman_ is an ambitious and multilayered allegory, an attempt to combine presented as a dream vision whose hero is a humble plowman, and whose narrator, the naive reaction to this mysterious poem in surprising ways. _Piers Plowman_ was so inspiring to the leading person, as can be seen in the letter of _radical_ priest John Ball in the readings following profound conversation, despite his scathing social satire, he offers no program for social knights protect the body politic, the clergy prays for it, and the commons provide its food, that what ailed society was that none of the three estates was performing its proper role.

_Piers Plowman_ survives in many manuscripts, a fact that suggests a large audience, which must have included secular readers in the government and law as well as the clergy. Most of John the A, B, and C-texts—all their history bear light on the poem's role in the Rising of 1381. Ball and other rebel leaders referred to it, while the C-text (it is translated in the excerpts beliefs of the reformers. Nevertheless, the poem remained popular for the next two centuries as_ Langland's_ social criticism, however, is only part of his project, for he considered individual salvation to be equally important. A strictly political reading of _Piers Plowman_—whether in the fourteenth century or the twentieth—misses a great deal of its originality and its power.

_Piers Plowman_ is a challenge to read, it is almost surrealistic in its rapid and unexplained transitions, its many dreams, and its complex use of allegory. It is as confusing to people reading it in its entirety as to those reading it in excerpts, as above. Nevertheless, the poem does have a kind of unity, of a thematic rather than a narrative sort. It is held together by the dreamer's vision of the elvish (or the sorcerer's) hero and his personal quest to save his own soul. This quest is loosely structured by the metaphor of the journey, which is reflected in the poem's subdivision into parts called _parish_—Latin for "step." The poem is further unified by the allegorical character of Piers the plowman: a literal fourteenth-century English farmer who, when the poem begins, he becomes a figure representing Saint Peter, the first pope and founder of the church, and of Christ himself.

The five passages included here suggest the connection between the social and spiritual aspects of the poem. In the _Prologue_, the dreamer has a vision of a tower (later explained as the seat of Truth, i.e., God), a hellish dungeon beneath, and between them, a "field of folk," representing various professions from the three estates, who are later said to be more concerned with their material than their spiritual welfare.

_Parish_ 2 is the first of three on the marriage of Lady Maud, an ambiguous allegorical figure whose name can mean "just reward," "bride," or the profit motive generally, the last. The dreamer is invited by Lady Holy Church to meet her marriage to "False Fickle Tongue." Members of all three estates attend this event, a sign of corruption on every social level. The allegorical nature of the poem is stressed in the last and, in a complex passage of personification, allegory represents the seven deadly sins as members of the common. Included here from _Parish_ 6 is the vividly realized portrait of Glutton, who revives in his sin as he
confesses it. Langland discusses the issues of poverty and work most directly in Par. 8, where Piers Plowman insists that the assembled people help him plow his barley before he labors, explicitly exempting the knights from producing food, as long as they protect the commons well—inducing roles may be reversed in heaven, and earthly undertakings can turn out to be too courteous to eternal works, and Hunger must be called in to offer an idle work, and the laborers demand more money, cursing the time for the statutes that have five furlongs.

The spiritual climax of the poem takes place in Par. 20, which depicts Christ's crucifixion. After many jests of theological debate about his own salvation, the dreamer thinks the man looks like Piers the Plowman, until he recognizes him as Jesus. This man is "(human nature)" for the "front of Piers the Plowman" (human souls).

Beneath Christ can release the souls from hell, a lively debate takes place among the "four daughters of God"—Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace—homely "wrenches" who have lived each other. They concede that forgiveness can take precedence over retribution, and Christ's death is the resurrection, the dreamer awakes and-leads his wife and daughter to church to celebrate Easter with him, thus connecting the spiritual experience to his personal experience.

The remainder of the poem, Par. 21-22, which are not included here, recount the foundation of the church (by Piers as St. Peter), and other apocalyptic visions of its subordinates, inevitably with the allegorical figure of Conscience setting out on a pilgrimage in search of Piers Plowman.

Langland did not write French-inspired rhymed poetry, which was fashionable in London and used by Chaucer, but rather he composed old-fashioned alliterative poetry, which survived the north of England and featuring romances in the alliterative "high" style, such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and the other based in the north and west, and tending to moralizing, which includes natural poems such as Richard the Redless, Mum and the Sothmeyer, and yeildes, with the first three usually happening with the same sound. The translations of alliterative enough to convey the flavor in modern English. The following passage, makes the point more clearly. The dreamer, with awe, admittance, reports that he... was told of a woman wonderingly dyed clothed,.. with pearls, the patent on ermine,.. Yow rowned in a corse, the leerly this noon bote,.. Fendlesse hir jyngles were frent with gold wy... And the richly rubyed as red as any gleede, And Dianus of denrest prides and double maner spires, Orientals and Ewages enerves to destory.

Piers Plowman, Prologue

In a summer season when the sun shone softly
I wrapped myself in woolens as if I were a sheep;
In a hermit's habit, holde in his works,
I went out into the world to hear wonders
And to see many strange and seldom-known things.

But on a May morning in the Malvern Hills
I happened to fall asleep, worn out from walking;
And in a meadow as I lay sleeping,
I dreamt the most marvelously, as I recall.
All the world's wealth and all of its woe,
Doting though I was, I certainly saw;
Truth and treachery, treason and guile,
Sleeping I saw them all, as I shall record.

I looked to the East toward the rising sun
And saw a tower—I took it; Truth was inside.

To the West then I looked after a while
And saw a deep dale—Death, as I believe.

Dwelled in that place, along with wicked spirits.
Between them I found a fair field full of folk,
Of all manner men, the common and the poor,
Working and wandering as this world asks us.

Some put themselves to the plow, and seldom played,
To work hard as they can at planting and sowing
And won what these wasters through glutosity destroy.

And some put themselves in pride's ways and apparel
Themselves accordingly in clothes of all kinds.
Many put themselves to prayers and penances,
All for love of our lord they live so severely
In hope of good ending and heaven-kingdom's bliss.

1. Translated by George Littleton.
2. These hills in the west of England were probably Langland's original home.
As anchorites and hermits that keep to their cells,
With no great desire to cruise the countryside,
Seeking carnal pleasures and luxurious lives.
And some turned to trade—they made out better,
As it always seems to us that such men thrive.
And some know as minstrels how to make mirth,
Will neither work nor speak, but wear out loud,
Invent slothy stories and make fools of themselves
Though it's in their power to work if they want.
What Paul preached about them I surely can prove:
Pilgrims and paladins pledged to travel together
To seek Saint James and the saints of Rome.
Went on their way with many wise tales
And took leave to lie about for a lifetime.
A heap of hermits with their hooked staves
Went to Our Lady of Walsingham, with wenchs in tow:
Great deadbeats that hated a good day's work
Clothed themselves in hooded cloaks to stand apart
And proclaimed themselves hermits, for the easy life.
I found there friars from all four orders,
Frequenting people to profit their gat.
And glossing the gospel to their own good liking:
Coveting fine copes, some of these doctors contrived.
Many of these mendicant friars
Find their love of money to their proper business.
And since charity becomes a broker and chief agent for lords' confessions
Many strange things have happened these last years:
Unless Holy Church and charity clear away such confessions
The world's worst misfortune mounts up fast:
A pardoner preached there as if he were a priest
And brought forth a bull with the bishops' seals,
Said that he himself could absolve them all.

Of phony facts and of broken vows,
Illiterates believed him and liked what they heard
And came up and kissed his pardons;
He banked them with his bulls and bleared their eyes
And with this rigmarole raked in their brochures and rings.
Thus you give your gold to help our gluttons
And lose it for good to full-time lechers.
If the bishop were true and kept his ear to the ground
He'd not consign his seal to deceit of the people.
But it's not through the bishop that this guy preaches,
For the parish priest and pardoner split the silver.
That, if not for them, the parishioners would have.

Still I kept dreaming about poor and rich,
Like barons and burgesses and village bondmen.
All I saw sleeping as you shall hear next:
Bakers and brewers, bouchers and others,
Weavers and websters, men that work with their hands,
Like tailors and tanners and tilters of earth,
Like dukes and dactylic joculators that do their work badly
And drive out their days with "Doe cousn sim, dame Emma."

Cooks and their helpers cried, "Get your hot pies!
Good greese and pig meat! Come on up and eat!"
And taverners toasted in much the same way:
"White wine of Alsace and wine from Gassigny.
Wash down your roat with La Reole and La Rochelle."
All thin, and seven times more, I saw in my sleep.

[The Marriage of Lady Mead]
And then I kneeled before her and cried to her for grace,
"Mercy, madame, for the love of Mary in heaven
That bore the blessed child that bought us on the cross,
Teach me the way to recognize Falsehood."

"Look to your left and see where he stands,
Falsehood and False and Fickle-tongued Liar.
And many more men and women like them.
I looked to my left as the lady said
And saw a woman wonderfully clothed.
She was trimmed all in fur, the world's finest,
And crowned with a coronet as good as the king's;
On all five fingers were the richest rings
Set with red rubies and other precious gems.

1. Both were used to a religious life of solitude, hermits in the wilderness and anchorites wailed in a cell dwelling.
3. "Pilgrimage" is a feathered in order to travel.
4. That is, his home at Compostela, in Spain.
5. "Jew" is a religious shrine to the Virgin Mary.
6. The four orders of friars—Franciscan, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians. In 12th-century England they were much disliked for their asceticism (cf. the friar in the ballad "Robin Hood and the Monkers' Tales.
7. Confession and the surname of men it is called the friar.
8. An official empowered to pass on from the Pope absolution for the sins of people who had given money to charity.
10. Lady Holy Church.
11. "Lying" the name of a character representing deceit in Old French literature.
And still dreaming I saw Meed’s marriage,
All the rich retinue rooted in false living
Were bid to the bridal from the entire country,
All kinds of men that were Meed’s kin,
Knights, clerks, and other common people,
Like jurors, summoners, sheriffs and their clerks,
Beadle, baliff, business men, and agents,
Surveys, victualers, advocates of the Arches,
I can’t keep count of the crowd that ran with Meed.
But Simon and Civi and his jurymen
Were tightest with Meed; it seemed of all men.
But Favel was first to fetch her out of chamber
And like a broker bought her to be joined with False.

from Pesias 6
[THE CONFESSION OF GLUTTON]

Now Glutton heads for confession
And moves towards the Church, his men culp’ to say,
Fasting on a Friday he made forth his way
By the house of Betty Brewer, who bid him good morning
And where was he going that brew-wife asked.

"To Holy Church," he said, "to hear mass,
And then sit and be shivren and sin no more."

"I have good ale, Glutton, old buddy, want to give it a try?"

"Do you have," he asked, "any hot spices?"

"I have pepper, poony, and a pound of garlic,
A farthing-worth of fenel seed; for fasting days I bought it."

Then in goes Glutton and great oaths after.
Give the shoemaker sat on the bench,
Was the game warden and his drunken wife,
Tim the tinker and two of his workmen,
Hick the hackney-man and Hugh the needler,
Clarice of Cock’s Lane and the clerk of the church,
Sir Piers of Pride and Plum of Flanders,
A hayward, a hernit, the hangman of Tyburn,
Daw the ditch-digger and a dozen rascals
In the form of porters and pickpockets and bale tooth-pullers,
A fiddler, a rat-catcher, a street-sweeper and his helper,
A rope-maker, a road-runner, and Rose the dish-seller,
Goldye the garlick-man and Griffith the Welshman,
And a heap of secondhand salesmen, early in the morning
Stood Glutton with glad cheers to his first round of ale.

1. A noble vouched for sweetening or referring to a wide variety of "sweeted" kvols, sweet medicine and sugar, including molasses, honey, treacle, orange, rum, or any other sweet, happy, or thoughtful beverage.

2. In modern times, these were used to refer to a variety of sweetened beverages, including molasses, honey, treacle, orange, rum, or any other sweet, happy, or thoughtful beverage.

3. A noble vouched for sweetening or referring to a wide variety of "sweeted" kvols, sweet medicine and sugar, including molasses, honey, treacle, orange, rum, or any other sweet, happy, or thoughtful beverage.


5. The book of Psalms.


7. Psalms 14:5.

8. The poet here uses the two preceding lines had given the poet particularly keen to the reader.
Clement the cobbler took off his cloak
And put it up for a game of New Fair. 4
Hick the backney man saw with his hood
And asked Bart the butcher to be on his side.
Tradesmen were chosen to appraise this bargain,
That whose had the hood should not have the cloak,
And that the better thing, according to the arbiters, compensate the worse.
They got up quickly and whispered together
And appraised these items apart in private,
And there was a load of swearing, for one had to get the worse.
They could not in conscience truthfully accord
Till Robbin the rope-maker they asked to arise
And named him umpire so that all arguing would stop.
Hick the hostler got the cloak
On condition that Clement should fill the cup
And have Hick the hostler's hood and rest content;
And whoever took it back first had to get right up
And greet Sir Glutton with a gallon of ale.
There was laughing and laughter and "please pass the cup!"
Bargaining and drinking they kept starting up
And sat so till evensong 5 and sang from time to time,
Until Glutton had gobbled down a gallon and a gill 6
His guts began to rumble like two greedy saws;
He pissed half a gallon in the time of a pair roster. 7
He blew his round bugle at his backside's bottom,
So that all who heard that horn had to hold their noses
And wished it had been well plugged with a wisp of briers.
He could neither step nor stand unless he held a staff.
And then he moved like a minstrel's performing dog,
Sometimes sideways and sometimes backways,
Like some one lying lines in order to trap birds.
And when he reached the door, then his eyes dimmed,
And he stumbled on the threshold and fell to the ground,
And Clement the cobbler grabbed him by the waist
And in order to lift him up set him on his knees.
But Glutton was a huge boot and troubled in the lifting
And barred up a mess into Clement's lap.
There is no bound so hungry in Hertfordshire
That he'd dare lap up that leaving, so unlawfully it snatched. 8
With all the woe in this world his wife and his daughter
Love him to his bed and put him in it,
And after all this excess he had a bout of sloth;
He slept through Saturday and Sunday till sundown.
Then he awoke pale and wan and wanted a drink:

4. An elaborate game involving the exchange of clothing.
5. Vespers, the evening prayer service and just before sunset.
6. The time it takes to say the Psalter, the Lord's Prayer.
7. A thin, rich form of silk.
8. A nickname for Piers, or Piers.
Don't keep company with rude-mouths or listen to their stories,
and especially at your meals avoid such men
For they are the Devil's entertainers and draw men to sin.
And do not oppose Conscience or the rights of Holy Church.
"I assent, by Saint Giles," said the knight then,
"To work by your wisdom and my wife, too."
"And I shall dress myself," said Perkin, "in pilgrims' fashion
And go with all those who wish to live in Truth."

Now Perkin and these pilgrims go to their plowing;
Many helped him to turn over the half-acre.
Ditchers and diggers dug up the strip-ridges;
All this pleased Perkin and he paid them good wages.
Other workmen there were who worked very hard,
Each man in his way made himself useful
And some to please Perkin picked weeds in the field.
At high prime, about nine  Piers let the plow stand
And oversaw them themselves, whoever worked best
Would later be hired when harvest time comes.
And then, some sat down and sang at ale
And helped plow this half-acre with a "hey trollickly!"
Said Piers the plowman in a pure anger.
"If you don't get up quickly and rush back to work
No grain that grows here will cheer you in need,
And though you die of grief, the devil take him who cares."
Then the phonies were frightened and pretended to be blind
And twisted their legs backwards as such losers know how
And moaned to Piers about how they couldn't work:
"And we pray for you Piers and for your plow, too,
That God for his grace multiply your grain
And reward you for the alms you give us here.
We may neither sweat nor strain, such sickness ails us,
Nor have we limbs to labor with, the Lord God we thank."
"Your prayers," said Piers, "if you were upright,
Might help, as I hope, but high Truth would
That no fakery was found in people that go begging.
You're wasters, I know well, and waste and devour
What true land-tilting men logically work for.
But Truth shall teach you to drive his team
Or you'll eat barley bread and drink from the brook,
Unless he's blind or broken-legged or branded with iron—
Such poor," said Piers, "shall share in my goods,
Both of my corn and my cloth to keep them from want.
But anchorites and hermits who eat only at noon
And friars who don't flatter and poor sick people,
Hey! I and mine will provide for their needs."

2. Grunt for dead bodies.
Dross and dregs were drink for many beggars.
There was no fat living that wouldn't bow to Piers
To be his faithful servant though he had no more
Than food for his labor and his gift at noon.

Then Piers was proud and put them all to work
At dawning and digging, at dung bearing afield,
At threshing, at thatching, at whistling pins,
At every kind of true craft that man can devise.

There was no beggar so bold, unless he were blind,
Dared oppose what Piers said for fear of Sir Hunger.
And Piers was proud of this, and put them all to work
And gave them food and money according to their deserts.

Then Piers had pity for all poor people
And made Hunger hurry up out of the country
Back home to his own yard and stay there forever.

"I promise you," said Hunger, "I won't go away
Before I have this day both dined and drunk."

"I've no penny," said Piers, "with which to buy pullets,
Nor goose or pork but two green cheeses
Nor a few curds and cream and an oat cake
And beans and pea bread for my kids.
And still I say, by my soul, I've no salt bacon
Nor any egg by Christ, to fry up together.
But I have leeks, parsley and scallions,
Chives and chervil and half-tape cherries,
And a cow with a calf and a cart-mare
To draw my dung afield during dry spells.
And we must live by this means of life till Lammas time
And by then I hope to have harvest in my fields;
Then may I make dinner just as I like."

All the poor people then fetched peascods,
Beans and baked apples they brought by the lapful,
And offered Piers this present with which to please Hunger.
Hunger ate it all in haste and asked for more.
For fear then poor folk fed Hunger quickly
With cream and curds, with cress and other herbs.
By then harvest drew near and new corn came to market.
And people were happy and fed Hunger deliciously.
And then Glutton with good ale put Hunger to sleep.
And then Hunger refused to work and wandered around.
Nor'd any beggar eat bread in which there were beans,
But the finest white bread and of pure wheat,
Nor no way would they drink half penny ale
But the best and brownest that brewers well.
Laborers with no land to live on but their own hands.

8. For charity's sake.
9. Cheaper kind of bread, standard fare for the poor.
1. A generic name for a horse, a farm horse, a kitchen horse.
As a herald of arms does when adventurous knights come to jousted. 

Old Jews of Jerusalem sang for joy. 
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. 

Then I asked Faith what all this activity meant, 
And who should joust in Jerusalem? "Jesus," he said, 
"And fetch the Fiend the fruit of Piers the plowman."

"Is Piers in this place?" I said, and he looked at me knowingly: 
"Liberum+dei+arborum+" has for love undertaken 
That this Jesus for his gentility will joust in Piers' armor, 
In his helmet and in his mail, humana natura. 
So that Christ not be known as consummata deus. 
In the plate-armor of Piers the plowman this cavalier will ride, 
For no dent will damage him or in deteine parts. 

"Who will joust with Jesus," I said, "Jews or scribes?" 

"No," Faith said, "but the Fiend and False-doom-to-die. 
Death says he will undo and bring down 
All that live or look on land or in water. 
Life says he lies and lays his life as pledge, 
That for all Death can do, within three days, he'll walk 
And fetch from the Fiend the fruit of Piers the plowman, 
And lay it wherever he likes and Lucifer bind 
And beat down death and bring death to death for ever. 
O death, I will be thy death, thy bite."

Then came Pilate with many people, sedes pro tribunali. 
To see how doubtfully Death would do and t' judge both their rights. 
The Jews and the justices were against Jesus. 
And all the court cried "Crucifige" loud. 
Then a prosecutor appeared before Pilate and said, 
"This Jesus made jokes and despised our Jewish Temple. 
To demolish it in one day, and in three days after 
Rebuild it anew—here he stands who said it— 
Both as long and as large, aloft and on ground, 
And as broad as it was ever; this we all hear."

"Crucifige" said a court officer, "he practices witchcraft. 
"Tolle, Tolle!" said another. And took sharp thorns 
And began to make of green thorns a garland 
And set it roughly on his head, and then hatefully said, 
"Ave, raby, 4 that sordidrel said, and polled needs at his eyes; 
And they nailed him with three nails nailed upon a cross.
And with a pole put poison up to his lips
And bade him drink, to delay his death and lengthen his days,
And said, "If he's subtle, he'll help himself now;"
And "If you're Christ—and Christ, God's Son—
Come down from this cross and then we'll believe!
That Life loves you and won't let you die."
"Consummatum est," said Christ and started to swoon.
Precious and pale, like a dying prisoner.
The Lord of Life and Light then laid his eyes together.
For dread the day withdrew and dark became the sun;
The wall of the Temple split apart all to pieces,
The hard rock completely even, and darkest night it seemed;
The earth shivered and shook as if it were alive.
And dead men for that din came out of deep graves
And told why the storm had lasted so long:
"For a bitter battle," the dead body said.
"Life and Death in this darkness destroy one another,
And no man will know for sure who shall have the mastery
Before Sunday, around sunrise," and sank with that to earth.
Some said he was God's Son who died so fairly,
Indeed this was the Son of God,8
And some said, "He's a sorcerer; good that we test
Whether he's dead or not dead before he's taken down."
At that time two thieves suffered death.
Upon crosses beside Christ, such was the common law,
A court officer came and cracked their legs in two.
And the arms after of each of those thieves.
But there was no pain so bold as to touch God's body;
Because he was a knight and a king's son, Kindly granted that time
That no pain had nerve enough to touch him in dying.
But a blind knight with a sharply honed spear came forth,
Named Longinus,9 as the record shows, and he had long lost his sight;
Before Pilate and the other people in the place he waited in readiness.
Over his protests he was forced at that time
To just with Jesus, this blind Jew Longinus;
For they were all gutless who hovered or stood there
To touch him or contact him or take him down and bury him,
Except this blind bachelor, who pierced him through the heart.
The blood spurted down the spear and spread open the knight's eyes.
Then the knight fell straight on his knees and cried Jesus mercy—
"It was against my will," he said, "that I was made to wound you."
And sighed and said, "Softly I repeat it."
For the deed that I've done I put myself in your grace.
Both my land and my body take at your pleasure,
And have mercy on me, righteously Jesus!" and right with that he wept.

Then Faith began fiercely to upbraid the false Jews?Called them low-down no-goods, accursed forever:
"For this was a vile villainy; may vengeance fell upon you
Who made the blind beat the dead—this was a punk's doing!
Conted low-downs! It was never knighthood
To beat a bound body with any bright weapon.
Yet he's taken the prize for all his great wounds,
For your champion rider, chief knight of you all,
Surrendered crying out defeat, right at the wall of Jesus.
When this darkness passes, Death shall be vanquished,
And you clowns have lost, for Life shall have mastery
And your uninterred freedom fill into servitude,
And all your children, charls, will never achieve prosperity,
Nor have lordship over land or any land to till,
And as barren be, and live by usury,
Which is a life that our Lord forbids in all laws.
Now your good times are over, as Daniel told you,
When Christ through the cross overcame, your kingdom will fall apart.
When the holy of holies comes, it ceases, etc."
What for fear of wonder and of the false Jews
I withdrew in that darkness to descend ad inferna;1
And there I surely saw, secundum scripturas, 1
Out of the west, as it were, a young woman, as I thought,
Came walking on the way, hallowed she looked,
Mercy that maid was named, a mild thing as well
And a very good-willed maidens and modest of speech.
Her sister, as it seemed, came walking softly
Squinted out of the east, and westward she was headed,
A comely and pure creature, Truth was her name.
Because of the virtue that followed her, she was never afraid.
When these maidens met, Mercy and Truth,
They asked each other about this great wonder,
About the dead and the darkness and how the day dawned,
And what a light and a shining lay before hell.
"I'm astonished by this business, in faith," said Truth,
"And I'm coming to discover what this wonder means."
"Don't marvel at it," said Mercy, "joy is its meaning.
A maid called Mary, and mother without contact
With any kind of creature, conceived through speech
And grace of the Holy Ghost, grew great with child,
Without womanly spot brought him into this world;
And that my tale is true I take God to witness.
Since this baby was born thirty winters have passed,
Died and suffered death this day about midday;
And that is the cause of this eclipse that now shuts out the sun.

9.8 Longinus appears in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, which was the principal source of this account of Christ's Martyrdom.
9.9 It is finished (John 19:30).
9.10 Matthew 27:34.
9.12 This and the next 19 lines are an example of late medieval illuminations.
2. He descendeditchelle (from the Apocodes Creed)
3. According to the Scriptures.
And I'll dance to their tune—do the same, sister!

For Jesus joined well, joy begins to dawn.

In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness.

Love, who is my lover, sent me such letters
That my sister Mercy and I shall save mankind,
And that God has forgiven and grunted to all mankind.
Mercy, my sister, and me to tell them all our
And that Christ has corrected the nature of righteousness.
Into peace and pity out of his own grace.

Look, here's the letter patent! said Peace, "in peace in idium—
And that this deed shall endure—dominam et requires:"
"Do you save?" said Righteousness, "or are you just drunk!
Do you believe that yeonder light might unlock hell?
And save man's soul? Sister, never believe it?
At the world's beginning, God gave the judgment himself.

That Adam and Eve and all their issue
Should downright die and dwell in pain forever.

If they touched that tree and ate of its fruit.

Afterwards Adam against his prohibition.

Are of the fruit and fowook, as it were.
The love of our Lord and his teachings, too.

And followed what the Fiend taught and his flesh's will.
Against reason, I, Righteousness, record this with Truth.

That their pain is perpetual—no prayer can help them.
Therefore let them chew as they chose and let's not fight about it,

sisters,

For it is care past cure, the bate that they are."

And I shall prove," said Peace, "their pain must end,
And finally their woe must turn into well-being.

For had they known no woe, they'd not know well-being;
For no one knows well-being who never suffered woe,
Nor what hot hunger is who never was famished.

Who could naturally describe with color
If all the world were white or all things swan-white?

If there were no night, I believe no man
Should really know what day means;
Or had God suffered at the hands of some one other than himself,
He'd never have known for sure whether death is sour or sweet.

If ever would a very rich man, who lives in rest and health.

Know what woe is if there were no natural death.

So God, who began all, of his good will
Became man of a maiden, to save mankind.

And suffered to be sold to see the sorrow of dying,
Which unites all care and is the beginning of rest.

For until plague meets with us, I give you assurance,
Nobody knows, as I see it, the meaning of enough.

—William Langland—

In meaning that man shall be drawn out of munkness
While this light and this beam will blind Lucifer.

For patriarchs and prophets have preached of this often.
That what was foot through a tree, a tree shall wain back,4
And what death brought down, death shall rise up?5

"What you're saying," said Truth, "is nothing but hot air!
For Adam and Eve and Abraham with other
Patriarchs and prophets who lie in pain.
Never believe that yonder light will lift them up
Or have them out of hell—hold your tongue, Mercy!

What you're saying is just a riddle; 1, Truth, know the truth,
That a thing that's once in hell never comes out.
Job the perfect patriarch discards your saying:
Because there is no redemption in hell.3

Then Mercy most mildly mouthed these words:
"From experience," she said, "I hope they'll be saved;
For venom undoes venom, from which I fetch proof
That Adam and Eve shall have remedy.
Of all devoring venoms the vilest is the scorpion's;
No medicine may amend the place where it stings
Until it's dead and applied thereto, and then it destroys
The first poisoning through its own virtue.
And so this death shall undo, I'll bet my life.
All that Death and the Devil first did to Eve.
And just as the deceiver through deceit deceived men first,
So shall grace, which began all, make a good end.
And deceive the deceiver, and that's a good deception:
It takes a trick to undo a trick.6

"Now let's just hold it," said Truth; "it seems to me I see
Out of the nip7 of the north, not very far from here,
Righteousness come running. Let's take it easy.
For she knows more than we—she was before we both were."

"That's true," said Mercy, "and I see here to the south
Where Peace, clothed in patience, comes ready to play;
Love has desired her long—I believe none other.
But Love has sent her some letter about what this light means
That hovers over hell thus; she'll tell us."8

When Peace, clothed in patience, approached them both,
Righteousness reverenced Peace in her rich clothing
And prayed Peace to tell her to what place she was going
And whom she meant to gladden in her gay garments.

"My wish is to go," said Peace, "and welcome them all
Who for many a day I could not see for munkness of sin,
Adam and Eve and many others in hell.
Moses and many more will sing merry

4. The first line here the four that Adam and Eve are,
duly transcribing homelaid; the second line is the
eclat on which Christ was crucified, thereby redeeming
hominolad.
5. Compare with Jok 7:9
6. From a brief song on Palm Sunday.
9. In peace to the selfsame... I will find out (Psalm 46:9).
Therefore, God of his goodness the first man Adam
Set up in first solace and in sovereign joy;
And then suffered him to sin, in order to feel sorrow,
To know thereby what well-being was, to understand it naturally.
And afterward, God ventured himself and took Adam's nature
To know what he had suffered in three different places:
Both in heaven and on earth—now he knew all joy.
But prove all things; hold fast that which is good.
So it shall go for these folk: their folly and their sin
Shall reach them what love is and bliss without end.
For nobody knows what war is where peace rules
Nor what is real well-being till he's taught by woe-is-me.

Then there was a person with two broad eyes:
A book that good father was named, a bold man of speech.
By God's body,' said this Book, 'I will bear witness,
That when this baby was born a star shone
So that all the wise men in the world fully agreed
That such a baby was born in Bethlehem city.
Who should save man's soul and destroy sin.
And all the elements,' said the Book, 'bear witness of this.
But he was God that made everything the sky showed first:
These in heaven took stella coniuncta,
And knelt it like a torch to reverence his birth:
The line followed the Lord into the low earth.
The witness of the Lord that was God, for he walked on it dry:
Peter the Apostle perceived his passage.
And as he went on the water knew him well, and said,
'Lord, bid me come to thee.'
And oh, how the sun locked up her light in herself.
When she saw him suffer, who made the sun and sea!
Oh, how the earth for heaviness that he would suffer
Quaked as if alive and the rocks cracked also!
Oh no, hell might not hold, but opened when God suffered
And let out Simon's sons to see him hang on cross.
He should not see death.

And now shall Lucifer believe it, loath though he be;
For Jesus comes yonder as a giant with an engine
To break and beat down all that oppose him
And to have out of hell all those he pleases.
And yet I, Book, will be burnt if he not arise to life
And comfort all his kin and bring them out of care
And all joy of the Jews dissolve and desist.

And unless they reverence this resurrection and honor the cross
And believe in a new law, he be lost body and soul.
"Quiet," said Truth; "I both hear and see.
A spirit speaks to hell and bid the gates be opened.
Lift up your gates.
A loud voice within that light said to Lucifer:
"Princes", of this place, quickly undo these gates,
For he comes here with crown, the ring of all glory.
Then Satan sighed and said to Hell,
"Such a light against our leave fetched away Lazarus!
Care and enmendence is come to us all.
If this king comes in, he'll fetch mankind
And lead it where Lazarus is and bind me easily.
Parratheph and prophets have long talked of this.
That such a lord and light shall lead them all hence.
But rise up, Ragnarock, and hand over all the bars
That Belshazzar your grandfather beat with your mother,
And I shall block this lord and stop his light.
Before we're blinded by this brightness, let's go bar the gates.
Let's check and chain and stop every chink.
So that no light leaks in through louvre or loophole.
Ashuratho, call out, and have out our boys.
Colting and his kin to save the castle.
Boiling brimstone pour it out burning
All hot on their heads who come near the walls,
Set high tension cross bows and brazen guns
And shoot out enough shot to blind his squadrons.
Set Mahmet's at the siege-engine and throw out millstrokes
And with hooks and caliprops let's block them all!
"Listen," said Lucifer, 'for I know this lord;
Both this lord and this light, I knew him long ago.
No death may hurt this lord, nor devil's cunning.
And where he wili is his way—but let him beware the dangers:
If he deprives me of my rights, he robs me by a power play.
For by right and reason the crowd that is here
Belongs to me body and soul, both good and evil.
For he himself said it, who is Sire of heavens.
That Adam and Eve and all their issue
Should grievously die and dwell here forever.
If they touched a tree or took an apple from it.
Thus this lord of light made such a law.
And since he is a loyal lord I can't believe
He'll deprive us of our rights, since reason damned them.
And since we've possessed them seven thousand winters.
Take note, ye wise clerks and ye wise lawyers,
That ye not mislead unlettered men, for David in the end
Witnesses in his writing what is the reward of liars.

Piers Plowman, Passus 20

5. John 12:31, common "be our end", "prince of this world" in a title of the devil.
8. Behold the Lamb of God (John 1:29).
10. "Therfore", a common term in scholastic argument, used to introduce the logical conclusion to an argument.
But through right and reason ransom here my servants.

I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

So what was gotten with guile, is now through grace won back.

And as Adam and all through a tree died
And all through a tree shall return to life.

And now your guilt begins to turn back on you

And my grace to grow wider and wider.

The bitterness you've brewed, enjoy it now yourself,

You who are doctor of death, drink what you've mixed!

For I who am Lord of life, love is my drink,

And for that drink I died today, as it seemed.

But I will drink from no deep ditch of learning

But from the common cups of all Christian souls;

But your drink becomes death and deep hell your bowl.

I fought so, I thirst even more for the sake of man's soul.

I thirst.

May no sweet wine or cider or precious drink

Fully wet my whistle or my thirst slake.

Till grape harvest time fall in the vale of Jehosaphat,

And I drink fully ripe new wine, resurrectio mortuorum.

And then I shall come as king, with crown and with angels,

And have out of hell all men's souls.

Friends and kindred shall stand before me

And be at my bidding, of blame or of pain.

But to be merciful to man then my nature demands,

For we are brothers of one blood, but not all in baptism.

But all that are my full brothers in blood and in baptism

Shall never come to hell again, once they are out.

To thee only have I sworn, and have done evil before thee.

It's not the practice on earth to hang any felons

More often than once, though they were traitors.

And if the king of the kingdom come in the time

When a thief should suffer death or other sentence.

The law requires he grant him a reprieve if he sees him.

And I who am King of Kings shall come at such time

When doom dams to death all the wicked,

And if law wills I look on them it lies within my grace

Whether they die or die not, did they never so ill.

Be it to any extent paid for, the boldness of their sin,

I may do mercy out of my righteousness and all my true words.

For holy writs that I take satisfaction from those who did ill,

As nullum malum impune, et nullum bonum meminisset.

And so on all the wicked I will take vengeance here.

And yet my kind nature in my keen anger shall constrain my will—

Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thy indignation—

To be merciful to many of my half-brothers.

For blood may see blood both thirsty and cold

But blood may not see blood bleed without taking pity.

I hard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.

But my righteousness and right shall reign in hell,

And mercy over all mankind before me in heaven.

For I'd be an unkind king unless I help my kin,

And namely in such need that needs to ask for help.

"Enter not into judgment with thy servant.

Thus by law," said our Lord, "I will lead out of here

The people I love and who believe in my coming.

But for the lies that you lied, Lucifer, to Eve

You shall bitterly abide," God said, and bound him with chains.

Astonished and company had in noks and crannies,

They dared not look on our Lord, the least of them all,

But let him lead forth those he liked and leave behind whomsoever he pleased.

Many hundreds of angels then harped and sang,

Flesh, flesh, flesh of God reigns as God.

Then Peace piped a note of poetry:

After darkest clouds, the sun will shine bright;

And love shall quicken after every fight.

"After fairest showers," said Peace, "brightest is the sun;

There is no warmer weather than after wetty clouds,

Nor any love dearer, nor dearer friends,

Than after war and wreckage when love and peace are masters.

There was never a war in this world nor wickeder envy

That love, if it were wanted, could not turn it to laughter,

And Peace through patience strew all perils.

"Truce," said Truth, "You tell us the truth, by Jesus!

Let us kiss each other and clutch in covenant!

"And let no people," said Peace, "perceive that we squabbled,

For nothing's impossible to him who is almighty.

"That's the truth," said Righteousness and kissed Peace reverently,

And Peace her, per secula seculorum.

Mercy and truth have met each other; justice and peace have kissed.

Truth trumpeted then and sang, Te deum laudamus.

And then Love strummed a loud note on the lute,

Behold how good and how pleasant it is, etc."

Till dawn the next day these damselles caroled

On which men rang bells for the resurrection, and right with that, I awaked.
And called Kit my wife and my daughter Galate:
"Arise, and go reverence God's resurrection,
And creep on your knees to the cross and kiss it as a jewel
And most rightfully as a relic, none richer on earth.
For it bore God's blessed body for our good,
And it terrified the Fiend, for such is its might
No gristy ghost may glide in its shadow!"

"PIERS PLOWMAN" AND ITS TIME

The Rising of 1381

The even previously known as the "Peasants' Revolt" is generally referred to by today's historians as the "Rising of 1381," since it is now recognized that it included many members of the commons who were not peasants but rather middle-class landholders, artisans, and so forth. William Langland had a rather ambiguous relation to the rising, for while depicting the conditions that caused it, he refused to endorse its radical social program. When the rebels invoked his character Piers as a cultural hero, he revised Piers Plowman for a second time (the so-called C-text), thus dissociating himself from them. This section brings together a number of documents that record the events of the rising, and more importantly, reveal the subjective voices of contemporary writers to it.

The causes of the rising were varied. Among them was the "Statute of Laborers" enacted by Parliament in 1351 to freeze wages and restrict laborers' mobility, both of which had been increasing as a result of the depopulation caused by the Black Death. The more immediate catalyst, however, was a flat poll tax enacted in 1380, which hurt the poor disproportionately and which the government collected in a particularly ruthless way.

The rising itself was astonishingly brief, beginning at the end of May 1381 and collapsing by the end of July. From the prosperous southern counties of Essex and Kent the rebels marched to London, swearing loyalty to one another and to Richard II. Their hostility was directed against the church hierarchy and the feudal lords rather than against the monarchy. In London they burned the Savoy Palace, the local residence of the powerful John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and uncle of King Richard. The king, then only fourteen years old, found his advisors ineffectual, and so retreated with them to the Tower of London.

Having agreed to meet the Essex contingent outside the city, at Mile End, the king acceded to their demands of an end to vilainage (serfdom), and ordered his office of chancery to make multiple copies of charters to that effect. During this meeting, some rebels broke into the Tower of London and beheaded two of the most hated men in the kingdom, Simon Sudbury (the king's chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury) and Robert Hales (his treasurer).

Afterward, they displayed their heads on London Bridge, as a sign that they were traitors to the commons.

The next day the king met with the Kentish rebels, again outside the city, at Smethfield. Here their captain Wat Tyler demanded not only the abolition of vilainage but fixed rents, partial disemboweling of the church and disposal of its goods to the poor, and punishment of all "traitors" held to be responsible for the poll tax. In the course of a scuffle, the Lord Mayor of London, William Walworth, stabbed Tyler and mortally wounded him; thereafter, the king rode before the rebels and declared himself their new captain, successfully leading them off the field.

Adam and Eve, detail of a misericord, c. 1379. Misericords were shallow seats in the choir stalls of medieval churches, on which workmen could rest, still standing, during the long celebrations of the Mass and Daily Office. Their undersides were often carved with animal grotesques and scenes of common life, both seen in this depiction of Adam and Eve from a misericord in Winchester Cathedral. Eve spins and Adam digs, in a moment reminiscent of the couple from John Ball's sermon "Whan Adam dall and Eve spinn, / who was thynne a gentleman?"

Tyler's death broke the will of the rebels, and the king promptly revoked the charters freeing the serfs. In a series of trials, he prosecuted the instigators, among them John Ball, the priest who had shortly before preached to the rebels at Blackheath the famous sermon challenging the division of society into three estates: "Whan Adam dall and Eve spinn, / who was thynne a gentleman?" Ball was found guilty of treason, and drawn, hanged, and quartered. Aside from such punishment, there were few apparent effects of the rising, although the nobles and the clergy relented in their treatment of the commons, and in the long run, the institution of vilainage declined. For the ruling class itself, the rising caused intense anxiety. John Gower, in his allegorical account, The Voice of One Crying, reports hiding in the woods to escape the peasants. Like him, the chroniclers like Thomas of Walsingham generally present the rebels as mad beasts.

What is perhaps most significant about the written reception of the rising is the languages—Latin, French, and English—in which it occurs. Like Gower's Voice of One Crying, the chronicles are generally written in Latin, although the Anonymus Chronicle, from which a passage is included here, is in French. Langland and Chaucer wrote in English, while the short poem below, The Course of Reuel, is masque-like, alternating English lines with Latin ones. Although there is little written evidence in the voice of the rebels themselves (who were generally illiterate), there are two tantalizing scraps identified as John Ball's letters, written in English, although embedded in Anonymus Chronicle accounts of Ball's trial and execution. It has been suggested recently that the most important fact about the rebel speeches and writings is their "vernacularity"—the fact that they appear in a language that the common people could understand.
people around Saint Katherine's. And he caused it to be read to them, the man who read it standing up on an old chair above the others so that all could hear. All this time the king remained in the Tower in great distress of mind. And when the commons had heard the bill, they said that it was nothing but a trifling and mockery. Therefore, they returned to London and had it cried around the city that all lawyers, all the men of the Chantries and the Exchequer and everyone who could write a word or a letter should be beheaded; wherever they could be found. At this time they burnt several more houses within the city. The king himself ascended to a high turret of the Tower to watch the fires; then he came down again, and sent for the lords to have their counsel. But they did not know how to advise him, and were surprisingly abashed.

On the next day, Friday, the commons of the country and the commons of London assembled in fearful strength, to the number of a hundred thousand or more, besides some four score who remained on Tower Hill to watch those who were within the Tower. Some went to Mile End, on the way to Brentwood, to wait for the king's arrival, because of the proclamation that he had made. But others came to Tower Hill, and when the king knew that they were there, he sent them orders by a messenger to join their companions at Mile End, saying that he would come to them very soon. And at this time of the morning he advised the archbishop of Canterbury and the others who were in the Tower, to go down to the little water-gate, and take a boat and save themselves. And the archbishop proceeded to do this; but a wicked woman raised a cry against him, and he had to turn back to the Tower, to his own confusion.

And by seven of the bell the king himself came to Mile End, and with him his mother in a carriage, and also the earls of Buckingham, Kent, Warwick and Oxford, as well as Sir Thomas Percy, Sir Robert Knoll, the mayor of London, and many knights and squires, and Sir Aubrey de Vere carried the royal sword. And when the king arrived and the commons saw him, they knelt down to him, saying "Welcome our Lord King Richard, if it please you, and we will not have any other king but you." And Wat Tyghler, their master and leader, prayed on behalf of the commons that the king would suffer them to take and deal with all the traitors against him and the land. The king granted that they should freely seize all who were traitors and could be proved to be such by process of law. The said Walter and the commons were carrying two banners as well as persons and pennances5 while they made their petition to the king. And they required that henceforth no man should be a traitor nor make homage or any type of service to any lord, but should give four pence for an acre of land. They asked also that no one should serve any man except at his own will and by means of regular covenant. And at this time the king had the commons sprayed in two lines, and had it proclaimed before them that he would confirm and grant that they should be free, and generally should have their will and that they could go through all the realm of England and catch all traitors and bring them in safety, and then he would deal with them as the law demanded.

Because of this grant Wat Tyghler and the commons took their way to the Tower, to seize the archbishop and the others while the king remained at Mile End. Meanwhile the archbishop had sung his mass devoutly in the Tower, and confessed

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1. This gripping account describes the rebel Wat Tyler's confrontation with the King. Written in French rather than Latin, The Anonimale Chronicle is considered to be more contemporary and more balanced than previous Latin accounts like that of Thomas of Waltham. Translated by R. B. Ashurst.

2. The common people as opposed to the nobility or the clergy are the third estate.

3. There is a hope of contacting me.

4. The beautiful palace of John of Courcy, the King's powerful uncle.

5. Chantries held the archives of justice and the Exchequer dealing with the collection of revenue. The Latin chronicles say the rising was a threat to the king. Thomas of Waltham, for example, reports that the rebels gladly burned records they saw as guaranteeing the local legal power over them.

6. Small flags and streamers were on a line.
the prior of the Hospital of Clerkenwell and others; and then he heard two or three masses and chanted the Compline, and the Pater Noster and Ave, and the Seven Penitential Psalms, and the Litany; and when he was at the words "Oremus sancta omnia pro nobis" [All saints pray for us], the commons entered and dragged him out of the chapel of the Tower, and struck and hustled him roughly, as they did also the others who were with him, and led him to Tower Hill. There they cut off the heads of Master Sion of Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, of Sir Robert Hales,1 High Prebend of the Hospitall of Saint John's of Clerkenwell, Treasurer of England, of Brother William of Appleton, a great physician and surgeon, and one who had much influence with the king and the Duke of Lancaster. And some time after they beheaded John Legge, the king's serjeant-at-arms, and with him a certain juror. At the same time the commons had proclaimed that whosoever could catch any Fleming or other alien of any nation, might cut off their heads; and so they did accordingly. Then they took the heads of the archbishop and of the others and put them on wooden polls, and carried them before them in procession through all the city as far as the shrine of Westminster Abbey, to the contemplation of themselves, of God and of Holy Church; for which reason vengeance descended on them shortly afterwards. Then they returned to London Bridge and set the heads of the archbishop above the gate, with the heads of eight others they had executed, so that all who passed over the bridge could see them. This done, they went to the church of Saint Martin's in the Vintry, and found therein thirty-five Flemings, whom they dragged outside and beheaded in the street. On that day there were beheaded 140 or 160 persons. Then they took their way to the places of Lombards and other aliens, and broke into their houses, and robbed them of all their goods that they could discover. So it went on for all that day and the night following with hideous cries and horrible tumult.

At this time, because the Chancellor had been beheaded, the king made the earl of Arundel Chancellor for the day, and entrusted him with the Great Seal; and all that day he caused various clerks to write out charters, patents, and letters of protection, granted to the commons in consequence of the matters before mentioned, without taking any fines for the sealing or transcription.

On the next day, Saturday, great numbers of the commons came into Westminster Abbey at the hour of Tierce,2 and there they found John Imworth, Marshal of the Marshals and warden of the prisoners, a tormentor without pity; he was near the shrine of Saint Edward, embracing a marble pillar, hoping for aid and succor from the saint to preserve him from his enemies. But the commons wrenched his arms away from the pillar of the shrine, and dragged him into Cheapside, and there beheaded him. And at the same time they took from Bread Street a valet named John of Greenfield, merely because he had spoken well of Brother William Appleton and the other murdered persons; and they brought him into Cheapside and beheaded him. All this time the king was having it cried through the city that every one should go peaceably to his own country and his own house, without doing more mischief; but to this the commons would not agree.

And on this same day, at three hours after noon, the king came to Westminster Abbey and about two hundred persons with him. The abbot and convent of the said

1. Sudbury and Hales were especially hated by the commons—see chancellor of England, for instance, the pillory, and the latter, as treasurer, for collecting it.
2. An area outside the walls of the city of London.
3. The reference is obscure. It may refer to a claim by the

abbey, and the canons and vicars of Saint Stephen's Chapel, came to meet him in procession, clothed in their cope and their feet bare, halfway to Charing Cross; and they brought him to the abbey, and then to the high altar of the church. The king made his prayers devoutly, and left an offering for the altar and the relics. Afterwards he spoke to the king a prayer, and confessed to him, and remained with him some time. Then the king caused a proclamation to be made that all the commons of the country who were still within the city should come to Smithfield to meet him there: and so they did.

And when the king with his retinue arrived there, he turned to the east, in a place before Saint Bartholomew's house of canons and the commons armed themselves in bands of great size on the west side. At this moment the mayor of London, William of Walsingham, came up, and the king ordered him to approach the commons, and make their chieftains come to him. And when he was called by the mayor, this chieftain, Wat Tyghler of Maidstone by name, approached the king with great confidence, mounted on a little horse so that the commons might see him. And he dismounted, holding in his hand a dagger which he had taken from another man: and when he had dismounted he bent his knee and took the king by the hand, shaking his arm forcibly and roughly, saying to him, "Brother, be of good comfort and joyful, for you shall have, in the fortitude of that to come, forty thousand more commons than you have at present, and we shall be good companions." And the king said to Walter, "Why will you not go back to your own country?" But the other answered, with a great oath, that neither he nor his fellows would leave until they had got their charter as they wished to have it with the inclusion of certain points which they wished to demand. Tyghler threatened that the lords of the realm would rue it bitterly if these points were not settled at the commons' will. Then the king asked him what were the points which he wished to have considered, and that he should have them freely and without contradiction, written out and sealed. Thereupon the said Wat Tyghler repeated the points which were to be demanded; and he asked that there should be no law except for the law of Winchester and that henceforward there should be no outlawry in any process of law, and that no lord should have lordship in future, but it should be divided among all men, except for the king's own lordship. He also asked that the goods of Holy Church should not remain in the hands of the religious, nor in the hands of any other person except for the church, nor should any church have a sufficient maintenance and the rest of their goods should be divided among the people of the parish. And he demanded that there should be only one bishop in England and only one prelature, and all the lands and tenements of the possessors should be taken from them and divided among the commons, only reserving for them a reasonable sustenance. And he demanded that there should be no more villeins in England, and no servitude or villeinage but that all men should be free and of one condition. To this the king gave an easy answer, and said that Wat should have all that he could fairly grant, reserving only for himself the regality of his crown. And he ordered him to go back to his own home, without causing further delay.

During all the time that the king was speaking, no lord or counselor dared to offer to give an answer to the commons in any place except for the king himself. Presently Wat Tyghler, in the presence of the king, sent for a jug of water to rinse his mouth, because of the great heat that he felt; and as soon as the water was
brought him round his mouth in a very rude and villainous manner before the king. And then he made them bring him a jug of ale, and drank a great draught, and then, in the presence of the king, climbed on his horse again. At that time a certain valet from Kent, who was among the king's retainers, asked to see the said Wat, chiefman of the commons. And when he saw him, he said aloud that he was the greatest thief and robber in all Kent. Wat heard these words, and commanded the valet to come out to him, taking his head in his hand as a sign of malice; but Wat himself refused to go to him for fear that he had of the others there. But at last the lords made the valet go out to Wat, to see what the latter would do before the king. And when Wat saw him he ordered one of his followers, who was mounted on horseback and carrying a banner displayed, to dismount and behand the said valet. But the valet answered that he had done nothing worthy of death, for what he had said was true, and he would not deny it, although he could not lawfully debate the issue in the presence of his liege lord, without leave, except in his own defense: but that he could do without reproach, for whoever struck him would be struck in return. For these words Wat wanted to strike the valet with his dagger, and would have slain him in the king's presence; but because he tried to do so, the mayor of London, William of Walworth, reason made with the said Wat for his violent behavior and contempt, done in the king's presence, and arrested him. And because he arrested him, the said Wat stabbed the mayor with his dagger in the body in great anger. But, as it pleased God, the mayor was wearing armor and took no harm, but like a hardy and vigorous man drew his dagger and struck back at the said Wat, giving him a deep cut in the neck, and then a great blow on the head. And during this scuffle a color of the king's household drew his sword, and ran Wat two or three times through the body, mortally wounding him. Wat spurred his horse, crying to the commons to avenge him, and the horse carried him some four score paces, and then he fell to the ground half dead. And when the commons saw him fall, and did not know for certain how it happened, they began to bend their bows and to shoot. Therefore the king himself spurred his horse, and rode out to them, commanding them that they should all come to him at the field of Saint John of Clerkenwell.

Meanwhile the mayor of London rode as hastily as he could back to the city, and commanded those who were in charge of the twenty-four wards to have it cried round their wards, that every man should arm himself as quickly as he could, and came to the king's aid in Saint John's Fields, where the commons were, for he was in great trouble and necessity. But at this time almost all of the knights and squires of the king's household, and many others, were so frightened of the affray that they left the liege lord and went each on his own way.

Afterwards, when the king had reached the open fields, he made the commons array themselves on the west side. And presently the aldermen came to him in a body, bringing with them the keepers of the wards arrayed in several bands, a fine company of well-armed men in great strength. And they enveloped the commons like sheep within a pen. Meanwhile, after the mayor had sent the keepers of the town on their way to the king, he returned with a good company of lances to Smithfield in order to make an end of the captain of the commons. And when he came to Smithfield he failed to find there the said captain Wat Tyghler, at which he marveled much, and asked what had become of the raider. And he was told that Wat had been carried by a group of the commons to the hospital for the poor near Saint Bartholomew's, and put to bed in the chamber of the master of the hospital. The mayor went there and found him, and had him carried out to the middle of Smithfield, in the presence of his companions, and had him beheaded. And so ended his wretched life. But the mayor had his head set on a pole and carried before him to the king, who still remained in the field. And when the king saw the head he had it brought near him to subdue the commons, and thanked the mayor greatly for what he had done. And when the commons saw that their chiefman, Wat Tyghler, was dead in such a manner, they fell to the ground there among the corn, like foolish men, imploring the king for mercy for their misdeeds. And the king benevolently granted them mercy, and most of them took to flight.

Three Poems on the Rising of 1381

John Ball's First Letter

John Ball to Saint Mary Priests, greeteth well all manner of men, and biddeth them in name of the Trinitie, Father, Sonne, & holy Ghost, stand manlike together in truth, & helpe truth, and truth shall helpe you:

now ragneth pride in price, scorneth* is holde[n] wise
lochery without shame, glutonie without blame,
enuye ragneth with reason, reigns
and sloath is taken in great season.

God doe boote* for nowe is time. Amen.

John Ball's Second Letter

Letter of the Commoners to the King

Let the King knowe heereby that the Commons do make amends for their late disobediency;

Iohn schep, som-tyme seynyte mate prest of yowke, and now of colchester, Greeth wel Iohnameles & Iohn the muliere and Iohn carrtere, and biddeth hem thei be war of golfe [frenche] in boagh, and stondeth to-gidere in godes name, and biddeth Pes ploughman / go to his werk and chaistate wel hobo the robbere; and taketh with yow Iohn Treweam and alle his felowes and no mo, and like schappe you to on heued! and no mo.

Iohn the muliere hath y-groundes smal, smal, smal.

The kynges some of heuesen schul paye for al.

be war or the be wo,* becuase or be sorry

knoweth your frend fro your loo.

Letter of John Ball to the King

...
The Course of Refred

This death test so many of the strong! 1

The Kyng therof had small, 2

it was in the hands of the greedy ones,

And therfore he was brought toiddles. 3

giving cause to an end of sorrow,

In Kent care 4 be gan, 5

on account of the sins of the wicked.

On roostes they be huncused 6 they ran,

wool attacking the rulers

In reges Regem, noque genites, 7

bear their shameful weapons

In kylde they were there Chieveteyses, 8

neither king of the realm, nor the people

The bishop 9 wen they sloughted, 10

nobody rising above their station

The living community of Englishmen

And so theye went to towte, 11

when removed from peace by faiths

Aultanum corpora stultus. 12

nor say his prayers to Christ

Salezem semely set. 13

in the sight of the fire

And so theye went to towte, 12

weeping over the blood of the faithful.

And so theye went to towte, 12

weeping over the blood of the faithful.

And so theye went to towte, 12

weeping over the blood of the faithful.

And so theye went to towte, 12

weeping over the blood of the faithful.
he saw different thongs of the rabble transformed into different kinds of domestic animals. He says, moreover, that those domestic animals were unfaithful to their true nature and took on the barbarousness of wild beasts. In accordance with the separate division of this book, which is divided into seven parts (as will appear more clearly below in its headings), he treats further in terms of the causes for such outrages taking place among men. • • •

[WAT TILTS AS A JACKDAW INVITING THE PEASANTS TO RISE]

Here he says that in his dream he saw that when all the aforementioned maidens stood herded together, a certain Jackdaw (as Englishmen, which is commonly called Wat) assumed the rank of commander over the others. And to tell the truth of the matter, this Wat was their leader.

When this great multitude of monsters like wild beasts stood united, a multitude like the sands of the sea, there appeared a Jackdaw, well instructed in the art of speaking, which no cage could keep at home. While all were looking on, this bird spread his wings and claimed to have top rank, although he was unworthy. Just as the Devil was placed in command over the army of the lower world, so this scoundrel was in charge of the wicked rabble. A harsh voice, a force expression, a very faithfulness likeness to a deity's head—these things gave token of his appearance. He checked the murmuring and all kept silent so that the sound from his mouth might be heard better. He ascended to the top of a tree, and with the voice from his open mouth he uttered such words as these to his compatriots:

"O you low sort of wretches, which the world has brought for a long time by its law, look, now the day has come when the peasantry will triumph and will force the freemen to get off their lands. Let all honor come to an end, let justice perish, and let all that once existed endure further in the world. Let the law give over which used to hold us in check with its justice, and from here on let our court rule.

The whole mob was silent and took note of the speaker's words, and they liked every command he delivered from his mouth. The rabble lent a deluded ear to his fickle talk, and it saw none of the future things that would result. For when he had been honored in this way by the people, he quickly grabbed all the land for himself. Indeed, when the people had unadvisedly given themselves into servitude, he called the populace together and gave orders. Just as a bellow usually grows calm after a stiff breeze and then a wave swells by the blast of a whirlwind, so the Jackdaw stirred up all the others with his outrageous shouting, and he thrust the people's minds toward war. The stupid portion of the people did not know what was a "court" might be, but he ordered them to adopt the laws of force. He said, "Strike," and one man struck. He said, "Kill," and another killed. He said, "Commit crime"; everyone committed it, and did not oppose his will. Everyone he called to in his madness listened with ears pricked up, and once aroused to his voice, pursued the [prescribed] course. Thus many an unfortunate man, driven by his persuasive raving, stuck his hand into the fire again and again. All proclaimed in a loud voice, "So be it," so that the sound was like the din of the sea. Stunned by the great noise of their voice, I now could scarcely lift my trembling feet. Yet from a distance I observed how they made their usual arrangements by clashing their hands. For they said this, that the mob from the country would destroy whatever was left of the noble class in the world.

With these words, they all marched together in the same fashion, and the wicked rule of hell led the way. A black cloud mingled with the furies of hell approached, and every wickedness poured into their hearts to destroy it. The earth was so thoroughly soaked with the dew of hell that no virtue could flourish from that time forth. But every vice that a worthy man abhors flourished and filled men's hearts from that time on. Then at midday the Devil attacked and his hand-shot arrow flew during that painful day, Satan himself was freed and on hand, together with all the sinful hand of servile hell. Behold, the untutored heart's sense of shame was lost, and it no longer feared the terrors of crime or punishment. And so when I saw the leaders of hell ruling the world, the nights of heaven were worth nothing. The more I saw them, the more I judged I ought to be afraid of them, not knowing what sort of end would be bound to come.

[THE LAZINESS AND GREED OF PEASANTS]

Now that he has spoken of those of knightly rank who ought to keep the state unharmed, it is necessary to speak of those who are under obligation to enter into the labors of agriculture, which are necessary for obtaining food and drink for the sustenance of the human race.

Now you have heard what knighthood is, and I shall speak in addition of what the guiding principle of other men ought to be. For after knighthood there remains only the peasant rank; the rustics in it cultivate the grains and vineyards. They are the men who seek food for us by the sweat of their heavy toil, as God Himself has decreed. The guiding principle of our first father Adam, which he received from the mouth of God on high, is rightly theirs. For God said to him, when he fell from the glory of Paradise, "O sinner, the sweat and toil of the world be thine; in them shalt thou eat thy bread." So if God's peasant pays attention to the plowshare as it goes along, and if he thus carries on the work of cultivation with his hand, then the fruit which in due course the fertile field will bear and the grape will stand abundant in their due seasons. Now, however, scarcely a farmer wishes to do such work; instead, he wickedly loves everywhere.

An evil disposition is widespread among the common people, and I suspect that the servants of the plow are often responsible for it. For they are sluggish, they are scarce, and they are grasping. For the very little they do they demand the highest pay. Now that this practice has come about, see how one peasant insists upon more than two demanded in days gone by. Yet a short time ago one performed more service than three did now, as those maintain who are well acquainted with the facts. For just as the fox seeks his hole and enter into while the woods are echoing on every side of the hole, so does the servant of the plow, contrary to the law of the land, seek to make a fool of the lord. They desire the leisure of great men, but they have nothing to feed themselves with, nor will they be servants. God and Nature have ordained that they shall serve, but neither knows how to keep them within bounds. Everyone owning land complains in his turn about these people;
each stands in need of them and none has control over them. The peasants of old did not scorn God with impunity or usurp a noble worldly rank. Rather, God imposed servile work upon them, so that the peasantry might subdue its proud feelings; and liberty, which remained secure for freemen, ruled over the serfs and subjected them to its law.

The experience of yesterday makes us better informed as to what perils the unly set possess. As the tawdily tawdry thins out the standing crops if it is not thinned out itself, so does the unly peasant weigh heavily upon the well-behaved ones. The peasant strikes at the subservient and soothes the troublesome, yet the principle which the old order of things teaches is not wrong let the law accordingly cut down the harmful teals of nuble, lest they overtop the nluter grain with their sting. Unless it is struck down first, the peasant race strikes against freemen, no matter what nobility or worth they possess. Its actions outwardly show that the peasantry is base, and it extorts the nobles the less because of their very virtues. Just as lopsided ships begin to sink without the right load, so does the wild peasantry, unless it is held in check.

God and our toil confer and bestow everything upon us. Without toil, man's advantages are nothing. The peasant should therefore put his limbs to work, as is proper for him to do. Just as a barren field cultivated by the plowshare fulfils the granaries and brings home no crop in autumn, so does the worthless churl, the more he is cherished by your love, fail you and bring on your ruin. The serfs perform none of their servile duties voluntarily and have no respect for the law. Whatever the serf's body suffers patiently under compulsion, inwardly his mind turns towards utter wickedness. Miracles happen only contrary to nature; only the divinity of nature can go against its own powers. It is not for man's estate that everyone of the class of serfs should try to set things right.

END OF "PIERS PLJORMAN" AND ITS TIME

MYSTICAL WRITINGS

Throughout the Middle Ages, religious belief was commonly expressed in the great public liturgies: the mass and the Divine Office—those prayers, hymns, and readings performed especially by monastic communities, at the eight liturgical "hours" from dawn until dusk. Private devotion, however, also had a continuous place in medieval Christianity. The British isles enjoyed a particularly rich and ancient tradition of liturgy in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, of which the earliest works were enriched in the late eleventh century by the influential works of Bede and the subsequent work of Bede, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Aneurin's prayers and related works were collected into portable books. Beginning in the thirteenth century, England also produced distinguished, sometimes elaborately decorated psalters—collections of psalms and other prayers—that were often privately owned. Toward the middle of the thirteenth century, an Oxford workshop produced the earliest of the decorated

Books of Hours, a form that was to prove enormously popular across Europe for the rest of the Middle Ages.

Books of Hours typically contained the "Little Hours of the Virgin," an abbreviated version of the Divine Office that allowed for private celebration of the holy hours, as well as other prayers, extracts from the gospels, and the seven penitential psalms. Psalters and Books of Hours both featured texts devoted to the Virgin Mary, only one manifestation of a widespread English tradition. Many were explicitly intended for use by women, both lay and clerical, and emphasized female leadership in their illustrations, as in the scene of women reading from the Bedford Hours (see Color Plate 10). Psalters and especially Books of Hours played a key role in the growth of lay literacy during the late Middle Ages.

By the fourteenth century, then, England had an ancient tradition of private religious devotion and various books created especially for that purpose as well as a growing readership, lay and clerical. Two further, related elements added to the growth in that century of works that have been grouped, largely retroactively, in "mystical." First, across Europe there was a renewed expression of "mystic spirituality," the emotionally, even physically empathetic contemplation of the crucifixion, especially the crucifixion of Christ and the sufferings of the Virgin Mary. This is reflected in the visions of the crucifixion in Taurin 18 of Langland's Piers Plowman, and in many liturgical, as well as in sculpture drawings like that on page 530. Second, widespread dissatisfaction with the established church—a more diffuse sense of spiritual needs left unfulfilled there—led a growing number of Christians to explore more immediate and often private avenues of religious experience. The quest for a mystical union with Christ or God the Father is a particularly ambitious aspect of such exploration.

This search was often exercised, particularly in the lay community and among religious women, in the recently invigorated vernacular, which (whether French or English) had long had a place along with Latin in Books of Hours. Among these expressions were the "wielden" or "wielden" translations of the Bible into Middle English, as well as texts intended for religious recitals and for people seeking mystical experience even as they remained active in the mundane world. These emergent religious aspirations, as well as some of their accompanying fears and tensions, are expressed below in Julian of Norwich's Book of Showings and the Companion Readings that follow it.

Julian of Norwich

1342-1420

Dame Julian of Norwich was an anchorite, a woman dedicated to prayer and contemplation who lived apart from the world, literally enclosed in a modest cell and symbolically "dead" to the secular world. Yet Julian also lived in the midst of the world. Her anchorhold at the church of Saint Julian—hence her name—was in a busy market neighborhood of Norwich. Dame Julian's lifelong stability as an anchorite, and her persistent rhetoric of humility (she most often speaks of herself only as a "creature"), may have masked or softened the daring of her theology. This she developed from decades of meditation on a sequence of sixteen visions of the Crucifixion—"showings"—that she received in extreme illness at age thirty. The urban space and domestic arrangements of Julian's anchorhold serve as an emblem for her theology and her place in the spiritual world. She had a maidservant, and received and

5. A briefly place like a thistle.

*The editor express their gratitude to F. Martin Chalkers for his advice on this section.*