

CHRISTIAN CATO:

A MIDDLE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE *DISTICHA CATONIS*

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INTRODUCTION

Item number 169 of Brown's *Index of Middle English Verse* lists two manuscripts of Cato's *Distichs* in six-line stanzas: MS Bodl. 3894 (Fairfax 14), fols. 122r-123v, and MS Bodl. 29003 (Add A. 106), fols. 15v-27v.¹ The Fairfax version is a fragment of only two leaves, coming at the end of one of the manuscripts of *Cursor Mundi*.² The version in MS Bodl. Add. A 106 is, in fact, an entirely different translation, unrelated to that in the Fairfax manuscript. Wells recognized this, and Förster demonstrated the difference by printing a few sample verses of the present poem.³

Brown's error persists, however. In one of the most recent discussions of the English versions of Cato, I.A. Brunner neglects to mention the Bodleian translation at all, although she discusses the Fairfax version.⁴ Furthermore, a mistake in the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* obscures the information given there as well.⁵

MS Bodl. Add. A. 106 is a quarto volume of the fifteenth century, measuring 13.5 cms. x 20.5 cms. Six separate paper manuscripts are preserved together in the original fifteenth-century binding of leather over boards. The book is mainly a miscellaneous collection of medical and scientific information, but it also contains the *Quatrefoil of Love*.⁶

The translation of the *Distichs* occupies the present fols. 15v-27v. The hand is a secretary, with the initial capitals outlined in red. The rhyme scheme, aab ccb, is indicated by red pen lines connecting the rhyme words. The dialect of the translation is a northern one.

This version of the *Distichs* of Cato is translated, as Förster noted, directly from the Latin, without the aid of any of the French texts available at the time.⁷ The epigrammatic Latin of each distich has been expanded to fill six lines of English verse. The work was done by a translator who was not particularly competent at writing Middle English verse, and whose Latin, furthermore, appears to have been somewhat shaky. The result is a translation with a great many line fillers, and some very strained syntax.⁸ It is possible that this translation is the result of an exercise by a not very gifted schoolboy.⁹

The translator's desperate attempt to fill up lines can result in a change in the meaning of the original. This sometimes takes the form of an appeal to reason (lines 39, 75, 224) or to public opinion (lines 60, 206, 549, 801). The translator gives the impression of sometimes urging ethical actions for immediate practical gain (lines 68, 239, 518-19, 633, 758-59) or, on the other hand, adds thoughts on the uncertainty of life and the necessity of living well in the face of death (lines 113-14, 130-31). Expansions of this kind, however, are quite compatible with the spirit of the original.

Distortion of a different kind occurs when the translator imposes his Christian habits of mind on his material. All things, both good and bad, come from God (lines 282, 293, 299, 364, 402, 445, 508, 586), even when, as in lines 402-05, this idea is very awkwardly combined with the image of Fortune's wheel. Good works are done for the glory of God (lines 89, 279, 296, 666, 887; cf. 499, 530, 844-49), while bad actions offend him (line 687) and must be atoned for (lines 679, 856). While the Latin distichs speak of a world of random events, in this translation God constantly watches over the affairs of men and sends suffering to test them (lines 429, 477, 777, 830; cf. 128). Paradoxically in a poem of advice attributed to the pagan Cato, knowledge is clearly felt to be Christian knowledge and God's law is the ultimate teacher (lines 568, 309). The greatest distortion of the original comes in Distich II 25 (lines 415-17),

where the stoic despair of the Latin is replaced by a promise of Salvation.

This translator's addition of Christian material is not a systematic re-interpretation of the *Distichs* such as those of Latin commentators on them.¹⁰ Rather, the author has translated the *Distichs* into the only context in which he could conceive them -- that of a Christian universe.¹¹

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NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹ Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York 1943). For a list of other Middle English translations of the *Distichs* of Cato, see my article "An Unknown Middle English Translation of the *Distichs* of Cato," forthcoming in *Anglia* (1981).

² It was printed in Richard Morris, ed. *Cursor Mundi*, V, EETS, O.S. 68 (1878; rpt. London 1966) lines 1669-74. See also F.J. Furnivall, "How Cato was a Paynym and a Christian Too," *Notes and Queries* 4th ser., II (1868) 176; B.J. Whiting, "Notes on the Fragmentary Fairfax Version of the *Disticha Catonis*," *Mediaeval Studies* 10 (1948) 209-15.

³ John Edwin Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, First Supplement* (New Haven 1920) 973; Max Förster, "Ein neuer mittelenglischer Cato," *Archiv* 145 (1923) 208-12.

⁴ Ingrid Arvide Brunner, "On Some of the Vernacular Translations of Cato's *Distichs*," in Sheena Z. Buehne et al., eds., *Helen Adolf Festschrift* (New York 1968) 99-125. Cf. the same author's thesis, *The Anglo-Saxon Translation of the Distichs of Cato: A Critical Edition*, Diss. Columbia Univ., 1965.

⁵ George Watson, ed. *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, I (Cambridge 1974) col. 508. A line of type has been inadvertently omitted, thus implying that the present manuscript was published

in *Archiv* (1905-6). In fact, the manuscript there printed, Univ. Lib. Camb. Hh IV 12, contains Benedict Burgh's translation of the *Distichs*.

⁶ For a complete list of contents, see Falconer Madan, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, V (Oxford 1905) 540-1.

⁷ The definitive edition of the Latin text is in Marcus Boas, ed. *Disticha Catonis* (Amsterdam 1952). Most of the manuscripts of the later Middle Ages, including the one used by this translator, are variants of Boas's text. For the various Old French versions see Robert Bossuat, *Manuel bibliographique de la littérature française du moyen âge* (Melun 1951) Nos. 2646-50, 5291; Ernstpeter Ruhe, *Untersuchungen zu den altfranzösischen Übersetzungen der Disticha Catonis, Beiträge zur romanischen Philologie des Mittelalters*, II (Munich 1968) 93-98. The Anglo-Norman translation of the monk Everard was well-known in England and was itself translated several times into Middle English.

⁸ The third and sixth lines of the stanzas particularly are often simply padding. See lines 57, 63, 69, 72, 121-23, 300, 303, etc.

⁹ For a discussion of proverb collections which resulted from school-boy exercises, see the article by Bartlett Jere Whiting, "A Collection of Proverbs in BM Additional MS 37075" in *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun Jr.*, ed. Jess B. Besinger Jr. and Robert P. Creed (London 1965) 274-89.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the Christian glosses on Cato, see Richard Hazleton, "The Christianization of Cato: the *Disticha Catonis* in the Light of Late Mediaeval Commentaries," *Mediaeval Studies* 19 (1957) 157-73.

¹¹ I should like to thank the members of the editorial board of *Florilegium* who read this article with care and offered many valuable suggestions. Any remaining errors are, of course, entirely my own responsibility. A grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada enabled me to examine the manuscript at first hand.

TEXT

- All chylder þat wyll clergy kon, fol. 15v
 Take hed how Catoun kenned his son
 Of lely lyuyng to lere;
 For to hym he told many a skyl
 To lere þe gud & leue þe yll 5
 Be ways many & sere.
- I 1 Son (he sayd) sen it is so
Þat a God is withowtyn mo,
 Maker of all mankynd,
 Als bukes says, & wit þerby 10
 Hym sal þou serue all soueranly
With clen hert & clen mynd.
- I 2 & son, to wake þou sal take kep
 So þat þou be not gyfyn to slepe
 Ne to vnrewleful rest; 15
 For ydelnes oft sythes begynnes
 To foster & forther many synnes
 Wher vertus suld be fest.
- I 3 The fyrst vertu to ald & jonge
þat is to restrene þi tonge 20
 In al reson unskyll;
 For with God he is worthe to prays
Þat sothefastnes in seson says
 & fro harm haldes hym still.
- I 4 & þerfor, sone, þou þe awyse 25
 When þou sall oper men chastyse
 To putt owt all envye.
- I 5 Son if þou wyll behald þi lyfe,
 Or þe maners of man or wyfe,

- & þe condycyens knaw, 30
 Þan sal þou proue in all þe pake
 Ðat no man lyues withowt lake
 In dyd or els in sawe.
- I 6 Ðam þat þou hopes may gretely greue,
 Al if it lyke to þi releue, 35
 Leue it for encheson;
 For mekyll praises men erthely gud, fol. 16r
 Bot mekyll mor men praises manhed
 Wher it is rewled be reson.
- I 7 Be myld & meke in wordes & dedes 40
 Ay whyls men reson to þe bydes;
 & also if men ryse
 Be nyght or day to do þe wrange.
 Ðan sal þou schew manhed emange;
 So wyrke þai þat er wyse. 45
- I 8 & for þe wordes, son, of þi wyfe
 Sall þou not with þi seruand stryfe
 Hir malice to mayntene.
 For oft sythes, as þe proces proues,
 Ðe wyfe hattes þat þe husband loues, 50
 Som tym so it is seyn.
- I 9 & if þi frend be fell of mode
 And þou entyse hym vnto gud
 & he þi rede refuse,
 3itt sal þou no3te sese þerfor 55
 Bot hym amonysche mor & more;
 Ðiselfe þan þou excuse.
- I 10 To þam þou wat hase wordes in wayn,
 Stire not þi steuen to stryn agayn,
 If þat þou wil wys sem. 60
 For wordes er gyfyn to ilka schrew,

& wysdam is gyfen bot to few,
Perfor fa[il]lyng is to þam.

- I 11 Lufe al men in lele charyte,
 Bot on al wyse luke þat þou be 65
 Vnto þiself moste nere.
 & to gud men þou do gudely
 So þat þou be not harmed þerby:
 Þis calles men counsell cler.
- I 12 Fle for to tell iapes or iangeloure, 70
 So þat þou be not mad none autoure
 Of tydynges, day nor nyzte.
 For to be still may nozte dysplese, fol. 16v
 & mekyll speche dose oft dysese,
 Bot it be rewled be ryght. 75
- I 13 Þam þat is hyght þe of þi brother,
 Hyght it not to none oper
 Tyll þou þerof be payd;
 For som men wyll hete ful hertly
 Þat ar ful faynte in to assy 80
 When þe soth is assayd.
- I 14 & if any oper man þe prayse,
 Wheder it be soth he of þe says
 Sese þiselfe abowte;
 & trew nozte mor of oper men 85
 Þan to þeself, þat suld þe ken
 Soth, within & withowte.
- I 15 & if þou se oper men well wyrke,
 Both to God & holy kyrke,
 & his wirkes be vnknawen, 90
 Þou may it tell till oper men,
 & say how þai his wirkes sal ken,
 Bot prayse nozte þine awne.

- I 32 And son, lat no3te pi hert be drawen fol. 18r 190
 Fro pi frend þat þou lang has knawen
 For no new conysaunce;
 For of þe knawen þou wate þe will,
 & how þe new is, gud or ill,
 Þou wat not bot be chaunce. 195
- I 33 & sen þou seys pi erthely lyfe
 Is vncertayn, to man & wyfe,
 And fals in to assy,
 Euer ilka day þou þe awyse
 To wirke so þat som profett ryse 200
 To saule or to body.
- I 34 & son, whar þou may, be mastry,
 Querecom any of þi company,
 In word or els in dyd,
 Suffre þaim, & seke no wreke, 205
 So sal men of þe worschepe speke,
 & helpe if þou haue ned.
- I 35 & if þou thynk, son, to aske oght
 Of any man þat aw þe noght,
 Al if þe gyfte be gret, 210
 Dred þou no3te to gyfe lytil thyng,
 For þat makes neighbours mery to syng,
 & grace so sal þou gette.
- I 36 When þou has fo[n]don swylk a frend,
 Be war alway whar þou sal wend, 215
 No strif stir 3ou betwyn.
 For of hatered is Ire þe rute,
 & acord is beyld & bute
 Of loue, & kepes it clen.
- I 37 & if þi seruand or þi wyfe 220
 Stir þe vnto mony strife,

- To Ire or to envye,
 Lat þou þi witt þan pas þi wyll,
 To reule þe be reson & skylly,
 To venge þe not vylously. 225
- I 38 For whomso þou ilk day may der,
 Þaim semes wel somtym to forber,
 & noȝte to wreke ilk wrang;
 For þe most vertue þat may plese fol. 18v
 Is to be sufferand in dyssece, 230
 If þou of strengthe be strang.
- I 39 & gudes þat þou gyttis with trawele,
 Kepe þam wel, for force wil fayle,
 & trust of frendes is non.
 For when þi laboure is to þe grefe, 235
 Þan falles þou son vnto myschefe,
 & al þi gudes be gon.
- I 40 Of mete to frendes luke þou be fre,
 & þan wil þai gyf agayn to þe:
 So sal þou frenschep fell. 240
 Bot how so euer ȝe part ȝour pelfe
 Be þou most frendely to þiselfe,
 Els wil it noȝte be welle.
- II Pref. Son, if þou list to vnderstand
 11.1-2 & ler how þou sal til þi land, 245
 To Virgyll þan tak hed;
- II Pref. & if þou wil haue knawyng cler
 11.2-3 Of Herbes, þam Macer wil þe ler,
 His romanse if þou red.
- II Pref. & if þe lyke þan to ler more 250
 11.4-5 Of batels þat hase ben befor,
 In Rome & in Affrike,
 Red Lucane, & þan may þou ler

- Of Marte, & of oper many & ser,
 For he gaf tent to slike. 255
- II Pref. & if pou wil, whils pou art zonge,
 11.6-7 To ler þe oght of lele l[o]fyng,
 Ðan Ovyd bus þe vse.
- II Pref. & if þi list be nozte parto,
 11.7-9 Lere þe þan for to lyfe so 260
 Ðat pou may syn refuse.
- II Pref. A, der son, tent vnto me gitt,
 1.10 & lere what is wysdom & wyt,
 & haue in mannes mynd;
 For wysdom is þe souerayne floure fol. 19r 265
 Ðat brynges furth frute & swet sauour
 Of al virtuse be kynd.
- II 1 & son, it is witt wel to do,
 To vnknewen men þat comes þe to,
 & beyl þaim as þi broder;
 270 For better it is gud frendes to haue
 Ðan ony kyngdom for to craue
 With enmytes of oper.
- II 2 & cast þe nozte to controue
 Of heuenly thynkes þat ar abou, 275
 How þai þar corse kepe;
 Bot of þe erth, sen pou is wrozte
 Of erthely thynges, sal be þi thozte
 Alway, to Godes worschop.
- II 3 Do so, my son, in þi dyd 280
 Þe day of ded þat pou nozt dred,
 Whenso God wil it send;
 For whils pou dredes þat day of strife
Pou loses þe lykyng of þi lyfe,
 In what land so pou lend. 285

- II 4 & for þe thyng þat is in doute,
 If þou be greuyd, lat ire passe owt,
 & strife not þerfor lang;
 For ire trublys mynd of men
 So þat þai may noʒte clargy ken, 290
 Whilk thyng is ryʒte or wrang.
- II 5 Son, it is witt for to dyspend
 Erthly gud þat God wil send
 By ryght rewle, & be reson;
 & if þou sal gyf ony thyng, 295
 Luke it be gyfen to Godes louyng
 & seyn fytt in gud seson.
- II 6 & fro al owtrag suld þou fle,
 & lytill thyng, if God gyf þe,
 Haue yoe þerof in harte; 300
 For a gret schippe may sykyrar be fol. 19v
 In lytil water þan in þe see
 To haue men in þer wharte.
- II 7 & if any of þi company
 Til oper trespas pryuely, 305
 & non bot þou it knaw,
 Þan sal þou layn it on alwyse
 So þat no sclauder þerof ryse;
 Þis lernys þe Godes lawe.
- II 8 & men þat gyttes þer gudes with syn, 310
 Trowe þou noʒte þat þai sal wyn
 Gud hape to þer behoue,
 For al if syn som tym be hyd,
 Som tym it sal be kyd,
 Vnto þam gret reproue. 315
- II 9 Lake noʒte þe strenght of lital men,
 For þer vertuse þou may not ken,

- Bot witt þis wel alwas.
 Sere men haue wit wel to do
 Whom kynd wil gyf no strengh þerto, 320
 Wherfor men suld þaim praies.
- II 10 & if one be noʒte lyke to þe,
 Of strenght, ne state, ne of degre,
 Mer þou hym neuer þe mor;
 For ful oft sythes son may þou se 325
 Þe ouercommer ouercommen be
 With hym þat fel befor.
- II 11 & son, agayns man þat þou knawes,
 Strife not with vnsemly sawys,
 Ne hald no childys lang; 330
 For of few wordes, ful wel we wat,
 Commes mekyll strif & gret debate
 If þai be mayntened wrang
- II 12 & gudes þat God gyfes þe of grace,
 Cast þou not how þai com in plase, 335
 Ne how God has þaim wroʒt;
 For al þat He has gyfen to þe, fol. 20r
 At is wil He may flitte fro þe,
 Wheder þou wil or noʒte.
- II 13 & sone, be bowne euer bysyly 340
 With al þi force to fle enuy
 & Ire, þat is euyle syn;
 For if it noʒte to oper der,
 To þiself it is euyle to ber,
 & hurtes þi hert within 345
- II 14 & if þou be dyssesed with wrang,
 Accused, or demede to draw or hang,
 With fals Iuge or vntrew,
 Be þou of hert stalworthe & stable:

- To þe it sal be profetable, 350
 When þai ful sore sal rew.
- II 15 & if þou haue ben at debate
 With any man, arly or late,
 & 3e be mad ful frendes,
 Seke þou neuer vengauce for þat sam, 355
 Ne pursches no3te to pare his name,
 For þan al wrang þou wendes.
- II 16 Prayse no3te þiselfe if þou do well,
 For þat eter þat, as folk may [t]ell,
 Folowes vaynglorie; 360
 Ne blam no3te þiselfe out of skylle,
 For, as clerkes acordes þertill,
 Þat is ypocrysye.
- II 17 If God haue sent þe grete plente
 Of erthely gudes, as gold or fee, 365
 Spend not euer fast þerfor,
 For þou gose lange abowte,
 In litill space is spendytte oute,
 When þou may gyte no mor.
- II 18 & som tym, son, it may be kenned 370
 Þat witt bus be with foly blendyd,
 Eter þe cause wil craue;
 & if þou feyn þe a ful to be,
 Luke þat no foly be fon in þe,
 Bot se þiself to saue. 375
- II 19 And luk þou be no3te lycherouse, fol. 20v
 No nothyng in þine awn house,
 Bot fle þat foule defame;
 For couatyse in mans body,
 With scarsenes & with lychery, 380
 May lyghtely lose his name.

- & be no thyng abayste;
 Bot trewly thynk in hert on þis: fol. 21r 415
 God is of myght to mend al mys
 Of men þat in Hym traste.
- II 26 If þou se thyng to sel or by,
 Take tent, & leue it noʒte lyghtely
 Wher þou may siluer saue; 420
 For if þi fronte be ful of hare,
 Efterward it may be bare,
 & non swilk happyne haue.
- II 27 What tym is past, son, s[e] þou sal
 & se whatym sal forther fall, 425
 Als fortherly as þou may;
 For whoso wil his tym well spend,
 S[e]th þe begynnyng, þe medes, & þe end,
 God wil hym help alway.
- II 28 & alway in spence vse mesure, 430
 So þat þou may þiselfe succure
 & war þe wel fro wath;
 With owtrage is euer euyle to del,
 & in mesure is hape & hele,
 To saule & body bath. 435
- II 29 & if þou sere folke assente
 To dem, or gyfe a iugement,
 What thyng is don or sayd,
 Deme þou noʒte þan þer agayn;
 For if þou dyd few wald be fayn, 440
 & many wald be il payd.
- II 30 Son, whil þou space & hel may haue,
 Seke þou how þiself may saue,
 & þiself scheld fro schame;
 For if God grante þe sertan tyd 445

& þou lat it slyp & ouerslyd,
 Þe tym is noȝte to blam.

II 31 On dremes, son, thynke þou not lang,
 Bot als þai com, so lat þaim gange,
 & pas out of þi mynd. 450
 On days what syttes þi hert most nere,
 Þat sal in þi slepe apere;
 Þis is þe cours of mankynd.

III Pref. What man þat letter of clargy knawes, fol. 21v
 11.1-2 & herthly heres, or says my sawes, 455
 Whilk I araye to rede,
 If he take tent to my counsayle,
 It may hym mend & mekyll awayle
 To fulfill it in ded.

III 1 & þerfor, son, sese noȝte to ler,
 & hold in þi hert if þou oght her,
 & spend no tym in vayne;
 For man þat wil noȝte lerned be
 Is lyke ane ymage made of tre,
 Þat to no gud may gayne. 465

III Pref. & if þou wil wirke as I þe wryte,
 11.3-4 It may þe turn to grete profyte;
 & on þe sam manere
 If þat þe list not on it luke,
 Blam not me þat makes þe buke, 470
 Bot þe þat wil not lere.

III 2 Ay whils þou rewles þe ryghtwysly,
 & oper haue of þe enuy,
 Þou sett not be þer sawes;
 For it is noȝte in our power 475
 A wikked tong to stynte & ster,
 Bot God al gud warkes knawes.

- & onely of þine awne. 510
 Better is betym þi saule to tent
 Ðan for to purchesse land & rent
 To gar þi name be knawen.
- III 9 & when þou commes to course of held,
 & hase grete welthes in þi weld, 515
 Ðan is tym to tak hed;
 And gyfe gladly with þi hend,
 For swylk meyd may þe mast mend
 In tym when þou has ned.
- III 10 & if þi seruand to þe say 520
 In counsell þat amend þe may,
 Refuse þou nozte his red;
 For in al thyng þat men sal vse
 Ðer is no counsell to refuse
 Ðat may wele stand in sted. 525
- III 11 & if þou fall, as dose ful fell,
 Both of witt & warldly well,
 Be nozte þerof gruchand;
 Bot soueryngly, as I ayr sayd,
 Laud God, & hald þe payd, 530
 As þe tym is ordand.
- III 12 Son, wed no wyf for warldly med, fol. 22v
 Bot bye lawe þi lyfe þou lede
 In lufe & charite;
 & if scho lufe aneoþer louer 535
 Ðou lat hir wend hyr way foreuer,
 Ðat no wers worth of þe.
- III 13 & son, what [men] of wysdom wirk
 To se þat suld þou nozte be irke,
 & tak gud tent þerto; 540
 & if þou se þer warkes well sped,

Take þou ensample of þer ded
& do þiself ryght so.

- III 14 & luke þou take no charge on hand
Bot [þ]at þou may performe to end 545
Als oper hase don beforne;
For if þou take on þe trawale,
& or þou end it fayntly falle,
So sal som men þe scorne.
- III 15 Bot & þou a comon synner know 550
Þat will not mend hym for no sawe
To sle a foul defam,
His syn þou sal noȝte hald pr[i]ue,
Lesse þat som men say of þe
Þou assentes to þe sam. 555
- III 16 If wikkyd law agayns þe wend,
Þan most þou make þe iuge þi frend,
Als bes þou noȝt excused;
Bot frend or foo wheder he be,
Þe law is gud in his degre 560
If þat it be well vsyd.
- III 17 If þiself haue don a trayn
Wharfor þe aw to suffre payn
As sothfastnes will dem:
If þou be angerd for þat ded 565
Suffre it mekly for þi med,
Þus þiself suld deme.
- III 18 & son, ler lessons of holy writt,
& wirk þerefter with þi witte,
& trew no talles in wayn. 570
For p[o]ettes tales mervels alway, fol. 23r
Bot al is noȝte soth þat þai say,
Al if þai sem certaine.

Sal þou be seruiasable;

For if þou trespas hir vnto

Þou greues þi fader & oper also:

Þis sal þou fynd no fable.

- IV Pref. And if þou wyll lyf sykerly, fol. 23v 610
- 11.1-2 Both vnto saul & to body,
 Refuse foly of schrewes,
 & put away al wykked thyng
 Þat may þe lett of lele lyfyng,
 & gyf þe to gud thewys. 615
- IV Pref. & if þou will rewle þi deid,
 11.3-4 Þer resons oft sythes suld þou red,
 Wher þou may fynd expreste
 Whylk thynges er honest for to vse,
 & whilk þe aw to refuse, 620
 & forber for þe beste.
- IV 1 Ryches, my sone, þou sal dyspyce,
 & chache away so couatyse;
 Lat it not with þe lend.
 For ryche men her hase grete trawell, 625
 & oft sythes may men se þaim falle,
 & far euyl or þai end.
- IV 2 Bot & gudes be gyfen be grace,
 Or els be kynd in any place,
 Loue God of al his send. 630
 Þan sal þi gud to þe awayle,
 Þat lyfys fude þou sal not faile,
 & far well at þine end.
- IV 3 & if þou be raklesse & lyghte,
 Þat þou reule nozte þi gudes ryght, 635
 zitt sal þou nozte forþi
 Say þus: þat þi hape is blynd.

Bot defaute in þiselfe þou fund,
 Ðat rewlles it wrangwysly.

- IV 4 Lufe þe peny with luf perfyte, 640
 Bot sett nozte þerouer þi delyte
 With hert to hald it still;
 For holy men may haue monee
 & spend it furth in gud degre,
 Als reson is & skylle. 645
- IV 5 For if þou be seke, hed or hend, fol. 24r
 Ðan may þi monee þe amend,
 Som salfe þerfor to seche;
 & if þou wil not parte þat pelfe,
 Bot lat it lige & lose þiselfe, 650
 Ðan wirkys þou als a wrech.
- IV 6 Son, seyn þou suffers for leryng
 Of straunge masters hard chastesyng,
 Mor blith þan sal þou be
 To suffre wilfully always 655
 Whatso fader or moder says
 Or dose in gude degre.
- IV 7 Son, ordeyn þe to do swilk ded
 Ðat may to þe be menske & med,
 With ryghtwysnes to rys. 660
 & thyng þat may turne to reprove,
 Fle it for þine awne behoue;
 Ðan wirkes þou als þe wise.
- IV 8 & of þine awn her what þou has,
 Gyfe gladly vnto þam þat craues 665
 In Godes nam, & has ned.
 & if þou gyf þi gud gladly
 Gret thanke her may þou gytt forþi,
 & to þi saul mor med.

- On frend to call or craue.
 If pou se oper dy or lyfe
pat may no trest vnto þe gyfe
 Her langer hel to haue. 705
- IV 15 & son if pou sal seke a frend
 Whame pou wil lufe to þi lyfys end,
 Behald noȝt his haueyng,
 Bot her what men wil of hym meyn,
 & luke his lyf be gud & cleyn 710
 & honest in al thyng.
- IV 16 The gudes pat pou gettes with purchasse
 Spend þarwil whils pou has spasse,
 For menske & for þi med.
 What helpes it her ryches to haue, 715
 & be countede for a knawe
When men spekes of þi sped?
- IV 17 And if pou be man of noble fame, fol. 25r
 & couettes for to kepe þi name,
pou reule þe ryghtwysly; 720
 & haue no lykyng in þi harte,
 Ne ioy of oper men euyl quarte,
 For pat is euyl envy.
- IV 18 & whyls pou hase þi wyttes in weld,
 Scorne not þaim pat falles in eld, 725
 Bot of þaim make pou þi mark.
 For if pou be wyght & weld,
 In eld pou salè be als a chyld,
 Both of witt & of warke.
- IV 19 & whils pou art ȝong, ler som gud 730
pat may þe help to þi lyfes fude
 In tym when pou has ned;
 For worldly gud may fayntly fall,

- & þan may konnyng mekyll awayll
& do som honest ded. 735
- IV 20 When þou heres men speke gud or ill,
Here þaim well & hald þe still,
 Al if þer talk be lange;
For & þou take tent to oper sawe,
So may þou þer condycyons knawe, 740
 Wheder þai meyn well or wrang.
- IV 21 & if þou couett to kon clargy,
þan vse þe scolles contynuly
 In 3eres whils þou art 3ongh.
For as þi hand thurght vs is able, 745
So in studys, if þou be stable,
 It kennes þe cler konnyng.
- IV 22 & haue [no] car for tym to come,
For ded ne for þe day of dome,
 & see encheson why: 750
Whoso þis lyf can wyl dyspys,
& wirkes well in alkyn wyse,
 Hym thar not dred to dye.
- IV 23 For & þou wil lere gud thewys
Of wytty men, & fle fro schrewys, 755
 Do no3t efter þer ded;
& tech þou þaim þan þat can lesse; fol. 25v
So sal þou come to connyngnesse,
 & also serue gret mede.
- IV 24 & son, if þou will haue þi hell, 760
With mekyll drynk þou sal not dell,
 For mannes witt it wastes;
& oft men seys of dyuers drynkes,
Sere sekenes in mans body synkes,
 þat vnto ded hym hastes. 765

- & rasys foule defam.
 If þai wil mend þam, beld þaim by,
 & els fle fro þer company 800
 Lesse þou lose þi gud name.
- IV 31 Son, som men þat wil lytyll say
 Wyll thynk enuy in þer hert alway,
 With þaim þe most bewar.
 For whar þe strem is stable & still, 805
 Þar is þe watter depe, be skylly,
 & most euyle to ouerfare.
- IV 32 & son, if fortoun turn his whele,
 So þat þi welth be not so wele
 Als it was wont to be 810
 Be oper men þou þe awyse;
 For kynd is for to fall & ryse,
 To þam & als to þe.
- IV 33 & if welthe be lang & large,
 Þan take to þe no gretter charge 815
 Þan þou may vndergange;
 For better is nere þe land to rowe
 Þan in þe see with wynd to blow,
 Wher þe stremes ar more strange.
- IV 34 When þou knawes ry3thtwyse men & gud, 820
 Mell þe no3te to munge þer mode,
 To wreth þaim wrangwysly;
 For God wil al gudnes reward,
 & wikkednes sal not be spard,
 Bot wrokyn as it is worthy. 825
- IV 35 If þou haue lose of erthely gud,
 Be enmys or by fyre or flode,
 Mourne no3t, lowd ne still.
 Bot more þou may mak yoy always,

- & thynk þat God so þe assays, 830
 If þou be stable of wyll.
- IV 36 Of worldly gud þou make no frese,
 Wheder it enpayre or it encrease,
 Tak þe tym as it wil fall.
 Bot & þou lose a faythfull frend, fol. 26v 835
 Ðat is a losse withowtyn end;
 Ðerfor be war withal.
- IV 37 & trest þou noʒte to lyf lange,
 For whedersoouer þou ryd or gange
 Ðus suld þou thynk in thoʒht: 840
 Ded folowes þe with gret fors,
 Ryght as þi schawdowe dose þi horse,
 Ðat lyghtly leues it noʒte.
- IV 38 & worschope God, son, on alwyse,
With encense & with sacrafyse 845
 Of gud lyfyng & lele.
 If synfull men þer offerand make,
 Bot if þai wil þer syn forsake,
 God wil not with þaim dele.
- IV 39 To ryche men sal þou do honour, 850
 Because þat þai sal þe socour
 In cause þou to þaim call.
 & also son þe bus forbere
 Euyl men, þat may to þe der,
 For mor il þat myʒte befall. 855
- IV 40 & if þou trespas, to God Almyʒty,
 Mend þiself, & aske mercy,
 Sorowyng for þi syn.
 If þou be hurt, in hed or hend,
With scharp medcyns it bus be mend, 860
 To wele so may þou wyn.

- IV 41 A frend þat has ben to þe trew,
 Al if he make his maners new
 Be honours or rychesse,
 Change þou þi maners neuer þe more, 865
 Bot thynke how it hase ben befor,
 & luf hum neuer þe lesse.
- IV 42 & if þou haue office for to kepe,
 Be to saue þine awn worschype,
 & war þe wel fro wice. 870
 So sal þou be of noble fame,
 & no man sal gyf þe þis name:
 Loser of office.
- IV 43 Be noȝt ouer ferd in feld ne town, fol. 27r
 Ne haue non euyl suspecyon, 875
 Nother to man ne wyfe;
 For he þat wil be ferd for noȝte,
 Or haue suspecyon euyl in thoght,
 Wer gud out of þis lyfe.
- IV 44 If þou haue seruandes at þi will, 880
 Says þaim in reson & in skylly,
 So þat þai do þer dette.
 Reproue þaim noȝt ouervilansly.
 Thinke þai ar men als wil as I,
 Al if þai be þus sett. 885
- IV 45 If þou haue mynd her for to make
 Any gud worke, for Godes sake,
 Do tyte & tary it noȝte;
 For it may fall so manyfald
Þou sal not wirke it when þou wald, 890
 & so may it be vnwroȝte.
- IV 46 & if synfull men dye sodanly,
 Haue no yoy in þi hert forþi,

- Bot sorow for þer vnsele.
 & þo þat lyfes euer as þai aw, 895
 If men þaim hed or hang or draw,
 We sal trow þai dy well.
- IV 47 Or if wekked men þi wyf haue blamed,
 & with þi frend falsly defamed,
 & þe soth be noȝt so, 900
 Þan sal þou suffre & forber,
 Noȝte wrangwysly þi wyf to der,
 & mak þi frend þi foo.
- IV 48 & son, if þou haue mekyll seyn,
 & mekyll hard wher þou hase ben, 905
 Be kennyng of clergy,
 Vse it in werke þan it is won;
 For mekyll to lere & lytyll to kon,
 Þat is bot vylany.
- IV 49 & haue no merwale in þi mynd 910
 If wyse men som defaute fynd
 Or mysse emang my ded.
 Because I couthe no better do fol. 27v
 Ay til on sentence wer is two
 Ar arayd for to red. 915
- & now is endytt þat was begon
 Þis boke, how Caton taught his son
 Gud counsels for to ken.
 He þat arayd it þus to rede,
 God graunte hym Heuen to his med, 920
 Wher euer is myrth. Amen.

TEXTUAL NOTES

- 10 wit] *superscript*.
- 26 oper] p oper, with p cancelled.
- 52 pi] *superscript*.
- 63 faillyng] *fallyng*.
- 118 frend] *superscript*.
- 143 as] has.
- 158 vncertayne] vnertayne.
- 173 worth] wroth.
- 180 fayn] fayr.
- 184 pou] *superscript*.
- 214 fondon] fordon.
- 216 zou] zour.
- 231 strengthe] th *superscript*.
- 257 lofyng] lyfyng.
- 359 tell] fell.
- 397 teche] tethe, with t cancelled and c *superscript*.
- 409 myrth] *superscript*.
- 424 se] so.
- 428 seth] soth.
- 538 men] werk.
- 545 pat] at.
- 553 priue] proue.
- 565 for] with cancelled and for *superscript*.
- 571 poettes] pettes.
- 607 pou] *superscript*.
- 666 Godes] d Godes, with d cancelled.
- 680 fond] faond.
- 682 kynd] bynd.
- 688 lengthe] th *superscript*.
- 697 tech] th tech, with th cancelled.
- 748 no] om.
- 757 pou] repeated, second pou cancelled.
- 770 pi] h pi, with h cancelled.
- 795 He] & he, with & cancelled.

- 852 *þou*] *superscript*.
 900 *þel s þe*, with *s* cancelled.

NOTES TO TEXT

- 7-12 The Latin has been given a Christian context.
 25-7 The first three lines of Distich I 4 have been inadvertently omitted from the manuscript.
 37-9 These lines do not complete Distich I 6, which reads "Utilitas opibus praeponi tempore debet."
 40-5 The sense of the Latin is badly garbled here: "Clemens et constans, ut res expostulat, esto: / temporibus mores sapiens sine crimine mutat."
 60 The translator has added this consideration for public opinion.
 75 The translator adds this exception to his Latin, which says simply "nocet esse locutum."
 76 "þou" was probably originally "þat," Latin "Rem."
 79-81 The lines are at best a paraphrase of "rara fides ideo est, quia multi multa locuntur."
 89 This clearly Christian reference has been added to the Latin.
 113-4 The Latin says simply "Cum dubia et fragilis nobis sit vita tributa." The translator elaborates on the suddenness and unpredictability of one's own death.
 128 In giving the Latin a Christian context, the translator has also strengthened the sentiment. The Christian must actually thank God for poverty, instead of simply "paupertatis onus patienter ferre memento."
 130-1 The original version simply stresses the senselessness of fearing death. The Christian translator, on the other hand, is sure that it is the knowledge of a righteous life which enables one not to fear it.
 145-7 These do not translate the second part of the distich: "utque quod est serues, semper deesse putato."
 168 "When your health fails" is added to the Latin.
 180 "Be happy to refuse it."

- 181 "herd man" here must be a compound with "herd" in the sense of *MED* herd n. (2) 2 (b): "a temporal ruler . . . master, director."
- 199-201 The translator has missed the point of "pro lucro tibi pone diem, quicumque sequetur."
- 206-7 The translator somewhat alters the sense of "obsequio quoniam dulces retinetur amici."
- 208-13 The translator has tried to make the two parts of the distich fit together better than they do in Latin, and has changed the sense somewhat in his attempt. Cf. "Ne dubita cum magna petas impendere parva: / his etenim rebus coniungit gratia caros." Boas calls these "Versus inconcinni" (p. 77).
- 223-4 This expands the Latin "ipse tibi moderare."
- 239 The translator adds a more practical reason for generosity to the Latin.
- 265-7 Not in the Latin.
- 273 This line is not in the Latin and changes the meaning of the distich.
- 277-9 The translator has had to re-interpret the Latin "cum sis mortalis quae sunt mortalia cura" in Christian terms. Lines 277-8 are clearly a reference to *Genesis*, and he has added line 279 to avoid seeming to urge secular values.
- 282 Again the translator stresses the unpredictability of death (cf. lines 113-4) and adds that the timing is controlled by God.
- 290-1 "clergy" is in apposition to "Whilk thyng is ry3te or wrang," although the construction is awkward.
- 292-7 The whole distich has been given a Christian reference: "Fac sump-tum propere, cum res desiderat ipsa: / dandum etenim est aliquid, cum tempus postulat aut res." The *Middle English* version says that material goods come from God and must be distributed for His sake. Line 297, "and [be] seen fit in good season" ("and be appropriate and timely"?) is a final attempt to translate "cum tempus postulat aut res."
- 299 The reference to God is the translator's addition to "parvo gaudere memento."
- 304-9 This is the usual mediaeval interpretation of this distich, although

Boas interprets its grammar differently. "Quod pudeat, socios prudens celare memento, / ne plures culpent id, quod tibi displicet uni." Mediaeval scribes and commentators commonly took "socios" as the object of the verb "pudeat." See Boas (at n. 7) 106-7.

- 309 The Latin does not mention God's law.
- 334-9 The translator interprets this distich in terms of material goods, but the Latin is more general: "Quid deus intendat"
- 364 For the translator, God is the source of all gifts.
- 373-5 The Latin distich stresses that sometimes it is prudent to seem foolish: "Stultitiam simulare loco prudentia summa est." The Middle English translation changes the emphasis.
- 376,380 The Latin originally referred to the twin crimes of *Luxuria* and *Avaritia*, but many mediaeval versions of the distich translate *Luxuria* as lechery.
- 385 The Latin manuscript used by the translator here must have read "quia multi multa locuntur." See Boas (at n. 7) 123.
- 400-1 To produce lines 400-1, the original Latin must have read: "Successus indignos," rather than "pravos" or "dignos." Cf. Boas (at n. 7) 129. Although God is not mentioned in the Latin, line 402 fits in well with the distich's emphasis on the ultimate punishment of the unworthy. However, lines 403-5 change this completely by substituting the idea of the chance element in Fortune's wheel. Here, as in line 808, Fortune is masculine.
- 415-7 The translator has replaced the Latin stoicism with the hope of a Christian salvation. Cf. "spes una hominem nec morte relinquit."
- 418-23 The Latin reads "Rem tibi quam scieris aptam dimittere noli: / fronte capillata, post haec occasio calva." This verse was generally misinterpreted by translators. See George Lyman Kittredge, "To Take Time by the Forelock," *MLN* 8 (1893) 466.
- 429 Although the distich originally referred to the double-headed god Janus, this was often changed in mediaeval translations to refer to the Christian God who can see both beginnings and endings. The translator of this manuscript, however, shows himself unaware of this tradition and Christianizes the Latin in a different way.
- 432 For "wath" see *OED* *wothe*: "hurt or harm."

- 436-41 This does not translate the Latin, which reads: "Iudicium populi numquam contempseris unus, / ne nulli placeas, dum vis contemnere multos."
- 445 The translator adds the idea that it is God who grants us time.
- 464 The translator, presumably for the sake of the rhyme, has altered the Latin image "quasi mortis imago."
- 477 The translator adds the idea that God watches over us constantly.
- 490-5 The Latin is about sloth rather than heaviness of heart: "Segnitiam fugito, quae vitae ignavia fertur;/ nam cum animus languet, consumit inertia corpus." The translator has looked ahead to the next distich.
- 499 There is no suggestion in the Latin that this conduct will please God.
- 508 Again the translator specifies that worldly goods come from God.
- 511-3 These lines exactly reverse the meaning of the Latin distich.
- 518-9 The motive which the translator gives for being generous sounds almost cynical compared to the Latin "munificus facito vivas, non parcus, amicus."
- 527 "witt" translates "sensu," rather than "censu" which appears in the Latin.
- 530 The Latin does not mention loving God here.
- 533-4 These lines are pure padding and interrupt the sense of the stanza. However, they do provide a glimpse of the translator's idea of the ideal married state.
- 549 The translator appeals to public opinion, which the Latin does not.
- 568 The Latin simply refers to laws, not to scripture.
- 580-5 The translator repeats the idea that men should be careful of weeping wives, but omits the Latin urging not to worry about angry ones.
- 586 Again the translator states that good things come from God.
- 588 "But it is necessary for your house."
- 592-7 The tone of the Latin is less moral: at least death will end our troubles.
- 598-603 The translator has missed the point here, and does not understand the meaning of "frugi."

- 608 The point of the Latin is that one should not offend a mother in order to please a father. The translator has reversed the sense.
- 622-7 The Latin stresses that the avaricious are always in need. The translator has missed this.
- 628-9 The phrase "be kynd" is parallel to "be grace," not to "be gyfen."
- 630-3 The translator suggests that the love of God will bring both worldly happiness and salvation. Neither idea is in the Latin.
- 643-5 This does not translate the Latin "quam nemo sanctus nec honestus captat habere." The translator has tried to make sense of the distich in the light of the following one.
- 666 The reference to God is absent from the Latin.
- 673 This changes the sense of the Latin: "primo quae sunt neglecta."
- 679 The translator takes a harsher view of sin than the Latin writer did. He stresses the necessity for atonement, while the original distich only asks that you not combine sins: Cum te detineat Veneris damnosa voluptas, / indulgere gulae noli, quae ventris amica est."
- 686-7 The translator has added the Christian interpretation to "hominem plus esse timendum."
- 710-1 The translator elaborates on the virtues a friend should possess.
- 721-3 Not a close translation of the Latin: "Fac fugias animo, quae sunt mala gaudia uitae."
- 758-9 The Latin does not specify why you should teach.
- 777 The translator adds the reference to God.
- 778-83 This badly misrepresents the sense of the Latin, which exactly contradicts line 781: "Discere ne cessa, cura sapientia crescat: / rara datur longo prudentia temporis usu."
- 796 The Latin refers to men who drink too much, not covetous men.
- 799-801 The meaning of the Latin has been twisted here: "Quod lautum est, animo complectere, sed fuge lites." The translator again appeals to public opinion in line 801.
- 803 The Latin does not mention envy, although it is clearly implied.
- 808 The translator has given Fortune a wheel. Cf. above lines 400-1.
- 830-1 The Latin does not have the idea that misfortune is God's test of one's will.

- 835-7 The translator's Latin may have had another second line here, as the Middle English does not translate the alternatives given by Boas.
- 842 The word "horse" was probably originally "corse," Latin "corporis," although "horse" makes reasonable sense here.
- 845-6 For the Christian translator the proper sacrifice is in living a good life. The meaning of the Latin is more literal: "Ture deum placā, vitulum sine crescat aratro."
- 850-5 The Middle English is a mistranslation of "Cede loco laesus, fortunae cede potenti: / laedere qui potuit, poterit prodesse aliquando."
- 856 The Latin does not mention God.
- 868,873 The Latin "officium" has been simply adopted into the Middle English without a translation of its meaning "service." "Loser of office" is an especially literal version of "officiperdi."
- 884 Cf. Everard's Anglo-Norman translation: "Pensez ke hommes sount, / Ansy ben cum vous." The Latin says merely: "homines tamen esse memento."
- 887 The Latin implies that one should seize all opportunities, not merely those to do good works. The translator has also introduced the idea of God here.
- 895-7 The tone of the Latin is ironical, implying that there are not many men who die happy because they have lived blamelessly. The translator misses this.
- 898-903 The translator has reversed the sense of the Latin, which urges caution with friends: "Cum coniux tibi sit, ne res et fama laboret, / vitandum ducas inimicum nomen amici."
- 907 The point of the Latin is not that you should use your learning but that you can learn from life as well as from books: "Cum tibi contigerit studio cognoscere multa, / fac discas multa, vita nescire doceri."