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Conceptions of Piers Plowman: 1550 to 1970's

by

John Raymond McCully, Jr.

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Director's Signature

[Signature]

Houston, Texas

May 1976
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INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that a critic or scholar's assumptions and concerns will determine what he looks for and what he sees in a literary work. It is perhaps equally obvious that what he sees and assumes are not merely a result of personal view but are in some sense a result of the views of the times and that an idea once convincingly stated tends to be perpetuated. These statements are abundantly demonstrated in Piers Plowman scholarship. The Renaissance scholars are commonly said to have praised Piers's prophecies, the eighteenth century its satire of moral and social conditions of the fourteenth century, and the nineteenth century its spontaneity (in the so-called Wordsworthian manner), its championing of the gospel of work (in the so-called Carlylian manner), and its autobiographical portrait of the poet or of the growth of the poet's mind. Though the statement about the conceptions of earlier scholars is an oversimplification, these conceptions, to varying extents, continue to the present. As early as the turn of the century, they began to be modified and challenged; and as the first half of the twentieth century has seen the man of letters increasingly replaced by the professional critic and scholar, modifications and challenges to these traditional conceptions have accelerated. Especially within the past twenty-five years, however, a group of scholars has separated itself from these traditions and has begun to explore Piers Plowman through extensive use of the exegetical tradition of the Middle Ages.
Piers Plowman exists in three versions, the A-, B-, and C- Texts, all written during the last four decades of the fourteenth century. It is accepted that they were written and revised in the order that the lettering indicates, and it is generally accepted that they are the work of one man, William Langland. Regardless of the text, the poem is a formidable work—in length, in structure, in subject matter. Its formidable subject matter and structure were acknowledged by its first publisher, Robert Crowley, who wrote in "The Printer to the Reader" of his 1550 edition of the poem:

... the sense [is] somewhat darcke, but not so harde, but that it may be understande of suche as will not sticke to breake the shell of the nutte for the kernelles sake.

During the subsequent centuries, even as the poem has been almost universally acclaimed as a great work—of prophecy, of satire, of autobiography, of art, of poetic homily, of Christian allegory—its shell has seemed indeed hard and the sense somewhat dark. In fact, the question is not only what is the kernel, but what is the shell.

Especially for the past hundred years students have been trying to determine its genre or to find the tradition of thought in which it was written, in other words, to find a work comparable to it in content, technique, and structure. They have sought some means of understanding such massive diversity as the wanderings and questionings of Will; the dramatic description of Lady Meed, her manipulations and her sophistry; a group of teachers called Reason, Wit, Inwit, Conscience, and Ymagynatyf; an ideal figure named Piers, who is identified as a plowman and as Christ; a description of the garden within man where the tree of Charity grows; a clearly allegorical narrative of Jesus approaching death; and a seemingly literal account of the harrowing of
hell. Students have sought, moreover, to ascertain the significance of the poem's structural divisions--its division into twenty Passus (or steps), into a series of eight dreams and two dreams-within-dreams, and into visions concerning Piers the Plowman and visions concerning Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.

During the first half of this century the poem was the center of the heated, and perhaps futile, authorship controversy, possibly resulting from the application to secular literature of Higher Criticism, with its interest in oral formulae, sources, scribal insertions and redactions--that is, its interest in tracing the development of the literary process. This controversy had so dominated Piers scholarship since John Matthews Manly argued for multiple authorship in The Cambridge History of English Literature in 1908 that when Morton Bloomfield published his 1939 article "Present State of Piers Plowman Studies," it dealt almost exclusively with the evidence for and against multiple authorship. It was he, however, who pointed the direction scholarship should take, and, in fact, was taking:

The immediate future in Piers Plowman scholarship seems to me to be in two directions, omitting for the moment the textual work which is basic and apt to extend over many years; (1) the study of the meaning of Langland's words and lines, and (2) a general study of the backgrounds in folklore, art, theology, homilies, religious tractates, and various literatures, as well as in social and economic history. The basic purpose is not to find sources, necessarily, but to make possible a new understanding of the intellectual and social atmosphere of fourteenth century England.

As Section III of his article shows, Bloomfield was aware that efforts had been made to relate the poem to its times. But more than he indicated had already been done to revive appreciation of the poem and to penetrate its meaning by Wilbur Gaffney, Howard W. Troyer,
Francis A. R. Carnegy, and Nevill K. Coghill, as well as by Henry W. Wells, Raymond W. Chambers, Greta Hort, and T. P. Dunning, whom he refers to, but gives rather short shrift. The scholarship of the mid-twentieth century, apparently taking Bloomfield's suggestion, has by and large focused on the context and structure of the poem and, as a result, the poem has become the subject of new controversy. Piers Plowman has now come to be at the very center of two of the most interesting and stimulating discussions in modern literary scholarship: the way in which symbol, allegory, and personification function in medieval vernacular literature and the relevance of biblical, patristic, and theological materials to the interpretation of medieval secular poetry. By 1958 there was sufficient interest, as indicated by the scholarship addressing itself to the controversy, to warrant a scholarly debate sponsored by the English Institute in 1958 and 1959 and published in Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature in 1960. Piers Plowman was chosen as the test case by the debaters. The debate concerned the validity of the approach taken by historical critics, or patristic-allegorists, as they may be more descriptively called. Though those involved in the debate and its publication differ widely in their orientations and backgrounds, none of them expresses theoretical objection to the use of patristic-allegorist exegesis in illuminating medieval secular literature. Dorothy Bethurum, the editor, is a philologically educated British scholar and critic of medieval literature; E. Talbot Donaldson, who states the opposition, is a co-editor with George Kane of the forthcoming edition of the B-Text as well as a translator and critic of medieval literature, whose major
book on *Piers Plowman* is biographically oriented; Robert E. Kaske, who presented the defense, is the prolific patristic-allegorist author of numerous studies of *Piers Plowman*; and Charles Donahue, whose summation is a brief history of schools of medieval exegesis, is a historian of ideas who believes that philology and typology are the most fruitful methods needed for the elucidation of medieval secular literature. All of the participants, including Kaske, indicate reservations to patristic-allegorism as it has in some instances been practiced.

That is not to say that there are no theoretical objections to the method. Dunning, in his 1955 review of Robertson and Huppé's *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition*, states that the allegorical interpretation fell into disfavor in the fourteenth century; 12 R. W. Frank, Jr., makes his case for a literal reading of allegory (1953); 13 and Morton Bloomfield seems to agree with Frank (1958). 14 The problem with these objections, however, is that the readings of these scholars tend to become mere paraphrase, as, for example, Bloomfield's reading of 11. 416-17 of Passus XVIII of *Piers*: "If Mercy kisses Peace, what else does that mean than that peace and mercy embrace?" 15 Even though they object to the methods of the patristic-allegorists, these scholars--Dunning, Frank, and Bloomfield--make use of patristic material. 16 Their methods differ from the patristic-allegorist's in several ways, but a notable difference is their reference to the scholarship of the past as opposed to the exclusive reference to the medieval exegetical tradition. The patristic-allegorists's lack of discussion of previous scholarship and expression of indebtedness may appear to be arrogance or ingratitude. It may be, instead, a matter
of exploring new territory. It may also involve the commonplace expressed by, among others, St. Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* (2.31.48 and 49), that though the reasoning may be valid, a conclusion based on a false premise is false.

The basic question, then, and the one with which this thesis concerns itself, is, What can the contemporary student of fourteenth-century literature find of value in the previous scholarship of *Piers Plowman*? The method of the thesis is to make an evaluative survey of that scholarship on *Piers Plowman* which deals even peripherally with the context of the poem into the seventies. The purpose is both to make that scholarship more readily accessible and to show that that scholarship tends to be a chronicle of the history of ideas. Since the terms of the controversy over the use of patristic exegesis in explicating medieval secular literature and the trends of the scholarship are established by 1960, emphasis will be given to those works pointing toward and concerning this approach. An addendum will survey studies since 1960.

The first chapter treats works which reveal conceptions of the poem held from 1550 to 1908, the year when the authorship controversy originated and when modern scholarship began increasingly to establish itself as a profession. After a discussion of references to both the poem and the title character through the eighteenth century, this chapter traces the beginnings of scholarship and scholarly approaches to the poem: prophecy, satire, aestheticism, autobiography, historical document, topical allegory, and the gospel of work. Chapter Two concerns the scholarship from 1908 through 1939 exclusive of source
studies per se, of descriptions of manuscripts, of accounts of the editing process, and of the authorship controversy. It reveals that while the earlier approaches were perpetuated, scholars began to evidence a new awareness of the religious context and, consequently, began examining *Piers Plowman* in the context of the homily, of mysticism, of the Church Fathers and theologians, and of multi-level allegory. Chapter Three indicates that from 1940 through 1960 *Piers Plowman* scholarship continued to separate itself into over-lapping but separate and definable approaches, or schools of criticism, culminating in the late 1950's in the debate over the applicability of patristic exegesis to the poem. The addendum, a survey of studies from 1961 into the 1970's, discloses both a continuation of the controversy over and testing of the validity of patristic-allegorism, or the use of patristic exegesis, and an increasing tendency to synthesize various previous perspectives and approaches with certain of the perspectives and approaches used by patristic-allegorists. This thesis attempts no original study of *Piers Plowman*. Rather, it offers a categorized history of the scholarship on the poem and presents the reservations and objections raised by one school of criticism against another.
NOTES


3 See George Kane, Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship (Univ. of London: The Athlone Press, 1965), and Donaldson, pp. 1-17. For the view that Piers is by more than one author, see J. R. Hubert, "Piers the Plowman After Forty Years," ME, 45 (1948), 215-25; Thomas A. Knott and David C. Fowler, eds., Piers the Plowman: A Critical Edition of the A-Version (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1952), pp. 8-15; and David C. Fowler, Piers the Plowman: Literary Relations of the A and B Texts (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1961), pp. 185-205, where Fowler suggests John Trevisa as the author of the B-Text. The view that Piers is by more than one author seems to be an issue of the past for most scholars.

4 The A-Text contains 2400 lines; B- contains over 7200; and C-, about 7300.

5 Robert Crowley, as quoted by Skeat, II, lxxiv.


7 Morton W. Bloomfield, "Present State of Piers Plowman Studies," Speculum, 14 (1939), 232. Bloomfield does not like some of the results, however, of the kind of study he suggested; see Morton Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature," ME, 56 (1958), 73-81. While he acknowledges that some medieval works are Christian in import, he does not believe that all of them are or that even the Biblical exegetes necessarily gave more than lip service to multi-level reading. He makes little attempt to substantiate his position in this brief article. He adds that, on the basis of consistency, various readings of a work can be justified, and even though he insists that all literature is in some sense symbolic, he states as a principle for reading a kind of literalism which sounds like what R. W. Frank, Jr., calls "personification allegory" ("The Art of Reading Medieval Personification Allegory," ELH, 20 (1953), 237-50). David Fowler makes an interesting observation that perhaps the reason for the outcry against the patristic-allegorists is that they expose "a tendency toward condescension in much modern criticism of the literature of the Middle Ages"; see David C. Fowler, "Piers Plowman," in Recent Middle English Scholarship and Criticism: Survey and Desiderata, ed. J. Burke Severs (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1971).

8 Bloomfield, pp. 228-32.


13 Frank, "The Art of Reading Personification Allegory."

14 Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature."

15 Ibid., pp. 78-9. A facetious but perhaps valid response is that literally it means that mercy and peace kiss, not embrace.


17 See Robertson and Huppé, p. ix, and Ben H. Smith, Jr.'s, statement to this effect in Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), p. 18.

That scholarship which deals exclusively with descriptions of the manuscripts, with the authorship controversy, and with source studies *per se* will not be included.

CHAPTER I: CONCEPTIONS OF PIERS PLOWMAN, 1550'S TO 1908

The discussion of the conceptions of Piers Plowman in this and in subsequent chapters will be placed under descriptive rubrics for clarity and convenience. These rubrics are neither those of a literary school nor those of any particular scholar: they are merely "signs" to direct the reader through the maze of conceptions regarding the poem during these four centuries since Crowley and other sixteenth-century readers of Piers Plowman began to write of or refer to the poem. The terms "prophecy" and "satire" are those applied by some of the earliest enthusiasts of the poem. The first rubric, "allegory," however, is obviously an interpretive one, and perhaps the term allegoria would have been more accurate. Indeed, there seems now to be an increasingly substantial body of evidence within scholarship, dating from the 1930's as shown in the introduction to this paper, to indicate that the older term may be more accurate. Nevertheless, since "allegory" is the term most widely applied to such poetry as Dante's, Langland's, and Spenser's, this term seems more immediately useful. Such rubrics as "Aesthetics," "Portrait of the Times," "Autobiography," "Gospel of Work" and "Topical Allegory, categorizing the scholarship treated within the latter part of this chapter, are subdivided by the names of scholars who seem to have established these approaches, or "traditions," from which modern scholarship on Piers Plowman springs. The chapters following seem not to require such subdivisions because, as scholarship became a profession, an individual scholar is less a progenitor than are the nineteenth-century scholars who began to establish the profession.
A. Allegory

That all the texts of Piers Plowman were written within the last forty years of the fourteenth century is universally accepted. It is equally well accepted that the fourteenth century was an age when—despite the Great Schism, the regular-secular controversy, Wycliffe and the Lollard movement, and general social unrest—the Church was still the dominant force in English society.\(^1\) As a dominant force, the Church comprised that body of assumptions and the knowledge based on them about God, man, the duty of man, and the nature of things which were expressed in the Bible, commented on and taught by the Church Fathers, compiled in the Summae and encyclopedias, and taught not only by schools and universities but also by the windows and wall paintings of churches and the carvings and statues within and without them, and even by wall paintings within public and domestic buildings.\(^2\)

That these assumptions and the body of knowledge based on them—this world view—constitute the most comprehensive and coherent system of knowledge ever known has been demonstrated by, to name a few, such scholars as C. S. Lewis, John Hollander, Marjorie Hope Nicholson, E. M. W. Tillyard, John Mulder and Emile Mâle,\(^3\) and that this view did not suddenly disintegrate in fourteenth-century Italy or sixteenth-century England has also been shown—that, in fact, it continued in part at least through the English Renaissance and Reformation and into the eighteenth century.\(^4\) The world view assumed that "God is a Circle, whose Circumference is nowhere and whose Centre everywhere."\(^5\) This theocentric, sacramental world view assumed the inter-relatedness of
the visible and invisible worlds; it assumed that the visible was "a book written by the hand of God in which every creature is a word charged with meaning," a "hieroglyph" whose "every detail . . . [is] a sign of some invisible substance or operation." Not only nature but also history (which includes what moderns call myth and legend), reason, and above all scripture were books through which God spoke, reciprocal books which were to be read to exalt the mind, to give guidance and direction to the lives of men, to bring men to God and to godliness. All these books were seen as "treacle" from heaven. From Paul through Justin, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria, through Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory, to Bonaventure, Alain de Lille, Bernardus Silvestris, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, and even to Thomas Browne and Richard Hooker, the Augustinian principle was stated: "... every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's." The Sacra pagina, Biblia, or Scriptura, of course, was the canon, the measuring rod, against which the truth of all the other books was evaluated.

That "the Bible was the most studied book in the middle ages" seems no longer open to question. Nor is there any question about its being subject to private interpretation. Some have said that only lip service was given to the traditional interpretation—the allegorical understanding of scripture. Others have asserted that the scholastic method of definition and logic caused an eclipse of the tradition. These views, however, have been forcefully, and I think convincingly, responded to. That there was from the early days of the church a
"puritan" tradition seems evident, but that it was not the dominant
tradition seems equally evident. 15

More evident still is that poetry does not grow well in the soil
of that tradition. Within this world view, however, all writing was
didactic; and, within the dominant, Augustinian tradition, 16 it would
be surprising indeed if poetry were not composed in the mode which
imitates the nature of things--the allegorical mode--so that the pith,
fruit, or kernel could be obtained only after careful thought and study
by those with spiritual understanding. 17 The sacramental world view,
which sees universal analogies, was the context; the allegorical, or
spiritual, mode of interpretation was the method. The method was not
merely a device. It was a way of thinking. St. Bonaventure's exposi-
tion of analogies 18 was not a new understanding, but one that was
perhaps never before so well expressed.

It is with this understanding that Robert Crowley, the first
printer of Piers Plowman, writes "The Printer to the Reader" of his
dition in 1550. He informs his reader of the purpose, the method, and
the content of the poem. Piers Plowman, he explains,

    doeth moste christianlye enstruct the weake, and sharply
    rebuke the obstinate blynde. There is no maner of vice,
    that reigneth inanye estate of men, whiche this wryter
    hath not godly, learnedlye, and wittilye, rebuked.

Structurally, he continues, the poem is a series of visions--"visions
and dreams, that he fayne him selffe to haue dreamed"; their content
is from God, whom "it pleased . . . to open the eyes of many to se hys
truth" during the time of Edward III, "guyenng them boldenes of herte,
to open their mouthes and crye oute agaynste the worckes of darckenes."
Then in the terms commonly used by men from the time of Augustine to
Thomas Browne to explain the art of reading, Crowley explains that "the sense [is] somewhat darcke, but not so harde, but that it may be vnderstande of suche as will not sticke to breake the shell of the nutte for the kernelles sake." He points out that the poem speaks of "a deaeth to come" and "of the suppression of Abbaies," which "geueth it the face of a propheceye." But he concludes with the exhortation to read Piers not as a prophetical or historical document, but for its kernel which rebukes "the obstinate blynde":

Loke not vpon this boke therefore, to talke of wonders paste or to come, but to amende thyne owne misse, which thou shalt fynd here moste charitably rebuked. The spirit of god gyue the grace to walke in the waye of truthe, to Gods glory, & thyne owne soules healthe. So be it."

In the century and a half after Crowley's discussion of Piers, it is difficult to sum up how the poem was understood, partly because of the intellectual ferment during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and partly because too little is yet known about how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers of different political and religious persuasions understood poetry. Certain of their perceptions about Piers Plowman do become clear, however. Piers was called "satyr" and prophecy; the poet was called a satirist, a prophet, and even a "proleptic" Protestant; and Piers the Plowman became an emblem of the spiritually ideal minister or the poor, uneducated, and oppressed layman. These varying perceptions may reflect the differences between the traditionalists and the Puritans. Or they may depend, at least in many cases, on whether the writer emphasizes the letter or the sentence of the poem. Alvin Kernan, in his discussion of the history and theory of satire, calls attention to Giraldus Cambrensis's obviously literal
misreading of the "goliard poems" and to the rhetorical claim of the
satirists that the letter of satire, unlike that of other poetic
genres, is true. Whether writers called Piers prophecy or satire,
then, may be due in part to their different perceptions, in part to
their different purposes and emphases, and in part to the acceptance
of the truth of both letter and sentence. The association of the poem
with the Wycliffites by Reformers does not in itself indicate that
the poem was read literally, for Crowley himself likened Langland's
enlightenment and boldness to Wycliffe's. Moreover, Helen White
called attention to the obvious fact that the obligations and interests
of sixteenth-century Reformers "were not to scholarship but to the
accomplishment of the contemporary purposes to which they had dedicated
themselves." Thus, a discussion of sixteenth-century views of Piers
Plowman must be highly tentative; any such discussion must deal with
sixteenth-century uses of the work, uses which can only incidentally
show what was thought of the poem, poet, and Piers.

The earliest uses of the poem seem to be strictly as propaganda;
they tell little more than that Piers was an ideal figure in the con-
text of vice and corruption. White, in her book *Social Criticism in
Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century*, discusses
thoroughly the sixteenth-century flood of attacks which make use of
Piers as spokesman against the rich, the lawyers, the friars, and
against transubstantiation, theological subtleties, ritual, and
corruption. Along with their attacks, some writers plead for the cir-
culation of the Scriptures in English. Some portray the spokesman
Piers Plowman, or sometimes just the Plowman, as a Puritan moved to speak by "the secret motyon of the holy goost." The pamphleteers and poetasters most obviously and immediately using Piers which White treats date from The Praier and Complaynte of the Plowman unto Christ in 1531, nearly twenty years before Crowley's edition, to Francis Thynne's Newes from the North in 1579, in which Pierce Plowman makes the usual attacks, though White marks the cautionary tone some of the later writers take toward radical ideas. Throughout these Reformist works, Piers the Plowman is an emblem of humility and godliness. 23

There are other works which indicate that the sixteenth century read, as Crowley seems to have, allegorically. William Webbe in A Discourse of English Poetrie in 1586 describes the author as "a very pithy wryter." 24 At least three poets of the century use the character Piers or the Plowman in their explicitly allegorical works--Gascoigne, Spenser, and the anonymous author of A Merry Knack to Know a Knave. In 1576 George Gascoigne in the first part of The Steel Glass portrays allegorically the relationship between Poetry and Satire as that of twin sister and brother: the sister is deceived into a marriage to Vain Delight, "errors [which] growe where false Prophets preach"; and the hemaphroditic brother, Satire, is subsequently raped by his sister's husband, kept in a cage of misery, and partially silenced when his tongue was cut out with the "razor of restraint." In the latter part Piers Plowman appears as "true humility" in contrast to those "false Prophets," or preachers "whose belly is their god." 25 Second, Edmund Spenser shows the influence of Piers Plowman, or if not the poem itself, certainly of the Piers tradition, in at least three of his poems, The
Shepherd's Calendar, Book I of the Faerie Queene, and Prosopopoeia: Or Mother Hubberd's Tale: his use is particularly evident in the first two. The "Maye" eclogue of the Shepherd's Calendar (1579) is a dispute between Piers, a wise shepherd who represents a Protestant pastor, and Palinode, a spiritually blind Catholic pastor who approves of and would like to participate in dissolute merriment. The eclogue is explicitly allegorical: in addition to Piers and Palinode, for instance, there is Pan, who is Christ, or God. In the Epilogue to the Calendar Spenser tells his Calendar to dare not go in the company of the Pilgrim whose part the plowman acted for a while. It is possible that this is a reference to Petrus, id est, Christus, in Langland's poem (B.XV.206), when Piers becomes identified with Christ. Moreover, in Book I (1590) of the Faerie Queene (X.66), commonly understood to be multi-level allegory, Spenser gives the origin of the Red Cross Knight's name. It is George (Georgos, or "Husbandman") because as the changeling of a king he was brought up by a plowman to become a plowman. Somewhat comparable to Piers, Red Cross is closely identified with Christ (Cantos 10 and 11) and at the end of Book I is to return to the England of his day, not to search for Piers, but to serve as Piers on earth. A third example of Piers in an explicitly allegorical context occurs in the 1594 play A Merry Knack to Know a Knav in which Piers, like Peace abused by Wrong in Piers Plowman (B.IV.47ff.), petitions the King for help from the depredations of a wealthy farmer. In the play, Honesty, who seems comparable to Conscience and Reason in Piers (V.1v.17ff.), guides the King so that he brings order into his kingdom.
In all these uses of Piers and of the poem in general made by pamphleteer, poetaster, playwright, and poet, it is clear that men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries think of the character emblematically and that Spenser, at least, thinks in terms of multi-level allegory. Thus, writers who refer to the poem as "satyr" or prophecy are not necessarily indicating that the poem is not allegorical. The significance of this fact is that the twentieth-century allegorical critics are pointing the students of Piers toward the approach which will be productive of a more nearly accurate understanding of the poem, and that scholars, particularly those in the past two centuries, who have detached the terms satire and prophecy from their Christian context, have based their studies on mistaken assumptions about the poem.

It is true, of course, that the Reformers were convinced that these former times when the Roman Catholic Church included the Church of England were times of oppression and darkness. And one of the traditions in Piers scholarship has been that the poem is prophecy and the poet a prophet, or even in some sense Protestant. This tradition has been at best condescending toward the actual historical context of Piers Plowman; at worst it has been hostile and bitter. Thus, those parts of the poem in which the poet has obviously not freed himself from the Church of Rome have been minimized, ignored, or apologized for. Other parts of the poem have been praised as the work of a visionary who saw, not men's misdeeds and weaknesses, but future social and political events; consequently such a man and his poem could not be orthodox. Not only has this tradition led away from the study of the poem itself, since some parts of it reflected "the old darkness," but
when the focus has been on the poem, this tradition has led to the
search for a context outside the Church as a means to understanding
Piers.

B. Prophecy

Only nine years after Crowley's edition John Bale, in 1559, calls
the author "a Wycliffite and a forerunner of the Protestants." In
the next century, in 1662, Thomas Fuller pronounces him "by prolepsis
. . . a Protestant." By 1813, when Thomas Whitaker published his
edition of the C-Text, the view of Langland as prophet has gained
sophistication, but knowledge has not given any particularly new
insights. True, Whitaker denies that the poet is Protestant or that
he even has tendencies toward Wycliffite or Lollard doctrines; he
nevertheless acknowledges that there is enough truth in the view of
the poet as prophet "to excite momentary surprise." Whitaker, moreover,
still considers the fourteenth century a time "of darkness and
spiritual slavery" from which the poet could not completely separate
himself. His interpretation of the conclusion of the poem is to be
expected: the poet leads his pilgrim out of the corrupt Roman church
into the Universal Church. Isaac Disraeli in 1841 reveals more about
his own political proclivities than he does about Langland when he
refers to the poet as a "sage, . . . satirist, and . . . seer (for
prophet he proved to be)." The poet is one who speaks for the sub-
merged masses of the fourteenth century, a democratic genius who writes
of "theological mysteries." In the following year Thomas Wright's
Introduction to his edition of Piers contradicts Disraeli's view of
the poet's democratic sympathies, asserting that the poet nowhere
attacks the doctrines of "the popish religion." The attacks on the corruption, injustice, and oppression of the time, however, did prepare the way for the Reformers. Wright's perspective, moreover, apparently prevents his seeing that Piers, the Christlike figure, does not remain a plowman: he states, "... the ploughman, and not the pope with his proud hierarchy ... represented on earth the Saviour...." The historian Milman (1855) is also aware that the author is no Wycliffite; in fact he points out Langland's derogatory use of the word "loller." Even so, to him as to his contemporaries, Langland is really a Protestant. He describes the poet as one who seeks Truth, not within the hierarchy of the Church, but within "the self-directing soul" guided by Reason, Conscience, and the Grace of God, finding as his source of authority an "unconscious" dependence on Scripture alone. The poem itself is an attack on church and state. Echoing Wright, G. P. Marsh, in his 1862 lecture on the "Origin and History of the English Language," states that Piers Plowman "prepared the English people for the reception of the seed, which the labours of Wycliffe and his associates were already sowing among them...." Marsh, too, sees the poem as an attack on church and state, a poem with little unity, he adds, because it needed none to accomplish its purposes. The tendency to read the history of ideas backwards, to see one's own time as the culmination of all that is worthy has come before seems to belong to every age. It seems to be especially strong among scholars of the prophetic Langland tradition.

None of those who perceived Piers Plowman as prophecy attempted a detailed study of the poem until 1894, partly because it had not been
thought worthy of analysis and partly because the interests of most scholars within this tradition had not involved the poem *qua* poem. Disraeli admitted he was mystified by it; Milman considered the poem incomplete, either left unfinished or the ending lost; Marsh thought it needed no structure. In 1894, however, Elizabeth Hanscom's study of the *Visio* appeared, a study which sought to set the poem firmly within its own time and to analyze it with some care. But too much knowledge had been lost. Her Protestant perspective and background are obvious. Her observations are general; much of her discussion is paraphrase. To her the poem contains satire, but is primarily a moral poem within the tradition of the Old Testament and subsequent prophets. The poet is a timid forerunner of the Reformation. Hanscom seems to have no sense of the fourteenth-century understanding of the Bible or of its sacramental view of the world.

Late in the 1890's two other works treat *Piers* as prophetic. They also make a striking departure from the earlier approaches. The article by J. W. Mackail in 1897 and the first edition (1899) of G. M. Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wycliffe*, both perhaps more accurately belong to the satiric tradition, but since both consider the poem a harbinger of the Reformation, they will be treated briefly here. Neither work is interested in the poem *qua* poem. Theirs is the approach of the nineteenth-century historian, the poem understood as a documentary account of the political, religious, and social abuses of the fourteenth century, an approach that continues to the present. To Mackail the poem still embodies the coherence of the Christian world view, perhaps the last work to do so, but it contains the prophecy
which Henry VIII would fulfill. Trevelyan finds that history corroborates the "gloomy utterance" of the poem. It is the assumptions and attitudes of earlier writers than Mackail and Trevelyan, however, who have most influenced the literary study of the poem. And while no one would disagree with Kenneth Sisam on the difficulty of excluding the ideas of a later age from the interpretation of medieval works, the assumption that the fourteenth century was an age of such darkness and oppression that a writer from that period whose work can still be read with pleasure and profit must have been a prophet, mystic, or seer who was outside of, above, or beyond his age has severely inhibited both the sympathetic study of the thought of the time and the careful study of the poem. Piers Plowman as prophecy is one of the earliest expressions of this antipathy to its age.

C. Satire

It has become a cliché that the Renaissance praised Piers Plowman's prophecy, the eighteenth century its satire. There is truth in the statement. As indicated already, however, Piers was called "satire" as well as "prophecy" during the Renaissance, and these terms are not necessarily exclusive, nor do they in any way necessarily preclude allegory. Whether entitled "dialogue," "complaint," "exhortation," "debate," or "disputation," the sixteenth-century works within the Piers tradition concern themselves with error and vice, and the prophet himself has always been perhaps even more of a preacher, or forth-teller, than a foreteller. Though Crowley was apparently aware that some in his day thought of Piers as a picture of times past or of occurrences to come, it is clear that Puttenham does not separate prophecy from
satire. One of the earliest references to Piers Plowman as satire, George Puttenham's The Art of English Poesie (1589), classifies the poem as "Satyr" and the poet as a "malcontent" attacking the vices of the time and seemingly a prophet of the fall of the "Romane Clergy." That by "satyr" Puttenham is referring to the genre of Piers is evident in that he associates the poet with "Lucilius, Luuenall and Persius among the Latines."

From Puttenham in the late sixteenth century to the writers of the eighteenth century, the predominant view of Piers Plowman defined the poem as satire. The problems with this term are that it was applied both to a mode and to a genre of great range and diversity; in addition, both Kernan and Peter observe that in the last two decades of the sixteenth century the conception of satire moved closer to classical satire than to the earlier English satiric tradition. Perhaps Dryden's essay "A Discourse Concerning the Origin and Progress of Satire" (1693) may be helpful in determining something of how Piers was seen during this interval. Dryden accepts the definition Daniel Heinsius gave to the satire of Horace, broadening its application:

Satire is a kind of poetry, without a series of action, invented for the purging of our minds; in which human vices, ignorance, and errors, and all things besides, which are produced from them in every man, are severely reprehended; partly dramatically, partly simply, and sometimes in both kinds of speaking; but, for the most part, figuratively, and occultly; consisting in a low familiar way, chiefly in a sharp and pungent manner of speech; but partly, also, in a facetious and civil way of jesting; by which either hatred, or laughter, or indignation, is moved.

Dryden explains that "without a series of action" does not mean "formless," but rather distinguishes the form of satire from the form of drama, which includes as one of its three unities "continuity of
Moreover, Heinsius's phrase "for the most part, figuratively and occultly" suggests that the Roman satirists were subjected to emblematic or allegorical reading. Thus, in the minds of some readers, satire and allegory are not necessarily exclusive. It seems, furthermore, that through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some writers applied both the terms prophecy and satire to a poem they read allegorically.

Puttenham (1589), Francis Meres (1598), Milton (1642), and George Hickes (1705) all label the Piers poet "satirist" or "satyrographus"; Thomas Hearne, in his 1719 edition of the Historia Rerum Anglicarum by William of Newburgh, writes, "There is no manner of Vice that reigneth in any Estate of Men which the writer Robert Langlande hath not godlily, learnedly, and wittily rebuked." Noticeably absent from this statement is any reference to the instructions of Holy Church to the search for salvation, or to anything that would indicate any knowledge at all of the Vita. But Michael Drayton's description of the poem a century earlier, 1610-1620, in the Poly-Olbion is similar: "the supposed vision...[discovers] the infecting corruptions of these times," and Drayton shows by his use of Piers Plowman itself that he knows more of the poem than merely its attack on vices. He recast the ending of Piers Plowman as an account of the overthrow of the Church in The Legend of Great Cromwell (11.777-864); this 1607 work is clearly in the medieval speculum tradition. Skeat, moreover, thinks it likely that Drayton's sonnet No. 12, "To the Soul" is a paraphrase of Anima's description of herself (Piers, B.XV.23-9); an examination of the sonnet gives no cause to question Skeat's observation. Whether the understanding of sentence in the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and early
eighteenth centuries is drastically different from that of an early sixteenth-century reader may be an open question. It is clear, however, that Langland's portraits and denunciation of sin rather than his remedies are becoming more and more the interest and focus of those writing about Piers Plowman.

Popular interest in Piers Plowman must have declined after the sixteenth century, for no new edition after Roger's 1561 reprint of Crowley's appeared until 1813. There were no doubt many reasons, among them, the language of the poem itself. The eighteenth-century interest in the classics and its reference to the pre-Reformation as "gothic" surely must have contributed. This combination of high regard for classical models, the consensus that pre-Reformation English was barbaric and unenlightened, and the difficulty of trying to read Middle English nearly eclipsed the knowledge of Piers Plowman. By the late eighteenth century the poem is in the main an enigma. Thomas Warton includes excerpts from it in his History of English Poetry (1774-1781). To him it is satire, whether as genre or invective is difficult to say; he also calls it allegory. He clearly sees it as an attack on vices in general, but he twice mentions its attack on and interest in "the absurdities of superstition." He concedes that despite the poem's "obscurities," it does "contain much sense and observation of life, with some strokes of poetry." For him it is Chaucer, not Langland, with whom English poetry begins. By the late eighteenth century Piers Plowman had become merely a puzzling item in literary history.

In 1813 Thomas Whitaker published the C-Text of Piers Plowman, the first edition of Piers Plowman to be published since 1550. "Satire"
is the term he applies to the poem in his introduction. It was this edition with its introduction which inaugurated a new interest in and understanding of the poem different from those of Crowley, Spenser, or Drayton. The Protestant antipathy to the Catholic Middle Ages resembles Bale's, Fuller's, and Warton's. The antipathy toward allegory, though not altogether new, is intensified. This satire, Whitaker explains, is written "in the midst of darkness and spiritual slavery," but is blunted as a result of the allegorical form Langland was compelled to adopt because of "vindictive" ecclesiastics. Allegory is "mere personifications of virtues and vices," not a way of thinking; satirical characters "must be persons." By "persons" Whitaker seems to mean characters having verisimilitude, or to modify slightly Jonson's phrase, Vices in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature should walk dressed as men and women. To be sure, in such a character as Gluttony, Langland, whom Whitaker calls "the first English satirist," achieves such high quality that he was surpassed only by George Crabbe, Whitaker's contemporary. In other parts of the poem, however, the work "often sinks into imbecility." The standard of judgment is obviously contemporary.

D. Aesthetic: Whitaker (1813) to Milman (1867)

The rest of Whitaker's Introduction continues to show his insularity; it is very much the product of what Northrop Frye calls the "Age of Sensibility." There is the interest in the poet as oracle, in the poet himself and in his sympathies, and in the literary process. The poet is imagined to be a contemplative solitary with acute perceptions whose political sympathies were democratic and whose religious
sympathies were with the Wycliffites. Despite the influence of the
schoolmen, whom he quotes, and the fact that he remained within the
Roman church, the poet thinks for himself; and his poem, the product
of a "wild" imagination, is unique and original. The work which was
"to improve the moral feelings" of his countrymen is itself the result
of "feelings" rather than reason or intellect. Yet Whitaker gains this
knowledge of the poet and the poem from a work "altogether the most
obscure in the English language."^2

Whitaker's views, or perhaps those who affected his views, were to
have a lasting influence on Piers Plowman scholarship. Throughout the
eighteenth century such men as Young, Burke, the Wartons, and
McPherson—to name a few—had written poetry, and had written about
poetry, as products of enthusiasm, of uncultivated and original genius,
of the sublime. In the late eighteenth century Rousseau wrote in
Reveries of a Solitary, "I shall say that which I have thought exactly
as it has come to me, and also with as little linking together as the
ideas of yesterday ordinarily have with those of the day following."^4
These ideas, combined with Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "the
spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," Coleridge's discussion of
the role of the primary and secondary imagination, and Shelley's defense
of the poet as the founder and arbiter of civilization—in short, the
intellectual climate of the nineteenth century—^5—probably account for
Whitaker's interest in the poetic process. His seems to be the first
statement of a new tradition within Piers Plowman scholarship which
concerns itself with the poem as the product of imagination and
feelings, whose purpose is to improve men through their emotions. Those
using this approach to the poem, an approach which assumes the antithesis of intellect and emotion, feeling, or imagination, have not
generally sought to penetrate the meaning of the poem. As a result of
their assumptions, their interests in the poem, when not focussed on
the poetic process, is autobiographical.

Drawing upon and extending Whitaker's assessments, Isaac Disraeli
in *Amenities of Literature* (1841) and Henry H. Milman (1867) acknowledge
that Langland is a great satirist, but the poet is even more: he is a
"profound" and "sagacious" "rude native genius." According to Disraeli,
in order to protect himself from the "vindictive," Langland tempers his
boldness with prudence by using personification, or allegory, which
Disraeli explains, is the most primitive poetic form.66 But the poem
contains vivid scenes "which enable us to forget the allegory
altogether." This prophetic poet is "vehemently democratic," writing
what his fellowmen would hardly dare to whisper. His emotional depth
and wild imagination enable him to combine the "invective" of the
satirist with the grandeur of Dante.67 Milman is primarily interested,
as shown above, in *Piers* as a precursor of the Reformation, illustrat-
ing the rejection of Latin Christianity by the native, Teutonic spirit,
but coinciding with this perspective is his discussion of the author
as a "sad serious Satirist," who in his "rude" and "uncouth" poem,
expresses the character and intensely moral feelings of rural England
in his "invective" against the clerics, from priest, mendicant, and monk
to bishop, cardinal, and pope.68
E. Portrait of the Times: Wright (1842) to Skeat (1886)

In 1842 Thomas Wright's edition of the B-Text was published. To Wright the poem is satire, of value as a document revealing the conditions of its time. He seeks to modify the misapprehensions of such men as Whitaker and Disraeli, and he would seem to have been well qualified to do so. By 1842 he had edited twenty volumes of medieval and Renaissance Latin, French, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English poems, songs, treatises, letters, and plays, in addition to having written several histories--one, of the literature and learning of the Anglo-Saxons; and in 1842 his series, Biography of Literary Characters of Great Britain and Ireland, began to be published. With his knowledge of the polemical writings of the Middle Ages and Renaissance as a background, he asserts that the satire of Piers is by no means a unique, isolated phenomenon and that the author, unlike Wycliffe and the Lollards, attacks "no single doctrine of the popish religion." Far from showing democratic sympathies, the poet "constantly preaches the Christian doctrine of obedience to rulers" (p. xxiii). In addition, Wright objects to Whitaker's principle of choosing a text assumed to be the product of a youth over one with the revisions and deletions of maturity. He points out, moreover, that nothing is known of the author, though he himself believes the poem to be the work of a monk from the Malvern area (pp. ix, xii). Thus Wright not only draws back somewhat from the tradition of the poem as prophecy but also declines to make suppositions about the character of the author or about the poetic process. Indeed, in his objection to Whitaker's editorial principle of preferring the "wild imagination" of youth over the
judgment of maturity, he seems to be resisting the view of poetry as proceeding from or directed toward the "feelings." In his opposition, however, he seems not to recognize that the language of poetry is metaphor, or in medieval terms, *allegoria, integumentum*, or *involucrum*. He, of course, recognizes that *Piers* is allegory, but he sees allegory as merely a "tedious" form, fashionable at the time and *Piers* as less allegorical and thus more interesting than such poems as the *Roman de la Rose*, which is wholly allegorical and structurally unified (pp. xiii-xiv). Wright, thus, appears to be the first modern scholar to concern himself with *Piers Plowman* as a philological and literary-historical document. According to him, besides being the "purest" form of the English language and "the finest example left" of native English verse, this satiric poem "laid open with unsparing knife the sins and corruptions which provoked" the revolutionaries and reformists of the fourteenth century (pp. xiii, xxviii). In his 1855 preface Wright reaffirms his belief in the importance of the poem as "an illustration of the political history of our country during the fourteenth century" (p. iv). Probably as a result of his knowledge of the late seventeenth-century emphasis on *Pier's* portraits and denunciations of sin, the poem in the hands of Thomas Wright becomes a graphic document of the social conditions of the fourteenth century and of a commonly held attitude toward them (p. xiv). The poem is in large measure valuable as one of the best "satirical" portraits on the political and religious life of its time and as the protest of its age against tyranny of any kind. In spite of the fact that the poem itself is orthodox, it influenced works that were not, works which were
opposing the feudal aristocracy itself and the "popish church"
(pp. v-xiii, xxxiii-xxvii).

Wright obviously draws upon a knowledge of the satiric works
written from the twelfth through the seventeenth centuries, but
equally obviously, as his statements about allegory indicate, he has
no understanding of their epistemological context: to him, like many
who will follow him, Piers Plowman differs only in form, or "style,"
from the verses and tracts of those times; and it, like them, can be
understood without a knowledge of the way men of that age understood
language or reality. Like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Wright
perpetuates the view that the meaning of Piers and its imitators is
unfortunately obscured "by a confused allegorical style" (p. xxv), but
that Piers is "less tedious" than others because its "vigorous
descriptions" can make one forget "the general defects of this class
of writings" (pp. xiii-xiv). Thus, in the mid-nineteenth century the
approach based on a reading of medieval and Renaissance satire and
propaganda, which like earlier readings ignores or regrets the form
of the poem, begins another tradition of Piers Plowman scholarship--
Piers as a literary-historical document.

In general agreement with Wright's perceptions are those of George
P. Marsh in his popular Origins and History of the English Language and
of the Early Literature It Embodyes (1862). The poem is a satire
which is in no sense revolutionary, but rather is "a calm, allegorical
exposition" of the vices of church, state, and society written for the
purpose of reform. It is of interest to some extent because of its
form, but primarily because it is a record of the "actual life and
opinion of its time."
From 1867-1884 the series of Skeat's editions of *Piers Plowman* with notes, introductions, and glossary for EETS appeared, and then in 1886 his parallel-text edition of the poem. His editions of the B- and C-Texts have not even yet been superseded. A man of such knowledge and accomplishment could not but set the course of *Piers Plowman* scholarship. Skeat was an editor and philologist almost without equal, careful to build upon the work of his predecessors and, at the same time, to work from fourteenth-century material. His critical approach is similar, but less successful. Aware of the changes in the meanings of many words from the fourteenth century to the nineteenth, he does not seem to be aware of the change in ontology and epistemology. To him, as to many of his contemporaries, the poem is "almost prophetic," and in spite of the fact that the poet himself is not a revolutionary, those who "seized upon" his boldness were (II, lv). Moreover, Skeat's antipathy to certain points of Catholic doctrine surfaces when he states that the poem asserts the error in the Pope's claim to be the successor to St. Peter: one who leads the Church should be the successor to Christ himself (II, xxvi). To Skeat, as to Wright, the poem is satire, though Skeat hardly uses the term: *Piers* illustrates English history, he says, but its pictures are of the poor, hard-working, and oppressed as opposed to Chaucer's portraits of the rich. Langland himself, apparently one of those whom he describes, is "constrained to speak out the bitter truth . . . the cry of an injured man," against the social, religious, and political conditions of the time (II, liv).
F. Autobiography: Skeat (1867-1886)

"The cry of an injured man" not only exposes the vices of his day; it also reveals the poet himself. And if, as Whitaker had stated and as this statement suggests, the poem is the product of feelings—if a poem is self-expression—then it must be in some sense autobiographical. Skeat's perception of the autobiographical nature of the poem, consequently, may be new in its emphasis, but it is the inevitable extension of Whitaker's conception of the poetic process. Skeat takes sharp issue with Whitaker, however, over Will's being the poet's "visionary." William Langland is the author; the Will of the poem is the poet himself; Kitte is his wife; Kalote, his daughter. "I can see no reason why," Skeat argues, "we should think the author is always trying to deceive us about himself..." The poem is "true autobiography" in that it "abounds with his opinions, political and religious... The allusions to his poverty and the care taken with his education are certainly true... To sum up all, his life and thoughts can be easily learnt from his poem..." As M. H. Abrams demonstrates in The Mirror and the Lamp, with the advent of poetry as self-expression and with the "I-representative" becoming the "poet in his proper person," the poet himself becomes the central focus for some nineteenth-century critics. Skeat is one of these. Thus another tradition in Piers Plowman scholarship was begun, one reading the poem as autobiography.

G. Topical Allegory: Skeat (1867-1886)

Concomitant with his views of the poem as a picture of the times, or history, and as "true autobiography," Skeat gives impetus to yet
another tradition of Piers scholarship—Piers as topical and personal allegory. Since medieval allegorical understanding had been lost and the poem was understood as history and autobiography, Skeat not surprisingly explicates passages within Piers as topical or personal allegory. Not only is he doubtless working from assumptions about poetry implicit in Wordsworth's Prelude with its attention to historical as well as autobiographical events, but also from concepts such as those of Shelley which have already been referred to. In his Defense of Poetry Shelley states that all perceptions of the invisible world, which are expressed as the laws, forms, and art of society—all of which spring from religion—originate with poets, who are the "legislators" and "prophets" of the world. Moreover, "all original religions are allegorical or susceptible of allegory." The poetry of Dante and Milton, he continues, is "merely the mask and mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised."77 The rather thin mask of the poet in Piers Plowman is, to Skeat, in part, the character Will. But the lunatic of the Prologue is the poet as well (II, 15). Besides these identifications of the poet, Skeat concurs with the identifications he attributes to Tyrwhitt of characters in the rat-mice parliament: the kitten is Richard II, and the cat is John of Gaunt.78 Later, in the parallel-text edition, Skeat modifies and expands the identifications: "the rats are the burgesses and more influential men among the commons; the mice, those of less importance. The cat is Edward III; the kitten is his grandson Richard, then heir to the crown" (II, 17). The Lady Meed passage, at least in the B-Text, is topical also, Lady Meed herself an "admirable" description of
Edward III's mistress, Alice Perrers (II, 31). The reference in Meed's argument with Conscience in both B- and C-Texts to the death of the king's father is "really" to "Edward II... , who was upon the throne at the time when the A-text was composed" (II, 45). Thus it is Skeat who also perpetuated and elaborated still another tradition--Piers as topical and personal allegory--a tradition which was to be carried to extraordinary lengths by later students of the poem.

As a consequence of his basing his critical study of the poem, as he had his philological studies and editorial practices, on the works of his immediate predecessors, he combines the perception of Piers Plowman as a historical document with nineteenth-century poetic theory and practice. His authority helped to insure that the subsequent focus on Piers Plowman centered on the poem either as a historical document and topical allegory or as an illustration of a process poem, as the allegorical autobiography of the poet, or as combinations of these. Though many scholars built upon Skeat's synthesis, not all of them did. For the sake of clarity, these various approaches will be traced separately.

H. Portrait of the Times: Skeat (1867-1886)--Tucker (1908)

The dominant treatment of Piers throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century up to the initiation of the authorship controversy by John Matthews Manly in 1908 was the one that Wright had espoused--the poem as satire, or a picture of the times, or in other words, the poem as historical document. George L. Craik, whose history was first published in 1861 and by 1897 had gone through ten printings, used only Wright's text. Following Wright's views rather closely, Craik
makes explicit what was qualified but implicit in Wright, that the
poem is of little worth as poetry. He endorses Wright's view of its
value as representative of early English language and style, and agrees
that its chief value lies in its "lively picture" of the general con-
ditions of the time. 79

Skeat endorsed this approach in his own discussion of the poem as
a picture of its time. His assimilation of nineteenth-century
assumptions about poetic feeling is, however, obvious in his account of
Piers Plowman as a portrait of the fourteenth century. Because his
description of the poem has been paraphrased repeatedly, it will be
quoted at length:

As indicating the true temper and feelings of the English
mind in the fourteenth century, it is worth volumes of
history. . . . Langland pictures the homely poor in their
ill-fed, hard-working condition, battling against hunger,
famine, injustice, oppression, and all the stern realities
and hardships that tried them as gold is tried in the
fire. . . . How often does the student of history . . .
long to get an insight into the inner every-day life of the
people, their dress, their diet, their wages, their strikes,
all the minor details which picture to us what manner of
men they really were! And it is in such a poem as the
present that we find all this. . . . (EETS, No. 28, pp. iv-v).

Using Skeat's text and his critical comments, John Richard Green's
Short History of the English People (1876) was equally as popular as
Craik's if not more popular. 80 Though he follows Skeat in considering
the poem from several perspectives, Green, like Craik, has little
regard for Piers as poetry, seeing only an occasional passage which can
be called poetry, a passage here and there which reveals a "love of
nature" or "the grim earnestness of wrath" (p. 270)--in other words,
feeling. His primary interest in the poem is in such portraits as
Skeat described, its portraits of "an age of shame and suffering such as England had never known" (p. 270). "All the darker and stern aspects of its age," he declares, "are painted with a terrible fidelity" (p. 269). Green's history was so popular that it was translated into German and it continued to appear in English through eleven printings, the last one in 1934.

Ten Brink's *History of English Literature*, first published in German in 1877, also uses Skeat's text and criticism. Ten Brink, however, uses an even greater multiplicity of approaches than Skeat, and, as one would expect, can find no unity or coherence within the poem. He not only considers the poet prophetic, satiric, and homiletic (apparently a new perception), but also autobiographical, topically allegorical, and mystical (another new perception). Though he does not explore any of his statements and while his summary of the poem is mere "plot summary," his suggestions may have been the stimulus for later explorations. His assessment of Langland's satire, or "series of paintings," itself departs somewhat from the approach to *Piers* as a historical document. Langland, he says, "held up a mirror to the world, in which it saw both its own image and the idea to which it had grown faithless" (p. 354).

Skeat continued to give emphasis to *Piers* as a picture of the times in his successive publications, and he and J. J. Jusserand in *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages* (1889), *Piers Plowman: A Contribution to English Mysticism* (1894), and *A Literary History of the English People* (1895) reinforced each other in their views of the poem's historicity. Jusserand follows the synthesis of Skeat in his
book on *Piers Plowman*, though he gives even more attention to the poetic process and the autobiography of the author. Quotations similar to the one above by Skeat are plentiful, however, in all three of the works of Jusserand, who claims that *Piers* presents graphic and lively scenes of "the merchant class, the religious world, the Commons of England" as well as of the suffering poor (*History*, p. 389). The poet is "the only author who gives a sufficient and contemporaneous idea of that great phenomenon, the power of Parliament" (p. 389); in fact, "his work at times reads like a poetical commentary of the Rolls [of Parliament]" (p. 391).

A spate of other works in this tradition appeared in the 1890's along with Jusserand's, several of which, like his, remained popular for decades. In 1892 Henry de Beltgens Gibbin's *English Social Reformers* was published. Gibbins acknowledges his indebtedness to Marsh, Skeat, and Green, and seems aware of only the *Visio*, for he refers to the dispute over indulgences as concluding the poem. He admits that "for us," the interest in the poem lies in Passus V and VI. Almost quoting Skeat, Gibbins says that the poet, as one of the poor, describes the misery, toil, and despair of the English poor.\(^{83}\) Though Gibbins and Frederick Snell are also interested in the autobiographical aspects of the poem, Snell in *The Fourteenth Century* (1892)\(^{84}\) and G. M. Trevelyan in *England in the Age of Wycliffe* (1899) treat the poem primarily as a source for illustrations of fourteenth-century life; both declare that the circumstances of the day were ripe for one to rise up and denounce the corruptions of Church and State (Snell, p. 379; Trevelyan, pp. 1-2).
The partial objective, in fact, of Trevelyan's progressivist history is to show England at a stage of its progress toward modern development (p. vi), though G. G. Coulton later considers him too lenient in his view of the medieval church. 85 Trevelyan, like most scholars of his time, is completely baffled by allegory; he refers to it as a "mysterious . . . style" which "seems to have been the favourite of the lower classes" (pp. v, ix, 204).

William J. Courthope (1895) and J. W. Mackail (1897) are among those who see *Piers Plowman* as a picture of its time, but in quite a different sense from most. Both are exceptional in their consciousness of the fourteenth-century context. Both see the poem as an embodiment of the conscience and consciousness of the fourteenth century, and moreover as the embodiment of a coherent world view. Mackail considers the poem to be "a picture, at once vivid and convincing, of the actual England of the time," when "modern forces" were beginning to break up the coherence of the Christian world view (p. 43). To his mind the poem reflects, "almost for the last time, that organized and coherent system of political and theological thought which to the mediaeval mind gave a complete account of the whole of human life" (p. 43).

Though Courthope makes no mention of its imminent dissolution, he too finds the poem portraying this coherence. His statement about allegory, moreover, startles in that he writes of it as a consciousness rather than as a device:

In Langland's poem are combined Caedmon's reverence for the text of scripture, Cynewulf's love of riddles, Richard of Hampole's spiritual theology, Robert of Brunne's practical common sense, all blended with that spirit of allegorical interpretation which had moulded the system of ecclesiastical training since the days of Gregory the Great. 86
While Courthope is aware that Piers Plowman embodies the medieval mind, at the same time he makes evident his belief in the universality of the human condition, at least in England. Thus, to him, "Langland's vigorous satire, vivid powers of description, strong sense of justice, so faithfully reflect the conscience of the English people, that his Vision often seems to be projecting its light upon the ethical problems of our own day" (p. 201). In this perspective he shows a farther departure from the discussions of Piers as satire, or a picture of the times.

One other piece of scholarship, that of Elizabeth Hanscom (1894), should be included here, though it was previously discussed as an example of the prophetic perspective. Hanscom assumes that a prophet's role is that of a satirist, who calls attention to and warns of the consequences of evil doing. Consequently, she studies the poem as satire; but like Courthope she does not regard the poem as a warning merely to the fourteenth century, as invective, or as merely a picture of the times. It is Langland's expression of moral concern; his "burden" is that" of endless generations: --the sins of the people" (pp. 447-48).

Thus, exclusive of the efforts of Hanscom, Mackail, and Courthope, most scholars in the nineteenth century who treat the poem as satire or as a picture of the times are basically following the tradition begun by Wright in looking upon the poem as a historical document, a source of vignettes which reveal what life was like in the fourteenth century. Samuel M. Tucker continues the tradition into the twentieth century with his summaries of sections of Piers Plowman in his 1908 Verse Satire in England Before the Renaissance, though he does
acknowledge that he is concerned with only part of the poem. But, as already noted, the reprinting and the new editions of the earlier works in the twentieth century in themselves show the continued interest in the poem as historical document. Most of these scholars see the allegory—if they mention it—as obscure, mysterious, cumbersome, or tedious, and most have at best little regard, at worst antipathy, toward the intellectual-theological, or Catholic, context of the poem.

I. Autobiography: Jusserand (1894) to Mensendieck (1910)

The Piers Plowman as autobiography has continued to have its enthusiasts since Skeat first gave emphasis to this approach. This scholarly tradition is certainly different from that which treats Piers as a picture of its time, as a glance at Wright's treatment will reveal; but in the work of Skeat they were combined so that the poem is often seen as a document both historical and personal. Around the turn of this century, however, the biographical tradition seemed to dominate even those who combined it with the historical. According to Abrams, "this strange innovation ... swept everything before it in applied criticism for more than a century" (p. 227). This is not quite true of Piers scholarship because of doubts cast on the authorship of the poem by Manly in 1908, but this tradition made a good start, especially in the 1890's. J. J. Jusserand (1894, 1895), Edwin M. Hopkins (1894), and Otto Mensendieck (1900, 1910) are perhaps the most imaginative scholars in this tradition, but Green (1876, pp. 269-71), Ten Brink (1877-93, I, 352-55), Gibbins (1892, pp. 6-9), and Hanscom (1894, p. 432) also write biographies of Langland with the poem as their
source. Indeed, as Jusserand himself admits, "No contemporary has
spoken of the author . . ., and no one seems to have known him" (Piers
Plowman, p. 59). Even so, the French scholar asserts that a study of
the poem reveals "the traits of his character, and the outline of his
biography, for he has described his person, and way of life" (p. 59).
Jusserand, then, constructs a biography: the "impressions" the poem
makes are that the poet was of humble origin and that he entered the
Church to escape "servitude" (p. 64). He was educated by "friends"
who perceived his brightness; and when for some reason, he discontinued
his education, he moved from Malvern to London, where one finds the
poet as a vagabond. The poet is naturally curious, has a "tender
heart" beneath his rough exterior, and is totally dominated by his
imagination (pp. 69-80). So Jusserand's book continues. Only one
detail seems to puzzle the scholar: he finds no other writer of
visions making someone other than himself the hero of his visions
(pp. 196-97).

Edwin Hopkins's article, entitled "The Character and Opinions of
William Langland as Shown in 'The Vision of William Concerning Piers
the Plowman,'" is an internal biography. Hopkins states that though
there is little material available for a biography of Langland's
"outer life," the "mass" of material "bearing upon his inner or mental
life" is "proportionally great."

Whereupon he sets forth Langland's views under such headings as "Scientific Information," "Political and Social Theories," "Theology and Religious Teaching," "Langland's
Philosophy"; under "The Spirit of the Poem" he discusses "Earnestness,"
"Insight," "The Prophecies," "Imagination and Originality," "Attitudes
"Scholarship" (pp. 233-88). He discusses all these subjects without regard to the speaker or to characterization within the poem. Hopkins begins his article with a diatribe against the "huge machine" of the fourteenth-century Church, citing its formalism, carelessness, hypocrisy, and voraciousness (p. 235); he obviously considers Langland to be outside this context, a man whose condemnation of the Church ranges from its exploitation of the people to the "curious questions and conceits" with which its clerics amused themselves (pp. 235-71 passim). He sums up his study with the statement: "To us the work is of immeasurable value as a storehouse of information" (p. 288).

Otto Mensendieck's ingenious biographical study appeared in 1900, Charakterentwicklung und ethisch-theologische Anschauungen des Verfassers von "Piers the Plowman," a shortened version of which he published in English in 1910, entitled "The Authorship of Piers Plowman." His article focuses on A-Text, Passus IX-XI, where he sees the allegorical figures as the internal experience of the author. "So then: 'Thought' will reveal his thoughts, 'Wit' will give us his knowledge, 'Dame Study' will acquaint us with his studies, 'Clergy' with his experiences when in clerical order, and so forth" ("The Authorship . . .," p. 406). The rest is an elaboration of this thesis.

J. Aesthetic: Jusserand (1894, 1895) and Hopkins (1894)

Even more fanciful are those who write of Langland's poetic process as embodied in his poem. Whitaker, Disraeli, Milman, and, to an extent, Skeat expressed the belief that the poem is self-expression. As one might expect from the focus on the poet's "inner" and "outer" biography
by Hopkins (1894) and Jusserand (1894, 1895), both men perpetuate this tradition in their discussions of Langland. But the variety of nineteenth-century assumptions about poetry appears in their descriptions. Hopkins tends toward the utilitarian conception of poetry as amusement, Bentham's alternative to playing push-pin (see Abrams, pp. 300-03), though he suggests that Langland came to realize after he had written much of his poem that it could be used along with his daily manner of life to set forth Truth (Hopkins, p. 235).

Langland, according to Hopkins, began his poem as "recreation," the "solace" of idle hours; it is a natural growth "put together in a childlike way" by a man whose poetic abilities were "inborn" (pp. 235, 277, 286). Jusserand's description, like his over-all approach to the poem, is a potpourri of nineteenth-century assumptions. His handling of the poem as self-revelation (see Abrams, pp. 226-27) has been discussed above. The scholar, furthermore, finds no hint of the artful in this poem: "All Langland's art and all his teaching can be summed up in one word: sincerity" (Piers Plowman, p. 153; see Abrams, pp. 312-20). Moreover, the work of this "half-mad poet of genius" (p. 20) is absolutely spontaneous--unplanned, unwilled, and even unconscious (see Abrams, pp. 213-17):

He speaks, as he thinks, impetuously, recking little of the consequences of his words either for himself or for others; they flow in a burning stream, and could no more be checked than the lava of Vesuvius. . . . [He] is scarcely aware that he invents; he stares at the sight and wonders as much as we do; he can change nothing . . . (pp. 153, 155).

Whether they view Piers as recreation or as the product of genius, however, neither Hopkins nor Jusserand questions the earnestness of
the author himself, nor—as one of the very few singularities of Piers Plowman scholarship—has anyone else.

K. Gospel of Work: Green (1876) to Jusserand (1895)

When dealing with a poem whose sincerity and moral earnestness is acclaimed, whose stated purport is to seek St. Truth, and whose "hero," Piers the Plowman, must plow his half-acre before he becomes the guide to repentant pilgrims whom he first sets to work, scholars of the nineteenth-century could hardly avoid thinking of Carlyle's "Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God's name!" Thus, an understanding of Carlyle, often a literal one, was applied literally to Piers Plowman, and another tradition in Piers scholarship was begun—Piers, the proclaimer of the gospel of work.

Piers the Plowman, of course, had been depicted emblematically, especially by the Reformers, as the idealized poor laborer, the personification of humility and godliness, and the poet had been called a "prophet" since the sixteenth century. By the nineteenth century, knowledge of the context of the poem had been lost so that Whitaker (1813) could write of the "strong democratic tendency" (p. xliii) of the poem and Disraeli (1841), of its "vehement democratic spirit" (p. xxxviii). Despite Wright's statements to the contrary (1842), Marsh (1862) still wrote and spoke of Langland's poem as a work of the people comparable to the Declaration of Independence (p. xlviii). Coinciding with this conception of the democratic context, the emblematic understanding had become literalized so that Milman (1855) regards Piers as the personification, not of humility and godliness, but of the
"industrious," "profoundly religious man." To be sure, an anonymous reviewer of Skeat's parallel-text edition in the *Athenaeum* (1887) writes of Piers as, in the first eight Passus, "the personification of honest and unambitious labour," but Elizabeth Hanscom (1894), who attempts to explicate the poem, calls Piers "the ideal English laborer" (p. 418).

John Richard Green (1876) seems to be the first to apply the notion of the poem's "democratic spirit" to an interpretation of the plowman in the so-called Carlylian terms of the gospel of labor: "The gospel of equality is backed by the gospel of labor. The aim of the Ploughman is to work, and to make the world work with him" (p. 270). In the following year (1877), Henry Morley writes about the poem similarly. Though he acknowledges that, to Langland, love is the fulfillment of the law, Morley is most emphatic that Langland is a man "uncompromising in [his] requirement of a life spent in fit labour, a life of Duty. . . . Every man has his work to do. . . ." And for failure to do one's duty there is "no valid repentance" without doing everything possible to make up for previous failure (p. 101). Morley does not read so literally that duty is physical work; he seems to see Langland, however, as a fourteenth-century Carlyle, calling men to "a Divine Law of Love and Duty" (p. 101). Gibbins (1892), who draws heavily upon the work of Marsh, Green, and Skeat, maintains that the poet is one of the laboring poor (pp. 7-9), whose poem rises to its "full significance" in Passus VI, where the poet elevates "the common labouring man, Piers the Plowman" (pp. 10-11). This Reformer, Gibbins continues--almost in the exact words of Green--"openly preached" the "gospel of equality" (p. 11) and "coupled [it] . . . with the gospel of Labour. The aim of Piers the Plowman is to work, and to make all
men work with him" (p. 13). Jusserand in his literary history (1895), like Morley, seems somewhat closer in terminology to Carlyle, or perhaps Taine, to whom Jusserand refers (p. 394), than to Green and Gibbins. Piers, he says, "above all" teaches that everyone must do his "present . . . , active and definite" duty (p. 387). Piers himself "performs each day his sacred task" of following "ceaseless the same endless furrow . . ." (p. 394). There is no place in Langland's world for those who do not perform their duties thoroughly and earnestly (p. 394). Though this tradition never became a dominant one, such respected exponents certainly make it influential. This tradition helped to encourage a literalistic reading of the poem in that it tended to understand labor as physical labor and to perpetuate the idea that Langland was one of the poor and uneducated and a spokesman for them. Moreover, the assumption that Langland was one of the poor and a spokesman for them and that the poem taught the gospel of labor tended to justify the neglect of a knowledge of the Church Fathers as necessary to understanding the poem.

L. Topical Allegory: Green (1876) to Trevelyan (1899)

The literalization of language which gave impetus to the perception of Piers Plowman's moral thrust as that of the gospel of work doubtless helped to perpetuate the tradition in Piers Plowman scholarship of topical and personal allegory. As Skeat has been shown to endorse more or less all the others, he accepted and advanced this means of explicating the rat-mice parliament, the Mead-Conscience debate, and Will himself. During the nineteenth century, most of those who treated the poem in this fashion simply repeated Skeat's identifications. Green
(1876) repeats the earliest identifications, that the cat is John of Gaunt and the kitten, Richard II (p. 270). Jusserand (1894, pp. 44-8), Hanscom (1894, p. 441), and Trevelyan (1899, p. 35) repeat Skeat's later ones, that the cat is the elderly Edward III dominated by Alice Perrers and the kitten, Richard II. Jusserand adds that the "raton of renon" is Peter de la Mare, speaker of the House of Commons, and the "sagacious mouse" is the poet himself. That Mensendieck (1900, 1910) extended this type of reading to the Vita, seeing it as an allegorical autobiography, has already been shown.

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were not without scholars who demurred or in some instances raised pointed objections to the dominant scholarly views. As early as 1864 Henry Morley, while himself treating literally the "biographical" and "historical" details, cautions--rather weakly to be sure--against a too literal reading of the poem: "we shall note . . . that the age given

[Coueityse-of-eyghes . . . / . . . folwed me fourty wynter . and a fyte more. . . (XI, 45-46)] belongs to the allegory and is not necessarily to be read as the statement of personal fact."92 Ten Brink in 1877 firmly states that this moral poem is written in the allegorical context of the Bible and the Church Fathers, but, not understanding this context, he says that the poem is not a coherent whole, and his summary of it is literal, or superficial. Courthope (1895) generally concurs with these views, to which he and Hanscom (1894) add that Piers deals with the sins of mankind of all times (see p. 41).

Two scholars, George Saintsbury and A. S. Jack, directly attack readings that take rhetorical "convention" for literal statements of fact. Saintsbury (1898) vigorously denounces the "'prosaic heresy,'
as we may conveniently call that which takes poetic and dramatic utterances for statements of biographic fact." Without the knowledge of the Christian world view, however, he finds the poem extremely difficult and suggests that the problem may be caused by the "mysticism" of the poem or perhaps by its "satiric intent," which required the poet to veil his attacks in allegory (p. 133).

In 1901 A. S. Jack published an article which follows Saintsbury in opposition to the "prosaic heresy" (pp. 397-98), but in addition he points students toward a recognition that a literal reading of Piers Plowman violates common sense (p. 404). Possibly because his approach was too radically different for nineteenth-century assumptions or possibly because the authorship controversy was to begin in full force in 1908, this work has not received the recognition it deserves. Admittedly negative in both purpose and technique (see p. 413), Jack's article clearly, explicitly demonstrates the mental gymnastics that one has to perform to make this allegorical poem into a literal autobiography. He states unequivocally that "we cannot safely affirm [that] any part or parts are unmistakably allegorical and others are real fact" (p. 408). He examines the use of dreams and the passages that contain statements about time, place, and Will's wanderings and habits. The use of specific numbers, the number forty-five, for example, seems to be chosen often for alliterative reasons, and thus numbers seem to be "definite alliterative expressions for indefinitely long periods of time" (p. 403, Jack's italics). Dream visions are not actually dreams, but are "common literary conventions of that age, in fact there were none more common" (p. 404). Wandering itself is a "common literary convention," he continues and cites such examples as
Widsith, The Wanderer, The Canterbury Tales, and the Grail legends (p. 405). The representation of a quest in terms of a journey is "as old as Christian thought" (p. 408). Moreover, he points out the impossibility of Will's literally looking for such characters as Dowel, Piers, and various other abstractions; Langland "mentions no real personages met by the way, except two friars" with whom his conversation is most "unlike actual conversation" (p. 406). Most significant to Jack is that to see the author himself as Will the vagabond wanderer is to see him become what the entire poem inveighs against (pp. 405-06). As to Will's wife and daughter--Piers, Wit, and Watte the Wariner have wives; Dowel has a daughter and Inwit has five sons (p. 412). It seems highly improbable that all of these are to be taken as actual persons. In sum, the wandering is an "allegorical framework" holding together "this great moral poem"; Will is a persona whose inner struggles and searches for the "True and the Good" are presented "in terms of the outer as we often find it in art and literature" (pp. 408, 411).

Unfortunately, this promising beginning was not followed up. One of the few indications of scholarly awareness of the article is Jusserand's almost casual comment in 1909 that "Professor Jack . . . assumes at the start, in his essay, the thoroughly skeptical attitude which is nowadays all the fashion."95

A survey of the scholarship, thus, demonstrates that by the beginning of this century the loss of the concept of the sacramental universe, in which everything is related to everything else, has affected language and, hence, reading in two basic ways, both of which seem to involve a distrust of words. The one tends to strip words of their metaphorical qualities so that all language is discursive: a
figure or image is mere sign, a simile or allusion. The other tends
to avoid analysis, rather to respond to images, figures, or affective
terms in order to recreate the supposed feelings or emotions of the
writer, whose language is conceived of as suggestive, not communicative.
These two ways of reading were to some scholars antithetical; in the
readings of other scholars these ways might be confused, confounded,
and conflated. Earl Wasserman refers to these two tendencies as the
"inclination to confuse discursive statement and emotive terms with
poetry" (p. 172).

Both tendencies seem to reveal the isolation of modern man and,
hence, of the individual scholar, in that the "discursivist" looks at
a work as in a mirror, to borrow the words of D. W. Robertson and
hears it say, "Thou art the fairest of all." A literary work from the
past then "becomes merely an instrument for the cultivation of our
own prejudices. We learn nothing from it that we could not learn from
the world around us" (p. 3), or from the Rolls of Parliament of the
fourteenth century. Similarly the mind of what Wasserman calls the
"associationist," one who responds imaginatively to images and
affective terms, tends to be like the mind of Charles Sumner, as
described by Henry Adams: it has "reached the calm of water which
receives and reflects images without absorbing them; it contain[s]
nothing but itself." The "discursivist" tends to see language as
sign and not symbol; the "associationist" tends to respond imaginatively
to images and affective terms.
NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1 The word church was used in several ways in the fourteenth century; the two meanings generally drawn upon in this thesis are the Church as the "community or whole body of Christ's faithful people collectively" and Holy Church as the teacher, or "the Church Catholic regarded as a divinely instituted and guided institution, speaking with authority through its accredited organs." See OED.


6 Male, p. 29.

7 Mulder, p. 60.


21 Crowley, as quoted by Skeat, II, lxxiv. That neither English nor American Puritans ceased to think typologically and in some instances allegorically has been demonstrated. For a bibliography of works which demonstrate this fact, see Sacvan Bercovitch, "Selective Check-List on Typology," Early American Literature, 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1970), 16-43, and "Selective Check-list on Typology: Part II," Early American Literature, 6, No. 2 (Fall, 1971), 19-40. See also Carl F. Strauch, "Review Essay: Typology and the American Renaissance," Early American Literature, 6, No. 2 (Fall, 1971), 167-78. See also Samuel Mather, The Figures or Types of the Old Testament, 2nd ed. (1705, rpt. N.Y.: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1969).


27 Spenser, pp. 23-29.

28 Ibid., p. 56.


30 A Merry Knack to Know a Knave in A Select Collection of Old English Plays, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, 4th ed. (1744; rpt. London: Reeves and Turner, 1874); the Piers episode appears on pp. 559-60.


33. Thomas Whitaker, as quoted by Skeat, II, xliiv-xlvi.

34. Isaac Disraeli, as quoted by Skeat, II, xxxviii-xxxix.


38. Disraeli, p. xxxix.


42. J. W. Mackail, "*Piers Plowman* and English Life in the Fourteenth Century," *Cornhill Magazine* 3 (1897), 42-58.


46. That *satire* was used both generally to mean "invective" and specifically to refer to a genre, see Kernan, pp. 6-7; John Dryden, "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire (1693)" in *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), II, esp. 44-60, 100-01; and OED.

47. Kernan, pp. 49-50, and Peter, pp. 106-07. That the increased interest in classical models for satire changed its purpose is questionable. Similar statements about rebuking vice have been made from at least as early as St. Jerome to Bernard of Cluny to Dryden to Pope; see quotations from St. Jerome and Bernard in Peter, pp. 18, 36;

48 Heinsius, as quoted by Dryden, II, 100.


51 Hearne, as quoted by Skeat, ed., EETS, Orig. Series Nos. 28, 38, 54, 67, 81, p. 87.


57 Warton, II, 102, 104, 122.

58 Ibid., p. 176.

59 Whitaker, pp. xxxix-xlv.


61 This aspect of Whitaker's introduction was discussed above, p. 20.

62 Whitaker, pp. xxxix-xlv.

63 See Robertson, Preface to Chaucer, pp. 10-18, 33, 40; and Abrams, pp. 70-99, for a discussion of the romantic influence on critical perspectives.

See Abrams, pp. 100-30.

For a statement of the origin of language, music, dance, architecture, painting, and law in religions, which are all originally allegorical, see Shelley's, "A Defense of Poetry" in The Selected Poetry and Prose of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Carlos Baker (N.Y.: Random House, 1951), pp. 496-97.

Disraeli, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

Milman, IX, 234-44.

See Wright (1883), I, v-xl.

Wright knows of only two texts and believes that a writer other than the author modified the original poem, which he assumes his text to be. For this information and for his objection to Whitaker's editorial principle, see Wright (1883), I, xxxv.

See Robertson, Preface, p. 316; Stock, pp. 38-59; Wetherbee, pp. 36-48.

This work was reprinted in 1869, 1885, 1892, and 1898.

Marsh, as quoted by Skeat, II, xlvii-xl.ix.

Whitaker thought the author's name was Robert; see Whitaker, as quoted by Skeat, II, lxxix.


Shelley, pp. 496-97. See also Abrams's discussion of Shelley, pp. 126-32.


83. [Henry] de B[ertilgans] Gibbins, English Social Reformers (London: Methuen, 1892), pp. 7-8 and passim, pp. 6-14. This work was reprinted in 1902 and 1913.


94 A. S. Jack, "The Autobiographical Elements in *Piers the Plowman*," *JEGP*, 3 (1901), 397-98.

95 J. J. Jusserand, "*Piers Plowman*, the Work of One or Five," *MP*, 6 (1909), 326.

CHAPTER II: CONCEPTIONS OF PIER S PLOWMAN, 1908 THROUGH 1939

Piers Plowman scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth century is, largely, a study in the continuation of nineteenth-century assumptions. Scholars within the prophetic tradition find their own antipathy toward that age of "darkness and oppression" in the poem; they are inclined to believe that the author is either a Wycliffite—one of the morning stars of the Reformation—or a Protestant, or at least like a Protestant in that his authority is the Bible and his concern is to elevate the feelings. Many in the satire-as-invective tradition find an egalitarian poet whose political, religious, and social sentiments are those of an English Whig and, therefore, a poet who preaches those twin gospels of equality and work. Those who see satire as document and some who see the poem as autobiography find the poem to be a "calm, allegorical exposition" and a "storehouse of information." When these scholars deal with the "allegory," they merely identify the personifications of the poet, his experiences, and actual people of his day. Scholars who consider a poem to be self-expression—some of the biographers but especially those interested in the poetic process—describe the poet and his poem as if Langland and Piers Plowman were of the nineteenth century, when "sensitive feelings," "wild" imagination, sincerity per se, and "native genius" were the requisites for a poet. These are over-simplifications of basic assumptions which were dominant in Piers Plowman scholarship when Manly set this scholarship onto a detour in 1908. One is tempted to say with the 1887 reviewer in the Athenæum, "Probably there is no other book of equal
celebrity . . . about which the ideas popularly entertained are more vague and inaccurate."¹

There were further changes occurring in nineteenth-century thought which were bound to affect Piers Plowman scholarship. Along with the loss of the sacramental universe and the consequent literalization and isolation came fragmentation, or as Abrams writes in regard to Kant, the "propensity . . . to separate the faculties of knowing, willing, and feeling";² and, as Abrams illustrates, the romantic poets attempted to live with and make sense of this epistemology which had as the counterpart to the faculties the separate realms of science, religion, and poetry. When the Benthamites, or Utilitarians, for whom hedonistic positivism was a religion, or at least a creed, attacked poetry as virtually useless and in some instances even harmful (see Abrams, pp. 300-03), apologists for poetry united poetry with religion, leaving two avenues to Truth--the discursivist, or assertive, which deals with "science" or "knowledge," and the associationist, or expressionistic, which concerns itself with imagination and feelings. Poetry as a burst of intensity or sincerity is of value either in and of itself, or in its power to elevate the moral feelings and, thus, to mold character.³

Moreover, because of the loss of the analogical thinking, which exists within a sacramental universe, both allegory and satire became less and less intelligible; Piers Plowman, consequently, became more and more puzzling to nineteenth-century scholars. In the seventeenth century, satire, with which Piers early became associated or identified, had been considered to be poetry "without a series of action." This
definition was not understood in either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century to mean "formlessness"; but by the nineteenth century, satire had for the most part come to be so literally understood that it was spoken of as formless assertion or invective. Allegory by the nineteenth century was generally referred to as "primitive," "tedious," and "cumbersome" personification. But there was also Shelley's conception of poetry as the mode of expression of the religions, all of which "are allegorical or susceptible of allegory." Poetry both veils and unveils eternal truths as well as the poet himself.  

The nineteenth century experienced the flowering of Biblical Higher Criticism as a parallel or perhaps an inter-related development. Its interest in origins and sources and in the "inner consistency" of parts of composite works led to, among other discoveries, the demonstration that the oldest Biblical fragments were poetry. It was inevitable that critical assumptions, interests, and techniques of Higher Criticism, which like those of the discursivists generally developed out of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalism and science, would be applied to Piers Plowman. And so they were.  

In 1908 two articles appeared on Piers Plowman which applied these techniques. T. D. Hall questioned whether the C-Text could be by the same author as A- and B- because it seems highly implausible that an author would deal "so destructively with his own workmanship," a work of "his mature age." Neither this article nor John Matthews Manly's 1906 article, which first challenged the single authorship of all three texts, would hardly have caused the imbroglio over authorship. But
Manly's second article contesting the unity of authorship of *Piers Plowman* appeared in the prestigious *Cambridge History of English Literature.* His theory of multiple authorship is based on what was commonly acknowledged about the poem and had even been praised—its putative lack of unity and coherence, or as Manly wrote of the B-Text (The A-Text *Visio* he praised highly), its "tendency to rambling and vagueness sometimes almost degenerating into incoherency" (p. 23). Having been argued in a work so widely respected and read, Manly's theory initiated the subsequent controversy dominating *Piers* scholarship for the next thirty years.

Since the controversy has been thoroughly surveyed by Morton Bloomfield and a discussion of it here would be repetitive and could contribute little to an understanding of the context of *Piers Plowman*, the terms of this controversy will merely be summarized briefly. The first two parts of Bloomfield's three-part article are a survey of the controversy itself; the third reviews the possible sources of and influences upon the poem. The author of *Piers Plowman* is, of course, unknown. There is not a single known contemporary reference to him. After a brief account of the assumptions and conjectures about the identity of the author to 1906, when Manly published his "lost leaf" article, Bloomfield describes in appropriately martial terms (Jusserand took up "the cudgels"; others "entered the lists") the arguments within the voluminous body of articles devoted to proofs and counterproofs in response to Manly's 1908 arguments set forth in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. The participants debated whether *Piers Plowman* is the product of one author (Jusserand, Chambers, Grattan,
and allies), of two (Hall), of five—really only four since no one denied that John But added all of, a substantial part of, or a few lines to Passus XII of A-Text—(Manly and followers), or of one author to whose poem changes were made by a series of scribes (Gorneman). Concurrently appearing were arguments over lost or misplaced leaves, over differences or similarities in alliteration, tone, poetic method, concerns, etc., between texts and within them, over misunderstandings or clarifications—depending on the party—in successive texts, and over traditional understandings about the author's name, about the author himself, and over the organization, or plan of the poem, or the lack of it.

Alongside and often commingled with this scholarship on the controversy over the author and texts, the traditions of Piers Plowman as prophecy, satire, portrait of the times, aesthetic, autobiography, gospel of work, and topical allegory continue in all possible combinations. Furthermore, interest in the meaning of the poem reciprocated with interest in the sources of the ideas and in the structure of the poem to begin the scholarly study of Piers in the context of the homily, of mysticism, of patristics, and of multi-level allegory. These new traditions were also combined with older traditions so that the course of Piers scholarship in the twentieth century is increasingly eclectic and complex. Underlying nineteenth-century assumptions, nonetheless, are pervasive. For the sake of clarity, scholarly positions of the next thirty or so years will continue to be treated separately with the exception of a small group of scholars who, because of the range and scope of the traditions they bring together, will be referred to as the Eclectics.
A. Portrait of the Times

Manly himself, as one might expect from the rationalist origins of his critical approach, was primarily interested in *Piers Plowman* as a picture of the times, in the tradition of Skeat and Jusserand. The first eight Passus of A-Text, his favorite section of all the texts, whose author he referred to as $A_1$, he cited as "the most vivid and trustworthy source for the social and economic history of the time" (CHEL, p. 1). Indeed, the portrait of Gluttony "presents the veritable interior of an English alehouse . . . with all its baseness and its gross hilarity" (p. 18). The satire, by which he seems to mean the denunciatory passages, is "all incidental" and "casual" (p. 12) except the portrayal of Meed and of her destructive, chaotic propensities and successes (p. 13). Manly agrees with Jusserand that the poem and Parliament voice exactly the same "sentiment and opinion" (pp. 14-19).

In somewhat of a departure from this tradition, however, Manly observes that the poet supplies the remedy for the evils, pointedly those presented in the Meed episode, in the fear of God's judgment and the "reassertion of the doctrine" of Holy Church (p. 19). While Manly himself did not explore this idea, subsequent scholars did.

Jusserand was the first to respond to Manly's CHEL argument. His view of the content of the poem, or at least one aspect of it, as Manly has already indicated, is quite similar to Manly's--that the poem is a portrait of contemporary society, and, by implication, a source for knowledge of social and economic history:
The author of Piers Plowman concerns himself especially with classes of men, great political movements, the general aspirations of the people, the improvements necessary in each class for the welfare of the nation. Contemporary events and the lessons to be deducted from them, the hopes, anxieties, problems, and sufferings occupying his compatriot's minds, are never far from his thoughts: plague, storms, French wars, questions of labor and wages, bishops becoming royal functionaries, power of the commons, and the king, duties of the nobles, the priests, the workmen.

Both men, furthermore, accept the basic incoherence of the texts. Manly attributes it to multiple authorship; Jusserand insists that it is in the nature of poetry.

The view of Piers as a portrait of the times continued to be expressed by allies of both Jusserand and Manly as well as by those not embroiled in the dispute. Though absolutely literal reading is typical of the controversialists (for example, Bradley explains B.VI.238-39 as a reference to the eclipse of August 17, 1384\textsuperscript{11}), most scholars in this tradition favor Skeat's view, that Piers is a document of the life and times of the fourteenth century. No doubt Skeat's shortened student edition of the B-Text (1869), which became the standard text-book, helped to establish his view. C. W. Previte-Orton (1910) in Political Satire in English Poetry perceives satiric literature as "photographic impressions" which enable modern man "to see things 'as they really were.'"\textsuperscript{12} Because of the popularity of these satires, he assumes that their pictures must be true even if somewhat over-stated (pp. 5, 18). Jessie Weston (1913) is in complete agreement with the Skeat-Jusserand-Manly view. In the introduction which precedes her translation of selections from A- and B-Texts, she assesses the poem as "a 'human document,' a page from the strenuous life of the mediaeval toiler."\textsuperscript{13} A. R. Benham (1916) concurs, pointing to Covetousness as an accurate
description of a fourteenth-century tradesman, but he adds a note regarding the moral purpose of the work, an addition which indicates, like Manly's statement, a growing consciousness of the larger purpose of the poem. To Benham's mind, the poet is like the Old Testament prophets, who called men to restore the religious system to its original purity (p. 33, n. 159). R. T. Davies (1926), in his *Documents Illustrating the History of Civilization in Medieval England*, simply re-affirms that the three texts are of "immense" value as documents of fourteenth-century social and religious life. And David Knowles in 1927 very nearly quotes Skeat: "We should go to . . . [Piers], rather than to any description of social or political England, if we would see our countrymen of the fourteenth century as they really were."  

Further evidence that, in some circles, this tradition remained popular is demonstrated by the continued re-printing of Green's history till 1934 and Trevelyan's *Age of Wycliffe* till 1935. In 1926, however, Trevelyan published a new history, *The History of England*. In this work he makes only slight use of the poem as a source for vignettes illustrating fourteenth-century life, a fact which suggests the growing awareness that an allegorical poem is not a historical document.  

Though there is generally the sense that the poem is more than a document by the 1920's, some critics nonetheless continue to interest themselves in *Piers Plowman* as only a source of historical information. Dorothy Chadwick's *Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman* (1922), as its title indicates, deals with the poem exclusively as a social document. Hers is probably at once the most literal and fanciful of any study ever to examine the social life of the century. Two instances
will perhaps suffice as illustration. She identifies "Pernel," who is referred to several times in the poem (e.g., B.IV.116 and V.26), as a "lady of doubtful reputation"; the poet, according to Chadwick, has her in mind when, at B.IX.177-78, he advises that the secular clergy (Wit is the spokesman in this passage) be allowed to marry (p. 19). Chadwick's explanation of C.IX.87-88 is that Piers, when he quotes "Super cathedram Moysi sedent, et cetera" is showing a plowman's awe of mayors by comparing them to those who sit in Moses's seat (p. 62). A variation on Piers as a document of the times appeared even as late as 1939, J. T. Durkins's study of Piers, "Kingship in the Vision of Piers Plowman." In the manner of the New Critics, theoretically using only Henry Wells's translation of the poem as the source of his views, Durkin states that the poem "shows the convictions and loves which . . . [the medieval] Church, after centuries of patient teaching, had finally succeeded in planting in the minds of medieval men" (p. 413). Those convictions, he says are that the king and the people have mutual obligations: the king, who rules by the power and advice of the people, must rule according to law (pp. 413-19); the people, in seeming paradox, must obey him without question because he is authorized by Christ (pp. 419-21).

The term satire is occasionally used by those within this tradition. Manly uses it (CHEL, pp. 12, 18, 19). Previte-Orton categorizes Piers as political satire. But satire seems to mean little more than a picture of the times, perhaps somewhat exaggerated. R. W. Chambers in 1919, after comparing Piers Plowman to works of devotion, concludes that
the poem is "not a devotional treatise, but a satire in the strict sense of the word: its subject is quidquid agunt homines: it takes us at the outset into the 'fair field of folk'--the wide world."20

Hugh Walker (1925) includes Piers in his book English Satire and Satirists, like Milton calling the poem the first great English satire21; but his view is comparable to that expressed in Benham's note, and by satire he has in mind a meaning similar to Chambers's. Langland's poem Walker regards as more than satire because its homiletic "moral earnestness" transcends the fourteenth century (pp. 9-10).

Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin does not seem to distinguish between satire, sermon, Piers, and portraits of the times; for in her 1939 study "Bishop Brunton and His Sermons" she observes that Brunton's sermons, like Piers and other satires of the period, reflect "the social, political, and religious background of the fourteenth century."22

By 1939 Chambers has modified his conception of Piers considerably; he, Henry Wells,23 and C. S. Lewis (1936) all agree that the poem has satiric passages, in Lewis's words, "as any other medieval poet might."24 "But," Chambers warns, "if we forget that it is also very much more, we shall . . . be constantly puzzled."25

The observations of two other scholars--Dorothy Owen and W. A. Neilson--will be included in this scholarly tradition because of their observations on the Visio. Dorothy Owen seeks to understand the rhetorical context of Piers Plowman and to use this context to explore the meaning of the entire B-Text. Her Piers Plowman: A Comparison with Some Earlier and Contemporary French Allegories (1912) may help to account for the caution of later scholars in regarding Piers as
illustrative of fourteenth-century life. After comparing the poem to such French allegories as *Li Romans de Carite*, *La Voie de Paradis*, *Le Roman de la Rose*, and *Le Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine*, she concludes that there was a common stock of allegorical material to be drawn upon from French and English sources, which in turn had probably independently drawn their material from commentaries on Scripture and other theological works. Yet when she comes to a discussion of the *Visio* she finds allegory "frequently forgotten" as the poet depicts "actual scenes" and "living persons, some it is true, . . . only sketched in . . ., but others are full length portraits" (pp. 20, 34-35). These pictures are not for their own sake, however, nor are they "spiteful" (p. 18); they are the work of a reformer and thus subordinate to his central concern--the pilgrimage to Truth (pp. 15, 18).

Neilson, in the prefatory remarks to his translation of the first eight Passus of A-Text in Neilson and Webster's *Chief British Poets of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (1916), describes the poem as containing some passages which are "direct realistic description of human nature or social conditions, others are long religious or moral discussions." In fact, he seems puzzled that he knows of no literary genre which can contain such diversity (p. ix). Then he makes a provocative observation which he does not develop: the use of visions divided by the waking and sleeping of the visionary "is an extremely common . . . [device] in allegory and serves the obvious purpose of affording a transition to a world of symbol . . ." (p. x).
These two scholars, Owen and Neilson, seem to be pointing students of *Piers Plowman* toward an understanding of the poem within the context of medieval thought, an understanding which avoids impressionism on the one hand and literalism on the other. Neilson especially is not able to see how the poem fits together, and neither he nor Owen explores the implications of their perceptions far enough, except to suggest that there is more to the *Visio* than what literally meets the eye.

Other scholars along with Owen and Neilson, all of whom still bear the stamp of nineteenth-century assumptions, make attempts to set the poem in its intellectual context or to counter the tradition of *Piers* as a picture of the times. Nevill Coghill (1935) remarks on the author's "astounding reserve in the matter of topical allusion."28 Owst (1933), conversely, finds topical allusion; but after first attacking the views of Skeat, Milman, Courthope, and March on the originality of the poet, he turns to Manly, of whom he writes:

> To say that Langland here "presents the veritable interior of an English ale-house in the fourteenth century, with all its baseness and its gross hilarity," may suffice for one who is capable of telling us later that the author of this part of the *Vision* "exhibits no special theological knowledge or interests and may have been a layman."29

In a footnote to this passage, Owst explains what he sees as the cause of Manly's "naive error":

> Obviously, unless one knows intimately the "social, theological and various" other ideas of the time and comes to the poem soaked in the contemporary language of expression, the characteristic phrases, imagery and arguments of the popular literature of religion, such misunderstanding is bound to occur . . . (p. 434, n. 5).

Thus, that *Piers Plowman* is the "most vivid and trustworthy source for the social and economic history of the time" *(CHEL*, p. 1) comes more
and more to be called into question as scholars become aware of the fourteenth-century context of the poem.

It was not until 1936, however, that Greta Hort succeeded in placing the so-called realistic portraits of the time in their medieval perspective. Using the writings of the Church Fathers as well as religious writings of the twelfth through the fourteenth century as a context for her study of Piers, she agrees that the descriptions of the Visio are in some sense descriptions of "contemporary society"; but because the poem is concerned with "an itinerarium mentis in Deum" (p. 63), the setting is really "middle-earth, with heaven above and hell below" (pp. 62-63) and this first section of the poem serves as "a presentation of the forces working in man as he moves toward the Tower of Truth and away from the Castle of Care." The poem is "not less of a social poem" because of its chief concern; it is a "medieval social poem, in which the social aspect is part of the theological aspect and subordinated to it" (p. 63).

Thus, from 1908 through 1939 the tradition of Piers Plowman as satire, as a portrait of the times, or as a documentary resource for the social, religious, or political historian seems to be losing out to the larger considerations of the rhetorical and theological context and the meaning of the poem. Manly called explicit attention to the importance of Lady Holy Church and her teachings in the first part of the poem, a section scholars in this tradition had generally passed over. Owen's book attempts to place the pictures in the perspective of the larger concern of the poem. Owst demonstrates that these pictures are not the result of observation or experience but are from
a rhetorical tradition which, because of his specialized study, he believes to be the exclusive property of the preachers and the homily-books. Hort, through her study of medieval thought, casts doubts on how authentic these pictures are because of the value medieval thought would place on such pictures and, consequently, because of their purpose in the poem. Thereafter, as other studies began to appear on the intellectual context, on the meaning of the terminology, and on the central concern of Piers Plowman, most scholars who are interested in social, political, and religious history use Piers with care and with qualifications.

B. Biography

Perhaps Saintsbury, Jack, and the authorship controversy aroused caution among scholars about reading Piers Plowman autobiographically; for in spite of such strong defenders as Jusserand, Chambers, and Coulton, this tradition was explored and developed by only a few scholars. To be sure, the controversialists themselves generally agreed that the poem revealed either the author's biography or at least his personality, the assumption that a poem is self-expression being well established. Manly (1908) and Hall (1908), who immediately lent his general support to Manly's argument in a prefatory statement to his own article, more or less agree that the personalities of the authors are revealed in the "poems." Both agree that A-Text, Pro1.-VIII, had a clear and orderly plan (CHEL, p. 13; Hall, p. 1), but while Manly considers the poet "a reformer . . . in the sense of wishing all men" to do well in whatever estate they find themselves and a believer in the doctrines expressed by Holy Church (p. 19),
Hall finds his personality scarcely discernible (p. 2). They concur on the "sincerity and emotional power" of the author of B- (CHEL, p. 33), to which Hall adds, "to know him familiarly is to love him" (1908, p. 2); both agree that the C- author is a moral, unimaginative "pedant" (CHEL, p. 36; Hall, p. 13) and a mangler of B- (CHEL, pp. 34-35; Hall, p. 4). The impressionism of both scholars as well as the sentimentality of Hall, obvious even in these few excerpts, is even more obvious in their works as a whole.

Three biographical studies were published in 1910. Mensendieck's allegorical study of the poet appeared in English in JEGP;31 George C. Macaulay deals briefly with the poet's biography and drags out the old argument on the poet's name in MLR;32 and Chambers, also in MLR, primarily responding to multiple-authorship arguments, calls Will the hero of the poem, argues that such authors as Cynewulf, Layamon, Dante, Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate had used their own names in their works and, therefore, that the character Will is William Langland, the author.33 Except for Mensendieck's, however, there was no major biographical study of Piers Plowman until Chambers's book, Man's Unconquerable Mind, in 1939.

Bright, Chambers, Coulton, and Osgood are among the few in the 1920's and '30's who continue to defend the poem as self-expression and, thus, as autobiography. The latter three scholars certainly carried the weight of authority, respectively an editor of Piers manuscripts, a prolific and knowledgeable historian, and a learned editor and translator. In 1924 in part of his article "Long Will, Dante, and the Righteous Heathen" Chambers sets forth the thesis that Passus XI
and XII of B- are a Wordsworthian prelude in which Langland "pauses to take a review of his own mind," then continues "with his 'great philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society.'" 34 "His subject," Chambers concludes, "is Wordsworth's" (p. 69). Chambers also wrote a letter to Allan Bright which was published as the "Preface" to Bright's New Light on 'Piers Plowman' (1928) reviewing the "facts" about the author, re-stating briefly his Wordsworthian interpretation, and endorsing Bright's book. 35 Bright, who is concerned with literal identifications of the setting of the poem, of characters within it, and with establishing the author's name and family, calls the poem "a great human biography--the cry of a soul in doubt, distress, and perplexity" (p. 78). Osgood in his literary history (1935) hedges after his imaginative description of the author, a description apparently much indebted to Jusserand, concluding, "Such, whether the poet, or only a shadowy fiction in the poem, seems to have been William Langland." 36

Chambers's major study of Piers Plowman, published in 1939, is in large measure biographically oriented; his purpose, like Carlyle's, is the study of great men. The chapters on Piers Plowman are a study both of the poet as revealed by the poem and of the poem itself. To Chambers, the two approaches are inseparable. His conception of the Vita of Piers as a Wordsworthian "review" of the poet's mind and "philosophical poem," that is his conception of the poem as selfexpression allows him to study the great mind which the poem reveals. The very title Man's Unconquerable Mind reflects Chambers's interest which he makes even more explicit in "To the Reader"--his Carlylian
admiration of "Great Men" (p. 21) and the courage one gains from observing and feeling in community with the "suffering heroic heart" (p. 17; again the words are Carlyle's). Needless to say, Chambers's study is an attempt to see the mind behind the poem. The dreamer is the poet who first explains the object of his search, how he might save his soul; he then surveys the unregenerate world and its transformation by religion (p. 123). After the poet learns that only when the mind is focused on God can a man do well (p. 121), he sets out on his search for "'Do-well,' 'Do-better' and 'Do-best'" (pp. 125ff). He is bewildered by a series of problems which he is unable to answer and breaks off his poem (pp. 129-31). When he takes up these problems years later, his first vision is an autobiographical confession.

Chambers, then, quotes his 1924 article on the relationship of this confession and succeeding passages--Passus XI-XII--to the rest of the poem: it is the prelude to Langland's philosophical poem (p. 149). Here and there throughout the poem, Chambers identifies "mouthpieces" for the poet (the lunatic, the "lewed vycory," p. 161); he traces the poet's search, much of it in paraphrase and quotation, and concludes that Langland is finally driven within himself to find the kingdom of God: "we are left with nothing save the unconquerable mind of the individual man" (p. 165).

As these readings show, most scholars within the biographical tradition, like those within the "satirical" tradition, are becoming more and more wary and even skeptical of reading Piers Plowman as a literal autobiography. Chambers, the most persistent defender of this approach, reads it as, for the most part, a spiritual autobiography.
Burdach (1926-32), Coghill (1935), and Hort (1936), however, challenge whether Piers can be read as an autobiography at all. Burdach denies that any medieval work should be read autobiographically, and even if Piers could be, to do so would be inappropriate to reform, which is the poet's objective. According to Hort, medieval men saw themselves as having a common humanity (p. 21); therefore, the quest for salvation is the same whether Langland based Will's journey on his own life or not (p. 21, n. 1). Unlike Burdach and Hort, Coghill does not attempt to approach the matter from a medieval perspective. He, nevertheless, makes a telling point; "any reader of Langland must be struck," he observes, by the deficiency "in personal allusion" ("Two Notes," p. 89).

C. Topical Allegory

Thus, with the decline in literalism in both the "satirical" and autobiographical traditions and with direct challenges to them, it is surprising to find that it was from the mid-1920's through the 1930's that the most extreme exponents of topical and personal allegory were writing. Perhaps as a result of the growing consciousness of Piers as allegory, this tradition provided an avenue into the poem for those whose interest lay not in a Christian poem but in social history.

Green's and Trevelyan's histories, of course, had followed Skeat's identifications of the rat-mice parliament. Previte-Orton in 1910 had agreed, and though in his judgment it was an artistic "blot," it was an excellent picture of the Good Parliament (p. 21). In 1925 Gerald Owst expands these identifications to include the King's speech just prior to the parliament. The "lunatic," he agrees with Skeat, is William
himself. The "angel of hevene" must be Bishop Brunton, who had actually preached a sermon which contains the story of the rat-mice parliament; the "goliardeys - a glotoun of wordes," then, must be the loquacious Peter de la Mare, speaker of the House of Commons.

Two extraordinarily industrious and fanciful men, Allan Bright and Oscar Cargill, published the results of their effort in 1928 and 1932. Bright, who believes that the poem "is a great human biography," finds references throughout the poem to Langland's relatives and neighbors in the Malvern area. Will, of course, is the author; Piers is an "idealized maternal relative"; the Knight, and also perhaps Clergy, are the kindly James de Brockbury, whose home one can locate if he strips the allegory from Piers' directions of the way to Truth. Scripture, then, must be Brockbury's second wife (pp. 59-64). These are illustrative of Bright's handling; there is more. Cargill, like Bright, believes that every abstraction is possibly a specific person or location. But unlike Bright, who is an ally of Chambers in the authorship controversy, Cargill is in Manly's camp and even states that Will is most likely "the human will (or Free Will)." Curiously, then, he turns to identification of the "historical allegory" because "it is . . . of appeal to the modern reader." False, he identifies as Lord William Latimer, Vice regent of Armorica, and Flattery is Richard Lyons, who was "implicated" with Latimer in the mishandling of money when Latimer was impeached. The Northern men (C.I.115-16) are Gaunt, Latimer, and Neville, all of whom had property in the north. The Castle of Caro, moreover, is the political party of John of Gaunt.
This tradition may not have had a wide following, but it retained enough interest to produce two additional works in the late 1930's, one by Mildred Marcett (1938) and the other by Bernard Huppé (1939). Marcett seems to have more interest in the identifications themselves than Huppé, however, whose primary concern is to establish the date of the texts. Marcett explains that her reason for exploring the controversy between Friar William Jordan, whom she sees satirized as the Friar-Doctor (B.XIII.25-179), and Uthred de Boldon is that proof of the "presence of personal satire" adds "immensely to the interest of the poem, opening up new vistas through which we may see further into the life of the Middle Ages." Huppé focuses on the Mead episode, discussing it as a historical allegory of the Court of Edward III, after the death of Queen Phillippa, when Alice Perrers had become his mistress. He acknowledges that the poem generalizes the specific historical Alice, however, so that allegorically she represents "venality" ("The A-Text," pp. 48-53, 60).

It is noteworthy that whether Piers Plowman was read as a historical or autobiographical document, "literal" or allegorical, the reader either found in the poem what he knew from his examination of historical records or wove relationships and situations out of whole cloth based on his findings. Such literal reading of Piers Plowman, coupled with imaginative reconstructions of the fourteenth century, did not go altogether unchallenged. Cyril Brett in 1927 calls into question Owst's identifications, observing that if Langland had Bishop Brunton and Peter de la Mare in mind, he was certainly not complimenting de la Mare as Owst had argued; for the Goliardeys "clearly" argues
"against the Angel's speech." Furthermore, "if Langland approved of de la Mare, he would hardly call him 'a goliardey." Fritz Krog, in his 1934 article in *Anglia*, specifically mentions Bright's mistaken idea that the seven years Thought followed Will can be used to establish the date of Will's supposed ordination (Bright, pp. 53-54); the number seven is used conventionally. In fact, because they are conventional, numbers are to be interpreted with great caution. Nevill Coghill's more general but no less arresting statement in his 1935 article applies to this tradition along with other literal readings, when he calls attention to the author's "astounding reserve in the matter of topical allusion" ("Two Notes," p. 89). This tradition gradually lost the interest of scholars as they turned their attention to the context of medieval thought and to the meaning of the poem.

D. Poetic Process

Studies of *Piers Plowman* as poetic process by the expressionists, or associationists, continued to appear throughout this first part of the twentieth century. In 1916 John Edwin Wells's widely used *Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050-1400* appeared. Listing *Piers* under "Satire and Complaint," he described the poem with an extravagance beyond even the earlier effusiveness of Jusserand. It would seem that his assumptions and conceptions are influenced by the discussion of writing expressed by Rousseau in "Reveries of a Solitary" or by John Keble's *De Poeticae Vi Medica*, a series of lectures given in 1832-41, published in 1844, and translated into English in 1912
(on Keble, see Abrams, pp. 144-48), or even by the "Spasmodics," whose poetry was, according to Hugh Walker, "passion piled on passion, its thought disjointed from thought."44 Dobell, the leader of the Spasmodics, believed that "poetry should roll from the heart as tears from the eye unbidden," and in the words of Walker, "he never checked the flow, and rarely revised what he had written" (Outlines, p. 84). Since only J. E. Wells's own description can show the extent to which it epitomizes these views, it will be quoted at some length:

The work is everywhere glowing, often flaming with noble feeling. It is a poem born of enthusiasm and imagination working on personal experience. Its visions are really visions, not mere figments of the intellect. Its achievements are not through conscious selection or skillful management toward a clearly preconceived design, but through sheer native aspiration and power. Indeed, it knows little of formal art. Swept along by the impulse of the moment, it forgets that it has a reader, it interrupts its story, it neglects transitions, it breaks up its pictures, it confuses its aims. Yet in its very faults lies much of its tremendous force. Its utterances appear to spring spontaneously from an uncontrolled passion, an exhaustless reservoir that pours itself out prodigally.45

Four works to some extent within this same tradition were published in the 1930's by Traversi (1936), Dawson (1933), Hort (1936), and Lewis (1936). The latter three of these are extraordinarily knowledgeable scholars, the quality of whose work is vitiated by, among others, such assumptions as these—that the poet has no control over himself or his work and that poetry appeals "directly" to the emotions. D. A. Traversi, whose article was published in 1936 in Scrutiny, calls Piers Plowman the product of unadorned "direct personal emotion,"46 its verse, hence, achieving "a peculiar relation of rhythm to feeling" in language comparable to "what D. H. Lawrence described as 'the ebbing and lifting emotion'" (p. 282). Such conceptions, most immediately
indebted to T. S. Eliot, and, of course Lawrence, are probably derived from nineteenth-century conceptions expressed by John Keble, that "secondary poets" copy the emotions expressed by "primary poets" (see Abrams, pp. 145, 318). Traversi's emphasis on emotion and feeling conclusively places him in the scholarly tradition of Piers as poetic process, with the assumptions of the expressionist, or associationist (see Abrams, pp. 134-38, Wasserman, pp. 185-86). His "analysis" of three images from Piers B.I.145-46, the "treacle of heaven," "plant of peace," and "point of a needle," verifies this assessment. As a disciple of Eliot's critical theory and of his views on modern psychic fragmentation, Traversi declares that these images are no products of a dissociated sensibility, but rather "Langland's language here is the vehicle of a finely integrated experience, alive and sensitive to every point of contact, and crystallizing suavely into poetry." Furthermore, he continues, "In writing of this kind, words become transparent vehicles for the emotion that underlies them and demand the simplest, most vital expression" (p. 284). Whatever these statements mean, poetry, to Traversi, is self-expression, the expression of emotion. He belongs without doubt in the tradition of the associationists, concerned with poetic process.

Christopher Dawson (1933) and Greta Hort (1936), though much more knowledgeable and less opaque than Traversi, see in Langland one who, with the "poetic automatism" of Hazlitt and Blake (see Abrams, p. 215), writes because he must: "necessity was laid upon him" (Hort, p. 18). In the effervescence typical of scholars within this tradition, Dawson describes Piers as "the vessel into which he poured his doubts,
his hopes, his criticism of life and his prophetic message" (p. 168).
Moreover, "at any moment the flame of pure poetry may blaze out and
silence the creaking machinery of didactic allegorism and the artifi-
cial vision of mediaeval tradition may pass into . . . spiritual
vision" (p. 170). Here one finds not only the spontaneous, unconscious
poet who "has no control over his pen" (Dawson, p. 169), but Carlyle's
and Shelley's prophetic poet (see Abrams, pp. 131, 313), the pure and
natural as opposed to artificial poetry of Carlyle and others (see
Abrams, p. 217), and, in addition, the poet whose work is both the
catharsis of Keble and Hazlitt (see Abrams, pp. 140-48) and the
criticism of life of the later J. S. Mill and of Arnold (see Abrams,
p. 334). Hort's thought is more restrained but not much less a
product of nineteenth-century assumptions. Though at one point she
states that whether Langland is writing from experience or not, his
motive of presenting the quest for salvation would be the same (p. 21,
n. 1); at another point she states that "to say that Piers Plowman is a
poem is to say that it embodies an experience which Langland had and
was forced to give expression to" (p. 18). Her conception of the
scholastic method, by which she analyzes parts of the poem, is really
Hegelian dialectic--the thesis-antithesis-synthesis of Hegel, Blake,
and Coleridge (pp. 38-39). That this method is not that of medieval
dialectic has been shown by Robertson, who explains that the medieval
master did indeed list "the two sides of a problem," but did not then
synthesize them; rather he reached a decision which he could support
and responded to "arguments opposed to it."
C. S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love* (1936) was one of the most influential works on the study of medieval literature until the patristic-allegorists and others began to question and refute his assumptions. Its effect is still mightily felt. In the tradition of Longinus as understood by Joseph Warton, Shelley, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Pater (see Abrams, pp. 132-38), Lewis writes of the "sublimity of *Piers Plowman*" (p. 160). Again and again Lewis refers to "lines," apparently "touchstones," of poetry, of "such heights" that they are "rare in poetry" of any time (p. 161). Distinguishing between a poem and poetry, he concludes that Langland "hardly makes his poetry into a poem" (p. 161). In other words, poetry consists of moments of intensity. Apparently drawing upon Coleridge's theory of imagination as opposed to fancy (see Abrams, pp. 167-77), Lewis regards the sublime lines of Langland as belonging "to . . . the 'intellectual imagination'; the unity and vastness were attained by thought, rather than by sense," They are thus "a true image and no mere conception" (p. 161), an allusion to the product of the Coleridgean artistic genius whose combination of imagination and reason is vital, not mere mechanical talent (see Abrams, p. 176). According to Lewis, this intellectual imagination gives Langland the power to make "imaginable," that is, to make into images, "what before was only intelligible," that is, discursively conceivable. Perhaps as basic as any of Lewis's misconceptions, however, is his nineteenth-century understanding of allegory, a matter which will be discussed below.

The time had not yet come, apparently, when *Piers* scholars would speak to this tradition of scholarship, which Robertson describes and
appropriately labels "aesthetic hedonism" (Preface, pp. 14, 33, 39-46, 361).

E. Moral or Religious

Hedonistic it may be, but the effusion and extravagance of this poetic tradition in Piers Plowman scholarship is never an art for art's sake aestheticism. Wells, for example, lauds the "noble feeling" in the poem; Dawson, its "criticism of life"; and Lewis, its moral message (pp. 158-59). Traversi recognizes that the "central doctrine" of the poem is the incarnation, that the conception of character is based on "moral impulse," and that the poem is a "complete survey of human life under the aspect of good and evil" (pp. 282, 286, 289). In fact, one of the tendencies in the twentieth century which becomes more pronounced no matter what the assumptions of the critic is a discussion of the basic moral or religious purpose of the poem. The terms which scholars interested in the poetic process usually employ in their discussion of the moral import of Piers are either mysticism, the gospel of work, or both; but some, with Owst, refer to the poem as homiletic; Hort even studies it in terms of her understanding of medieval theology.

This is not to say that nineteenth-century scholars did not treat the poem as a moral work. Discursivist scholars tended to limit such discussion, which was usually brief, to its prophetic and reformist purposes; associationist scholars tended to stress the sincerity and earnestness of the poet. These traditions indeed continued into the twentieth century. Some, particularly in the early part of the century, continue to write of the purpose of the poem quite generally.
Previte-Orton (1910) not only reads literally but also simplistically. To him the "moral" of Piers Plowman is "Be good and you will be happy" (p. 19); the poem is apparently a gigantic fable. No wonder he can say there is no great mind at work in this poem (p. 19). Neilson (1916), in spite of his awareness that the use of visions in allegory was a convention which leads into the world of "symbol," refers to certain passages within the poem as simply "religious or moral discussion" (p. x). Iijima (1925) refers to the "ethical" ideal of the poem. 49

1. Gospel of work

A considerable number of the scholars who discuss the moral significance of the poem continue the tradition of the gospel of work. Though most of these scholars do not say so, they seem to take the Visio as the whole poem, or at least the most significant part of it. A possible reason besides interests and assumptions may well have been that the most widely available text was Skeat's edition of the Visio. Green's Short History, moreover, with its discussion of Langland's fusion of the gospels of equality and work continued to be popular and was reprinted till 1934. In 1917 this tradition gained support from a respected scholar in an academic discipline which had not before dealt with Piers—from the art historian E. W. Tristram in his article "Piers Plowman in English Wall-Painting." Tristram describes "fourteen or fifteen" wall paintings he has found in English churches, all "contemporary with or later than the writing of the poem." 50 The central figure is nude with outstretched hands showing the stigmata and with the "tools of labour, arranged [about his head] so as to form
a halo or glory. Clearly the painter has wished to convey the idea of
the analogy of Christ's suffering and crucifixion to the life of the
labourer" (p. 135). Recalling the Genesis account of fallen man's
life of toil-hardly the sanctification of labor-and referring only
to Émile Mall as his source for Vincent of Beauvais's praise of manual
labor as delivering man's body from the "necessities to which, since
the fall it is subject," Tristram makes a sweeping and unwarranted
conclusion: "[w]ork, as a remedy for evil and a means of salvation
... had always been encouraged by the Church" (p. 135).

This view was often expressed throughout the twenties and thirties
as the gospel of labor, the sanctity of labor, often in the Carlylian
terms "Do the Duty which lies nearest thee." Kenneth Sisam in a short
introduction to *Piers Plowman* in his 1921 anthology lends his support
to this tradition, observing that this satire which calls men back to
Biblical living "is directed against the general slackening [among all
classes of society] of the bonds of duty." In 1924 this tradition
 gained another influential exponent, Johan Huizinga, whose popular
*Waning of the Middle Ages*, like Tristram's article, received its
impetus from the study of art, of the paintings of the Van Eycks and
their contemporaries. In spite of his knowledge that the sacramental
view of life permeated the minds of medieval men, that it was a world
of "impeccable order, architectonic structure, hierarchic subordination"
which embraced "all nature and all history," and that this conception
was made visible in allegory, Huizinga perceives *Piers Plowman* merely
as a "strangely fantastic and touching poem" which exemplifies and
gives expression to "the sanctity of labour" (p. 179). In contrast
to Tristram, however, Huizinga believes this to be a new economic awareness first found in England (p. 179).

In the years immediately following (1925 and 1926-1932), two works appeared which, probably because they were published in German, did not at the time significantly influence *Piers Plowman* scholarship. These two make an attempt to reconcile the earlier assumption of *Piers* as the gospel of work, with the obvious spiritual concern of the poem. The first of these, an article by R. Hittmair in 1925, by its very title, "Der Begriff der Arbeit bei Langland," suggests its focus—the plowing of the half-acre—and its scholarly tradition—the gospel of work. Aware of the poem's religious context, Hittmair decides that to the poet the only means to salvation, the means of freeing man from evil, is for man to do the duty that is set before him. The other German work, Konrad Burdach's *Der Dichter des Ackermann aus Böhmen und seine Zeit* (1926-32), combines a study of *ne solliciti sitis* and the "doctrine" of poverty with a study of what he sees as the idealization of the plowman. His sources are the Old and New Testaments, St. Augustine, and later religious thinkers (even Wycliffe), in which he finds these concepts united in the idealization of labor (pp. 268-83, 297, 308-10, 315-21, 341-42, 351-58, passim).

In 1932, 1935, 1936, and 1939 the successive works of Cargill, Osgood, Lewis, and Coulton appeared with their sometimes explicit, but literal-minded, indebtedness to Carlyle. Oscar Cargill in 1932 perceives the poem as an anti-Bradwardine work opposing "salvation . . . through the free grace of God." In both the *Visio* and the *Vita*, but "even more" in the *Vita* the poet's theme is "Works are the Cure of the
World" (Cargill's italics, p. 357). To Osgood it is Reason who first preaches "the Gospel of work," but who is then joined by "honest Piers," who proclaims, "Work! Work, everyone of you--even ladies and knights--on behalf of the poor" (pp. 90-91). Lewis similarly finds, though less evangelistically states, that the message of the poem is for all men to "do their duty" (p. 159). And Coulton in Medieval Panorama perceives the "strength of . . . feeling" of this "democratic author" coming through to the reader in part through the person of "the perfect peasant," "Carlyle's Peasant Saint"--Piers. 54

In 1934 a new approach to the scholarly tradition of Piers as the gospel of equality and work appears, yet even more in the Carlylian tradition. A student of and for a time an assistant in the editorial work of R. W. Chambers, F. A. R. Carnegy published a study of Piers Plowman which attempts to treat the poem as allegory, a natural mode of expression within a sacramental universe. What he really does is to treat the poem as symbolic within a transcendental universe. In other words, Carnegy seems to see Langland as a fourteenth-century Carlyle. This approach is a significant departure from the usual understanding of allegory as mere personification or fantasy. Carnegy understands the unity, the wholeness, the inter-relatedness of all of life presented by Carlyle. He sees the same perspective in Piers Plowman. Carnegy's perspective causes him to study Piers within the context of the social unrest described in Trevelyan's Age of Wycliffe and History of England, works in which Trevelyan remarks that the situation in those times "reminds us of a modern labour movement," 55 and in the context of the solutions to the "modern labour movement"
set forth by Ruskin in Unto This Last and by Carlyle in Past and Present (Carnegy, pp. 10-12, 43-46).

After surveying the social conditions of the fourteenth century which Trevelyon presents, Carnegy asserts that the labor problem specifically and social unrest generally are a major concern of the poet. This social unrest in the Visio, however, "is used as an allegory to illustrate the sins of the human race" generally and the specific danger of the greed of the upper classes and the laziness of the lower (p. 14). The solution to this problem is precisely the one Ruskin offers—mutual trust and affection between employer and employee (p. 11). The Vita concerns itself with the very same problems, now in the form of a quest: how is this solution to be brought about? Allegorically this quest illustrates man's "search for, and failure to find salvation" (p. 45). It could even be said, Carnegy continues, that the labor problem is of secondary importance. This is not really so, however, because the solution to the problem of man's salvation is exactly the same as the solution to the labor problem, "which for the author or authors . . . constituted the most momentous social danger of the day" (p. 45). The poem, thus, states its concern "in terms in keeping with the orthodox religious views of the age, but the meaning is surely the same as that of Carlyle's words, viz. that the reward of work is to be found in its heroic nature" (p. 45). The heroic "King . . . guided by Conscience" and the ideal "manual labourer," Piers, are the solution to the corruption, greed, idleness, and discontent (p. 46).

It is only at the very end of his book that Carnegy indicates an awareness that he is analyzing a poem not written within the context
of nineteenth-century assumptions. He concludes that the final "solution offered by the dreamer" in Piers Plowman is "essentially different" from that of the nineteenth century in that, in Piers, only through Christ can these conditions of mutual trust and affection be achieved. The inseparability of the social and divine order is based on faith in Christ, and Piers the Plowman himself exemplifies this unity in combining in himself the human and the divine (p. 46).

Despite this rather unexpected conclusion, Carnegy's study is one of the most careful attempts to analyze the entire poem through a close reading of the text, and in the main, his is a clear, coherent reading. As early as 1912 Dorothy Owen had suggested a possible connection between the performance of duty and the attainment of Truth and had emphasized "the inter-dependence of the various orders of society" in the poem, but she did not develop either idea. Studies earlier than Carnegy's had explored the allegorical structure, in more general terms, as well as allegorical motifs. To this point, however, his study is the most thorough attempt to explicate the poem and by far the most provocative of the studies within the scholarly tradition of the gospel of work.

Scholarship correcting Carnegy's perspective was soon to come. As a response to his study and to the scholarly tradition generally of Piers as the gospel of work, two books based on a knowledge of patristic thought attempt to demonstrate the inadequacy of even a transcendental approach to the poem. The orientation and perspective of this tradition are inappropriately temporal and material; the consequent assumptions, emphases, and conclusions regarding the poem are literal. Greta Hort's
commentary (1936) on Piers Plowman as a social document serves equally well as a response to this tradition. The description of the Visio, she asserts, is a generalized setting which presents those "forces" within man which impede his journey to Truth, or his "itinerarium mentis in Deum" (p. 63). The poem is social only in the sense that it is theological; that is, social man must always be mindful of his end (p. 63). Father Dunning in the following year (1937) speaks directly to Carnegy's study. He calls attention to the fact that Carnegy's only sources for the gospel of work are Ruskin and Carlyle and suggests that the basic problem with his study is his twentieth-century perspective (pp. 128-29). But, caught in his own literalism, Father Dunning's discussion of the first appearance of Piers the Plowman is indistinguishable from Carnegy's. Dunning, moreover, quotes Father Thurston on "the canonization of Hard Work" and Mâle on "the Beatification of Manual Labour" as well as Owst, St. Jerome, St. Paul (II Cor. 8.9), St. Gregory, St. Bede, and St. Francis (pp. 118-19). Nevertheless he succeeds in demonstrating what he takes to be the basic weakness of Carnegy's study when he places the acquisition of the necessities of life in the theological context of the fourteenth century. In so doing, he attempts to show that it was Carnegy's too limited knowledge of medieval thought that probably caused his failure to see the distinction the poem makes between plowing the half-acre and the pilgrimage to Truth. To Carnegy's conflation of these two, the plowing of the half-acre (providing material necessities, as Dunning interprets it) and the pilgrimage to Truth (the journey toward salvation), Dunning responds explosively: "Mead
married to False!" (p. 128). In other words, as a discursive reader, Dunning regards the plowing of the half-acre as work to provide physical necessities through private ownership of property. Yet this state of affairs is a result of the fall of man. Man, therefore, must recognize that his ownership is a trust to be used for the common good (A-Text, pp. 53-56). Providing physical necessities as an end in itself, thus would be portrayed through the marriage of Meed to False. Dunning, consequently, believes the plowing of the half-acre to be preliminary to the questing journey toward Truth (see also pp. 18-20 et passim).

2. Homily

Even before Carnegy's study, of course, it had become clear to some scholars that in order to understand Piers Plowman, they must understand more than the social and political events of the fourteenth century. Several studies exploring the theological, religious, or philosophical context of the poem have already been referred to. These began appearing with considerable frequency from the mid-1920's. One scholar whose two books for a time made a decided impact on Piers Plowman studies was Gerald Owst with Preaching in Medieval England (1926) and Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England (1933). These two works, especially the latter, spoke directly to the idea that Piers is a social document, an original work based on observation. It also dealt cogently with specific passages within Piers, reinforcing the growing awareness that an understanding of the intellectual and rhetorical context would enable scholars to penetrate the meaning of the poem.
As early as 1883 Ten Brink had suggested that *Piers* is homiletic, and in 1894 Jusserand had quoted or alluded to statements by Thomas Walsingham, Nicholas Bozon, and John of Bromyard, which he compared to passages or incidents within the poem (*Piers Plowman*, pp. 19, 38-40); but Owst's knowledge of the sermons and homily-books is without parallel. While in his first book he does not discuss *Piers* in any detail, nevertheless, he asserts, "In reality, it represents nothing more nor less than the quintessence of English mediaeval preaching gathered up into a single metrical piece of unusual charm and vivacity" (*Preaching*, p. 295). There is nothing in *Piers*—neither "a concept of the poet's mind" nor a literary technique—which is not found in sermon literature (pp. 295-96).

In *Literature and the Pulpit* (1933), Owst re-affirms at the beginning the homiletic nature of *Piers Plowman*, repeats this affirmation here and there throughout, and concludes with a quotation of the statement from his earlier book that the poem is the "quintessence of English medieval preaching" (pp. 6, 40, 84, 228, 450, 547, 549, *passim*). Even when he makes no direct reference to the poem, a reader familiar with it immediately recognizes parallels between the poem and sermons on corrupt clergymen (pp. 244-86), on the Cardinals (p. 249), on the retinue of the Pope and Cardinals (p. 250), on papal bulls (pp. 250-73, *passim*), on minstrelsy (p. 327), on merchants' stretching cloth to cheat the purchaser (p. 353), on wasters (p. 326), on lawyers (pp. 338-49). He makes his study quite convincing not only through these parallels but also through his explication of such a character as Gluttony by quoting parallel passages from sermon literature to show, for instance, that the tavern was the "devil's chapel"
and thus "a very definite menace to the common weal" (p. 435; see also pp. 434-49). Owst thus refutes those who see Langland as having written his poem merely from having observed fourteenth-century life.

Notwithstanding his refutation of scholars who hold Piers to be a self-expressively autobiographical or historical document and his insistence that they immerse themselves in the ideas of the time (p. 434, n. 5), Owst's own books are marred by literal reading (he is an adherent of autobiographical and topical allegory), by his progressivist view of history, and hence by condescension toward medieval ontology. Like many of his contemporaries, he understands allegory to be personification and is apparently unaware that an allegorical portrait of one of the seven deadly sins may be a composite figure. Thus he accuses Langland of "clumsily" adopting material from the homily-books because Coveytise in Piers is both a laborer and a merchant (pp. 88-89; p. 88, n. 1). But then, after all, Owst explains, the poet is a "pioneer" at a "quaint" and "experimental . . . stage" of English poetry (pp. 87-88). Compared to Dante's work, Langland's poem is "simple" (p. 58); compared to Chaucer's poetry, Langland's is "crude" (p. 229). Moreover, because of the poet's "primitive instinct" concerning the celestial and diabolical hierarchies (pp. 92, 110), he is at his best dealing with particulars (p. 110).

For the next few years after Owst's books appeared, few scholars dared write about Piers Plowman without reference to them. But as early as 1932 Sister Carmeline Sullivan, in her dissertation, The Latin Insertions and the Macaronic Verse in Piers, recognizes that both she and Owst are viewing parts of the work and not "the literary composition
as a whole," and hence, that he has over-stated his case. 58 Hort (1936) objects to Owst's second book on similar grounds (p. 17), though she quotes his assessment of Bromyard's Summa Predicantium (p. 134) and, like Owst, uses the work as a means of explaining the sacrament of penance.

Dunning (1937) builds upon Owst's thesis, adding that if Piers Plowman is the "quintessence of English medieval preaching," then "it must be at the same time a faithful summary of the doctrines of the medieval Church, as expounded by the Fathers and theologians" (p. 8). After establishing the poet's orthodoxy (pp. 8-11), Dunning then analyzes the A-Text within the context of the Church Fathers. Two years later (1939) Bloomfield, in his survey of Piers scholarship, acknowledges the partial validity of Owst's thesis, observing that "a reformer and a man of deep moral sincerity would naturally resemble the preachers of the age" (p. 232), but he qualifies Owst's assertion by pointing to scholarship which shows parallels to Langland's ideas in other allegorical poems, in Duns Scotus, in St. Thomas Aquinas, and in religious tractates as well as in sermons (pp. 229-32). Langland, Bloomfield believes, "was acquainted with that vast medley of mediaeval knowledge which all educated men of the age knew" (p. 232).

3. Mysticism: General

One group of scholars, seemingly not at all influenced by Owst, was a group who studied Langland in the context of the "Three Lives" of the fourteenth-century English mystics, a new scholarly tradition established by Henry Wells in 1929. 59 Wells was not, as a matter of
fact, the first to associate Langland with mysticism, but his is a near complete departure from earlier approaches. Those earlier than Wells and some contemporary with him seem to have derived their conception of Langland the mystic from the prophetic tradition combined with nineteenth-century poetic theory, with the most important theorist probably being Shelley.

The convention of viewing *Piers Plowman* as prophecy had maintained its advocates through the nineteenth century, but this convention gradually was eclipsed by other conventions. The final publication of Trevelyan's *Age of Wycliffe* in 1935 was for some time one of the last statements of the position. Scholars who refer to *Piers* as prophecy are more likely to speak of it in the way Elizabeth Hanscom and A. R. Benham had, as prophetic in a homiletic sense. Konrad Burdach (1926-32) believes the so-called prophetic passages in the poem are to be understood in terms of fourteenth-century eschatology specifically involving the Second Coming (pp. 314-15, passim). But in 1926 Iijima calls Langland a "mystic" who "sees visions and makes prophecy" (p. 44), and here the emphasis is on Langland as a "mystic," apparently in the sense of Shelley's mystic or visionary prophet.

As early as Jusserand (1894), Langland had been labelled a mystic; in fact, the sub-title to Jusserand's book *Piers Plowman* is *A Contribution to the History of English Mysticism*. Nevertheless, scarcely thirty pages are devoted to "mysticism," and the word is so loosely construed as to include the concepts of Dante, Rulman Merswin, Richard Rolle, George Fox, John Wesley and George Whitefield, William
Blake, Dante G. Rossetti, Percy B. Shelley, and Robert Browning as well as Langland (Piers Plowman, pp. 192-219). To Jusserand the characteristic all mystics share is that "nearly all of them border on madness," and some cross the border (p. 213; see Abrams on Shelley and poetic madness, p. 192). He strongly emphasizes their "originality," Langland being "one of the most original writers of the group" (p. 192), and seems to consider heterodoxy and even heresy as another characteristic of this group (pp. 204-05, 213-16).

Christopher Dawson in 1933 shows himself to be a son of Jusserand, albeit somewhat restrained by his knowledge. Though he too unites nineteenth-century poetic theory, prophecy, and mysticism, he places less emphasis on Langland's originality, suggesting, for example, that the source of the "prophetic" passage in B.x,317-20 ("a king shall come") is the prophecy of St. Hildegarde, the German mystic of the twelfth century (p. 186). Dawson even perceives the poem to be concerned with the hope for salvation of humanity through faith in the redeeming power of the Incarnation dramatically presented by setting Piers, the personification of the ideal, against Meed, the personification of "economic motive" (pp. 179, 184-85); yet he still regards Langland's successors to be those who left the Church, such as the Puritans and rebels, and Fox, Bunyan, and Blake (p. 160).

Though David Knowles in the English Mystics (1927) writes of the mystics's ability to "express shades of feeling and earnest persuasiveness," he explicitly responds to the belief, held since at least the nineteenth century, that the medieval mystics were unorthodox
theologically; he refutes the statements and implications that a medieval mystic, Langland in particular, is unorthodox. He traces the development of mysticism from St. Augustine to the Victorines, who elaborated the mystical life (pp. 31, 33, 44-45). Of Langland's Piers Plowman, he declares it "entirely orthodox" (p. 56). The question of Langland's orthodoxy is a decidedly important matter. As Father Dunning (1937) states, "If he was not [orthodox], Catholic doctrine will not suffice to interpret him, for in using it he will have given it twists of his own" (p. 8).

4. Mystical Three Lives: Active, contemplative, and mixed

Henry W. Wells's pioneer article of 1929 placed the study of Piers Plowman on a completely new footing. Wells assumes that Langland wrote his poem within the orthodox mystical tradition of the Three Lives—the Active Life, the Contemplative Life, and the Mixed Life. At least theoretically, he rejects the expressionism characteristic of past scholars, many of whom had defended the unity of authorship of the poem and had assumed a "relative coherence" in its structure. To these he contends, "We cannot 'sense' the answer to our problems [of its coherence]; we must analyze the poem" (p. 124). At the same time that he opposes expressionism, his analysis separates him from the literalists. Will, for instance, is "the name symbolically given to the Christian pilgrim at birth" (p. 125), and doing well is not simply good works, or good deeds, but involves faith, the sacraments, meditation, prayer, and devotion (p. 131). In his analysis, he observes that the Visio is directed toward the laity; the Vita; toward the
clergy. The subject of the latter--life as it should be in the world as it is--as well as its structure is repetitive of the former, but is raised to the more rigorous standards applied to the clergy. Within the three sections of the Vita--the Vita de Dowel, the Vita de Dobet, and the Vita de Dobest--the poet sets forth those three progressive ways of life proper to the clergy as treated by St. Thomas, by the Meditationes Vitae Christi, and by Walter Hilton (pp. 134-35). The Active Life (Dowel) is the life of learning and of priestly responsibilities; the Contemplative Life (Dobet), the life of asceticism; and the "Active Life expressed in the corporate Church, or Unitas," (Dobest) is "the rule of the Bishop" (p. 131). These sections of the Vita, Wells continues, with their explication and dramatization of the Three Lives, bear a similarity to the "psychological trinity" within man which is paralleled by St. Augustine to the Holy Trinity. This trinitarian concept "is still a further organizing factor" within the poem (pp. 134-35).

Wells's approach to the poem is one of the first attempts at systematic analysis and remains for some scholars not only a pioneer study, but still the point of departure for their own. Subsequent studies by Howard Meroney, S. S. Hussey, Robert W. Frank and Joseph E. Milosh have shown that he had apparently read neither widely nor deeply the writings of the mystics, however, nor did he analyze the poem as carefully as his statement of intention suggests. Even so, his 1929 study is a landmark in Piers Plowman scholarship. He convinced most subsequent students that the poem has a basic coherence, and despite the fact that Nevill Coghill and others who built upon his work tended
to be more literal than he, Wells himself is quite aware that Will is "the Christian Pilgrim" who is educated by various teachers concerning salvation (p. 125) and that the "Three Lives" are internal states, or degrees of holiness (p. 133).

Coghill, Chambers, Dunning (to some extent), and Wells himself addressed themselves to the task of building upon, qualifying, and reinforcing Wells's 1929 theses. In 1933 Coghill published "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B-Text." This study concerns much more than the Three Lives and combines a variety of assumptions, yet its chief predecessor is Wells's article. The Vita de Dowel, he believes, is a "vague allegorical autobiography of the poet," somewhat in the manner discussed by Mendingieck, which dramatically sets forth those basic virtues necessary for those who would live the Active Life, those who would live the "Contemplative or Clerkly Life," and those who would live the "Pontifical Life" (pp (pp. 112-13). Each successive life builds upon the basic virtues of the life of Dowel, which is the "life of Faith and Work" of a layman. The next, the life of Dobet, is the life of a "Contemplative or Clerk," who must practice what he preaches; the highest of all, the life of Dobest, is "all the above" plus the "exercise [of] episcopal authority" (pp. 120, 124, 130-33). These views Coghill restates more concisely--and more literally--both in his introduction to Wells's 1935 translation of Piers and in his 1935 review of Carnegy's book. Passus viii-xv, Vita de Dowel, he states, "defines . . . in maxim form" the virtues proper to a layman, and to the other two lives as well,
"under the form of . . . [the poet's] autobiography." The Three Lives are the Active Life of the layman, the Priestly Life, and the Episcopal Life (Review, p. 48; "Introduction," p. xxii).

Dunning (1937) agrees that Thought defines Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest as the "objective states of perfection"—the Active, Contemplative, and "Mixed" Lives—but that the dreamer, not satisfied with this response, receives another from Wit (pp. 173-74). Wit's definitions are internal, the three ways to perfection of the Pseudo-Dionysius, "the Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive states or ways of perfection" (p. 174).

Obviously unhappy with Coghill's literalizing of his ideas and ignoring Dunning's second triad, Wells published "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman" in 1938 specifically to caution against being "over-literal" about the Three Lives: "We may easily mistake a symbol for a reality [by which he seems to mean "an estate"], or a part for the whole" (p. 342). To Father Dunning he responds that the second triad—the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive states—strikingly resembles the former; indeed, he agrees that Dobest is "clearly the ideal or unitive life" (p. 344). His real quarrel with Dunning is that the dreamer can be taken as a judge of the worth or validity of the explanations he is given: "The dreamer is always pictured as less enlightened than his spiritual teachers and as frequently fallible" (p. 344). The Three Lives, he argues, are not estates, but internal or psychological states. Dowel, or the Active Life, is the life of "faith, good works, and the hope of heaven"—the "bare necessities for salvation" (p. 343). This way of life may be deepened and broadened both by meditation and by
service to one's fellow man. Dobet, or the Contemplative Life, then, is priestly in a metaphorical sense. Priests, to be sure, ought to be superior to laymen "in contemplation and devotion," though this manner of life is not "literally the priestly life": to be a priest is to be contemplative; to be a contemplative is not necessarily to be a priest (p. 345). When he used it in 1929, Wells similarly intended the term "Episcopal Life" in reference to Dobest to be understood metaphorically and now thinks a more accurate term would be "Unitas" (p. 347). Like the other terms, however, it is to be understood figuratively (p. 347). To Langland, Wells concludes, all these lives "are parts of himself and of everyman" (pp. 346-47). "In short, his [Langland's] three states are psychological rather than sociological" (p. 347).

The discussion of the mystical Three Lives is continued by Chambers in Man's Unconquerable Mind in 1939. He is closer to Coghill than to Wells in that he tends to see them literally. The first is "the life of active labour in the world"; the second, the "clerky or monastic life of renunciation, poverty and contemplation"; the third, the episcopal life whereby the contemplative is recalled into active life (pp. 102-03). After referring to Wells's use of St. Thomas and the Meditationes, Chambers compares Langland's Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest to the explanation of the Three Lives in Hilton's Book That Is Called Mixed Life, observing that the chief difference seems to be that, in Langland's poem, Christ embodies all three lives while Hilton considers the various lives suitable to different individuals (pp. 104-06). Finally, as is his latitudinarian custom throughout the book, Chambers
compares Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest to the Indian in Kipling's "The Miracle of Purun Bhagat," who was first Prime Minister, then became a beggar, and was afterwards called back into public service (p. 106).

Three of these scholars—Wells, Coghill, and Chambers—established the context of the mystical Three Lives as the appropriate context in which to study Piers Plowman. This approach has been extremely influential, although their studies were based on limited knowledge of the mystics and of medieval thought generally, presently and on controversial assumptions about poets and poetry. Since Coghill and Chambers will be dealt with in a separate category below—the Eclectics—and since response and reactions of subsequent scholars to the Three Lives tradition will be discussed later, suffice it to say for the moment that, of the three, Wells is less literal and seems more nearly conscious of the fourteenth-century ontological context of the poem than either Coghill or Chambers.

One scholar whose study gently corrects the emphasis of these scholars who regard Piers Plowman as only properly understood within the context of mysticism is Conrad Pepler in his 1939 article, "The Spirituality of William Langland." His objection is that scholars failing to consider the importance of the "Mass and Divine Office" to the pre-Reformation mystics such as Rolle, Hilton, and Julian of Norwich imply that these had little influence on them and that their faith, like that of post-Reformation mystics, was an "individualistic religion," when such was not the case. Pepler finds in Piers Plowman the corrective to this misunderstanding of English Catholic spirituality (p. 846). He contends that the poem explicitly reveals its context
by the emphasis it gives to the "liturgy, the Mass and the Sacraments," not as "externals of religious life," but as the basis for "the spirit of Unity, . . . of Holy Church, the Mystical Body of Christ" (pp. 852-53).

5. Patristics

Wells, Coghill, Chambers, and Pepler are by no means, of course, the only scholars to attempt to set Piers Plowman in its proper intellectual context, as the discussion of Owen, Tristram, Owst, and Carnegy has already shown. The patristic-allegorists are indebted, not necessarily directly, to the work of all these scholars, but equally indebted—if not more so—to their predecessors in studying Piers specifically within the context of the Church Fathers. In 1914 H. S. V. Jones published a short article on *ymagynatyf*. In a careful study of "mediaeval psychology," using primarily Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Minor*, but also Richard's *Benjamin Major*, Boethius's *De Consolatione*, the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, St. Augustine's *De Anima et ejus Origine*, and the works of other Church Fathers, Jones not only defines the term *ymagynatyf* and its role in relation to the other faculties, but also especially addresses himself to the relationship between *ymagynatyf*, *kynde witte*, and *clergy* in Piers. 63 Even before Jones's article, Mensendieck had used Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* to define *ymagynatyf* (1900, 1910, p. 406), and Chambers had used Chaucer's "Parson's Tale" and the *Ancrene Riwle* (1910) to refute Manly's "lost leaf" hypothesis by showing that, just as Skeat had suggested in 1886 (II, 88), Robert the Robber was
appropriately associated with Sloth in that theft and sloth were conventionally linked ("The Authorship . . .," pp. 6-7). Jones, however, devotes his article exclusively to the study of the meaning of the concepts in Piers Plowman within the context of patristic writings in order to show that the characters in the poem are intelligible, consistent, and meaningful if *ymagynatyf*, for example, is understood to be the repository for images, or memory, and the mediating faculty "between the senses and the reason" (pp. 587-88), instead of "Imagination or Fancy," as Skeat had understood it (II, 179).

It was in the 1920's and 30's, between the two World Wars, that the burgeoning scholarship found a few scholars turning their attention at least in part to the patristic context of Langland's images, concepts, and motifs. Two articles which came out in 1927 make tentative steps in this direction. Mabel Day, having noticed in Duns Scotus's *De Rerum Principio* a "simile" of a tree comparable to Langland's Tree of Charity (B.XVI.1ff.), summarizes the two and then concludes that Duns Scotus's teaching about how Jesus gained specific knowledge explains the "strange passage" where Piers is said to have taught Jesus "the art of healing." Scotus maintained that "the human soul of Christ" acquired this specific knowledge "through the contemplation of the Logos (here represented by Piers) . . . ." Day's article is too brief and too limited in scope to warrant more than two observations: first, that the article is little more than a source study which indicates no awareness of how extensive the image of the tree is in medieval thought, and second, that her identification of Piers with the Logos is purely arbitrary.
The other 1927 article, by Cyril Brett, analyzes the lunatic-angel-goliard passage (B.Prol.123-42). By defining the words *pietas* ("mercy") and *jus* ("justice") and by observing that the Goliardays is "clinging to the letter of the law," he concludes that the responsibility to govern with both justice and mercy, a matter of common concern in the late fourteenth century, was imposed upon the King (pp. 261-62). With the social emphasis typical of scholars of the early twentieth century he asserts that this concept is one of the major concerns of the poem.

There were studies, however, by students of medieval thought which were much more substantial than Day's and Brett's, notably parts of Burdach's massive book on *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* (1926-32), an article by Howard Troyer (1932), and books by Hort (1936) and Dunning (1937).

From 1926 through 1932 Konrad Burdach traced certain concepts found in *Piers Plowman* through the Bible, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Dante, and other religious writers peripheral to his study of the author of *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* and his times. Among these are his suggestions of James 2:2 as the source for the banquet at the Court of Conscience with the Friar-Doctor (p. 224 and n. 2), his discussion of the similarity of St. Thomas's and Dante's treatment of the cardinal virtues to Langland's (pp. 302-03), and his positing of James 5:7-8 and St. Augustine as sources for the allegorical tree, an image which has a long and complex history (pp. 221 and n. 2, 285-87 and n. 2). Burdach is, moreover, the first scholar to identify the source of the lines of the Pardon, *Et qui bona egerunt*, etc., as the Athanasian Creed (p. 267, n. 1).
But more significant to his discussion of the poem is his study of certain pervasive doctrines and ideas concerning Adam, Piers, the plowman, and ne solliciti sitis. According to Burdach, Adam, in "mystical" (i.e., allegorical) thought, was both the antithesis and the antitype of Christ, and, thus, man's very nature was both human and divine (p. 321). The name "Piers," i.e., Peter, was both a common name which could stand for Everyman and the name of the chief apostle of Christ (pp. 358-59). The plowman epitomized uncorrupted human nature, or man in the image of God (pp. 282, 294, 297, 341). Interrelated with these is the teaching in regard to ne solliciti sitis: only through the lack of anxiety about bodily needs, which results from faith, as the basis for work or any activity can one achieve the love for God potential in man's semi-divine nature (pp. 351-52). Thus, Piers the Plowman is a semi-divine figure like Moses, Jacob, Solomon, and Peter--like Christ, but never Christ himself (pp. 341-42, 351-53). Petrus, id est, Christus, then, clearly refers to Peter the Apostle (pp. 311-12); the search for Piers at the conclusion of the poem is the search for the ideal pope (p. 314).

Burdach's German work was not to make its impact on English scholarship till Donaldson made extensive use of it in 1948; the three other studies--by Troyer, Hort, and Dunning respectively--were easily available to English scholars. Even so, Troyer seems to have been virtually ignored for the next few years. His is an allegorical reading of the poem, specifically a study of Piers, on the authority of St. Thomas. Like Burdach he believes the key to understanding the character of Piers is his human and divine nature, but unlike Burdach he finds
the key to be the human and divine nature of Christ as discussed in
the *Summa Theologica*, not that of man (p. 371). Because Troyer's study
is, properly speaking, allegorical, it will be discussed below.

Hort (1936) and Dunning (1937), while to some degree aware of
allegory as a way of perceiving, are more concerned with establishing
the theological context of *Piers Plowman* and with explaining its
doctrinal framework. These two books take seriously that context as
no book-length work would do until Robertson and Huppé's in 1951.

Despite Hort's nineteenth-century assumptions about poets and
poetry, her use of theological writings corrects many scholarly
misconceptions. A medieval "social poem" will always subordinate con-
cern for social problems to its concern for man's eternal destiny;
social problems are of concern in part because they affect the
individual, but not the individual in any unique sense (p. 63).
Opposing biographical reading and individualism generally, Hort points
out that Will is not merely William Langland, but is "stripped of all
individualizing features," and his question is the concern of
fourteenth-century mankind: "[W]hat shall a man do to save his
soul [?]" (pp. 21-22). The *salus animarum*, or *itinerarium mentis in
Deum*--the theological perspective--is the "unifying and controlling
force in the poem" (p. 15; see also pp. 22, 63). The "ultimate end,"
she explains, is indeed "practice (religion)" and thus the poem is set
in this world with its portrait of social corruption and of a question-
ing dreamer (pp. 16, 62-63). The "proximate end, "however, is "theory
(theology)" and thus must be read--if read with understanding--in the
context of the *itinerarium mentis in Deum* (pp. 16, 63-64). Without
this understanding of theology and of its importance to the fourteenth-century mind, the poem will remain enigmatic to the modern reader. "[I]f we want to enjoy reading *Piers Plowman,*" we must "read it in as medieval a way as we can"; that way can be achieved only through knowledge of theology and the recognition that it permeates the poem (p. 23).

Hort explains not only the context and the concerns of the poem, but also the definition of terms used for the faculties in medieval psychology and the doctrines of predestination, the atonement, and the sacrament of penance. Her supporting authorities are far ranging, from St. Augustine to Wycliffe, including Peter Lombard, Abelard, Aquinas, Hugh of St. Victor, St. Bonaventura, Alanus de Insulis, Peter Cantor, William of Ockham, Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus, St. Anselm, and John of Bromyard. Because of her belief that *Piers* is a process poem and her failure to recognize "*Et qui bona egerunt,* etc.," as a quotation from the Athanasian Creed, however, she mistakenly concludes that while working his way through heresy to his orthodox position, Langland first arrives at a "Pelagian answer to the *salus animarum.*" Even to the end she believes that he leans toward the view of Wycliffe on Confession (pp. 6, 94, 112, 155). Despite these misunderstandings resulting from her nineteenth-century assumptions, however, Hort's study remains a valuable, if sometimes misleading effort toward setting *Piers Plowman* in its proper context.

Another pioneer in his use of the Fathers to illuminate the poem is T. P. Dunning. Even though his book, *Piers Plowman: An Interpretation of the A-Text,* deals primarily with the A-Text, his study of the B-Text some twenty years later, "The Structure of the B-Text of
Piers Plowman," indicates that he considers the approach and the concepts in this book valid for the B-Text as well. To Dunning, the poem is the work of a "moral theologian" (as opposed to a theoretical one), who is obviously writing from a patristic context (p. 11). Like Hort, he quotes extensively from such authorities as St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Thomas, Dante, the sermon literature quoted by Owst, Richard Rolle, Archbishop Thoresby's Catechism, and also from secondary literature on medieval thought. He justifies his approach on the basis of the medieval practice of quoting the same passages from the early Fathers in successive commentaries so that, for instance, St. Augustine and St. Gregory exerted great influence on the Middle Ages (p. 11). This practice is demonstrable, not conjectural. Dunning observes that as early as 1894 Jusserand had noticed that Piers Plowman is studded with quotations from the Bible and from the Church Fathers. "Yet," he chides, unaware of Hort's book, "the striking fact is that no one has yet made extensive use of the Fathers in the interpretation of the poem" (p. 13). Thus, he says, "I felt justified a priori" in approaching the poem in the context of patristic thought "and more than justified a posteriori by the results" (p. 13).

Dunning does not bother to argue that Will is not William Langland, (an identification which is beside the point); the function of Will, or the dreamer, is to ask rhetorical questions in the manner common to medieval text-books designed for moral instruction and to works of moral instruction like the Divine Comedy (p. 60). Without equivocation or apology, he explores the poem, not as a picture of the fourteenth century, but as the problem of the proper use of temporalia "considered
in relation to man's supernatural end" (p. 26). Possession of private property is a consequence of the Fall. Yet Christianity teaches the brotherhood of all men and its corollary, almsgiving, or more accurately, the "common use" of material goods (p. 53-56, 138-41). As the Prologue portrays reality, or the problem, and Holy Church teaches the proper response to it, A. Passus II-VII (B.II-VI) dramatically present the problem and its resolution: "... if Society ... is to run smoothly, Reason must rule the realm and the hearts of men, and love must conquer law" (p. 141; see pp. 138-41); that is, the "law of Charity" is the solution to all men's problems--social and moral (p. 108). In short, Dunning, like Hort, concludes that the focus on temporalia in no sense makes Piers a poem merely about the fourteenth century. For, to the fourteenth century, society was the Church (p. 129), the state "merely part of the Church" (p. 108), and every order within the society--laborer, knight, clergy--was "necessary to the other, whose combined efforts tended to the attainment of Truth, or God . . ." (p. 129). The way "mapped-out by Piers Plowman in Passus vi." is by Grace through the Sacraments. This is precisely what any orthodox Christian would accept (p. 129).

Father Dunning, nevertheless, is caught by his tendency toward literalism, natural to one who has a preference for "realism" and, consequently a distaste for allegory, and by his insufficiently critical respect for some of his scholarly predecessors. In spite of the fact that he recognizes Piers the Plowman as "allegorically or symbolically" the life of Christ (p. 119) and that those included in the Pardon are the followers of the teaching of Holy Church, "exemplified in Piers
Plowman: that is to say, regenerate Society" (p. 144) and in spite of his vehement disagreement with F. A. R. Carnegy, Dunning's discussion of Piers, as he first appears, is difficult to distinguish from Carnegy's. The "roots" of the allegorical plowman, Dunning insists, lie "deep in reality" (p. 119). His primary disagreement with Carnegy, it appears, is over the social perspective which causes Carnegy to fail to distinguish the plowing from the Pilgrimage, to confuse means and end--the preparation for the journey, provision for human necessity, with the journey itself, "the attainment of Truth" (p. 127). But Father Dunning's limited understanding of medieval allegory and consequent literal tendency forces him to admit that "from the reader's point of view, the exclusive concentration on the ploughing in Passus vii. has tended . . . to put the question of man's final end out of perspective" (p. 147). His resolution to this problem is to state that the Visio deals exclusively with the proper attitude toward temporalia and, thus, the plowing is preliminary to the pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, Father Dunning cannot account for the Piers of "the B continuation," who seems to him to be simply one of the many "nebulous" figures in the Vita of the B-Text (p. 120). Nor can he account for Will's discussion of dreams at the end of the Pardon episode: "a favourite subject" during the Middle Ages, "these lines are of no particular significance or interest" (p. 153). And though he praises the allegory of Piers Plowman, his very praise reveals his basic limitation: scenes which "glow with life and colour and freshness" and, in seeming contradiction to earlier statements, characters who "are real men and women, typical figures of the England of the day, throbbing
with vigour and vitality" (p. 163) instead of "the dull and formless
mouthpieces . . . found in the usual vision allegories of the period"
(p. 163). It is his constant insistence on the necessity of under-
standing the poem within the context of the Church Fathers and on
keeping in mind the teachings of Holy Church and Piers's direction to
Truth that brings Father Dunning to a closer understanding of the
poem than almost any previous scholar.

6. Multi-level allegory

"archaic," "cumbersome," "tedious," "the rudest . . . of all poetic
fictions," "quaint"--is it not "natural" for one to make such
observations, such judgments, about what he does not understand? And
this lack of understanding is, according to Owen Barfield, the result
of a change in "consciousness" from the Christian era to the scientific
age, which causes the modern man "to regard as quite distinct" what
his forefather combined into "the literal, on the one hand, and the
symbolic or metaphorical, on the other." Phenomena viewed sacrementally
are not perceived as merely the physical; there are no sharp distinc-
tions between the literal, or physical, and the symbolic (p. 74). The
physical is always a representation and, thus, is in modern terms
"symbolic." This mode of perceiving in which learning the names of
"collective representation," or what is perceived to be there (p. 19),
as the means to Truth accounts for the importance once given to the
Seven Liberal Arts with Grammar, Rhetoric, and Dialectic as the basic
trivium (pp. 74-75, 84-86, 88). "To learn about the true nature of
words," Barfield explains, "was at the same time to learn about the true nature of things. And it was the only way" (p. 86).

There is, consequently, no present equivalent for the symbolic, or allegorical, conception of the Christian era: what moderns call symbolic "is an approximation to, or a variant of, their 'literal'" (p. 87), for "the essence of [modern] symbolism is, not that words or names, as such, but that things or events themselves, are apprehended as representations (p. 87). Thus, the severing of "words and things" into "two mutually exclusive categories" is a consequence of what William Barrett has referred to as "the loss of a whole system of symbols, images, dogmas, and rites which had the psychological validity of immediate experience," a loss which, in turn, results in "the despiritualization of nature, the emptying of it of all . . . symbolic images" (p. 27). And, as Barfield writes, words become "mere" words.

It was inevitable that a poem written before these changes occurred should become for the most part mystifying, dull, or unsatisfying--even when doctrine and dogma and rite and even some of the images are still known--to one who lives in a world where things are merely things and words are merely words. Modern man continues to use the same "words," but "their meanings have shifted" (p. 74). He has become, in the words of Barrett, "secularized in every department of life" (p. 28), and Barfield believes, generally unable to conceive of life, the world, or man as ever having been any other way (pp. 12, 29-30, 36, 39, 42, 51-52, 58, 66). "Is it not clear," Barfield queries, "that we find allegory desiccated precisely because, for us, mere words are themselves desiccated--or rather because words are 'mere'?" (p. 86).
This awareness has been long in coming. It was not until 1901 that A. S. Jack, aware that a literal understanding of *Piers* was no understanding at all, attempted to confute literalistic reading, or as he and Saintsbury called it, the "prosaic heresy." Prior to this date and later, various scholars whom Bloomfield includes in Part III of his "Present State of *Piers Plowman* Studies" (1939) suggest the possible influence of French, Spanish, Italian, or English allegorical poems on *Piers* (pp. 229-30), but these scholars entertain the assumptions about poetry of their contemporaries and nineteenth-century predecessors. Their work seems to be mere source hunting. Previte-Orton (1910) seems to have a glimmer of what makes men of the past come to "conclusions [which] appear unjustifiable to us" when he suggests that it is "largely a matter of their different premises" (p. 3). In 1912 Dorothy Owen's *Piers Plowman: A Comparison with Some Earlier and Contemporary French Allegories*, which is not, as the title and as Bloomfield imply, merely a source study, attempts to explicate the poem in the context of allegorical poetry, but she too seems only dimly aware of the changes in consciousness. She believes that since the poet's "creative" impulse is stronger than the "didactic," his characters are "living persons"; and, allegory forgotten, his scenes are "actual scenes" (pp. 20, 35). Yet she also writes that the didactic impulse in the fourteenth century manifested itself in allegory, a "common literary medium for reflective poems" (p. 130; see also pp. 16, 131). As Owen Barfield writes even in 1957, "For us, the characters in an allegory are 'personified abstractions', but for the
man of the Middle Ages Grammar or Rhetoric, Mercy or 'Daunger', were real to begin with, simply because they were 'names'. And names could be representations, in much the same solid-feeling way as things were" (p. 86). It is studies like Dorothy Owen's, however, that begin to prick the twentieth century to an awareness that allegory is not simply a device and that prepare the ground for later studies. But she herself alternately treats allegory as a medium--personification (pp. 33ff.)--and as a way of perceiving and writing about reality (p. 131).

Notwithstanding her limitations, Owen does reject the notion that the poem is autobiographical or even a record of "personal experience"; rather in Piers Plowman the poet allegorically "embodies his thought about life" (p. 15) because, to him, "the unseen is more real than the seen" (p. 131). The sources for his thought are those common to other allegorical poems, "the commentaries on the Bible, Patristics and other theological writings which were studied in the monasteries of the period" (pp. 3, 127); the quest or pilgrimage is a medieval commonplace (p. 62), which "in the experience of one man" (p. 14), "regarded as typical of that of humanity" (p. 131), combines satiric descriptions of "the various problems of moral life" (p. 15) and the search for righteousness (p. 18).

Little seems to have been done with allegory in the next few years. Neilson (1916) makes one statement in the introduction to his translation of the A-Text, that allegory leads the reader into the "world of symbol" (p. x). Until the 1930's the little that was done was the work of the topical or biographical allegorists.
Then in the 1930's several authors began to consider the allegory of *Piers Plowman* in terms of the meaning of the poem. In 1930 Roberta Cornelius's dissertation—basically a source study—traces the "image" of "the edifice" through homilies and poetry ultimately back to the Church Fathers and, in the process, reveals that allegory is not merely a device, but a mode of writing which was based on perception: Langland, she asserts, "knew the tenets of the 'doctours,' the theology, and consequently the allegory of the time." In a time when, she observes, the body was thought of as a temple in which the soul dwelt, it "would have been most surprising" if temple imagery had not been used (p. 73). Like Owen's her study suggests the way toward greater understanding, which it in itself could not fulfill.

Thus tentatively in source studies at first, then more directly and forcefully through the study of words, motifs, or characters, and finally through analyses of the poem, scholars began to show that consideration of *Piers Plowman* as allegory within the context of fourteenth-century thought illuminates images, characters, scenes, and structures which had previously seemed quaint, confused, and perplexing. Several scholars apply to their studies in one way or another what they refer to as "multi-level symbolism" or allegory as well as references to the Church Fathers and to contemporary or earlier "secular" and religious writings. The land was being cultivated and the seeds planted for the controversy which was to burst forth in the 1950's. The tendency in the 'thirties, however, is to discuss *Piers* as allegory, *Piers* in the context of the Church Fathers, *Piers* as
"vaguely allegorical," or Piers as containing ideas similar to those of his contemporaries and the Church Fathers.

Cornelius's dissertation was completed in 1930. Beginning in 1932, every year thereafter through 1939 saw the appearance of one or more studies which speak to or treat Piers as allegory: in 1932 a patristic-allegorical analysis of Piers the Plowman by Howard Troyer, in 1933 Nevill Coghill's general discussion of the poem as polysemous allegory, in 1934 F. A. R. Carnegy's study which, though symbolic, he calls allegorical (see above pp. 76-78), in 1935 Coghill's briefer but more pointed statements of his views of allegory as a way of thinking and Charles G. Osgood's general statements on the allegorical mode of Piers Plowman as a way of explaining the invisible in terms of the visible, in 1936 statements by both Derek A. Traversi and C. S. Lewis that Piers is allegorical--Traversi's that allegory in Piers is experience and Lewis's that allegory is personification--as well as Greta Hort's brief discussion of the medieval man's expectation of polysemous allegory in poetry in her book on Piers, in 1937 the allegorical explication in parts of Father Dunning's book on the A-Text, in 1938 Wells's tentatively allegorical treatment of B-Text, and in 1939 R. W. Chambers's articles and book which follow in their own way Lewis, Coghill, and Wells. Of these scholars, however, the only two who might be called patristic-allegorists are Troyer, who has been largely ignored, and Dunning, who has vehemently objected to the work of later and more thorough patristic allegorists (Review of Robertson and Huppé, pp. 23-29). C. S. Lewis, the most influential scholar in this group, discusses symbolism and allegory in what Chaucer would call, at best, an
"upsodoun" fashion: allegory, to him, is mere personification; symbolism is sacramentalism (Allegory of Love, p. 45). Almost a hundred years earlier, Thomas Carlyle in his discussion of Dante had expressed a similar understanding of the difference between allegory and symbolism in "The Hero as Poet" (1840). Symbolism he believed to be a means of expressing invisible reality by means of the visible; allegory is mere "emblem." "Men," Carlyle asserts, "do not believe in Allegory" (p. 97). Most of these 1930's scholars who are concerned with the allegory of Piers Plowman either maintain the modern assumptions of their predecessors or attempt to combine them with what they do know of medieval thought into a synthetic approach, as if all views about Piers Plowman are pieces of a gigantic puzzle which simply need to be searched out and put together. An examination of each of these will show at least some of their strengths and weaknesses.

Howard William Troyer's 1932 article "Who Is Piers Plowman?" is a remarkably careful reading of a major figure, or conception, within the poem. Relying on St. Thomas and a medieval lyric and on H. O. Taylor and H. F. Dunbar as authorities for his allegorical, tropological, and analogical explication of Piers the Plowman, he finds the unity of Piers in all his appearances and in all the references to him to be in his humanity—the first Adam (man the race) and the second Adam (God made man who saved the race), and various individual representatives of these two. Perhaps because of lack of knowledge or because of his emphasis, his reading of the rest of the poem tends to be literal, suggestive rather than exegetical of the tropological and analogical.
The cause is probably lack of knowledge. For instance, he believes that medieval allegory is to be understood intuitively (p. 373). Moreover, he is unaware that the lines of the Pardon are from the Athanasian Creed, and his first explanation of the tearing of the Pardon is that it illustrates the frustration of a poor plowman who discovers that he has been "taken" by a pardoner (p. 378). In fact, all too often he gives a literal summary of the poem. He deals with none of the Latin quotations. On the other hand, his discussions of the Tree of Charity, *Activa-Vita*, and especially of Piers as he appears or is referred to are illuminating, and notwithstanding his failure to recognize the Athanasian Creed and his acceptance of the priest's interpretation of the Pardon—or lack of it—Troyer's explication of the Pardon scene as a commentary on men's having become so complacent that they "believed themselves saved" regardless of their deeds (p. 378) is on the mark. Of all the summaries of the poem, his is both less literal and less fanciful or arbitrary. His approach is enlightening enough that it is unfortunate that his perceptions and insights were not followed up.

With the exception of Lewis, most of the other scholars theoretically regard allegory as a mode of thought. Their analyses of the poem tend to belie their statements. Wells's 1929 article had treated *Piers* as a symbolic work; Coghill in 1932 had stated that the poem was a multi-level work comparable in form to a fugue. Then, in 1933, explicitly basing his study on Wells's article, Coghill says that the Three Lives are to be interpreted allegorically, tropologically and anagogically; but, he immediately proceeds to literalize Wells's
discussion of the Three Lives. Giving no medieval authority for his views, he objects to Troyer’s statement that "the author felt man had made the atonement by their own lives [utterly futile]" and calls Troyer’s discussion over-complicated and "quasi-heretical" (pp. 109-10); yet Coghill himself acknowledges that it "has always been believed" that redemption is "conditional; it is for the Christian to avail himself of it by Faith and Works" (p. 117). Though he professes to discuss Piers Plowman as a work to be understood allegorically, tropologically, and anagogically, Coghill’s reference to the "shadowy phantoms, Thought, Clergye, Imaginatif, or . . . Haukyn" as opposed to the "robustness of Piers," who "is always flesh and blood" (p. 118) surely does not indicate an appreciation nor an understanding of allegory. His analysis is actually symbolic: for him, characters and events within the poem are "allegorical," but not words. His is an ingenious reading, but it is the reading of a modern, as he reveals both by the lack of medieval authority for his views and his repeated references to "intuition" and "feeling" as the source and province of the poetic process and, thus, of poetry. In 1935, in his introduction to Wells’s translation, Coghill explains that allegory is no mere device or writing technique but "the form of thought and poetry that arise from the deep intuition of the seamless coat of the Universe" (p. xvii). He explains the four levels of patristic allegory (p. xvii), but he also continues to assume that a poet writes because he must and that, despite its plan, the poem cannot be carefully analyzed because there is a "wildness" or roughness in the details (p. xix). It is finally, however, Coghill’s assumptions that poets deal with feelings,
and that *Piers* is a process poem which almost negates what he might otherwise have contributed to *Piers* scholarship:

Langland was a poet who liked to be seen feeling for his ideas; he tries out successive notions, and noses his way among opinions before the reader's eyes. Never, perhaps, a learned man, . . . he gives the effect of one who listened gladly to disputation, contributing now and then his native opinion to a discussion that was, philosophically, somewhat above his head; much as an undergraduate reading for Honours in History, and having friends reading Greats, might pick up from conversation as much philosophy as he could clumsily understand and despise the rest as quibbling subtlety. . . . he has a set of ideas at the back of his head [consequently], and being a better poet than logician, he feels for them, rather than thinks them ("Character of," p. 128).

Osgood (1935) obviously has knowledge of medieval allegory; he knows its purpose, briefly traces its sources in Greek, Roman, and Biblical literature, and explains that such poetry can be written only when there is a body of commonly understood symbols—"the Cross, the Seven Sins, the Four Virtues, the Pilgrimage of Life, the Castle of the Soul" (p. 92). Given this knowledge, his treatment of *Piers Plowman* as a biographical and social document seems almost inexplicable. Perhaps he is trying to find in the poem something of value to the modern reader since, he explains, "symbols are now so faded, and our beliefs so at variance, that medieval allegory often seems to us remote, meaningless, and dull" (p. 92). His reference to the "allegory of [modern] political cartoons" (p. 92), makes it appear that he really thinks of allegory as merely a device or technique. Hort (1936) states that the medieval mind was in the "habit" of allegorizing and "would be on the look out for an allegorical meaning" (pp. 23-24).

Nevertheless, her summary of the poem is absolutely literal, a plot
summary (pp. 4-14); and her explications make essentially no use of allegory. Henry Wells's 1938 article refers to the "anagogical, moral, and personal allegories," as well as the "historical allegory" of Piers Plowman and treats it as multi-level symbolism. But the main thrust of his article is to insist that the Three Lives must not be read literally.72

Traversi (1936) and Lewis (1936) both write about allegory, but neither understands medieval allegory. To both, allegory in general is personification. According to Lewis "[t]he allegorist leaves the given--his own passions--to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is fiction" (p. 45). Thus, he writes that the "only oddity" of Piers "is its excellence" (p. 158)--its "excellent satiric comedy" (p. 159), the author's "truly exceptional... poetic imagination" (p. 160), the "sublimity" of certain passages (pp. 160-61). Lewis regards Langland as a "very great poet" (p. 161), but Piers Plowman as a whole he considers "confused and monotonous" and not finally a poem (p. 161). Traversi writes of allegory as "a tyrannous abstraction" (p. 289); Piers, however, "starts from the real" (p. 289). Its allegory is "a real and experienced thing, and its virtues spring out of flesh and blood" (p. 290). Typical of the article, these statements are vague and effusive, but it seems clear that allegory is basically a technique to Traversi, more than a technique in Langland's hands only because Traversi considers him one who has not suffered a "disassociated spirituality" (p. 289).

Father Dunning's conception and handling of allegory in his 1937 book are curious. He refers to the "allegorical exposition of..."
moral principles" in Piers (p. 20), to allegory as a "convention in medieval poetry" (p. 101), to "the dull and formless mouthpieces . . . found in the usual vision-allegories of the period" (p. 163). He states a decided preference for dramatic "realism" (pp. 163, 170, 199-200). In fact, his concentration on the A-Text is due to his belief that the Visio is a separate poem from the Vita, the former combining in its allegory the "new realism and the "old intellectuality and spirituality" into "powerful thought and powerful drama" (p. 200). Allegory, thus, seems to him to be a poetic technique.

Nevertheless, his knowledge of medieval thought is such that his handling of the poem is far better than any previous analysis. He is fully aware that a summary of the plot is not an explanation of the allegory (p. 25). He knows that this is a poem which pits Cupidity and Charity against each other (pp. 26, 30, 42-44, 69, 106-11, passim). He knows that to medieval man, as to St. Augustine, "men in their social relations are bound by exactly the same law as that which governs their moral life as individuals: and this law is the law of charity . . ." (p. 108). And, though he tends toward the literal, his explications are generally allegorical. The King in Passus III, for instance, signifies "Kingship in general, . . . the King of England in particular,. . . the individual man . .--and better, I think--the human will in general" (p. 101).

Some of Dunning's chief limitations are a result of his distaste for allegory, his lack of knowledge that the Pardon is from the Athanasian Creed, his acceptance of the Priest and the Friars as authorities, and his failure to see the importance of most of the Latin
quotations. Despite these limitations, his is a more knowledgeable study and comes nearer to the heart of a major part of the poem than any work prior to Robertson and Huppé.

7. Eclecticism

R. W. Chambers, whose book, Man's Unconquerable Mind, was published in 1939, perhaps more than any previous scholar epitomizes the Eclectic. The Eclectics are probably the strongest opponents of the patristic-allegorists because they make use of fourteenth-century thought but retain modern assumptions. Chambers is not, as should be evident, the first Eclectic. Coghill, Hort, Owen, and many others before him and contemporary with him share, in many ways, his approach. In a very real sense scholars are by nature—and of necessity—eclectic; that is, they build upon the work of their predecessors. But the scholarly approach which will be labeled Eclectic draws either directly or indirectly upon aspects of fourteenth-century thought, but its perspective is modern. The Eclectics's views of poetry, man, and life in general are basically post-Christian. Perhaps, like Arnold, they cannot really believe that anyone ever took Christianity and sacramentalism seriously: "The world in general has always stood towards religions and their doctors in the attitudes of a half-astonished clown acquiescingly ducking at their grand words and thinking it must be very fine, but for its soul not being able to make out what it is all about."73 Their primary concern often seems to be to see the "relevance" of the poem, to see in the poem what they admire and as nearly as possible to ignore, or perhaps to praise the fine feeling, of the rest—usually the explicitly theological—or to so
generalize it that it becomes a vague "good" which almost no one could oppose and almost all would subscribe to.

Chambers, Eclectic that he is, makes use of allegory or, perhaps more accurately, symbolism, in his study of Langland—and here the emphasis is on Langland rather than on Piers Plowman. In response to Manly's pointing to Haukyn as an example of "B's" lack of control, Chambers replies, with a reference to C. S. Lewis for corroboration for his response: "Nothing could show better than does this criticism the difficulty which the modern mind finds in following medieval allegory" (p. 152). Literally, Haukyn is exactly as Manly describes him. "Allegorically, Haukyn stands for the whole body of sinning penitent laity ... (p. 152). Knowing, moreover, that "medieval interpretation gloried in its multiple meanings, literal, allegorical, moral and analogical" (p. 119), Chambers admits that Piers' quotation of "si ambulauero in medio vmbre mortis, etc.," during the Pardon scene may be a reference to the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" as "the deceit of heretics" (p. 119), but he himself prefers the more "common-sense explanation which would occur to the average man," which Chambers's reading of the "Ordinary Gloss" simplifies to "death can have no terrors for the just man" (pp. 119-20).

"Allegory" is by no means his only approach to the poem; in very truth the breadth of Chambers's eclecticism is awesome. He agrees with Christopher Dawson in equating Langland with all those who seek Truth even to the point of, "in the words of Canon Streeter," renouncing "not merely the good things of this life, but the hope of life to come" (p. 90). Thus, Chambers asserts, "any Englishman who will take the
trouble to understand it [the poem] can sympathize with it" (p. 90). He accepts the views of those from the Prophetic Tradition of Piers scholarship that Langland as well as Wycliffe was "the morning star of the Reformation," though he does reject the idea that the poet was a "proleptic Protestant" (pp. 94-95). He agrees with those who see Piers as a social document that the poem "does deal with contemporary conditions; it is full of satire and complaint," but it is also "much more" (p. 122). Though not concurring with scholars who regard poetry as effusion, Chambers believes Piers to be a process poem, the B-continuation a prelude and a philosophical poem comparable to Wordsworth's and on exactly the same subject: the poet's survey of his own mind followed by his "views of Man, Nature, and Society" (p. 149). Consequently, he agrees with some of the biographical critics: the "first two passus of the B-continuation" are the "struggle of a poet's soul" (p. 149). At the same time he professes agreement with Wells and Coghill—who themselves do not agree—on the Three Lives (pp. 102-06, 125-28). He commends Greta Hirt on "her excellent work on Piers Plowman, (p. 243, n. 3) and Owst on his book on the sermon literature and Piers (p. 104, n. 2).

Chambers uses Mensendieck's and Jones's discussion of ymagynatyf (pp. 138-40); he identifies the source of the lines of the Pardon, though he does not explore the implications of his discovery (p. 118); and he discusses the tradition that the pagan Trajan was permitted to enter Heaven, though he adds that Langland "interprets the baptism of the Spirit" as "a broad-minded Christian . . . in the present day"
(pp. 148-49). He explores further than Wells had the views of Aquinas and Hilton on the Three Lives and uses selected passages of Scripture quoted in Piers, e.g., "Psalm XV, 'the gentleman's psalm,'" (p. 119) and Psalm XLII, "a psalm of the penitent and vexed soul," to explicate the poem. He seems to believe that almost all the scholars are partially accurate, and he seems to try to find in the poem something for everybody.

As this survey of the scholarship appearing alongside and often as part of the authorship controversy has shown, the approaches of the scholars of the nineteenth century were not generally rejected, but tended to be incorporated into the larger consideration of the meaning of the poem. The controversy itself seems to have been sparked by attempts to understand the poem. More and more it became evident to scholars that without an understanding of the intellectual context of the fourteenth century--both what was thought and how it was thought--the poem could not be understood. The survey of Piers scholarship reveals the efforts of many scholars in these thirty-odd years to achieve these objectives.

An increasing number of scholars began exploring the poem, to the best of their knowledge, from the perspective of patristic and other religious writings and of allegory. In 1933 Gerald Owst, immersed in homiletic literature, asserts the necessity of knowing "intimately the 'social, theological and various' other ideas of the time . . . [and of coming] to the poem soaked in the contemporary language of expression, the characteristic phrases, imagery and
arguments of the popular literature of religion" (Lit. and Pulpit, p. 434, n. 5). Also in 1933, J. M. Campbell calls scholars of medieval literature to an even more basic preparation than a knowledge of the sermons that they may understand the literature—the knowledge of the Church Fathers. Aware that he is asking a great deal, he concludes:

If a familiarity with the work of these Fathers [Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory, Jerome, Isidore, Bernard] be too heavy a burden, much of the work being attempted should be abandoned until the Fathers are better organized philologically or an alliance should be made with patristic scholars, so that researchers in the one field may suggest useful research effort in the other. 74

Greta Hort, attempting to approach the poem from some knowledge of the Fathers and other theologians, especially of St. Thomas, is convinced that "if we want to enjoy reading Piers Plowman, we shall have to put ourselves into the right frame of mind for it, and read it in as medieval a way as we can" (p. 23). Many other scholars, particularly in the 1930's, concur to the extent of their own knowledge and awareness. Then in 1939 Morton Bloomfield in "Present State of Piers Plowman Studies" concludes his summary by pointing the direction for future endeavors: the most profitable approach to the study of Piers Plowman is "(1) the study of the meaning of Langland's words and lines, and (2) a general study of the backgrounds in folklore, art, theology, homilies, religious tractates, and various literatures, as well as in social and economic history" (p. 232). The purpose of such study is "to make possible a new understanding of the intellectual and social atmosphere of fourteenth century England" (p. 232). Few scholars
henceforth dare altogether ignore these injunctions. It is out of the differing conclusions scholars arrived at, as a result of such studies, that the controversy arose over the use of these studies in the interpretation of medieval literature.

For the next twenty years *Piers Plowman* scholars made a concerted effort to ascertain the milieu of the poem, though the New Criticism also began to make its impact. The earlier traditions re-appear from time to time—even the ones which seemed to have been dropped, refuted, or discarded—but usually in a more sophisticated form, incorporated into a larger, more comprehensive view of the poem. The tendency, whatever the assumptions and approach, is to extend the base and to draw from a wide range of scholarly traditions.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II


6 Theophilus D. Hall, "Was Langland the Author of the C-Text of the Vision of Piers Plowman?" MLR, 4 (1908), 1-13.

7 John Matthews Manly, "The Lost Leaf of 'Piers the Plowman,'" MP, 3 (1906), 359-66.


22 Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin, "Bishop Thomas Brunton and His Sermons," *Speculum* 14 (1939), 334.


28 Nevill Coghill, "Two Notes on Piers Plowman: The Abbot of Abingdon and the Date of the C-Text; Chaucer's Debt to Langland," Medium Aevum, 4 (1935), 89.


38 G. R. Owst, "The 'Angel' and the 'Goliardeys' of Langland's Prologue," MLR, 20 (1925), 273-75. Owst incorporate this article in a revised form into his book Literature and the Pulpit, pp. 284-88. Seeking to identify Haukyn as a historical person, Ingrid von Bonsdorff examines public records and decides that the family name was probably Hankyn; thus the work Haukyn is a scribal error. See Bonsdorff, "Haukyn or Hankyn," MP 26 (1928), 57-61.

39 Oscar Cargill, "The Date of the A-Text of 'Piers Plowman,'" PMLA, 47 (1932), 357-60.

40 Mildred Elizabeth Marcett, Uthred de Boldon, Friar William Jordan, and Piers Plowman (N.Y.: Published by the Author, 1938), p. 64.

42 Cyril Brett, "Notes on Old and Middle English," MLR, 22 (1927), 262.


49 Ikuzo Iijima, Chaucer and Langland (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1925), p. 44.


53 R. Hittmair, "Der Begriff der Arbeit bei Langland," Die Neueren Sprache (Festgabe für Luick), 6 (1925), 204-18.


67. Roberta Douglas Cornelius, "The Figurative Castle: A Study in the Mediaeval Allegory of the Edifice with Especial Reference to Religious Writings," Diss. Bryn Mawr 1933, pp. 31-32. In Bloomfield's section on source studies, he omits an article by William Gaffney which, because of its detailed summaries of parallels to Langland's "Christ-Knight" from such varied sources as romance, lyric, sermon, and manual, illustrates a general knowledge of this concept and of other images and motifs parallel to Piers. These parallels are suggested as possible sources and are not used to illuminate the poem.
by Gaffney, "The Allegory of the Christ-Knight in Piers Plowman, PMLA, 46 (1931), 155-68.


69. For examples of purely literal summaries, see George W. Stone, "An Interpretation of the A-Text of Piers Plowman, PMLA, 53 (1938), 656-77, and Hort, pp. 4-14.

70. K. Coghill, "Note and Observations: Langland, the 'Naket,' the 'Naujty,' and the Dole," RES, 8 (1932), 305.


CHAPTER III: CONCEPTIONS OF PIERS PLOWMAN, 1940 THROUGH 1960

By the 1940's it was almost universally acknowledged that Piers Plowman is basically a religious poem and must be dealt with as such. Given that, there has been great diversity and often sharp disagreement. The approach that Owst, Campbell, Hort, and Bloomfield called for, however, began leading scholars to the Church Fathers. In 1950 D. W. Robertson, Jr., delivered a paper, "Historical Criticism," at the English Institute, Columbia University, subsequently published in English Institute Essays¹ proposing not just the relevance, but the necessity of Biblical, patristic, and theological knowledge to an understanding of medieval literature. This paper was quickly supported by his articles "The Pearl as Symbol" (1950), "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens" (1951), and "Some Medieval Literary Terminology, with Special Reference to Chrétien de Troyes" (1951), and his and Bernard Huppé's book Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition (1951).² The basic issues are the way symbol, allegory, and personification function in medieval vernacular literature and the relevance of Biblical, patristic, and theological materials to the interpretation of secular poetry. By 1959 these issues had raised such interest and disagreement that they were debated at the English Institute by E. Talbot Donaldson, Robert E. Kaske, and Charles Donahue. Though the controversy is still very much alive in a veritable explosion of scholarly works on medieval literature, the basic premises of the disagreement were set forth by the disputants in 1960.
During the nineteenth century, when such scholars as Whitaker, Wright, and Skeat established the dominant approaches to *Piers Plowman*, the poem was treated primarily as a historical document or as a work of self-expression, not as a meaningful work in its own terms. By nature conservative, scholars have built upon these now traditional approaches. Thus, throughout the 1940's and 1950's, these traditions continued to be perpetuated, qualified, and often combined in a variety of ways.

A. Prophecy

1. Literal

An even older tradition—*Piers* as prophecy—also continued through this period in diverse forms. Henry Wells in *New Poets from Old* (1940) even repeats the old canard that Langland is "an incipient Protestant."³ That there are passages, notably Passus III.282-327, VIII.98-106, and X.317-22, 329-30, which are "prophetic" is clear, but the degree of emphasis placed on these passages and the interpretation are by no means uniform. Three general approaches have been taken to these passages between 1940 and 1960—the literal, the reformist, and the Messianic or apocalyptic. Though no other scholar takes quite the anachronistic view that Wells maintains, other scholars are as literal in their understanding of these passages. Huppé in 1947 and Donaldson in 1949 both suggest the possibility of a literal prophecy. Huppé in particular thinks it possible that the prophecy at the end of A-Text, Passus III, may have been a reference
to the hope of reform through the Good Parliament, a hope that by the
time Langland wrote the B-Text, however, "would have seemed a bitter
mockery." In 1959 in his note to lines in Passus V and XV, J. F.
Goodridge suggests the possibility that the poem anticipates "the
reformation of an earthly king."  

2. Reformist

Several other scholars regard the poem as socially influential,
intentionally or unintentionally. Helen White states, in Social
Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century
(1944), that her interest lies not in the poem itself, but in its
influence; she suggests that the poem and its title character embody
"a prophet's vision" of reform, the work of an idealist who always
runs the risk of influencing the revolutionary. In his 1950 lecture
A. H. Smith seems to concur with White's assessment that the poem
exerted "a powerful, if somewhat misleading, influence upon later
thinkers who did not . . . fully comprehend its meaning." Though
not dealing with the poem's influence, Douglas Bush in 1952 calls the
poet a "crusader and prophet" with a vision of what Christian England
ought to be. It is Henry A. Moe, however, whose apparently popular
lecture most emphasized the socio-juridical influence of the poem.
His lecture was given before and published by the American Philosophical
Society in 1958 and with only slight revisions given again at MLA and
published in the 1959 PMLA. His thesis is that Piers Plowman
"directly affected history" in that "the actual language of some
verses of that poem became the law of England and later of the United
States, and of all Anglo-American legal jurisdictions, to define what are and what are not valid purpose for [humanitarian] foundations" (p. 37, 1958; p. 371, 1959). That is, Piers provided the basis for subsequent tax-free foundations, or "organizations set up for charitable, educational, religious, and eleemosynary purposes" (p. 37, 1958; p. 371, 1959). Moe believes that the poem, through its influence on Wat Tyler and on Englishmen in general, changed social thinking from the otherworldly emphasis on prayers for souls to helping one's fellow man in need (pp. 39-41, 1958; pp. 373-75, 1959).

3. Messianic or apocalyptic

Some of these same scholars—notably Hupé and Goodridge—accept the possibility that the poet was foreseeing a literal reformation, but give emphasis to the Messianic or apocalyptic significance of various passages of Piers Plowman. Other scholars agree. Nevill Coghill in 1944 explains a series of passages in Piers as having to do with Christ's Second Coming, a point which Morton Bloomfield notes and commends in his 1947 review. A more comprehensive treatment of Piers as prophecy is Donaldson's 1949 study of the multi-faceted use of the word minstrel in the poem. His treatment relies heavily on a section of the C-Text (C.X.105-38) which is not in A- or B-; however, Donaldson believes that though the idea is most fully developed in C-, it is present in the two earlier texts. Citing the lines regarding the "mynstrales of heuene"—"meny tymes hem happe/h To propheciem . . ." (C.X.113-14)—and citing the OED for the meaning of prophet,
Donaldson suggests that the poet envisions himself as a prophet both in the sense of "speaking according to the will of God" and of foretelling future events, with the emphasis on the former. Robertson and Huppe in their 1951 book treat various passages apocalyptically, as warnings of the coming Day of Judgment (pp. 64, 72-73, 90, 125) and Margaret Schlauch (1956), while primarily interested in social conditions, notes that the poem contains some element of the apocalyptic. In the introduction and notes to his 1959 translation, J. F. Goodridge remarks on the apocalyptic connotations of Passus IV, V, X, and XVIII (pp. 19; 44-45; 328-29, n. 45; 338, n. 38; 359, n. 36). Of Conscience's language in Passus III and IV, he states that it is the "language of the prophet Isaiah, the realistic scene is combined with a Messianic prophecy of an ideal kingdom. . . ."
(p. 19). In 1960 Morton Bloomfield sets out to remedy the neglect of the apocalyptic in Piers which he remarked upon in his 1947 review. He gave a paper at MLA, published in The Centennial Review, in which he asserts that Piers Plowman is apocalyptic in its view of life and is perhaps generically an Apocalypse, or is an amalgam of several genres written by a poet with an apocalyptic perspective.

That there is, indeed, a prophetic or apocalyptic perspective in Piers seems unquestionable; the passages cited are explicitly so. The problem with this scholarly tradition in its older form is its literalness. That Henry Wells, who wrote an article to counter literal readings of the Vita, should by 1940 have so turned from that perspective is unfortunate. His is a combination of the discursive and the associationist treatment so characteristic of the nineteenth
century. In regard to Bloomfield's approach, R. E. Kaske precisely and perceptively reviews both its strengths and its weaknesses, remarking that "one inevitably suspects that a work involving six different genres ["allegorical dream narrative, dialogue, consolatio, or debate; and encyclopedic or Menippean satire" and "complaint, commentary, and sermon"], themselves subsumed under a questionable seventh, can in effect be said to belong to no genre at all." 14 Bloomfield's new information on context, his definitions, the emphasis he gives to the words of Lady Holy Church and to eschatological passages, however, are indeed helpful.

Another, almost equally old, tradition of Piers Plowman scholarship which continues to have its adherents is that of Piers as a document of the times. This tradition has been so broadened that it is in part accepted by almost all scholars. And well it should be. That a poem, like scholarship, is a product of its times as well as of its author is taken by most to be self-evident. A problem with this tradition has been that it tended to lead the reader from the poem to a discursive or fanciful reading, sometimes both. Still another problem has been the matter of focus. Almost no one any longer, however, still considers it to be merely a document. Even so, some medievalists of distinction and writers of literary histories still emphasize this tradition and its younger sister tradition, topical allegory. Though Bernard Huppé (1941), J. A. W. Bennett (1943, two articles), and Aubrey Gwynn (1943) all continue the attempt to date the texts on the basis of historical allusion, Huppé and Bennett, at least, are aware that the poem is more than a document, as their subsequent works on the poem reveal.
B. Topical Allegory

The modern tradition of Piers Plowman as topical allegory, so closely related to the use of the poem as a historical document, is obviously maintained by Huppe, Bennett, and Gwynn in their articles dating the poem. And Huppe even as late as 1947 still writes that the "bitterly ironic" rat-mice parliament was included because of the failure of the Good Parliament of 1377; but, he adds, it contributes toward the poet's picture of a "corrupt and venal" world (pp. 582-83). His 1949 article "Piers Plowman: the Date of the B-Text Reconsidered," however, deals strictly with dating the text on the basis of topical historical allusion. A scholar now and then continues this tradition. R. W. Rauch's article in The Review of Politics (1943) discusses the rat-mice parliament as an allegorical treatment of "the monarchic crisis of 1377, when the powerful barons threatened the deposition of aged Edward III and the establishment of a regency for the boy Richard II." Rauch treats the poem, however, in the context of medieval Christian thought even though his primary concern is the political structure of medieval England.

The most extreme view, directly continuing the tradition of topical allegory of Allan Bright (1928), is Ladislav Cejp's An Introduction to the Study of Langland's Piers the Plowman, B-Text (1956). By finding anagrams in line after line of Piers, he "discovers" that the poet's real name was Robert de Rokayle and that "William Langland was his assumed name." He finds references in further anagrams to such figures as Wat Tyler, Chaucer, Wycliffe, John of Gaunt, and John Ball.
No other scholar even approximates this point of view. Yet Bloomfield makes use of Bright and Marcett in his very tentative 1943 attempt to identify the poet as a Benedictine monk, and Howard Meroney in 1950, discussing the poet's delight in word play, cites the "jibe at Friar William Jordan" and, with some reservations, Huppe's discussion of "the allusion to Alice Perrers in the A-Text." Not considering the author a careful artist, Meroney is not troubled by "such petty things" (p. 6). Knott and Fowler's "Explanatory Note" to their A-Text (1952) continues the long-standing practice of identifying allegorical characters as historical figures. Citing Bennett's 1943 *PMLA* article, they note that the reference to the king's son in Passus IV is "presumably" the Black Prince and Conscience is John of Gaunt. Similarly, Goodridge's "Notes to Text" of his 1959 translation treats the Prologue and Passus II and III as historical allegory, citing Skeat's notes (1886), Jusserand's *Piers Plowman* (1894), Owst's *Literature and the Pulpit* (1933), and Bennett's two 1943 articles.

C. Portrait of the Times

Most scholars who regard the poem as a portrait of the times are not so specific as the topical allegorists. But two other distinct groups make mention, at least, of Piers as a portrait of the times. One group of these scholars with all their diversity of approaches, assumptions, and concerns agrees that *Piers Plowman* is a unified work written with a religious consciousness and purpose. The other group regards the poem as planless or uncontrolled. Chambers, who had been studying *Piers Plowman* prior to and during the 1930's, maintains the
same general positions he expressed earlier, including his position on the unity of the poem. His 1941 lecture reaffirms what he had stated in 1939, that the poem "contains much satire," by which he seems to mean a picture of the corruption of the time, but that its aim, like Dante's, is to lead those living in "the state of wretchedness . . . to the state of blessedness."\textsuperscript{22} By 1944 Coghill has in some ways significantly changed his conception of the poem. Though he continues to develop his allegorical reading of the poem in his study of the pardon scene, he now regards the poem as "Langland's survey or vision of his England" (p. 50) and refers to "topical narrative allegories . . . about the moral condition of England . . ." (p. 68). Contrary to his earlier statements about the author's reticence in personal and topical allusion, he now considers each of the seven deadly sins "a source-book for the social historian" (p. 47). Again in the appendix to his 1949 translation of the poem, Coghill states, "It [Piers] is a picture of fourteenth-century England judged by the standards of Christianity."\textsuperscript{23}

From the 1940's through 1960, however, numerous scholars increasingly express reservation about such literal identifications and even question the validity of taking the poem to be an accurate portrait of the times. Not only are the possible historical references subordinated to the purpose of the poem, but also these references are difficult to distinguish from satiric rhetorical conventions. Most believe, therefore, that the references must be carefully verified by a source outside the poem, and absolute verification is difficult indeed. At the same time that the historicity of details within
Piers are being questioned, almost all who refer to the poem in relation to fourteenth-century social conditions see it as a religious, or Christian, poem—regardless of whether they believe Piers Plowman to be structureless, planned but uncontrolled, or carefully structured. Huppé himself does not reject historical allusion, but does agree in his 1951 book written with D. W. Robertson, Jr., that the "historical suggestions...are illustrative rather than structurally fundamental" (p. 51, n. 6). Even earlier, in 1948, Albert Baugh in his Literary History of England expresses doubt about the topical allusions. In the following year, 1949, Donaldson discusses in some detail the scholarship on historical allusions and topical allegory and concludes that despite the fact that "ninety-nine one-hundredths of the poem is far removed from anything political," certain scholars have made it appear to be a "medieval Absalom and Achitophel" (p. 87). Though the allusions may be interesting to pursue, they are "valuable only so long as the identifications fit the known facts without having to read between the lines or to pervert the obvious sense in order to achieve our ends" (p. 111). He warns against seeing allusions everywhere, against ignoring "any independent meaning the passage may have, or...[against adopting] too readily the attitude that it means nothing unless we can identify the reference" (p. 111; see also pp. 112-16). But then he acknowledges that there probably are general allusions, for he would not present the author "as altogether blind to what was going on about him" (p. 116).
Yet after these objections in Chapter Four, in Chapter Seven Donaldson curiously remarks that an "attempt to test the historical authenticity of any of the details of fourteenth-century life would seem, at the very least, an act of ingratitude," and that social historians, among whom he notes Jusserand, Coulton, and Chadwick, have held *Piers* in high regard "as an original source of information concerning medieval England" (p. 201). "[W]e must," he concludes, "regard him as something of an expert on his times" (p. 202). These statements do not seem consistent with Donaldson's earlier warning against searching for topical allusions (pp. 87, 111-16) and his insistence that the reader "must remember that *Piers Plowman* in all its forms deals with matters *subspecie aeternitatis* and to read it without bearing this in mind is to misread it" (p. 80). Donaldson, however, does not always maintain a consistent point of view from chapter to chapter. Perhaps the explanation in part is his admission that he, like Chambers, is more interested in the "personality" the poem reveals than he is in the poem itself (p. 199). Also like Donaldson and Chambers in his interest in the poet, George Kane's admittedly "personal" view of the poet (1951) encompasses the value of the poem to the historian because of its presentation of fourteenth-century life. Nonetheless, a poet who believes in the wickedness of his day and whose imagination plays with the idea of a golden age, does not offer a "complete picture" or a "cross section" of his day. In one of the several Chambers Memorial Lectures on *Piers Plowman* given at University College, London, A. H. Smith in 1950 remarks on "its rich display of contemporary social and historical material" and points out that an understanding of
contemporary history is essential to an understanding of the poem (p. 6). The historical material is, nevertheless, subordinate to a work whose theme is "the Search for Truth and Salvation" (p. 6). As Donaldson and Kane seem most influenced by Chambers, Smith's approach is similar to Bloomfield's 1939 assertion that the poet is "universalizing" the conditions and situations of his day in a manner similar to a medieval preacher.

Derek A. Traversi's views by 1954 seem especially influenced by Coghill in his discussion of the allegory of Piers and by Owst in his discussion of its rhetoric; for Traversi the poem "is in the first place, and above all, the reflection of society and a civilization." By "society and civilization," though, he is speaking of the poem not as a mere social document, but as the embodiment of allegorical thinking in a profoundly religious work (pp. 144-46). John Speirs in 1957, like Traversi a student of F. R. Leavis but unlike Traversi a mythic critic, asserts that the scenes within the poem are "both a spiritual wilderness and contemporary London," a combination of the realistic and symbolic which is "characteristic of much medieval poetry." In the notes to his 1959 translation, Goodridge supplements Skeat's notes regarding historical allusions primarily with information from Bennett's articles (Goodridge, pp. 322, 323, 324, 362, et passim), but, agreeing with Coghill and making some use of Robertson and Huppe, H. W. Wells, Dawson, Owst, Dunning, Chambers, Maguire, and others—often not very coherently integrated—he regards the main thrust of the poem to be "the most important of all questions possible to the Christian, namely 'How can a man win salvation?'" (Coghill, as quoted
by Goodridge, p. 11). A. C. Hamilton's 1958 article on Spenser and Langland parallels passages from Piers Plowman and Book I of The Faerie Queene, asserting that both poems combine "allegory of contemporary events" with a "vision of the world as the Inferno" and the search for "how I may save my soule."\(^{28}\)

In 1951 Robertson and Huppé state, note, and allude to the reflection of contemporary life in the poem. The political allusions are, they believe, "illustrative," but not "structurally fundamental (pp. 51, n. 6, 62). More basic thematically is the friar-secular controversy (pp. 7-8, 234). They insist that the reader most needs to understand the tradition of Biblical commentary to understand the poem (pp. 1-16). Alfred Kellogg (1958), in agreement with their approach and, thus, examining the poem in relation to the commentaries, states that "Langland was very much a part and observer of the world of his time, but he existed simultaneously and perhaps even more fully in a world of Biblical interpretation and allusion."\(^{29}\)

While varying in their emphases and assumptions, a second group of scholars can be loosely grouped under three categories: they base their studies on scholarship prior to Chambers's and Coghill's; they agree that the poem is a picture of its time from a religious perspective, and most of them agree that the poem is formless or, if planned, not coherently executed. Typical of these scholars, H. S. Bennett (1947) considers the poet "careless" of his art but "careful" to present in his uneducated way his "deep knowledge of the England of his day" in order to induce England to become "a Christian country."\(^{30}\) George K. Anderson, in his Old and Middle English Literature (1950) recalls
Coulton's and Skeat's terms regarding Piers as a vivid "panorama of medieval society in England," an impressive "human document," "a realistic picture of the life of its time," and though "not a work of art," still "a great social document."\(^{31}\) Despite his emphasis, however, Anderson is well aware that this is only part of the poem: "... its purpose is primarily didactic ... in the manner of the medieval teacher who desires to emphasize the contemptus mundi" (p. 162). Tillyard, in The English Epic (1954), agrees that the Visio "mainly concerns contemporary England" while the primary concern of the poem as a whole is "salvation and ... the earthly pilgrimage"; and, unhappily, since none of the versions is complete, it is difficult to make out how the separate parts of the poem relate to one another.\(^{32}\) Margaret Schlauch (1956) and David Daiches (1960) both regard the poem as a social document which gradually becomes more and more obscure in the later part.\(^{33}\) Schlauch calls it "[t]he most important literary document picturing the social and religious agitation of the fourteenth century ... ." (p. 213), recording the misery of both city and rural life, but from the perspective of the poet's religious principles (p. 216). Daiches repeats Manly's remark on the vivid portrayal of the medieval tavern and praises its social realism (pp. 124-26), but also calls the poem in its "search for the good life, for salvation, for truth, and for God ... [a] psychomachia" (p. 126). The concern of Mary Eliason's 1951 article, "The Peasant and the Lawyer," in which she uses both Langland's and Chaucer's poems as documents, is purely sociological, but she acknowledges that Langland's poem is religious.\(^{34}\)
The sociologist G. C. Homans is one of the few who still treat *Piers* without giving some recognition of it as a Christian poem. In *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (1941), using *Piers* purely as a historical document with little awareness of medieval thought, he calls Langland "left-wing" and a "sentimentalist," who writes for the common man in the contemporary class struggle.35

Thus by the 1940's, even more in the fifties and sixties, scholars by and large have become quite conscious of *Piers Plowman* as a religious poem; and while most agree that it reflects in some sense the time in which it was written, they regard the use of the poem as a socio-historical document as risky and limited. They were given support by M. L. Levy in 1943 in his article, "As Myn Auctor Seyth," in which he argues that medieval man did not make the modern distinction between history and fable, or fiction.36 Several scholars explicitly question or deny the validity of *Piers* as a picture of fourteenth-century life, in part continuing the objections of Owen, Owst, and Hort. In 1947 Huppé, even while identifying political and social events, denies that the poem is "concerned merely with . . . satirical descriptions"--even in the *Visio* (pp. 587, 600). It is not social and political satire, but a picture of the corrupt world, "the civitas terrena" (p. 583), and this picture shows the struggle against evil which is a part of the process of educating Will to bring him to salvation (pp. 600-04). Gordon Hall Gerould (1948) is very nearly in agreement with Huppé. He too sees the poem as the education of Will and the so-called picture of the times as a picture of "the very present evils of his own age--and ours."37 Gerould warns that this work must not be read as a social
document (p. 62). R. E. Kaske, in 1951, questions whether the material is historical. He doubts that Lady Meed can be historically identified because the "figurative presentation of such material is of course a commonplace of medieval didactic literature." Elizabeth Suddaby (1955) rejects the idea that Piers is to be considered useful to the social historian, as a "puzzling allegory," or as a theological and spiritual work. To her it simply "gives pleasure." A. G. Mitchel in his 1956 lecture rejects outright the identification of Lady Meed with Alice Perrers or Conscience with John of Gaunt. Such biographical interpretations as Huppé's and Bennett's, he avers, "distort our understanding of the allegory. . . ." R. H. Bowers in 1959 begins his article with Gerould's admonition that Piers must not be read as a social document. Like Huppé and Gerould, he regards the poem as an education poem, according to Bowers, a "wholly traditional" education poem in the genre which is derived from Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. Alvin Kernan's book on satire, The Cankered Muse (1957), asserts that the devices of this and similar medieval poems--"dream, prophecy, pilgrimage, vision, quest . . . direct our attention to the symbolic scene of human folly and vice." Reading such poems as social documents leads away from the poem to questions of whether the society of the day was really so "debased," and thus "criticism of satire degenerates into discussion of . . . the economic and social conditions of his [the author's] time" (p. 2).

To questions and criticism about the historicity of Piers Plowman, the eminent historian, Gervase Mathew, as early as 1948 had responded:
"It is hard to reconstruct in detail the social and economic history of late fourteenth-century England. There is so much evidence and so much of it appears to be conflicting." He considers the details of London life in Piers Plowman most likely literary convention (p. 362). Mathew's view is reinforced by John Peter in Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature, who categorizes Piers as "complaint," a genre closely related to the sermon and, in fact, developed by the Church Fathers. Unlike satire, which is concrete and personal, complaint is conceptual and impersonal. Langland's poem consists of "commonplaces of medieval religion" (p. 9). Further reinforcing these views, G. D. G. Hall's brief article on B.X.326-7, "The Abbot of Abingdon and the Tenants of Winkfield" (1959), points out that, contrary to Coghill's argument in "Two Notes on Piers Plowman" (1935, pp. 83-89), the Abbot Coghill writes of was a highly respected man. Thus, though some few scholars persist in reading Piers Plowman as a social, political, and economic portrait of England, they do so in the face of formidable opposition. Robertson and Huppé's note that such "historical suggestions... are illustrative rather than structurally fundamental" (p. 51, n. 6) is probably accurate. But those who focus on these illustrations as literally accurate in order to examine the social, political, religious, or economic situation of the late fourteenth century are likely to be in error. That the poem is rooted in its age and, as a result, tells something about the life of its time is undeniable. Nevertheless, William A. Irwin's statement about the historical nature of the Old Testament may, perhaps to a lesser extent, be applicable to a study of Piers Plowman
as history: "We can no longer doubt . . . [its] factual basis, but he would be a bold spirit who would undertake to delineate that basis."46

D. Autobiography

With Piers Plowman still examined as prophecy, as a portrait of the times, and as topical allegory, one would expect to find the poem treated as an autobiography either literal, spiritual, or both. And so it is. Chambers, now joined by Coghill, Donaldson, and Kane, continues an eclectic approach which accepts the Biblical and even the patristic context of Piers Plowman, but which also accepts the nineteenth-century assumption that poetry is autobiography or self-expression. Three of these scholars--Chambers, Donaldson, and Kane--are primarily interested in the poet rather than in the poem (Coghill is a partial exception). The influence of these scholars alone is sufficient to keep this approach alive. In 1939, both in his essay, "Robert or William Langland," and in his book, Man's Unconquerable Mind, Chambers had spoken directly and forcefully to the question of the identity of Will.47 In fact, the article is a polemic written to demonstrate that in medieval dream visions the author always "claims . . . to be the dreamer" and that no fictional figure "distinct from the writer . . . can have been in his [the writer's] mind" (p. 440). Chambers's 1941 lecture, "Poets and Their Critics," maintains this same assumption: in Piers Plowman "one man unlocks his heart"--"a broken heart" because of the state of the Church (pp. 123, 127). The poem is, as he earlier stated, a Wordsworthian autobiography (see esp.
Coghill, as he changed his opinion of the poet's revelation of his times, also changed his opinion of Langland's revelation of himself. By 1944, he, like Chambers, has become interested in the workings of the poet's mind and in the poem as "a spiritual biography: in which the poet "leaves on record the prejudices of his youth in all their insolence and passes on to his maturity and the change of his views" ("The Pardon," pp. 77-78). That record is presented through various characters: the lunatic of the Prologue and the ignorant vicar of Passus XIX.417, who are "the poem himself" or a "mouthpiece of the poet," stating his "political creed" (pp. 63, 161); such "ghostly advisors" as "Thought--Wit--Study--Learning--Scripture," representing stages in the growth of "his own maturing mind" (pp. 55, 71); and *ymagynatyf*, his power "in middle age to see the images of memory in their true perspective" (p. 77). In the appendix to his 1949 translation, Coghill reaffirms these views. Following his visionary allegorical survey of England, the "dreaming poet" presents his "meditations" (Visions, p. 132). That Coghill is still identifying the various characters with the poet is shown by his use of Clergy's statement about theology (B.X.180): "He [Langland] himself admits freely that theology has troubled him 'many score times'" (Visions, p. 134).

In the same year that Coghill's translated excerpts were published, E. Talbot Donaldson joined forces with Coghill and Chambers via his book entitled *Piers Plowman: The C-Text and Its Poet*, in which he discusses all three texts from the perspective of C-. Throughout the book, the assumption, made explicit from time to time, is that in B-,
as in the other texts, the "one man" Will argues, "draws a rash conclusion," acts foolishly, "and then, chastened, returns to the argument in order to draw from it a more constructive conclusion. But it is the same man all the time--the Dreamer, or the poem himself" (p. 173). Permeated as it is by references to the poem as autobiography, Donaldson's book, not surprisingly, concludes with the chapter, "Autobiographical Material." In it he states his primary interest:

The reader of Piers Plowman is almost inevitably seduced into making speculations about its author, so curiously provocative and attractive is the personality that casts its shadow upon every page of the poem. Indeed, for the modern reader the strong sense of personality is one of the poem's greatest charms (p. 199).

Referring to his discussion of minstrels in an earlier chapter, Donaldson considers Langland embarrassed by appearing to lead the kind of life that he condemns (p. 224). Then, in the conclusion to this chapter, exclaiming over Langland's "apologia pro vita sua," this editor-critic reveals his perception of Langland's character:

[Here is] a brilliant portrait of the personality of a man who knew himself well[: his] . . . hit-or-miss way of life . . . ; his inability to justify himself either for writing or for begging, and his perfectly obvious intention to go right on doing both so long as they are necessary to his search for Truth; and finally his faith that, no matter how deceived by himself and tricked by the world, he can somewhere and sometime arrive at the end of his quest and justify the means by which it was carried on . . . . (p. 226, Donaldson's italics).

Whatever else may be said about this perception, Donaldson here appears to contradict himself in his statements that the author was "deceived by himself" and "knew himself well."
George Kane, one of the co-editors (with Chambers and Donaldson) of the *Piers* texts and in agreement with Donaldson on the interest of the modern reader, carries on the autobiographical tradition in his admittedly "subjective approach" in *Middle English Literature*, published in 1951 (p. viii). The avowed purpose of the book is to make Middle English poems "real," as opposed to "quarries." Any plan or symbolism within the poems, he asserts, is "best understood in terms of an analysis not of themselves but of the highly individual art and personality of the author"; basic to an understanding of these is "consideration of every single feature of his work and temperament" (p. 184). Kane maintains that no matter how well a scholar may know fourteenth-century Christian doctrine, he cannot understand the poem unless "he knows the personality" of the author because he cannot know what the author's view of that doctrine would have been (p. 184). He thus "analyzes" the poem in terms of the "emotional, the intellectual, and the moral sides of the poet's religious temperament," at times in conflict with, at other times in harmony with his "poetic impulse." These appear in various combinations throughout the poem, accounting for its unevenness in poetic quality. Various passages are the result of "a religious and moral, a religious and emotional, a religious and intellectual impulse, and an artistic impulse" (pp. 208-09, 233, *et passim*). Kane's study reveals to him that the author

had the quality that often goes with faults of carelessness over-impulsiveness, namely a generous, unselfconscious temperament; that he was made artistically great by a poetic vision of unusual power . . . ; that strength and
kindliness tempered one another in his character; that he was utterly serious about his high purpose and could yet see the ludicrousness in himself; and that he accepted the failure which almost of necessity was his lot in life without sacrificing to it the loftiness of his principles (p. 248).

As one compares assessments of the character of the author by biographical scholars, it seems evident that such a "subjective approach" tells more about the values and interests of the scholar than it does about the poem or about the man who wrote it. 48

Though no other scholar during these twenty years tries to present such an analysis of the character of the author, several maintain in one form or another the assumption that Will, the dreamer, is to be identified with William Langland, the author. In his "Piers Plowman': The Pardon Reconsidered" (1950), John Lawlor clearly indicates his agreement with Coghill and Chambers. The poem is composed of two parts: a "satirical fable" followed by an autobiographical-philosophical poem in which the author recounts his "arduous search for the truth." 49 H. S. Bennett's remarks in 1947 recall the view of Jusserand and other early scholars: the poet's "limited education" was, no doubt, the cause of his insularity and of his having to spend "all his life at the miserable business of a hireling mass-priest . . ." (p. 30). Partially in the Manly tradition, George K. Anderson (1950) believes that the A-Text references "to the author as Will" are to be taken as "the Christian name William," and though Anderson has reservations, he thinks it probable that "Will (Langland or whoever else)" wrote A- and that it was subsequently revised by others (p. 158). Mary Eliason (1951) refers to Will as the poet (p. 510), and D. A. Traversi (1954) accepts the conventional
biographical data (p. 129), but neither is interested in the poet per se. From the self-expressive and psycho-analytic school, E. M. W. Tillyard (1954) refers to Will's reply to Ymagynatyf as Langland's own assertion "that occasional recreation may fit a man for more serious things." In his 1951 article "The Pardon Scene in Piers Plowman, basically accepting C. S. Lewis's view of allegory, R. W. Frank explicitly asserts that the Dreamer is "the poet himself" and in his 1957 book reveals the further assumption that such characters as Clergy as well as the Dreamer speak for the author. ^51

E. Aesthetics

Scholars who hold to the autobiographical and self-expressive tradition, as one might expect, maintain various other nineteenth-century assumptions about poetry: that it is non-intellectual, non-rational, or non-logical; that it is the product of emotion, fantasy, or the imagination, parts of it exhibiting originality and imaginative intensity; that it is written for relief, pleasure, or both; that it is a dramatic process poem which reveals Will, the poet-dreamer, working through ideas as he confronts them; that, as a poet, he shares with other poets superior perceptions or intuitions (see Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind, pp. 89, 148). Henry Wells (1940), now in agreement with Chambers, writes of poets as men outside of time with common concerns and sympathy: "Lucretius and Seneca, Dante, Langland and Spenser . . .--[a]ll poets attempting to pluck out the mystery of life with the aid of heroic fable, must so far as they are aware of each other at all, feel a community of spirit" (p. 177). To be sure,
he acknowledges that Langland uses "scholastic and patristic imagery," but many of these images are "unorthodox" and Langland's symbolic treatment of the plowman is free and original. A poet comparable to Hart Crane, Langland draws images "from mysticism, from colloquialism, and from his own fancy" (p. 117). Chambers (1941), of course, assumes that the poem contains the poet's feelings about the life he observes (see esp. pp. 121-27), and Coghill in his 1944 article and in his 1949 appendix to *Visions from Piers Plowman* concurs. Coghill makes explicit that *Piers* is neither a public poem nor an altogether successful process poem; it records how Langland "grappled" with problems as they "arose before him" ("The Pardon," p. 68). The "tangles of theology and speculation" sometimes diminish but never extinguish the poet's "poetic force" (*Visions*, p. 134). This diminution, Coghill explains, is due to the fact that poets find it "easier to express [their ideas] visually than logically" (p. 135). Donaldson in 1949 sets forth views comparable to those of Chambers. Like Chambers, he sees Langland in a Wordsworthian context; the poem is the product of the poet's "eye, and ear, --both what they half create, / And what perceive . . .," or, as Donaldson phrases it, the product of "a powerful poetic mind" acting upon "the sights and sounds of the world around him" (pp. 144; 144, n. 6; and 273). This work allegorically reveals both the poet and his view of the world, but this allegory "must not--indeed cannot--be read with the intellect alone, but must be interpreted by a sympathetic imaginative process" (p. 185).

No other scholar, however, reveals a range of nineteenth-century assumptions comparable to those of George Kane. In his 1951 consideration of the "experiences of life" of authors "whose emotions and
aspirations were as real and as important in every sense as our own" (p. viii), he discusses not the poems but the poets and his own responses. Langland is a "poetic genius" whose "stern religion" could not wholly repress his "genuine poetic inspiration," nor his "passionate if guilty love of poetry" (pp. 191, 208, 211). Reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's incredulity, Kane explains that "in the intelligent man, however devout, the mind had an existence independent of religion, and demanded satisfaction in the fulfillment of its function."

Langland, consequently, took "pleasure" in his speculations despite the "nagging doubt about the propriety of his literary activity" (pp. 207, 212). As is "the nature of the poet," Langland needed "to establish his identity by publishing his opinions, and to satisfy a vanity, dependent upon literary achievement, of whose existence he was probably not aware" (p. 212). He had an "urge to poetry," a "need to create," an "intense imagination" and a "passionate attachment" to "poetic creation" which could produce "striking emotional and artistic effects" and passages of "intense emotional force," passages of "a dramatic and not a moral insight," and even "occasional moments of felicitous expression" (pp. 190, 192, 207, 208, 232, 233). The passages Kane quotes he considers "[p]oetically" to be "probably the best" (p. 233). Some of these poetic passages "moved" Langland to a "romantic regret for this greatness [of pre-Christian men] and beauty [of lovely women] that comes to naught" (p. 232). The "transforming fancy" of Langland was so powerful that his "fiercely logical religiosity" was not able to stifle it (p. 207). This chapter on Piers Plowman, as well as the book generally, is, thus, a veritable repository of nineteenth-century poetic theories and assumptions.
Here one finds poetry construed as beautiful passages of intensity which are products of the imagination, the emotions, or the fancy (whether taken to be the same or several is not clear). Despite uneasiness and even guilt caused by stern, rigid religiosity, the poet is impelled by inspiration, imagination, or "urges" (again, whether the same or several is not clear) to create original, non-moral, insightful lines which reveal a sympathy which his religion would, but could not extinguish.

The assumptions of other scholars are not so transparent. Their assumptions, nevertheless, are evident in their approach to the poem, in their emphases, and in their terminology. Scholars of the mid-century tend to be less effusive than earlier ones, or as D. W. Robertson states in his Preface to Chaucer, they have "calmed the more violent expression of the early romantic" (p. 51). In 1948 Gordon Hall Gerould insists that the poem "be read as a poem" whose author is "a devout and earnest Christian" (p. 62). John Lawlor in 1950 similarly objects to reading Piers as something other than a poem (p. 449). Derek Traversi's revised version of his 1936 article, published in Boris Ford's The Age of Chaucer (1954), illustrates well this more moderate response to the poem. Traversi, nevertheless, still admires the "direct personal emotion" (p. 130), still compares Langland's language to D. H. Lawrence's (p. 134), still admires the "unchecked" flow of words concerning the "treacle of heaven," "plant of peace," and "point of a needle," where, says Traversi, one finds "language . . . a finely integrated experience, alive and sensitive to every point of contact, and crystallizing suavely into poetry"
(p. 143). Though the revision is more explicitly focused on the poem, Traversi is obviously writing from the assumptions of the associationists. A. C. Hamilton, in 1956, is even more restrained in his parallel analysis of Piers Plowman and Book I of The Faerie Queene, but he too writes of the "imaginative intensity" of the two poets (p. 545). In 1960 in his dissertation, David Van Harrington analyzes Langland's characterization. Like Gerould before him, he too asserts that Piers Plowman must be read "as a poem" which has as its concern the examination of "the problem of attaining salvation."52

From 1950 to 1955 several essays appeared on Piers which recall the poetic automatism of Hazlitt and Blake combined with the playing pushpin of Bentham. Howard Meroney (1950), despite his exploration of the poem in terms of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages of spirituality, assumes that Langland wrote for "pleasure" and "solace" (pp. 6, 8). Revealing himself to be one of this school in his chapter on Piers in The English Epic and Its Background (1954), E. M. W. Tillyard asserts, "He [Langland] wrote consciously to teach, unconsciously to ease his mind of its burden" (p. 158); in his 1959-60 series of lectures, (now additionally influenced by the mythic critics) he speaks of Langland's "free and new treatment of . . . myth" (p. 43). In 1955 Elizabeth Suddaby, another scholar in the tradition of poetry as pleasurable vicarious experience, quoting Lawlor, makes known her antipathy to viewing Piers as a social document, a "puzzling allegory," or a "vehicle of certain great theological and spiritual truths" rather than as "a work which gives pleasure and which can be read and re-read with a sense of exhilaration and discovery" (p. 91).
The assumptions of still another group of scholars, are not identical (though they are similar) to the assumptions of those who, following the lead of R. W. Chambers, read Piers as a Wordsworthian poem. This group of scholars differs from Chambers in that their focus is on the poem itself. Because of their wealth of knowledge and their long-time attention to Piers Plowman, several of these scholars are still making their mark on Piers scholarship. Regardless of their knowledge, they either ignore or reject what D. W. Robertson carefully explains in his 1950 English Institute paper, his articles, and his and Huppe's book on Piers. These ideas are more forcefully expressed later in the introduction to A Preface to Chaucer (1962) through contrasting medieval and romantic poetic theory. Robertson believes that one is not to sympathize or empathize with a character in a medieval work, nor is he to share the character's experience vicariously: he is not to be "moved" nor to gain a hedonistic-aesthetic experience. The "appeal" of medieval art "is intellectual rather than emotional." A work is "devised to stimulate thought rather than emotion."53

It is obvious, of course, that scholars writing before 1962 could not have known A Preface to Chaucer, but as early as the 1890's scholars were calling attention to the "prosaic heresy," not to mention the subsequent appeals to fellow scholars to inform themselves of the context in which medieval literature was written. Knowledge of this context has bit by bit been made at least partially accessible. Yet John Lawlor in both his 1950 and his 1957 articles, like Chambers, compares Piers Plowman to the romantic autobiographical-philosophical poem and, like
Coghill, regards *Piers* as a process poem. The very title of his second article, "The Imaginative Unity of *Piers Plowman*," reveals the presuppositions he brings to the poem. A. G. Mitchel, another of the co-editors of *Piers*, in his 1956 lecture on Lady Mead, continuously refers to her as a "woman" as he discusses the dramatic process involved in the revelation of her character. Allegory, he asserts, is the "art of implication," and a poet "moves" rather than informs his reader (pp. 3, 25, *et passim*). Both scholars evidently read *Piers* as a vicarious experience. Elizabeth Zeeman [Salter] in "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," published in 1958, even with her awareness that "the deepest . . . [interpretation of the poem] is of a most subtle spirituality," nevertheless, finds that "the great imaginative motif," the pilgrimage, is to be taken "by reader and poet-dreamer no less than by Piers and his crowd of penitent, stumbling pilgrims."54 This statement alone does not demonstrate that she reads for vicarious experience, but she then contrasts the "poet-allegorist" who works dramatically "with the greatest freedom and imaginative range" with the prose writer: "Langland's allegory cannot long remain purely didactic [as it is when Christ appears in Piers's human nature]; its natural movement is towards drama" (pp. 1, 14). Guided by this "instinct for drama," Langland never allows his reader to "lose touch for long with the warm humanity of the plowman" who "leads us irresistibly through an experience as rich as it is sometimes perplexing and challenging" (p. 16). Another scholar who explains medieval literature in terms of modern life and, thus, reads *Piers* vicariously is R. H. Bowers in his "*Piers Plowman* and the Literary Historians"
Though he makes a case for reading *Piers* as a Boethian "education poem," he seeks to explain what he regards as its "sprawling" structure by comparing it to the education of John Stuart Mill, concluding that this "great work of imaginative literature" is of necessity "dramatic" and must be "confused" and "sprawling" in order accurately to present the process of education (pp. 3-4). In a brief statement in an otherwise historical article in 1958, Morton Bloomfield, whose knowledge and influence have given great impetus to *Piers Plowman* studies, quotes with approval E. Talbot Donaldson's statement at the end of an article on *Piers* texts to the effect that the three versions extant are probably accidents in that, doubtless, the author continued to revise his work till his death. Unlike Donaldson, however, who regards the texts as revisions of the poem, not of the plan, Bloomfield views the poem as the record of Langland's never-ending quest for perfection ("*Piers Plowman* and the Three Grades of Chastity," p. 228), in spite of the fact that he had objected on precisely this basis (that *Piers* is a process poem) to Coghill's "The Pardon of Piers Plowman" (Review, pp. 463-64). In 1959 J. F. Goodridge attempts to synthesize as many scholarly views as possible in the appendix to his translation. Though he rejects the biographical approach, to him the poet is an original "maker" whose purpose is both "to discover the truth for himself" and to convey this truth to others, i.e., *Piers* is both a personal and a public poem. As such, it is a dramatic process poem in which the poet "mixes realism with fantasy." Like other critics of this group, he asserts that, though the poem is not polysemous allegory, it has no one interpretation (pp. 12-14, *et passim*). He seeks
to take a mid-course between the analyses of the formalists and aestheticist, on the one hand, and the analyses of the patrists and patristic-allegorists, on the other—with sometimes incisive, sometimes incongruous results.

It thus can be seen that, in spite of the emphasis on penetrating the meaning of this universally acknowledged medieval religious poem and in spite of the growth in recognition of its allegorical and patristic context, the approach to Piers Plowman by its editors and by many knowledgeable scholars remains partially modern. The interest is in vicarious experience, "in tensions," in the "dynamic quest," in the "sympathetic response to . . . real or imagined difficulties" of Will and Piers and in Will's "striving towards a goal" (see Robertson, Preface, pp. 37-51). The poem is not studied as "a problem to be solved" through its "enigmatical arrangement of visible things which . . . serve to call attention to an invisible truth," a work "devised to stimulate thought" (pp. 15, 48).

Scholars before Robertson, however, rejected assumptions of the poet as autobiographer and of the poem as vicarious experience. As early as 1946 Leo Spitzer, in "Note on the Poetic and Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors," forcefully argues that the "I" persona in medieval literature represents, not the author, but "mankind": it was so written and so understood. In the following year, 1947, Bertrand Bronson responds directly to Samuel Johnson's misunderstanding of "Lycidas" and then—as does Spitzer—to C. S. Lewis's misunderstanding of allegory and symbolism. Bronson's article, "Personification Reconsidered," is a reinforcement and an extension in time of Spitzer's
discussion of the use of personal, fabricated, or borrowed experience in any combination for didactic—never for self-expressive—purposes. Even though Bronson's article focuses on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature, the perspective and assumptions are derived from the same general sources as those of the earlier literature which Spitzer treats. The eighteenth century, according to Bronson, "is the last historical effort to stave off the collapse of those sustaining postulates which for centuries had given dignity and importance to mankind" (p. 177).

The succeeding years saw scholars speaking to the notion of the Dreamer as the poet and, as has been indicated, turning more and more to the analysis of the poem instead of the poet. By the late 1950's most scholars, with the exception of those already discussed, either ignore the biography, express their reservations, or reject it.

Gervase Mathew (1948) affirms that Will is the persona for, but not the representation of, the author; and the details about his life in London with a wife and daughter "are probably in the convention of literary self-caricature that Chaucer used" (p. 362). Gordon Hall Gerould (1948) states even more emphatically that Will, the dreamer, is not a particular man, but rather "the allegorical history of a human being" (p. 61). After stating in 1947 that "Will is the will" ("The Authorship," pp. 599, 603, 604, 612), Bernard Huppé in "Petrus Id Est Christus: Word Play in Piers Plowman, the B-Text" (1950) discusses Will as the obstinate human will. And then he and Robertson, in their 1951 book, repeat that Will is "representative of the faculty will rather than of any individual person" (p. 34). In 1959 Alvin
Kernan in *The Cankered Muse* makes his case against biographical reading, that it directs attention from the work (p. 45), while J. F. Goodridge, after giving a biographical sketch, suggests that if the biography is not "fictitious," it is at best "distorted" and "humorous" (p. 9).

As has been suggested already, though, the autobiographical reading seems easier to reject or to set aside than the romantic assumptions about the nature of poetry and, consequently, of the experience of poetry. Margaret Williams demonstrates this statement well. Her remark on *Piers* in 1949, "The 'I' in the poem is Long Will, the dreamer, each of us," seems to indicate that the poem is at least not solely autobiographical; but that she is, nevertheless, reading with nineteenth-century assumptions is clearly revealed in the introduction to her 1971 translation of *Piers* when she refers to the poem as "the self-expression of an individualistic thinker swayed by his own feelings as well as by many literary traditions."59 John Lawlor in 1957 considers the question of whether *Piers* is a public or private poem insoluble and thus, as mentioned above, sets forth to discuss the "imaginative unity" of the poem (p. 116). The perspective, thus, of Spitzer, Bronson, Mathew, Robertson, and Huppé is not shared or accepted by a great many medievalists.

Other scholars, however, continue in the forties and fifties to speak to romantic readings either directly or indirectly. In 1950 J. A. W. Bennett responds directly: "Professor Willey . . . described poets as concerned with truth of feeling. Langland's concept of Truth certainly involves feeling; but it is very rational, very practical."60 George Sanderlin, Sister Rose Bernard, R. E. Kaske, Randolph Quirk,
and Alfred L. Kellogg as well as others continue to demonstrate Langland's use of traditional ideas, motifs, and figures. But until Robertson's *Preface to Chaucer* in 1962, the patristic-allegorists tended to respond indirectly, that is, to show the highly intellectual quality of the poem rather than to attack the emotional or imaginative response. A thoughtful response, of course, does not require that a reader be unaffected; the reverse is true. It is a matter of the hierarchies. As the *Parson's Tale* of Chaucer has it, one's response should follow "this ordre or ordinaunce": "God sholde have lordship over resoun, and resoun over sensualitie, and sensualitie over the body of man. But soothly," he adds, "whan man synneth, al this ordre or ordinaunce is turned up-so-doun." Or as Robertson and Huppé state in "Some Conclusions" of *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition* (1951), ". . . we must understand its [the poem's] full human import, the permanent symbolic value of the search for Piers Plowman" (p. 234).

This does not mean that the reader is to sympathize or identify with or to be moved by Will, but rather,

To understand the poem in its relevance to ourselves, we must attempt to recapture some of the old enthusiasm for . . . the greatest of all crusades, the pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem (p. 235).

And they continue, "Medieval thinkers realized to the full that without some concept of value it is impossible to lend the events of everyday existence significance beyond animal satisfaction" (pp. 235-36). And finally, the poem, in addition to representing "its turbulent and critical age and place," expresses
some of man's most cherished ideals. Society is still being misled by false leaders. Modern man, like Will, is still searching for leadership which will embody traditional belief with human compassion, which can reformulate and activate the principles of charity and bring the world a little nearer the Vision of Peace (p. 248).

This reformulation and activation, however, in their view are not to be brought about by a "psychological" or "aesthetic" or "emotional" response to Piers Plowman.

F. Eclecticism

Those labelled in Chapter II the Eclectics obviously do not accept the assumptions, approach, or attitude toward Piers Plowman from which Sanderlin, Donna, Kellogg, Bennett, Kaske, Robertson, Huppé, and Quirk study the poem. The Eclectics discuss the poem as moral, religious, or Christian; but their interest, which is usually in the poet or in the poetic process, causes them often to concentrate their efforts on these concerns rather than on the poem. At the same time it must be pointed out that they have done some of the pioneer work on the poem.

By 1940 Henry Wells has clearly joined this group of scholars. His book attempts to show the continuity of concern among poets, their common objective and spirit--probing into Mystery (p. 177). Chambers's essay published by the British Academy in 1941 offers nothing new: it is more or less a condensation of his 1939 book, Man's Unconquerable Mind. Of Langland, he asserts, "Fortitude is his theme . . ." (p. 131); his discussion makes clear, however, that that fortitude is not the fortitudo of Augustine and the medievalists, but man's unconquerable mind. The poem is religious, or Christian, because--as Wells remarked the year
before—"few men of genius . . . [are] behind or ahead of their times" (p. 11); and Chambers uses Dante's stated objective to describe the aim of Langland: "To remove those living in this life from the state of wretchedness and lead them to the state of blessedness" (p. 119). Although Chambers has several successors, John Lawlor in his 1950 article reveals himself to be Chambers's most devoted disciple. Lawlor, aware that the poem "attempts to relate human affairs to a Christian scheme of values," believes that the "driving force in Langland is a fierce attachment to truth . . ." (p. 450). Like his mentor, he discusses the satire within the Visio as a revelation of the poet's "deepest awareness," [which,] "like Wordsworth's is of a man's duty" (p. 458). The Vita then, as one might expect, is Langland's "philosophical poem" (p. 452), in which the poet "admits us to thought in its very context, not its ordered expression: as we read we are thinking, caught in the ebb and flow of his mind" (p. 450). Here is a mind that is unconquerable in its "arduous search for the truth" (p. 450). Lawlor's 1957 article is less indebted to Chambers, but still maintains the assumptions that the Visio reveals "the poet as predominantly a satirist (p. 121), and the Vita involves the reader in the very process of the search (p. 126). Thus, he asserts, a person can more accurately understand the poem by involving himself in that process than by studying doctrines (p. 126). Another of the Eclectics who, though more psychoanalytical than Chambers, is still very much in the tradition, is George Kane, Chambers's co-editor, the editor of the published A-Text (1960), and the general editor of the Piers Plowman texts. In his 1951 book Kane, however, as he is more
psychoanalytical than Chambers, treats the poet's religion as only one facet, albeit the most important one, of his personality. Kane's professed intentions are to study "Piers Plowman as a poem" (p. 185), a poem whose subject is a quest (p. 243); but Lawlor appropriately notes that Kane's study is not a study of the poem but of various facets of the poet's personality ("Imaginative Unity," p. 115, n. 5). Kane is convinced that Langland's "religion" and his "intense imagination [are] equalled by few divine poets other than Dante and Milton" (pp. 191-92).

As was shown above, by the time of Nevill Coghill's 1945 Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, published in Proceedings of the British Academy (1944), Coghill has, like Wells, joined Chambers in the eclectic approach. The B-Text of the poem he now believes to be an anatomy of England from a moral perspective, but "suggestive of a mystical rather than a moral vision, insofar as these can be distinguished" ("The Pardon," p. 68). The appendix to his 1949 excerpts of Piers shows little change in his views, except that he adds that the anatomy is "judged by the standards of Christianity" (Vision, p. 152), an assertion he had made as early as 1935 ("Introduction" to Wells's translation, p. xviii).

Also in 1949, Donaldson published a new eclectic study of the poem, the most thorough since Chambers's. Sections of the book, which takes as its focus the C-Text, especially Donaldson's study of the use of the minstrel and of recklessness, are provocative and insightful; and some of his statements about the poem lead one to hope for more: "Saturated with Christian thought, the poet says everything in terms
of it" (p. 110); "we must remember that Piers Plowman in all its forms
deals with matters sub specie aeternitatis [a statement Coghill had
made in 1935, ("Introduction" to Wells's translation, p. xviii)] and
to read it without bearing this in mind is to misread it" (p. 80).
Yet, the subtitle itself, The C-Text and Its Poet, accurately
indicates the focus of the book in that the book defends the C-Text,
and the "prosaic heresy" permeates the book.

Drawing upon the works of these scholars and others and, like
them, retaining the nineteenth-century assumptions about poets,
poetry, and the poetic process, E. M. W. Tillyard in The English Epic
(1954) asserts that the work draws upon the "common property" of
Europe--the patristic writings and allegory; he finds the discussions
of the Three Lives of Hilton and Aquinas most illuminating, but then
uses Plato's myth of the cave to elucidate Langland's thought (pp. 158,
167). He, like the other Eclectics, tends to view the poem as a great
Christian poem comparable to the Divine Comedy. His general statements
concern the grand design of the poem; his "specific" ones involve
paraphrase and summary (passim).

One other scholar will be dealt with here who is not usually
placed in the category with scholars like Wells, Chambers, Coghill,
Donaldson, and Tillyard--R. W. Frank. True, his focus is the structure
of the poem; he makes far more use of patristic and medieval works than
the others; he devotes a great part of his 1957 book to a refutation
of the Three-Lives theory; and he is in partial agreement with C. S.
Lewis that allegory is personification. Nevertheless, from time to
time he reveals that, though his approach may be a careful analysis of the structure of the poem, his assumptions about the poet and the poem are those of the Eclectics. This similarity should not be surprising since, despite Frank's use of medieval and patristic material, the scholarship he cites most approvingly was published before 1940. In his 1957 book Frank, like Coghill and Donaldson, agrees that the entire poem concerns how a man may save his soul (p. 12); but, like them, he also shows his lack of consciousness of the artificial nature of medieval rhetorical devices. He believes, for instance, that the dream-vision can be illuminated by Fromm's study of real dreams; thus in spite of the fact that the poet is a more conscious artist and has a greater "sense of form than many critics have allowed him," his use of the dream-vision explains his lack of control so that "there are many irrelevancies, many irregularities in the poem" (p. 4). Moreover, the poem is autobiographical: the poem recounts "the poet's own spiritual dilemma at some period of his life" (pp. 57-58, 60). As a poet Langland has "passages in which he creates vivid images and intense emotion," and he uses traditional motifs "in a most original manner" (p. 93). In short, R. W. Frank has read patristic and medieval literature and knows that the ultimate concerns of a fourteenth-century Christian would be the eschewing of cupidity and the embracing of charity--the salvation of the soul (pp. 20 et passim). Nevertheless, his nineteenth-century assumptions about poets, poems, and the poetic process, and his discursivist approach make him one of the Eclectics.
These eight are not, of course, the only scholars of Piers who adhere to nineteenth-century assumptions. They are among the most influential, however, to make use of medieval material, yet retain as one basic assumption, among others, the autobiographical and self-expressive nature of poetry.

G. Gospel of Work

As a part of the search for salvation, the tradition of the gospel of work, or the sacredness of doing one's duty, still maintains its adherents during the forties and fifties. This moral perspective gained its greatest support from Carnegy's monograph of 1934, but discursivists almost of necessity have read the plowing of the half-acre, the encounter with Hunger, and often the description of those included in Piers the Plowman's Pardon within this tradition. Though no scholar between 1940 and 1960 considers the message of duty or work to be either the major theme or context of the entire poem as Carnegy did, the Visio continued to be so considered.

As late as 1947 Bernard Huppé reads the Pardon Scene discursively, stating that it reinforces Holy Church's teaching "that humility and honest labor (Dowel) are necessary if man is to follow Truth . . ." ("Authorship," p. 601), and in 1948 Albert Baugh in his Literary History asserts, "The whole episode [plowing the half-acre in particular but also the entire sixth and seventh Passus] suggests that man should do the task that falls his lot" (p. 243).

Several other scholars through 1960 discuss the first part of the poem in terms of the gospel of work, or duty--John Lawlor, A. H. Smith,
R. W. Frank, J. F. Goodridge and David Daiches. John Lawlor in his 1950 article "Piers Plowman: The Pardon Reconsidered," at that time working from the premises of Chambers, explores the Visio and its culmination in the Pardon Scene as "Langland's preoccupation ... with Duty, with right conduct. ... Langland's deepest awareness, like Wordsworth's," he asserts, "is of man's duty" (pp. 457, 458). By 1957, in his "Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman," however, Lawlor is convinced that his earlier view is incorrect as a result of Dunning's 1956 article "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman." In a departure from his 1937 discussion of "the canonization of Hard Work" (pp. 118-19), Dunning documents the fact that the active life was not regarded as merely a life of "manual labour but the active practice of virtue," that is, "works of religion and devotion" (p. 230; see Lawlor, "Imaginative Unity," pp. 113-15). Nevertheless, Dunning himself still regards the Visio as "an exposition of how the different ranks of society are to be provided with food and clothing so that they may serve God. But the service of God in a positive fashion has not yet begun" (p. 231). A. H. Smith (1950), though, a co-editor of the Texts, does not appear to be an Eclectic like Chambers, Kane, and Donaldson, but rather holds similar views to those of Morton Bloomfield in emphasizing the necessity for a total knowledge of medieval society and culture. Like Bloomfield and Dunning he reads literally; consequently, the Visio, after presenting the "dishonest and corrupt" world, shows that the first stage of improving this world is through "the simple life of toil and virtue. ... Truth promises a pardon to all who work ..." (p. 30).
Then in 1951 R. W. Frank, the most forceful proponent of this tradition of the gospel of work, published "The Pardon Scene in Piers Plowman." Admittedly a literal reader, Frank proclaims that "before man can begin his journey toward Truth he must do his feudal duties in the world" (p. 317). In the Visio, which he regards as complete in itself, the "principle of action which will lead to damnation--the desire for mede, for riches--and the principle of action which will lead to salvation--honest work and doing well"--are both presented (p. 324). Thus, the "idealization of labor" (Frank's italics), not the life of contemplation, gives the answer both to the problems of the corrupt social order and to the question of salvation in "the philosophy of work. . . ." For the pardon says man must 'work' (do well) to be saved, and it is offered to, and accepted by, the personification of the good workmen, Piers Plowman" (p. 327). Frank's book Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation (1957), unlike Lawlor's article, shows no change in view; he, instead, maintains and reinforces this tradition of Piers as preaching the "doctrine" or "philosophy of work" (pp. 22; 32, n. 1; 38): "The good work of this world is also in some measure the good work of salvation," but, Frank quickly adds, "The poet's method is not symbolic" (p. 23). Continuing his literal reading, he asserts that Langland treats fourteenth-century social and economic problems "with the passion of an inspired pamphleteer. . . ." Agreeing with Dunning, Frank maintains that to reach God, or to attain salvation, a person must first do his earthly tasks both as a part of and as preliminary to his "spiritual works." Moreover, "[t]he doctrine of the pardon, do well, i.e. do good works and be saved, is a logical
culmination of the doctrine of labor in the vision" (p. 24). Relying even more heavily in his book than in his 1951 article on Konrad Burdach, who like many other scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth century had expounded the gospel of work, Frank states repeatedly that man saves himself and his society through the "doctrine of the spiritual value of physical labor [which] blurs the line between 'work' and 'good work' and makes them a unity" (p. 33).

Goodridge (1959) and Daiches (1960) both agree that the poem is allegorical, yet both treat literally the plowing of the half-acre and the Pardon, though Goodridge is less literal than Daiches. Even so, Goodridge in his "commentary on the allegory" (p. 15) finds that the Pardon, from God, is the message that "men may gain their Pardon by honest work along," though he adds that this work is "a good and honest life, in whatever vocation" (p. 23). Then, puzzlingly, he states that Piers's tearing of the Pardon indicates a recognition "that the Law has failed" and he now "takes upon himself the heavier burden of a New Law" (p. 24). Daiches, acknowledging that he cannot "follow the somewhat rambling course" of the Vita, deals largely with the Visio. In true discursive fashion, he simply states that "Piers directs everybody to hard work" and that after the Pardon Scene, Passus VII "concludes with the poet's passionate remarks on the superiority of good works to indulgences and papal bulls as means of pardon" (pp. 125-26).

In regard to the gospel of work, Hort's and Dunning's responses still seem basically valid (see above p. 79). Though W. A. Pantin in The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (1955) is himself a discursive, or literal, reader of Piers Plowman (see p. 185), he
counters the conception of *Piers* as the deification of the laborer in his refutation of E. W. Tristram's interpretation of paintings which Tristram labeled the "'Christ of the trades' or 'Christ as Piers Plowman'". These paintings, Pantin states, are more likely "directed either against Sabbath-breaking, or against the use of oaths such as 'God's wounds'" (p. 240). Effective as such a response may be, it is the awareness of a changed world view discussed by M. H. Abrams, Earl Wasserman, and William Barrett and the re-orientation of thought and consciousness advocated by such scholars as Owen Barfield, Rosemund Tuve and the patristic-allegorists that shows the limitations of discursive and expressionistic literary criticism.

H. Satire

From 1940 to 1960 another of the oldest traditions of *Piers* scholarship, the poem as satire, continues to have its adherents. Though the meaning of the word by the seventeenth century was and has remained fluid, the late view of satire as simply a portrait of the times, or factual source material for the historian, which was dealt with above, will not be included here. Here satire understood as criticism of the times, usually exaggerated, for the purpose of reform will be discussed. Only a few scholars regard the poem as wholly satire, though many speak of its satiric elements, passages, or attitude—especially in the *Visio*. Albert Baugh in his 1948 *Literary History* refers to the satire, though he admits that he's not always sure what is being satirized (p. 244). John Lawlor in 1950 discusses the *Visio* as a piece of "the satirist's work of destruction" (p. 449)
and in 1957 suggests that the dominant mental trait of the poet is his "satiric intelligence" (p. 121). George Kane in 1951 considers him an "orthodox Christian moralist" who though not a satirist resembles one in his "indignation" and "nostalgia" (pp. 213-14). Father Dunning in his 1955 review of Robertson and Huppe objects to their treatment partially on the basis of their failure to treat the "pointed satire of the times" (p. 24). A. C. Hamilton in 1958 makes several references to Langland's satire (pp. 537, 547). Then in 1960 Bloomfield includes, as one of the genres which makes up the apocalypse, "encyclopedic (or Menippean) satire" and writes of Langland's severe criticism, his "bitter and explicit satire" of contemporary history (pp. 289-90, 293-94). If, however, all those scholars were discussed who refer to Piers as a bitter attack on abuses of the day, as social criticism, as an anatomy of a corrupt world, as a judgment on contemporary life, as a poem filled with reforming zeal and crying for repentance and reformation, then almost all the scholarship between 1940 and 1960 would have to be included.

Though none of these scholars, except Bloomfield, labels the poem as a satire in its entirety, there are those who, whether they consider the poem only satire or not, discuss it only in those terms--each, of course, using satire in his own way. In 1950 George K. Anderson, in his Old and Middle English Literature, seems to combine the nineteenth-century tradition of satire as a portrait of the times and satire as invective, though he recognizes that the invective is not misanthropy but didacticism. Of Piers Plowman, he states that though "... nothing in the period presents so vividly the panorama of medieval society in
England as *Piers Plowman* and *The Canterbury Tales* and such sections as the confession of the Seven Deadly Sins "for sheer realism cannot be surpassed anywhere in medieval literature" (pp. 154, 160), this "realism . . . is not necessarily overdrawn . . ."; it is, however, "harsh, acid, and directed toward the instinct of disgust" (p. 162). The purpose of arousing this disgust, he explains, is "primarily didactic, and didactic in the manner of the medieval teacher who desires to emphasize the *contemptus mundi*" (p. 162). Anderson, thus, seems to be placing satire in its medieval context until one recalls that prior to this statement he refers to the poem as an example of the "literature of revolt with sturdy proletarian backbone" (p. 155) and that he subsequently, in contrast, calls the poem "conservative as every satire is likely to be," but then, again in seeming contradiction, adds that the poet, "deeply sympathetic to the problems of the time," is "the most distinguished spokesman of the commoner of the Middle English era in his vague yearnings for a better world, which is sometimes called 'fourteenth-century socialism'" (p. 163). Needless to say, these statements do not reveal a knowledge of the *contemptus mundi* tradition. Though he calls the poem the "greatest vision poem in Middle English literature," surpassed only by the *Divine Comedy* (p. 159), his discussion makes obvious that, to Anderson, the poem is a social document which reveals the author's antipathies and sympathies.

sources of satire are not literary or philosophical; they are social and economic.\(^63\) His understanding of Piers is comparable to Anderson's; and, to his mind, the "social milieu," not "models and conventions" nor "ideas and principles," are the necessary knowledge for an understanding of early English satire in general and Piers Plowman in particular. Piers sets the approach to satire, according to Smith, until the last decade of the sixteenth century when "formal satire, on the classical model" began to be the more influential mode (p. 216). Piers Plowman served as the native English model for satire, "its purpose and function," because, in an age of change, it "emphasized the unity of religious and social concerns" in a type of writing whose "form is secondary to the social concern which gives the work its impetus and motive power" (pp. 216, 210, 194). Knott and Fowler seem essentially in agreement with Anderson and Smith on all accounts, though they give more emphasis to the "positive message" of Christianity (p. 56). They concur that the poem provides material for "social historians" and that the poet is a satirist denouncing abuses in every area of life (pp. 54-56), but they add that "he presents . . . his vision of an ideal Christian society, governed only by the law of Love, and nourished by Holy Church . . ." (p. 56).

In 1959 Alvin Kernan's The Cankered Muse was published, and in 1960 Morton Bloomfield gave a lecture on Piers at the Modern Language Association convention. Both Kernan and Bloomfield propose that Piers Plowman is to be understood within the context of satire. Kernan endorses Anderson's and Smith's perceptions that the poem is one of the social documents of protest "made from the bottom by the economic
victims of a society which only pretended to be organized on Christian principles" (p. 42). At the same time Kernan warns that satire will be misread if it is read as autobiography, as historical documents, or as episodic pictures dissociated from the whole (pp. 2-5). What he calls the "frame" of the satire--"a dream, prophecy, pilgrimage, vision, quest, mirror, arraignment, will, or sea voyage"--"all de-emphasize the satirist himself and direct our attention to the symbolic scene of human folly and vice" (p. 46). It is in the late fourteenth century that this native tradition, to which Piers belongs, and to which successive satire is indebted, took form (pp. 40-43). Bloomfield gives to these matters a quite different emphasis. He makes his case for Piers Plowman as an "amalgam" of genres, one of which is "bitter and explicit . . . encyclopedic (or Menippean) satire" (pp. 293-94). The poem, in contrast to Kernan's belief, reveals the "apocalyptic urgency" and "basic perplexities" of the author (pp. 293-94). Bloomfield grants, however, that "the betrayal of ideals especially by the clergy" and "the need for love and justice" presented in all three texts "reveal the hard struggle for Christian perfection" (p. 295), with the reform of the friars basic to reform of society as a whole (pp. 290, 294).

I. Social Protest and Homily

Closely related to satire, often synonymous with it in intent, are works of social protest and sermons. In fact both Hallett Smith (1952) and Alvin Kernan (1959) take note of methods, aims, and even "characters" used in common by satirists, preachers, and moralists (Smith, p. 212, n. 47; Kernan, p. 42, n. 7). Though Ten Brink in 1883.
suggested an association between the sermon and *Piers Plowman*, it was
Gerald Owst's two books (1925, 1933) that established the tradition
of *Piers Plowman* as the "quintessence" of medieval sermonology. While
Donaldson (1949) regards Owst's attempt as "the ultimate *reductio ad
absurdum* of historical scholarship" in that it presents Langland as "so
busy listening to sermons that he was able to come to know the sights
and sounds of the world around him only through the lurid descriptions
given by the pulpitsers" (p. 144, n. 6; see also Tillyard, 1954, p.
170), many scholars, especially those not quite so influenced by
nineteenth-century poetic theory, grant that there is a similarity,
perhaps even an interrelationship (cf. Peter, p. 49). Despite
Donaldson, what has been stated of satire can also be said of the
homiletic tradition: that to discuss or even refer to all those who
see an affinity between the medieval sermons and the poem would be to
include a host of scholars; but the tendency is to view sermons as
contributing to the style of the poem and, according to A. C. Spearling
(1960), as helping to make intelligible the "common Scriptural images"
which are "pregnant with potential meanings."64 Goodridge, in 1959,
still argues that the "most plausible" of "the attempts . . . to set
Langland in his proper context . . . is . . . G. R. Owst" (p. 10).
More generally, Donald Attwater (1957) and Theodore Silverstein (1959)
simply state that *Piers* is a "tract for the times," "a bit of moralist's
work well done."65

Three major scholars besides Goodridge place the poem squarely in
the tradition of the sermon--Helen White in *Social Criticism in Popular
Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century* (1944), Derek Traversi in
"Langland's *Piers Plowman*" (1954), and John Peter in *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (1956). White denies that *Piers* is generically a satire, but a poem "highly critical . . . [of] the church and society of his day" (p. 3). In no way unique in its views, the poem shares them with "the ordinary orthodox preachers of the period," (p. 12) she asserts, and quotes Gerald Owst that these views "indeed [are] a perfect echo in every respect of the Church's message to the world" (Owst, 1933, pp. 548-49, as quoted by White, p. 12). Traversi, also drawing upon Owst, believes that Langland's imagery, alliteration, and word choice are the product of the preacher's art. It is this language of the preacher, everywhere present in the poem, which gives it its "immediacy" and power (pp. 130-32). John Peter in 1956 is in complete agreement on the relationship between *Piers Plowman* and homiletic tradition (pp. 1-13, 46-47, 49-50). He traces the origins and the development of complaint and of satire. In spite of the fact that his judgments sometimes seem to be determined by his thesis--the Christian development of the complaint as opposed to the classical origins of satire--, that he tentatively accepts the poem as autobiographical, and that he reads discursively ("Langland's attitudes . . . are more or less doctrinal attitudes . . . simplified by allegory . . ." [p. 9]), Peter's study is helpful in that it traces the complaint from the Church Fathers through the theologians and moralists into the sixteenth century, when complaint and satire were merged under the term satyre (pp. 14-109; see also pp. 9-10). Goodridge's 1959 statement about the context of the poem as the homily has already been given. He uses this context as explanation for the
style of the poem and as justification, not only for his translation of *Piers* into prose, but also for the style of his prose translation—the "dashes, stoppings—short, and sudden changes of tone, and . . . the repetitions, exhortations, apostrophes, and exclamations which belong to the sermon style" (p. 57).

As pointed out above, those who regard *Piers Plowman* as satire, homily, or social criticism tend to focus on the *Visio*. Such scholars as Hallett Smith, Alvin Kernan, Helen White, and John Peter, who are interested in the influence of the poem on subsequent writings, do not profess to be explicating *Piers* as such, nor to be interested in what more the poem is or contains. Other scholars, as has already been shown, were forced to enlarge their perspectives to include a more comprehensive context than satire, social protest, or homily. One of the perspectives which, even prior to 1940, had strong advocates was mysticism.

**J. Mysticism: Three Lives**

Since 1929 when Henry Wells explored the structure of the poem in terms of what he called the Three Lives of medieval mysticism, Active Life, Contemplative Life, and Mixed Life, this context has dominated or been included in most discussions of *Piers*. During the 1930's this tradition was well established by Cognill, Wells, and Chambers; and among most of the Eclectics was unquestioned as the most illuminating context in which to study the poem. In the 1940's, however, some scholars began moving away from it, and during the 1950's this scholarly tradition repeatedly came under attack and repeatedly was
defended. Both some of the attackers and the defenders, nevertheless, agree that medieval mystical and ascetical writings are helpful in understanding the poem.

Throughout most of the 1940's only a few voices were raised against the Three Lives tradition, although, as has already been indicated, the three chief expositors of this tradition--Wells, Coghill, and Chambers--were not in total agreement (see above, pp. 102-07). In 1940, Wells's *New Poets from Old*, having other concerns, does not treat the Three Lives. This book does reveal that his earlier exposition of the poem in these terms may have originated from his assumptions that Langland's fanciful originality and mystical heterodoxy contrast with Langland's "scholastic and patristic imagery" (p. 117). Moreover, Wells believes that Langland contributed to the "steady secularization in the philosophical and poetic expression of mystical experience" (p. 118) that has occurred in the western world. Chambers in his lecture the following year (1941), regardless of Wells's 1938 objections, repeats the literal view of the Three Lives expressed in 1939. Dowel is the Active Life, or honest work; Dobet is the Contemplative Life, or the life of renunciation, "voluntary poverty, long-suffering charity, and patience"; Dobest is the life of an "ideal bishop who, from the life of poverty and contemplation, returns to active life, to guide and correct others"--in short, the Mixed Life (*Poets and Their Critics*, p. 120). Piers the Plowman lives each of these lives in turn, first as the plowman, then as "the life of voluntary poverty . . . embraced by Christ, and finally as the spiritual ruler" (p. 122). Long an adherent of the Three Lives
tradition, Coghill, as has already been pointed out, had modified his views of the poem considerably by his 1945 Gollancz lecture, a modification which includes his perspective on the Three Lives. This perspective is based on his new thesis that A-Text is as a "topical narrative allegory" (pp. 41-44, 62, 81) which moves foward smoothly until the Pardon scene and more especially Passus IX, when through "a verbal whim" Piers's simple question about Dowel branches into a rather incoherent consideration of multiple topics, among which are not only "what part the Active life of the Laity . . . might hope for" in regard to salvation and, further, questions about the relationship of faith, works, and learning in attaining salvation, but also what the clergy (Dobet) and the episcopate (Dobest) have to do with Dowel (in Blanch, ed. pp. 55, 75-78). These new considerations required a re-writing of the poem, the B-Text, which is "a new kind of poem" (p. 86). The new poem is "suggestive of a mystical rather than a moral vision" in that it is an exploration of "Salvation and the Three Ways that led to it" instead of a moral poem about England (pp. 68-69). In "puzzling over" the "classic examples" of Faith (the Penitent Thief), Works (Trajan), and Learning (Aristotle) in relation to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, Langland "hit upon a new trinity" which led to his resolution--Faith, Hope, and Charity (p. 78). "Abraham," Coghill explains, "is to Faith as Moses is to Works" (p. 79); then in the Samaritan's commentary on the parable of the Good Samaritan, "Faith, Works, and Learning are made one with Faith, Hope, and Charity. . . . at last Charity and Learning, the Good Samaritan and Piers, are made one with Christ, and He one with Humanity" (p. 80). So much seems clear enough in
conception, if not in application to the poem. But, then, referring to Wells's original article of 1929 and to Troyer's allegorical study of Piers in 1932, Coghill professes "to link" his study to theirs—a linking that is not at all clear. Seemingly to leave his own scheme behind, he advises that the modern reader attempt to duplicate the author's "complex imaginative act" of recognizing the parallels between "Piers the Farmer," the "Laity," "Do-wel," and "God the Father"; between "Piers the Teacher," "Clergy," "Do-bet," and "God the Son"; and between "Piers the Builder of the Barn," the "Episcopate," "Do-best," and "God the Holy Ghost." Piers the "simple farmer" of the A-Text becomes the exemplum of each way of life, each of which is a respective function of the persons of the Trinity, in whose image man is made (pp. 84-85). However, when Coghill again returns to the poem in 1949 with his translation of Visions from Piers Plowman, his abbreviated discussion seems to owe less to his article than to Wells's 1929 interpretation. Still insisting "that allegory is not meant to be explained but perceived imaginatively" (Coghill's italics), he explains that "there are three (no more) ways of Good Life: ... Dowel is the Active, that creates that by which we live," exemplified by the "honest and neighborly way of Christian life" of Piers as he first appears, and is parallel to the work of God the Father. "Dobet is the Contemplative or Priestly that helps our redemption by teaching, healing, and suffering," exemplified by Piers as Christ, and parallel to the work of God the Redeemer. "Dobest is the life of Authority that governs and inspires the Church by which, spiritually, we live," exemplified by Piers who established Unity, and parallel to God the Inspirer
(pp. 133-36, 138). Thus, in his summary, he falls back into a more literal approach from the insights in his 1945 lecture.

In 1946-47 Father Conrad Pepler began to set forth a variation of the Three Lives tradition, though his articles have not had a great influence because they were published outside the mainstream of literary scholarship, in the devotionally oriented Life of the Spirit. Pepler, moreover, who works from Wells's translation, seeks to collate into a unified conception the various explanations of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. These "lives" he equates with the three inner stages which lead to salvation—the stages of the Contemplative Life which are variously referred to as Matrimony, Widowhood and Virginity, or as the life of "the beginner, the proficient and the perfect"—all, as Langland presents them, lived within the world instead of within a order ("Langland's Way," p. 202). There are, thus, really only two ways of life—the Contemplative, which leads to salvation, and the Active. The Active Life is "evil life," or it is "in its lowest form . . . a purely 'natural' living according to the flesh and at best . . . something approaching the well-meaning, busy life usually described by the mystical writers as 'active'" (p. 202). After this discussion, however, Pepler quotes Coghill's rather lengthy 1933 collation of all the definitions given of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest throughout the Vita as partial statements of the Three Lives (p. 203). He apparently accepts Coghill's collation as accurate, for he gives no indication that he recognizes it as incompatible with his discussion of Active Life as "evil life" and of the Meditative Life as the three stages of perfection.
Numbered among those who adopted the thesis that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are the Three Lives and the organizing principle of the poem are Wells, Coghill, and Chambers. In some cases refining it are such distinguished medievalists as Bernard Huppé, Stella Maguire, John Lawlor, E. Talbot Donaldson, and T. P. Dunning. By 1947 Bernard Huppé, earlier concerned with dating the texts, joins the growing number of critics in an analysis entitled, "The Authorship of A and B Texts of Piers Plowman." He follows Coghill, Chambers, and to some extent Wells in assuming that "Dowel is the virtue of the active man individually seeking salvation," that "Dobet is the virtue of the man who, through love, has come to a more contemplative plane of spiritual life" and that "Dobest . . . is the fusion of active and contemplative virtue . . . , the activities of the ideal bishop . . ." (p. 610).

Similar to his predecessors he finds that Piers the Plowman embodies the Three Lives, but he offers his own variation. Piers first lives the life of Dowel and then reaches the life of Dobet, where he learns of Dobest, the life which emulates Christ. At the end of the poem, however, Piers is gone from the world; but, as Will had throughout the poem, he continues to follow Piers in death to the tower of Truth (pp. 619-20).

Two years after Huppé's study, which assumes the presence of the Three Lives, Stella Maguire's influential study of Haukyn appeared, and though she discusses only the Active Life, her quotation of Coghill's 1933 article indicates her acceptance of his basic thesis concerning the Three Lives. Her contribution is to contrast the
inadequate Active Life of Haukyn with the godly Active Life of Piers. Haukyn's is the "decent, well-intentioned life based on, and judged by, purely temporal conceptions of goodness," which seeks to minister to material needs, while Piers, who fulfills the "moral obligations of the Active Life" (Coghill, "The Character," as quoted by Maguire, p. 100), lives "a life . . . in the light of eternity, directed by the bidding of God," a life which recognizes material needs, but views them from the perspective of man's "eternal end" (p. 103).

John Lawlor's 1950 article on the Pardon Scene treats only Dowel and Dobet, though he refers to the "offices of Dobet and Dobest" (p. 452), presumably, in the tradition of his mentor Chambers, the Priesthood and Episcopate respectively. Either unaware of or not accepting Maguire's analysis of Piers in relation to the Three Lives, Lawlor refers to Dowel as the Active Life of "self sufficiency," "the life of simple well doing . . . [which] is insufficient," the life that the only good man in all England--Piers--has lived (pp. 452-53, 455-56). At the Pardon Scene Piers confesses his evil deeds, repents, and relies in "child-like trust" on mercy; at this point he enters the life of Dobet, or Contemplation, becoming a "son" instead of a "servant" (pp. 452-53, 456). Piers, realizing that he could not reach truth by means of his previous good life, will now "do more by doing less" (p. 454).

Also, in 1950, and also within the Three Lives Tradition of Wells, Coghill, and Chambers, A. H. Smith in his lecture at the University of London asserts that the subject of the poem is "the Search for Truth and Salvation" (p. 27). His "spiritualized handling of the poem
is apparently indebted to Wells's 1938 article. Once it is established
at the Pardon Scene that the "life of toil and simple virtue . . .
surpasses indulgences" (p. 31), then the poet in the *Vita de Dowel*
examines the three kinds of life which are, in the character of Piers,
represented by Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. These three are the "stages
by which Mankind can achieve Salvation" (p. 32)—first, "the life of
simple virtue," the life presented in the *Visio* by Piers; second,
"the spiritual life in which Charity and Christ on earth are
identified"; and third, "the state where Piers is Grace and represents
spiritual fulfillment" (p. 32).

In 1954 both E. M. W. Tillyard in *The English Epic and Its
Background* and Derek Traversi in his chapter on *Piers* in Boris Ford's
*The Age of Chaucer*, like these their predecessors, take Wells, Chambers,
and Coghill as basic authorities, though Traversi does not explicitly
say so. Tillyard, like the other Eclectics, believes that the primary
motif is salvation, Langland's personal salvation (pp. 162, 164, 171).
Unlike most of the Eclectics, however, he believes that the poem is
artistically unsuccessful. His discussion of the Three Lives illus-
trates both this acceptance of the works of his Eclectic predecessors
and the reason for his reservation about *Piers* as a successful poem.
He agrees that Dowel is the active life, or the "practical" life of the
"good layman"; that "Dobet is the contemplative life, or the life of
the man of a religious order"; and that Dobest is the mixed life, "The
life of the highest human responsibility made possible by the union
of activity [the "practical life"] and contemplation, the life of the
Bishop" (pp. 166, 169, 170). He even reproduces Coghill's scheme,
given above, of the four levels of meaning of the poem. Nevertheless, that Langland, whom he regards as the dreamer, "sets out on a pilgrimage" after the Pardon Scene "to a place where he has already arrived," Tillyard finds "structurally shocking" (p. 169), and thus he considers the poem "nobly planned" but poorly executed (pp. 168-69). Traversi, in his discussion of the allegorical nature of the poem with its frequent contrasts between the ideal and the actual, never refers to Wells, Coghill, Chambers, or the Three Lives. Nevertheless, he discusses the "three successive states" toward perfection and "the active and contemplative virtues" (pp. 138-40). Piers, of course, is the "symbol" of each state successively (pp. 132, 135, 138). Dowel, "simple dedication to honest toil," living "truly in the sight of God and in accordance with the precepts of the Church" is "the lowest form of the Christian ideal"--the "first step on the road to perfection" (pp. 137, 139). Dobet, which is "the life of positive dedication to spiritual realities and to the practice of the supreme virtue of Charity," is, of course, a higher state and is "normally though not necessarily" the life of the religious (p. 139). Dobest, combining the virtues of both Dowel and Dobet, "is, in its most complete form, the life of spiritual authority, supremely confided . . . to the rules of the Church," the life which "is the highest destiny open to man on earth" (pp. 140, 141). It is in the contrast of these three progressively more spiritual and thus more responsible ideals with the concreteness of this picture of the degeneration of the world that the poem gains its "intensity and moral urgency" (pp. 136-46 passim).
In 1946 a paper read at the Modern Language Association by Howard Meroney, a version of which was published in 1950, has been most influential in giving a new direction to the study of Piers Plowman and the mystical tradition.

Meroney differs from those who have treated the poem in the Three Lives tradition of Wells, Coghill, and Chambers. He believes, instead, that the "Three Lives" are the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive stages of perfection that, according to Dunnin in 1937, are the definitions of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest given by Wit, definitions which had been "common places in mystical theology since the time of the Pseudo-Dionysius" (A-Text, p. 174). Meroney thinks the similarity is obvious, even to the novice, between Piers Plowman and popular mystical works such as the Scala Paradisi, St. Bonaventure's Incendium Amoris, Rolle's Fourme of Parfit Liuyng, Hilton's Scala Perfectionis (pp. 10-11). It is these three inner lives--the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive--that Langland calls Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. Those in the Purgative stage, the incipientes or servi, are beginners who in penitence turn from vice, or evil, toward virtue; those in the Illuminative stage, the proficientes or mercenarii, renounce themselves and, in Piers Plowman, through contrition and confession grow in Charity (pp. 10-11); those in the Unitive stage, the perfecti or filii, are "men of enlightened faith and saints dwelling in ecstasy, ... one with the Will of God" (p. 10). Thus, the Visio is the working out of self-denial, "ascetical" in its emphasis (p. 9). The Vita is "devoted to Charity and the Crucifixion"; it "is mystic" in that the dreamer and his "fellow sinners" set out "on the Way to the Tower of Truth,"
that is, to Christ, who said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (as quoted by Meroney, p. 9). It is this triad rather than that "false and mischievous analogy which has stultified Piers Plowman criticism for twenty years" (p. 13) which elucidates the poem.

Donaldson accepts Meroney's triad as well as the earlier one, suggesting that both of them, and perhaps others, are simultaneously referred to by the poet in the B- as well as in the C-Text. Donaldson is unwilling "to pin the poet down to any single system of theological thinking" (p. 159). In fact, he calls Langland "an intellectual catchall," in whose work experts on Thomistic thought, on mysticism, and even on "the esoteric backwashes of medieval thought" find conceptions derived from their areas of expertise (p. 160). Nevertheless, he finds most helpful the studies concerning the active, contemplative, and mixed lives and the purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages (pp. 158-60). Langland, he believes, attempts not surprisingly to synthesize these "quite dissimilar triangles" since he lived in a time when "all religious ideas came, from the analogy of the Trinity, in groups of three . . . (p. 160). The Visio, Donaldson states, concerns Active Life, or the life of social man. The Vita, beginning with the Pardon Scene, is a rejection of the Active Life for the "more subjective and more contemplative life of the individual in his search for perfection" (p. 158); yet the Vita itself contains, in its first section (Vita de Dowel), a depiction of the Active Life synthesized with the first of the stages, the Purgative. The "chief difference" between the triads as they appear side by side in the Vita
is that the first, as applied to the life of the individual seems to develop in a sequence from outwardness (the active life) to inwardness (the contemplative life) to inward-outward (the mixed life), while the second develops in a sequence of three stages of inwardness . . . (p. 159).

This synthesis seems plausible enough about the poem in general, but it is difficult to see how this discussion of the triads relates to Donaldson's explications of specific passages.

As a matter of fact, his explications themselves seem self-contradictory. On the one hand, Donaldson affirms and re-affirms Truth's acceptance of the active life of Martha in the Visio (pp. 166, 168); and Piers the Plowman, he states, embodies the ideal active life--though what the ideal active life is is not stated (p. 169). On the other hand, he considers the effect of the Pardon Scene to be "an absolute and unequivocal" rejection of the active life (p. 162, n. 7), and after stating that Haukyn represents "the moral aspect of Do-Well," Donaldson finds him to be also "representative of the average sort of active life" (p. 175) and his confession to be the emphatic conclusion that if Haukyn's active life is "Do-Well, then we must Do-Bet" (p. 176). Moreover, Dobet is "a cure for the evils attendant upon active life." That cure is "patient poverty, which is obviously understood as a manifestation of a contemplative life" (p. 177). Donaldson does not discuss Dobest, for of the last section of the poem where he assumes it is treated, he admits, "... I am unable to make much out of this" (p. 197).

Donaldson's statement concerning Dobest is not unlike the position taken by T. P. Dunning in 1937 concerning the entire Vita of the B-Text, which he found to be an enigma (see A-Text, pp. 191-94). Dunning then
argued that the mystical quest in the A-Text is found only in the *Vita*,
which he took to be a separate and complete poem in the form of a
debát. In the A-Text, Wit's exposition, which makes up the major
portion of the "poem," and Study's definition of Dowel, Dobet, and
Dobest are to be identified with the mystical three stages toward
perfection of the inner life. Dunning did find the Active,
Contemplative, and Mixed Lives as expounded by Wells and Coghill in
the definitions given Will by Thought and Clergy, but the Dreamer,
Dunning believed, rejects the Three Lives in his "concluding summary"
because a person in any station of life is to do well, to do better,
and to do best in "an affair of the will, for nothing can separate man
from God but a deliberate violation of His law" (*A-Text*, p. 181;
see pp. 167-82).

The position that only the *Vita* treats the mystical quest has the
assent of a number of scholars. Margaret Williams (1949), John Lawlor
(1957), A. C. Hamilton (1958), J. F. Goodridge (1959) as well as
Dunning (1955, 1956)--all indicate in their discussions of *Piers* that
the treatment of either the three stages, the Three Lives, or both, is
limited to the *Vita*. Williams's brief discussion, accompanying her
translation of excerpts, is something of a composite of Dunning and
Wells. Each part of the poem, she asserts, is what its title
indicates: the *Visio* is a "Vision of the World" and focuses on "Man"
and on "Things as They Are"; the *Vita de Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest*
concerns the "Active Life," "the Contemplative and Priestly Life," and
"Church Authority," respectively centering on the work of God the
Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost (p. 526).
T. P. Dunning in 1955 and 1956--compelled, as many scholars have been, to return to *Piers Plowman* as a consequence of the 1951 study of Robertson and Huppé--remains the staunchest exponent of the idea that only the *Vita* treats the mystical three stages and the Three Lives. His 1955 review of, or more accurately his attack on, their book stoutly denies "the close relationship of the *Visio* and the *Vita*" which, among other relationships, Robertson and Huppé, had sought to demonstrate. In Dunning's words, "they are determined to find in the former mention and discussion of the three states of the spiritual life, denoted in a perfectly unequivocal manner in the *Vita* . . ." (Review, p. 28). In 1956 Dunning responds to Robertson and Huppé's interpretation with his own interpretation of the B-Text in an article which appears to be an abbreviated and slightly revised version of his 1937 interpretation of the A-Text. He does allow the Active Life a place in the *Visio* to the extent that Piers's directions concerning the journey to Truth, which Dunning reads as the way of the Ten Commandments, is "the first stage of the Active Life, the lowest plane of the spiritual life" ("The Structure of the B-Text," p. 231); the *Visio*, however, is concerned primarily with providing the necessities for life and with preparing man for the spiritual life by "limiting" . . . his natural appetites" through instruction in moderation (p. 231). Only the *Vita* "is concerned with the spiritual life proper" (p. 232). As he had suggested in 1937, Dunning finds both the Active, Contemplative, and Mixed Lives--the "objective" states-- and the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive Ways or states of the *incipientes*, the *proficientes*, and the *perfecti*--the "subjective" states-- of
progress into Charity in the Vita of the B-Text (pp. 233-34). A major part of his article seeks to demonstrate that the Active Life is, as Wells had stated, the spiritual life. Moreover, the Contemplative Life is not a life devoid of "external works" (pp. 225-30).

John Lawlor, by 1957, is strongly indebted to Dunning, though he has by no means rejected his analogy of Piers Plowman to The Prelude ("Imaginative Unity," pp. 124-25). After reviewing Dunning's and S. S. Hussey's 1956 articles on the Three Lives in Piers Plowman, in which Hussey attacks the conception and Dunning defends it, Lawlor accepts both Hussey's criticisms and Dunning's responses to them (p. 114). Like Dunning, Lawlor approves Wells's 1929 statement that the Active Life itself is "the spiritual life," consisting as Dunning (1956) states, of "vocal prayer, mortification, the service of the neighbour, the practice of the virtues" ("Structure," p. 230; Imaginative Unity," p. 113). Like Dunning also, he regards the poem as a "blending of two traditional triads--active, contemplative, and 'mixed' lives and purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways" (p. 113). In the Visio, according to Lawlor, "'doing well' . . . refers to all Christians" and to pagans as well (pp. 114, 120), a modification of Dunning's view that the Visio treats the importance of "coming to know oneself" and of keeping man's provision for his necessities in proper perspective before the poem, as Lawlor agrees, can deal with "the spiritual life proper" (Dunning, as quoted by Lawlor, p. 121; see also pp. 115, 119). Lawlor does not show in any detail how these conceptions are worked out in the poem, however, because his concern in this article is not with "doctrines" but "with the nature of his [the
Dreamer's] progress towards his goal"; in this progress, Lawlor believes, one can see the "imaginative unity" of the poem, and in this vicarious experience of questing lies the value of *Piers Plowman* (p. 126).

Ostensibly indebted to Lawlor's 1950 article as well as to Wells, Coghill, and Meroney, A. C. Hamilton in 1958, in a comparison of *Piers* with Book I of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, treats the Active Life and Contemplative Life and the three stages of the Contemplative Life in a manner not dissimilar to Dunning's with one notable exception: Hamilton regards the Active Life as the life concerned with the temporal world (pp. 543-44). The movement within what he calls the *Vitae*, a second poem written as a sequel to the *Visio*, begins in the *Vita de Dowel* in which the incidents with the Friar-Doctor and with Haukyn reveal to the Dreamer the "inadequacy of the active life," or with excessive concern about one's livelihood (pp. 540, 543-45). The Dreamer's pilgrimage, then, corresponds to the mystical pilgrimage from the purgative through the illuminative and into the unitive stage to "regeneration and restoration" (pp. 540-41). This pilgrimage had been prefigured in the person and in the pilgrimage of Piers himself at his first appearance in the *Visio* and in the Pardon Scene (pp. 534, 538-39). After this pilgrimage is complete, however, Langland concludes his poem with a return to the satiric vision of a world in chaos (p. 547).

It is J. F. Goodridge in 1959 who consciously and admittedly incorporated Dunning's work into an analysis of the poem. In his attempt to combine many scholarly perspectives, however, Goodridge like Donaldson achieves incongruity and inconsistency. In regard to
the Pardon Scene, he remarks that the life of the Church "can no longer rest on natural goodness alone"; it must follow the "life of penance, and [thus] the honest plowman must follow Christ into the wilderness" (p. 25). On the *Vita*, Goodridge states with Dunning that Piers the Plowman moves from the life concerned with *temporalia* to the spiritual life, and then the Dreamer, who at first thinks of the Three Lives as vocations, gradually follows Piers from the Active Life—now referred to as asceticism, not as a vocation or as "natural goodness"—into the imitation of Christ, or Charity, where he finds that all three lives are really the one life of Charity (pp. 25-27).

As this overview of the variations in the treatment of the Three Lives reveals, the forties and fifties find more and more scholars qualifying or rejecting the Wells-Coghill-Chambers view, which had been hailed as a major break-through in elucidating *Piers Plowman*. Dunning, of course, early raised questions concerning it. And in 1949 Donaldson, while accepting it in part, had called the "Hiltonesque" triad restrictive (*The C-Text*, p. 158). When Meroney's article appeared in 1950, it calls this approach "a false and mischievous analogy which has stultified *Piers Plowman* criticism for twenty years" (p. 13). Thus, while some of the proponents of the three stages differ sharply with the proponents of the Three Lives, others find a composite of the two illuminating. Alongside these perspectives are three others which differ, often markedly, from these and from each other: one tends to identify *Piers* with what is referred to as monastic mysticism, with a variation of this approach suggesting the influence of the thought of the monk Joachim of Flora; another tends to reject mysticism altogether
even while regarding Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest as degrees or stages in
growth toward Charity, or the perfect love of God; still another finds
mystical thought illuminating without identifying the poem with any
particular mystical writer or doctrine.

K. Mysticism: Monastic

Ignoring the Three Lives tradition altogether in 1944, Helen White
sees in the poem "the radical idealism of the mystic," but the
mysticism she refers to is that of the "thoroughly orthodox" tradition
of the ministerial, pastoral, and monastic ideals; that is, the
denunciation of the religious for their failure to live up to their
ideals, not the rejection of the ideals themselves (pp. 4, 10-12).
Like White in regarding the Three Lives as either restrictive or
irrelevant, J. A. W. Bennett and Morton Bloomfield, especially
Bloomfield, suggest monasticism as an illuminating context in which to
explore the meaning of the poem. While Bennett regards Langland's
conception of the contemplative life as monastic, he believes that the
poet draws upon a much broader context. In his 1950 article in The
Listener, Bennett asserts that one aspect of Langland's uniqueness
is his use of the monastic tradition of the contemplative life, not as
applicable to the religious only, but as equally applicable to the life
of the layman. The poem demonstrates that without this perspective on
life "our lives will inevitably be unbalanced" ("Wm. Langland's . . .

Bloomfield concurs. In 1943 he suggested the possibility that the
author Langland was a Benedictine monk, a theory admittedly based
"on a very slight probability" ("Was Wm. Langland . . . ?" p. 61), a
theory that no one has pursued further. In his 1947 review of
Coghill's *The Pardon of Piers Plowman*, Bloomfield expresses surprise
that Coghill would assume that triadic thought "is quite unusual in
mediaeval thought" and, thus, that Langland's triads can be easily
identified (p. 464). A decade later Bloomfield in "Some Reflections
on the Medieval Idea of Perfection" states that monasticism played a
vital role in the conception of perfection and that multiple trinities
based on the Pseudo-Dionysian conception of hierarchy were widely
accepted; especially the Victorines expounded these conceptions
(p. 228). Based on a belief in a multi-leveled, analogical,
sacramental universe, the trinitarian stages of perfection were
described in various terms, such as "beginner, progressor and perfect,"
or "marriage, widowhood and virginity." Sometimes they were expressed
in terms of social classes, sometimes in terms of the mystic
trinity of purgative, illuminative and unitive, sometimes in
psychological terms like meditation, prayer, and contempla-
tion, sometimes in terms of virtue--civil, purifying, pure
and exemplary. Nor [he adds] are all these necessarily
exclusive (pp. 231-32).

Though not a discussion of *Piers Plowman*, this article concerning
perfection, analogical thinking, trinitarian conceptions, and the role
of monasticism in formulating and perpetuating this thought is an
outgrowth of Bloomfield's long interest in and study of the poem and
is a preparation for further study of the poem (pp. 214-15). His
follow-up article applying some of these ideas, "Piers Plowman and the
focuses on only two specific passages, while including references to
others, he believes that the three stages toward perfection, variously
referred to as "marriage, widowhood and virginity . . . or chastity, continence and virginity, or later, lay priest and religious" (p. 230), permeate the poem and that Langland's source is the monastic ideal--"the most notable Christian attempt to seize perfection by imitating God and perhaps even by deifying man" (p. 228). It is the monastic ideal against which the poet judges the inner and outer worlds, the anima and saeculum; from which he draws his terminology and emphases; and which is itself the object of Will's quest (pp. 227-29). In his paper "Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse," given at the MLA convention in 1960, published in 1961, Bloomfield specifically denies that "the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways of the mystic" apply to Piers; rather the "older tradition" of monastic perfection is the context by which the quest within the Vita becomes clear (pp. 284-85), and it is the return to "monastic ideals" to which the poem calls the world; it is the perfection which Langland seeks (pp. 289, 294). Bloomfield objects to associating Piers Plowman with non-monastic mysticism because of the mystics's individualism, their concern with and focus on the individual quest for God; and though he acknowledges that such an individual quest is "implied" in the poem, "Piers is first of all socially oriented . . ." (p. 285). It belongs to the monastic tradition which concerns itself with "[h]istory and society . . . as both the beginning and final sections of the poem show very clearly" (p. 285).

The influence of one particular monastic tradition, that of Joachim of Flora, a twelfth-century Calabrian abbot, has been explored
in more detail than any other in an effort to find parallels to Langland's triads. Joachim was first mentioned by Jusserand in 1894 in his potpourri of "mystics" (Piers Plowman, p. 195). Dawson (1933) and Glunz (1937) also suggested possible Joachistic affinities ("Wm. Langland," p. 175; Die Literarästhetik, pp. 524, 533). Again in 1938 Henry Wells made passing reference in his discussion of the life of Dobest to Joachim's teachings, but added that Joachim, "unlike Langland, pressed his mystical views of the three periods of history so far as to impugn the unity of the Trinity and so to become questionable in his orthodoxy" ("Philosophy of Piers," p. 349).

Similarly in regard to Dobest Donaldson (1949) mentioned that "[t]racers of the historical view of Joachim of Flora have been noted" (The C-Text, p. 180).

Little serious attention had been given to Joachim and his influence, however, until in 1950, first, Marjorie E. Reeves and, then, in 1954 she and Morton Bloomfield explored Joachim's historical scheme. In 1957 Bloomfield and three other major medievalists, R. W. Frank, R. E. Kaske, and Willi Erzgräber published studies of Joachim and his influence or studies in which Joachim's influence is given serious consideration. Frank, in a lengthy footnote, does not commit himself, but he acknowledges that the conceptions he has found in Piers Plowman "might have their sources in doctrines connected more or less remotely with the teachings of Joachim of Flora" (Piers Plowman and Scheme, p. 17, n. 4). Kaske, also in a footnote appended after the completion of "'Gigas' the Giant in Piers Plowman," announces his "tentative conclusion" regarding Langland's use of Joachistic teachings
in the speech of Book (B.XIII.230-50), and promises a forthcoming study to support it (p. 185, n. 26). In contrast to his dismissal of Joachistic influence in his 1955 article because, as he states, Langland is too keenly aware of the power of sin and of man's susceptibility to temptation to believe in perfectability, by the time he published his book on the C-Text in 1957, Erzgräber acknowledges some possible Joachism in the poem. Bloomfield's lengthy article in Traditio (1957) is an investigation of Joachim, his works, doctrines and influences—a study which, like his study of the medieval idea of perfection, he applied to Piers Plowman in an article published in the following year.

In the second section of that article, "Piers Plowman and the Three Grades of Chastity" (1958), Bloomfield makes extensive use of his study of Joachim in a tentative and partial elucidation of the Tree of Charity (B.XVI. and C.XIX). He posits that Langland's tree has at least overtones of the progressivist historical teachings of Joachim, that in the course of history the world, which has moved from under the Old Law of the Father to the New Law of the Son, will finally move into the "spirit of intelligence" under the Holy Spirit (p. 246)—a scheme that recalls the organizational paradigm of Wells, proposing that Dowel is dedicated to the work of God the Father, Dobet to the work of God the Son, and Dobest to the work of God the Holy Spirit. On the assumption that Langland is "eccentric and original in more ways than one" (p. 242), Bloomfield suggests that Langland is combining the iconographic features of the "tree of chastity" with those of the Joachistic tree of the Three Ages to form
what "should be called, perhaps, the Tree of Perfection," though he admits that, in his view, Langland's vagueness and inconsistencies allow only a possible interpretation (pp. 246-48, 253) and that what these Joachistic overtones may mean in regard to the poem as a whole "still needs explaining" (p. 253).

In the following year, 1959, R. E. Kaske in "The Speech of 'Book' in Piers Plowman" accepts the previous suggestions of Joachistic influence (p. 138, n. 3) and, less tentatively than Bloomfield, explicates B.XVII.228-57, as a reference to Joachim's conception of the third age when "the spiritual . . . understanding of both Old and New Testaments . . . supplant[s] the letter of these Testaments," as the New had supplanted the Old, "inaugurating a universal reign of Love and Peace" (p. 139). An example of Kaske's treatment is his discussion of the burning of Book (l. 252) as the Joachistic burning of the letter of the Testaments comparable to the consuming of the sacrifice of Elijah in I Kings 18 (pp. 139, 141). The imagery at the close of this vision of Piers Plowman, according to Kaske, combines into a climactic scene "as though it were indeed the dawning of the third world age" (p. 144).

In 1960 Bloomfield again turns briefly but with more certainty and with a broader view of the poem to the Joachistic influence on Piers. Though not explicitly acknowledged in this article, "Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse," Bloomfield's discussion here of Piers is permeated by his acquaintance with Joachistic teaching, a fact acknowledged and explored in the expansion of this article into book form in 1962. In the article, however, he continues to reject
individualistic mysticism as a profitable context for understanding 
Piers, insisting rather that it is the older, socially-oriented 
monastic tradition which illuminates the poem. Since the friars, 
"as types of monks," had betrayed their ideals, Langland sees them as 
a chief source of the corruption of fourteenth-century society and, 
hence, their reform as "[t]he solution to the whole problem of the 
world." Their reformation would, then, inaugurate the new age of 
Joachim, when all men "become monks, as Joachim of Flora . . . had 
predicted" (pp. 288-90).

At the same time that scholars are studying various fourteenth- 
century and earlier doctrines in an attempt to equate Langland's with 
one or another or several, other scholars qualify and some even reject 
outright these attempts as misguided and futile efforts which limit 
rather than elucidate the poem or which misinterpret the doctrine 
Langland supposedly follows. S. S. Hussey's 1956 article, "Langland, 
Hilton, and the Three Lives," argues that scholars, "having perceived 
some correspondence between Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest and the active, 
contemplative, and mixed lives, . . . equate the triads, thereby 
limiting the interpretation of the former" (p. 133). Not only does he 
show that Langland probably could not have known Hilton's writings on 
the Three Lives; he also shows that, even if Langland had, his triads 
and Hilton's do not correspond. Contrary to the Wells-Chambers- 
Coghill order of active, contemplative, and mixed lives, Hussey finds 
that Hilton places the contemplative life highest of all (pp. 135-37). 
Moreover, Hilton clearly does not regard merely manual labor as the
Active Life, as Coghill had stated (p. 139). Hussey methodically considers the purgative, illuminative, and unitive lives of Meroney; the amalgam suggested by Dunning and Donaldson, including Donaldson's discussion of the Bernadine triad humility, charity, and unity; and Pepler's discussion of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest as the three stages of inner life—the beginner, the proficient and the perfect. Hussey regards them all as too technical and restrictive, inadequate to encompass all that Langland attributes to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest (pp. 142-45). Hussey, nevertheless, suggests as one possibility that the triad in the poem may be a sort of loose composite of "ideas which were 'in the air'" (p. 146). But, discursive reader that he is, he thinks it more likely that this unlearned poet meant simply three "degrees of the same thing"—the practicing of the good life which leads to salvation (pp. 147-49).

Since Hussey's article appeared too late for him to use, R. W. Frank in his 1957 book *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation* covered some of the same points. He, too, convincingly rejects the notion that Gregory, the Pseudo-Bonaventure, or Hilton identified Active Life and manual labor, though Frank, like Hussey a discursive reader, believes that Langland idealizes manual labor by associating it with the Active Life and embodying it in Piers the Plowman (pp. 10-11). A further similarity to Hussey's is Frank's belief that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest constitute degrees of one concept, not three separate concepts: the three are obedience to the "law of love" in "a greater and greater degree" (p. 12); or as Frank later states, the three are
"degrees of effort in the struggle to lead the good life" (p. 37). In short, Frank believes that "the triad always has the basic, literal meaning of Dowel, i.e. 'do good,' 'lead the good life that wins salvation'" (p. 42).

David C. Fowler and Theodore Silverstein in their 1959 reviews of Frank's Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation applaud the book, both for Frank's discussion of the inadequacy of previous analyses of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, or in Fowler's words, for "his refutation of the 'three lives' theory. I have never thought," he continues, "that Piers Plowman has anything whatever to do with the active, contemplative, or mixed lives."72

In 1958 Elizabeth Zeeman [Salter] continues the assault on the Three Lives, though she gives no evidence of knowing Hussey's article or Frank's book. Her statement that it is a "mistake to insist on close equations with any particular doctrine" ("Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage," p. 1) is especially forceful in its attack on the Three Lives view because she studies the poem in the context of the fourteenth-century mysticism of Richard Rolle, Dame Julian of Norwich, and The Cloud of Unknowing as well as Walter Hilton; all she regards as orthodox and well versed in the homily (pp. 103). The triads, she says, "are only sub-divisions of the large search for Truth" through love as expressed in and by Christ (pp. 2, 8-9, 15-16).

Thus, the context of the Three Lives and the fourteenth-century mystics, which since 1929 had been one of the most convincingly presented foundations on which to base the study of Piers Plowman, began more and more to give way during the 1940's and 50's through the
qualifications and attacks of preeminent scholars, the most convincing of whom examine carefully the writings of the "mystics," the broader context of patristic and theological thought, or both. By 1940 almost no one attempts to elucidate or even to make use of *Piers Plowman* without referring in some sense to its theological perspective, and most scholars have come to recognize that that perspective is traceable to the writings of the Church Fathers. But, like the discursive scholar Thomas Wright in the nineteenth century, his twentieth-century descendents read *Piers Plowman* as if it were some combination of a tract for the times and a quest which makes use of personification and preachments. Or in R. W. Frank's terms, they read the poem "literally."

According to Owen Barfield (1957), however, the thought of the Middle Ages had no equivalent to the literalism of the present (*Saving the Appearances*, pp. 86-87). Significant medieval scholars, nevertheless, in theory or in practice either deny or are unaware of this difference in perception and conception.

L. Patristics and Medieval Theologians

Some of those scholars who have opposed the Three Lives approach, such as Frank and Hussey, and some of those who follow it, such as Donaldson and Dunning, have drawn upon the Church Fathers and other theologians. This search within the orthodox tradition is not surprising; for as Pantin (pp. 248-62), Milosh (esp. p. 112), and Zeeman (p. 1), among others, have shown, the mystics were not heretics or heterodox, as nineteenth-century scholars would have it. Scholars during the forties and fifties increasingly turn, as J. M. Campbell in
1933 had exhorted, to the Bible as understood through patristic thought, for assistance in illuminating a poem written when the influence of the Fathers pervaded all areas of thought. Here, those scholars will be discussed who, unlike the patristic-allegorists, tend to read discursively or whose approach is that of the historian of ideas as opposed to the historical critic.73

Though Wells (1940), Chambers (1941), and Coghill (1949) make passing reference to theologians of the Middle Ages, Wells even stating that "Langland looks . . . frequently backward to the patristic period, or the early Middle Ages" (New Poets, p. 11), their studies can hardly be called patristic. It is such scholars as George Sanderlin (1941), T. P. Dunning (1943), Rose Bernard Donna (1948), and Gervase Mathew (1948), as well as a number of scholars who might be referred to as intermediate between the Eclectics and the patristic-allegorists and who will be discussed later, who carry on the work of Father Dunning, his contemporaries and predecessors. Sanderlin, in a 1941 article which focuses on the G-Text treatment of Liberum Arbitrium but which makes reference to B-, explores especially the thought of St. Anselm in order to explain the concept and the character Langland uses. Dunning's 1943 article adds little to his earlier defense of the orthodoxy of Langland's handling of such characters as Trajan and Imaginatif, using St. Thomas as his authority ("Langland and the Salvation," pp. 46 et passim). In his 1937 book Dunning had quoted writers ranging in time from a third-century anonymous author included in the Patrologia Latina to St. Ambrose and St. Thomas to support his statement of Langland's orthodox handling of Trajan (A-Text, p. 198).
Sister Rose Bernard Donna establishes the Augustinian basis of *Piers Plowman* through her study of hope and despair in the poem, in the process showing Langland's traditional use of the "psychology" of sin and the central importance of the will (pp. 12-14 et passim). And Mathew in "Justice and Charity in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*" (1948) asserts that Langland's poem is written within the context of "patristic commonplace," within conceptions held by theologians from Ambrose and Lactantius to John of Salisbury (pp. 363-64).

E. Talbot Donaldson in 1949 refers to theologians more often than any of his eclectic predecessors; and though his study of certain passages and terms does throw light on the poem, he also reveals his propensity to read literally, as any scholar must who holds to the "prosaic heresy." In addition to Bernard of Clairvaux, in passing he quotes or refers to Augustine, John of Damascus, Isidore of Seville, Alcuin, and Francis of Assisi (pp. 123, 146-47, 155, 174, 188-93, 196-97).

The 1950's, perhaps partly because of D. W. Robertson's 1950 appeal in "Historical Criticism," his series of articles, and his and Huppé's 1951 book, saw a surge in scholarship on *Piers Plowman*. Some of the major scholarship based on the Fathers and the theologians of the Middle Ages was written by historians of ideas, who tend to be discursivists.

Even before Robertson precipitated the controversial storm concerning the relevance of Biblical, patristic, and theological materials and concerning the way allegory functions in medieval vernacular literature, however, R. W. Frank, Jr.--one of his staunchest opponents--
was already at work on Piers Plowman. In "The Pardon Scene in Piers Plowman" (1951) Frank is the first to give strong evidence that the Athanasian Creed was widely known and used (pp. 321-22), and to state that its moral impetus was toward "fulfilling one's worldly duties," or "moral action," and toward becoming "the man of good works"; it also encouraged a life of "prayers and penance" (pp. 320, 323). To reinforce his position that Active Life "is not physical labor," he quotes Gregory the Great, St. Bonaventura, and refers to St. Thomas Aquinas and Walter Hilton—all of whom, according to Frank, show that Active Life is "just the kind of activity that Piers pledges himself to: prayers and care for his spiritual profit" (pp. 325-26). Moreover, he refers to the Glossa Ordinaria and Peter Lombard's Commentarius in Psalmodios Davidos concerning Piers's quotation of "si ambulauero in medio umbre mortis . . ." as evidence that Piers does have faith in the Pardon in defiance of the priest (pp. 323-24). Thus, in 1951 Frank was making rather extensive use of medieval theology as a corrective to Piers Plowman scholarship. Though not multi-level allegory, this discussion is consistent with the reading accorded Piers by patristic-allegorist.

However in his 1953 article and in his 1957 book Frank turns back toward the discursivist position of earlier scholars. Frank's 1950 article rejects any apocalyptic implications in the conclusion of the poem. The Anti-Christ, he concludes,

means either the Pope, as the one responsible for this league of ecclesiastics and sins, or else all Christians, but especially churchmen, who by their evil lives or corruptions of doctrines and sacraments lead men to sin rather than to grace ("Conclusion of Piers," p. 314).
This statement does not indicate either antipathy or condescension toward the poem or its context. At least a lack of sympathy seems evident in Frank's 1957 book, however, when he states, "The Dreamer's suspicions of intelligence are the suspicions of an age of faith skeptical of reason" (Scheme of Salvation, p. 48). Antipathy or condescension are even suggested by the statement that "the Church [was] jealous of its custodianship of the sacraments" (p. 99). In his book Frank repeats that though "there are apocalyptic overtones," the "Antichrist . . . means either the pope, as the one responsible for this league of ecclesiastics and sin, or else all Christians, but especially churchmen, who by their evil lives or corruptions of doctrines and sacraments lead men to sin rather than to grace" (p. 112).

Moreover, here in disagreement with Glunz and Burdach, with whom he generally agrees, Frank insists that Piers is neither the "Christ of the Second Coming" (p. 117; see Glunz, pp. 533, 534-35) nor "an ideal pope" (p. 117; see Burdach, p. 314). Piers "can be a good man, or that goodness, that semidivine quality in human nature which . . . lies behind the conception of Piers" (p. 117).

At any rate, by 1953 Frank has become a thorough-going discursivist, as his article published in that year and his 1957 book indicate. In 1953 Frank, for the most part, relies on secondary material, largely Leo L. Camp's 1942 dissertation. He does, however, quote Cassiodorus's commonplace definition of allegoria, saying one thing and thereby signifying another, and he does give references to similar definitions by Isidore of Seville and Nicholas of Lyra (pp. 239-40, n. 6). Frank also quotes Nicholas to the effect that
Scripture does not always have four levels of meaning (p. 248), a position which St. Augustine himself had taken in De Doctrina Christiana, 3. 10. 14, and from which Robertson and Huppe work (see, e.g., pp. 6; 60, n. 23).

Frank's *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation* (1957) is basically a formalist attempt to elucidate the poem through careful "literal" reading. He recognizes, however, that he must defend his approach, in so far as possible, with the aid of medieval writers, partially in response to proponents of the Three Lives tradition and to patristic-allegorists. And as R. E. Kaske in his 1959 review suggests, Frank's attention to structure may be his most significant contribution toward an understanding of *Piers*. Throughout the book, in both text and notes, Frank makes extensive reference to Biblical, patristic, scholastic (especially the *Summa Theologica*), devotional, and homiletic writings. His discussion of these references may be helpful as an introduction to certain points of Christian doctrine and at times to provide insight into passages. In their reviews both Kaske and T. P. Dunning point to passages which are especially well handled. Dunning makes mention of the "well-chosen quotations" which illustrate "contemporary notions of 'patient poverty'" (review, p. 68). Kaske commends Frank's discussion of *redder* *quod debes* and of Need (review, p. 752). Yet Dunning and Kaske comment on the inordinate amount of summary in the book.

Both Dunning and Kaske point out, moreover, that Frank's treatment is not altogether trustworthy. Dunning states that Frank "misunderstands the doctrine of indulgences" and that he "does not
seem to understand that the poverty advocated by Patience is evangelical poverty" (p. 68). Kaske's criticism is even more thorough. He believes that Frank's discussion of grace is inaccurate on two accounts: Frank seems not to recognize that "divine mercy is the source of grace and a substitute for it" (p. 732), and he confuses the medieval and the "sharper post Trentian distinction between sanctifying and actual grace," partly perhaps because Frank's source is Hastings's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, which in itself gives a "misleading" definition (p. 732; p. 732, n. 2). Other inaccuracies Kaske cites, supporting his statements through reference to the Summa Theologica because Frank makes extensive use of it, are Frank's conception of mortal sin, his use of "state of mind" for "the union mystica," and his reference to conscience as a "faculty" (p. 732, n. 2).

A scholar who has contributed enormously to Piers Plowman studies, whose discursive propensities have been discussed before, is Morton Bloomfield. His massive and immensely useful study The Seven Deadly Sins appeared in 1952. Its subtitle, An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature, indicates the tremendous range of this study which begins with ancient origins in Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian, Mithraic, Assyrian, and Jewish thought and traces the developing concept through Book I of the Faerie Queene. Chapter III of his book treats the formulation of the conception of the seven deadly sins from the time of John Cassian in the fifth century through the Middle Ages, admittedly guided by Otto Zöckler's Das Lehrstück von den sieben Hauptsünden: Beiträge zur Dogmen und zur Sittengeschichte, in
"Whenever possible," he states, "I have examined the references afresh, and in some cases I have made new interpretations" (p. 356, n. 1). The documentation from the *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* in addition to extensive use of medieval poems, tracts, and sermons, including material from unpublished manuscripts, is awesome indeed. Nevertheless, when he discusses what he refers to as "probably the greatest treatment of the cardinal sins in English literature" (p. 196), he merely summarizes Langland's descriptions (pp. 196-201). Throughout the book, beginning with his reference to *Piers* in the text (p. 85) with its explanatory note which states, "Genre-pictures illustrating the sins reach their most perfect expression in English literature in the great confession scene of the seven deadly sins of *Piers Plowman*" (p. 365, n. 145), Bloomfield has prepared the reader to expect something quite spectacular as he refers to works which "influence" or "foreshadow" *Piers* or works which are "analogues" or "forerunner[s]" or "similar" to Langland's "masterpiece" (pp. 141, 151, 162, 164, 165, 186, 187, 208). It seems puzzling why Bloomfield considers Langland's presentation more perfect than Spenser's unless Bloomfield prefers what may be seen as realism to the emblematic.

In 1957, 1958, and 1960, Bloomfield presented three articles (followed by a major book on *Piers Plowman* in 1962) in which he makes use of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians. "Some Reflections on the Medieval Idea of Perfection" (1957), like Hort's book based almost entirely on the Scholastic synthesis derived from Aristotelian and
traditional Christian thought, is an exploration of a conception he believes to have been a commonplace in medieval thought—perfectibility. Bloomfield states that he undertook this study because he believes it will help to elucidate *Piers Plowman*. He, moreover, asserts that the "holistic" medieval ideal of perfection was maintained by monasticism, with which Bloomfield has long thought Langland had some association.

In his article published the following year (1958), "*Piers Plowman* and the Three Grades of Chastity," this scholar applies to the poem the ideas he explored in the previous article. The first third of the article asserts that the poem concerns both personal and social perfection (p. 227). When Jesus commanded his apostles to be perfect, he was commanding them to be in harmony with the universe, with the physical world, and with their fellow man (pp. 229-30). Thus, *Piers Plowman* concerns the degrees to which mankind can approach the ideal. The image or theme employed is marriage, widowhood, and chastity. The latter section of the article focuses on two passages in which Langland treats the theme of chastity. First, Bloomfield analyzes B.XIII.31-52, the negative exempla—Solomon, Samson, Job, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Vergil, Alexander, Rosamund, Felice, and Lucifer. Though Bloomfield makes use of the Fathers, of medieval theologians, of histories, of other poems, and of philology, he admits that some of the exempla do not quite fit. Nevertheless, he concludes, the poet can make his material "do service . . . , as Langland chose to do . . . ." (p. 235). The second passage is B.XVI, the Tree of Charity, or as Bloomfield calls it, the "Tree of Perfection" (p. 246). He finds this image to be a composite of the Tree of Life, the Tree of Charity, and the
Joachite tree of the Three Ages, though Langland hesitates to carry out the full implications of his "symbols" (p. 247). To be sure, Bloomfield's discussion is provocative and his identifications are imaginative; but, when he sets his analysis into its context (B.XVI and C.XIX), he merely summarizes the episode (pp. 248-53). He offers his analysis tentatively, however, and acknowledges "some obvious inconsistencies which are puzzling" (p. 253).

His third article, "Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse," is a lecture given at MLA in 1960. This article is a précis, or perhaps a preview, of his book of the same title, 78 in which he seeks to establish the genre of the poem. He believes that the poem is either an apocalypse or, at least, apocalyptically oriented. This doomsday perspective can be reconciled with perfectibility because, according to Bloomfield, the Scholastics held that persecution, sin, and the work of the Antichrist are allowed by God for the purpose of the renewal which follows. Bloomfield reemphasizes that the poem is "socially oriented" (p. 285), indicating, as he does so, his distaste for individualistic mystics, whom he regards as "often eccentric and even mad" and whose prophecies are "obscure, . . . difficult to disprove disprove," and may be "applied again and again ad libitum, not to say ad nauseam" (pp. 283, 286). Because of its beginning and ending descriptions, its title character and agricultural imagery taken from apocalyptic Biblical contexts, its "eschatological signs in natural phenomena," and, most important of all, its emphasis on "current social ills," Bloomfield has no doubt that the poem is in some sense apocalyptic (p. 287). Moreover, the "amalgam" of "genetically
related" genres discernible in the poem indicate that Piers is either an apocalypse or a work by an author with an apocalyptic cast of mind (p. 294). The poem is not totally successful, however, because it reveals the author's own "basic perplexities," which he attempts to "dramatize . . . and objectify" (p. 294).

Another patristic, Willi Erzgräber, published an article in 1955, "William Langlands 'Piers Plowman' im Lichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie und Theologie," and, in 1957, William Langlands "Piers Plowman" (Eine Interpretation des C-Textes). Though his discussions range widely among the Fathers and theologians, he concludes that Piers is ultimately rooted in Thomism, as opposed to Augustinianism, by way of Duns Scotus ("Wm. Langlands . . .," pp. 131, 139-41). At the Pardon Scene, however, Piers the Plowman takes the Pelagian position: he trusts completely in man's natural powers (pp. 134-35). In fact, Erzgräber considers kynde, which he interprets as "nature" and the "natural," and reason, which he seems to equate with moderation, to be two of the dominating conceptions within the poem. Langland, he believes, advocates following reason and natural law ("Vernunft und . . . natürliche Sittengesetz," pp. 131-32). According to Erzgräber, the poet like St. Thomas believes in the natural inclination of man toward virtue (p. 132). The King, the authority who holds society together, is bound by natural law, that law which is impressed upon reason and through which, as St. Thomas stated, came the Decalogue (p. 133), while the Church, the instrument of grace, is concerned solely with the life beyond the temporal order (pp. 133, 139-40). Langland, in Erzgräber's hands, then, sounds almost like a fourteenth-
century Goethe in that, though striving is not quite all, it is certainly basic to the development of the natural potential for virtue which is within man so that man can fulfill himself, contribute toward the good of society, and like Trajan gain an eternal reward (pp. 131-33, 137-38). Langland is aware, however, of the danger of pride in this striving; thus he advocates the ideal of "patient poverty" (p. 138). This ideal—dowel—is conceived within the Franciscan spirit, but this influence too is derived from Duns Scotus (pp. 138-39). Though in the B-Text there may be a hint of the mystical (p. 144) and though Langland's conception of penance and his denunciation of those who seek material gain show affinities with Wyclif's ideas (p. 147), Langland is neither a mystic nor a Wyclifite. The basis for almost all of his ideas can be found in Duns Scotus. Langland, however, is finally unique in his intellectual position, Erzgräber concludes, in that he sees the great tasks which lie before man, he understands the constant dangers that hinder man, yet he trusts that man can do the good Christ taught and lived (p. 148).

Erzgräber's book, since it is devoted almost exclusively to the C-Text, will be dealt with briefly. His broad reference to the Fathers and theologians and his reference to Piers scholarship is even more extensive in the book than in his article; and he regards at least Dobet in the C-Text as rooted in the Augustinian tradition, though still filtered through Duns Scotus (Wm. Langlands . . . , p. 207). The format of the book is the alternation of a discussion of scholarship, a summary of a section of the poem, and then references to the Church Fathers and theologians on specific points. Even David Fowler, who at
bottom is himself a discursivist, expresses disappointment in his review that the book contains so much summary and so little explication. 79

In a discussion of scholarly work on Piers which is based on the patristic writings and which treats the poem discursively, W. A. Pantin's English Church in the Fourteenth Century (1955) and John Peter's Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (1956) might be included. Both regard the poem as being within the context of complaint and satire and both regard Langland's thought as being within the tradition of the Church Fathers and theologians, and one with the preachers of his day. W. P. Palmer, because of his 1957 dissertation comparing Wyclif and Langland, 80 might be included: he discusses Langland and Wyclif within the patristic tradition, especially as they, in his view, reflect "the cross-currents of philosophical, religious, political, and social ideas of 1360 to 1385 in England" (p. 1769).

Father T. P. Dunning, however, is the only other major scholar of medieval literature who fits generally into this category of patristic discursivists. In his 1955 review of Robertson and Huppé, Dunning vehemently insists that Langland's poem is not "Sacred Scripture" (p. 24) and that the poet "quotes Sacred Scripture in much the same way as do the preachers and moral writers: to reinforce the literal meaning of what he is saying or to point an allegory [by which he means basically personification]" (p. 28). It is in this review that he states an apparent modification of his earlier view that Piers can best be understood within the context of the Church Fathers and
theologians. He now believes that those works which will illuminate
the poem are those used by the preachers, written by the preachers and
by

the moral writers: the libri distinctionum, which by the end
of the thirteenth century had become vast encyclopaedias, con-
taining not merely Scriptural quotations on everything from
Abstinentia to Zelus, but also patristic material, theological
and canonical discussion, and sermon-matter; . . . the Summae
Confessorum, such as the famous Summa which John of Freiburg
made from Raymond of Peñafort's Summa de Casibus and which was
evermously influential in the fourteenth century; above all,
. . . the numerous Specula of the later thirteenth and the
fourteenth century, . . . [t]he Speculum Prelatorum, for
instance of William of Pagula (written c.1319-26), and his
Oculus Sacerdotis (1317-33), of which more than fifty manu-
scripts are extant in England . . . (p. 28).

In the following year, 1956, Dunning published his article which makes
use of some of these works, but he continues to draw directly upon the
Fathers. This article, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman,"
is actually a condensation of his 1937 book on the A-Text, though by
now he accepts both texts as by one author. Perhaps this fact accounts
for his more-or-less superimposition upon the B-Text, in summary
fashion, of his theory regarding the A-Text. His article, general as
it is, is primarily devoted to the Vita since the Visio in both texts
is essentially the same. He still believes the Visio to be concerned
with providing the necessities of physical life preliminary to the
concern of the Vita, the spiritual life itself (pp. 230-32).

Obviously, then, plowing the half-acre is still simply providing food,
or physical necessities; moreover, in spite of the text, Dunning still
asserts that Piers's directions to Truth are "the way of the
Commandments" (p. 231). His primary concern with the Vita is cate-
gorizing the definitions of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, which with two
exceptions fit into two "classes." Those definitions of the Friars (VIII.18ff), of Wit (IX.94-97, 199-206), of Study (X.129-34, 187-88), of Ymagynatyf (XII.30-40), and of Patience (XIII.136-71) deal with the "the Purgative Way, the Illuminative Way and the Unitive Way," the three subjective stages of growth into Charity (pp. 233-34, 236).

The definitions of Thought (VIII.78-102), Wit's first One (IX.11-16), Clergye (X.230-65), and the Friar-Doctor (XIII.115-17), all represent degrees of the spiritual life, the "objective" states (pp. 234-37). The first objective stage is Active Life, explained by "St. Gregory, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and other spiritual writers" as the life of "works of religion and devotion," or "the ascetical life" (pp. 229-30). The second and third stages are the Contemplative Life, as set forth by St. Gregory, St. Bernard, the Victorines, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas, and as lived by St. Catherine of Siena, St. Bridget of Sweden, "and other contemporaries of Langland" (pp. 228-29). The Contemplative Life is not a life devoid of action as the Active Life is not a life devoid of contemplation. Rather, the Contemplative Life is conceived of as the life of the religious as opposed to the life of the laity. The two stages, Dobet and Dobest, then, are the objective stages toward Charity, exemplified by "the lives of religious, anchorites, and hermits" and "the life of prelates" respectively (pp. 236-37).

Dunning's theory is not treated in detail; he simply sketches the outline, and it does not appear that he necessarily distinguishes between the presence of an idea in the poem and the poet's use of it. His article is a commentary on the poem from the point of view of his theories, supporting his statements by references and quotations which,
he explains, had been made widely available "in a great number of semi-popular and popular manuals and compendia" (p. 225).

There are scholars, of course, who have recorded their opposition to the use of patristic, theological, devotional, or homiletic material in the explication of Piers Plowman. Since most of these are post-1950, much of it seems really to be opposition to patristic-allegorism. This opposition, then, will be discussed later, after the views of the patristic-allegorists have been examined.

Other scholars, however, who are not themselves patristic-allegorists, have made no objection to the approach and their work is consistent with it. Such a scholar is Randolph Quirk. In two brief articles, one in 1953 and the other in 1954, he explores the meaning of Langland's terms *wit*, *kind wit*, *inwit*, *conscience*, and *imaginatif*. In order to discover the possible meanings of these words, Quirk made use of material made available to him by Hans Kurath, the general editor of the Middle English Dictionary ("Langland's Use . . . ," pp. 182-88 plus notes, and "Vis Imaginativa," pp. 81-83 plus notes). In his 1953 article, "Langland's Use of 'Kind Wit' and 'Inwit,'" Quirk purports to be laying the ground work for further study in that he does not profess to have given "a complete interpretation" of the concepts. He does conclude, nevertheless, that Langland's use of the terms reflects his effort "to find terms with which he could express in a consistent allegorical framework complex concepts of scholastic philosophy which would yet be intelligible to an English public" (p. 188).
From the point of view of some patristic-allegorists the discursive-patristic critics, even those opposed to patristic-allegorism, continue to assist in the task of understanding Piers Plowman. Discussions of medieval doctrine and world view, of popular motifs and images and of terminology, for instance, are valuable as is careful reading of the texts of the poem which point out structures, motifs, and, in some instances, lucid explanations of critical scenes and images.

M. Allegory as Symbolism or Personification

1. Symbolism

It will be recalled that in his 1945 Gollancz lecture (published in 1944), Nevill Coghill presented his revised view of Piers Plowman: the poet began writing a historical "narrative allegory" comparable to Wynnerie and Wastoure, a poem which Gollancz himself had suggested as the source for Piers Plowman. The earlier poem appears aptly to fit the conception of allegory--personification--presented by C. S. Lewis, one of the conceptions which had been preeminent during the nineteenth century and which the popularity of Lewis's Allegory of Love served to perpetuate. Coghill states that the A-Text of Piers Plowman is superior to its predecessor because the author's "strong architectural instinct" enabled him to write a poem whose formal organization is superior and because in his "superior genius" Langland added a moral dimension to his historical narrative allegory ("Pardon" in Blanch, ed., pp. 40-44, 62). The Pardon Scene and subsequent "significacio," typical of "personification-allegory," raised more problems than they
solved and, thus, the poet recognized that handling such matters would require "a new kind of poetry" (p. 60). This "new kind of poetry" is the B-Text with its additional levels of meaning (p. 81).

As has been shown, earlier scholars had recognized *Piers Plowman* as more than personification or topical allegory. Henry Wells, who in 1929 established the basis on which Coghill has built, had sought in 1938 to correct the literalistic tendencies of Coghill and others; and in 1940 Wells asserted that "[n]o one is likely to dispute that" Langland's poetry is allegorical, "[a]lthough the word often chills the modern ear . . . ." Then Wells offers his own definition: "An allegory is simply a protracted network of metaphors" (*New Poets*, p. 201). If one allows for the troublesome problem of imprecision in modern literary critical terminology and the consequent interchangeable use of metaphor and symbol, it becomes clear that Wells is merely summarizing in different terminology his earlier discussion of the "symbolism" within *Piers Plowman*.

Coghill himself as early as 1933 had offered a multi-level allegorical scheme for the poem. In this 1945 lecture, however, he briefly traces the history of allegory as a way of thinking, citing Origen, quoting Gregory and the popular couplet, and citing Troyer's article on the allegory of Piers the Plowman and Troyer's quotation of St. Thomas as the authority for his approach (pp. 81-82). As R. W. Frank remarks in 1957, though, despite the fact that Coghill "invokes the method, [h]e does not really apply it" (*Scheme of Salvation*, p. 8). Frank is essentially correct. Coghill, like so many of the scholars who preceded and succeeded him, holds that poetry
is to be "imaginatively, not rationally perceived" ("Pardon," in Blanch, ed., p. 84). Thus, his allegory is actually symbolism. Events and the characters involved in them, not words, "are apprehended as representations" (Barfield, p. 87).

The appendices to Coghill's 1949 translation of excerpts from Piers reveal these same conceptions and practices unchanged. The third appendix is essentially a literal summary of the poem (Visions, pp. 132-36); the fourth is a "brief note on . . . [the] highly philosophical and complex subject" of medieval allegory (pp. 137-39). Here again he informs his reader that allegory, which originated from the Biblical study "of the early Fathers of the Church," was "at its best . . . not a writer's trick or a piece of excogitated ingenuity, but a whole way of looking at experience" based on the belief that the "Universe" and man were "all of a piece." "Piers Plowman constantly exhibits" all the four levels of meaning, "often simultaneously, sometimes one or more at a time." Then he illustrates this technique, seemingly in striking departure from his summary of the poem. Statements which leave little doubt that Coghill is actually discussing symbolism are that allegory was used "to interpret or present the unknown through the known," that not only Langland and Boccaccio and Shakespeare but even Eric Gill, the English sculptor and illustrator, "created" allegorical works, and "that allegory is not meant to be explained but perceived imaginatively" (Coghill's italics, pp. 137-39). As the Appendix which precedes this discussion of medieval allegory indicates, however, Coghill's imaginative perception, if this appendix is an expression of it, is not much of a departure from other literal plot summaries.
Similar conceptual handlings of Piers Plowman, that is, similar symbolic interpretations, continue to appear in the late forties and throughout the fifties. Two years before Coghill's Visions from Piers Plowman appeared, Bernard Huppé's lengthy article (1947) was published. Though not yet a patristic-allegorist, Huppé has turned from his conception of the poem as topical allegory to the poem as the education of Will for salvation. In the lunatic-goliard-angel passage, he quotes Isidore of Seville and refers to the City of God to make the point that the passage demonstrates the problem of a king who becomes "'[t]yrant,' not 'king'" because he fails to temper justice with mercy ("The Authorship," p. 587). The thrust of the article is that in order to attain salvation Will, an impatient and contentious "allegorical figure," (p. 604) must be brought to the recognition that he is a part of a "corrupt and venal" world in which a ceaseless struggle occurs between good and evil and then, after he gains this awareness, he must learn to live the life in which he has been instructed first by Holy Church and later by others (pp. 583, 600-04). He must follow the guidance of Piers, who at first embodies the Active Life and afterwards the Contemplative Life; and finally as Will continues to learn, he finds that in order to achieve Dobest, he must live the life of Christ (pp. 601, n. 41; 603; 619). "Thus," Huppé concludes, "the Vita de Dobest pictures man's attempt ... [to live the God-like life]. It is, in effect, an ecclesiastical history ..." (p. 620). By 1947, then, Huppé's study is essentially within the tradition of the Three Lives; his discussion of allegorical figures and of "allegorical actions" is no longer topical, but symbolic, though he does not altogether reject topicality.
Gordon Hall Gerould in his influential article on *Piers* (1948) repeatedly refers to the poet's use of "allegory," even while using New Critical techniques and insisting that the poem be read as a poem. The "allegory," he believes, begins with Lady Holy Church's explanation of the scene presented in the Prologue (p. 62). Moreover, Will is "the allegorized history of a human being" and Piers the Plowman is no "shape-shifter," but the "summation" of all the offices through which he is revealed in the poem (pp. 61, 74). Piers the Plowman, in sum, is "the symbol of humanity's quest for the way of salvation" (p. 67). Gerould, thus, makes no distinction between allegory and symbol and actually focuses on symbolic characters and situations. As in other scholarly works, there is a hint of *figura*, or typology; but Gerould's handling seems basically symbolic.


Constructing her study upon the basis laid by Huppé in his 1947 article, as well as upon Coghill and Chambers, Stella Maguire sets out
to show that Langland's "allegorical perception . . . personifies, in the figure of Haukyn, the very life, the whole of which they [the "arguments," "themes and episodes of the Visio"] are the parts" (p. 109). Her reference to Haukyn as allegorical, as "emblematically the moral obligations of the Active Life" (Coghill, as quoted by Maguire, p. 100), as the "archetype of all those in the Field of Folk who" work hard (p. 101) within an otherwise literal reading of Piers Plowman shows that this is not an allegorical discussion of the character, but a questionably accurate symbolic one.

Donaldson (1949), as one would expect, very carefully summarizes the studies done by his three Eclectic predecessors at the beginning of his chapter, though as pointed out above, he combines their theories with that of Meroney. From time to time he refers to the "allegory" of the poem, but his is clearly not an allegorical reading. His nearest approach to an allegorical analysis is his discussion of the Tree of Charity in both the B- and C-Texts (pp. 183-95). He refers to St. Augustine as well as to secondary works based on the Church Fathers and medieval writings, but even if an examination of his handling did not betray his lack of understanding of medieval allegory, his statement about allegory would: "It is obvious, of course, that allegory must not--indeed cannot--be read with the intellect alone, but must be interpreted by a sympathetic imaginative process" (p. 185)--a statement remarkably close to Coghill's, that "allegory is not meant to be explained but perceived imaginatively" (Coghill's italics, Visions, p. 138).
A historian of ideas who is obviously aware of the patristic origins of Langland's thought, Atcheson Hench in "The Allegorical Motif of Conscience and Reason, Counsellors" (1951) has presented a summary of parts of works which contain the motif, the first of which is a sermon by Bernard of Cluny. He also notes that in his 1921 dissertation he had "quoted from patristic writings before Bernard's . . . [comparable] extended metaphors . . ." (p. 194, n. 1). Though his summaries are discursive and he draws no conclusions from them (see p. 201), he does seem to recognize that allegory is not personification alone, but is symbolic (see pp. 193, 197). Little can be said of his summary of Piers, however, except that, regarding Lady Meed, he observes that "though capable of being the symbol of just pay or reward, [she] is actually the symbol of misused pay or bribery" (p. 197).

In 1954, in The English Epic and Its Background, Tillyard reproduces Nevill Coghill's "schematised . . . four senses or meanings" (p. 167), but his discussion of Langland's allegory is as nebulous as his admitted "understanding." He informs his reader that Langland's allegory is "kaleidoscopic":

Langland, indeed, does not care for simple, sustained allegory. He prefers to push an allegory to a certain length, to achieve some kind of approximation and then to drop it and to substitute something which, though different, may yet end in working in the same direction (p. 164).

Referring to Jusserand's likening of Langland's allegory to "clouds," Tillyard then invents an analogy of his own, that it is "a pageant in the sky. That pageant presents definite shapes, but these keep moving and one melts into another" (p. 164). Needless to say, one is not
surprised by the statement, "Exactly how far one can detect this use [or "three or four layers of meaning"] will never be decided . . ." (p. 167). Whether these remarks about Piers should be called symbolic or merely confused is perhaps an open question.

Traversi, Mitchel, and Zeeman—all three give emphasis to the "poetic" quality of Piers Plowman, though they approach this quality from radically different directions. Traversi tends toward expressionism—but less so in 1954 than in 1936; Mitchel resembles the New Critics in his assertion that a work must be read as a self-contained entity; and Zeeman assumes that poetry is the product of the "poetic imagination" and, somewhat in agreement with George Kane, that the didactic and the poetic, or "dramatic" are conflicting modes ("Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage," pp. 8, 10, 14, 16).

Derek Traversi, in his 1954 revision of his 1936 article, makes mention repeatedly of Langland's "allegory," "allegorical design," "allegorical structure," and "allegorical method" ("Langland's Piers," e.g., pp. 129, 134-35, 136, 138, 144, 146). He even discusses the medieval "allegorical outlook" which enabled one to see "simultaneously" a "situation" on various ascending levels as a "part of the transcendent order" (p. 135). He then summarizes the appearances of Piers the Plowman as "a perfect example" of Langland's use of allegory. Traversi, however, uses the terms allegory and symbol synonymously throughout his article (e.g., pp. 132, 135, 138, 144, 145). It is his emphasis on Langland's "poetic" rhythms, images, and language that reveals Traversi to be more nearly an aesthete than an allegorist (pp. 130-34, 143, 145-46).
In the tradition of Chambers and Coghill, at least to some extent, is A. G. Mitchel, who in 1956 delivered "The 3rd Chambers Memorial Lecture" on *Lady Mead and the Art of 'Piers Plowman,'* in which he sets out to discuss this character, or this "woman" as he calls her (e.g., pp. 9, 22-23), as illustrative of Langland's use of allegory.

Allegory [he begins], in the most skilful practice of it, is an art of implications... The challenge to the poet is to present character and action that are in themselves interesting and colourful and that enable the poet to convey his thought precisely and subtly (p. 3).

His opening statement thus indicates that Mitchel is thinking "symbolism." He shortly confirms this indication when he asserts that in this poem, "just as... in any good play or narrative" (p. 4), a reader will understand the character simply by reading carefully without reference to anything outside the poem, such as "contemporary thought" (p. 4). Thus, as one might analyze a character in twentieth-century literature, Mitchel does a "psychological" study of Lady Meed. It is this partially illuminating analysis that reveals that he is thinking of her as a "symbolic" woman instead of as an allegorical character. Mitchel regards her as a highly intelligent woman who is unable to understand Conscience's accusations, however, because she is not accustomed to being scorned. Her response, he believes, is not rhetorical; it is natural (pp. 8-9). "She believes what she says" (p. 9). And when she acts, she really believes that she is helping people (p. 23). Yet, despite her putative intelligence, she considers Conscience's objections to her to be "pretentious hair-splitting" (p. 18).
In contrast to the scholars on allegory discussed thus far, Elizabeth Zeeman in "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth" (1958) seems in her opening paragraphs almost to be patristic-allegorist. After quoting Crowley's now-almost-commonplace lines on the shell and the kernel of Piers, she writes that "critics agree basically on the fact that the poem must be given a number of interpretations—the deepest of which is of a most subtle spirituality" (p. 1), a statement which is immediately followed by a reference to the illuminating context for these interpretations: "That the orthodox contemplative writings of the medieval church may resolve some problems is already recognized" (p. 1). One soon finds, however, that here is a study which views Langland as a "mystic" and a "poet" (p. 2). "Allegory" proves to be various symbolic interpretations which "cannot long remain didactic; its natural movement is toward drama," one of the main differences "between Langland, the poet-allegorist, and Hilton, the prose-writer" (p. 14). Moreover, Piers the plowman at his first appearance is obviously no ordinary plowman; he is the "symbol of the operation of the divine upon the human" in this pilgrimage whose "source," "centre," and "goal" is Christ (pp. 4, 10, 7; see also pp. 13, 14, 16). Thus, though Zeeman's discussion of the poem in the context of Hilton, Dame Julian, and The Cloud of Unknowing is provocative, it is nevertheless, symbolic and not allegorical because of her assumption that the didactic and the poetic, or dramatic, are in conflict, and that "Langland's allegory cannot long remain purely didactic" (p. 14). Similar to Mitchel, she believes that "Langland always needed to turn to the drama of flesh and blood" (p. 16). This
problem accounts for the flaws and "inconsistencies" in the poem. This assumption separates her work both from that of the discursive patristics and from the patristic-allegorists, though she is closer to the latter than to the former.

With the possible exception of J. F. Goodridge, who sought to synthesize almost all possible perspectives on the poem, these last three "symbolists" tend to be independent of the Wells-Coghill-Chambers tradition of scholarship. Speirs (1957) with his mythic, or as Patricia Kean calls it "anthropological" approach, is obviously concerned with symbols. He finds the poem, as illustrated by the Prologue, to be that "combination of realism and symbolism characteristic" of medieval religious allegory; at the same time that it is contemporary London, it is also "a wilderness of the spirit"—a field suspended between heaven and hell like the setting of the Miracle plays (Medieval English Poetry, pp. 35; 35, n. 1). Concerning the Tree of Charity, he summarizes Langland's lines; he asserts that in its "rich symbolism" the tree is Christ, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Jesse; and he quotes E. W. Tristram on "the double or triple symbolism" of "every part of the tree" (p. 389).

The other two are equally different from each other and from Speirs in their approach to the allegory of Piers—both, however, symbolic. These two—Hamilton and Goodridge—and Elizabeth Zeeman have published three of the more helpful symbolic studies of the 1950's. A. C. Hamilton (1958) approaches Piers by way of comparison with Book I of Spenser's Faerie Queene, the two poems being "the same Christian vision drawn from Scripture and presented in a common language of
allegory" (p. 536). The section-by-section juxtaposition of the two poems shows Hamilton that *Piers* is literally a response to the Dreamer's question of how he may save his soul; allegorically, "the search for Piers"; tropologically, "the search to know himself . . . [,] for Charity is within"; and anagogically, Christ's jousting at Jerusalem (p. 545). Hamilton's summary of the two poems, however, reveals meaning, not necessarily inconsistent with the previous explanation of *Piers*, but certainly different:

Their poems, as allegories, express simultaneously through the central myth of the quest, the pilgrimage of man's soul, the progress of man within the Church, and the history of the poet's own age (p. 547).

The differences are great enough to suggest that Hamilton's scheme has not quite worked. One of the major problems with his analysis of *Piers*, of course, is his failure to consider that the Scripture which permeates the poem and which Hamilton himself recognizes as the source of the poet's vision is being used as more than a source for imagery and general precept.

J. F. Goodridge in the introduction to his 1959 translation of *Piers Plowman* similarly fails to recognize the importance of the medieval understanding of Scripture within the poem. He, moreover, rejects patristic-allegorism for a symbolic interpretation of the poem. Goodridge's discussion of allegory reveals his lack of understanding of it, and also reveals his assumptions about poetry to be those originating in the nineteenth century. Allegory, he explains, permitted the poet "unlimited scope and freedom, though it sometimes led to diffuseness"; its flexibility permits infinite variety, including
mixtures of "realism" and "fantasy" (p. 12). In accepted modern and
nineteenth-century manner, Goodridge sets forth the author's purpose:
"first to discover the truth for himself—for allegory is not a poetic
device, but a way of thinking . . ." Secondly, Langland wished
homiletically "to bring home to his contemporaries, and especially his
fellow-clerics" his "harsh," "grotesque . . . picture of the world"
(pp. 12-13). With his assumptions about the nature of allegory, it
is to be expected, consequently, that Goodridge will make repeated
use of such terms and phrases as "powerful and absorbing drama,"
"symbolic character," "complex symbolism," "poetical evocation," and
"poetic drama" (pp. 14, 15, 38, 43, 44 et passim).

No matter how discursively a scholar reads, no matter how literal-
minded he may be, it is extraordinarily difficult for him to avoid
seeing something more in Piers Plowman than "a Tract for the Times"—
a label which Theodore Silverstein applies; but even he adds that its
allegory is a "literal device of extended metaphor" (review of Robertson
and Huppé, 1959, pp. 204-05).

In 1950 R. W. Frank, who has become one of the most dogged
opponents of patristic-allegorism, published "The Conclusion of Piers
Plowman." He focuses on line 381 of the final passus, "And that freres
hadda fyndyng that for nede flateren," seeing it as "a key to the
meaning of the conclusion . . ." (p. 314). To be sure, his article
treats the poem as historical allegory, but a patristic-allegorist
would find no fault with that approach per se unless a claim were made
that this level is definitive, a claim Frank does not make. Though his
reading is "literal," he appropriately corrects Huppé's 1947 statement
that Will is following Piers "on the final pilgrimage ... to the tower" (Huppé's italics; "Authorship," p. 620).

Frank and Morton Bloomfield, whose literalism has already been noted above, are not, of course, alone among medieval scholars. A. H. Smith is one of their company. Nevertheless, in his 1950 lecture (published in 1951) Smith admits that a summary cannot really provide any idea of the complexity of this poem that includes symbolism and allegory, terms which he seems to use in reference to the personifications, e.g., of Gluttony, or as symbols, e.g., Lady Mead and Conscience (pp. 29-30).

Smith's and Bloomfield's conceptions of allegory seem almost identical, as Bloomfield's comments on Piers in The Seven Deadly Sins (1952) reveal. Bloomfield discusses late medieval allegory as "simple personifications" to which "naturalistic detail" is added--"at its best in Piers Plowman" (p. 165). He likens these "[g]enre-pictures" to wall paintings, in fact, to the presentations in graphic art generally--"in tapestries and murals, in miniatures and sculpture" (pp. 365, 151-52, 171). Like Smith, though, Bloomfield sees these personifications in the hands of Langland "lifted to a higher plane" to become "novel and strangely moving" (p. 201), or apparently symbolic. Indeed, as he acknowledges in "Symbolism in Medieval Literature" (1958) any meaningful use of language, in fact, any meaning, "is, at least to some extent, symbolic."

Another scholar who is basically a discursivist but who treats allegory as symbolic or metaphorical is John Peter. In spite of his thesis that satire in England emerged between 1580 and 1600 as a
result of a new acquaintance with the Greek and Roman satirists, he contrasts Chaucer's Monk—a fourteenth-century "satirical" portrait—with Langland's "Sloth, the parson"—a portrait in the complaint tradition (Complaint and Satire, 1956, pp. 4-9). Peter's discussion of Langland is especially interesting because it, whether as a result of his thesis or as a result of his careful analysis, leads him to look backwards to the Church Fathers as a source for this "mode" (pp. 14ff.); and in his summary of complaint as illustrated partly by Sloth, many of Peter's conclusions are quite consistent with those of the patristic-allegorists: "Complaint is usually conceptual, and often allegorical"; "Complaint is impersonal," both in the sense that it does not direct its attack upon a particular individual and in the sense that it does not reveal the author's personality ("Langland's verse reflects his beliefs, leaving his personality to be guessed at. . . . Langland's attitudes . . . are more or less doctrinal attitudes . . . [p. 9]"). "Complaint is corrective [as opposed to the tendency of satire "to be scornful"] and clearly does not despair of its power to correct." Furthermore, Peter adds, "In reading complaints we are ourselves trimmed, for the simple reason that all men are" (pp. 9-10). All of these conclusions, even in Bloomfield's view, would require that complaint be considered symbolic.

2. Personification

Though there had been scholarly condescension, disagreements, and an occasional defense of Piers Plowman as allegory in the nineteenth century, it was the twentieth-century scholars who set about the task of
rediscovering the nature of the allegory in the poem. Until 1950 and afterwards, to a great extent, allegory had been treated as a kind of symbolism, understood of course as moderns understand symbol. Robertson's paper on "Historical Criticism" and his articles might have merely raised hackles here and there; his and Huppé's book on Piers, which systematically and extensively analyzed the entire poem from a patristic-allegorical point of view, aroused indignation and anger perhaps unmatched even by the vehemence of the authorship controversy.

Morton Bloomfield, however, was raising objections to the idea of multi-level allegory as early as 1947, when he reviewed Coghill's The Pardon of Piers Plowman. "[A]llegory and symbolism," he asserts, are "really quite different processes," in fact, "[i]n some ways, . . . the exact opposite of each other" (review, p. 463). Then, he explains:

Symbolism starts from a literal story, historical or created, and interprets it in various senses (often, in medieval times, four). It is a movement from the concrete to the abstract. Allegory, on the other hand, is really personification. It is a movement from the abstract to the concrete (p. 463).

Whether he is conscious of the fact or not, Bloomfield's definition is almost identical to Coleridge's:

An allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses. . . . On the other hand a symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general. . . . It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible. . . .

Bloomfield's objection is not that Langland uses only "allegory"; rather, the scholar believes Piers contains both personification and
symbol, and even, at times, "a four-fold [sic] meaning (often called, in
order to add to the confusion on the subject, the allegorical
interpretation)." Most of Piers, however, he believes to be "allegory,"
i.e., personification (p. 463). As a part of his second objection,
Bloomfield maintains that "the fourfold interpretation," especially
popular among the Victorines, began to lose favor during the Middle
Ages as early as the thirteenth century, as demonstrated by St. Thomas
Aquinas (p. 463).

After Robertson's and Robertson and Huppe's works were published,
Bloomfield was the first to take up the attack. In 1952 he published
both The Seven Deadly Sins, several pages of which he devotes to a
brief history of symbolism and allegory, and a review of Piers Plowman
and Scriptural Tradition. In the review, Bloomfield argues that, from
the twelfth century, changes in exegesis began to occur and that
"[a]fter the Victorines, the multi-leveled symbolic interpretation
became . . . less popular . . . , and in general by the fourteenth
century its influence was weak" (p. 247). Furthermore, "Piers Plowman
is essentially an allegorical, not a symbolic, work" (a re-statement
that Piers uses personification). Bloomfield does acknowledge that
"four- (or three- or two-) level meaning" may be found occasionally, but
not often (p. 247). In his book he offers the nineteenth-century
definitions of symbolism and of allegory or personification" (p. 30),
giving as his sources C. R. Post's Mediaeval Spanish Allegory (1915)
and C. S. Lewis's The Allegory of Love (1936), before he traces the
history of the two concepts using the nineteenth-century definitions
(see pp. 29-36).
In December of 1953 R. W. Frank, in an article entitled "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification Allegory," in near-complete agreement with Bloomfield, presents his response to the polysemous allegorical reading of Piers Plowman and to medieval works generally. While he accepts the term allegory, he makes a distinction between two types—"symbol-allegory" to refer to works like The Divine Comedy and "personification-allegory" to refer to works like Piers Plowman (p. 238). He wavers between the idea that personification and allegory are opposites and that they are merely different (pp. 237; 242, n. 15). Relying heavily on L. L. Camp's 1942 dissertation, Frank states, "Characters [i.e., personifications] are never allegoric. They are literal . . ." (p. 243). Personification becomes allegoric only when a character speaks or acts (p. 243). At least four times he defines his two allegorical categories, like Bloomfield, in the nineteenth-century fashion: symbol begins with the concrete; personification begins with the abstract, and abstractions are not "concrete form" but the product of a writer's "psychology or biography, . . . literary sources or the history of ideas" (pp. 238, 239, 240, 241, 242; 242, n. 15). He studiously avoids mentioning the patristic-allegorists, preferring instead, apparently, the weaker opponent Coghill (p. 249; it is possible that the article was submitted before Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition was published, but Frank does mention Edward Bloom's 1951 article).

Frank, in contrast to St. Augustine, the other Fathers, and medieval theologians and poets, informs his reader that the medieval writer and preacher offer no help, "for they were not interested in
this kind of literary criticism" (p. 239). Moreover, the authors and
preachers complicate the matter by using both in a single work; for, as
Frank acknowledges, to them "both were methods of expressing the truth"
(pp. 238-39). In apparent self-contradiction and in contradiction to
the Scriptures, St. Augustine, John of Salisbury, Richard de Bury,
Hugh of St. Victor, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and John of Bromyard--to name
a few--he misleadingly asserts the half-truth that "the medieval
allegorist was not intent on baffling his reader" (p. 240); an author,
therefore, usually explains his own "symbol-allegory" by attaching a
"significatio" or by explaining his symbol. Then in another contra-
position, Frank states that the writer does not always explain because
explanation may be (1) "artistically clumsy," (2) "dangerous"
politically, (3) unnecessary since he "thinks he can" expect his reader
"to understand," (4) communication which he reserves for "a select
few," or (5) impossible if the author "is a mystic and cannot describe
his experience literally" (pp. 240-41).

"Personification-allegory" is less complex than "symbol-allegory"
and, therefore, easier to read. Since the personifications are simply
what "their names say they mean" (p. 243), the understanding of the
meaning of the name ("imaginatif," for example) is all-important. Not
only will the name, which is to be read "literally," explain itself,
but also it will give "the reader a key to the theme or problem being
dramatized," as in the first vision of Davel, in which all the
characters are aspects of "human intelligence and human learning"
(pp. 245-46). Nevertheless, Frank accepts the possibility that the
personification may also "suggest a historical character." He, of
course, objects to Greta Hort's attempt to explain the meaning of Langland's "names" (p. 244, n. 22, n. 23).

Finally, Frank denies any connection between allegory--"symbol" or "personification"--in poetry and in Scriptural exegesis; in fact, he maintains that personification-allegory "developed without any historical connection whatsoever with Scriptural exegesis" (p. 249), apparently assuming that, as a consequence, the form was not ever used in exegesis. But even the application of the fourfold method to Scripture, Frank argues in agreement with Bloomfield, tends to be "over-estimated" and was declining "in the later medieval period" (p. 248).

In 1957 Frank offers his study of Piers Plowman as a test of his "supposition" (Scheme of Salvation, p. 3). In his Prologue, he offers a brief summary of that supposition:

[The statements of personification--of the character "thought," for example--are to be read literally. There is no reason to suppose that there is a hidden, a second meaning in a speech by an abstraction. . . . I shall read the poem as a literal rather than an allegorical poem, and I shall be looking for literal rather than hidden, second, or "higher meanings" (p. 2).

Frank takes note that at times the poet "does intend a second meaning," but when he does, he usually gives his own explanation (pp. 2-3).

The next two years saw the appearance of Bloomfield's attack on patristic-allegorism and his re-assertion of his earlier theory on personification, and the appearance of reviews of Frank's book, four of which will be discussed here.

Bloomfield, interestingly, regards patristic-allegorism as a part of the "exceedingly fashionable . . . intellectual flight from history"
to interpret literature symbolically or, as it is often called, "allegorically" ("Symbolism," p. 73). Moreover, "revolt against psychology" is another "[p]arallel" modern departure from "[t]he particularity of fact and event" (p. 73). After briefly tracing the origin and development of Biblical exegesis (pp. 73-74; 74, n. 2) and the origin and development of its application in modern medieval studies beginning in 1929 with the publication of Harry Caplan's "The Four Senses of Scripture" and H. Flanders Dunbar's Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the Divine Comedy, Bloomfield makes known his belief that though not "totally wrong," the method applied to medieval works generally and especially to medieval secular works "is essentially erroneous" (p. 75). He has four primary objections: (1) the assumption that symbolism is unique to the Middle Ages and that "no essential difference [exists] between literary works and theological or pastoral works" (p. 75); (2) the belief that, "except perhaps in sermons," the later Middle Ages gave emphasis to the literal sense of Scripture; (3) that not even during the period of its greatest use was multi-level symbolism systematic or consistent (p. 76-77); (4) that "the polysemantic [sic] school makes no difference between the Bible which was dictated by God . . . and literary works written purely by sinful and erring man" (p. 77); and (5) that there is no way of verifying a symbolic interpretation (pp. 80-81). Bloomfield does accept "an occasional symbolic reference," but that any man, sinful or otherwise, apparently, could intentionally write multi-level symbolism he regards as "unthinkable" (p. 78). He then resolves the matter: "common sense must step in" (p. 78). Theologians
themselves "had to give lip service to," but doubtless never really practiced, except occasionally, this method (pp. 80-81). Followed by his paraphrase of a passage from *Piers Plowman*, he insists that "personification [is] not symbolism," and, in the manner of the authorship controversialists, asserts that "the burden of proof lies" with his opponents (pp. 78-79).

Two of the 1959 reviewers of Frank's book, John Lawlor and Theodore Silverstein, essentially approve of his discussion of *Piers* as personification-allegory. Lawlor finds Frank's distinctions useful and "if adopted" believes that they "may . . . save some confusion." Despite reservations, Silverstein applauds Frank's "clearing-up of the essential ground over which exegesis must be fought out" and his insistence "that to read responsibly an allegory which is literally an allegory [personification, presumably], you start by being as literal as you can." Kaske's review, also in 1959, reads like a response to Lawlor and Silverstein. Kaske explains at the outset that his own research has led him to different assumptions about allegory. He then takes note of the fact that Frank had presented the theoretical basis for this book "earlier" and that the theory "has so far received neither conclusive support nor . . . general acceptance" (p. 730). Kaske's second major point is that Frank's own statements about his method are contradictory and that, contrary to his theory, he has not consistently read the poem literally. An especially telling point is Kaske's statement that Frank's association of the Trinity with each of "the major
divisions of the poem . . . remains puzzling indeed if it is not to be thought of as somehow contributing an additional stratum of meaning" (p. 731).

The year before, D. W. Robertson had attacked one of the bases for the theory of Frank's method and one of the apparent errors in Bloomfield's argument against patristic-allegorism: Robertson cites the commentaries of Grosseteste, Gorran, Holcot, and Berchorius; the Glossa Ordinaria; scribes of the fourteenth century; the preface to the Anticlaudianus, Raison's remarks in the Roman de la Rose; the poetic theory of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Salutati; Gower on the Aurora; and Chaucer's Parson's Tale--as he puts it, "[t]o mention a few instances"--as evidence that Frank's method is "contrary to both mediaeval theory and mediaeval practice" and as evidence opposing the view that "spiritual exegesis" had virtually ceased to exist by the fourteenth century (p. 396).

Thus, an analysis of Piers Plowman scholarship more than supports George Landow's 1971 statement that "[t]he allegorical tradition in painting, poetry, and critical theory so vital in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, had all but died by 1856 when Ruskin published the third volume of Modern Painters . . . " (p. 321). Indeed, as M. H. Abrams has shown, by that time poetry in general, and allegory in particular--understood by its attackers as mere personification--had been under attack for over a hundred years (pp. 285-89; 385, n. 85). That the attack continued through the nineteenth century, by and large successfully, has been demonstrated by Abrams, by Landow in his quotations by Coleridge, Macaulay, Arnold, and Carlyle (pp. 321-32), and by the statements of scholars concerning Piers Plowman.
N. Patristic-Allegorists

The patristic-allegorists, or as they tend to call themselves, the historical critics, did not burst full blown into the literary critical world, as this examination of Piers Plowman has shown. When Robertson, at the English Institute Conference in 1950, issued his call for "that kind of literary analysis which seeks to reconstruct the intellectual attitudes and the cultural ideals of a period in order to reach a fuller understanding of its literature" ("Historical Criticism," p. 3), he was simply emerging as one with Owst, J. M. Campbell, and Hort, for instance, to whom the wisdom of the past is worthy of respect, to whom literature can serve as "an excellent guide" to "judgments of value" based "not only on our own experience, but also on the conception we are able to formulate of the experience of humanity," to whom, in short, literature "can provide the food of wisdom as well as more transient aesthetic satisfaction" (p. 31). Modern man would do well, Robertson believes, to recall "the wise humility taught in the twelfth century by Bernard of Chartres, who said, 'We are dwarves upon the shoulders of giants!'" (p. 31).

In spite of the fact that patristic-allegorists may perhaps not quite consider the historians of ideas and the eclectics (and literary critics generally) who are their predecessors the giants on whose shoulders they sit, they acknowledge the contributions to their own understandings of those predecessors. Among those prior to and contemporary with Robertson and Huppé, to whom the term patristic-allegorist may be applied, are a few scholars who were essentially applying or moving toward the application of "historical criticism"
to Piers Plowman even before Robertson's English Institute paper. In 1941 George Sanderlin, who has already been mentioned, and in 1949 Alfred L. Kellogg, in "Satan, Langland, and the North," analyzed passages in the C-Texts using patristic exegesis. In 1950 Huppé and in 1951 R. E. Kaske--neither of whom was then exactly applying the technique--published respectively "Petrus Id Est Christus: Word Play in Piers Plowman, the B-Text" and "The Use of Simple Figures of Speech in Piers Plowman B: A Study in the Figurative Expression of Ideas and Opinions." Huppé's thesis is that this word play, which is to be understood within the medieval context, is the "unifying principle . . . : God may be known only through Will, that is, the will, instructed by Piers, Petrus, id est Christus" (p. 190). Kaske, actually as a historian of ideas in this article, concludes that Langland's theology, his "figures," and his conceptions generally "are highly traditional," many of them "commonplace in medieval didactic literature" (pp. 572, n. 3; 593).

It is also evident [he notes] that a study of them (particularly of the patristic figures) in the light of their traditional continuity would be a tremendous contribution to our knowledge both of Piers Plowman and of medieval literature generally (p. 572, n. 3).

Robertson's "Historical Criticism," which sets forth the theory of patristic-allegorism, applies the theory to works other than Piers Plowman. Nevertheless, critical passages in Piers are frequently touched upon. In the context of charity, he makes mention of the Pardon Scene when "Pieres for pure tene pulled it [the Pardon] atweyne": 
Under the Old Law, which Piers Plowman tears in half to the astonishment of literary historians, salvation was not possible. The New Law [charity] does not replace the Old Law, but simply vivifies it, and all of the Old Law is implicit in the New (p. 5).

Continuing his discussion of charity, now in relation to cupiditity, as the two ultimately opposed loves and their figuration as Jerusalem and Babylon with man the "pilgrim or exile in a Babylonian world who should journey toward the eternal peace of Jerusalem," Robertson explains the allegorical conception of Jerusalem as it relates to Will's quest for salvation, his search for charity, and the explanations he receives (see B.I.140-41, 146-47; XV.145-90; XVI.1ff.):

Jerusalem was thought of as existing within the human heart, in the church or in society, and in the after life, and the pilgrimage of the spirit had to be made, as Will learns in Piers Plowman, first within one's self" (p. 6).

The "wandering pilgrim," moreover, may wear "varied costumes. . . . In Piers Plowman he travels in the guise of the human will seeking Truth in the confused field of the fourteenth-century church" (p. 22). In a further apparent reference to the garden where the Tree of Charity grows, in Passus XVI, Robertson explains the necessity of the "methods of historical criticism." A poet, using "an artificial 'pictura,'" so combined Scriptural signs that this "new poetic combination . . . may not resemble verbally any passage in Scripture. The result is a pictura [sic] which is fundamentally Biblical, but which does not contain any Biblical phrases." Such a garden is found in Piers Plowman as well as in other Old and Middle English poems (p. 13). This lecture was not documented since it was intended as an introduction to the exceedingly well-documented studies which followed it.
J. A. W. Bennett in England published a brief article on *Piers Plowman* in March, 1950, before Robertson presented "Historical Criticism" at the English Institute in America in September of the same year. It will be recalled that Bennett's two previous articles (1943) concerning the poem had been attempts to establish the dates of the texts. This article, however, is a survey of the context, method, and subject of *Piers*. Though it might have been analyzed with the patristic scholarship since it assumes that Langland knows St. Augustine and St. Bernard, in fact, he "may have had monastic training" ("Wm Langland's," p. 381), it is not discursive. It might have been grouped with those who regard allegory as symbol since he seems to use the term allegory as a sustained metaphor and he refers to the poem as "a complex of several allegories" (p. 381). Nevertheless, his remarks on allegory suggest that his critical position is not far from that of the patristic-allegorists:

We are still inclined to think of allegory as Dickens described it painted on the ceiling in Mr. Tulkington's chambers--'a bulky lady in celestial linen sprawling among flowers, clouds, and big-legged boys and making the head ache'. But the personifying of abstractions is the least part of allegorical method. Indeed, allegory is not a literary method so much as a way of embodying spiritual truth (p. 382).

Bennett associates Langland with poets like Dante, Chaucer, and Alan of Lille, who through poetic fable attempted to convey the truth which philosophers from St. Augustine to St. Bernard and St. Thomas had sought in their syntheses of the "all-inclusive unity . . . of the whole natural and supernatural order" (p. 381). "Love," Bennett asserts, "is the one constant element," for in Langland as in Dante "[p]hilosophy . . . has Wisdom for her subject-matter, and for her form, Love'.'
(pp. 381-832). Both poets in this are in "the tradition of St. Augustine and St. Bernard, the tradition that profoundly affected St. Thomas himself" (p. 382). Langland's "uniqueness, his greatness," then, lies not in his originality of conception but in his ability "to relate the world of nature to the world of the spirit, man's inner life to the life of society, the life of study and contemplation to the life of action; and to express these relations in vivid terms" (p. 382). The one major assumption on which Bennett seems to differ with the patristic-allegorists (to be sure, there may be a number of disagreements on individual points) is the assumption regarding the poet's learning. Though he regards Langland as knowledgeable, he questions going "to the opposite extreme" from regarding the poet as merely a wandering "rustic" to considering Langland as himself a philosopher (p. 381).

Two years following this article (1952), another appeared anonymously in The Times Literary Supplement, as a review of Rossell H. Robbins's edition of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century lyrics and of Robertson and Huppé's book. It is, in the main, a favorable one, praising the book as the most methodical and fruitful study of "Langland's series of allegories" and of the frequent necessity of knowledge of traditional interpretation in order to understand Langland's use of Scripture ("Medieval Studies," p. 478). The reviewer does express, however, some serious reservations about the extent to which the authors apply their method. In fact, this review sounds suspiciously like Bennett's article, even to his major objection: "No one any longer believes that he was writing for peasants: we must not rush
to the opposite extreme of supposing that he wrote for professor of exegesis" (p. 478).

One other work written before patristic-allegorism became a definite school of criticism should be mentioned here. In 1951 Thomas J. Grace at Oxford University completed his dissertation, "A Study of the Ascetical Elements in Piers Plowman and Their Bearing on the Structure and Meaning of the Poem: With Special Reference to the B-Text." Grace defines ascetical as the "tropological" meaning of the poem, "the application of the story to the spiritual life of the individual soul" (p. ii). In his first two chapters, prior to his tropological explication of the poem seriatim, he discusses the medieval understanding of allegory and the tradition of asceticism. According to Grace, the first sign that medieval allegory was looked on with distaste though still with understanding is in the work of Sir Richard Blackmore in the late seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century in the writings of Addison and Johnson it is clear that allegory has come to be understood as personification (pp. 13-14). Langland, Grace concludes, clearly used the fourfold method, emphasizing first one level, then another (pp. 31-32).

In his second chapter he disagrees with those who have sought affinities between Langland and the mystics, one of his main objections being that mysticism is concerned with acquiring "particular graces" while asceticism is concerned with spiritual and moral perfection. Grace, however, does not believe that Langland belonged "to any school." He borrowed from the great range of knowledge available. "The application was his own" (p. 56). Though Grace
occasionally refers to a level of meaning other than the ascetical, or
tropological, his analysis of Piers focuses on this one level.

To support his views, Grace quotes widely from the Church Fathers,
theologians, and devotional writers--John Cassian, Origen, Cyprian,
Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Bede, Anselm, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas,
Bonaventure, Pseudo-Bonaventure, Richard and Hugo of St. Victor,
Rhabanus Maurus, William of St. Thierry, Thomas Holcott, Richard
Rolle, Walter Hilton, David of Augsburg, and Rudolph de Biberach.

Robertson and Huppé's book is, indeed, an awesome scholarly and
critical venture. If Robertson's paper in 1950 erred on the side of
too little documentation, his and Huppé's Piers Plowman and Scriptural
Tradition (1951) so extensively glosses the text with commentary,
primarily from the Patrologia Latina, that reading it, especially the
Latin of stylists like Godefroid de Fontaines, is likewise a major
venture. Their book is the first and, so far as I know, the only pub-
lished study of an epic-length work to be so minutely and coherently
analyzed in its entirety, with readings so extensively documented from
the Church Fathers and medieval theologians and homilists. There is
hardly a word--not to mention an image, motif, or scene--to which
Robertson and Huppé do not address themselves, though not, unfortunately,
always with consistency. In all the objections raised to the book,
this lack of consistency has been pointed out only by Morton Bloomfield
(review, p. 245), critics of the book having concerned themselves pri-
marily with its methodology.

Contrary to the view that Scripture quoted in Piers is "to
reinforce the literal meaning of what he [Langland] is saying or to
point an allegory," that it is macaronic, that it is an "appeal to
authority . . . to show that his . . . teachings were not revolutionary"
and "to . . . make the teachings of the Church and the Bible more
intelligible to the common people,"91 Robertson and Huppe believe that
the Scriptural quotations provide "a key to the ultimate source of
its [the poem's] allegorical meaning" (p. 2). This Scriptural key,
however, can be found only in the sentence, or the spiritual inter-
pretation, "established by the Fathers" and "not greatly altered in
the course of time" (p. 4). The sentence "might be elaborated" on
three levels; but, as the authors point out, there was variation.
Since students were taught to master grammar, syntax, and "obvious
meaning" in order that they might then study "the higher meaning, the
doctrinal content," or sentence, Robertson and Huppe regard as the
"natural" consequence that an author would write "with a definite
sentence in mind." This sentence was not a superimposed "moral" but
was integrated, often "skillfully," into the work to form "the dominant
unifying element" (p. 1). The poet selected from the abundant possible
meanings of a word, making clear by its context which meaning he has
chosen; but the meanings were traditional and a knowledge of these
meanings is necessary in order to understand the poem (pp. 5-6). Thus,
these scholars show through their exegetical references not only the
meaning of words but the "poetic effects" and structural perfection
Langland achieved through his use of "Scriptural connotations"
(pp. 247-48).

Robertson and Huppe find the poem, in an ultimate sense of
course, to be concerned with charity and cupidity (pp. 10-15); but more
specifically Piers treats the "controversy between the friars and the seculars" (p. 234); it "analyzes" the confusion and chaos of fourteenth-century society, its loss of ideals and the causes of this loss; and finally it "describes in detail the ideals which must be reactivated if the Christian world is ever to go again on the greatest of all crusades, the pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem" (pp. 234-35; see also pp. 236-48). Robertson and Huppé do not profess to have given a definitive reading; in fact, they call their book "merely a beginning which indicates a direction for fruitful study of the poem" (p. 16).

For several years subsequently, little was done to reinforce their study. Doubtless, one basic reason was that most medieval scholars had done little to correct their ignorance of the Church Fathers which J. M. Campbell had lamented in 1933. Two scholars, however, made considerable effort. From 1957 through 1960, R. E. Kaske in five articles and Alfred Kellogg in two sought to illumine specific passages.

Kellogg, in his 1949 article had shown the illuminating possibilities of patristic-allegorism. In "Langland and Two Scriptural Texts" (1958), he, in one instance, began with a suggestion in one of Robertson and Huppé's notes (p. 44, n. 52) and showed that, contrary to their suggestion, the Latin quotation was probably not a scribal error; in a second instance, he gave a patristic-allegorical interpretation of the procession accompanying Lady Mead. The first text is the one at B.I.117 (C.II.111), which, since Skeat, had been accepted as "[a]n inexact quotation from Isaiah xiv. 13, 14 . . . ." (Skeat, II, 25) until Robertson and Huppé found that, with the exception of the word
pedem for sedem, "Alanus de Insulis quotes the line . . . as in our text, . . ." referring to the Psalms as his source. They then found the line as it is found in Alanus in St. Augustine's commentary on the first psalm (p. 44, n. 52). Kellogg explains that St. Augustine "[i]n his Enarrationes in Psalmo, . . . interprets the word 'pes' [foot] as a figure of love, of the movement of the soul toward its desired object" in his discussion of charity and cupidiry, in which he uses Satan as the exemplum of those who, recognizing their position of special favor, succumb to pride and fall from God's love (pp. 387-88). Langland, indeed, quotes this line in the context of those who "Lopen out with Lucifer" (B.I.116). But there is more. In St. Augustine's Confessions Kellogg finds that pondus (weight), which seeks its natural level, is also "my love; by it I am carried wherever I am carried" (as quoted, p. 388). The two—pondus and pes as images of love—came to be closely associated, and so Thomas Bradwardine, in De Causa Dei, quotes St. Augustine thus: "My foot [not, as in Augustine, my "weight"] is my love; by it I am carried wherever I am carried" (as quoted, p. 388). According to Kellogg, then, Langland's line is not a misquotation or scribal error, but a perfectly traditional conception.

The other text Kellogg treats is Exodus 15:1-4, the song concerning the horse and his rider being cast into the sea when Pharaoh and his army were drowned in the Red Sea. There were two separate traditional interpretations. One began with Origen whose commentary was repeated by Bede and Rabanus Maurus, in which the passage was interpreted allegorically to mean that the horse is anyone born of flesh and
its rider is either God or the devil and his angels. Judas was an example of a horse whose rider became Satan (pp. 390-91). The second tradition began with the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, the assault of the vices upon the virtues. The idea was picked up and elaborated by Gregory in the *Moralia*, and elaborated further by Bernard in *Sermones in Canticorum*. Bernard contrasts the "struggle between the forces of the 'Amica,' the soul and bride of Christ, and the chariots of the vices [of Pharaoh] under the leadership of Satan [Pharaoh himself]" (as quoted, p. 392). The three chief forces, or princes, in the Satanic army are Malice, Luxury, and Avarice, whose chariots are also allegorized (p. 392). Both traditions are found in the *Glossa Ordinaria* (pp. 392-93). Stephen Langton combines the two traditions so that "both sinners and sins become identified with carts" (pp. 395-96). Langton, furthermore, substitutes Superbia for Malice and identifies the three with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life of I John 2:16. Following Langton, Richard de Wetheringsett (c. 1230) writes of the lust of the flesh as the "devil's palfrey," of avarice as a "rouncy," and of pride as a "war horse." Kellogg finds in *Piers*, B.II.161-65, 179, 182, and A.II.132ff., a further synthesis of these traditions, making them a commentary on the world Langland saw around him. Meed's motley procession, hence, is not an original idea but an adaptation from the commentaries: the war horse, or *dextrarius*, becomes "as destreres dihten" (A.II.150); the *runcinus trottnane* becomes the "sysour . . . that softly trotted" (A.II.135; B.II.164); the palfrey becomes the "prouisours [dressed] on palfreis wyse" (A.II.148; B.II.170); and the chariot becomes the "cart" and the "long cart" of
the "commissarie" and of "Lyer" (A.II.154, 156; B.II.179, 182).
False, Pavel, and Liar obviously represent their father, the devil (pp. 379-98).

In all this Kellogg has sought to show what patristic-allegorists assume: that "Langland was very much a part and an observer of the world of his time, but he existed simultaneously and perhaps more fully in a world of Biblical interpretation and allusion" (p. 398)--an assumption first demonstrated in this kind of detail with the authority of their knowledge by Robertson and Huppé.

In 1960 Kellogg published another article, "Langland and 'Canes Muti': The Paradox of Reform," in which he expands an idea which Robertson and Huppé had treated briefly (Robertson and Huppé, pp. 124-25, 151-52). The passages where the idea is found are B.X.274-87, and XII.123-27. Making use of commentaries on Isaiah 56:10 by Gregory, Gildas, Aelfric, Wulfstan, and the fourteenth-century Speculum Christiani, Kellogg suggests that Langland is expressing his concern both about the secular clergy and the criticism of them by the friars and Lollards ("borel clerkes"). Langland, he believes, was afraid of the divisions within the Church, especially of "unbridled criticism"; his hope was for "a reform movement within the secular clergy" (pp. 25-35).

Four of Kaske's articles will be treated here; the fifth--presented in 1960 in the English Institute debate--will be discussed later. The first of the two 1957 articles, "Langland and the Paradisus Claustrialis," explicates B.X.300-05 in the patristic-allegorical manner, not as a
"fond personal recollection," but rather as an "indictment of worldly religious," those who despite their religious vows live corrupt lives, through the exegetical figure of the cloister as a paradise of study and love. These lines, preceded and succeeded by conventional descriptions of the worldly religious, "furnish another brilliant proof" of the poet's fresh, lively use of traditional figures in a carefully organized manner (pp. 481-83).

Kaske's "Gigas the Giant in Piers Plowman" (1957) and "The Speech of 'Book' in Piers Plowman" (1959) both deal with the same passage, the former article actually being subsumed within the latter. As his extensive examination of the commentaries, hymns, and poems show, the word Gygas in B.XVIII.249-51, "is universally interpreted in the Latin tradition as a reference to Christ" (p. 177). Langland is apparently here, through the words "gynne engyned," referring to the incarnation seen as a "device, a trick, by which God has been able to outmaneuver the Father of lies . . ." (p. 182; see also p. 180). In the extended context, Kaske suggests that the reference to the sun in 11. 243-44 and to "his moder gladye," 1. 253, additionally point to

Mary as the Second Eve and a sharer in the work of redemption; as a representative of mankind at the Crucifixion; and particularly as a symbol of the human nature of Christ, juxtaposed here with the proofs of His divinity to emphasize the theme of the geminae naturae . . . (p. 184).

In a note at the end of this article, Kaske suggests that the speaker of these lines, whom he had initially identified as the Bible (p. 177), may be the "littera of the New Testament" in that intermediate place of fulfilling the Old Testament just before the beginning of the "new spiritual age" (p. 185, n. 26).
In 1959 examining B.XVIII.228-57, Kaske discovers the passage to be more comprehensive, more allusive, in fact, "one of the most originally conceived, intellectually controlled, and compact mosaics of traditional allusion in *Piers Plowman* or elsewhere" (p. 133). Concerning the identification of Book, Kaske still regards the identification in his 1957 note as accurate, but in addition he suggests that it may also include the Breviary and perhaps be an allusion to both the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature (p. 132). A second section of this article suggests that the speech may possibly refer to the Joachistic three ages, an idea discussed above.

In his other 1959 article, "Langland's Walnut-Simile," Kaske elucidates another passage (B.XI.245-57) which had been a puzzle to scholars who have not used patristic exegesis. The "walnut-simile--like so many other figures in *Piers Plowman*--is of exegetical origin," Kaske explains (p. 650). He finds both verbal and structural parallels to almost every line of this passage in the works of the Greek and Latin Fathers and in medieval sermons, hymns, poems--in short, almost everywhere in traditional writings. The "kernel" of the walnut itself is the *nucleus* of "sweetness of internal devotion which consoles the just and the patient" on one level; on another it is "the sweetness of the indwelling Christ," a level closely related to "the sweetness of the heavenly reward in Christ"; and finally it figures the earthly life of Christ himself, who, "the joy and the salvation of mankind," was "hidden within the rough exterior of poverty" (p. 653). Though the passage may lose "some of its apparent 'originality' by modern standards[] [i]t gains . . . in purposefulness . . . [and] in that
complexity of metaphysical allusion that distinguishes medieval religious poetry at its best" (p. 654). With such careful, knowledgeable readings by patristic-allegorists, who are obviously explaining words, lines, and passages which had been considered either enigmatic or the result of carelessness, whimsy, or "poetic effect," it is no wonder that a debate was scheduled by the English Institute.

But before the debate is discussed, some opponents of patristics, allegorists, or patristic-allegorists should have their say. Some fear the loss of "poetry" which results from such analyses; some are concerned that this approach removes the poem from modern experience. Some make telling points. Most of their criticism is directed toward Robertson and Huppé's *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition*. Writing prior to the controversy over patristic-allegorism and even acknowledging that there is a validity in the multiplicity of approaches (though he finds the Wells-Coghill-Chambers approach and the patristic approach potentially misleading), George Kane in 1951 maintains that the "safest" and "most fruitful" approach is the study of the poem "as a poem" (see pp. 182-85). He then proceeds to "psycho-analyze" the author. In her 1955 article Elizabeth Suddaby, however, is more inclusive and severe in her broad condemnation of considering *Piers Plowman* "as a document of major importance to the social historian, as a puzzling allegory, and as a vehicle of certain great theological and spiritual truths," but only exceptionally as a poem, a work which gives pleasure and which can be read and re-read with a sense of exhilaration and discovery (p. 91).

In the same year Willi Erzgräber makes the incredible charge that Robertson and Huppé overlook the poetry by reading symbolically what
is meant to be taken realistically ("wo sie ganz eindeutig realistisch
gemeint ist," "Wm. Langlands," pp. 130-31). John Lawlor, who in
1950 was more nearly in agreement with Suddaby, by 1957 holds the more
tolerant view of Kane ("Imaginative Unity," pp. 113-16). In his view,
the most profitable approach is to "concern ourselves less with
doctrines . . . , and more with the nature of his progress towards
his goal" (p. 126). This approach takes one into the "very pressure
of experience itself" (p. 126).

The perspectives and concerns of these critics and scholars,
whatever they mean by "poetry" and "experience," are decidedly modern;
and the patristic-allegorist can find little in their works which
elucidate the poem. There are critics and scholars, on the other hand,
whose indictments must be responded to even though their perspectives
are modern because their obvious knowledge of medieval material
carries with it greater authority and, in some instances, serves as a
corrective to misreadings, misunderstandings, and insufficient
knowledge. Morton Bloomfield's review of Robertson and Huppé's book
in 1952, in which he attacked allegorism, patristic-allegorism in
particular, has been discussed. He vehemently objects to the method,
of course; but in the review he criticizes what he calls errors of
"fact." In his words, Robertson and Huppé "continually confuse
epistemological and metaphysical categories with psychological and
ethical categories. They also seem to misapprehend the difference
between a category per se and a category in terms of its ends"
(p. 245). He cites numerous passages which demonstrate confusion and
contradiction concerning the active and practical intellects; as one
example, he points out that they "equate Kinde Witte with both scientia and the speculative intellect (p. 152), which are by no means synonymous" (review, p. 245). The basically sympathetic review by Randolph Quirk in 1953 calls attention to an apparent misreading of Prologue, 11. 23-24, which weakens the effectiveness of the book. These lines, Quirk asserts, "seem clearly to mean 'some people (not choosing to be plowmen or merchants or minstrels) applied their energies to ostentation and dressed accordingly . . ." (p. 254). So much weight is placed by Robertson and Huppé on these lines as meaning "false plowmen . . . who dress as plowmen through pride" (as quoted, p. 254). that this reading threatens the whole structure, "[p]aradoxically . . . [because of] the high degree of structural perfection it seeks to attain. . . ." The very intricacy and skill of the entire book, thus, is flawed "when one part is shown to be unsound" (pp. 253-54). Such previous reviews, as well as the high regard in which Dunning's work is held, give credence to his 1955 objections to Robertson and Huppé's attempt to show in the Visio "mention and discussion of the three states of the spiritual life, denoted in a perfectly unequivocal manner in the Vita," and to show Piers the Plowman in the Visio as he is described "without ambiguity" in the Vita, failing thereby to indicate his development (review, p. 28).

A. C. Spearing in his 1960 "The Development of a Theme in Piers Plowman" objects to the "arbitrary and unrestricted allegoricism" of Robertson and Huppé on the basis of his formalist reading in terms similar to those of both Father Dunning and the "aesthetic" critics. Spearing states that the poem "progresses through a gradual deepening
understanding of truths" presented early in the poem (p. 252). Thus, when Robertson and Huppré interpret Hunger as "spiritual hunger" at B.VI.135-40, and then treat B.VI.255-58, as Piers the Plowman's concern with physical food, they show an unwarranted "regression" in the development of the "bread-image" (pp. 252-53). Their mistake, he asserts, is the mistake of R. W. Frank's and of other "recent interpretations" of the poem--the failure to take into account "the pregnancy of its language" (pp. 252-53).

As a survey of these opponents has shown, the battle line--even if raggedly--has been drawn. The debate at the English Institute reveals these and other divisions as Dorothy Bethurum adds her "fears . . . [that] the revolt against philology," the study of which is still the category under which pre-Chaucerian literature is treated, "has gone far, perhaps too far" in the association of early literature with other disciplines ("Foreword," p. v). She raises the question, moreover, of whether and when the exegetical method--if it is an appropriate one to apply to medieval literature--is to be applied to "the Arthurian romances . . . , Chaucer's work, and . . . apparently secular lyrics" (p. vii). In her view the sexual imagery in such religious works as those of St. Bernard "complicates the problem" (p. vii). In the debate, E. Talbot Donaldson94 presented the case against patristic-allegorism; R. E. Kaske,95 the defense; and Charles Donahue96 in his supposed summation actually presents further opposition.

Donaldson initiates the debate with the statement: "I am not aware of any theoretical objection to the use of patristic exegesis in the
criticism of medieval literature . . ." (p. 1), a misleading one, for he subsequently presents several. Since his objections are categorical and Donahue's are historical, Donahue's "Summation" and then Donaldson's "Opposition" will be discussed before Kaske's "Defense."

Donahue bases his opposition first on the partially mistaken belief that patristic-allegorists believe that "[p]atristic and medieval exegetes cared little for the . . . text [which he regards as synonymous with "the letter"], and were interested mainly in higher spiritual meanings reached by allegory," and second on the more nearly accurate belief that patristic-allegorists believe that "[t]he exegetical conviction that 'the letter killeth but the spirit quickeneth' had a profound influence on all, or almost all, medieval poets" and, thus, "that all, or almost all medieval poems are to be approached as allegories" (pp. 61-62). Donahue accepts the studies of Erich Auerbach in Mimesis (1953) and Herman Jordan in Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur (1911) that the Greeks were concerned with static characters or "fixed states," tending "to move by way of abstraction from the concrete real to a world of clear and manageable ideas" while the Hebrews concerned themselves with the dynamic, with "process and person," tending toward the treatment of "the complexities of concrete reality" (pp. 62-63). While Donahue states that in the Hebraic consciousness, "[w]hat is true of individual lives is true of the lives of nations" (p. 63), a statement which suggests close inter-relationships if not multi-level understanding, he regards this only as an indication of process in both the individual and national spheres.
Thus, Donahue sees the Hebraic spirit and early Christian exegesis lending themselves to typology (pp. 63-65).

Allegory, according to Donahue, is from the Greek tradition. By the sixth century B.C. the Greek gods had come to be viewed as "natural or psychic forces" (p. 65), and through the Stoics and neo-Platonists allegory came into Christian thought. Donahue regards the two--typology and allegory--as "basically different." "Nevertheless," he explains, "Greek allegorizing did become a part of the Christian exegetical tradition" despite the objections of some early Christians (p. 66).

Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine all made use of both typology and allegory without distinguishing between them. Of these Augustine has been the most influential, and his language at times lacks "exactness." Donahue is convinced, however, that his exegesis, like that of the other Fathers, is in the main "'Hebraic,' typological, rather than allegorical in the Greek sense" (p. 72; see also pp. 66-72). It is Donahue's contention that preachers, monks, and later exegetes misread Augustine and, finding the allegorical more useful than the literal sense, made extensive use of it on the supposed authority of Augustine (pp. 72-75). During the twelfth-century development, the "poetical," i.e., allegorical, and the "discursive," i.e., figural, came into conflict. It was Hugh of St. Victor who "best analyzes and presents" and "methodized for the use of the teacher" an exegetical approach which is "essentially" Augustinian--the three levels on which Scripture may be read, "the historical, the allegorical, and the tropological" (p. 75). But then Donahue discusses another triad which
Hugh makes use of—the *littera*, the *sensus*, and the *sententia*—and concludes that the use of this triad, "the procedure any philologist necessarily adopts . . . , has no connection with the other triad, historical, allegorical, tropological. The latter applies only to scripture" (pp. 76-77). Thomas Aquinas, "conservative and mainly Augustinian" (p. 77) repeats the terminology of exegesis, however, which originated with Cassian, that "Scripture has four meanings, literal or historical, allegorical, tropological or moral, and analogical" (p. 78). He, like his predecessors, nevertheless insists "on the primacy of the literal sense" (p. 78).

After this brief and somewhat controversial survey, Donahue concludes (1) that all "[t]he better schooled commentators . . . insist . . . on the primacy of the letter" of Scripture; (2) that "little in the exegetical tradition" would come between the idea that a work should be "clear" and "beautiful" according to the letter; (3) that despite the fact that Donahue himself has said that the Fathers made no such distinctions "[a] clear distinction should be made between" the typology of the Christian and the allegory of Greek exegesis ("When the modern critic turns, like Keats's Apollonius, a cold philosophical eye on poor Kit and Kalotte dissolving them into *intellectus* and *memoria*, he is following Stoic rather than Christian methods of exegesis."); and (4) that, as he calls them, "the pan-allegoric school" has "shed much light" in calling "attention to the importance of patristic and medieval exegesis for the interpretation of medieval letters" (pp. 80-82).
As was stated above, Donaldson in his opposition begins by stating that he knows of no "valid theoretical objection" to patristic-allegorism, a statement which he shortly repeats (p. 2). Yet one must regard these statements as debate strategy. In the first place, he expresses disbelief that "good medieval poetry is such single-minded allegory," that is, that an allegorical poem promoting charity, a term which he seems to understand in a reductionist manner could be "very good" (pp. 1-2). A second apparent objection is that patristic-allegorists, as he understands them, superimpose a meaning on a poem, whereas he asserts "the right of a poem to say what it means and mean what it says, and not what any one . . . thinks it ought to say or mean" (pp. 2-3). Third, he offers the suggestion that charity "is not the only subject worth writing about, and that many poems may conduce to charity without mentioning it either specifically or allegorically" (p. 3). A fourth statement of opposition is Donaldson's suggestion that "the Fathers . . . were less expert at devising rules for poets than . . . at devising rules for Christians" and his scepticism concerning "the generalization that medieval poets were enjoined by patristic authority to write nothing but allegories supporting charity . . ." (p. 3). Donaldson then states, "I cannot find that any of the patristic authorities ever clearly exhorted secular poets to write as the Bible had been written . . ." (p. 4). Finally, concerning sententia, Donaldson asserts that "competent poetry" will always contain what might "be called sententia," whether it is Greek, Latin, Arabic, Jewish, or non-Christian (p. 4). These statements of opposition are difficult to assess because they are general; moreover, it is not clear what critic he is addressing.
Donaldson's analysis of Robertson and Huppe's book on Piers, of Mortimer Donovan's article on the Nun's Priest's Tale, and of Robertson's interpretation of "Maiden in the Moor"—his test cases—is a combination of perception and wit. His discussion of Robertson and Huppe seems to reveal a lack of understanding of patristic-allegory in that he seems to assume that there is no literal level (see p. 7), but he does, for instance, call attention to the passage concerning those who "dress as plowmen through pride," a passage Quirk had commented on earlier, and to the abrupt and unexplained moving from metaphorical to literal—plowmen are prelates, but anchorites are anchorites (pp. 9-11). His reference to Piers the Plowman is clever, but it is not clear why he uses the plural plowmen:

I hope that the first time I read the poem I had enough sensitivity to it to realize that the word plowmen was loaded, even without the benefit of the Fathers. On the other hand, I do not think that I said at this point, "Hah, 'plowmen,' id est praelati" (p. 11).

One example perhaps will suffice to illustrate a literal-mindedness which is not, to be sure, characteristic of Donaldson, though this is not the sole instance. In his discussion of the "Maiden on the Moor" as Robertson explicates it, he gives a retort to Robertson and then asks his reader not to assume that he has said all that he might:

Robertson asks the question 'Why should she eat primroses?' I hope that if I answer 'Because she was hungry,' it will not be said of me that a primrose by the river's brim a yellow primrose was to him, and it was nothing more (p. 24).

In his concluding remarks, Donaldson shows that Robertson's 1950 paper has offended him, a matter which Kaske in "The Defense" calls attention to when he remarks on the seemingly "emotional objection" to patristic allegorism (p. 28). Donaldson refers to Robertson's
concluding statements concerning "transient aesthetic satisfactions"
(as quoted, p. 25), and responds:

It is here that my disagreement with him becomes absolute. I do not feel that the effect that the poems of Chaucer and Langland and other poets have upon me is mere transient aesthetic satisfaction. I believe that a great work of art provides the reader with the food of wisdom because it is a great work of art. If this food is not specific Christian doctrine, I console myself that it emanates from a humane tradition that is as old as Western civilization and that Christianity has done much to preserve (pp. 25-26).

This indignant concluding response seems ironic, for in Donaldson's chapter "Medieval Poetry and Medieval Sin," he asserts that poets "are in general far less interested in that fact [that "virtually all the great lovers of literature are . . . either fornicators or adulterers"] than they are in the human love whose value . . . the lovers enhance . . ." (p. 172). Then, after referring to the "morbid negatives" of Chaucer's Parson, he states that Chaucer was not particularly good at formulating "doctrines on sin," but he was good at revealing "the marvellous variety of life in a world which, however, sinful, is the only world we've got . . ." (p. 173). A medievalist who forgets that, to his authors, "there is another worlde besyde this" is likely to be offended by the patristic-allegorist.

Kaske's defense is based on documentation that the "[i]nterpretation of the Vulgate Bible occupied a central place in the intellectual life of the Middle Ages" (p. 27). Evidence for this statement may be found in commentaries, encyclopedias, sermons, hymns, sequences, the liturgy, and pictorial arts. He documents, moreover, that "the allegorizing technique which formed an important part of biblical exegesis was increasingly extended to non-biblical material as well"
(p. 27). Kaske, like Donaldson, professes to support his position by testing the method in relation to medieval poetry, but, first, he responds to certain objections to the method. In response to the reductionist view of Donaldson concerning charity and cupidity, he insists that, since he is dealing with an age which did not make sharp distinctions between the religious and the secular, to say that a work is didactic does not mean that that work was "employed in simple evangelic frenzy" nor can imagery be "most fruitfully" understood by immediately associating it with charity and cupidity, "accurate though the formula may be as universalizing commentary" (pp. 28-29). As to the matter of audience, he admits that little is known about "the 'sophisticated fourteenth-century English audience'" (p. 30); but it is obvious that a scholar must know a great deal more than the original audience of a poet or perhaps than the poet himself, for the scholar must be able to follow the poet's lead (pp. 30-31). A rather wide knowledge of exegetical lore is suggested, however, by the references to glosses, the exegetical metaphors, and exegetical allusions found in, e.g., Langland and Chaucer, and "in medieval art, medieval homiletic literature, and the medieval liturgy including the hymns and sequences" (p. 30).

Kaske points out, however, that the approach does have a multitude of problems to work out. "What we need first," he asserts, "is a really prodigious amount of minute, systematic research centered on individual medieval works . . . [to show] the precise contributions made by the exegetical tradition . . ." (pp. 31-32). To this end Robertson and Huppé made "a bold beginning." Weaknesses in their study
have been pointed out, weaknesses largely the result of lack of knowledge. Kaske believes it "less accurate, then, to say that the approach . . . has failed, than that it has not yet been painstakingly tried" (pp. 32-33). The remainder of his article is made up of a discussion in clear, abbreviated fashion of his own previously published or prepared articles and of articles in progress. His conclusion is a restatement of the necessity for further study and, finally, "[t]o this statement I should add that so far as one can tell, work of this kind is still close to its beginning" (p. 60).

The recognition of the accuracy of Kaske's statement, however, calls to mind at the same time how much time and effort and thought have gone into the scholarship of Piers Plowman since W. W. Skeat began to resurrect this medieval poem with his publication in 1866 of extracts from manuscripts, or how far criticism has come since Jusserand's enthusiasm for and spirited defense of the "greatness," unity, and integrity of the poem and its author. On the other hand, it also calls to mind the bromide that each age sees in its past what it wants or needs to see and the over-simplified statements made from time to time that the Renaissance saw Piers as prophecy, the eighteenth century saw it as satire, the nineteenth century saw it as the spontaneous overflow of the powerful feelings of a poor cleric, advocating the gospel of work, and the first third of the twentieth century saw it as the object of the celebrated authorship controversy. An examination of the scholarship of Piers Plowman has shown both the limitations and partial accuracy of these statements. The awareness of this partial truth has led Bloomfield to refer to patristic-allegorism as the latest fad, "a general intellectual flight from history" ("Symbolism," p. 73).
In an age such as this, however, no literary approach seems completely to fade from the scene. Though scholars are, of course, aware of the statements made repeatedly since the Reformation about the passing of the Old Order and of the profound pessimism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers who have pondered the resultant void, some seem not fully cognizant of the implications for literary criticism of this change in consciousness. Patristic-allegorists are seeking to regain the knowledge of that Old Order because they believe that

[modern man, like Will, is still searching for leadership which will embody traditional belief with human compassion, which can reformulate and activate . . . principles . . . [which will] bring the world a little nearer the Vision of Peace (Robertson and Huppe, p. 248).

Many of their opponents, however, do not believe that these principles are "the principles of charity" (p. 248), and their conception of "peace" is all too often merely the absence of war. To be sure, fellow scholars "have furnished an indispensable steppingstone to . . . [the] investigations" of patristic-allegorists (p. ix), but scholarship which seeks to think as the medieval man thought, to know what he knew, and to understand how and what he understood is, indeed, still close to its beginning.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


Bernard F. Hupé, "Date of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," SP, 38 (1941), 34-44; J. A. W. Bennett, "The Date of the B-Text of Piers Plowman, Medium Aevum, 12 (1943), 55-64, and "The Date of the A-Text of Piers Plowman," PMLA, 58 (1943), 566-72; and Aubrey Gwynn, "Date of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," RES, 19 (1943), 1-24.


Morton W. Bloomfield, "Was William Langland a Benedictine Monk?" MLQ, 4 (1943), 57-61.


29 Alfred L. Kellogg, "Langland and Two Scriptural Texts," Traditio, 14 (1958), 398; see also pp. 385-86.


34 Mary Eliason, "The Peasant and the Lawyer," SP, 48 (1951), 506.


54. Elizabeth Zeeman [Salter], "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," Essays and Studies, 11 (1958), 1, 2, 8.


56. Leo Spitzer, "Note on the Poetic and Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors," Traditio, 4 (1946), 414-22.


64 A. C. Spearing, "The Development of a Theme in Piers Plowman," RES, 11 (1960), 252. Spearing is here arguing for a rather wide audience for Piers as opposed to John Burrow, who, on the basis of his study of the beneficiaries of willed copies of the poem, believes the audience to have been restricted to clerics and educated laymen; see Burrow, "The Audience of Piers Plowman," Anglia, 75 (1957), 373-84. The question concerning the poet's knowledge and learning and the related question of his audience have been important factors in exploring the context of the poem. Nineteenth-century scholars unanimously agreed that Langland was unlearned and his audience popular; see, e.g., Marsh (1862) as quoted by Walter W. Skeat, ed., The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1886), II, xlviii; Thomas Wright, ed., The Vision and Creed of Piers Ploughman, 2nd ed. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1883), I, xxiii; and J. J. Jusserand, Piers Plowman: A Contribution to the History of English
Mysticism, trans. M. E. R. (1894; rpt. N.Y.: Russell and Russell, 1965), p. 173. These assumptions continued into the twentieth century unchallenged until 1915, when Gertrud Görnemann suggested that the poem was written for the upper-middle class; see Görnemann, Zur Verfasserschaft und Entstehungsgeschichte von "Piers the Plowman," Anglistische Forschungen, heft 48 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1915), pp. 139-40. Most scholars, however, continued to accept what had become the traditional view: see, e.g., M. Ray Adams, "The Use of the Vulgate in Piers Plowman," SP, 24 (1927), 559-60, 566; Sister Carmeline Sullivan, The Latin Insertions and the Macaronic Verse in Piers Plowman (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of Amer., 1932), p. 53; Nevill K. Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B-Text," Medium Aevum, 2 (1933), 128; Chambers's Man's Unconquerable Mind (1939), p. 104; and Coghill, "Pardon" (1944) in Blanch, ed., pp. 82-83. In 1936 both Greta Hort and C. S. Lewis assert that Langland was a man of learning whose audience was the clergy and those laymen with some knowledge of theology; see Greta Hort, Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought (1936; rpt. Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1969), pp. 156-59; and C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936; rpt. N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), p. 159. Throughout the forties and fifties, nevertheless, notable scholars continue to quote, paraphrase, or refer to Coghill's 1933 description of Langland as an unlearned intellectual catch all who wrote for the common man: see H. S. Bennett (1947), p. 50; Donaldson (1949), pp. 159-60; Tillyard, The English Epic (1954), p. 158; S. S. Hussey, "Langland, Hilton, and the Three Lives," RES, 7 (1956), 146-47; and Frank, Scheme of Salvation (1957), p. 10. At the same time, however, other scholars continually showed reasons for contrary views. By the time he reviewed Coghill's "The Pardon of Piers Plowman" in 1947, Morton Bloomfield makes the bold statement that "Langland [is] one of the most learned of English poets" (p. 464). Gervase Mathew (1948), while assuming that the poem had a popular audience, asserts that "according to medieval categories the Vision of Piers Plowman is essentially a learned poem" (pp. 326, 361). In his 1951 book George Kane posits a wide audience, but it is a dual one--the populace who would appreciate "merely clever macaronic verse," and the learned, who would recognize sophisticated irony, the veiled rebuke of the bishops, and the wealth of Biblical and traditional allusion (pp. 189-90, 204). In 1952 an anonymous reviewer of Robertson and Hupé's book in the Times Literary Supplement states, "No one any longer believes that he [Langland] was writing for peasants: we must not rush to the opposite extreme of supposing that he wrote for professors of exegesis"; see "Medieval Studies," rev. of Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins, and Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition, D. W. Robertson, Jr., and Bernard F. Hupé, Times Literary Supplement, 25 July 1952, p. 478. Dorothy Everett, however, is probably most accurate when she warns against drawing "too sharp distinctions between . . . 'aristocratic' and 'popular'" poetry; see Everett, Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 49. W. A. Pantin, in the same year, clearly demonstrates that the too sharp separation of laity and
clergy in itself is a mistake. "It is impossible," he asserts, "to exaggerate the importance of the educated layman in late medieval ecclesiastical history"; see W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (1955; rpt. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1963), p. 189; see also pp. 250, 253-62.


70 Willi Erzgräber, William Langlands "Piers Plowman": Eine Interpretation des C-Textes, Frankfurter Arbeiten aus dem Gebiete der Anglistik und der Amerika-Studien, heft 3 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1957), pp. 72-76.


73 D. W. Robertson, Jr., in "Historical Criticism" (1950), distinguishes between the two; see especially pp. 3-4.

74 Three of Frank's articles had been prepared before Robertson's 1950 address at the English Institute and series of articles appeared: "The Conclusion of Piers Plowman" JEGP, 49 (1950), 309-16; "The Number of Visions in Piers Plowman," MLN, 66 (1951), 309-12; and "The Pardon Scene in Piers Plowman" (1951).


78 An examination of the documentation in Bloomfield's book Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse reveals that, though he does make use of the Fathers, theologians, and medieval religious works, Bloomfield usually acknowledges that he is following the studies of their works done by previous scholars; see, for example, the following notes: pp. 182-83, n. 8-23; 194, n. 40 and 45; 195, n. 48; and 196, n. 62. Bloomfield is less literal, or discursive, in this book than in any of his prior publications; he, nevertheless, often summarizes when he deals with an extended section of the poem seriatim (see pp. 108-126).

79 David C. Fowler, Review of Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, by Robert Worth Frank, Jr., and of William Langlands "Piers Plowman": Eine Interpretation des C-Textes, von Willi Erzgräber, MLQ, 20 (1959), 285-87. As evidence of Fowler's tendency to summarize, see "The 'Forgotten' Pilgrimage in Piers the Plowman," MLN, 67 (1952), 524-26; and his Piers the Plowman: Literary Relations Between the A and B Texts (1961), which is replete with paraphrase and summary.


83 Morton W. Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature," MP, 56 (1958), 74, 76, 79. In this article, however, Bloomfield insists that "personification [is] not symbolism. Personification," he asserts, in agreement with R. W. Frank, "is making what is abstract concrete" (p. 78; see Frank, "The Art of Reading . . .," p. 242). If, as Bloomfield states, "meaning is at least partially symbolic" (p. 74), then unless personifications are meaningless, surely they are "at least partially symbolic."


86 For a summary, see Leo Leonard Camp, "Studies in the Rationale of Medieval Allegory," Abstracts of Theses and Faculty Bibliography, 1942-3, Publications of the University of Washington, Theses Series, 8 (1944), 93-96. Camp considers the ascription of "personification to medieval allegory" absurd (p. 93). He finds, however, that Roy Mackenzie (whom Frank refers to with approval; "The Art of Reading . . ." p. 245, n. 24) and C. S. Lewis are inaccurate in that what they call personification is not allegory as opposed to symbol, for "[in the traditional sense, current everywhere until about the eighteenth century, allegory is an extended metaphor by which one thing is said and another meant . . .]; that is, allegory is "as we would say . . . symbolic . . ." (p. 93). Of C. R. Post's definition of allegory (which Bloomfield makes use of; Seven Deadly Sins, p. 30), Camp states, "A moment's thought will show that this definition will describe almost any kind of didactic fiction" (p. 93).

"Personification," Camp explains, "was . . . a rhetorical figure . . . never in theory associated with allegory . . ., despite the constant association of the two devices in practice" (p. 93). He, as Frank indicates, advocates that personification be read "literally" (pp. 93-94).


88 Theodore Silverstein, Review of Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation, by R. W. Frank, Jr., MP, 56 (1959), 204-05.


In 1956 Richard M. Hazelton wrote a dissertation using the Commentaries of the Church Fathers to explain the medieval use of Cato; "Two Texts of the Disticha Catonis and Its Commentary, with Special Reference to Chaucer, Langland and Gower," Dissertation Abstracts, 16 (1956), 1899 (Rutgers Univ.).

Randolph Quirk, Review of Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition, by D. W. Robertson, Jr., and Bernard F. Huppré, JEGP, 52 (1953), 253-55.


ADDENDUM: CONCEPTIONS OF PIERS FLOWMAN
FROM 1961 TO THE 1970'S

Like scholarship generally, since 1960 Piers Plowman scholarship has flourished. While the controversy sparked in 1950 over historical criticism continues, scholars have not allowed it to dominate the study of the poem. Some scholars have attempted to build upon those insights and scholarship of the sixties even while others have utterly rejected them. But the general trend has been toward consolidation. The lines between the schools of scholarship have been blurred even further; and the categories subdivided into new ones as various facets of a tradition have been explored.

This exploration has convinced such scholars as Morton Bloomfield and George Kane that certain long-held assumptions are fallacious. In his 1962 book Piers Plowman: A Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse, Bloomfield acknowledges that in 1939 he, and no doubt others subsequently, had thoughtlessly repeated the idea, which he suggests began in 1895 with E. M. Hopkins's article, that Langland was not an educated man. On examination of the evidence, he now believes the author to be university educated.1 Kane, in his 1965 Chambers Memorial Lecture, "shamefacedly" includes himself among those who wrote wrongly, he now believes, regarding Piers Plowman as autobiographical.2 At the same time, a suggestion by a scholar or a contemporary interest or an assumption of the present will produce a new "school of scholarship." Illustrative of the effect of a scholarly suggestion is the burgeoning scholarship on medieval grammar, a totally neglected context, until Ben Smith and Morton Bloomfield
mentioned it in 1961 and 1963, the exploration of Piers Plowman in the context of the liturgy and more especially in the context of typology, and to a lesser extent in the context of iconography and Biblical imitatio, and still less fruitful, but nevertheless valuable, are those in the context of satire, complaint, and the homily. Interesting but still in its exploratory stages is the scholarship seeking to relate Piers Plowman to the Realist vs. Nominalist, or the Neo-Augustinian vs. Scholastic, controversy of the fourteenth century.

On the other hand, contemporary assumptions and interests have produced studies on Piers from psychological and mythic assumptions, such as those of Constance Hieatt (1967) and Norman Hinton (1966), as well as studies ranging from the popularizations such as J. V. Holleran's (1966) essentially New Critical study "without erudite scholarly machinery," John Lawlor's (1962) and William Ryan's (1968) books for beginning students of the poem, and Rosemary Woolf's (1962) article on the non-medieval characteristics of the poem. While showing his knowledge of medieval concerns, Lawlor maintains in modified form the position he has held on the poem since the 1950's: that the primary value of it is its record of human experience and that the most accessible means to it for the modern reader is through the great Romantic long poems. He now, however, states the belief that the two kinds of poetry--medieval and Romantic--are written from different aesthetic assumptions. Woolf, Ojars Kratins (1963), and Jasodhara Sen Gupta (1964), to the contrary, believe that Piers Plowman is not typically medieval and, thus, can be illuminated through such modern techniques as cinematography, photography, and Lawrence Durrell's "sliding panel."
Despite their differences, however, common to all scholars is the acknowledgment that the content of *Piers Plowman* is Christian. And, presently, most scholars believe that when modern perspectives and understandings are used in illuminating the poem, they must be related to the comparable medieval ones or the modern perspectives must be shown to correspond with "reality" and, hence, are to be found in the work of thoughtful men of any age.⁷

Though the predominance of scholarship is concerned with illuminating the meaning of *Piers Plowman*, a number of the older scholarly traditions remain with their interests primarily in fourteenth-century history, in the poetic process, or in the poet himself. *Piers* as a picture of the times, as topical allegory, and as in some sense autobiographical has even been given new impetus by those who study the poem in the context of patristic-allegory and typology.

A. Portrait of the Times and Topical Allegory

It is now widely acknowledged that *Piers Plowman* is a poem which reflects the social conditions, the political philosophy, and the theological assumptions of the fourteenth century, and even makes references to contemporary people and events. Among the few studies, however, focusing on these are John Fisher's 1961 examination of the political structure, R. H. Bowers's 1961 note identifying *foleuyles lawes*, Roland M. Frye's 1969 study of the theology, and Lucie Polak's 1970 note on pilgrims and pilgrimages. Fisher finds its presentation of society to be "conceived in Roman terms" with a king and a populace governed by elected officials.⁸ Bowers identifies the mysterious
foleuyles lawes as a reference to the five notorious Folville brothers who, as Skeat hypothesized, exercised a "rough mode of . . . justice." Frye takes Piers to be a "storehouse" of orthodoxy concerning reason and grace, and Polak uses the poem as an introduction to her discussion of pilgrims and provisions for them after the first year of Jubilee in 1300.

Other scholars incorporate discussion of social conditions or topical allegory into larger contexts. One of David Zesmer's points in his Guide to English Literature of the medieval period (1961), for instance, is that Langland is more interested in people and in things than in ideas. Elizabeth Orsten in her 1961 article believes that the topical political allegory in the rat-mice parliament is the letter from which the spirit, or fruit, can be gleaned. Morton Bloomfield (1962) uses topical allegory as a basis for his assertion that Langland's views are monastic—accepting among others, the identification of the "angel of hevene" as Bishop Brinton, one of whose sermons is comparable to the rat-mice parliament in Piers (p. 74), and the Friar-Doctor as friar William Jordan, the arch opponent of Uthred de Boldon (p. 74). Nevill Coghill, in his 1964 contribution to the "Writers and Their Work" series, refers to Alice Perrers as Meed and to Hunger as a fourteenth-century famine and commends Alan Bright's 1928 book with its identification of numerous places, people, and events in Piers as topical allegory. In 1966 Przemyslaw Mroczkowski suggests that the plowing of the half-acre is a reference to contemporary labor problems. Elizabeth Kirk in 1972 makes a number of references to Langland's acute
observation, and to his realism, even comparing him to Jane Austen. All these scholars seem to regard the historical references as of some importance.

In 1961 C. S. Lewis somewhat reluctantly condones the "vestiges of real history" as of some value to the modern reader who needs an "apparently rational" basis for taking the poem seriously. While acknowledging "realistic" details as evidence of Langland's attitudes toward fourteenth-century society, Elizabeth Salter in 1962 insists that the poem is not in intent documentary and that the significance of these details can be understood only within the "larger web of allegorical significances." J. A. W. Bennett considers the "distinction between the allegorical and the actual" to be "futile." Though scholars obviously do not unanimously agree, the consensus seems to be with Salter that whatever "vestiges of real history" the poem contains serves a larger purpose than documentation.

B. Autobiography and Self-Expression

The "vestiges" of the author, like the "vestiges of history," have been reevaluated during the sixties and early seventies, and in the process several new perspectives on this nineteenth-century tradition have emerged. Eclectic scholars have tended to be more cautious in their identification of autobiographical details because of George Kane's partial defection from the autobiographical approach in his two 1965 monographs. Moreover, John Lawlor, in 1962, distinguished between the romantic and medieval aesthetic; but his distinction is not sharp and it is clouded by his analogies between the romantic and medieval long poem
and by his suggestion that a knowledge of the romantic long poem makes the medieval more accessible to a modern audience (pp. 311-12). On the other hand, the increasing influence of Biblical typology has vivified the biographical approach in that such typological scholars as Elizabeth Salter and Elizabeth Orsten, distinguishing typology, or figura, from allegory, insist that typology as opposed to allegory has its basis in the historical. Consequently, though Will the dreamer may signify various past and future figures and even the human will, he also, in some sense, represents William Langland the poet. A further complication of this tradition is the assertion of such an influential scholar as John Lawlor (1962), who denies that the poem is autobiographical but equally insists that it reveals the working of the author's mind (pp. 229, 285), and of such a scholar as Donald Howard in 1965, who regards the poem as traditional as well as autobiographical and self-expressive. He, however, believes that the scholar is on most defensible grounds studying Langland's "concerns" rather than his life or his intentions (pp. 31-40, et passim). The two categories, Autobiography and Self-Expression, are here combined because the tendency of the scholarship has been to combine and conflate the two, though individual scholars may insist on the one and reject the other. David Fowler in 1961 and John Lawlor in 1962 in their books and Przemysław Mroczkowski in his 1966 article reject an autobiographical reading; nevertheless, these three scholars believe that the poet sheds his persona at times and speaks "in his own person" in the poem. In addition, Fowler states that the poem as a whole is not self-expression while Lawlor finds the process of the poet's thought one of the major attractions of Piers Plowman.
Bloomfield's 1962 book affirms the special importance of autobiography in the poem (pp. 6-8). Rosemary Woolf, in 1962, believes similarly that the Dreamer's perplexity is a reflection of the poet's own and she too accepts the poem as somewhat autobiographical (p. 122). E. Colledge and W. O. Evans in a brief 1964 article support Woolf's thesis, including even more emphasis on the autobiography of the poet revealed by the poem. Nevill Coghill's brief booklet prepared for the "Writers and Their Work" series in 1964 offers the conventional biography (pp. 11-17). Only a few scholars after 1965, however, give such credence to the autobiographical details of Piers Plowman, no doubt because of George Kane's Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship, a carefully argued defense of single authorship relying less on biography than had previous defenses, and his Chambers Memorial Lecture, The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies, a study setting forth the view that the traditionally ironic pose of the persona makes literal acceptance of autobiographical details a modern fallacy. Both studies were published in 1965.

Despite Kane's monographs, William Ryan's 1968 book, which attempts to popularize Piers Plowman, suggests that Langland the man is of major interest to the modern reader and that the poem can be profitably read for such information (pp. 14-15). While aware of Kane's warning, Mary Riach seems at first to take heed, but then offers an almost exclusively biographical and self-expressive analysis of the third vision of the poem.

A number of scholars who explore Piers Plowman within the typological, or figural, tradition of the Bible adhere to the
identification of the Dreamer and poet, though few studies focus on this aspect of the poem. One of the most influential scholars, Elizabeth Salter, in her 1962 *Piers Plowman: An Introduction* has not yet concluded that the poem is basically figural, as she will in successive studies of *Piers*; but her analysis of the allegory of the poem shows her to be moving in that direction (pp. 66 ff.). In 1962 she is still close to the Eclectics, though far more immersed in medieval thought than prior scholars seem to have been. As J. A. W. Bennett will state in 1969, she regards a choice between the "literal and the symbolic" to be unnecessary and "unnatural" (p. 68). She maintains that it is "vital" that the Dreamer be understood as the poet-dreamer. The bewilderment of the Dreamer serves both the function of representing the author's uncertainties and the function of allowing a less informed audience to identify with the ignorant, questing Dreamer (pp. 91-92). In her successive studies of the poem, she more forcefully affirms the figural approach. In a 1964 study of the tropological meaning of *Piers*, Joseph Longo repeatedly makes the point that Will is William Langland. Elizabeth Salter along with Derek Pearsall published an edition of excerpts of the C-Text in 1967 in which the two scholars seem to hold a position midway between the Eclectics and the figuralists. Though they accept Lawlor's views concerning the process of the poem and subject *Piers* to the "organic" criticism of Coleridge; nevertheless, they assert that the "essential structure of his [Langland's] thought is figural . . . ." Moreover, they refer to Erich Auerbach's 1944 essay, "Figura." In 1968 Elizabeth Salter gave the Gollancz Memorial Lecture
in which she set forth explicitly that the most illuminative context in which to explore Piers Plowman is that of figura as discussed by Auerbach. It is in this lecture that she qualifies her earlier conception of the relation between poet and Dreamer: "The life of the poet-dreamer may, in fact, be illusion, but it is presented vividly, as if it were real." Such a presentation is necessary in a figural poem, for "the figural must be set firmly into history." 28

As one might expect from her 1961 study of the topical allegory of the rat-mice parliament, Elizabeth Orten accepts the Dreamer as poet and the Dreamer's searching as the poet's own. Her 1966 dissertation makes explicit this view and her 1969 study of patientia in Piers reaffirms it. In 1970 she examines Langland's lines on life within the cloister as heaven on earth. As a result of her analysis she rejects the possibility that the poet was a monk, finding his view too naive for one who knew well the monastic life. She suggests, rather, that the poet may have an idealized or even a nostalgic conception from early school days at a cloister or from use of the monastic libraries and from association with some of the monks in the Worcester area. 29

In S. S. Hussey's 1969 anthology of Piers Plowman criticism, three scholars study the poet revealed within the poem--John Burrow, W. O. Evans, and David Mills. A recurring statement among these studies is that certain characters are "alter egos" of other characters--most often of the Dreamer, who is in some sense identified with the author. 30 Hussey himself in his introduction offers a biographical sketch and affirms his belief that Will is related to the author. 31
Mills believes that Will and Piers the Plowman are the two conflicting elements within Langland, or as he states it, Will is the Hyde to Piers's Jekyll (p. 210). Burrow finds within the poem satire turned upon the author himself, a technique which must be recognized for a full understanding of Piers Plowman (pp. 116 ff.); and Evans accepts that the Dreamer's quest is the author's personal quest. Consequently, the Dreamer is to be identified with the author. One can thus gain at least a general impression of Langland (passim). John Burrow, in 1971, reaffirms that the Dreamer is a representation of the author with the qualification that the Dreamer is "fictionalized." Finally Elizabeth Kirk maintains the same general view in her 1972 book. In the tradition of Chambers's 1939 article, she argues that the "Dreamer's name was Will, because it was the name of the real poet" (p. 47).

Even more scholars expound the view that the poem reveals the author's own confusion, turmoil, and intellectual and emotional quest. Bloomfield, Lawlor, Salter, and Woolf—all in 1962—regard the poem as self-expression. Lawlor's views have been mentioned before. Bloomfield, Salter, and Woolf incorporate Lawlor's perspective into their own. In 1963 and 1964 studying Piers in the context of medieval sermon technique, A. C. Spearing believes the poem to be a spontaneous overflow of the poet's concerns, digressive and spontaneous like medieval sermons. Charles Muscatine (1963), on the basis of his study of Piers, states that Langland reveals within the poem an awareness of the dissolution of the old order to which he calls his countrymen to return. Howard (1966) refers to the evidence of Langland's "intellectual strivings" but asserts that they are the "conscious workings" of the poet's mind.
(p. 205). In the same year (1966) in a study of Piers in the context of the complaint, Thomas Kinney states that the complaint expresses the emotions of the author.  

36 A. K. Moore's 1968 article on the unity of medieval literature rejects both the Aristotelian and the Coleridgean approach. Furthermore, in his hasty survey of the scholarly approaches, he seemingly rejects all of them except Lawlor's. Hence, he believes that the "unity" of Piers Plowman is in its reproducing the confusion of life.  

37 Similarly, David Mills (1969) believes that the "structure is its meaning."  

38 S. T. Knight and Patricia M. Kean, also in 1969, prefer Howard's term, that the poem reveals the poet's concerns, but both Sister Mary C. Davlin (1971) and Pietro Cali (1971) follow Lawlor in the view that Piers Plowman is a process poem duplicating the educational experience of life.  

40 Similarly, in their books, Margaret Williams (1971) and Elizabeth Kirk (1972) believe the poem to be self-expression and self-revelation; throughout her book Kirk compares Langland and his methods with Keats and Wordsworth and their struggles and revisions.  

Despite the fact that most scholars ignore this issue, several continue to raise their voices in opposition to the autobiographical or the self-expressive approach to Piers Plowman, or to both. Three studies in 1962 deny the Dreamer-poet identity from quite different perspectives. Lawlor (1962) repeatedly rejects the identity of the "I," or the Dreamer and the poet (pp. 265, 312), yet he cautiously suggests that the poem ends with Langland's own prayer for grace (pp. 315-19). He, of course, considers the process of the poem to be of major interest. Jay Martin (1962), in his study of "Wil," totally rejects both the autobiographical and self-expressive for a rhetorical Will, who represents
mankind and may be regarded as a stylized reflection of Langland. These scholars received added support in 1965, of course, from George Kane, who in *The Autobiographical Fallacy* considers the dreamer Langland's "construct" (p. 15). Not only does J. V. Holleran (1966) deny that the dreamer is Langland, but also he finds the poem too carefully structured to admit any authorial confusion or quest (pp. 37, 40). Ben Smith in his 1966 book emphatically asserts that *Piers Plowman* in its careful combination of patrician imagery is no "spontaneous outpouring." S. T. Knight (1969) makes mention of the "pseudo-biography" in *Piers* (p. 298); Barbara Raw (1969) describes Will as Everyman and the human faculty; and in his 1970 medieval anthology D. W. Robertson, Jr., reaffirms his earlier view: "The *persona Will* . . . is designed to fit into the structure of the poem, not to reveal any literal information about the author."

C. Stylistics and Aesthetics

A major criticism which British scholars have leveled at Americans in recent years is that a great many of the American studies are "source" studies yielding no aesthetic fruit. And, indeed, during the past twenty years scholars outside of the United States concerned themselves far more with style and with the quality of the poetry of individual sections of the poem than have scholars within the United States. Part of the disagreement and difference in concern stems from different assumptions about the nature of medieval aesthetics and medieval poetry in particular. Medieval American scholars have tended to examine semantics, word-play, image, theme, and structure in order to understand
the meaning of the poem, or sections of it. Medieval scholars outside the United States often discuss the effects of the poem as poetic intensity, dramatic and imaginative involvement of the reader, and the beauty of poetic ornament. Such a division between the two groups of scholars is not, of course, absolute, but as a generalization it has some merit.

Illustrative of the approach of American scholars to stylistics is Morton Bloomfield's discussion of style in 1962, emphasizing the temperance and the synthetic quality of Langland's style. Referring to Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana, he characterizes the style of the poem as the middle style, thoroughly appropriate to its subject (pp. 34 ff.). Gerald O'Grady, in his 1962 dissertation, refers to Auerbach's discussion of style in Mimesis and to Langland's middle style. It is a British scholar, however, J. A. W. Bennett, who in 1969 states, "The incarnation was totally incompatible with the principle of the separation of styles: Christ had come not as a hero or king but as a carpenter's son" (p. 316).

Nevertheless, more typical of British scholars than Bennett are Elizabeth Salter in her earlier studies, John Lawlor, and Rosemary Woolf, who in 1962 discuss the style and aesthetic appeal of Piers Plowman. Yet the three discussions of style and aesthetics are markedly different. Salter, in the second chapter of her 1962 book, discusses the poet's art within the context of the medieval alliterative, homiletic, and dream vision traditions. Langland's diction is simpler, his conception more complex than other alliterative poetry (p. 22). His structure and style are comparable to sermon practice and theory; in
fact the sermon tradition, she believes, accounts for "passages of inferior poetry" as well as for those of plain, direct naturalness and "poetic and dramatic simplicity" (pp. 33, 36). Langland unquestionably has a "sensitivity to words and rhythms, an eye for the dramatic, the grotesque, a feeling for the pathetic," but it is "spiritual forces" which inspire this religious poet to his greatest poetry (p. 64).

Rejecting patristic-allegorism and de-emphasizing the content in order to emphasize the process, Lawlor in Part I of his book discusses the poem *seriatim*, an often illuminating study prepared for students not familiar with medieval literature. Part II he devotes to "Poetic Techniques." He elucidates Langland's puns and word-play and praises the "realism," the "natural rhetoric," the "dramatic," "subtle," and "graphic" language of *Piers* (pp. 189-281 *passim*). Moreover, he mentions the cinematic and photographic "visual techniques," an idea which several subsequent scholars have repeated. Woolf, too, treats the style and process of the poem, but her perspective on these matters and Lawlor's are starkly different. Woolf focuses on what she regards as the "non-medieval qualities" of the poem: "its lack of a sustained literal level," its "deep emotional power," its allusiveness and evocativeness, its non-visual quality, the exploration of personal perplexities—all seem in contrast to the usual medieval poem, and it is the poet's concrete, active verbs which give the poem its "dominant tone" (pp. 112, 114, 117, 121). Furthermore, these as well as other qualities suggest that Langland may be the only medieval poet moved by imagination rather than by reason (p. 123).
The influence of Lawlor's concept of the poem's imaginative unity has already been taken note of. His statement about the cinematic quality of the poem and Woolf's belief that *Piers Plowman* is a poem not of its own time has gained a following. Three essays appeared in 1963, two expressly endorsing Woolf's article. Ojars Kratins briefly discusses the "romantic uncertainty" of the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes (p. 304). A second essay, John Burrow's examination of the third vision in 1963, analyzes the events of the vision chronologically, an analysis which convinces him that Langland uses a technique he labels "substitution": that is, the plowing of the half-acre is substituted for the pilgrimage (it is the actual as opposed to a "metaphorical" pilgrimage). Comparably, Truth's actual pardon is substituted for the expected literal pardon. Consequently, Burrow concurs with Woolf that the poem has no sustained literal level. 48 A third essay by Charles Muscatine (1963) examines the continually shifting settings within the poem, concluding that Langland's handling of space is indeed unusual in medieval literature. The most appropriate term to apply to it is surrealism (pp. 115-20).

Two brief articles in 1964 reinforce Rosemary Woolf's 1962 approach that Langland's ideas and artistic techniques are more accessible through modern analogies than through medieval ones. E. Colledge and W. O. Evans assert approvingly that *Piers Plowman* "is a wholly original work" enjoyed by each successive age as "men have ... [found in it] what they have looked for . . ." (p. 304). These scholars are interested in the poet's humanitarian views, views they consider most unusual during the Middle Ages and thus more understandable in terms of later
perceptions (pp. 309-12). Less interested in the content than in the techniques and recalling Lawlor's and Muscatine's statements, Jasodhara Sen Gupta commends Woolf's article, adding that Lawrence Durrell's "'sliding panel' technique," that "trick photography" or surrealistic artistic techniques, or even cinematography serve the modern reader well in his reading of Piers Plowman so that he is "better equipped" than his predecessors to "accept and enjoy" the poem (pp. 201-02).

Other scholars agree that Piers can best be approached in the late 1960's and early 70's via modern analogies or conceptions. J. V. Holleran, in 1966, examines the role of the dreamer in Piers Plowman in order to show that the poem is intelligible "without erudite scholarly machinery" (p. 50). Tacitly agreeing, Florence Jones (1968) finds the perspective of Charles Dickens, especially as expressed in his novel Hard Times, to be a direct avenue to the poem. William Ryan in his 1968 book states the belief that too much has been made of Langland's difficulty while his stature as "good company for the hours of leisure" has been virtually ignored (p. 124). W. O. Evans's article in Hussey's 1969 anthology acknowledges such medieval conception as the affirmation of hierarchy and the necessity of understanding such terms as cortasve in their medieval context (p. 267). Nevertheless, Evans seems to hold the position that the poet's willingness to lay bare his own "apparently contradictory ideas"; his "strong," "passionate," and persistent character; his "liberal" and humanitarian views as well as the often "lyrical" quality of his poetry afford a pleasing experience, both aesthetically and intellectually, to "any twentieth-century liberally minded man" (pp. 245-46, 267, 269, 270). In the same anthology David
Mills's analysis reveals to him a poet "imprisoned by his environment and language" whose "irrational hopes and visions . . . can never be known either through experience or through words"--a man all alone (p. 212). In short, Langland through Will reveals the dilemma of existential man. Philip Hobsaum in 1971 declares the pointlessness of attempting historical criticism. Like others of his persuasion he decries scholarly machinery, which obscures rather than clarifies medieval poetry. He believes that the language of the Visio of Piers Plowman is "superior in concreteness, in drama, in weight, pithiness, [and] example"--English before "the language deteriorated" (p. 343). The Vita he regards as a separate, parallel poem "manifestly inferior" to the Visio (p. 337).

Most scholars are not willing to go so far as to credit Langland with such extreme individuality, inventiveness, and modernity. Many, however, do agree with Lawlor and Salter concerning the poet's sensitive, careful use of language for poetic, dramatic, experiential effects. Typically British is the 1963 article and Chapter Four of the 1964 book, Criticism and Medieval Poetry, by A. C. Spearing. Spearing feels sure that Langland's digressive style, borrowed from the sermons he had heard, is natural to his subject. The poem indeed is a notable exemplar of "natural rhetoric" (1963, pp. 734 ff.). Furthermore, because of its debt to the late medieval homily with its extemporaneous development, more "than almost any other medieval poem," Piers Plowman creates the impression of a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (1964, p. 69). For this very reason, however, the poem contains both the poetically "magnificent and impoverished" and a disturbing "balance
between organization and chaos" (p. 87). Like Lawlor, Spearing regards the poet's great accomplishment to be the involvement of the reader in experience (p. 94). Salter and Pearsall's edition of selections to the C-Text (1967) with their introduction and notes continues to explore stylistic features, attributing to Piers a wider range of stylistic indebtedness, but also making more explicit their conviction that the poem is basically figural. Under the category "Allegory," they discuss its many modes--personification, dramatic, diagramatic, non-visual, and exempla--before they examine what they believe to be the poet's basically figural thought process (pp. 3-28). The remainder of their introduction is devoted to cohesive stylistic and aesthetic features (pp. 28-58). Their notes reinforce and point their more general introductory discussion. On the one hand, they call attention to the presence of poetic ornament (pp. 61, 100), and to the dramatic and imaginative use of tradition (pp. 82, 99, 158). On the other, they point to passages which are discursive, stiff, and mechanical (pp. 98, 108, 111).

From the end of the 1960's through the 1970's some scholars refer to the poet's aesthetic techniques or his aesthetic effect, and some to his poetic imagination; some others discuss both these techniques and their effects. Two works examine Langland's stylistic techniques--a 1969 article by R. W. V. Elliott and chapters of William Ryan's 1968 book on Langland. One of Ryan's major efforts in his attempt to provide a guide for beginning students is his discussion of aesthetically pleasing word patterns and puns. The expressed purpose of Elliott's examination of the topographical and geographical terms in Piers is to find common ground for scholarly agreement and to encourage "a fuller
appreciation of Langland's poem and of his art.\textsuperscript{52} In 1969 four scholars either refer to the effects of Langland's stylistic techniques or explore them. Elizabeth Orsten in her treatment of patience as a major theme repeatedly states and demonstrates the poet's ability to vivify "abstract ideas" (pp. 321, 333). Rosemary Woolf's examination of the pardon scene emphasizes its drama and suspense.\textsuperscript{53} And W. O. Evans remarks on the "intrinsic beauty" of some of Langland's lines (p. 276). S. T. Knight's article on \textit{Piers Plowman} is almost a study in the aesthetics of the poem. It is punctuated by references to the "delicacy" or "bluntness" of the imagery, to "lyrical" lines, and to passages of "poetic celebration," on the one hand, and on the other, to passages of "lame poetry" (pp. 287, 303, 306, 308).

In 1971 John Burrow and Pietro Cali concern themselves with the style, aesthetics, or both of \textit{Piers Plowman}. Believing that the literature of the late fourteenth-century poets contains stylistic features in common, Burrow sets out to demonstrate that their use of irony, of humor, of the dreamer, of an originality new to medieval literature, and of a carefully planned and executed formal structure, and that their infrequent use of the heroic, of vivid battle narratives, and of "high seriousness" constitute a literary homogeneity worthy of designating this particular historical era the Ricardian period (\textit{passim}). Cali's purpose is extremely modest in comparison: he seeks to show that both \textit{Piers Plowman} and \textit{The Divine Comedy} are two great allegorical poems whose aesthetic appeal is inseparable from their meaning (\textit{passim}).
Pamela Gradon (1971) and Elizabeth Kirk (1972) attempt to aid the reader in experiencing the poem, both placing considerable emphasis on the way that images, lines, and passages should affect the reader. Gradon seeks repeatedly to demonstrate the emotional impact, the dramatic power, and the evocative quality of Langland's poem in her discussion of the sources and levels of the incidents, characters, and images of *Piers Plowman*. One of the most illuminating explications in a book of somewhat uneven quality is her handling of Christ as the Good Samaritan coming in Piers's arms to joust at Jerusalem: she examines each of the concepts--the Good Samaritan, Christ, the knight, Piers, the plowman--and the range and depth and subtlety of this concentration of concepts drawn from various traditions. Kirk similarly emphasizes the drama of the poem, finding this quality to be in part the result of Langland's "attempt to revitalize the language of the liturgy and quicken . . . 'dead metaphors'" (p. 188). She finds his dynamic poem with its "hallucinatory" and "kaleidoscopic effect," its "incantatory emotional intensity," and its "splendid lyric" passages less medieval than Chaucer's poetry (pp. 21, 23, 134, 138). *Piers*, she believes, can be favorably compared not only with Jane Austen's "social realism" but also with Yeats's conception of the "self and anti-self," with Wordsworth's self-examination in the *Prelude*, but most of all with Keats's revelations of his growth as a person and as a poet (pp. 78, 143-44, 148, 188).
D. Psychology and Myth

Psychological and mythic studies came rather late in Piers Plowman scholarship in comparison to their entry into scholarship generally. Otto Rank's "Der Sinn der Griselda-Fabel" appeared in 1912, Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance appeared in 1920, Maud Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry appeared in 1934 along with a host of other psychological and mythic studies. But it was not until 1958 that John Speirs applied the mythic approach to Piers Plowman (his references to Piers are almost altogether limited to footnotes), and then in the 1959-60 Clark Lectures E. M. W. Tillyard made some use of the mythic approach to Piers.\(^5\) During the 1960's several scholars began to suggest the dream psychology of Freud, Jung, or both as a method of elucidating Piers Plowman. Some scholars regard the poem as both psychological and mythic; others regard it as one but not the other. Again, certain scholars find Langland perceiving truths of experience or reality unusual in a tradition- and convention-bound age, while others believe that the traditions and conventions, properly understood, parallel modern perceptions. John Lawlor and Rosemary Woolf, both in 1962, assert that Langland's poem is true to dream experience. Lawlor's suggestion is merely a casual reference (p. 113); Woolf regards this quality as strikingly non-medieval (pp. 116-18). Agreeing with Woolf that Langland's poem lacks a "sustained literal level," John Burrow (1963) also partially agrees with her that the poet makes use of "authentically dream-like inventions," inventions that "powerfully" convey "dream-like" experience (pp. 266-67). In his 1966 book Donald
Howard, like Woolf, believes that Langland dispenses with convention in his visions so that they contain the psychological reality of actual dreams (pp. 207-27 passim). Constance Hieatt, in *The Realism of Dream Visions* (1967), most thoroughly explores this avenue to an understanding of Langland's poem. Acknowledging that any one of her explications may have an alternate interpretation, she, nevertheless, believes that the accumulated weight of her evidence supports her conclusions that medieval dream theory is a construct which parallels in its essential features Freudian and Jungian psychology (pp. 12, 50-60). R. W. V. Elliott in 1969 refers to Lawlor's suggestion and extends it to state that the free association and vagueness of *Piers Plowman* recalls Freud's discussion of dreams (p. 233).

In the 1970's three books and a dissertation continue to pursue the psychological approach. Pamela Gradon, in 1971, briefly explores the effects of the dream vision, referring to Hieatt's 1967 monograph (pp. 83-90). Elizabeth Kirk (1972) explores the methods and their effects. She affirms her belief that present knowledge of the creative process indicates that, regardless of theories of art, a poet's mind is working both consciously and unconsciously. And Langland's poem represents the process of working through and out of a problem as set forth by Jung (pp. 118-88 passim). Charles M. Matlock's 1972 dissertation, at the State University of New York, Albany, explores the poem like Hieatt, using Freudian, Jungian, and medieval dream conventions. 56

Among those few scholars who discuss *Piers* in terms of archetypes without treating dream psychology are Jay Martin (1962) and Norman Hinton (1966), joined by Rosemary Woolf in 1969. Martin refers to
Northrop Frye as illuminating concerning Will, the wanderer-dreamer (pp. 542-43). Hinton argues in his 1966 article for the cooperation of mythic and patristic-allegorical scholars, whose scholarly techniques and conceptions of reality and the world he explores in some detail, finding the archetype and the anaglogue remarkably similar (passim). Woolf in 1969 states that the tearing of the pardon can more illuminatingly be called mythic than allegorical, for it is the nature of myth to present the "trivial" as having "cosmic consequences" (p. 75).

Most scholars discussing Piers mythically associate myth and psychology. Rosemary Woolf in 1962 points out the similarity of the world in relation to the dream and of the archetype to the copy (p. 116), and Joseph Longo (1964), in examining Piers tropologically, discusses Passus XI and XII in relation to both psychology and the mythic archetype of "separation, initiation and rebirth" (pp. 295 ff.). Though Hieatt (1967) is interested in demonstrating the parallels between medieval and modern dream psychology and in explicating Piers Plowman by means of modern dream psychology, she gives a nod toward the mythic, for instance, making mention of Jung's archetypes, of Maud Bodkin, and of the anthropological scholar John Speirs (pp. 56, 97). Gradon (1971) cites Hieatt and, though she seems to equate symbolism and myth, she is more explicit and clear in her discussion of the psychological impact and, indeed, of the psychological character of the poem: "Piers is, in effect, the alter ego of the Dreamer . . ." (p. 108). Elizabeth Kirk (1972), more interested in the psychological, does not really explore the poem mythically; even so, she does refer to
Piers the Plowman, the farmer, becoming "the archetype of all those whose vocation in the world is their mode of serving God and man and their school of Truth" (p. 73). It should be added, however, that most of these scholars discuss the psychological or mythic qualities of Piers Plowman in relation to the medieval context.

Nevertheless, fellow medievalists qualify or reject the psychological or mythic approaches, believing their application to be a distortion of the conceptions and literary techniques of the Middle Ages. C. S. Lewis in his 1961 "De Audiendis Poetis" does not believe that the psychological or mythic criticism attends closely enough to distinctions, but he grants that both may be helpful to the modern reader of medieval literature who needs "apparently rational grounds" or a "sop" to the intellect when the reader cannot take seriously the original intellectual basis of the work (pp. 13-14). Both Morton Bloomfield and Jay Martin (1962) reject the use of dream psychology because they believe that Langland's use of the dream vision is in the classical and Scriptural tradition of divine inspiration (Bloomfield, p. 12; Martin, p. 541). In the same year (1962), Elizabeth Salter refers to the dreams as revelatory and prophetic, as a consciously used stylistic device (pp. 58-60); and Gerald O'Grady regards them as the poem's rhetorical framework (p. 160). In 1966 Elton Higgs's dissertation explores the literary use of the dream framework by, among others, Langland.57

E. Eclecticism

The exploration of intellectual history and, consequently, that growing body of knowledge of medieval images, conventions, and
especially of Biblical typology has helped to make Eclecticism, or for clarity, synthesis, a trend rather than a category. At the same time, the Eclectics have tended to be separated by the formalist approach so that those who follow the Eclectic tradition of Coghill and Chambers have made progressively more use of the history of ideas while the "new" Eclectics tend to focus on stylistics, aesthetics, and structure with little reference to historical scholarship. This latter group has been discussed above. The former group has by and large joined the patristically and theologically oriented scholars.

Thus, relatively few scholars maintain the older Eclectic tradition of Chambers and Coghill. Coghill, of course, perpetuates the tradition to some extent in his 1962 article, in which he observes that Piers Plowman is one of the greatest works of the "poetic imagination," and to a greater extent in his 1964 contribution to the "Writers and Their Work" series. In this booklet Coghill presents a Langland biography, and discusses the process of composing this mystical and apocalyptic poem. Though Coghill knows of no eighteenth- or nineteenth-century work comparable to the vision and the intensity of Piers, he believes that such twentieth-century authors as Samuel Beckett and David Storey have once again broached the old questions, but the intensity that accompanied the fourteenth-century hope is gone (pp. 42-43). In 1962 John Lawlor and Elizabeth Salter may somewhat accurately be placed in this category, but Salter's subsequent studies in typology and art place her later works outside this category. In 1962, however, she and Lawlor devote attention to the wholeness of
of the poet's imagination and to the naturalness of his satiric, dramatic, and poetic effects while emphasizing that the poem is that of a devout medieval Christian and embodies his moral and doctrinal concerns. Donald Howard, in 1966, indicates his affinity towards the older Eclectic approach in his interest in the workings of the poet's mind, in his interest in the poet's intellectual strivings, and in his agreement with Chambers's 1939 article that the dreamer is to be identified with the author (passim).

Pamela Gradon and Margaret Williams in 1971 and Elizabeth Kirk in 1972, however, seem to be the scholars most appropriately now labelled Eclectic. Gradon has been discussed earlier, for her major concern is with the stylistics of the poem. While qualifying views she expressed in Glee-Wood in 1949, Williams remains very much in the Eclectic tradition of Coghill. Her schematic treatment is a modification of his; her discussion of stylistic techniques and effects and even her statement, like Coghill's, that the poem traces its theology and its "allegorical" mode and conception ultimately to the works of Augustine and the other Fathers, place the introduction to her latest translation with the mid-twentieth-century Eclectics (pp. 6-22). Kirk's book is the only book by an Eclectic in the Coghill and Chambers's tradition to discuss the poem seriatim. Her knowledge of the history of ideas is carefully and coherently combined so that her book, like Lawlor's, is often illuminating, but also like his book tends to treat somewhat summarily such difficult passages as the Tree of Charity and Patience's riddle (pp. 151-52, 168-70).
F. History of Ideas

Very few scholars any longer attempt to dismiss Langland's devout Christian faith, the canon, always implicit, often explicit, against which he examines fourteenth-century society. A great many scholars, moreover, concur that his poem is influenced by the homily and homily manuals and by mysticism (though probably not by any particular "school" of mysticism). David Fowler (1961), Barbara Raw (1969), and several other students of the poem discern evidence of the author's use of Biblical imitatio; John F. Adams (1962) suggests that Piers can be profitably examined in the tradition of the three ages of man; and four dissertations from 1967 through 1972, by Daniel M. Murtaugh (1967), by John F. McNamara (1968), by Janet Coleman (1970), and by Diane P. Lichstein (1972), explore the poem in the context of the Scholastic vs. Neo-Augustinian, or Nominalist vs. Realist, controversy of the fourteenth century. Philip Hobsbaum suggests this as possibly the contemporary context of Piers Plowman (p. 351).

1. Satire

A tradition within Piers scholarship which maintains a limited but persistent following is that of Piers Plowman as satire or complaint. It is not, of course, that scholars deny that the poem is, in some sense, satiric, but rather that most believe that this category is too restrictive to encompass the diversity and complexity of the poem. Bloomfield and Lawlor (1962) both find a strong element of satire in the poem, Lawlor stating that the dominant tone of Piers is satire
(Bloomfield, pp. 150 ff.; Lawlor, pp. 207, 281, et passim). Jay Martin in 1962 makes an interesting observation that one of the reasons for the difficulty of the poem is that Langland's was a satiric vision for which there was no form then available (passim). John Yunck's *The Lineage of Lady Mead* (1963) traces the history of venality satire from classical, pre-Christian times through the Bible and the Middle Ages to *Piers Plowman*, his study of *Piers* focusing on only the Lady Mead passus. Pasquale Di Pasquale's 1965 dissertation and Donald Wesling's "Eschatology and the Language of Satire in *Piers Plowman*" (1968) are both based on Bloomfield's 1962 book. S. T. Knight's 1969 article, synthetic in its compass, builds upon the thesis that Hallett Smith, Helen White, and John Peter had expounded in the 1950's. His thesis is that Langland so transformed the genre that satire, thenceforth, became a more comprehensive medium than it had been before he wrote *Piers Plowman*. 65

2. Apocalypse or apocalyptic thought

An element that had been obvious to readers of *Piers Plowman* even in the sixteenth century began to receive attention in the 1940's and 50's under the terms apocalyptic, or eschatological. In his 1961 book Thomas Fowler remarks on the apocalyptic overtones (p. 90). But Morton Bloomfield's 1962 book presents the most thorough and extensive study of *Piers Plowman* as an apocalypse. Since his thesis was discussed in Chapter III of the dissertation, it will not be repeated here. Though his study as a whole has not been adopted by most scholars, it ranks among the most influential analyses of the poem. In contrast to his
1939 call for the exploration of "Langland's words and lines, and . . . a general study of the backgrounds," in 1962 he stated that "[t]he chief difficulty is not in line by line analysis, although that method can still be fruitfully used, but in the over-all significance of the divisions" of the poem (p. 116). Some of the major scholars who have made use of Bloomfield's insights are Mary Carruthers (1965, 1973), Donald Howard (1966), G. H. Russell, a co-editor of the Piers texts (1966), S. S. Hussey (1969), Ruth M. Ames (1970), Anne Middleton (1972), Elizabeth Kirk (1972), and R. E. Kaske (1974). Two articles and one dissertation, however, develop further elements of Bloomfield's thesis. One is Wesling's in 1968, which is mentioned above (passim); the other is Elizabeth Orsten's "Patientia in the B-Text of Piers Plowman" in 1969. Orsten accounts for this theme in the poem because an apocalyptic poet will especially need to possess his soul in patience: most people who hear him and reform themselves will do so only temporarily (pp. 329, 332, et passim). Alexander V. Globe's dissertation in 1970 explores apocalyptic themes from the Sibyllene Oracles and the Revelation found in Langland, Spenser, and Marvell.

3. Liturgy

In 1959 J. F. Goodridge stated that a knowledge of the Missal and Breviary were more important aids to understanding such a passage as the Tree of Charity than any other source. His observation was reinforced in 1962 by Bloomfield in his discussion of Langland's parallel use of the life of Will, the world itself, and the liturgical year--all coming
to their inevitable end (pp. 27, 85-86). Donald Howard in *The Three Temptations* (1966) refers to Bloomfield's analogies with approval (pp. 184-85).

Numerous scholars now find in the liturgy a source for Langland's images and conceptions, as Goodridge had suggested. P. M. Kean in "Langland and the Incarnation" (1965) demonstrates the clarity and meaningfulness of such images as the treacle of heaven and the *plente* of peace through knowledge of the Sarum Missal.69 Ben Smith in *Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman* (1966) suggests that the liturgical readings during Lent provide the complex of images Langland uses in his handling of the Piers-Knight-Good Samaritan (pp. 90-91, 96), and similarly Elizabeth Orsten, in her 1966 dissertation, asserts that Langland drew his conceptions of *caritas* and *justitia* as well as others from the liturgy (pp. 2218A-19A). Developing this approach even further than had Smith, Raymond St. Jacques (1969) believes that the associated meanings found in Langland's Samaritan derive from and are clarified by the liturgy, which doubtless served as a source of inspiration as well.70 Barbara Raw's "Piers and the Image of God" (1969, pp. 169, 176), Ruth M. Ames's *The Fulfillment of the Scriptures: Abraham, Moses, and Piers* (1970, p. 65), and Sister Mary Clemente Davlin's "Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman B*" (1971, pp. 9, 19) all posit the liturgy as a major source of the poem and, thus, an enlightening context for its study.

Three scholars, however, attempt to show the liturgy as an even greater contribution. Pasquale Di Pasquale in his 1965 dissertation, "The Form of *Piers Plowman* and the Liturgy" (p. 4626); R. E. Kaske
in his 1974 "Holy Church's Speech and the Structure of Piers Plowman" (p. 320); and Robert S. Rudolph in a lecture given at the 1974 MMLA convention, "Cyclical and Linear Time in Piers Plowman, B Version, Passus XVI-XX,"71 all demonstrate not only that imagery and conceptions in the poem but also the very structure of the work itself is illuminated by a knowledge of the calendar and of the respective readings of the liturgical year.

4. Patristics and Medieval Theologians

By 1961, with the exception of those scholars discussed earlier in the addendum, it is commonly understood that a knowledge of medieval theology is requisite to an intelligible reading of Piers Plowman. A host of scholars, consequently, set themselves to the task of acquiring such knowledge that they might penetrate the meaning of Piers Plowman. Though David Fowler (1961) relies heavily on such predecessors as Frank and Robertson and Huppé, he also explores both erudite and popular theological works in his study of the poem, a study which may be the last major work by an adherent of multiple authorship. Among others, he examines a Cornish mystery cycle and the works and characteristics of John of Trevisa, whom he posits as the author of the B-Text (pp. 43-71, 186 ff.).

Several historians of ideas trace motifs through medieval literature, including Piers Plowman. Siegfried Wenzel published two works in 1967 of this kind. His book The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature asserts that, in Langland's poem, the sin is treated in both a traditional and an original manner so that
the poem achieves a fluid movement from the abstract to the concrete. In "The Three Enemies of Man," an article on the same theme as Donald Howard's book, Wenzel traces the history of the concept, as does Howard, but only briefly applies his findings to Piers Plowman; his use of Piers is by and large illustrative rather than illuminative. Another study, more limited in its scope, is Joan H. Blythe's 1971 dissertation "Images of Wrath: Lydgate and Langland."

In 1969 T. P. Dunning re-examines the Vita in the light of scholarly correctives of his 1956 article, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman." In the meantime he has examined sermons and popular theological manuals more carefully. He concludes that "Langland is not really in search of anything." His work is rhetorical in the vein of Uthred of Boldon's De Perfectione Vivendi, Bromyard's Summa Praedicantium, the sermons of Thomas Brinton, and other exhortations to the Church Militant to perfect its life. Father Dunning uses this context to define Langland's Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.

Dunning, of course, is not alone in his attempt to define Langland's terminology. In two articles, one published in 1964 and one in 1969, P. M. Kean explores the terms "love," "law," and "lewte" in the Visio and Vita respectively within the context of Scholastic theology. The first part of the poem, she believes, treats the concept of the Good State, and the second part treats the concept of the Good Life. Her definitions, hence, are a means to exploring the poem thematically. A. V. C. Schmidt's four articles appeared in 1968 and 1969. One of his 1968 articles, "A Note on Langland's conception of
'Anima' and 'Inwit,'" suggests that Langland's conception of these terms has its origin in the *De Anima* of Cassiodorus but that the conception was perpetuated through the centuries at least into the thirteenth century. His other article of that year (1968) asserts that Langland's term "free wit" is uniquely Scholastic. Schmidt's 1969 articles reinforce his belief in the wide-ranging origins of Langland's terminology. He finds a parallel use of grammatical analogy in Wycliffe and, of the ten informing elements of patience, seven are listed in Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale*. Yet the weight of evidence points to Langland's direct knowledge of Augustine's *De Patientia*. A second article in 1969, "Langland and Scholastic Philosophy," explicates the central section of the poem, the so-called "psychological" section. Schmidt agrees with Greta Hort and George Sanderlin that the Scholastic theologians provide the appropriately illuminative context in which to explore this section of the poem. However, he believes that these scholars err in examining Langland's terms in the context of those scholastics who became well known in the past two centuries, especially Thomas Aquinas. It is by the study of the works of the lesser known men like Michael Ayguami that Langland's terms may be explained. Additionally referring to Stephen Langton, Isidore of Seville, and the Victorines, this scholar concludes that, in the final analysis, Langland's conceptions most closely resemble those of Augustine. 77

Three other articles and two dissertations explore Langland's terminology. Mary C[arruthers] Schroeder, in "The Character of Conscience in *Piers Plowman*" (1970), examines the scholastic definition
of conscience ("the judge of right and wrong"), the mystic and monastic definition (God's dwelling place within man), in relation to the actions of the character Conscience. On the basis of her study she states that Langland's Conscience is a composite character, whose elements are drawn both from theology and from the romance tradition. 78 The dissertations of Britton J. Harwood, "Piers Plowman and the Ways of Knowing" (1970), and of Ernest N. Kaulbach, "The Imagery and Theory of Synderesis in Piers Plowman B. Passus V. 544 f. and Passus XIX" (1970), both examine the poet's terminology. Harwood examines the terms "resoun," "thought," and "conscience" in the body of his dissertation and additional terms in his appendices; his thesis is that the poem is exploring the means of repairing God's image within man. 79 In the same year (1970) an article appeared by Harwood and the director of his dissertation, Ruth F. Smith, "Inwit and the Castle of Caro in Piers Plowman." They first define the word "inwit" in the context of Dominican thought, agreeing more nearly with Robertson and Huppé than with Quirk, Frank, Schmidt, or other scholars that "inwit" as used in the allegory of the Castle of Caro is the "practical reason." They suggest that Rabanus Maurus's commentary on spirit, soul, and body may furnish the basic outline for Langland's castle. 80 Kaulbach's study of the poem is less comprehensive, but his exploration of the term "synderesis" is the most thorough of any study on the subject. Using "biblical commentary, canon law, spiritual-political tractate, medieval psychology, ME ascetical-mystical literature, moral theology, and secret anagram" to explore the concept, he then applies his knowledge of its operation in both the natural man and the man under grace as
he finds Langland drawing upon these "images." In his analysis, he explores Langland's handling of these two variations of synderesis through the last part of Passus V and through Passus XIX of the \textit{Vita}.\footnote{In a brief article, "Changes in the Roles of Reason and Conscience in the Revisions of 'Piers Plowman'" (1972), an extension of Mary C[arruthers] Schoeder's article on Conscience and Schmidt's "Langland and Scholastic Theology," Charles W. Whitworth, Jr., discovers that in each successive text Langland uses Scholastic terminology with more precision. He then summarily traces the inter-related roles of Reason, Conscience, and Grace in the poem.\footnote{}}

5. Patristic-allegorical

Though not necessarily Robertsonians, perhaps more scholars since 1961 have explored \textit{Piers Plowman} exegetically than in any other manner, often combining this method with the mythic, autobiographical, and aesthetic approaches. Some of these have already been referred to and, hence, will not be dealt with again, although they make extensive use of or work from the assumptions of Patristic-allegorism. These scholars include Fowler (1961) on the B- \textit{Vita}, Orsten in her 1961 discussion of the rat-mice parliament, Bloomfield (1962) on the apocalypse, Burrow (1963) on Langland's substitutionary techniques, Longo (1964) and Hinton (1966) in their combination of this approach with the mythic, Vasta (1965) in his approach to mysticism, Gradon (1971) in her stylistic approach, and Kirk (1972) in her Eclecticism.

Ben Huddleston Smith, Jr., in his 1961 "Patience's Riddle, \textit{Piers Plowman} B, XIII," like his professor, R. E. Kaske, demonstrates his
ability at "crux bursting." Through the use of the commentaries and Priscian's grammar, he explicates the riddle line by line and explores its meaning in context (passim). Kaske follows this article with both reinforcement and a supplementary interpretation in 1963, "Ex vi transicionis and Its Passage in Piers Plowman" (passim). Smith's 1963 dissertation, published in 1966 as Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman, includes his 1961 article and explores B. I. 111-21, 146-62; I. 173-201; XVI. 4-89; and XVI-XVIII. Through his use of the commentaries by, among others, St. Augustine, Rabanus Maurus, Denis the Carthusian, and Hugh of St. Cher, his use of iconography, of medieval grammar, and of medieval poems, Smith sets out to explicate these individual passages and to demonstrate that charity is a major theme in Piers Plowman. By referring to lines and passages passim throughout the poem, he shows how Langland drew the thread of this theme even while focusing upon others.

One of the most extensive explications of Langland's poem since Robertson and Huppé's 1951 book is Gerald L. O'Grady's 1962 dissertation, "Piers Plowman and the Medieval Tradition of Penance." O'Grady believes that the poem is at one with the massive attempt to educate the populace concerning penance after the Fourth Lateran Council. His method of explication is a careful patristic-allegorical examination of the B-Text in the context of the Fathers, theologians, and penitential literature. Like Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition, this work deals with the "thought structure" of the poem; it too is a multi-level discussion, but not—as critics of the method have often charged—a consistently fourfold level. Perhaps two of
the most striking departures of this dissertation from the Robertson and Huppé book is that O'Grady does not believe that the Three Lives motif plays any significant part in the poem and he does believe that the poem moves in part through the juxtaposition of apparent opposites (e.g., justic and mercy) followed by a spiraling synthesis which often repeats an earlier line (e.g., pp. 168-82).


Hoffman's article seeks to correct Kaske's "The Speech of 'Book' in Piers Plowman" (1959), a reading which in turn was corrected by E. Talbot Donaldson in 1966 in "The Grammar of Book's Speech in Piers Plowman" through what Donaldson calls a "semantic" analysis. Hoffman, in his objection to Kaske's tentative linking of Book's speech with Joachistic thought, offers an alternative grammatical reading through some use of patristics. 84 Kean (1965) explores the imagery of B. I. 145-56, using the Scriptures and commentaries by Origen, Tertullian, St. Gregory, and St. Bernard. She concludes that the treacle of heaven and the plente of peace as well as the other images in the passage
are altogether traditional with their associations established in Langland's time (passim). Risse (1966) supplements Alfred Kellogg's 1958 note on Langland's use of Isaiah 14. 13-14, pointing out that the replacement of pedem for sedem is probably, as Kellogg suggests, Langland's. And he agrees also that the substitution is based on St. Augustine's Enarrationes in Psalms. Fables II and IV of the standard school author Avianus were allegorized in school commentaries, which usually quoted or paraphrased the Augustinian interpretation of Isaiah 14. 13-14 and Psalm 109.1. Thus, in response to Kaske's question during the 1959 debate of how a medieval audience might have recognized such a slight change, Risse states that the "school commentaries" may possibly have provided the means. 85 Taitt's brief 1971 note on Langland's version of Lot's incest makes clear that the Bible does not provide the source. It is, however, frequently found in the commentaries, including the Glossa Ordinaria. 86 Szittyá's dissertation (1971) offers the interesting possibility that the antifratal imagery of the late medieval period is derived, not from the actual historical friars, but from thirteenth-century antifratal satiric and eschatological writings, which identified the friars with such Biblical types as Cain, the pharisees, and the false prophets who were to precede the Antichrist. 87 Hill's 1974 "Two Notes" supplement earlier discussions on the numberlessness of the evil angels and on Trajan's interruption of Scripture. Reference to exegetical handling of the fallen angels and of the ten commandments indicates that Langland relies on it for language and imagery which reinforces and anticipates ideas from section to section of his poem. 88
6. *Figura*, or Typology

An approach that seems to be gaining proponents is the figural, or typological, school of criticism. Morton Bloomfield in 1962 gave this approach some attention, especially in his treatment of the Harrowing of Hell. His chief reason, in fact, for believing that the poem does not end in despair is that the Harrowing of Hell is a type of the Last Judgment, when Christ will free all the redeemed (pp. 123-26). Gerald O'Grady (1962) treats the typological element in the poem even more extensively, believing that the fourteenth-century world is shown as the type--living under the Old Law--when it should be the antitype--living under the New Law since the coming of Christ (pp. 246-49, 260). Elizabeth Salter in 1962, in 1967 with Derek Pearsall, and again in 1968 discusses the typological nature of *Piers Plowman* (see above pp. 300-01). The thrust of her 1968 lecture, "Medieval Poetry and the Figural View of Reality," is not that the poem contains typology but that it is basically typological. "We cannot restate too often," she asserts, "the fact that the most pervasive single influence upon *Piers Plowman* was that of the Bible" (p. 84). Moreover, the Bible demands to be treated figurally. It is not surprising, then, that Salter holds Langland's method to be the dominant method used by Biblical exegetes--*figura* (pp. 84-89). In her 1971 article, "*Piers Plowman* and the Visual Arts," she reaffirms her belief in the typological nature of the Bible and of *Piers*: she insists that "seeming irrationality can only . . . be resolved by [examining] the words of the psalms in their literal and figural senses" 89
and suggests that the juxtaposition of phenomenal and spiritual reality in *Piers* can be similarly illuminated (pp. 15-21).

Furthermore, Elizabeth Orsten in her 1966 dissertation, "The Treatment of *Caritas*, *Justitia*, and Related Themes in the B Text of *Piers Plowman*," expresses the view that "Old Testament allegory" (presumably typology) is Langland's method in the *Visio* (p. 2218A). Katherine B. Trower in her dissertation, "The Plowman as Preacher: The Allegorical and Structural Significance of Piers the Plowman in *Piers Plowman*," written in 1968, asserts that the poem is structurally figural in that the *Visio* presents Piers the Plowman working under the Old Law as a typological figure comparable to Abraham and Moses. In the *Vita* he is presented first as Christ himself and then as Peter. The poem, thus, traces salvation history.  

Five scholars have written books and articles from the typological, or figural, perspective from 1969 to 1972. Like Harwood in his 1970 dissertation, Barbara Raw in "Piers and the Image of God in Man" believes that the thesis of the poem is the restoration of God's image in man. Like her figural predecessors, she believes that in the *Visio* Langland presents a world under the Old Law—with a difference, however. Raw asserts that typology enables Langland to present simultaneously the fourteenth-century world, the liturgical year, and the history of the world, her sources being the Church Fathers, the theologians, the liturgy, and devotional writings. In her examination of Piers, she traces his figural growth from the pre-Mosaic through the Mosaic coming of the Law (the pardon). The Tree of Charity episode dramatizes Piers's preparation for the advent and the Incarnation, followed by
Piers's becoming one with Christ and thus departing from this world, after Christ has first become one with Piers. Will, the individual seeker and the human will, follows Piers like the other pilgrims; but he cannot become one with Christ as Piers had, because Will is still in this world (passim). The following year (1970), Mary C[arruthers] Schroeder examines the pardon scene within the context of the exegetical tradition. The Visio, she concurs, is the world living under the Old Law: the plowing scene portrays the helplessness of the natural world as it fluctuates between "want and plenty," where disorder reigns—in short, the fallen world. God responds to this state of affairs with his pardon. Langland has clearly shown the fourteenth-century society, however, still under the Old Law. Though the focus of her 1973 book, The Search for St. Truth, is on the poet's language, the figural conception is a significant element in the book as well (pp. 32-33, 66-68, et passim).

Another enlightening study within the figural tradition is Ruth Ames's The Fulfillment of the Scriptures: Abraham, Moses, and Piers (1970). Two points of especial interest that Ames makes explicit through her use of the exegetical tradition are that Christians believed that the Church had always existed and that one probable stimulus for Langland's poem was that Jews had still not accepted Jesus as the Christ. Moreover, she demonstrates that "[w]hile the expository teaching [of the poem] is . . . the same from the first passus to the last, the action and allegory follow the history of the world according to the Christian interpretation" (pp. 91-92).
Two articles in 1972, Sister Mary Clemente Davlin's "Petrus, Id Est, Christus: Piers the Plowman as 'the Whole Christ'" and Michael R. Paul's "Mahomet and the Conversion of the Heathen in Piers Plowman," contribute to the understanding of troublesome conceptions in the poem. Davlin, avoiding the anachronistic term "deification," explains that the Church teaches that man, Christ, God, and the individual Christian are, at the same time, one and separate. She then shows that such an understanding clarifies Langland's figural characters, especially Piers the Plowman, on whom she focuses, so that there is no reason to refer to him as a "shape-shifter." Paull discusses the degenerate clergy presented at the beginning of Dobet, Passus XV, who are set in contrast to the early Christian saints. This passage is preliminary to Langland's concern for the conversion of the heathen. A knowledge of "Mahomet" as an apostate Christian, a false prophet deluding men, a schismatic causing disharmony, reveals that the poet is using traditional typological conceptions as both a commentary on and an exhortation to the people of his own day.

7. Allegory

The validity of applying multi-level allegory continues to be a controversial subject through the 1970's even among those who make use of patristic exegesis in their discussions of Piers Plowman. In spite of the numerous references to and brief histories of patristic exegesis, little new has been said. Bloomfield (1962) has become somewhat more receptive to it, though he theoretically still to some extent follows the view set forth by C. S. Lewis (which, according to Thomas Grace, Lewis later rejected) and
the method of reading proposed by R. W. Frank, Jr. (pp. 13-23).
Lawlor (1962) accepts Frank's "personification-allegory" and
explicitly rejects patristic-allegorism (pp. 251-58). Salter
(1962) states that she has no theoretical objections, but her
experience with the poem provides no verification of the method
except in such passages as the one treating the Good Samaritan
(pp. 6, 65-70). In their 1967 edition of the poem, she and Pearsall
discuss the different modes of allegory. Through 1968 she maintains
essentially the same view, objecting to the "clinical" handling of
the patristic-allegorists, on the one hand, and the literal readings
of R. W. Frank and Donald Howard, on the other (pp. 73-74; p. 74, n. 5).
It is in her lecture, "Medieval Poetry and the Figural View of Reality,"
that she most fully sets forth her approach to Piers Plowman. Rosamond
Tuve's Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity
(1966) treats allegory as a mode of thought. On the one hand, however,
Tuve notes that Piers is to be read "intermittently" [her italics]
as allegorical and, on the other, that it is so written that the letter
demands to be taken fantastically. Pamela Gradon's brief history of
allegory in Form and Style in Early English Literature (1971) is in
essence the same as Charles Donahue's at the English Institute debate,
that allegory has its origins in the Greek tradition, that typology
has its origins in the Judeo-Christian, and that they are separate and
opposing modes, but that they, nevertheless, were commingled in
practice (pp. 32-66). Mary Carruthers in her 1973 book endorses
Frank's 1953 essay on personification-allegory as an appropriate
reminder that personifications are words, not "human characters." Though she uses allegory and figura interchangeably, at the outset of her book she defines allegory as the Augustinian "cognitive mode," which regards the visible as a sign through which the invisible can be understood (pp. 39-40, n. 3; 141-42; 10-11).

William C. Strange's 1968 article, "The willful Trope: Some Notes on Personification with Illustrations from Piers (A)," provides a stimulating discussion of prosopopeia, the general category under which the trope moderns call "personification" was placed. Its subcategory was figurae sentiarum, figures of thought, never figurae verborum, or figures of speech. The figures of thought aimed at a "lively illusion of reality" and was not merely decorative nor a paraphrastic manner of writing. Strange's use of Piers Plowman, however, is disappointingly literal, basically mere summary.97 And as Rosamund Tuve stated in 1966, if Piers Plowman is allegory as she believes it to be, it cannot by its very nature be summarized (p. 264, n. 17).

8. Iconography

With the development of historical criticism, especially patristic-allegorism, has come the tendency to interdisciplinary comparison. This technique is, of course, by no means new among art historians, but it is relatively new among literary scholars. While Robertson was presenting the iconography of Chaucer in 1962, John Lawlor was suggesting that Piers Plowman might be compared to a tapestry or to other forms of medieval art (p. 235). In the same year, however, Rosemary Woolf remarked on its non-pictorial quality (p. 115). But in 1963 Charles
Muscatine published "Locus of Action in Medieval Narrative," a brief and general yet highly influential article placing *Piers Plowman* in the context of the "Gothic tension" reflected in late medieval art. Salter and Pearsall (1967) regard iconography as one of the sources of Langland's poem, and in their notes point to the graphic as well as the dramatic description of such passages as the meeting of Mercy and Peace with Truth and Righteousness, and the Harrowing of Hell (pp. 9, 13-16, 34-36).

Taking a somewhat different tactic, R. E. Kaske in *Piers Plowman* and Local Iconography* (1968)* parallels passages from the poem to iconography in the Worcester area. On a choir stall in the twelfth-century church of St. Giles, a carving of two pigs eating from one pot remind the reader of Glutton's guts sounding like "two greedy sowes" (B. V. 347). The Norman fonts at Southrop, Gloucester, and at Stanton Fitzwarren, Wiltshire, contain the only examples Kaske has found of *Ira* in the virtue-vice cycle being beaten on the buttock; these recall that Wrath in *Piers Plowman* avoided monks because they "baleised [him] on the bare ers. and no breche bitwene . . ." (B. V. 175). Moreover, such passages within *Piers* as the dreamer's fall into the hands of Fortune (B. XI. 5-32), the Tree of Charity, and Christ in the form of *Gygas* the geaunt* can be found iconographically presented in the Malvern area.* D. W. Robertson, Jr. (1970), on the other hand, compares the opening lines of the poem describing the tower and the dale with Titian's "Sacred and Profane Love" (p. 427). Pamela Gradon (1971) believes that the development of "realism" in literature
parallels the development of perspective in art, a point that Muscatine
had made. She also finds Langland's poem comparable to the "fantasy"
of Hieronymus Bosch (pp. 1-5, 74).

Elizabeth Salter agrees that Langland's technique is comparable to
Bosch's in her 1971 *Piers Plowman and The Visual Arts,* but she agrees
with little else that impressionistic observers of medieval art have
stated. She pointedly and forcefully refutes Muscatine and Bloomfield,
among others. The "surface irrationality may not indicate confusion
of outlook," she asserts, "but rather . . . the ways in which the poet
and artist can express the relationship of phenomenal and spiritual
truth" (p. 21). To be sure, Langland's technique does resemble Bosch's,
but their mode is not fantasy, but rather the conviction that mankind,
"once destined for greatness," is rushing headlong to his death and
damnation (p. 24).

9. Medieval grammar

One of the most promising areas of study recently broached is
medieval grammar. Ben Smith in 1961 and Kaske in 1963 examine
Patience's riddle, using among other works, Priscian's grammar.
Moreover, in 1962 Bloomfield calls attention to the absence of a
learned vocabulary in the English of the fourteenth century and suggests
that the three "Do's" might have a grammatical origin (pp. 164, 119).

P. M. Kean in 1969 is in tacit agreement when she points out that
Clergy's second definition of Dowel and Dobet as two infinites which
find Dobest is illuminated by the knowledge of the scholastic *infinitus,*
or "indefinite." That is, Dowel and Dobet are "indefinites" until
they find their object in Dobest (pp. 91-92). A. V. C. Schmidt in 1968, "A Note on the Phrase 'Free Wit' in the C-Text of 'Piers Plowman' (Passus XI. 51)," points out the difficulty of finding an English equivalent for a technical Latin term (p. 168), and in his 1969 "Langland and Scholastic Philosophy," he suggests that the poet's reason for not translating both *liberum arbitrium* and *anima* may have been that he considered them untranslatable (p. 152). In the same year (1969) Priscilla Jenkins in "Conscience: The Frustration of Allegory" sets forth the view that in Langland's attempt to present "realistically" the corrupt world *vis-à-vis* the world of idealism in allegory, its natural mode, the allegory is almost destroyed. 100

Not until 1971, however, with the publication of "Mede and Mercede: A Study of the Grammatical Metaphors in *Piers Plowman* C: IV. 335-409" by Margaret Amassian and James Sadowsky was the poem again explored in the context of speculative grammar. Their expressed purpose is "to place William Langland within a well-established literary fashion, and to offer evidence that, like his predecessor Alanus de Insulis, Langland used grammatical metaphor for far more serious purposes than" complaint or parody. After a word-by-word, line-by-line analysis, they assert that Langland's verbal ingenuity, as these lines show, is perfectly in accord with Christian doctrine. 101

Two other scholars further explore Langland's grammar, Anne Middleton in "Two Infinites: Grammatical Metaphor in *Piers Plowman*" (1972) and Mary Carruthers in *The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman*. Middleton's article is based on the medieval assumption that the laws of grammar are "discovered, not made by man."
She, consequently, seeks the explanation for Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in their grammatical relationships; she then explores Clergy's response at the banquet with the Friar-Doctor, adding to Ben Smith's images of charity in Piers Plowman. In short, her article shows the banquet scene as well as Conscience's riddle to be a cluster of traditional associations and images (passim). Carruthers's book is based on the assumption that, like St. Augustine, Langland was attempting to "redeem" the language. Consequently, the search for St. Truth is as much a search for a medium as it is a search for a goal. She believes that a basic fallacy in the argument over the nature of allegory is that the participants have not begun with the recognition that reality lies in words. Her approach, hence, is based on St. Augustine and the speculative grammarians (pp. 3-33 et passim).

Though this approach is recent and, no doubt, has errors which must be worked out with the cultivation of more accurate knowledge, the approach promises to be a most fruitful one. As Thomas A. Ryan has reminded the modern reader in "The Poetry of Reform: Christian Socratism in the First Dream of Dowel," his 1971 dissertation, the Word himself became flesh. To traditional Christians, therefore, words remained the most important means to truth.

The tendency in recent years to synthesize and to continue to examine Piers Plowman in the context of the fathers and of medieval theologians has brought remarkably diverse scholars to general agreement and often to cooperative efforts. One outcome of these studies is the apparent growth in respect for the content of the poem. As
David Fowler states, "Even a slight trace of condescension in the mind of a critic, no matter how sensitive he is to literature, can impeach his critical conclusions." This growth in respect has allowed scholars to subject the poem to the rigorous examination it requires and deserves. Another encouraging sign is the willingness of scholars to be convinced and to acknowledge publicly the error or inadequacy of their former views. Dunning's conversion to single authorship and his response to the correctives of his peers regarding the three "Do's" Bloomfield's animadversions on the uncritical acceptance of an unlearned poet, his included, when the overwhelming evidence indicates quite the contrary, and Kane's rejection of the "autobiographical fallacy," which he himself had advocated earlier, are cases in point.

In addition, the exploration of knowledge readily available to Langland promises further illumination. Iconography, not impressionistically examined, but examined knowledgeably, in the manner of Elizabeth Salter and R. E. Kaske, should continue to prove enlightening in regard both to individual passages and to the overall meaning of the poem. The study of the liturgy, whose possibilities Goodridge, Kean, Smith, St. Jacques, and others have already demonstrated, should also continue to assist scholars to elucidate the poem since liturgical worship has always been the central focus of traditional Christianity, the clergy having been given extensive instruction in its meaning and value, the laity as well having been encouraged to frequent participation. The liturgical year with its constant reminder of salvation history, on the one hand, and of the individual birth, rebirth and death, on the other, seems an especially pertinent subject
for exploration as a context for understanding the work of a devout
man whose poem reveals an obvious concern for salvation history, both
general and personal. Bloomfield, Kaske, and Rudolph have merely
suggested what may prove to be a key to at least one of the structural
elements—the correspondence between the liturgical year, the history
of the world, and the life of Will. Furthermore, since the thrust of
the teachings of the Church, carefully enunciated in the liturgy, is
that all history leads up to Christ and all looks back to him, the
study of salvation history itself and of typology, which it assumes,
should continue to make the poem more accessible. Ruth Ames's study,
along with the works of Elizabeth Salter and Barbara Raw, has proved
the value of the approach. Most especially, however, a serious and
respectful examination of the language of the poem, specifically in
the context of speculative grammar, should be useful; for Langland
reveals in his poem the value he places upon the word, its definition
and its form. Margaret Amassian, James Sadowsky, Anne Middleton, and
Mary Carruthers have made excellent beginnings. With the recognition
that the exploration of these areas suggests, the recognition that
Langland's is a sacramental vision of the interrelatedness of the
phenomenal and the spiritual, scholars may yet become equipped to
break the shell, to illumine the sense of Piers Plowman.
NOTES TO ADDENDUM


26 Ibid., p. 27; see also pp. 24, 26-27, and 34. See also their discussion of the allegorical modes, pp. 9-20, 96, 99, et passim.


33 Bloomfield, pp. 127-54; Salter, Piers Plowman, pp. 52 ff., 91-92; and Woolf, p. 120.


Ryan, passim. An article which Ryan prepared in 1964 but which was not published until 1969 has been recast as Chapter Six of his book; see William M. Ryan, "Word-Play in Some Old English Homilies and a Late Middle English Poem," Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later, eds. E. Bagby Atwood and Archibald A. Hill (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1969), pp. 265-78.


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86 Peter Taitt, "In Defense of Lot," Notes and Queries, 18 (1971), 284-85. For the view that Langland works independent of and even in contradiction to patristic exegesis and the Bible, see Elizabeth Lunt, "The Valley of Jehoshaphat in Piers Plowman," Tulane Studies in English, 20 (1972), 1-10.


92 Mary C. Davlin, "Petrus, Id Est, Christus: Piers the Plowman as 'the Whole Christ,'" Chaucer Review, 6 (1972), 280-92.


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