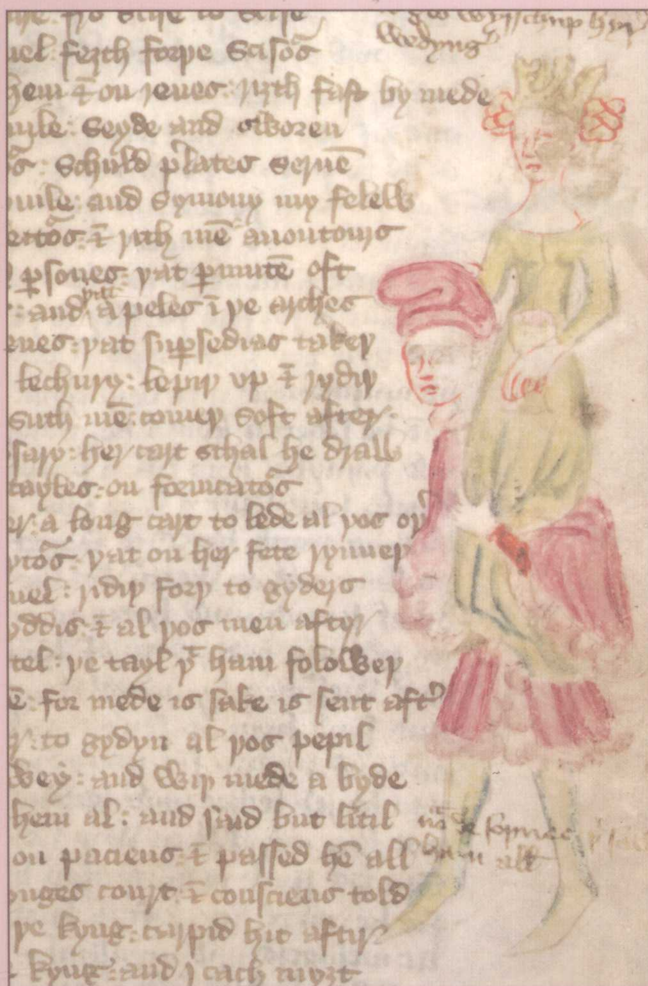
PIERS PLOWMAN

WILLIAM LANGLAND



EDITED BY ELIZABETH ROBERTSON
AND STEPHEN H. A. SHEPHERD

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

William Langland
PIERS PLOWMAN

THE DONALDSON TRANSLATION
MIDDLE ENGLISH TEXT
SOURCES AND BACKGROUNDS
CRITICISM

Edited by

ELIZABETH ROBERTSON
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER

and

STEPHEN H. A. SHEPHERD
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York* • *London*

W. W. Norton & Company has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The Nortons soon expanded their program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By mid-century, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Copyright © 2006 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Translation of the B Text of PIERS PLOWMAN by E. Talbot Donaldson
copyright © 1990 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.
First Edition

The text of this book is composed in Fairfield Medium
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.
Composition by Binghamton Valley Composition, LLC.
Manufacturing by the Courier Companies—Westford Division.
Production Manager: Benjamin Reynolds.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Langland, William, 1130?–1400?
[Piers the Plowman]
Piers Plowman: the Donaldson translation, select authoritative Middle English text, sources and backgrounds, criticism / William Langland; edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Stephen H. A. Shepherd.
p. cm. — (A Norton critical edition)
Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0–393–97559–2 (pbk.)

1. Langland, William, 1330?–1400? Piers the Plowman—Criticism, Textual. 2. Langland, William, 1330?–1400? Piers the Plowman—Sources. 3. Langland, William, 1330?–1400? Piers the Plowman. 4. Christian pilgrims and pilgrimages—Poetry. 5. Christian poetry, English (Middle) 6. Visions—Poetry. 7. Dreams—Poetry. I. Robertson, Elizabeth Ann, 1951– II. Shepherd, Stephen H. A. III. Donaldson, E. Talbot (Ethelbert Talbot), 1940– IV. Title. V. Series.

PR2013.D6 2004
821'.1—dc22

2004057578

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110-0017
www.wwnorton.com
W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House,
75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Preface

Elizabeth Kirk once remarked that there are some books that should never be read for the first time. *Piers Plowman* might be said to be one of those books. One of the masterpieces of the Middle Ages, this fourteenth-century English poem can repeatedly frustrate the reader. It is difficult to follow the plot—as Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall tell us, "Langland is not committed to a narrative structure in any continuous way"[1]—and once a thread emerges, it then leads nowhere in particular or digresses into new sets of ideas and narratives. Nominally, the poem is a dream vision—but it proves to comprise not one, but eight dreams, with two additional dreams within dreams. It is also a pilgrimage that has several protagonists and multiple quests. It resists closure, ending with the search with which it began. Although it is known as a personification allegory, it refuses to keep the allegorical and the literal separate. As Kirk and Judith Anderson write, "it is not the sort of allegory we find in the fifteenth-century play *Everyman*, where personifications seem intended to reduce moral and religious ideas that would otherwise be abstract or difficult to something simple and plain. Quite the contrary: it uses allegory to make the reader think harder and face more problems."[2] It is written in a conventional alliterative medium, but it does not always conform to the technical expectations of that medium; for example, it has lines longer than the traditional alliterative line, it alliterates nouns with seemingly inconsequential words such as prepositions, it eschews the ornate and specialized vocabulary characteristic of alliterative gems such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Morte Arthure*, and the *Wars of Alexander*. According to Derek Pearsall, "the structure of the poem is associative and idiosyncratic, the very sequence of materials often difficult to understand, its handling of dream and allegory shifting, inconsistent, opportunistic; what appears to be its main ordering structure, [the main character, Will's, search for] . . . Dowel Dobet and Dobest, turns out to be a façade, and the central theophanic character, Piers Plowman, a mystery; characters emerge, disappear, re-emerge, problems are taken up and dropped unsolved. By any standards but its own it is near to artistic breakdown."[3]

In addition, the poem's textual history is complex (a situation not necessarily unrelated to the exigencies of its reading). It is known in three versions called the A-, B-, and C-versions—and a fourth, the Z-, has been proposed. The exact relationship among the versions of the poem is uncertain, although it is generally accepted that A, a shorter version, precedes

1. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall, eds. *Piers Plowman* (Evanston, Ill.: York Medieval Texts, 1969), p. 32.
2. Elizabeth Kirk and Judith Anderson, Introduction to *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation by E. Talbot Donaldson* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), p. ix.
3. Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 1977), p. 178.

B and that C is a revision of B, one that clarifies the theology and politics of the previous version. It is also uncertain who wrote the poem, although it is attributed to the narrator of the poem who seems to call himself William Langland. Based on internal evidence offered by the poem, a rough biography has been proposed, although in actuality there is scant evidence for any biography at all. The author might have been born around 1325 and must have died after 1388.[4] The life of the author would thus have spanned the reigns of Edward III (1327–1377) and Richard II (1377–1399). The A-version is dated by some between 1365 and 1370 and the C-text in the late 1390s. If these datings are correct, and if the poem is the product of a single author writing over a long period of time (rather than, for example, someone producing many versions of a poem at the same time for multiple audiences), the poet then wrote, and rewrote, his majestic poem across some twenty years of his life. The poem carries within it the marks of the tumultuous events of those years—the political, economic, and emotional aftermath of the Great Plague of 1348–1349, including the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the death of Edward III, and the troubled reign of Richard II, the Hundred Years' War, and the religious controversies spurred by the followers of Wycliffe known as the Lollards.

Our lack of specific information about the poet further complicates our understanding of his work. There are hints within the poem about the supposed biography of the author. Some argue that William Langland hides his name acrostically in the phrase "I have lived in land," said I, "my name is Long Will" (xv.152). The "autobiographical passage" of the C-text (reprinted in this Norton Critical Edition, p. 363) tells us that the narrator, Will, is married to Kit, has a daughter named Calotte, and that he is a cleric in minor orders who was paid to pray for the souls of others. As compelling as these details seem to be as autobiography, we must remember that they are presented within a fiction. The poet may have been named Will, but the human will is also an allegorical entity in the poem. One fifteenth-century note (appended at the end of the C-text of *Piers Plowman* preserved in Dublin Trinity College MS. 212 [D.4.1]) attributes the poem to the son of one Stacy de Rokayle, a member of the gentry who owned land at Shipton-under-Wychwood, but support for this attribution is tentative. In the end, we know little or nothing at all about this author except what we can discern from the text. The original dialect of the poem suggests the poet came from west Worcestershire near the Malvern Hills he mentions in the Prologue (1.5). His profound knowledge of, and engagement with, the cultural life of London tells us he was more than an occasional visitor, however, to the metropolis; indeed, like his contemporary Geoffrey Chaucer, he is quintessentially a London poet—but unlike Chaucer, Langland is a poet of all of London, not just of the court.

As has long been recognized by historians, the poem is a compendium of fourteenth-century culture, and its very richness contributes to the challenges it poses to its readers. It embraces every aspect of that life from the most mundane (life in the local pub) to the most abstract (the meaning of imagination). Because it is so richly embedded, the poem requires a close reading that includes not just intellectual, literary, and theological learning, but knowledge of a wide variety of cultural realms that infuse the

4. See further the essay by Ralph Hanna, printed herein, p. 591.

此为试读，需要完整PDF请访问：www.ertongbook.com

poem's language—the legal, the theological, the domestic, the ecclesiastical, the political, the economic, the mercantile, the material, and the spiritual. From that perspective, the Sources and Backgrounds section of this Norton Critical Edition helps reveal for first-time readers of *Piers Plowman* the vital encyclopedic imagination of the poet; at the same time, it is one of the glories of this work that references to other texts can never solve the poem's own profound engagement with its culture.

Notwithstanding its inherent difficulties, the (perhaps deliberate) obscurity of the poet, and its daunting cultural range, this poem was extremely popular in its own time, as more than fifty surviving manuscripts attest. It was read widely by Langland's contemporaries and became well known enough that it was called upon as a rallying point for the leaders of the so-called Peasants' Revolt.[5] Some think that the C-text revisions, generally viewed as theologically and politically more conservative than the B-text, reflect the poet's dismay that it was so read. Yet its encompassing vision allowed for widely divergent understandings of it, then, later, and now. In the Renaissance, it did not find its way into print until 1551, during the reign of Edward VI, but did so then because it was favored for its supposed proto-Protestant sentiments. Distance has allowed us to see that the poem's density offers possibilities for many kinds of readers with a variety of political and theological positions, yet its primary emphasis is traditional, orthodox, and conservative; if it has a mission, it is reformist rather than revolutionary.

That said, its poetics is radical and visionary. Knowledgeable advocates of the poem would insist that its confusions are commensurate with its visionary apprehension of social and theological reality. Like many great poems, *Piers Plowman* invites the reader to discover, as William Blake would say, the "infinite" beneath the appearance of convention and ideology, once the "doors of perception were cleansed."[6] The honesty of this poem lies in the recognition that such transformations of perceptions of society and its institutions require strenuous mental, emotional, and imaginative—and for Langland—spiritual effort. The poem has the potential to change one's life. It is difficult to read this poem without reexamining how you know what you know and how and why you believe what you believe. It challenges complacency of all kinds—from the intellectual to the emotional. As Kirk and Anderson write, "it is also a profound exploration of the processes of human thought, which drove one frustrated and fascinated student to calling it a 'poem that hurts your mind,' because it makes the reader think more probingly about the assumptions of its society and of the reader's own society than most texts require."[7] It is filled with indignation for the suffering of others, and scathing scrutiny not only of the failures of others, but also of one's own capacity for self-deception; at the same time, its unstinting examination of self and world is infused throughout with compassion. These are just some of the reasons why one might wish to read the work of an unknown poet, who never settled on a final version of a poem, and whose work is so difficult to follow.

It may help readers to engage with the poem if they come to accept that

5. See Sources and Backgrounds, p. 484.
6. William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Plate 14, in *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 188.
7. Kirk and Anderson, p. vii.

frustration and incompleteness are an essential part of experiencing the poem; indeed they are fundamental to it, for the poem's goal is not so much to disseminate Christian ideals, as to make those Christian ideals immanent in every moment of daily life. A reader can be drawn into the text in such a way that she or he becomes the protagonist on a quest slowly developing in understanding and frustrated in a search for truth. Along with Will, the reader encounters a variety of domains, including a variety of institutions (the Church, the schools, the marketplace, etc.) that offer conflicting and multiple perspectives. The poet's "cast of thought is one that refuses to approach a problem from one point of view without putting that perspective to the test against the most cogent alternatives known to him."[8] Its difficulties are like those of postmodernism—except for the urgency of the faith that impels the quest for meaning.

Even the textual history of the poem contributes to its urgent probing. The great number of surviving manuscripts of the poem and the successive versions they seem to represent need not appear to be so bewildering if one sees in this record of variation a record also of a poem which refused to stop becoming. And whether this was because a single author, or subsequent copyists, or a combination, drove this movement is less important to decipher than to see in the condition of the poem's preservations the integrity of a material reenactment of its interior insistence on repeating, reassessing, renaming, redefining, rejecting, reaccepting, and rereading the salvific life.

In some ways the poem is quite simple. Holy Church tells us at the beginning that God has provided all beings with three basic necessities, food, clothing, and shelter (I.17–26). The poem unfolds by exploring how and why it is that those necessities are no longer equally available to all. Society is impelled by its individuals' needs to recover these gifts; in Langland's vision they should be recovered for everyone equally. Hence the needs of the poor permeate the poem—but just as the poor are shown to be needy, so are the rich. Need in the end is shown to be material and spiritual, and the two domains are irrevocably intertwined. Fulfillment of need can finally only be sought in God's love—something only briefly and imperfectly experienced in the temporal world, but a love that urgently needs to be sought. Unity can never last; transcendence can only be glimpsed; quests take place without movement and must constantly be reinitiated. The technique of the poem is integral to its themes: a reader must go through the poem not just to find its meanings, but also to experience them.

For these and other reasons, a translation of the poem alone cannot suffice to convey its riches. Within brief passages, single lines, or even single words, the poet makes language shimmer with multiplicity and variety. To engage the poem's experiential qualities, the reader needs to delve into the Middle English. In examining the original language, the reader will find, in Blakean terms, that the imagination is "unfettered," released from conventions, dogma, and the doctrinal. Take, for example, "Treuthe is tresore the triest on erthe" (I.137). The poet loves puns, and in "triest" is a typical example with the triple referents of "tree," "three," and "true"—

8. Kirk and Anderson, p. xii.

that is, the tree of the Cross, the Trinity, and abstract Truth.[9] The line thus offers three forms of meaning—the doctrinal (the Trinity), the affective (meditation on the Cross), and the abstract (the most pure truth), where all three lead to the same place but must be experienced differently; at the same time; none can exist without the other two. Elsewhere, the author's complexity is conveyed less in individual words than in the development of thought over a few lines. For example, the narrator begins an allegorical pilgrimage to truth at the beginning of the poem, but interrupts the pilgrimage to plough a field (in Passus VI). The ploughing itself becomes the pilgrimage. At other moments, the poet will provide images of uncommon lyrical beauty that cannot be adequately conveyed in translation, such as his image of God's love as a plant weighed down to earth with desire for humanity (I.152ff). The poem stretches the resources of language and style in such various and unpredictable ways that a full appreciation of its poetics can only finally be gleaned through engaging it in its original language. Through such an engagement the reader can come to appreciate Langland's brilliant transformation of theological truths that have become commonplace and weakened by power and acquisitiveness into the dynamism of love.

Acknowledgments

This edition came into being at the request of Judith Anderson and Elizabeth Kirk, who originally asked Elizabeth Robertson and C. David Benson to take up the work unfinished by E. Talbot Donaldson; that is, to combine his edition of the B-text of *Piers Plowman* with their finalized translation of that text and to provide sources and backgrounds to complete a Norton Critical Edition of this magnificent poem. As this project has developed, this proposed structure has inspired new work. We have shifted from Donaldson's B-text to producing one of our own close to it and more closely aligned with the translation. The attendees of the 1995 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Chaucer-Langland Institute in Boulder, Colorado, using their own teaching experiences as a guide, also recommended and encouraged such a project. After C. David Benson decided to leave the project, Stephen Shepherd agreed to take over his position. We, therefore, are extremely grateful to C. David Benson for his generous contributions to the foundations of our work. In addition, this project could never have been completed without the meticulous long hours word-processing and proofreading by Colleen Anderson at the University of Colorado. Another selfless and extremely helpful contributor to this project is Anna Baldwin, who offered suggestions for the Sources and Backgrounds section.[1] We are also grateful to Derek Pearsall for his response to our selections. In the initial stages of the project, Jessica Staheli worked tirelessly and intelligently gathering secondary sources and permissions for

9. Maureen Quilligan discusses this pun and Langland's delight in polysemy in her *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979). For students wishing to pursue this kind of study of Langland's polysemy, the best sources are the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*).
1. We are eager to recommend Anna Baldwin's forthcoming guide to *Piers Plowman*, which will include summaries of each passus as well as reading and essay options.

the sources and backgrounds to the text. Later graduate assistance was helpfully provided by Eric I. Turner and Melanie Haupt. We would like to thank the Graduate Committee on Arts and Humanities at the University of Colorado, the Council on Research and Creative Work of the University of Colorado, and Southern Methodist University for contributing to the travel a collaboration of this kind requires. We would like to acknowledge George Kane's generosity in allowing us to use his text and for his helpful advice at the initial stages of this project. We would also like to thank Judith Anderson and Elizabeth Kirk for help and encouragement throughout the project. We would also like to thank Shelli Shepherd and Jeffrey Robinson for their kind and perspicacious contributions to the completion of the volume. We are grateful to Carol Bemis for her extraordinary patience and thoughtfulness about the production of this text. We have dedicated this volume to the teacher, mentor, and friend who has introduced so many to this wonderful poem. We are honored to make the fine work of so distinguished a scholar as E. Talbot Donaldson available to undergraduates. Any royalties for this book will go to the scholarship fund in his name in the hope that future students will continue to recognize his brilliant contributions to medieval studies.

Elizabeth Robertson
Stephen H. A. Shepherd
Boulder, Colorado, and Dallas, Texas
August 2005

Reading Middle English†

The original dialect of *Piers Plowman* appears to have been that of the South West Midlands (comprising mainly Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, and Worcestershire, and which includes the Malvern Hills area mentioned in the *Prologue*). The text of the Middle English version presented in this Norton Critical Edition is, however, written in a less westerly Midlands dialect, reflecting the preponderance of manuscripts of the B-version which emanate from the environs of London—and quite possibly also reflecting the author's own move to London, where his poem was copied and distributed by many interested readers. The comments below apply to Midland English.

I. The Sounds of Middle English: General Rules

The following general analysis of the sounds of Middle English will enable the reader who has not time for detailed study to read Middle English aloud so as to preserve some of its most essential characteristics, without, however, giving heed to many important details. The next section, "Detailed Analysis," is designed for the reader who wishes to go more deeply into the pronunciation of Middle English. Middle English differs from Modern English in three principal respects: (1) the pronunciation of the long vowels *a*, *e*, *i* (or *y*), *o*, and *u* (spelled *ou*, *ow*); (2) the fact that Middle English final *e* is often sounded; and (3) the fact that all Middle English consonants are sounded.

1. LONG VOWELS

Middle English vowels are long when they are doubled (*aa*, *ee*, *oo*) or when they are terminal (*he*, *to*, *holy*); *a*, *e*, and *o* are long when followed by a single consonant plus a vowel (*name*, *mete*, *note*). Middle English vowels are short when they are followed by two consonants.

Long *a* is sounded like the *a* in Modern English "father": *maken*, *madest*.

Long *e* may be sounded like the *a* in Modern English "name" (ignoring the distinction between the close and open vowel): *be*, *swete*.

Long *i* (or *y*) is sounded like the *i* in Modern English "machine": *lif*, *whit*, *myn*, *holy*.

Long *o* may be sounded like the *o* in Modern English "note" (again ignoring the distinction between the close and open vowel): *do*, *brode*.

Long *u* (spelled *ou*, *ow*) is sounded like the *oo* in Modern English "goose": *house*, *now*. Note that in general Middle English long vowels are pronounced like long vowels in modern languages other than English. Short vowels and diphthongs, however, may be pronounced as in Modern English.

2. FINAL E

Final *e* is sounded like the *a* in Modern English "sofa." It is commonly silent before words beginning with a vowel or *h*.

† Reprinted, with adaptation, from M. H. Abrams et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), I: 15–18, with permission of W. W. Norton & Company.

3. CONSONANTS

Middle English consonants are pronounced separately in all combinations—*gnawen*: *g-nawen*; *knowe*: *k-nowe*; *write*: *w-rite*; *folk*: *fol-k*. In a simplified system of pronunciation the combination *gh* as in *night* or *thought* may be treated as if it were silent.

II. The Sounds of Middle English: Detailed Analysis

1. SIMPLE VOWELS

Sound	*Pronunciation*	*Example*
long *a* (spelled *a*, *aa*)	*a* in "father"	*maken*, *madest*
short *a*	*o* in "hot"	*happe*
long *e* close (spelled *e*, *ee*)	*a* in "name"	*be*, *depe*
long *e* open (spelled *e*, *ee*)	*e* in "there"	*mete*, *eet*
short *e*	*e* in "set"	*bisette*
final-*e*	*a* in "sofa"	*large*
long *i* (spelled *i*, *y*)	*i* in "machine"	*I*, *lif*, *myne*
short *i*	*i* in "in"	*wit*
long *o* close (spelled *o*, *oo*)	*o* in "note"	*do*, *roos*
long *o* open (spelled *o*, *oo*)	*oa* in "broad"	*go*, *woo*
short *o*	*o* in "oft"	*potel*
long *u* when spelled *ou*, *ow*	*oo* in "goose"	*house*, *power*
long *u* when spelled *u*	*u* in "pure"	*vertue*
short *u* (spelled *u*, *o*)	*u* in "full"	*ful*, *love*

Doubled vowels and terminal vowels are always long, whereas single vowels before two consonants other than *th* and *ch* are always short. The vowels *a*, *e*, and *o* are long before a single consonant followed by a vowel: *nāmë*, *sēkë* (sick), *hōly*. In general, words that have descended into Modern English reflect their original Middle English quantity: *lĭven* (to live), but *līf* (life).

The close and open sounds of long *e* and long *o* may often be identified by the Modern English spellings of the words in which they appear. Original long close *e* is generally represented in Modern English by *ee*: "sweet," "knee," "teeth," "see" have close *e* in Middle English, but so does "be"; original long open *e* is generally represented in Modern English by *ea*: "meat," "heath," "sea," "great," "breath" have open *e* in Middle English. Similarly, original long close *o* is now generally represented by *oo*: "soon," "food," "good," but also "do," "to"; original long open *o* is represented either by *oa* or by *o*: "coat," "boat," "moan," but also "go," "bone," foe," "home." Notice that original close *o* is now almost always pronounced like the *oo* in goose, but that original open *o* is almost never so pronounced; thus it is often possible to identify the Middle English vowels through Modern English sounds.

The nonphonetic Middle English spelling of *o* for short *u* has been preserved in a number of Modern English words ("love," "son," "come"), but in others *u* has been restored: "sun" (sonne), "run" (*ronne*).

For the treatment of final *e*, see "General Rules," "Final *e*" (p. xvii).

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

2. DIPHTHONGS

Sound	*Pronunciation*	*Example*
ai, ay, ei, ay	between *ai* in "aisle" and *ay* in "day"	*faire, lay, heigh, sweyved*
au, aw	*ou* in "out"	*penaunce, lawe*
eu, ew	*ew* in "few"	*seweth*
oi, oy	*oy* in "joy"	*boy, soiled*
ou, ow	*ou* in "thought"	*thoughte, lowe*

Note that in words with *ou* and *ow* that in Modern English are sounded with the *ou* of "about," the combination indicates not the diphthong but the simple vowel long *u* (see "Simple Vowels," above).

3. CONSONANTS

In general, all consonants except *h* were always sounded in Middle English, including consonants that have become silent in Modern English such as the *g* in *gnaw*, the *k* in *knight*, the *l* in *folk*, and the *w* in *write*. In noninitial *gn*, however, the *g* was silent as in Modern English "sign." Initial *h* was silent in short common English words and in words borrowed from French and may have been almost silent in all words. The combination *gh* as in *night* or *thoughte* was sounded like the *ch* of German *ich* or *nach*. Note that Middle English *gg* represents both the hard sound of "dagger" and the soft sound of "bridge."

III. Parts of Speech and Grammar

1. NOUNS

The plural and possessive of nouns end in *es*, formed by adding *s* or *es* to the singular: *werk, werkes*; *preyer, preyeres*; a final consonant is frequently doubled before *es*: *God, Goddes*; *hed, heddes*. A common irregular plural is *eyen* (spelled variously, including *eyn, yen, iyen, eghne, eyghen*—"eyes").

2. PRONOUNS

Where they appear, the chief differences from Modern English are as follows:

Modern English	*Middle English*
I	*I, Y, Ich*
you (singular)	*thow, thou* (subjective); *thee* (objective)
her	*hir(e), her(e)*
its	*his*
you (plural)	*ye* (subjective); *yow* (objective)
their	*her(e)*
them	*hem*

In formal speech, the second person plural is often used for the singular. The possessive adjectives *my* and *thy* take *n* before a word beginning with a vowel or *h*: *thyne ende, myn herte*.

3. ADJECTIVES

Adjectives ending in a consonant sometimes (though not consistently) add final *e* when they stand before the noun they modify and after another modifying word such as *the, this, that,* or nouns or pronouns in the possessive: *a good hors,* but *the* (*this, my, the kinges*) *goode hors.* They also may add *e* when standing before and modifying a plural noun, a noun in the vocative, or any proper noun.

Adjectives are compared by adding *er*(*e*) for the comparative, *est*(*e*) for the superlative. Sometimes the stem vowel is shortened or altered in the process: *faire, fairer, fairest; low, lower, lowest.*

4. ADVERBS

Adverbs are formed from adjectives by adding *e, ly,* or *liche*; the adjective *fair* thus yields *faire,* and *fairliche*; *wikked* yields *wikkedly.*

5. VERBS

Middle English verbs, like Modern English verbs, are either "weak" or "strong." Weak verbs form their preterites and past participles with a *t* or *d* suffix and preserve the same stem vowel throughout their systems, although it is sometimes shortened in the preterite and past participle: *love, loved; here, herde; mete, mette.* Strong verbs do not use the *t* or *d* suffix, but vary their stem vowel in the preterite and past participle: *take, toke, taken; fynde, fonde, founden.*

The inflectional endings are the same for Middle English strong verbs and weak verbs except in the preterite singular and the imperative singular. In the following paradigms, the weak verbs *loven* (to love) and *heren* (to hear), and the strong verbs *taken* (to take) and *gynnen* (to begin) serve as models.

	Present Indicative	*Preterite Indicative*
I	*love, here*	*loved*(*e*), *herde*
	take, gynne	*took, gan*
thou	*lovest, herest*	*lovedest, herdest*
	takest, gynnest	*tooke, gonne*
he, she, it	*loveth, hereth*	*loved*(*e*), *herde*
	taketh, gynneth	*took, gan*
we, ye, they	*love*(*n*) (*th*), *here*(*n*) (*th*)	*loved*(*e*) (*en*), *herde*(*n*)
	take(*n*) (*th*), *gynne*(*n*) (*th*)	*tooke*(*n*), *gonne*(*n*)

The present plural ending *eth* is southern, whereas the *e*(*n*) ending is Midland. In the weak preterite, when the ending *e* gave a verb three or more syllables, it was frequently dropped. Note that in certain strong verbs like *gynnen* there can be two distinct stem vowels in the preterite.

	Present Subjunctive	*Preterite Subjunctive*
Singular	*love, here*	*lovede, herde*
	take, gynne	*tooke, gonne*
Plural	*love*(*n*), *here*(*n*)	*lovede*(*n*), *herde*(*n*)
	take(*n*), *gynne*(*n*)	*tooke*(*n*), *gonne*(*n*)

In verbs like *gynnen*, which have two stem vowels in the indicative preterite, the vowel of the plural and of the second person singular is used for the preterite subjunctive.

The imperative singular of most weak verbs is *e*: (*thou*) *love*; (*thou*) *drynke*. The imperative plural of all verbs is either *e* or *eth*: (*ye*) *love*(*th*), *here*(*th*), *take*(*th*), *gynne*(*th*).

The infinitive of verbs is *e* or *en*: *love*(*n*), *here*(*n*), *take*(*n*), *gynne*(*n*).

The past participle of weak verbs is the same as the preterite without inflectional ending: *loved*, *herd*. In strong verbs the ending is either *e* or *en*: *take*(*n*), *gonne*(*n*). The prefix *y-* often appears on past participles: *y-loved*, *y-herd*, *y-take*(*n*).

Reading Langland's Alliterative Verse†

Piers Plowman is written in the so-called "alliterative long line," a direct descendant of the alliterative poetry of Anglo-Saxon England. This form was still being used by poets in the North and West and was brought to its fullest development in the jeweled craftsmanship of Langland's contemporary, the poet of *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but it became a lost tradition after the fifteenth century when it was superseded by the iambic pentameter line introduced by Chaucer. Such verse does not normally rhyme. Nor does it have a standard number of syllables and a regularly repeated alternation between stressed and unstressed syllables, of the kind we are used to in most English poetry. Instead, each line contains at least four major stressed syllables, with varying numbers of unstressed syllables distributed among them; the stressed words are bound together by a pattern in which at least three of them begin with the same sound.[1] The Dreamer-narrator's first picture of the dream world (Pro. 14–19) in Middle English, which is translated on page 3 offers a good example:

> As *I* bi*he*lde into the *e*st, an *hie*gh to the sonne,
> I seigh a *t*oure on a *t*oft, *t*rielich y-maked,
> A *d*epe *d*ale binethe, a *d*ongeon thereinne
> With *d*epe *d*yches and *d*erke and *d*redful of sight.
> A *f*aire *f*elde *f*ul of *f*olke *f*onde I there bytwene,
> Of alle *m*aner of *m*en, the *m*ene and the riche,
> *W*orchyng and *w*andryng as the *w*orlde asketh.

† Reprinted, with adaptations, from William Langland, *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation by E. Talbot Donaldson* ed. Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990), pp. ix–x, with permission of W. W. Norton & Company.

1. In this system, the letters *v* and *f* count as the same letter, but the sounds *s* and *sh*, or *ch* and *k*, do not. Any vowel or diphthong alliterates with any other, or with a word that begins with the letter *h*, especially in words in which, as in many modern British dialects, the *h* is lightly stressed or even not pronounced at all.

Notes on the Middle English Texts

Editorial Procedures

All unreprinted editions of Middle English texts in this Norton Critical Edition have been prepared from manuscripts, incunabulae, or photographic reproductions thereof. *þ* and *ȝ* have been modernized (the former to *th* and the latter to *gh*, *y*, or *z*), as has the use of *u* and *v*, *i* and *j*; abbreviations are expanded silently. Word-division, punctuation, and capitalization are editorial. Otherwise, and excepting the correction of mechanically obvious scribal errors, the orthography of the base texts has not been regularized. In the texts in the *Sources and Backgrounds* section where this may present difficulties, we have employed marginal glosses or explanatory footnotes—and persistently difficult words and potential "false friends" (such as *the*, "thee/you") are reglossed roughly every 100 lines. Editorial emendations to the base text that go beyond the correction of mechanically obvious scribal errors are placed within square brackets; omissions are made silently.

This Middle English Text of Piers Plowman

The original plan of this dual-language edition was to reprint selections from the standard (indeed, monumental) scholarly edition of the B-Text by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, printed by the Athlone Press (the edition is commonly known as "Kane-Donaldson"); this was the edition upon which the translation was, in principle, based. We intended to print as much of the text as the press would generously allow, about 40 percent. It became evident, however, that to print anything less than the entire Middle English text would do an injustice to Donaldson's translation, as well as to new readers' perception of the original poet's assiduous excellence. A detailed comparison of Donaldson's translation with Kane-Donaldson reveals, moreover, that Donaldson did not always follow Kane-Donaldson's choice of readings from the large number of manuscripts that he and Kane had to consult in their effort to decide which manuscript, if any, had the best claim to recording what are most likely the author's original words (as opposed to those substituted by later copyists). There are more than 400 such points of variation. Most are minor, often introduced to render a sustainable alliterative vocabulary in the translation: for instance, Passsus III, line 2, where Donaldson chooses a common manuscript reading, "before," over Kane-Donaldson's "to." Other variations stand to alter the interpretation of the text substantially: thus, in the Prologue, line 17, Donaldson rejects Kane-Donaldson's trenchant conjectural emendation to "bond[age]" from "bondemen" (serfs, husbandmen), and returns "bondmen." Another example: at Passus V, line 20, where in Kane-Donaldson the dreamer speaks of the uprooting of trees that betokens that "dedly synne . . . shal fordoon hem (them) alle," Donaldson, following the minority reading of two *Piers* manuscripts, changes "them" to to the more alarming "us."

Any facing-page complement to Donaldson's translation that is to make best comparative sense to students must then reflect not Kane-Donaldson but "Donaldson's Kane-Donaldson." For more advanced students inter-

ested in the complex history and theory of editing *Piers Plowman*, such a complementary Middle English edition, when compared against Kane-Donaldson, stands to uncover differences of opinion between the two great scholars that have otherwise gone unrecorded.

For this complementary edition, Stephen Shepherd selected as the base text the copy of *Piers Plowman* preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Manuscript Laud 581. Amongst editors of the poem this manuscript is given the identifying sigil "L." The authority of L is generally held to be very high. For their base text, Kane-Donaldson chose manuscript W (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.17), but believed L to be the next-best choice, and acknowledged its "superior originality" and its avoidance of the "150 more group errors" reproduced in W (p. 214); indeed, the Athlone edition resorts to many of L's readings in its emendations. Selecting L enables us to present an authoritative edition without reproducing Kane-Donaldson, and yet one that is close enough to Donaldson's translation to make a high proportion of emendation unnecessary. Where we have had to introduce changes to the base text, it is usually to accomodate Donaldson's acceptance of Kane-Donaldson emendations, and these changes, sourced in Kane-Donaldson, are marked with the usual square brackets. The spelling within emendations has been changed to reflect the usual forms of the L text. We have endeavored to punctuate the edition in a fashion that corresponds as closely as possible to that of the translation, and we have silently resolved the spelling of Latin and French quotations to match their quoted counterparts in the translation. Paragraphing and other breaks in the text have also been aligned with the translation.

Note on the Translation†

The translator of *Piers Plowman*, even more than translators of other works, is faced with the temptation to make the poem simpler and clearer than it actually is. To some extent this is inevitable. A translator cannot translate without making up his mind one way or another about certain things that are open to debate, and Donaldson's Chaucer students will never forget his setting them translation exercises, accompanied by scathing remarks about the futility of putting Middle English that doesn't make sense into modern English that doesn't make sense either. But a translator who lets his translation turn into a reinterpretation, a glorified gloss, has sacrificed something central to the character of Langland's poem. Furthermore, the impact of Langland's style depends on his abrupt juxtaposition of words from widely divergent levels of diction and on the graphic sharpness of his often sardonic wording. He is concrete where the translator wants to be abstract and particular in the very midst of discussing the general. His syntax is sometimes contorted, not simply in ways that are natural in Middle English (in which case it should be translated into equally natural-sounding modern English) but also in ways that create special effects or juxtapositions. A translation constantly threatens to

† Reprinted from William Langland, *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation by E. Talbot Donaldson*, ed. Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp. xv–xvi, with permission of W. W. Norton & Company.

become blander, more uniform, less complex and compelling than its original. Donaldson's particular concern as a translator was to avoid these dangers as fully as possible. He did not want to tame the poem.

A second and related concern of his was to observe as closely as possible the actual constraints of Langland's alliterative meter. He found during the ten years he worked on the translation that, whereas one would suppose these two goals to be in tension with each other, in practice the more strictly he kept to the poem's formal demands, the better he could resist the temptation to rewrite, tidy, and rationalize it. Perhaps keeping faith with Langland's form gives a kind of distance that is good protection against trying to make the poem too much one's own, the poem Langland might have written if he had been somebody else.

The translation is entirely Donaldson's, and the editors have regarded the translation itself as outside their charge, except for the correction of an insignificant number of actual typographical errors or omissions in his finished manuscript. It should also be noted that he was working with his and George Kane's own edition of the poem, including line numbering, and that the translation will differ accordingly from translations of other editions; where he diverged from Kane-Donaldson, we have noted this fact. The notes, however, are our own, and he must not be held responsible for them, except where he had already annotated passages that appear in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, fifth edition (1986).[1]

* * *

Using This Edition†

The Gloss

Words appear in the Gloss at the back of the book if they fall into one of the following categories: (1) important concepts or names of allegorical figures that need more explanation than can readily be confined to a note; (2) modern cognates of Middle English words that have lost some pertinent meaning or connotation of the word they translate or have acquired further, potentially misleading ones; (3) names of places and people or terms for officials, institutions, and the like that recur frequently.

In every case these words are footnoted on their first occurrence in the text (or on the first occasion when a meaning not self-evident to the modern reader is involved). Where the Gloss entry is fuller than the footnote gloss, the footnote adds "(Gloss)" or, if substantially fuller, "see Gloss." On subsequent occurrences in a new *Passus* or after a substantial interval, the word is followed by an asterisk if the Gloss is relevant.

Foreign Words and Biblical References

Much annotation in the edition concerns the Latin words and lines, and the occasional French, that Langland scatters through his English. Where

1. In the present Norton Critical Edition, some new notes have been added, and many of the notes made by Kirk and Anderson have been retained, some augmented, and some streamlined [*Editors*].

† Reprinted from William Langland, *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation by E. Talbot Donaldson*, ed. Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp. xxv–xxvii, with permission of W. W. Norton & Company.

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com