The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman vnto Christe
and Its Sixteenth-Century Evolution

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Introduction

The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman vnto Christe (henceforth referred to as *The Praier*) is considered to be a Lollard text written in the late fourteenth or, more likely, in the early fifteenth century. It first appeared in print in 1531, published by Merten[1] de Keyser in Antwerp.[2] In line with Lollard doctrine, *The Praier* complains about the manifold faults of the Roman Catholic Church. The text campaigns against such corruptions as auricular confession, the imposition of penance by priests and clergy turning away from those who need them the most (the poor) to ingratiate themselves with the rich elite.

Although the poem can be positively identified as belonging to the so-called Plowman[3] tradition, its origins are much less clear. The preface of the text identifies it as being "written not longe after the yere of oure Lorde A thousande and thre hundred" (l. 3-6).[4] This date, however, seems too early to agree with the Lollard contents, as Lollardy did not flourish until the early fifteenth century.[5] At the same time, the language used in the text indicates that it is unlikely for it to have been written during the sixteenth century, when it was first published.[6] Most likely, *The Praier* was written in the early fifteenth century, before being published in the following century. The date of the preface, therefore, appears to be a device to give the text an imagined authority by predating it to its original composition.

When the text was published in 1531, its editor fitted it with its preface. The editor, however, was not the tract's publisher, Merten de Keyser. Who the editor was is, like the original date of composition, uncertain. A later publisher of the text, John Foxe, attributed the preface to William Tyndale in his second edition of his *Acts and Monuments* in 1570; not in the least because the initials "w.T." appear at the head of the preface in the second edition of the text printed by Thomas Godfray in 1532.[7] Modern scholars have settled on two possibilities: William Tyndale and George Joye. Both have been associated with Merten de

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[1] His name has been variously mentioned as Merten, Marinus and Martinus. As his name is mentioned in an article concerning the use of Dutch and Flemish printers by the English as Merten, I have chosen to refer to him as such throughout this thesis.

[2] Parker, D.H., ed. *The praier and complaynte of the ploweman vnto Christe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, pp. 3-4.

[3] In keeping with the traditional spelling of the title of the poem *Piers Plowman*, I will follow this spelling for "plowman" throughout my thesis. I will, however, respect the spelling found in primary or secondary sources.

[4] References to line numbers follow the numbers as given in Douglas Parker's edition of the text.

[5] Parker, pp. 3-4.

[6] Hudson quoted in Parker, *The praier*, p. 91, note 38.

[7] Parker, *The praier*, pp. 3-4.

Keyser and are know to have written Lollard texts. Although it appears more likely that Tyndale was the editor instead of Joye,[8] a conclusive case cannot be made for either of them.

Problems such as the unknown date of composition and the unknown author/editor of the sixteenth century preface appear to have inhibited extensive scholarly research on *The Praier*. Although the text of *The Praier* survives in several sixteenth and seventeenth century printed editions, there is only one modern scholarly edition, that of Douglas Parker. Dating from 1997, this edition is already nearly twenty years old. Parker constructed his critical edition by basing himself only on the original 1531 publication, although he does consult the printed edition of John Foxe in order to include Foxe's sidenotes to the text of *The Praier*. Extensive as Parker's scope is, his edition does not cover any comparisons between early and later printed editions of *The Praier*.

Part of the difficulty in doing research on *The Praier* is the fact that there are no manuscript copies available for analysis. Any comparison between editions of the text, such as this thesis attempts, can therefore only arrive at partial conclusions, since there is no way of knowing what text was used by Merten de Keyser when he first produced a printed edition. It is therefore highly unlikely that scholarly work will ever be able to trace the evolution of the text, like Charlotte Brewer did for the manuscripts and subsequent printed editions of *Piers Plowman*.[9] As a result, it will most likely also be very hard to construct a definitive argument concerning *The Praier*'s place in the plowman tradition.

Compared with the lack of research on *The Praier* itself, there is an abundance of research on *Piers Plowman*. The different manuscript editions inspired research early on. Since Crowley's printed edition of 1550, there have been many subsequent publications of the poem itself.[10] The different manuscript editions have not only inspired textual comparisons, they also inspired research into the socio-political background of *Piers Plowman*. The discovery of the editing of (passages of) *Piers Plowman* led to research into subsequent Protestant readings of the poem, such as Robert Crowley's, which in turn gave rise to research on the plowman tradition when other texts with a character called Piers came to light. [11] Given

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[8] Ibid. pp. 42-47.
[9] Brewer, C. *Editing Piers Plowman: The Evolution of the Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
[10] See, for example, Charlotte Brewer's study on the evolution of *Piers Plowman*, where she compares a few of the most famous printed editions of the poem, by Robert Crowley, W.W. Skeat and George Kane and E.T. Donaldson amongst others.
[11] See for example Benson, C.D. *Public Piers Plowman*: *Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004; Scase, W. Piers Plowman *and the New Anti-clericalism*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature vol. 4, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1989; as well as a range of articles contained in, for example, the two companions to *Piers Plowman*: Alford, J.A., ed. *A Companion to* Piers Plowman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988 and Cole, A. and

the existence of the *Yearbook of Langland Studies*,[12] research on subjects related to *Piers Plowman* is still very much alive. However, research concerning the Protestant appropriations of *Piers Plowman* and the plowman tradition which developed subsequently appear to have attracted less attention. Much of the research on the plowman tradition was published in the 1980s, making secondary sources on this subject well over twenty-five years old.[13]

The 1530s were a time of religious reform both in England and on the continent and the socio-political and socio-historical circumstances of the time may have affected the publication of *The Praier*. An example of this can be seen in the fact that *The Praier* was first published on the continent in Antwerp, rather than in England itself. Even though a second edition was printed shortly afterwards in 1532 by Thomas Godfray in England, there must have been a reason why the first edition was published abroad. When John Foxe published an edition of *The Praier* in 1570, almost forty years after the original by De Keyser, he provided the text with commentaries. Foxe thought the commentaries necessary to aid the reader's understanding of the text: "Adding withall in the mergent for the better vnderstanding of the reader, some interpretation of certayne difficult termes and speeches, as otherwyse myghtperhaps hinder or staye the Reader[.]".[14] The original text of *The Praier*, then, may have been deemed too controversial to be printed in England in 1531. When Foxe decided to publish it in 1570, he might have deemed it too old to be understood without additional commentary.

The aim of this thesis shall be to examine five different versions of *The Praier*, each from a different year, to explore any (editorial) differences between the versions. The main focus of the analysis is to explore if modifications were made to the reformist content of *The Praier* that may have been influenced by contemporary social and/or political changes. An attempt will be made to relate any differences between the editions to the socio-historical circumstances of its relative time of publication and/or editorial influences.

Galloway, A., eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Piers Plowman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[12] William Langland is the proposed and generally agreed upon author of *Piers Plowman*. Brewer, *Editing* Piers Plowman, p. 1.

[13] See for example, Barr, H., ed. *The Piers Plowman Tradition*, London: J. M. Dent, 1993; Hudson, A. "Epilogue: The Legacy of *Piers Plowman*". Alford, J.A., ed. *A Companion to* Piers Plowman, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 251 – 266; White, H.C. *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1944.

[14] Foxe, J. *The first volume of the ecclesiasticall history contaynyng the actes and monumentes of thynges passed in euery kynges tyme in this realme, especially in the Church of England principally to be noted : with a full discourse of such persecutions, horrible troubles, the sufferyng of martyrs, and other thinges incident, touchyng aswel the sayd Church of England as also Scotland, and all other foreine nations, from the primitiue tyme till the reigne of K. Henry VIII.* London: John Daye, 1570. (*STC* 11223), p. 494, right-hand column, upper half. Because line numbers are not included in this edition, the references to the quotations are rather vague of necessity.

With the advent of printing, it became easier to produce text in larger quantities. Therefore, there are several works in which *The Praier* survives, apart from the original 1531 edition by De Keyser. It was, for example, included in several editions of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*. As there is no space in this thesis to compare all the editions in which *The Praier* survives, this thesis will focus on comparing the 1531 edition of *The Praier* as presented by Douglas Parker to four other editions. These editions have been selected primarily on their date of publication; one edition is the second printing of *The Praier* in 1532 by Thomas Godfray, the other editions are found in editions of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*. The first edition used in this thesis is the second edition of *Actes and Monuments* which dates from 1570, the year in which John Foxe first included *The Praier* in his work. The second edition used dates from 1580, which is the last edition of *Actes and Monuments* on which John Foxe worked personally. The third edition used dates from 1610, and was printed nearly thirty years after Foxe's death. The chosen editions, however, also share some similarities beyond containing the text of *The Praier*. Godfray's 1532 edition was published only a year after De Keyser's original 1531 publication. Godfray's edition might therefore most closely resemble the text of *The Praier* as it was reprinted in Parker's critical edition. The other editions all have in common that they are editions of the same work, *Actes and Monuments*, in which *The Praier* is contained. John Foxe presumably worked on the first two are editions himself, while the last edition was published by a different publisher (the Company of Stationers) after Foxe's death.[15] Moreover, these editions are regularly separated from one another by one other edition. The comparisons which will follow will be based on the similarities shared between these different editions, taking De Keyser's 1531 edition as the original of the text in each case.

As Douglas Parker pointed out in his edition, different editions of one text – in his case, the surviving 1531 copies of De Keyser's publication – can also contain spelling variants.[16] When the variation is deemed to be of little to no significance, it will not be mentioned as this thesis is focused on identifying structural or ideological differences, such as a possible toning down of reformist elements in the text.

This thesis takes the work of Charlotte Brewer, *Editing* Piers Plowman*: The Evolution of the Text* as its model, to the extent in which that is possible. Brewer examined several

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[15] Foxe, J. *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happening in the Church with an vniuersall historie of the same : wherein is set forth at large the whole race and course of the Church from the primitiue age to the later times ... with the bloody times ... and great persecutions against the true martyrs of Christ ... : now againe as it was recognised, perused, and recommended to the studious reader by the author, Master John Foxe.* London: Company of Stationers, 1610. *(STC* 11227).
[16] Parker, *The praier*, pp. 79-80.

printed editions of *Piers Plowman* and discusses differences in these editions with regards to the choices and preferences of the editors in their presentation of the poem and the additional apparatus, such as notes and glossaries.[17] As was mentioned before, *The Praier* no longer survives in a manuscript copy and so the evolution of the text can only be traced starting from the earliest printed edition, without being able to refer to an older text and see how they differ as Brewer could do in her analysis/introduction of Crowley's edition of *Piers Plowman*. This thesis therefore differs from Brewer's study, as there is no scholarship available on older editions which might have shown differences between the manuscript editions and De Keyser's 1531 printed edition. Moreover, there are only two surviving printed editions in which *The Praier* is the only text: De Keyser's 1531 and Godfray's 1532 version. Otherwise, the tract survives in the *Actes and Monuments* of John Foxe.

By establishing the position of *The Praier* vis-à-vis the writings in the Plowman tradition, this thesis will explore the reformist contents of the tract and how that content may have been influenced (edited) by the socio- and politico-historical context of the editions published after De Keyser's 1531 edition. Comparing the text with the Plowman tradition, more or less reformist contents may indicate to what extent the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century influenced the composition. Similarly, an exploration of the sixteenth century in England and on the Continent may help to explain any differences found in sixteenth-century editions of *The Praier*. Following this introduction, Chapter 1 will discuss the contents of *The Praier* as well as give a brief overview of the historical context of the early sixteenth century in England. Chapter 2 will then discuss the Plowman Tradition and *The Praier*'s place within this tradition. Chapters 3 and 4 will cover the comparisons between De Keyser's 1531 and Godfray's 1532 edition, and De Keyser's 1531 edition with the editions in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, respectively. A closing chapter will devote attention to the relationship of *The Praier* and other (plowman) texts that were published in the 1520s and 1530s.

This thesis will show additional insights concerning a text that has received little scholarly attention in the past. At the same time, this thesis aims to better contextualize a text that has a complicated history of production and history of reception, by trying to relate the text to its socio-historical background and similar (plowman) texts published around the same time. As this text was published during the Reformation, it is expected that there will be little editing throughout the versions as editing the tract would affect the reformist contents of *The Praier*.

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[17] Brewer, *Editing* Piers Plowman, p. 3.

Chapter 1 – *The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman vnto Christe* and its historical context

A Short Summary

As was mentioned in the introduction, *The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman vnto Christe* is a Lollard text. The contents are the reason that it seems unlikely that the tract was published around the year 1300, as its running title claims. Because the contents of this work are the focus of this thesis, this chapter will take a closer look at the text of *The Praier* by summarizing it.

There are no surviving manuscript editions of *The Praier*. The uncertain date of composition of the original also means we do not know whether the tract was actually written down in a manuscript, or whether it was a printed text from the beginning or even if a version existed before De Keyser's 1531 edition of *The Praier*. According to Anne Hudson, the archaic language used in the tract does suggest that the text is older than its sixteenth century publication.[1] However, this uncertainty about the origins of *The Praier* means that the summary of the tract, as well as the following analysis, start *in medias res* as the 1531 edition has to be the starting point because that edition cannot be compared to earlier versions of the tract. The lack of information about previous versions does not mean that a comparison such as that of this thesis cannot be made. The points raised in this thesis will, if not for any previous work, be valid for the comparison between De Keyser's 1531 edition, as well as the subsequent editions by Godfray and John Foxe.

There are two surviving copies of De Keyser's 1531 edition of *The Praier*, one held by the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and one held by the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York City. Douglas Parker based his edition on the edition from the Huntingon Library, comparing this edition with the edition held by the Pierpoint Morgan Library and the second edition, Godfray's 1532 publication of the tract.

As far as scholarship has allowed us to understand, the tract as it was published by Merten de Keyser runs for nearly 1700 lines. It is divided into two parts, a preface of 151 lines, which includes the glossary that follows the preface, and 1528 lines that comprise the actual "praier and complaynte". Pointed out by Parker, the main text is not so much a prayer *and* complaint, but rather conflates these terms.[2] The tract is cast as a prayer in which the

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[1] Hudson, A. "'No New Thynge': The Printing of Medieval Texts in the Early Reformation Period" in Gray, D. and Stanley, E.G., eds. *Middle English Studies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 153-74.
[2] Parker, *The praier*, p. 7.

narrator voices his complaints about the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, especially its main representative: the pope. The following summary is based on Parker's analysis of the structure and content of the tract.[3]

The preface was not part of the original composition.[4] It was added to the main text of *The Praier* in the sixteenth century. As was mentioned in the introduction, the authorship/editorship of the preface is uncertain. It has been set up to draw an analogy between the persecution of Christ and his followers and the persecution of sixteenth-century reformists. Christ, as well as the reformers, were accused by the Roman Catholic Church of propagating 'new lerninge' (l. 23), even though that 'lerninge' was taught 'more than a thousande yeres before' (l. 17-8) according to the author of the preface. Prominent reformers, like Christ, are also punished by their persecutors; Christ through his condemnation to die on the cross, sixteenth century reformers by what the author conceived of as murder (l. 84-7). The author also points out that Christ's enemies attacked Him because of His low social status, as they did not believe someone of low social status could have anything meaningful to say. Low social status was also the reason the Church cited against the protestations to the Church, as people of low social status could not know the divine truth of things. In the extended analogy of the preface, the author/editor tries to establish a direct descent of Christ for the sixteenth century reformers. Christ was not teaching anything new, so surely the reform movement of the sixteenth century was not advocating something new either. To firmly drive this point home to the reader, the author of the preface closes by referring to the antiquity of the main text, which served as evidence for the earlier tradition of the complaints lodged by the author in the preface.

After a short glossary, the main body of the *The Praier* starts by an impressive show of knowledge of the Old and New Testament by the narrator. This display of knowledge anticipates the other lists that will be presented in the tract. The list is a device to unite some of the more disparate material the narrator cites in his prayer/complaint. After his display of knowledge of the Testaments, the narrator turns his attention to what he considers to be the enemies of Christianity: those who call themselves Christ and false prophets (ll. 381-4) Rather than trusting these people to tell the general population ho to worship God, the narrator points out that there are only three things which are necessary to worship God: "in louyinge god ouer all other thinges. In dredinge god ouer alle other thinges. In trusting God ouer all other

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[3] Ibid. pp. 3-13.
[4] Ibid. p. 41.

thynges" (ll. 398-400). If a Christian does this, he may be certain that God will forgive him his sins.

Picking up on the point of forgiveness, the narrator turns to mount his first attack against the Roman Catholic Church, an attack against auricular confession. According to the narrator, God and Jesus Christ did not need help from the Church to forgive Their followers, as Jesus had forgiven Peter and Mary Magdalene their sins without ecclesiastical help (ll. 428-31). Presuming God would need help to forgive His followers was to place oneself above God (l. 433-5). The complaint about auricular confession is extended by a list of three abuses that are commonly associated with auricular confession: lay people coming to believe that one priest has greater power than another to forgive sins (l. 473-5), that certain priests can forgive both sins and temporal punishment to atone for those sins (l. 476-9) and the sale of forgiveness and absolutions (l. 481ff).

This abuse of penance by members of the clergy lead the narrator to consider the appropriation of God's power by the Roman Catholic Church in general and specifically by the pope. The pope is attacked for undoing 'thy law of mercy/ and of loue (l. 512-3) and supporting other disreputable members of the clergy. Apart from their appropriation of God's power, the narrator also attacks the clergy for forsaking those they should support the most: the poor. Instead, the clergy attach themselves to the rich and thereby become like the Pharisees who worshipped God with their lips rather than with their hearts (ll. 565-6).

This "lip service" leads the narrator analyze what constitutes a true prayer. Rather than paying clergy to pray for one, it is a private affair that ought to be done by the person him- or herself. Moreover, the narrator deems the institutionalization of prayer in the masses as another fault of the pope, as mass prayers take away the privacy of prayer for the individual believer. Touching on masses, the narrator also turns to the ever controversial point of transubstantiation in Catholic masses, followed by a list of minor complaints such as unmarried clergy, the worship of saints and idolatry.

The complaints are followed by a section of six examples which illustrates how the world has been 'turned vpso doune' (l. 678), to show how Christ's law has been inverted by the Roman Catholic Church. The narrator complains, for example, that cattle thieves are slain, whereas priestly adulterers and fornicators thrive (ll. 863-7) and that hose who break the ecclesiastical law are considered heretics, but those who ignore the law are deemed good, Christian men (ll. 872-4). In his attack of the clergy, the narrator is very much preoccupied with the pope. The pope is considered to be the source of the evil in the Roman Catholic Church, who has singlehandedly turned the world upside down by doing the opposite of what

is expected of him according to Christ's teaching. The attack on the pope takes up a large part of the work and is followed by a brief section that returns the tract to a more general criticism of the Roman Catholic Church, by attacking the doctrine of purgatory, simony and an extended commentary on clerical celibacy. It is also at this point that the significance of the display of Biblical knowledge becomes clear. All that is needed to live a good Christian life can be found in the Bible. There is no need for intercession by the clergy, as they have only corrupted Christ's law. In essence then, the narrator is echoing the Protestant notion of 'sola scriptura' and the idea of a lay clergy.

According to Parker the preoccupation with the pope at times threatens to offer the progression and efficacy of the text,[5] but the author of the text used a clever rhetorical device which, I feel, offers an extenuating circumstance. When the main body of *The Praier* first begins, the narrator addresses himself directly to God. By doing so, Parker too states that the text itself is effectively turned into a private prayer/complaint.[6] I believe a personal prayer does not call for the same level of coherence that a public exposé of the corruption of the Church would call for. In fact, it even supports the narrator's status as a plowman. Although his Biblical knowledge clearly separates him from other members of his class,[7] the organizational flaw ties him more strongly to his humble origins and might even echo the narrator's sentiment that God will hear his prayer, even if it is not as well prayed as those offered to Him by professional clergy (ll. 592-8).

The Historical Background: England in the Sixteenth Century

As was mentioned before, it is not known whether or not the text of *The Praier* was actually written some time in the fourteenth century as the running title claims, since there are no manuscripts that attest to its existence. Any claims concerning the influence of the fourteenth century poem *Piers Plowman* and other plowman writings must remain tentative, although the poem may certainly be considered the source of inspiration for the figure of the plowman the author used in this tract. Moreover, Parker has shown that *The Praier* relates to some sixteen other sixteenth-century texts that are of a reformist nature and feature a plowman.[8] Because

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[5] Parker, *The praier*, p. 12.
[6] Ibid. p. 7.
[7] Ibid. p. 14.
[8] The other texts Parker says are related to *The Praier* are *God spede the plough, Here begynneth a lytell geste how the plowman lerned his pater noster, Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte: A dyaloge betwene the marchaunt the knyght and the plowman dysputyng who is a verey gentylman and who is noble and how men shuld come to auctoryte…, A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman, The Plowman's Tale, John Bon and mast Parson,* Hugh Latimer's Sermon on the Plowers, *The Vision of Piers Plowman, A godly dyalogue and dysputacion betwene Pyers Plowman and apopysh* [sic] *preest concernyng the supper of the lorde, I playne Piers*

the text can be placed definitively in the sixteenth century because it was printed several times in this century, and because of the uncertainty surrounding *The Praier*'s origins, this thesis will only explore the sixteenth-century circumstances that may have influenced the production of the printed editions.

As with so many periods of English history, the sixteenth century in England was a period of conflict. Of most importance for this thesis is the religious conflict that developed during the reign of Henry VIII (1491 – 1547) and continued up to the reign of Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603). In a little more than one hundred years, England separated itself from Rome and switched between the Catholic and the Protestant strain of Christianity no less than three times. This struggle is detailed by Doreen Rosman in her work on religion during the Tudor and Stuart eras of England's history, and the information presented below takes her work as its source.[9]

Although England had, on and off depending on Viking invasions, followed the Catholic strain of Christianity since its conversion by St. Augustine in the sixth century, the Tudors got into conflict with the Roman Catholic Church during the reign of Henry VIII. Up until his accession to the throne, England had had – in theory at least – a single religion: Catholicism. Especially after Luther's manifest against the Roman Catholic Church, however, religious and institutional tensions became prominent in the English religious sphere. Yet no attempts were made to convert the nation's religion to Protestantism. In fact, Henry had been named 'Defender of the Faith' for his tract which denounced Luther. The situation changed when Henry VIII saw his dynasty in danger. Married to Catherine of Aragon, the king had only begotten daughters and most of them had not lived beyond infancy. As daughters were not allowed to ascend to the throne, Henry VIII wanted to marry another woman, Anne Boleyn, in hopes of fathering a son with her. When the pope refused to grant Henry a divorce, England slowly moved away from the Roman Catholic Church. The break with Rome became permanent when Henry had Anne Boleyn crowned as the queen in 1533, after having had his marriage to Catherine annulled. He was promptly excommunicated by the pope and in 1534 Henry declared himself head of the Church in England.

Despite the break with Rome, the English church was for all intents and purposes still a Catholic institution. The only difference was that, instead of the pope, the king was now the

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which cannot flatter, Pyers Plowmans exhortation vnto the lordes, knightes and burgoyesses of the Parlyamenthouse, Pierce the Plowmans Crede, Newes from the North, The Shepheards Calender, Tale of the Ploughman, and *The Banckett of Iohan the reve vnto Peirs* [sic] *ploughman, Laurens laborer, Thomlyn tailyer and Hobb of the hille with other*.

[9] Rosman, D.M. *From Catholic to Protestant Religon and the People in Tudor and Stuart England. Introductions to History*. London: UCL Press, 1996, pp. 18-35.

head of the Church. That the English Church was still fundamentally Catholic is demonstrated by the fact that Henry did not only persecute those who were, in his eyes, too faithful to Rome, Henry also prosecuted those with reformist or Protestant ideas. Nevertheless, Henry could not prevent Protestant ideas slowly gaining ground in England. In part this was due to the martyrs who were willing to die for their faith, and in part is was due to the accessibility of reformist tracts that were imported into England from clandestine printing presses on the Continent.

Upon Henry's death in 1547, his son Edward ascended to the throne. As he was only ten years old, Edward was appointed his maternal uncle, Edward Seymour, as Lord Protector. Since both Edwards were strict Protestants, the reformers changed the English Church accordingly. Being a sickly child, Edward died in 1553, only six years after becoming king and he was followed by his half-sister Mary, Henry's oldest daughter by Catherine of Aragon. She was a Catholic and hurried to undo the changes that had been done to the English Church during Edward's reign, such as restoring the authority of the pope in Rome. Supported by her Catholic husband, Mary also harshly prosecuted those who wanted to depose her as well as those who were of the Protestant persuasion still. Because Mary had had no children, she was succeeded upon her death in 1558 by her half-sister Elizabeth. Elizabeth was, like Edward, a Protestant, and re-returned the English Church to a Protestant persuasion. Although the general public may not have been Protestant at heart, an effort was made to at least outwardly conform to Elizabeth's new, Protestant standards, much like she herself had outwardly conformed to her half-sister's Catholic rule. Like her father, however, Elizabeth persecuted both those that were still overtly holding on to their Catholic faith, as well as those who wanted to introduce much more radical ideas than Elizabeth herself wanted for the nation's religion.

Within one generation, the nation's official religion had changed no less than four times. It therefore seems unlikely that the religious persuasion of the general public would have truly changed from one persuasion to the other. Rather, they would have made sure the outward appearances matched with the current monarch's persuasion, as Elizabeth herself had done during Mary's reign. Nevertheless, after the accession of each new monarch there was danger, persecution and bloodshed.

It is likely that for this reason *The Praier* was first printed abroad in Antwerp, rather than in England itself. Through the wool trade, England had a strong bond with Flanders, and

so relatively easy access to the technically more advanced printing presses of Flanders.[10] Furthermore, the Low Countries themselves were a site of active religious reformation as early as the 1520s,[11] if not of an actual Protestant persuasion, and so would not have minded the production and publication of a reformist tract, at least not as much as England would have. As the major cultural hotspot of the Low Countries in the sixteenth century, Antwerp was very much open to new ideas,[12] making it the logical place to print such a reformist tract.

Another thing to take into consideration is the situation England itself. There were only a few printers in England,[13] and those that were in business fell under strict government control pertaining to the publication of books. Failing to comply with government regulations could be severely punished.[14] That this censorship system appeared to be rather inefficient does not seem to have affected the decision to print *The Praier* abroad. Moreover, in 1531 Henry VIII was going after the entire English clergy, claiming that they had usurped royal authority in the administration of canon law.[15] This made England a highly volatile stage to print religious tracts, let alone religious tracts of a reformist nature. The reasons for publishing the text abroad can, unfortunately, go no further than stating that publishing abroad was the safest alternative to actually have the text published. Antwerp printers were familiar with English writers and patrons, as Tyndale's English translation of the Bible was clandestinely published there too. Antwerp's ties with the yearly market of Bergen op Zoom also provided a good opportunity for any printed books to be smuggled into England, despite attempts of the English government to thwart smuggling of unwanted books.[16] As it is unknown what text was used by De Keyser to prepare his edition of *The Praier*, it will remain unknown and uncertain through whom and why De Keyser acquired access to the text. The choice for Merten de Keyser was probably made because he had previously published other works by Tyndale and reformist writers such as George Joye.

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[10] François, W. "The Antwerp Printers Christoffel and Hans (I) van Ruremund, Their Dutch and English Bibles, and the Intervention of the Authorities in the 1520s and 1530s."*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 101: 1 (2010), p. 10.

[11] Arblaster, P. *A History of the Low Countries*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. pp. 113-9.

[12] Marnef, G. "Protestant Conversions in an Age of Catholic Reformation: The Case of Sixteenth-Century Antwerp." In Gelderblom, A-J., De Jong, J.L., Van Vaeck M., eds. *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*. Intersections vol. 3 (2003), Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 33-48.

[13] François, "The Antwerp Printers". p. 10.

[14] "The Sixteenth Century", Abrams, M. H., and Stephen Greenblatt, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 7th ed. Vol. 1. New York, Londen: W.W. Norton &, 2000, p. 483.

[15] Ibid. p. 475.

[16] François, "The Antwerp Printers", p. 14-6.

Chapter 2 – The Plowman Tradition

Almost from his earliest conception, the figure of Piers Plowman was used for reformist causes. He was even listed as one of the leaders of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, although this was clearly a misattribution.[1] His most famous appearance in literature is in William Langlands's *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*, dating from the middle of the fourteenth century. Although Langland himself was an orthodox author,[2] his poem was appropriated to reformist causes soon after the manuscripts gained circulation. The poem inspired a series of spin-off poems and other reformist tracts that have come to be known as the *Piers Plowman* tradition or the Plowman tradition. One of these spin-off texts is *The Praier*. This chapter will explore the relationship between *The Praier* and the Plowman Tradition and the ramifications for the place of *The Praier* within this tradition.

Before examining the place of *The Praier*, a few remarks about the traditions have to be made. As the mention of two different names might suggest, there is no clear definition for the traditions, and so there is also no clear consensus about which texts do and which texts do not belong to the tradition. Despite the suggestion of the name, the *Piers Plowman* tradition does not necessarily cover texts which allude directly to Langland's *Piers Plowman*. In the texts treated by Helen Barr, only one of the four texts alludes directly to *Piers Plowman*.[3] Conversely, the *Piers Plowman* tradition as proposed by Helen C. White not only includes *Piers Plowman* and texts which directly allude to the poem, it also includes texts featuring a general plowman.[4] As not all the texts of this tradition refer to a character named Piers, it is also known as the Plowman Tradition, or as "plowman writings."[5] Because the name Plowman Tradition can be considered more neutral, this thesis will use that name throughout when referring to the tradition to which *The Praier* arguably belongs.

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[1] Barr, "Introduction", pp. 4-5.
[2] Brewer, *Editing* Piers Plowman, pp. 7-8.
[3] Barr, "Introduction", pp. 1-45. The titles included in Barr are *Richard the Redeles,,Mum and Sothsegger*, *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, and *The Crowned King*.
[4] White, *Social Criticism*, pp. 1-40. The texts discussed by White are *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*, *The Praier*, *pierce the Ploughmans Crede*, *Pyers Plowmans Exhortation, unto the Lordes, Knghtes and Burgoysses of the Parlyamenthouse*, *Newes from the North*, *I playne Piers which cannot flatter*, *A godly dyalogue and dysputacion betwene Pyers Plowman and apopysh* [sic] *preest concernyng the supper of the lorde*, *the Debate between Pride and Lowlines*, *The Plowman's Tale*, and *Jack up Lande*.
[5] Dean, J.M. "Plowman Writings: Introduction". *Medieval English Political Writings*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996, par. 1. < http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/dean-medieval-english-political-writings-plowman-writings-introduction>

Along with some twenty other texts, *The Praier* can be identified as belonging to this Plowman tradition. The twenty texts belonging to this group can be divided again into two categories: those belonging to the Alliterative Revival of the fourteenth century and those belonging to the "Ploughman Tradition of Complaint".[6] In the Alliterative Revival, fourteenth-century poems revived and continued the use of alliteration as a stylistic device similar to the alliterative forms of Anglo-Saxon poetry.[7] The "Ploughman Tradition of Complaint" is constructed by Douglas Parker and focuses on the continuity between the complaints of (ecclesiastical) abuses in *Piers Plowman* and plowman writings of the sixteenth century.[8]

The tradition to which *The Praier* belongs is named after "one of the most expansive poems written in Middle English"[9]: *Piers Plowman*, also known as *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*. Written in alliterative verse, the poem is a satire on the many faults of the Church and contemporary society as perceived by its narrator, Will.[10] [11] In a series of dream-visions, the poem relates the search of its narrator and his quest to "save [his] soul". In the first part of the poem, the narrator is taken to the King's Court, where he presents the reader with the "corrupt social condition of England."[12] Then the reader is presented with concrete proposals for reform, such as social equality rather than class distinctions, and personal and spiritual regeneration, under the guidance of Piers the Plowman.[13] Today, the

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[6] The texts *Richard the Redeles/Mum and Sothsegger*, *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, *The Crowned King* and *Death and Life* can be said to belong to the Alliterative Revival; see Pearsall, 1977, p. 153. According to Parker, the texts *God spede the plough, Here begynneth a lytell geste how the plowman lerned his pater noster, Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte: A dyaloge betwene the marchaunt the knyght and the plowman dysputyng who is a verey gentylman and who is noble and how men shuld come to auctoryte…, A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman,* The Plowman's Tale, John Bon and mast Parson, Hugh Latimer's Sermon on the Plowers, *The Vision of Piers Plowman, A godly dyalogue and dysputacion betwene Pyers Plowman and apopysh* [sic] *preest concernyng the supper of the lorde, I playne Piers which cannot flatter, Pyers Plowmans exhortation vnto the lordes, knyghtes and burgoyesses of the Parlyamenthouse, Pierce the Plowmans Crede, Newes from the North, The Shepheards Calender,* Tale of the Ploughman, and *The Banckett of Iohan the reve vnto Peirs* [sic] *ploughman, Laurens laborer, Thomlyn tailyer and Hobb of the hille with other* are the sixteenth century texts that belong to his Ploughman Tradition of Complaint. *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* appears in both categories, because it is both reminiscent of the tradition of alliterative poetry (Pearsall) and a work of complaint (Parker). Parker's *Vision of Piers Plowman* refers to the 1550 edition of Robert Crowley, rather than the original manuscript.

[7] Gray, M. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 2nd ed. London: Longman York Press, 1992, p. 17.

[8] Parker, *The praier*, pp. 52-78.

[9] Barr, "Introduction", pp. 3-4.

[10] Treharne, E. "William Langland: Piers Plowman" in Treharne, E., ed *Old and Middle English, c. 890 – c.1450 an Anthology..* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2010. p. 689.

[11] I intentionally use the word 'narrator' here instead of 'author', as there is no scholarly consensus on who the author is. Traditionally, scholars have followed W.W. Skeat in acknowledging William Langland as the author, although this claim has quite recently been countered by C. David Benson. Because of this uncertainty about the author, any claims on the poem representing his views must also be dubious. The attacks on clergy mounted in the poem, however, can be ascribed to the narrator, as he is the one presenting these attacks.

[12] Pearsall, D. *Old English and Middle English Poetry*. London: Routledge, 1977, p. 177.

[13] Treharne, "William Langland", p. 689.

poem survives in over fifty manuscripts, indicating that *Piers Plowman* was highly popular in its own time.[14] This is corroborated by the fact that some contemporary readers have left a record of their engagement with this poem.[15]

The tradition as a whole is named after one of the poem's most important characters, Piers Plowman. He guides Will, the narrator, through the second half of the poem, where Will and the reader are presented with alternatives that would remedy social corruption. In this part of the poem, Piers represents the simplicity of Christian virtue and "the true inwards bases of faith."[16] He guides Will through the dream-visions, and by explaining to Will what the visions mean, Piers guides Will to spiritual truth. Piers is a humble and simple figure, who is later transformed to represent Christ. The relationship between spiritual discernment and the figure of the plowman is not new, see for example Ecclus 6:18-20 in the Old Testament.[17] Langland, however, was the first to equate a plowman with Christ. Using the humble and simple plowman as an example, the poem manages to explain difficult religious concepts by referring to metaphors extracted from a plowman's life.

Despite the poem's popularity, however, *Piers Plowman* also became the subject of religious controversy as it was appropriated to endorse Lollard ideas.[18] The figure of Piers, for example, was used by the leaders of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, as the poem in which he figured well represented the oppressed commoners and official corruption.[19] Even though *Piers Plowman* is critical of several contemporary practices of the clergy, the poem as a whole cannot be called reformist.[20] Langland was "a fundamentally conservative and orthodox thinker".[21] Despite it being used to rally support for the Peasants' Revolt, the poem did not call for an uprising such as that of the Revolt. Rather than calling for a reform such as that of the Peasants' Revolt or later that of the English Reformation, Langland appears to advocate a social reform that will help to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Like Langland,

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[14] Ibid. p. 688.

[15] "William Langland, ca. 1330 – 1387" in Abrams, M.H. and Greenblatt, S., eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000, pp. 318-9. According to Abrams and Greenblatt, manuscripts and two sixteenth-century editions of *Piers Plowman* have comments in the margins by their readers and those who studied the poem.

[16] Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry*, p. 177-8.

[17] See also Luke 9:62; I Corintians 9:10; II Timothy 2:6 in the New Testament, but also texts such as the *Song of the Husbandman.*

[18] Barr, "Introduction", p. 5.

[19] Abrams and Greenblatt, "William Langland", pp. 318-9.

[20] Parker, *The praier*, p. 54.

[21] Abrams and Greenblatt, "William Langland", p. 319.

Piers Plowman is fundamentally an orthodox poem, calling to reevaluate the current (fourteenth century) state of society and reinstate Christian values in society.[22]

The orthodoxy of *Piers Plowman* changed when the poem was printed in 1550 by Robert Crowley (1517 – 1588). Detailed by Charlotte Brewer in her work on the evolution of *Piers Plowman*, Crowley does not heavily edit the text of the poem.[23] However, by fitting the poem with his "The Printer to the Reader" preface, he transforms *Piers Plowman* into a Protestant reformist tract. Moreover, Crowley provides marginal commentary in which he highlights elements from *Piers Plowman* and explains them in light of the contemporary sixteenth-century religious struggles. In his preface, Crowley identifies the purpose of the poem to be equal to that of the Protestant reformer John Wycliffe (1320 – 1384). Not only did Crowley turn *Piers Plowman* into an actively reformist poem, he thereby also created a precursor for other sixteenth century reformist literature and provided reformist writers with an appropriate character to fight what they considered the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.[24] The result of Crowley's transformation is most clear when titles of other reformist tracts, such as *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* dating from 1553, refer back to *Piers Plowman*.[25] These tracts not only borrowed the character of Piers; they also referred back to *Piers Plowman* through the way they treated their subject as their source text did (according to Crowley) or by invoking its alliterative meter,[26] or presented their grievances in the form of complaint literature.

The texts most commonly associated with *Piers Plowman* and the Plowman tradition are *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede, Richard the Redeless, Mum and Sothsegger* and *The Crowned King*. This association was already made by Derek Pearsall in 1977 and appears to be endorsed by Helen Barr's decision to include them in her work on the Piers Plowman tradition. These four texts are linked most closely with *Piers Plowman*, because they are all written in the alliterative verse characteristic of the Alliterative Revival and the poems rely on *Piers Plowman* as source material. *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* is most reminiscent of *Piers Plowman* itself, with a plowman teaching the narrator the text of the Creed, after the narrator's failure to learn his Creed from one of the four mendicant orders he visits. *Richard the Redeless*, *Mum and Sothsegger*, and *The Crowned King* are essentially all poems which analyze kingship to offer advice to their respective kings (Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V)

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[22] Treharne, "William Langland", p. 689.
[23] Brewer, *Editing* Piers Plowman, pp. 7-19.
[24] Parker, *The praier*, p. 60-3.
[25] Hudson, "Epilogue", p. 255.
[26] Ibid. p. 254.

as well as analyzing the roles of different members of society. In contrast to these texts, the sixteenth-century texts focus on attacks against the clergy (e.g., *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman*) and church corruption (The anonymous *Plowman's Tale'*.

There were a few characteristics of Langland's Piers the Plowman that made him an ideal literary proto-Protestant that could be used by other reformist writers, even though Langland himself did not advocate religious reform through the figure of the plowman in the way his followers did. One of these characteristics was that even though the plowman occupied a humble station in life, often accompanied with a great degree of poverty, he nevertheless appeared to be spiritually enlightened. The plowman is so often worldly poor but spiritually rich that poorness appears to be a prerequisite for spiritual enlightenment in the sixteenth century. Poorness seems to trigger common sense, intelligence and spiritual wisdom, all of which become clouded in the wealth of the traditional church. [27] The figure of the humble plowman was especially appealing to (Lollard) reformists, because they believed that all people "with a feeling faith and an open hart" should have access to Christian doctrine, and not just a select few. [28] Piers the Plowman was the literary embodiment of this ideal.

The plowman narrator of *The Praier* is most certainly enlightened. Before turning to his actual 'praier and complaynte', the narrator starts with an impressive display of knowledge of the Old Testament. Far from being a mere demonstration of his knowledge, this opening establishes the literary technique of the list which the narrator will use later to tie together more disparate material than verses from the Old Testament. At the same time, his knowledge appears to give credibility to the complaints about the corruption of the traditional church. A man, even a humble plowman, cannot be wrong in observing such faults if he possesses such detailed knowledge of the Old Testament. The plowman's integrity is corroborated and deepened by the fact that the reader is presented with the narrator's personal prayer to God. [29] In having a plowman narrator who attacks the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, *The Praier* seems to fit squarely within the Plowman tradition, especially the Tradition of Complaint as developed by Douglas Parker. In his view, the critique that is mounted in *Piers Plowman* can be construed as complaints about the practices of Roman

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[27] Parker, *The praier*, p. 70.
[28] Ibid. p. 57.
[29] Ibid. p. 7.

Catholic clergy, because the poem calls for the (personal) improvement of the clergy/Church rather than reform of the Church.[30] This is the same critique that is expressed in *The Praier*.

There are, however, a few problematic points. As pointed out by Anne Hudson, the plowman narrator of *The Praier* hardly seems to exist outside of the title.[31] It has to be assumed by virtue of the title that the narrator is a plowman, rather than a learned "malcontent of that time."[32] Moreover, it is impossible to determine whether *The Praier* was in fact invoking the figure of Piers the Plowman, or if it was referring to the plowman as a sixteenth century commonplace that referred to popular misgivings about the church and its role in society.[33] As argued by Lawrence Warner, Piers Plowman was as much a creation of Langland as it was a folk figure.[34] This issue is further complicated by the fact that it is unknown when *The Praier* was originally composed, and so no reference to Langland or the folk figure can be determined. As mentioned in the introduction, the language of the text is not representative of sixteenth century language use.[35] At the same time, the claim that the text was "written not longe after the yere of oure Lorde A thousande and thre hundred" (l. 3 – 6)[36] conflicts with the Lollard contents of the text. Whenever the poem was written, the author did not think it was necessary to explain his choice for a plowman narrator or establish the narrator's authority.[37] The contents of the text present a similar problem. While it resembles *Piers Plowman* in its concern for the poor and the text is highly critical of the Roman Catholic clergy, there are no real textual links to *Piers Plowman* such as those that are found in the poems belonging to the Alliterative Revival, for example in *Pierce the Plowman's Crede*. Because of these problems, it can be hard to convincingly argue that *The Praier* belongs to the Plowman Tradition. The similarities to other works that do belong to the genre because they share criticism of clerical abuses or use a plowman narrator, however, seem to outweigh the problems mentioned above and so *The Praier* can be located within the Plowman Tradition.[38]

The problems surrounding *The Praier* are not wholly (inter)textual problems. Another factor that has had a significant impact scholars' ability to place the text in an appropriate literary context is the lack of research concerning *The Praier*. Scholars have been aware of the

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[30] Ibid. p. 56.
[31] Hudson, "Epilogue", p. 257.
[32] George Puttenham quoted in Parker, *The praier*, p. 52.
[33] Hudson, "Epilogue", p. 258.
[34] Warner, L. 'Plowman traditions in late medieval and early modern writing." in *Plowman*, Cole, A. and Galloway, A., eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Piers* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 199.
[35] Hudson quoted in Parker, *The praier*, p. 91, note 38.
[36] All line numbers will refer to the numbering as presented in Parker's edition of the text.
[37] Hudson, "Epilogue", p. 259.
[38] For an extensive comparative argument, see Parker, *The praier*, pp. 52-78.

text's existence; it is mentioned by Derek Pearsall in his section on the Plowman tradition and Anne Hudson questions any categorization of the text as plowman writing in view of the fact that the plowman of *The Praier* seems to only exist in the title of the work. As previously mentioned, it appears that Douglas Parker's critical edition is the first extensive study of both the text itself and of the text's historical and literary context. While Parker's work on this text cannot be underestimated, it also has to be taken into account that his work is currently the only extensive scholarly work available on *The Praier*. Moreover, his work is, by this time, already over fifteen years old. The lack of other available material, however, does not necessarily endorse Parker's work. For example, Louise Bishop criticized Parker for not consulting John Bower's work on the Piers Plowman Tradition, as this would supposedly have benefitted Parker's analysis of *The Praier*'s place within this tradition.[39]

Parker, however, does argue that *The Praier* belongs with the Plowman tradition. Although there may not be a plowman present within the narrative, there are other indicators that argue in favour of *The Praier*'s place. One of these is his concern for his own socio-economic class throughout the tract. The narrator invokes Christ's help for His 'pore servantes' (l. 153), as well as regularly referring to 'lewed man' (l. 197), contrasting them with the abusive practices of the clergy, culminating in the narrator's imploration to God to receive his prayer even though it is neither payed for nor prayed as well as the prayers offered by religious men (ll. 592-8).

There are other factors which may have inhabited research into the (context of) *The Praier*. The availability of suitable, primary source material (the only independent editions of the tract are De Keyser's 1531 and Godfray's 1532 editions) obviously could have played a part. Other factors could be judgments such as Hudson's reproach that *The Praier* may not properly belong with the plowman tradition because there is no plowman present in the narrative in the 1988 companion to *Piers Plowman*,[40] making the text a less popular or interesting research subject. Moreover, it appears that researchers have favored texts that explicitly refer to a Piers in their title or in the text itself or texts that specifically have a plowman present in their narrative, such as the texts included in the *TEAMS* monograph on medieval political writings.[41] *The Praier* does not refer to a character named Piers or even makes explicit that it has a narrator or character who is a plowman. Another reason may have

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[39] Bishop, L.M. "Parker, ed., The Praier and Complaynte (Bishop). *The Medieval Review* 10-12-1998. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/4587/98.12.10.html?sequence=1>
[40] A second companion was published by Cambridge University Press early 2014.
[41] Dean, "Plowman Writings", pars. 5-8. The Plowman writings contained in this volume are the *Song of the Husbandman*, *God Spede the Plough*, *I-blessyd Be Cristes Sonde*, and *Chaucer's Plowman*.

been that the swing of research trends has not favored analyses of socio-historical or socio-political backgrounds of the more obscure medieval texts. Whatever the reason or reasons may have been, the end result remains the same: there is very little research available on *The Praier* itself, and much of the research that is available to relate *The Praier* to the plowman tradition is quite old.[42]

Because of the lack of research concerning *The Praier*, there is only the work of Douglas Parker to state that the tract does indeed belong to the Plowman tradition, specifically that of complaint literature. It is therefore difficult to state conclusively that the text really does belong in that tradition. However, Parker's extensive comparative analysis with works that do belong to the tradition such as *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman* and Hugh Latimer's Sermon on the Plowers, as other scholars have claimed, make it plausible that *The Praier* can be, and perhaps even should be, analyzed as being a part of this tradition. I also want to make another remark concerning the absence of the plowman in the narrative itself. As was mentioned earlier, the author of *The Praier* used a rhetorical device through which the audience/reader becomes a witness to the narrator's prayer. As a prayer, it only seems logical that the plowman hardly exists outside of the title, as participating in the narrative of the prayer would be equivalent to talking about oneself in the third person. The concern for the socio-economic class of the plowman, as well as the connection between plowman and spiritual discernment are, in my opinion, sufficient textual evidence to treat *The Praier* as a part of the Plowman tradition.

Throughout this thesis, I will analyze *The Praier* based on the assumption that it belongs with the Plowman tradition. The prayer and complaint will be analyzed as if they are uttered by the plowman who is referred to in the title of the text. Any differences found in (the editing of) the editions that will be analyzed for this thesis will be explained with reference to this tradition and its socio-historical and/or socio-political circumstances. In doing so, this thesis will provide an argument that can support Parker's analysis of *The* Praier as plowman writing, or otherwise present evidence that Parker's argument is in need of more nuance, as was also suggested by Louise Bishop.

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[42] For examples, see Chapter 1, page 4, note 13.

Chapter 3 – Godfray's 1532 Edition of *The Praier*

After the first edition of *The Praier* was printed in Antwerp in 1531, it was reprinted the following year in England itself by Thomas Godfray. *The Praier* was one of the many reformist tracts that were printed abroad, and one of several that were printed by Merten de Keyser.[1] Although we cannot know whether manuscript copies were still circulating in England before the printed edition of 1531, it can at the very least be considered peculiar that the first printed edition of this text was produced on the Continent rather than in England itself, although the strained religious situation in England may go some way towards explaining this decision. Before turning to the comparison of the two editions, a few issues need to be noted. The first is that this research can only start *in medias res*, as there are no known surviving manuscript copies of the poem against which any printed editions may be compared as previously mentioned. It is therefore also unknown what kind of text Merten de Keyser may have used to produce his printed edition of the text and what changes he may have made to this exemplar text. Further, De Keyser's and Godfray's editions are the only two known independent editions of the poem. It is therefore also difficult to examine them the way Charlotte Brewer examined the printed editions of *Piers Plowman*. Any editing done in *The Praier* will be examined in light of what the editing means for the ideology it presents, rather than how the editor came to his decision.

The 1531 edition of *The Praier* is already a recognizable reformist tract. The narrator prays/complains to God about the corrupt manifestations within the Church, and, near the end, emphasizes that the Old and the New Testament and God's commandments are the only things necessary to live a true and fulfilling Christian life. He attacks those he perceives to be the true enemies of Christianity: those who say they were Christ, the forgiving of sins and imposing of penances by papal priests, abuses associated with auricular confession. In general, the narrator mounts an attack at the clergy and other papal corruptions, such as the doctrine of purgatory, simony and the reluctance to fight or get married. All in all, *The Praier* seems to amount to an exposé of all that is wrong with the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy and he beseeches God to give those who suffer under that corruption, i.e., the poor, the strength to keep enduring that suffering until God can save them.

The 1532 printed edition of *The Praier* that was used for this thesis is the digital reproduction of the copy owned by the Bodleian library, made available at Early English

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[1] Parker, *The praier*, p. 3.

Books Online *Short Title Catalogue* number 20036.5. The text, including preface, consists of 82 pages, with a total of 86 pages in the *STC* edition. The title page is illustrated with a decorative border surrounding the running title and the quotation from Matthew 10:21. Although his name does not appear anywhere in this edition, it has been assumed by the *STC* and also by Douglas Parker that Thomas Godfray must have been the printer of the 1532 edition, because the decorative border of the title page is the same border that is used in another work where Godfray does sign his name to the publication.[2] Although other printers certainly could have acquired the printing plate with the design of this border, it seems unlikely as the second book where Godfray uses this border is dated at 1535 and signed with his name.[3] Yet, there is no way of eliminating the possibility that Godfray may have acquired the printing plate of another printer, who would have originally printed the 1532 edition. Godfray's tentative association with other printed editions of reformist tracts,[4] however, makes it plausible that Godfray was the original printer of the 1532 edition.

One of the first noticeable things about the text is that unlike the 1531 edition, Godfray's preface does not address "the Christen reader" (l. 11-2), but instead reads "w. T. to the reader".[5] It has been assumed that these initials refer to William Tyndale, a reformist writer whose work was also published by Merten the Keyser, who used the same font to print Tyndale's works as he did for the 1531 edition of *The Praier*.[6] The attribution of William Tyndale has a great impact on the original preface, as it transforms the preface from a general address to the reader to Tyndale's personal address to the reader. The reason for this edit seems to have been commercial. Tyndale was a well-known reformist author in the sixteenth century,[7] and so it would likely help sales of this edition if his name was associated with it.

Another edit that has a great impact on the 1532 edition is the omission of the glossary that is provided at the end of the preface in the 1531 edition. Disregarding the changes made to the spelling in the preface, Godfray copied the 1531 preface almost verbatim, including the original reference to a glossary to aid the reader. The glossary itself, however, is completely omitted from Godfray's edition. It can only be conjectured why Godfray did not include the glossary. Given that printed books were costly to produce in the sixteenth century, it seems that the glossary was omitted on purpose. The omission of the glossary can be plausibly

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[2] Ibid. p. 47; p. 92, note 45.
[3] Early English Books Online *STC* 26119, p. 2, left side (border); p. 44, left side (signature).
[4] Parker, *The praier*, p. 47 – 48.
[5] Early English Books Online *STC* 20036.5, p. 2.
[6] Parker, *The praier*, p. 4.
[7] Tyndale translated the New Testament into English in 1526, a decidedly reformist action. Rosman, *From Catholic to Protestant Religion*, p. 27.

explained in the context of the place where the 1531 and 1532 editions were produced. The 1531 edition was produced by a French publisher, living in Belgium, printing an English text. Although authorship of De Keyser for the preface cannot be proven and scholarship has conjectured the author/editor to be William Tyndale, it seems much more likely that De Keyser would attach a glossary, because his clients were not likely to read or speak English very well;[8] especially not if the English "be now antiquate and worne out of knoulege by processe of tyme" (ll. 109–10).[9] For the same reason, the original author might have thought that even for an English audience a glossary would be convenient, as is also testified by John Foxe. Godfray might have considered that, even if the language was somewhat outdated, an audience whose native tongue was English would not have needed a glossary to help them understand the message of the main text of *The Praier*. Whereas De Keyser's edition may have been intended to be distributed amongst Continental readers as well, Godfray's edition likely intended for a wholly English audience.

Possibly, the size of the book may have played a part in Godfray's decision not to include the glossary. The glossary would take up at least one page, if not two. In the sixteenth century, books would still have been an expensive luxury commodity, so "wasting" a page, or two, on a glossary that his reader would not really need seems a plausible reason for its omission. The value of the space of the pages seems to be corroborated by the fact that Godfray relies quite heavily on the use of abbreviations in his printed text. On multiple occasions, numerals that were written out in the 1531 edition have been replaced by Roman numerals in Godfray's 1532 edition. This is already evident in the running title of *The Praier*, where the word "thousande" is replaced with the Roman numeral M (5). The same is done in line 106, where the year is now completely substituted with Roman numerals, becoming "M and LLL". Abbreviation is not only evident in Godfray's use of numerals. Throughout both the preface and the main text, Godfray relies on manuscript abbreviations as well. The conjunction "and" is regularly replaced with the abbreviation "7", and the letters n and m are regularly replaces with a tilde (~) on the preceding vowel. Even in the examples mentioned, however, there is an inconsistency in the use of abbreviations. The numerals, the conjunction and abbreviated words are not abbreviated consistently throughout the text. This inconsistency then, argues against trying to save precious space on the page. Moreover, the book contains three blank pages: one before and one after the page containing the title of the work and one after the text has finished. While it may have been unavoidable to have a blank

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[8] François, W. "The Antwerp Printers", p. 14.
[9] All line numbers refer to the numeration as given in Parker's edition of the text.

page because of the process of printing, it seems that a work containing three blank pages may not have been very concerned with efficient use of space. The reproduction of the *STC* does not contain an image with a ruler, nor does it include the dimensions of the original book in the record of this edition.

Besides using abbreviations in his edition, Godfray also heavily edited the spelling of the 1531 edition. But as with Godfray's use of abbreviations, his editing in spelling is also inconsistent. Overall, the spelling is heavily edited, but there are also instances where Godfray copied the original spelling, even if he had amended the spelling in previous sections of the text. Because of these inconsistencies, it is hard to say whether Godfray tried to amend the spelling of his edition to suit a certain spelling standard or a certain dialect. A more likely explanation for the heavy editing of spelling, however, is the fact that the 1531 edition was printed by a man for whom English was his third or even fourth language. Even if De Keyser had an exemplar of *The Praier* with which he could have prepared his edition, he had no dictionary to consult on the correct spelling for the 1530s. While his spoken English may have been quite good, spelling it would have been an entirely different endeavor for De Keyser. If his exemplar was unclear, he could only consult his own speech or follow the spelling of his previously printed English books. Although Godfray worked well before the appearance of the first English dictionaries as well,[10] he was much more familiar with contemporary English spelling(s) since he was a native speaker of the language. To reach as big an audience as possible, it would be only natural to adjust the spelling to that with which the possible clientele was most familiar.

Godfray's editing seems to have mainly focused on the outward appearance of the text. He seems to have normalized the spelling according his native speaker standards, and make more efficient use of the page by employing manuscript abbreviations, rather than actively editing the content of the poem. While the text is not word for word the same, the overall content of the poem remains the same. Godfray has made no attempts to lessen the attacks mounted at the papal clergy, or to make the plowman more present in the narrative. As there is no biographical information available on Godfray, there is no way of knowing whether or not *The Praier* represented his own views on the papal clergy.

Rather than editing the text of *The Praier*, Godfray appears to have edited to context of the tract by positing an association with the reformist writer William Tyndale. This

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[10] The first English dictionaries did not appear until the early seventeenth century. See Blank, P. "The Babel of Renaissance English" in Mugglestone, L., ed. *The Oxford History of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 231.

association imbues the text with a rather sensationalist feeling, as if the association with Tyndale means that it must be a text worth reading. In a sense, this could be termed structural editing, because Godfray has changed the framework of *The Praier*. It does appear, however, that Godfray did not want to be associated with his own edition of *The Praier* as he did not sign his name to the publication. Considering the tumultuous times of the early 1530s, this is hardly surprising. We can therefore assume that at the very least Godfray was publishing his edition illegally, as publication of the text would most likely have been stopped had Godfray complied with the normal censorship rules of Henry VIII's government. In the worst case scenario, Godfray only published *The Praier* to profit from the possible association it had – or that Godfray made the text have – with William Tyndale. In a better scenario, Godfray felt sympathetic to the complaint of the plowman and felt that it ought to be published. In the latter case, it would also make sense that Godfray would not edit the contents of the poem, as that would affect the reformist nature and thereby the message it would want to bring across.

In conclusion, Godfray did heavily edit the 1531 edition before publishing the new edition himself. However, his editing is mostly of a superficial nature. Even with some slight semantic editing, the overall editing does not affect the original intent or purpose of *The Praier*. The text is still highly critical of certain practices of the Roman Catholic Church, such as auricular confession, and the narrator also laments the poor guidance of the poor, lay people by the corrupt clergy. Had Godfray edited the text to tone down this critical message, he would have cut his own throat because then he could no longer associate this text with William Tyndale, who was a known reformist writer. Without associating this rather obscure text with William Tyndale, it would have remained an anonymous reformist tract, which would not have made Godfray any money. Despite the strict limitations on reformist writing issued by the Tudor government, Godfray had to leave the text as it was and rather anonymize himself if he wanted to make any money by printer *The Praier*.

Chapter 4 – John Foxe, his *Actes and Monuments* and *The Praier*

John Foxe was an English historian and martyrologist, whose *Acts and Monuments* – also known as *John Foxe's Book of Martyrs* – would shape the opinion of the English public concerning the Catholic Church. Foxe was born in Boston, Lincolnshire in 1516 or 1517. From an early age, it appears that Foxe had a disposition for learning and so he enrolled at Oxford University in 1534 at the age of sixteen, a courtesy of his stepfather John Hawarden.[1] Foxe stayed on as a fellow at Oxford University after his own graduation in 1537, until he had to take his priest's orders. Being a Protestant himself, Foxe opposed having to take his priest's orders and so he resigned from the university in 1545.

After moving to London and finding employment there, Foxe started to work for English Reformation under the young Edward, writing several tracts.[2] He already began work on his *Acts and Monuments* during this period, but would not complete the first edition until 1560. As a Protestant, Foxe suffered during the reign of Mary and lived in exile in several different European countries, such as the Low Countries, Germany and France. In exile, Foxe would continue to work on what would become the first draft of the *Acts and Monuments*. After the accession of Queen Elizabeth, Foxe returned to England and finished his first edition of the *Acts and Monuments*.[3]

Known both then and now as *John Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, the book describes the lives and suffering of many English martyrs "from the primitiue tyme till the reigne of K. Henry VIII". The book focuses on the suffering of the Protestants and proto-Protestants as they were being persecuted for their beliefs. The first edition already is a massive work, filling some 1800 pages in the first edition.[4] The book went through four editions during Foxe's lifetime, as well as several other editions and abridgements after his death. All the editions that were published during Foxe's life (editions 1-4) as well as editions that were published posthumously (editions 5-10) can be found in the *Short Title Catalogue*.[5] The text of *The*

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[1] Freeman, T.S. "Foxe, John (1516/17–1587)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10050 (accessed June 12, 2014).
[2] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "John Foxe", accessed juni 12, 2014.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215429/John-Foxe>
[3] Ibid. pars. 2-4 .
[4] Mozely, J.F. *John Foxe and his Book*. London: SPCK, 1940, p. 129.
[5] The different editions are, chronologically listed, *STC* 11222a (1563), 11223 (1570), 11224 (1576), 11225 (1583), 11226 (1596), 11226a (1597; second volume of the 1596 edition), 11227 (1610), 11228 (1632), Wing F2035 (1641), Wing F2036 (1684) and Wing 2037a (1686).

Praier appears in the second and fourth through tenth editions. It is unclear why Foxe did not include the text in the first edition and why he deleted it again for the third edition.

The 1570 edition of *Acts and Monuments* was the second edition of this work, published in two volumes numbering approximately 2300 pages of double-columned text.[6] Although the title remained the same, Foxe edited so much in the second edition that it can be considered to be a separate work from the first edition.[7] It had an extended scope with respect to the first edition to include amongst other things personal testimonies of persecutions of Protestants,[8] and became one of the most comprehensive historical works available in the sixteenth century. The edition used for the analysis of this thesis is the Early English Books Online reproduction of the copy owned by Harvard University Library.

The Praier is contained in the first volume, where it is incorporated in the section on the reign of King Edward III (1312-1377, r. 1327-1377).[9] This is one of the first changes Foxe makes to the work. Rather than placing the text in the sixteenth century during the reign of Henry VIII, when *The Praier* was published, Foxe appears to have believed the date provided by the running title of the poem as it is found in De Keyser's 1531 and Godfray's 1532 edition: "written not longe after the yere of oure Lorde A thousande and thre hundred" (l. 3-6), as he includes the text for the year 1360.[10] By transposing the tract to the fourteenth century, Foxe definitively turns *The Praier* into a Lollard tract – at least when it is contained in the *Actes and Monuments*. It is unknown whether Foxe may have had a manuscript copy of the tract that allowed him to date the text to the fourteenth century. However, considering that the text copies an addition made by Godfray, Foxe must have at least used this copy for his work.[11]

The associations with 1532 edition are reinforced through the fact that Foxe also omitted the glossary of the preface. However, Foxe edited the preface much more drastically, in that he deleted the preface entirely. Instead, he fitted *The Praier* with a preface of his own hand, in which he acknowledges a debt to William Tyndale in whose book it was supposedly included, again strengthening the association of *The Praier* with Tyndale, like Godfray had

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[6] Mozley, *John Foxe*, p. 141.
[7] Freeman, "Foxe, John", par. 52.
[8] Ibid. par. 52.
[9] *The Praier* is reproduced on pages 494-501
[10] In the 1570 edition Foxe does not yet indicate line numbers for the columns, so the references to quotes from this edition are rather general out of necessity. Foxe, 1570, p. 494, left-hand margin, lower half.
[11] Godfray added the phrase "thy wordes" in line 600, turning the original "[…] whan he spake to the puple thy wordes they turned in to songes…" into "[…] whan he spake to the people thy wordes / they turned thy wordes in to songes…". It appears this was done for clarification that God's words were turned into songes *after* Ezechiel spoke to the people rather than as he spoke to them, and this addition is copied by John Foxe.

done. Foxe's remark is reminiscent of the "w.T. to the reader" heading found on the preface in Godfray's 1532 edition. In thus strengthening the association with Tyndale, Foxe also strengthened *The Praier*'s association with the Lollard or reformist cause because Tyndale was known as a reformist writer. The reformist nature of *The Praier* is indicated by Foxe in his introduction, as he introduces the year 1360 as the year "wherin the Lord, after long darkenes beginneth some reformation of his churche".[12] The author of *The Praier* is one of the first Foxe adds to his list of martyrs, of whom Foxe enumerated several before moving on to introduce *The Praier*.

In his introduction, Foxe is also very clear about his editorial choices for *The Praier*, saying:

> I haue as truly distributed the same [i.e., the text of *The Praier*] abroad to the readers handes: neyther chaunging anye thing of the matter, neither altering many words of the phrase therof. Although the oldnes and age of his speche & termes be almost grown now out of vse: yet thought I it so best, both for the vtilitie of the boke to reserue it frō obliuion, as also in his own language to let it go abroad, for the more credit and testimony of the true antiquitie of the same [i.e., *The Praier*]. Adding withall in the mergent for the better vnderstanding of the reader, some interpretation of certayne difficult termes and speeches, as otherwyse myghtperhaps hinder or staye the Reader[.][13]

To his credit, Foxe indeed did not change the content of the tract, although he did heavily edit the spelling, despite his claim that the spelling would bear witness to the antiquity of the text. One spelling edit that deserves a mention is Foxe's consistent use of the capital G and L when the narrator adresses God or the Lord, much like is done nowadays.

The text of *The Praier* is also followed by an afterword by Foxe. It briefly summarizes the attacks mounted on the pope by the text, before moving on to a text that Foxe associates with Wycliffe and Lollardy. In Foxe's opinion, *The Praier* was a useful text to introduce the anti-papal sentiments of "Wycleffe and hys felowes" (p. 501, righthand column), effectively turning the tract into a proto-Wycliffite or proto-Protestant tract. By placing the text in a different time period, before the peak of Lollardy and using it as an introduction for Wycliffe's teaching, Foxe also places the content of the original tract in a different light. Rather than maintaining the biting anti-papal criticism the text has in De Keyser's 1531 or Godfray's 1532 edition, the text now seems be less biting, although not less critical, of the

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[12] Foxe, *The first volume*, p. 494, left-hand column, lower half.
[13] Ibid. p. 494, right-hand column, upper half.

papacy. In the context given by Foxe's introduction and afterword, *The Praier* seems to become a source text for Wycliffe's ideas about the reformation of the Church and in Foxe's context it appears to be a leg up to the, in Foxe's eyes, more complicated ideas or texts of Wycliffe.

Disregarding the effects on the ideology of the text when Foxe transposes it to 1360, the actual placement of the tract in the middle of the fourteenth century could be seen as a kind of "restorational editing". As has been mentioned previously, it is unknown when *The Praier* was composed. Linguistic evidence suggests a date of origin earlier than its sixteenth century publication, possibly the early fifteenth century. While 1360 is not the early fifteenth century, it approaches the possible original context of the text closer than De Keyser's 1531 edition, as there this placement means there is a tighter coherence between the Lollard contents of *The Praier* and the temporal context.

The fourth edition of the *Actes and Monuments* was published in 1583 and comprised around 2100 pages. Like the second edition, the fourth edition also added new material to its pages and deleted material found in previous editions. This edition also re-included *The Praier*, as it had been deleted in the third edition. This re-inclusion of the tract did not, however, entail a restoration to the sixteenth century. Rather, Foxe included *The Praier* in the same place as it had been included in the second edition of 1570: under the reign of King Edward III in 1360.[14] Curiously, although the text of the tract itself does not differ with respect to the 1570 edition, the heading of the pages in which *The Praier* is printed reads "the complaynt and prayer of the ploughman",[15] even though the title of the text itself contains the right word order in the main body, i.e. "the prayer and complaint".[16] This mistake is most likely due to the speed with which John Daye, the publisher, wanted to finish this fourth edition. Daye's health was failing him and he wanted to see the edition completed before his health would actually fail him. This speed made detailed proof-reading impossible and so many typos and other mistakes have remained in the text.[17] Another example of these mistakes is that the heading for *The Praier* is also found several pages onwards, where the narrative of the text has gone on to discuss *The Storie of Armachanus*.

The fourth edition was also the last edition John Foxe worked on himself, as he died in 1587. The publication of the fifth through tenth editions show, however, that the *Actes and*

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[14] Foxe, *Actes and monuments* 1583, p. 398, left-hand column, lower half. This fourth edition of the *Actes and Monuments* also does not contain line numbers.
[15] Ibid. pp. 398-406. The faulty heading is found on pages 399 [398], 400, 405 [398] and 406 [408].
[16] Foxe, *Actes and monuments* 1583, p. 398, right-hand column, upper half.
[17] Freeman, "Foxe, John", pars. 87-8.

Monuments did not die with Foxe. Although Thomas Freeman claims that each of the posthumously published editions of Foxe's book has been edited to suit the different agendas of the editors,[18] it appears that *The Praier*'s place as a proto-Wycliffite or proto-Protestant work may have saved it from deletion in their editing. *The Praier* is contained not only in the sixth edition, published in 1610, which was examined for this thesis, but also in all the other posthumously published editions that are available in the *STC*. In all instances, *The Praier* is included under the reign of Edward III and is introduced by Foxe rather than the sixteenth-century preface. Like the two other editions of Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, the 1610 edition also changes nothing about the content of the text but rather places it in the fourteenth century, pre-Wycliffite context. This edition also contains the heading with faulty word order, although this appears to be remedied from the seventh edition onwards.

Foxe himself also did not edit *The Praier* between the second and fourth edition, although the deletion from the third edition could be considered a very drastic editing action. He also left the ideology of the tract intact. However, the placement of *The Praier* under the reign of Edward III and adding his own introduction and afterword have a definite effect on the framework in which *The Praier* is regarded. Rather than proving the continuity of the sixteenth-century reformist complaints, *The Praier* becomes the starting point of these complaints, which are afterwards elaborated upon by Wycliffe. As such, it looses much of the intensity the tract has as a sixteenth-century publication. The process that led Foxe to decide that *The Praier* should be included in the reign of Edward III remains unclear. Foxe is known to have carried out extensive research on all editions, except for the third one.[19] In the course of his research, he may have come across an earlier version of *The Praier* that is now lost to us, or *The Praier*'s association with Tyndale in the 1532 publication by Godfray may have told Foxe that the main text was older than Tyndale's preface. The Lollard sentiments expressed in the tract, however, make Foxe's decision to use it as an introductory text to Wycliffe's teaching curious, and would benefit from further research into *The Praier* itself and Foxe's process of research and composition.[20]

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[18] Ibid. par. 89.

[19] Ibid. par. 77.

[20] Even though Mozley's work on Foxe and his book contain chapters on the making (chapter 5) and method (chapter 6) of the *Actes and Monuments*, his book dates from 1940 and new research may offer new insights complimentary, or possibly rebuking, those presented by Mozley.

Chapter 5 – Other (Plowman) Texts and *The Praier*

In all the editions examined in this thesis, the contents of the poem are not edited. Rather, especially in the case of Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, the framework for the tract has been edited to suit the needs of the publisher in a structural kind of editing. As England's separation from Rome had only been underway for two years in 1531, it is possible that *The Praier* was first printed in Antwerp due to the tentative character of that separation. As was detailed in Chapter 1, Henry VIII actively persecuted those with reformist views. Although Henry himself may not have help the pope in high regards due to the latter's unwillingness to grant Henry a divorce, the attack against the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and the pope in *The Praier* may have been too much to be granted publication in England as harsh censorship measures were employed.[21] Technological issues may also have played a role in the decision to publish the tract abroad. Printers on the continent were technologically more advanced than the printers in England, and the demand for reading material in England was so high that the English printers may not have been able to cope by themselves.[22] Neither of these considerations, however, can account for the early publication of *The Praier*, as it was published well before Crowley's edition of *Piers Plowman* and is often considered to be the first text of the sixteenth-century Plowman writings.[23]

Unfortunately, there is also very little information available on the original publisher, Merten de Keyser and the original author of the tract is unknown. These avenues of inquiry are therefore also closed in trying to determine what made *The Praier* eligible for such early publication. Instead, this chapter will explore the similarities or differences with other sixteenth-century plowman writings that were published around the time of *The Praier*'s original publication in 1531. Within the sixteenth-century Plowman tradition, the texts surrounding *The Praier* are *Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte: A dyaloge betwene the marchaunt the knyght and the plowman dysputyng who is a verey gentylman and who is noble and how men shuld come to auctoryte…* (published in 1525, henceforth referred to as *Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte*), *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman* (published in 1530), and *The Plowman's Tale* (published in 1536). These texts, two predecessors and one

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[21] Abrams and Greenblatt, "The Sixteenth Century", p. 483.
[22] Avis, F.C. "England's Use of Antwerp Printers 1500-1540". *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 1973, Mainz: Verlag der Gutenberg-Gesellschaft, 1973, pp. 234-40.
[23] White, *Social Criticism*, p. 26.

successor of *The Praier*, were chosen as similarities in their contents can establish a continuity of the views expressed or techniques used to express reformist views.

Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte is a text in which a merchant, a knight and a plowman question each other on the importance of wealth, inheritance and birth with regards to the notions of gentility and nobility. The plowman takes control of the debate and argues that virtue warrants gentility and nobility rather than wealth, and he is a much more eloquent ad persuasive speaker than his wealthy companions.[24] Although the subject of this work is not a reformist one, the figure of the plowman is similar to the narrator of *The Praier*. Despite their low social status, both plowmen display a spiritual discernment and wisdom that appears to be linked to their low social status. They are able to discern the simple spiritual truth, because they are not blinded by the wealth that those in higher social positions possess, such as the merchant and the knight do.

A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman, unlike the preceding text, is a reformist tract – or possibly, tracts. A composition of Jerome Barlowe and William Roye, their version of this text is compiled of a dialogue and two prose tracts.[25] Like *The Praier*, this text was also first published on the Continent rather than in England.[26] The three parts of the work attack three different issues related to the Roman Catholic Church. The dialogue mounts an argument for radical reforms within the Church, an example of which is the second part. This second part is, originally, a fourteenth-century Lollard tract which attacks the clerical impropriation of secular land and the abuses that come with it, such as the raising of tithinges. The last section of the work argues in favour of a vernacular Bible. The use of the Lollard tract is a device to show that the complaint against the clerical impropriation of land is also of considerable antiquity, and not a "new", sixteenth-century complaint.[27] *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman*, then, shares more similarities with *The Praier* than *Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte*. Not only is this text also first published on the Continent, it also shares *The Praier*'s anti-papal sentiments. Even though the attack against the Roman clergy is much narrower than that of *The Praier* in that it only attack the impropriation of secular lands rather than a host of things like *The Praier* does, *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman* also emphasizes the continuity of its own complaint and that of its (fourteenth-century) predecessors. In doing so, this text is one of the

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[24] This summary is based on that given in Parker, *The praier*, pp. 93-4, note 54.
[25] Ibid. p. 25.
[26] Ibid. p. 20.
[27] This summary is based on the information given in Parker, *The praier*, pp. 25-6; pp. 93-4.

most clear examples which "articulate[s] the marriage between Lutheran and Lollard ideologies […] published between 1525 and 1531."[28]

The Plowman's Tale is a fourteenth-century Wycliffite text, which is often misattributed to Geoffrey Chaucer through its later inclusion in editions of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[29] It has to be differed from Thomas Hoccleve's version by the same name, which is an orthodox piece about a monk who is encouraged by the Virgin Mary to recite her Psalter daily.[30] The anonymous tale that has been misattributed to Chaucer is a 1380-line alliterative poem, which sets the Griffon, the representative of the traditional Roman Catholic Church, against the Pelican, the representative for reform, to discuss the need for reform. Most of the poem is taken up by the Pelican, who enumerates, and so argues against, the evils of the clergy. Speaking for 1111 of the 1380 lines,[31] the Pelican attacks the established and well-endowed clergy in favour of the poorer and oppressed Lollard priests. After advancing the views of the pope, the Griffon is attacked by the Pelican and a Phoenix (both symbols of Christ), ensuring victory of the Lollards over the Roman Catholic Church.[32] Of the three plowman writings that surround the publication of *The Praier*, *The Plowman's Tale* may have the most in common with *The Praier*. Not only does the tale quite literally attack (a representative of) the pope, it also attacks a wide range of clerical evils. Wawn characterized the attack as "anti-papal, anti-curial, anti-monastic, anti-mendicant, anti-clerical".[33] Moreover, the tale also features a plowman in its title who barely participates in the narrative of the tale, but who is at the same time characterized as a person of spiritual discernment, as Harry, the host of the *Canterbury Tales* who is features in the prologue of the tale (ll. 1-52), asks the plowman to tell "some holy thynge".[34]

Another characteristic which *The Praier* shares with *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman* and *The Plowman's Tale* is the manipulation of older material, generally to prove the continuity of the attacks mounted in the texts themselves with attacks that were mounted against the Roman Catholic Church in the fourteenth century. Although the main text *The Praier* is thought to be composed in the late fourteenth or early

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[28] Ibid. p. 26.
[29] Ibid. p. 63.
[30] Ibid. p. 61.
[31] Ibid. p. 67.
[32] This summary is based on information given in Dean, J.M. "The Plowman's Tale: Introduction" in Dean, J.M., ed. *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991, par. 4.
<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/dean-six-ecclesiastical-satires-plowmans-tale-introduction>
[33] Wawn quoted in Parker, *The praier*, p. 68.
[34] Dean, "The Plowman's Tale", par. 4.

fifteenth century, the four-page preface is sixteenth century addition, [35] which sets up an extended analogy between the persecutions of Christ and his reformers and sixteenth-century reformers and uses the main text to demonstrate the antiquity of the sixteenth-century religious complaints. *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman* uses a Lollard tract attacking the impropriation of secular land,[36] and *The Plowman's Tale* was originally written in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century as well, before it was added to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, thereby giving the text a literary pedigree it did not deserve as well as turning Chaucer in to a supporter of Lollardy.[37] Only *The Plowman's Tale* does not emphasize the continuity between its source material and the sixteenth-century reformist complaints.

It also has to be taken into account that all these texts were published during the early years of the Reformation, which involved many persecutions in England as it was separating from Rome. The Reformation on the Continent was more intense, and the fact that both *The Praier* and *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman* were published on the Continent may have influenced their ideology, in advocating a true separation from Rome and Catholicism. By stressing the continuity between their arguments and that of their Lollard predecessors, they were showing that their ideas were not new. In fact, the antiquity of their ideas might have made them more credible, similar to *The Plowman's Tale* claiming a literary pedigree by attaching itself to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. These texts appear to have all been written to expose the corruptions and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church and point out the "cause of reform in the 1530s."[38]

While the other Plowman writings may not share *The Praier*'s areas of attack, or even be a reformist text (*Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte*), they do demonstrate that *The Praier* was published in a literary context that voiced concerns similar to that of *The Praier*, which used the literary device of the plowman to question social and/or socio-religious issues or which demonstrate continuity of the complaints or arguments lodged by the sixteenth-century reformers. Moreover, other literary works of a reformist nature were also being published around the time that Merten De Keyser produced his edition of *The Praier*. William Tynsdale's translation of the New Testament into English had been published during the same period, as well as issues of *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe*, *A Lytle treatous or dialoge very necessary for all christen men to learne and to knowe*, and *The summe of the holye scripture*

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[35] Parker, *The praier*, pp. 3-4; 7.
[36] Ibid. p. 93, note 54.
[37] Ibid. p. 63.
[38] Ibid. p 98, note 72.

amongst others.[39] *Rede Me and Be Nott Wrothe* attacks the Roman clergy, and cardinal Thomas Wolsey in particular.[40] *A Lytle treatous or dialoge very necessary for all christen men to learne and to knowe* attacks confession, pilgrimages, images and the mass,[41] and *The summe of the holye scripture* is a translation of Henricus Bomelius' *Summa der Godliker Scrifturen* and is a theoretical discussion of Luther's view on justification by faith.[42] Even though these texts have no plowman character and express different criticism from *The Praier*, it is obvious that *The Praier* was not a singular appearance on the literary stage of the 1530s. While there may not have been many Plowman writings on which *The Praier* could rely for composition and publication, the text was to find "a congenial home among these other tracts", as Douglas Parker put it.

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[39] Ibid. pp. 19-20.
[40] Ibid. p. 28.
[41] Ibid. p. 27.
[42] Ibid. p. 29.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the editing of *The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman vnto Christe* in several sixteenth-century published editions, using the work of Charlotte Brewer on the evolution of printed publication of *Piers Plowman* as a framework. Unlike Brewer's study, the research of this thesis had to start *in medias res* by necessity, as there are no known manuscript editions in which the tract survives and with which the first printed edition of the tract could be compared to act as a starting point, like Brewer's chapter on Crowley's *Piers Plowman*.

The basis for comparison was Douglas Parker's critical edition of the 1531 edition, which is based on the publication of Merten de Keyser in Antwerp. It was compared with Thomas Godfray's edition of 1532 that was published in England, and the editions included in the second, fourth and sixth edition of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*. These editions were chosen because of mutual similarities: Godfray's edition was published the year following De Keyser's publication, while the other editions are all editions of the same work with a regular new edition interval in between.

Despite the apparent initial decision to publish *The Praier* abroad, Godfray did not alter the contents of the poem to facilitate publication in England. Instead, he linked the text to William Tyndale, and edited the text by incorporating manuscript abbreviations and replacing written numerals with Roman numerals. I have suggested that this may have been to scale down the size of the book, although Godfray is too inconsistent in his use of abbreviations and Roman numerals to conclusively support that argument. The *Short Title Catalogue* reproduction of Godfray's edition is not reproduced with a ruler to indicate size, nor is the size mentioned in the description of the text. The association with Tyndale does affect the framework of Godfray's publication, as it imbues the text with a level of sensationalism. Tyndale was a well-known reformist author, and so the association would have turned *The Praier* into a kind of "must read" reformist tract, rather than being appreciated for the contents themselves.

Foxe, like Godfray, did not edit the content of the tract, but rather edited the context of *The Praier*. Foxe appears to have followed Godfray's suggested link of *The Praier* with William Tyndale, but has cut out the original sixteenth-century preface and replaced it with an introduction by his own hand. Foxe has also furnished his edition of the text with marginal comments, which generally explain a turn of phrase or the text's present argument to the

reader. Foxe also imbued the text with greater antiquity, by including it in his section on the reign of Edward III, giving 1360 as the date of origin. It is unknown whether Foxe had access to a manuscript exemplar of the text, but the association with Tyndale and editorial similarities to Godfray's 1532 edition suggest that Foxe must have at least used that edition for his own work. Like Godfray's changes, Foxe's editions of *The Praier* have been edited in a more structural way, which honored the tract's original Lollard sentiments. At the same time, Foxe's decision to use *The Praier* as an introduction to Wycliffe's work undoes much of the intensity of the original tract.

The lack of editing to the contents of *The Praier* appears to be odd at first, especially when looking at the socio-historical and socio-political circumstances of the publication. The sixteenth century was a tumultuous century, as it witnessed the rise of the Reformation, both in England and on the Continent. While the Reformation was no less radical on the Continent, England witnessed a unique to-ing and fro-ing from the Catholic strain to the Protestant strain of Christianity during the Tudor era. Within one hundred years, England went from being Roman Catholic to English Catholic, Protestant, Catholic and Anglican as King Henry VIII separated the English Church from Rome and was succeeded by his children Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I. Each time, those who held the "wrong" views as well as those who held too orthodox views were persecuted. While this may have motivated the decision to publish *The Praier* abroad, it makes Godfray's decision to not edit the contents of the poem stand out all the more. However, the decision to let the contents remain intact can be understood when *The Praier* is compared to other Plowman writings that were published during the same period. The two works that are closest to the 1531 publication, *Of Genytlnes and Nobylyte* and *A proper dyaloge betwene a Gentillman and an Husbandman*, follow the traditions of the plowman as a figure of spiritual discernment and using older material to emphasize continuity between Lollard and reformist views, respectively. The first Plowman writing to follow the publication of *The Praier*, the anonymous *The Plowman's Tale*, also incorporates reformist views from older work and a humble plowman to express reformist views. The sixteenth-century preface that was added to De Keyser's 1531 publication of the text also stresses the continuity between the hardship the sixteenth-century reformers have to endure and the hardship Christ and his followers endured during the foundational period of Christianity. Editing the content of *The Praier* would have meant compromising the continuity emphasized in the text. Other non-Plowman writing published during the same period contain similar reformist arguments, and so *The Praier* is a typical early sixteenth-century, reformist publication. The later inclusion by Foxe in the fourteenth century can be

termed as "restorational edition", as he restored the tract to its supposedly original place in reformist history.

This thesis has shown the evolution of *The Praier* in the sixteenth century, in that the contents of this tract have not been edited throughout several subsequent editions in which the text appeared but the contexts in which the text have appeared has been affected by subsequent editors. Despite the tumultuous historical context of the Reformation, editing the contents would have defeated the purpose for which the tract was used: to demonstrate continuity between Lollard ideas and sixteenth-century religious complaints, or – in the case of Foxe – to use the text as an introduction for Lollard ideas. It is impossible to say whether or not De Keyser edited *The Praier* before publishing it in 1531, as there is no known manuscript or other exemplar that De Keyser may have used to produce his publication. For Godfray, however, it was important to keep the link of the text and the preface to stress the continuity of the complaints of the sixteenth-century reformers. Conversely, it was important for Foxe to keep the tract but replace the preface in order to introduce the readers of his *Actes and Monuments* to the teaching of John Wycliffe. *The Praier and Complaynte of the Ploweman vnto Christe* may be one of the few texts that, like *Piers Plowman*, is both a fourteenth and a sixteenth century text, due to its later appropriations by English reformers.

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-------- *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church with an vniuersall history of the same, wherein is set forth at large the whole race and course of the Church, from the primitiue age to these latter tymes of ours, with the bloudy times, horrible troubles, and great persecutions agaynst the true martyrs of Christ, sought and wrought as well by heathen emperours, as nowe lately practised by Romish prelates, especially in this realme of England and Scotland. Newly reuised and recognised, partly also augmented, and now the fourth time agayne published and recommended to the studious reader, by the author (through the helpe of Christ our Lord) Iohn Foxe, which desireth thee good reader to helpe him with thy prayer.* London: John Daye, 1583. (*STC* 11225)

-------- *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happening in the Church with an vniuersall historie of the same : wherein is set forth at large the whole race and course of the Church from the primitiue age to the later times ... with the bloody times ... and great persecutions against the true martyrs of Christ ... : now againe as it was recognised, perused, and recommended to the studious reader by the author, Master John Foxe.* London: Company of Stationers, 1610. *(STC* 11227)

The praier and complaynte of the ploweman vnto Christ writte[n] nat longe after the yere of our Lorde M. [and] thre hu[n]derd 1532 (*STC* 20036.5)

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