Classic Poetry Series

William Langland

- poems -

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Piers Plowman The Prologue (B-Text)

In a somer sesun, whon softe was the sonn{.e}, I schop me into a shroud, as I a scheep wer{.e}; In habite as an hermite unholy of werk{.e}s Wente I wyde in this world wondr{.e}s to her{.e}; Bote in a May{.e}s morwnynge on Malverne hull{.e}s Me bifel a ferly, of fairie, me-thought{.e}.

I was wery, forwandr{.e}d, and went{.e} me to rest{.e}
Undur a brod banke bi a bourn{.e} sid{.e};
And as I lay and leon{.e}de and lok{.e}de on the watr{.e}s,
I slumbr{.e}de in a slepynge, hit swy{.e}d so muri{.e}.
Thenne gon I meeten a mervelous sweven,
That I was in a wilderness{.e}, wuste I never wher{.e};
And as I beheold into the est an heigh to the sonn{.e},
I sauh a tour on a toft, try{.e}lyche i-maket;
A deop dal{.e} bineoth{.e}, a dungun ther-inn{.e},
With deop dich and derk and dredful of sight{.e}.
A feir feld full of folk fond I ther bitwen{.e},
Of all{.e} maner of men, the mene and the rich{.e},
Worchinge and wandringe as the world asketh.

Summ{.e} putten hem to the plough, pleiden ful selden{.e}, In settynge and in sowyng{.e} swonken ful hard{.e}, And wonnen that theos wasturs with glotonye distruen. And summ{.e} putten hem to pruid{.e}, apparaylden hem ther-after, In cuntenaunce of clothing (.e) comen disgisid. To preyer{.e}s and to penaunc{.e} putten hem mony{.e}, For love of ur Lord liv{.e}den ful streit{.e}, In hop{.e} for to hav{.e} hevene-rich{.e} bliss{.e}; As ancr{.e}s and hermyt{.e}s that holdeth hem in heor{.e} cell{.e}s, Coveyt{.e} not in cuntré to cairen about{.e}, For non likerous lyflod{.e} heor{.e} licam to ples{.e}. And summ{.e} chosen chaffar{.e} to cheeven the bettr{.e}, As hit semeth to ur{.e} sight{.e} that such{.e} men thryveth; And summ{.e}, murthh{.e}s to maken as munstrals cunn{.e}, And get{.e} gold with her{.e} gle, giltles, I trow{.e}. Bote japers and jangelers, Judas children, Founder hem fantasy{.e}s and fool{.e}s hem maaden, And habbeth wit at heor{.e} will{.e} to worchen yif hem lust{.e}. That Poul precheth of hem, I dar not preoven heer{.e}; Qui loquitur turpiloquium he is Lucifer (.e)s hyn (.e). Bidders and beggers faste aboute eoden, Til heor bagg{.e}s and heore balies weren bretful i-crommet; Feyneden hem for heor{.e} food{.e}, foughten att{.e} al{.e}; In glotony{.e}, God wot, gon heo to bedd{.e}, And ryseth up with ribaudy{.e} this roberd{.e}s knav{.e}s; Sleep and sleughth{.e} suweth hem ever{.e}.

Pilgrimes and palmers plihten hem togeder{.e}s For to sech{.e} Seint Jam{.e} and seint{.e}s at Room{.e}; Wenten forth in heor{.e} wey with mony wys{.e} tal{.e}s, And hedden lev{.e} to lyen al heor{.e} lyf aftir. Ermyt{.e}s on an hep with hokid{.e} stav{.e}s, Wenten to Walsyngham and her{.e} wenchis after; Gret{.e} lobr{.e}s and long{.e} that loth weor{.e} to swynk{.e} Clotheden hem in cop{.e}s to beo knowen for bretheren; And summ{.e} schopen hem to hermyt{.e}s heore es{.e} to hav{.e}.

I fond there frer{.e}s, all the foure ordr{.e}s,
Prechinge the pepl{.e} for profyt of heor{.e} womb{.e}s,
Glosynge the Gospel as hem good liketh,
For covetyse of cop{.e}s constructh hit ill{.e};
For monye of this maistr{.e}s mowen clothen hem at lyking,
For moneye and heor{.e} marchaundi{.e} meeten togeder{.e};
Sethth{.e} Charité hath be chapmon, and cheef to schriven lord{.e}s,
Mony ferly{.e}s han bifall{.e} in a few{.e} yer{.e}s.
But Holychirche and heo hold{.e} bet togeder{.e},
The most{.e} mischeef on mold{.e} is mountyng up fast{.e}.

Ther prechede a pardoner, as he a prest wer{.e} And brought forth a bull {.e} with bisschop {.e}s sel {.e}s, And seid{.e} that himself might{.e} asoylen hem all{.e} Of falsnesse and fastinge and of vouw{.e}s i-broken. The lewed{.e} men levide him wel and lik{.e}de his spech{.e}, And comen up knelyng{.e} to kissen his bull{.e}; He bonch{.e}de hem with his brevet and bler{.e}d heore eiven, And raught{.e} with his rag{.e}mon ring{.e}s and broch{.e}s. Thus ye yiveth our {.e} gold glotonis to helpen! And leveth hit to losels that lecherie haunten. Weor{.e} the bisschop i-blesset and worth bothe his er{.e}s, His sel shulde not be sent to deceyv{.e} the pepl{.e}. It is not all bithe bisschop that the boy{.e} precheth, Bote the parisch prest and the pardoner part{.e} the selver That the por{.e} peple of the parisch schulde have yif that heo ne weor{.e}, Person{.e}s and parisch prest{.e}s playneth to heor{.e} bisschops, That heor{.e} parisch hath ben por{.e} sethth{.e} the pestilenc{.e} tym{.e}, To have a lycence and lev{.e} at Londun to dwell{.e}, To sing{.e} ther for simony{.e}, for selver is swet{.e}.

Ther hovide an hundret in houv{.e}s of selk{.e},
Serjauns hit semid{.e} to serven att{.e} barr{.e};
Pleden for pens and pound{.e}s the law{.e},
Not for love of ur Lord unloseth heor{.e} lipp{.e}s on{.e}s,
Thou mightest beter meten the myst on Malvern{.e} hull{.e}s
Then geten a mom of heor{.e} mouth til moneye weor{.e} schew{.e}d!

I saugh ther bisschops bold{.e} and bachilers of divyn{.e}
Bicoom{.e} clerk{.e}s of acount{.e} the king for to serven.
Erchedeken{.e}s and denis, that dignité haven
To prech{.e} the pepl{.e} and por{.e} men to feed{.e},
Beon lopen to Londun, bi leve of heor{.e} bisschop{.e}s,
To ben clerk{.e}s of the Kyng{.e}s Bench{.e} the cuntré to schend{.e}

Barouns and burgeis and bond{.e}-men also

I saugh in that semblé, as ye schul heren aftur, Bakers, bochers, and breusters mony{.e}, Wollen{.e}-websteris, and weveris of lynen, Taillours, tanneris, and tokkeris both{.e}, Masons, minours, and mony other craft{.e}s, Dykers, and delvers, that don heor{.e} ded{.e}s ill{.e}, And driveth forth the long{.e} day with "Deu vous sav{.e}, Dam Emm{.e}!" Cook{.e}s and heor{.e} knav{.e}s cryen "Hot{.e} pi{.e}s, hot{.e}! "Good{.e} gees and grys! Go we dyn{.e}, go we!" Taverners to hem told{.e} the sam{.e} tal{.e}, With wyn of Osey{.e} and win of Gaskoyn{.e}, Of the Ryn and of the Rochel, the rost to defy{.e}, Al this I saugh slepynge and sev{.e} sith{.e}s mor{.e}.

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