

Shearing the Shepherds: Violence and Anticlerical Satire in Langland's Piers Plowman

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between anticlerical satire and violence in *Piers Plowman*. It identifies a clear reluctance to involve aggression in complaints against the church: despite the prevalence of images of assault and injury in the poem, these are never extended to the priesthood, even though physical attack is often central in other medieval works satirising the clergy. The implications of this aversion are considered, both in terms of Langland's stance as a satirist, and in terms of his conception of the church and its role in society. It is suggested that Langland's hesitance at once marks the limits of his satire and underscores its radicalism, indicating dissatisfaction with mere localised attack; it is also argued that Langland's separation of the church from violence might imply a stronger commitment to peace-making than many recent critics have allowed.

In her study of patristic influence on *Piers Plowman*, Margaret Goldsmith raises a suggestive point about its author's attitude towards the church.¹ She writes: 'We cannot doubt that William Langland was an angry man. One part of him would certainly like to take a stick to cheats, spongers and corrupters, and double-dealers of all kind – especially if they walk under the protection of a tonsure and a habit'.² As this statement makes clear, Goldsmith sees a firm connection between Langland's anticlerical satire and corporeal violence. She sees in his text a clear desire to bruise, break or otherwise damage the bodies of ecclesiastics, as they attract his hostility above any other target. Beneath his critiques, in other words, is a wish to inflict actual injury on priests, as Langland's denunciations seem to be underpinned by aggression, or even motivated by it.

What makes this comment valuable is not that it is necessarily correct or well-founded, but the fact that it articulates an assumption which echoes throughout *Piers Plowman* scholarship. The link Goldsmith posits between Langland's criticism of the clergy and aggression pervades commentary on the poem. Barbara Johnson, for instance, finds similar beliefs among the poem's early readers, noting that 'the Lollards and English reformers' saw Piers as a 'prophet ploughing for Christian truth by the violent action of attacking thorns and briars', while the idea that Langland 'lashed the vices of the clergy...with savage energy' attains the level of a cliché among nineteenth-century scholars.³ The same conviction appears in the work of

more recent critics, as George Kane also sees Langland's satire as analogous to physical attack, stating that he 'was obliged to speak out...with loud violence' when addressing the priesthood.⁴ The connection Goldsmith describes is therefore a longstanding one in criticism. Langland's anticlerical remarks are often held to resemble violence, as assault seems to provide their underlying stimulus.

The purpose of the present article is to interrogate this enduring assumption. Its main objective is to determine whether Langland's satire on the clergy is indeed supported by an implicit pattern of violence, or whether a different interplay is at work between his censure and his portrayal of wounding. However, it will also broaden this inquiry to consider what such an association can reveal about the poem as a whole, especially regarding Langland's position as a critic of the church, and his understanding of the proper social function of the church.

One of the first points to note is the sheer importance of violence and anticlerical satire in Langland's vision. There can be little doubt that each of these issues occupies a fundamental place in his writing. Both leave a deep imprint on Langland's polemic position, his ethical schemata, and his rhetorical strategies alike. The presence of anticlerical satire in his work, for instance, has attracted attention throughout the history of the poem. As is well known, early modern readers treated such concerns as the dominant aspect of *Piers*, placing Langland's outbursts against 'the pride of the Romane Clergy' at the centre of the text.⁵ Thus Robert Crowley's 1550 edition directs the reader towards such 'principall poyntes' as 'what shameful Simony reigneth in the church' and 'Howe Wrath teacheth the Fryers', while John More, writing in 1593, regards the poem as wholly concerned with castigating the priesthood, placing it 'against shrift, Popes curse, Friers, sacrificing priestes, single lyfe, Cannon lawe, purgatorie'.⁶ Although modern criticism has tended to regard such a view as 'a gross renaissance distortion', and relocated the poem's 'deepest' or 'primary' meaning in its 'subtle spirituality' and 'religious function', the importance of satire in the poem remains undeniable.⁷ Langland draws from a wide range of traditions opposing or ridiculing particular orders within the church: this is clear from Penn Szitty's study of his antifraternism, and Jill Mann's analysis of his satire against monks, bishops, parsons and nuns.⁸ Alongside these borrowings, his text also raises a number of original criticisms of the priesthood. As Wendy Scase argues, even at his most 'derivative' Langland impressed radically 'new meanings' on to the topoi he inherited, effectively initiating a 'wider, less stable...more dangerous' vein of

satire against the church.⁹ Reproof of the clergy is amongst Langland's most important projects. Even if it can no longer be seen as the ruling part of his work, it remains true that the poem has a powerful undertow 'blatantly hostile to the institutional church'.¹⁰

The poem's use of injury is no less significant. References to assault and injury recur throughout *Piers*, as a number of key ideas are depicted in terms of bodily damage.¹¹ For instance, when presenting the threat of famine, Langland draws heavily on the imagery of attack, letting Hungir seize the gluttonous Wastour 'be þe mawe,/ And...be þe wombe', smash a 'bretoner aboute þe chekis' until 'he lokide lik a lanterne al his lif aftir', and finally 'beot hem so boþe he brast ner here mawis' (A, vii.159-63). The same terms are used to describe Hungir's defeat, as he receives a comparable thrashing from Piers: he is smacked 'amydde hise lippes' with a 'bene batte' until 'he bledde into þe bodyward a bolle ful' (A, vii.164-66). Along similar lines, the tension between Pees and the tyrannical purveyor Wrong is also expressed by means of injury. Pees first appears with 'his heued & his panne bloody', after a harmful encounter with his opponent has left him with 'þis skape...wipoute gilt' (A, iv.64-65). Violence also infiltrates the prophetic sections of the poem. At one stage Clergie predicts that 'er that kyng come Caym shal awake,/ Ac Dowel shal dyngen hym adoun and destruye his myghte' (B, x.328-29). Even its central figure seems to emblematis aggression to some degree: as D. Vance Smith remarks, 'ever since Cain killed Abel, plowmen have been associated with violence and rupture'.¹² Aggression is evidently an important symbolic resource for Langland, as he repeatedly turns to the vocabulary of assault. No less than anticlericalism, violence plays a key role in the poem's general structure, as 'norms of violence and rule by sheer power' are deeply embedded in the text.¹³

Yet for all the regularity with which *Piers* draws on injury, and despite the poem's powerful sense of antipathy towards the church, there are in fact few identifiable points at which these two concerns overlap. In fact, at several stages the poem actively seems to shy away from allowing anticlericalism and mutilation to converge. One of the most conspicuous instances of this occurs during Hungir's onslaught. Although images of bodily assault surround this figure, his attacks pointedly do not extend to the 'prestes' and 'freres' who appear in the poem after his fight with Wastour and the Bretoner (C, viii.190-91). Even the B-text's 'heap of heremytes' are beyond Hungir's reach: these figures merely experience 'fere of

hunger', specifically not its direct, injurious effects, and are even able to take up 'spades' to 'dryve away Hunger' (B, vi.187, 190). The same separation of the church from injury occurs at several further points. Elsewhere, it is proposed that any commoner bearing 'brood swerd or launce' ought to 'be demed to the deeth but if he do it smythe/ Into sikel' (B, iii.305-7). In the lines which immediately follow this ordinance, however, 'preestes and persons' stand only to have their 'benefice worth bynomen' for similar offences (B, iii.311-14). Even on the battlefield Antecriste's 'proute prestes' seem to be impervious to Consience's barrage of 'feveres and fluxes...rewmes and radegundes and brennyng agues': 'passynge an hundred/ In paltoks and pyked shoes...coomen ayein Consience with Coveitise thei helden' (B, xx.218, 82-84, 218-20). Throughout the poem, therefore, it seems that any discussion of violence will inevitably dissipate as soon as the church is introduced into the text. It is as though Langland is meticulously following the advice he puts into the mouth of Ymaginatif: 'Nolite tangere christos meos/ For clergie is kepere under Crist of hevene' (B, xii.126-27).

Perhaps the most significant case of this, however, is the moral harangue delivered by Consience in the A-text, and by Reson in the later versions. This homily consists of a wide-ranging plea for social reform, and draws on the power of violence to implement its schemes. After the speakers lay the blame for 'thise pestilences' at the door of 'pure synne', they advise the assembled crowd to re-establish patterns of authority that have supposedly lapsed (B, v.13). Each profligate should be made to 'wynne þat he wastide wiþ sum maner craft', husbands should exercise command over their vain or shrewish wives, and parents should discipline wayward children (A, v.25). The chief means by which these improvements are to be achieved is through aggression and injury. In the A-text, henpecked husbands are ordered to beat their wives discreetly at home, rather than see them rebuked publicly: 'Thomas he tauȝte to take two staues,/ And fecche hom felis fro wyuene pyne' (A, v.28-29).¹⁴ In B this call is taken further, as Reson also bids 'Bette kutte a bough outhur tweye/ And bete Beton', and advises 'chapmen to chastisen hir children' on the basis that 'whoso spareth the spryng spilleth hise children' (B, v.32-34, 40). Bodily wounding is apparently central to the social renewal Consience and Reson outline.

Nevertheless, this brutal programme is pointedly not extended to the church. Even though these speeches turn to 'prelatis & prestis togidere' immediately after addressing fathers and husbands, both speakers signally fail to apply the same

prescriptions to the clergy (A, v.34). They merely ask that ‘prestis’ attempt to ‘libbe as ȝe lere vs, we wile leue ȝow þe betere’, and to ‘proue it hemselue’ all that ‘þei preche þe peple’ (A, v.35-36). There is no mention of castigating this group physically in order to remedy its failings. Once again, all talk of wounding stops short of churchmen, as the curative potential of injury is exhausted before it reaches the priesthood.

The C-text, however, follows a different course at this point, although does not break fully with this tendency. The prophecy of Clergie from Passus X of the B-text is transplanted into Reson’s diatribe, which now promises that ‘þer shal come a kyng and confesse ȝow alle/ And bete ȝow...for brekyng of ȝoure reule’ (C, v.168-69). It is also promised that ‘þe abbot of engelond and the abbess his nese/ Shal haue a knock on vppon here crounes and incurable þe wounde’ (C, v.176-77). Although it would appear that wounding is now being extended towards the church, the eschatological colour of these lines effectively neutralises this possibility. Since wounding becomes the inevitable destiny of clerics, the need for action against them in the present disappears. The clergy are isolated from the immediate measures which, for instance, Bette is ordered to take against Beton, or merchants must take against ‘here children’. They are still placed beyond the range of injury as the remainder of the sermon conceives it. Violence once again is not permitted to encroach upon Langland’s engagement with the church, as a strict boundary remains in place between the two.

All of this could be dismissed as coincidence if two episodes within the poem did not spell out the trend more or less explicitly. The first of these occurs in Will’s first vision. In all three versions of *Piers*, after the members of Mede’s wedding party have been dispersed, the King orders them to be rounded up and tortured. Each has a punishment specially designated to him: Leiȝere, for instance, is to be put ‘on þe pillorie’, and Falsnesse is ordered to be ‘feteriþ...faste’ (A, ii.162, 167). When news of this reaches these two malefactors, they seek refuge with the priesthood. Falsnesse ‘for feer fleiȝ to þe Freris’ while Leiȝere takes shelter among the secular clergy: ‘liȝere lep away þennes...til pardoners hadde pite and pulden him to house/ Wysshon hym & wypide him...And senten hym on sundais wiþ selis to chirche’ (A, ii.173-83). These measures are evidently successful, as the vices manage to evade capture and punishment. The episode further underscores the general reluctance of *Piers* to associate wounding and the clergy. In effect, the church is so far removed from mutilation that it may provide sanctuary from it. Langland is not merely unwilling to

extend his more brutal proposals towards clerics, he also regards the church as automatically shielded against such attacks.

A second sequence which further emphasises this pattern occurs in the fourth vision, during the 'dyner' hosted by Conscience. This section is notable for containing the single instance in which Langland's narrator explicitly desires to see a corrupt cleric receive bodily punishment. When Will observes the 'Maister' or 'Doctour' of Divinity gorging at Conscience's table, filling 'hise grete chekes' with 'manye sondry metes, mortrews and puddynges', he registers his disgust by wishing corporeal torment on the man: 'to Pacience I tolde,/ And wissshed witterly...that disshes and doublers this ilke doctour bfore/ Were molten leed in his mawe, and Mahoun amyddes' (B, xiii.63, 78-83). Again, however, despite the forceful terms in which this curse is phrased, the possibility of wounding the cleric is denied almost as soon as it is evoked. Pacience quickly counsels against this violent feeling, 'preynte on me to be stille', and assures Will that pain will be the Maister's inevitable lot without his intervention: 'Thow shalt see thus soone...he shal have a penaunce in his paunche and puffe at ech a worde,/ And thanne shullen his guttes gothele, and he shal galpen after' (B, xiii.86-89). In other words, indigestion will provide the castigation that Will demands without his intervention. By means of this exchange, Langland again avoids introducing violence into his portrayal of clerics. The warning of Pacience is much like Reson's prophecy of 'a kyng' who will 'confesse' and 'bete' venal churchmen: again, immediate torture is replaced by a distant, delayed reprimand. But it is also worth noting there is a significant discrepancy between the punishment Will desires and the eventuality Pacience predicts. The 'penaunce in his paunche' is conspicuously less severe than the hellish tortures Will wishes to see inflicted on the man. His vision of the Doctour being force-fed molten metal is replaced by a considerably less harmful bout of trapped wind. Even more importantly, bodily mutilation is specifically removed from the later penalty. In spite of the similarities between the punishments foreseen by Will and Pacience, Pacience revises the sentence passed by Will to omit wounding the friar. This section of the poem therefore not only repeats the sense of delay Langland voices elsewhere, but deliberately steers away from subjecting the Doctour's body to violence. Even his promised punishment falls short of injury.

In fact, the episode of 'this Goddes gloton' pinpoints another important strand in Langland's handling of violence and the church. As in his treatment of the Maister,

whenever Langland hints elsewhere that clerics may be subject to bloodshed, it is only to deny this possibility. Such a pattern appears in his allusions to Ophni and Phinees, the brothers and corrupt priests of 1 Kings 1-3.¹⁵ The history of these figures does offer scope for connecting violence and clerical corruption. In the Old Testament they are ‘children of Belial’ who grievously abuse their office, habitually stealing meat from sacrifices and lying ‘with the women that waited at the door of the tabernacle’ (1 Kgs ii.12, 2.22). They are finally undone when they lead the Ark of the Covenant into battle against the Philistines: a ‘great slaughter of the people’ results, in which they are killed and the Ark is captured (1 Kgs iv.17). Their father, the judge Heli, responds to news of their deaths by falling ‘from his stool backwards’, breaking his neck (1 Kgs iv.18). The B-text of *Piers* refers briefly to ‘Offyn and Fynes’ during the speech of Clergie, where the figures symbolise ‘badde preestes’ as a whole (B, x.278-79). Their portrayal here does not deviate from Langland’s general policy of omitting injury from the discussion of priests. Although it is reported that they were punished ‘for hir coveitise’, their violent deaths are passed over in silence. Langland simply reports that their crimes made ‘*Archa Dei* myshapped and Ely brakke his nekke’ (B, x.279-80).

The C-text, however, moves this sequence to the Prologue and enlarges it considerably. This was probably a late revision by Langland: as a number of scholars have observed, the absence of alliteration in this new section suggests that it was left ‘unfinished’ by its author at the time of his death.¹⁶ Here Langland does mention that Ophni and Phinees were ‘disconfit in bataille’ and ‘slayen anon’, and emphasises their status as ‘preestes and men of holi church’ (C, Pro.112-13, 118). In other words, violence and the clergy seem to coincide in the newer account of their story. Furthermore, the subsequent warning that ‘God shal take veniaunce on alle swiche preestes/ Wel harder and grettere’ appears to extend this threat to every member of the church (C, Pro.121-22). Nonetheless, the larger context of these remarks serves to restate the distance between aggression and the priesthood. William Rogers has studied this section in relation to fourteenth-century crusades, particularly those of John of Gaunt in Spain and Henry Despenser in Flanders. He finds Langland adopting a deeply critical position, akin to Gower’s opposition to the ‘moerdre and manslawhte’ that ‘stant overal/ In holi cherche’.¹⁷ Rogers draws attention to two points Langland raises when referring to Ophni and Phinees: his attack on ‘boxes...y-bounden with yre,/ To vnder-take þe tol of vntrewe sacrifice’, and his charge that

priests currently tolerate 'ydolatrie...in sondrye places menye' (C, Pro.96-98). The first of these complaints is interpreted as a reference to the 'chests' installed in parish churches for the collection of 'crusading funds', while the second is seen as an allusion to Islam, which was wrongly thought to venerate images or 'maumettes', and which the English church was arguably ignoring as it waged war on fellow Christians (C, Pro.119). This turns the Ophni and Phinees episode into an attack on the church for sanctioning such morally dubious campaigns: for Rogers it becomes 'a story about clergy who rely on military action and place the mysteries of their religion in its service', and serves as a 'warning about the particular clerical corruption that amounts to supporting the crusades'.¹⁸ If Rogers is correct in his assertions, then Langland is evoking Ophni and Phinees in order to attack clerical involvement in warfare. As a result, these two victims of violence are being considered only in order to separate the church from violence in general. Once again the issues of belligerence and the clergy are kept at bay from one another. They appear together here only so that Langland can insist on their proper division.

It is clear from all this that *Piers Plowman* shows a marked reluctance to draw on mutilation during its engagement with the church. While violence is deployed in a range of contexts throughout the poem, there appears to be some impediment at work in the text, which keeps Langland from applying this fruitful set of terms to his commentary on the priesthood. Any reference to violence seems to peter out as soon as the church is addressed.

This in turn raises the immediate question of exactly why Langland refuses to involve clerics in scenes of wounding or assault. Although his desire to distinguish the two issues is readily apparent, the reason for this division is not. One immediate solution might be to assume a general disapproval of injuring clerics in medieval culture more widely, or at least within the traditions to which *Piers* belongs. Such a stance is adopted by Anne McKim when examining similar patterns of thought in Hary's *Wallace*: McKim considers Hary's 'sparing of noncombatants, specifically identified here as priests' in terms of the wider 'limits on violence' apparent from other narratives of warfare.¹⁹ However, in Langland's specific case this reasoning is difficult to apply. The literary background of *Piers*, and especially the currents of satire and complaint in which it is situated, do not support this approach very comfortably. The fact is that violence was available as a rhetorical device in such literature: the various exchanges of polemic and critique that erupted between orders

of the church during the Middle Ages, arising inevitably ‘whenever a religious movement attained an institutional status surpassing and threatening the privileges of others’, freely use violent imagery to dramatise their criticism.²⁰ One early example is the *Planctus super Episcopis* or *Complaint on the Bishops*, a piece evidently written by an English supporter of Innocent III during the pope’s quarrel with King John. Sequences of mutilation and violence occur throughout the text, symbolically reinforcing its attacks on John’s allies: at one stage the poet urges ‘Elias to draw a sword’ against the Bishop of Ely, and imagines this figure ‘bruising the three unbelievers’ and ‘knocking them readily to the ground’.²¹ Closer to Langland’s own period is an antifraternel carol preserved in MS Cotton Cleopatra Bii, and apparently composed as part of the tension between secular and mendicant orders.²² This includes one stanza in which its narrator fantasises about friars being consumed bodily by their own iconography and ‘self-regarding myths’: ‘A cart was made al of fyre, as it shuld be,/ A grey frer I sawe þer-inne, þat best lyked me./ Wele I wote þei shal be brent’.²³ Such aggressive devices are not only common, but even develop into formal requirements in particular satiric genres. In the fabliaux and their Latin precursors, for example, anticlerical violence almost attains the level of a structural necessity, as R. Howard Bloch and Alison Williams have documented.²⁴ Likewise, injury is used extensively in apocalyptic complaint, a tradition with which *Piers* is often linked. As Morton Bloomfield and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton in particular have stressed, the apocalyptic concern with ‘new life and renewal’, and the explicit conviction that ‘the false Church would be overcome’, often spill over into images of ‘brute force’.²⁵ The work of Langland’s continental contemporaries provides several cases of this: for instance, Catherine of Siena holds that ‘the very stones’ will ‘rise up against’ venal clerics, and ‘the earth swallow them up’, while Bridget of Sweden foresees a time in which the pope himself ‘shall be struck with a blow that will knock his teeth out’, and those who ‘entered into the Holy Church’ but ‘who sin without fear’ will be ‘hung on a fork-shaped gallows and devoured by crows’.²⁶ The prevalence of such imagery is further shown by the fact that some sources identify satire itself with aggression and mutilation, as Fulgentius refers to ‘satyra precussit’ (‘satire lashing out’), while Petrarch specifically compares his attack on the papal court to ‘inflicting a wound’.²⁷ In short, images and threats of violence were well within the scope of medieval satire, taking their place amongst the more scurrilous and ‘Saturnalian’ elements of the genre that A.J. Minnis and John Fyler outline.²⁸

Comparing Langland to other examples of medieval anticlerical satire therefore only underscores his eccentricity, as his aversion to violence is not shared by earlier and contemporary critics of the church. Although Langland makes extensive use of several of established discourses when criticising the clergy, he deliberately excludes a device which not only recurs throughout them, but which some authors consider as a symbolic realisation of satire's ruling principles. It is therefore clear that Langland's inhibition cannot stem from any wider conventions governing the practices and techniques of medieval satire, since aggression is deeply embedded in many of the discourses he is deploying. Ultimately, it seems fair to conclude that Langland's refusal to portray wounded clerics is informed by some assumption specific to his work. Some particular understanding of aggression and the church in *Piers* renders the two themes incompatible.

A reason for this incongruity does in fact begin to emerge when Langland's deployment of violence is considered closely. The role that wounding plays in his text suggests why it cannot be applied in his examination of the church. Broadly speaking, Langland seems to be using violence in order to create meaning among the conceptions he addresses. His application of force is designed to convey particular significance to the abstractions in his work, impressing specific senses and connotations on to them. This is perhaps most evident in his treatment of individual personifications. Throughout *Piers*, injury assesses such figures, leaving marks on their bodies which ascribe certain values to them. For instance, during the confession scene in the second vision, wounds serve to encode the Deadly Sins, turning their peculiar offences into a more visible, corporeal form. Thus Envy's gnawed 'lippes' and the knocks Gloton sustains, as he 'þrompelde atte þrexwolde and þreuh to þe grounde', are clear emblems of the wrongdoing they represent: the first demonstrates Envy's resentment, as 'for wraþe he bot his lippes', while the second provides a visible record of the character's indulgence (A, v.67, 351). The fact that both sets of wounds rebound back on the performer also denotes the self-destruction inherent in such vices. Injury thus works to disclose the iniquity of these figures, publicising the nature of their corruption: it operates much like the punitive rituals Foucault describes, serving 'to brand the victim with infamy'.²⁹ A further example is the appearance of Piers himself in the penultimate vision. Here the Plowman bears wounds that recall Christ's Passion: 'sodeynly me mette/ That Piers the Plowman was peynted al bloody' (B, xix.6). This mutilation has the effect of rendering Piers

indistinguishable from Christ. On witnessing Piers, Will is forced to ask, 'is this Jesus the justere...that Jewes dide to dethe?/ Or is it Piers the Plowman?', only to be told that the figure is both at once: 'Thise arn hise armes...ac he that cometh so blody/ Is Crist with his cros' (B, xix.10-11, 13-14). Piers' newly 'bloody' form transmits divinity to him, doing so with such force that he appears to merge with Christ: as Stephen Barney comments, his 'bloodied person' generates a 'mysterious identity' between himself and Jesus.³⁰ This 'hypostatic union' is a simple variation on the process that defines Envy and Gloton.³¹ Despite producing a different valuation, establishing a link between Piers and the Redeemer with 'al his grete wounde', it operates in much the same way (B, xviii.99). Again disfigurement classifies its sufferer, assigning meaning to them by inscribing signs on their body. Just as the wounds of the Sins proclaim their misbehaviour, so Piers' bleeding denotes his holiness. Injury provides Langland with a means of attaching particular sets of meaning to his figures.

However, the ability of violence to impress significance also has another, broader function in the poem. As well as defining individual figures, injury succeeds in establishing relationships between Langland's conceptions, and organising them into systems. The power distribution implicit in violence is often used to create patterns of subordination and authority among the ideas Langland cites. The fight between Hungir, Wastour and Piers, for instance, organises the three into a clear hierarchy: by rendering their engagement in the form of a pitched battle, with clear victories and defeats, Langland is able to gather them into a fixed order, defining the authority of each in relation to the others. A similar process is at work in the struggle between Poverté and the various sins. This again creates a definite ranking among its participants: 'if Wrathe wrastle with the poore he hath the worse ende...if Glotonie greve poverté, he gadereth the lasse' (B, xiv.224-29). To echo Peter Haidu, aggression possesses a clear 'relational structure' in *Piers*, integrating its performers into larger schemes and networks.³² There are a number of points at which this idea is stated quite openly, as 'poustees' are posited as marks of subjection which automatically consign their bearers to a rank beneath another. In Ymaginatif's speech in the B-text, for instance, the existence of physical suffering becomes a witness to God's dominion over man, as 'angres' are termed 'bitter baleises' with which 'God beteth his dere children' (B, xii.11-12). In fact, Ymaginatif intertwines divine power and the infliction of pain even further, converting the shepherd's protective 'virga' and

‘baculus’ of Psalm 22 into implements of violence: the verse ‘thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me’ is here rendered as ‘thow strike me with thi staf, with stikke or with yerde’ (B, xii.14). Again, violence is a means of fixing a clear gradation, defining which party is subordinate and which is dominant. Throughout the poem, therefore, violence allocates meaning to individual concepts while transcending such locality, organising ideas into gradations, linkages and oppositions. It is a tool used in the creation of meaning, helping to formulate the text’s concepts and to organise them into a coherent framework. In Gordon Teskey’s phrase, Langland seeks ‘to yoke together heterogeneous things by force’ in his work.³³

All of this indicates why Langland encounters such difficulty in depicting the injury of priests. It suggests that his reluctance is bound up with the issue of his own authority as a writer. Since Langland is employing wounds in a broadly interpretive or diagnostic manner, as a means of imposing definitions and grouping ideas into relationships, his refusal to injure ‘preestes and persones’ suggests that he is unwilling to impress such classifications on to the clergy. He does not wish to inscribe the priesthood with his own designations, to mark them in the same direct manner that he imprints other figures and ideas. This in turn implies that Langland is unable to award his work authority over the discourse of the established church. He cannot challenge or override the meanings it possesses with his own interpretations, since it generates definitions that he cannot contest. In effect the church is not available for the symbolic manipulation that he deploys elsewhere, since its own formulations are of greater weight than his own. In this area of the poem at least, the authority of clerical discourse appears to exceed Langland’s own, providing a cluster of meanings which he is unable to overwrite.

This is reinforced by a further element in Langland’s treatment of aggression. Although Langland does not subject the clergy to violence in his work, there are numerous points at which he allows priests to inflict wounds on others. As David Aers observes, throughout *Piers* the church ‘stands, with its members, under judgment for...its endless collusions with organized violence’.³⁴ All three Prologues contain an episode which sharply delineates this relationship. In this opening section of the text, the deceit of pardoners is translated into a physical onslaught, as the sale of indulgences is presented as an attack on the bodies of the gullible. Will watches as a crowd of ‘lewede men’ gather around a pardoner, who responds by striking them with his ‘bulle with bisschopes seles’: ‘He bunchide hem wip his breuet and bleride here

eiȝen/ And rauhte with his ragemon ringes and broches' (A, Pro.66, 71-72). The link between clerics and aggression evident here is reiterated at several later points. At one stage, Wrathe describes the gossiping of nuns and monks as a spur to violence, which causes communities to 'crache with...kene nayles' and 'bloody...chekes' (C, vi.140, 150). The poem even ends with a sustained depiction of clerical savagery, as Antecrist assembles an army of 'freres', 'al the convent' and 'inparfit prestes and prelates' (B, xx.58-60). This garrison is armed with 'longe knyues' and 'brode hoked Arwes' and sent to storm Piers' barn of Unitee, damaging 'wikkedly many a wise techere' during the attack (C, xxii.218-20, B, xx.303). Once again, the behaviour of churchmen becomes a series of assaults, a readiness to mutilate other bodies.

This only underscores the imbalance of power Langland assumes between the church and himself as a critic. The fact that clerics are permitted to enact aggression and assault, while he cannot exercise such procedures against them, exposes a clear one-sidedness in the relationship between poet and object. The clergy's isolation from violence suggests that they carry for Langland an absolute authority as creators of meaning: they are stubbornly resistant to his manipulation or arrangement, while retaining the ability to carry out such determinations themselves. In sum, when examined through the lens of violence, a limit appears in Langland's analysis of the church. Despite the boldness of Langland's critiques, as he forcefully compares 'the ideal exercise of the authority of the Church with its reality', and even at times champions 'experiential knowledge' over 'didactic authority', he cannot expose the church to the redefinition that wounding may implement.³⁵ As Kerby-Fulton writes, 'Langland struggles within his writing to establish his own authority from what is apparently a position *outside* the church': in this case he seems to fail in that struggle, leaving the power firmly in the hands of the priesthood, with no means of overruling it or seizing it for himself.³⁶

Yet by the same token, Langland's reluctance also has a more radical dimension. Although it might disable his satire and complaint in one sense, in another respect it lends his work a greater range. Langland's lack of interest in violence implies that he is trying to expand the scope of his critique beyond the possibilities that aggression stands to offer. In this, he may be responding to medieval commentaries on Roman satire, which do at times associate rhetorical violence with the limitation of attack.³⁷ Throughout scholastic discussions of satire, there is a repeated insistence that satire should properly avoid specific persons in order to

address generalities and abstractions: as Paul Miller summarises, medieval exegesis tended to view satire as ‘a type of ethical verse...which in forthright, unadorned terms censures and corrects vices in society...eschewing slander of individuals but sparing no guilty party’.³⁸ Thus Isidore of Seville, whose comments laid the foundations for later conceptions of the genre, describes satire as a form which ‘gathers together vices in general’ and ‘snatches up sins broadly’.³⁹ Much the same point is made by an older contemporary of Langland, the Franciscan John Ridevall, who insists that ‘the poets of the Romans who are called satirists’ did not castigate named sinners, but were ‘strong and sharp critics of sins and carnal delight’.⁴⁰ As A.J. Minnis outlines, satire for medieval commentators achieved its power from its impersonality, as it both spared ‘no one from censure’ and was ‘careful to avoid spreading slander about particular individuals’.⁴¹ This in turn awards violence a problematic status in conceptions the genre. For a number of writers it becomes a method that leads away from this ideal. Satire which imitates physical attack is seen to be merely *ad hominem*, its application extending only to the object being addressed, rather than performing its correct function. This point is made explicit by John of Garland in his *Morale Scolarium* (c.1241). In the opening section of this poem, an elaborate satire on the ‘morals of students’, John sets out the overall purpose of the work. He claims that the ‘new satire’ he is writing will avoid violent attack and so attain a more ‘general’ or expansive range: he promises that ‘no specific person will be cut here with a spiteful barb, but I will let the pen play generally’.⁴² John clearly associates violent critique, or satire which aims to ‘cut’ its target, with an undue limitation of scope. His own satire will overcome this difficulty by addressing types rather than individuals, sacrificing images of violence in favour of broader ‘play’. John’s comments find an echo in the remarks of Nigel Witeker, whose prologue to the *Speculum Stultorum* (c.1180) confronts a similar problem. Nigel states that his text will avoid ‘direct allegations’ and ‘sharp rebukes’ in preference for ‘stringing together jokes’, and goes on to declare violent reproof fundamentally ineffective: ‘the application of ointment alleviates more kinds of illness than does the branding iron’.⁴³ Again, there is a sense that aggressive satire, or criticism which takes bodily wounding as its model, is flawed precisely because it is too ‘direct’ and narrow in its focus. As a consequence, these two critics of the church, the first attacking the minor orders and the second addressing ‘diversis ordines’ (‘various orders’), avoid associating their compositions with bodily violence. It is as though aggression, being directed against an individual

body and producing sensations particular to that body, cannot address sins in wider terms.⁴⁴ It may only function as a response to the single cleric under attack, overlooking the larger transgressions they have committed. In effect, relying on images of violence prevents satire from achieving its largest possible sweep. Therefore, despite the popularity of violent imagery in medieval satire, and the occasional conception of satire as a type of aggression, the relationship between violence and complaint is a vexed one. Norris Lacy's remark on violence in the fabliaux can be justly extended here: aggression is always seen as 'anti-priest but not really anticlerical', fatally localising the complaint being made.⁴⁵

When all this is considered, it highlights an interesting feature of Langland's aims and methods as a satirist. By distancing his analysis of the church from aggression, Langland appears to be abandoning the narrowly focused type of criticism that violence implies. His rejection of anticlerical violence shows a desire to engage with broader themes and ideas, and to devise a mode of attack which can extend its focus beyond single priests in isolation. In short, Langland's abandonment of this strategy is a calculated move in the construction of a more expansive critical position. It signals his ambition as a commentator, and a wish to address the ecclesiastic structure in its entirety.

But beyond these concerns, there is also a further, potentially more important conclusion that can be drawn here. Langland's attitude towards violence and the priesthood begins to suggest something about his overall conception of the church itself, and the social function it should fulfil. To illustrate this point, it is worth returning to a section of the poem which has already been touched on a number of times in this article, namely Will's dialogue with Ymaginatif. It has been frequently observed that this episode, which occurs in Passus XII of the B-text and Passus XIV of C, plays an important role in the poem as a whole: Minnis for instance argues that it can be treated as a sort of key to the entire vision, as Ymaginatif himself is both 'the medium through which everything in the poem has passed' and 'offers solutions to many of the most difficult problems raised therein'.⁴⁶ In line with this assessment, Ymaginatif offers several valuable remarks on the issue of aggression. In the longest version of this episode, that included in the B-text, Ymaginatif begins by reasserting Langland's conviction that plague and other sufferings should be understood as a warning to 'amende thee wile thow myght', and defines these 'poustees of pestilences' in expressly violent terms: he describes them as 'bittere balesises' with

which ‘God beteth his deere children’ (B, xii.10-12). This sets the tone for many of the passages that follow, as Ymaginatif describes Christ preventing the stoning of a ‘womman...in avoutrye taken’, compares a ‘lewed man’ to ‘a blynd man in bataille’ who ‘bereth wepne to fighte’, and finally evokes the Psalmist’s injunction ‘nolite tangere christos meos’ (‘touch not my anointed’) in relation to ‘chopping’ (B, xii.64, 105, 126).

This series of remarks is deeply significant, since Langland is directly considering the relationship between the church and violence here, and doing so in terms which have clear implications for the rest of the poem. Throughout this section, Langland draws close to the ‘peacemaking’ conception of the church identified by Daniel Thiery, in which the ‘priest was expected to quell conflict through good example and personal intervention’, and clerics as a group were expected ‘to act as peacemakers’.⁴⁷ Much like the sources analysed by Thiery, Langland suggests that the proper role of the church is to moderate and eliminate aggression, actively seeking to curtail hostility.

This is perhaps most evident in his reference to the verse from Psalm 104, ‘nolite tangere christos meos’. Annotators usually treat this as a tacit rebuttal of the Wycliffite theory of dominion. Hence Derek Pearsall holds that this section of the poem ‘alludes slightly to an important Wycliffite doctrine, that priests of unholy life lose the power of their holy office’, while A.V.C. Schmidt sees here ‘an implied warning to the secular power against interference with the prerogatives of the clergy’, and terms the verse itself ‘a standard text cited to support clerical privilege’.⁴⁸ In other words, the emphasis here falls on secular critics of the church, who are advised not to attack the clergy either physically or verbally. There is little that can be disputed here outright: in the C-text, Langland even makes this point more explicit, restating an earlier warning that ‘godes veniaunce’ will befall any ‘lewede’ that mishandles the ‘cofre of cristes tresour’ (C, xiv.69, 54). However, this passage also has a wider scope than this reading perhaps allows. In these lines, Langland is not only considering the priesthood as a potential object of violence, but giving it an active role in the wider prevention of aggression. The lines immediately preceding the Psalm quotation clearly refer to bloodshed as a wider phenomenon: ‘medle we noght mucche with hem to meven any wrathe,/ Lest cheste chafen us to choppe ech man other’ (B, xii.123-24). The use of the word ‘man’ is markedly unspecific, being equally relevant to both clerics and laity, while ‘choppe each...other’ hints at violence as a larger exchange of

blows. Rather than describing one party falling victim to another, therefore, this statement appears to outline a broader conflict, a general skirmish not restricted to any single group. The implication here seems to be that ignoring the 'science' of the church can only provoke widescale brutality and combat, which might be equally harmful to both laity and clergy. This is confirmed by the context of the lines, and the fact that they occur alongside accounts of laymen being injured for disregarding clerical privileges, as Ymaginatif refers to the 'sorwe' of Saul who 'leiden hond theron...and loren hir lif after' (B, xii.120). This necessarily implies that respecting the office of the clergy, and the 'knowynes' and 'wisdomes' peculiar to its members, will prevent slaughter. Langland appears to link priestly authority with the reduction of violent conflict. If the authority of the priesthood is honoured, then situations in which 'choppe ech man other' will be averted. The church, in other words, ought to operate as a check against aggression.

This point is further reinforced by an earlier passage in Ymaginatif's speech, dealing with the story of the woman taken in adultery. Langland's reading of Christ's intervention here is curious, in that it entirely skirts over the challenge 'he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her' (Jn, viii.6-7). In his account there is no mention of Jesus' speech which precedes his writing 'with his finger on the ground', as Langland concentrates entirely on the 'caractes' by which 'the Jewes knew hemselve/ Giltier as afore God and gretter in synne...and wente away for shame' (B, xii.78-80). There is not even any speculation that the writing reiterates the words Christ has spoken, as it is the mere fact of writing that holds Langland's attention. In other words, Langland is only interested in Christ's disruption of the sentence 'stone hire to dethe', and not in the conditions he offers which might make such violence acceptable (B, xii.75). 'Clergie', in the sense of both literacy and the priesthood, is presented here as an end to violence, as Langland brushes over the fact that Christ offers circumstances in which such violence might be justified. Again, Langland seems to be emphasising the role of the church in minimising aggression: as the inheritors and imitators of Christ, they too should eliminate bloodshed 'thorough clergie', not offer rationales for its exercise (B, xii.77).

These ideas become all the more significant when they are read against the wider patterns of thought present throughout *Piers*. The views expressed by Ymaginatif help to account for Langland's stringent withdrawal of the clergy from violence, and also shed light on the fact that he routinely sees any pairing of the

church and violence in terms of corruption. Both of these features also suggest a view of the church as an institution ideally dedicated to peacemaking. Langland excludes the church from violence when seeking to define his network of concepts because he wishes to posit it as essentially non-aggressive; likewise, he uses clerical involvement in aggression only to mark abuses because he holds that any failure to promote peace on the part of the church is innately corruptive. After all, when the Doctour claims that ‘al the wit of this world...kan noght parformen a pees bitwene the Pope and hise enemys,/ Ne bitwene two Cristene kynges’, this marks the moment when it is proven decisively that Dowel is not to be found with him (B, xiii.174-76). The issue of Langland’s ‘pacifism’ is of course undecided, and has exercised critics for a number of decades. Although Throop could describe Langland as ‘an ardent pacifist’ later treatments of the subject have been rather more muted.⁴⁹ For example, Denise Baker finds only ‘covert endorsements of efforts to make peace’ in *Piers*, and ‘oblique criticisms’ directed only at the ‘economic incentives’ for warfare, while Ben Lowe argues that Langland saw war as a ‘practical and necessary activity’: ‘his attack on war is limited to how it is prosecuted and the motives behind it’.⁵⁰ The evidence marshalled here might in fact suggest a different sensibility. The methodical manner with which Langland separates the clergy from violence, as well as his explicit comments on the matter, indicate that his commitment to such ideas might be stronger than these critics allow. His conception of the church suggests that the institution should stand apart from violent conflict, and even actively work to suspend it, following Christ’s example with the woman taken in adultery.

To return to Goldsmith’s assertion, that Langland would at some level ‘like to take a stick’ to anyone wearing ‘a tonsure and a habit’ who abuses their office, it is now clear that little in this remark can be supported. Langland rigorously avoids deploying aggression in his satire on the clergy, consistently stopping short of the priesthood when invoking violence as a social remedy. Even when he does bring the two themes into contact with one another, as in his treatment of Ophni and Phinees, he insists on their proper separation. However, the question of whether Langland was prepared to ‘take a stick’ to ecclesiastics also avoids the most interesting and important issues: how Langland conceived his attacks on the church, how he viewed his own critical authority in relation to it, and how comprehensive he wished his engagement to be. As has been argued here, when considered in these terms the absence of anticlerical violence in *Piers Plowman* possesses both a radical and a

conservative dimension. It signals on the one hand a difficulty in claiming authority over the priesthood, an inability to impose personal definitions and judgements on to its members; on the other, it shows a desire to transcend the merely specific when making charges and accusations. But more than this, it also suggests that the proper role of the church is to defuse or arrest violence, since its involvement in aggression is invariably associated with wrongdoing, and it is located steadfastly outside the patterns that violence generates. As such, Langland's treatment of violence provides an important register of his general stance when confronting or satirising the clergy, and an index of his general aspirations for the church itself.

¹ The following editions of *Piers* are used here: William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the A version*, ed. George Kane (London, 1988), p.330; William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: a critical edition of the B-text*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, 2nd ed. (London, 1997); William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the C version*, ed. George Russell and George Kane (London, 1997). Subsequent references appear in parentheses in the text.

² Margaret E. Goldsmith, *The Figure of Piers Plowman: the image on the coin* (Cambridge, 1981), p.90.

³ Barbara Johnson, *Reading Piers Plowman and the Pilgrim's Progress: Reception and the Protestant Reader* (Carbondale, Ill., 1992), p.187; Joseph Ritson, *Bibliographica Poetica: A Catalogue of English Poets, of the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth Centuries* (London, 1802), p.27; Anon., 'Geoffrey Chaucer', *Westminster Review* 40 (1871), 381-98 (p.382); John Laird Wilson, *John Wycliffe, patriot and reformer: a biography* (New York, 1884), p.64.

⁴ George Kane, *Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics, Piers Plowman* (London, 1951), p.214.

⁵ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Menston, 1968), p.50.

⁶ *The vision of pierce Plowman nowe the second time imprinted*, ed. Robert Crowley (London, 1550), ff.2, 4v (STC 19906); John More, *The Table of the Beginning of the World to this day* (London, 1593), p.193 (STC 18074). See R. Carter Hailey, "'Geuyng Light to the Reader": Robert Crowley's editions of *Piers Plowman*', *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America* 95 (2001), 483-502; John N. King, *English Reformation Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), pp.319-39.

⁷ John Norton-Smith, *William Langland* (Leiden, 1983), p.8; Elizabeth Zeeman, 'Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth', in *Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman: a modern critical anthology*, ed. Robert J. Blanch (Knoxville, Tenn., 1969), pp.117-31 (p.117); Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman: an introduction* (Oxford, 1969), p.24. See also Edward Vasta, *The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman* (The Hague, 1963).

⁸ Penn R. Szittyá, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, 1986); Penn R. Szittyá, 'The Antifraternal Tradition in Middle English', *Speculum* 52 (1977), 287-315; Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973), pp.23-4, 58, 131.

⁹ Wendy Scase, 'Satire', in *Medieval England: an encyclopedia*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and others (New York, 1998), pp.665-67 (p.667); Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge, 1989), p.123.

¹⁰ Anne Hudson, *Premature Reformation: Wycliffite texts and Lollard history* (Oxford, 1988), p.408.

¹¹ See for instance Ralph Hanna III, 'School and Scorn: gender in *Piers Plowman*', *New Medieval Literatures* 3 (2000), 213-27 (pp.226-27); C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman: Modern Scholarship and Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, Penn., 2004), pp.203-46.

¹² D. Vance Smith, *The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century* (Minneapolis, 2001), p.21.

¹³ David Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London, 1980), p.68.

¹⁴ On this point see Walter Thomas Johnson, *The Prophecy of William Langland* (Irvine, Calif., 1977), p.50.

¹⁵ The Vulgate chapter division is used here. This story appears in 1 Sam. 1-3 in the King James and subsequent Protestant versions.

¹⁶ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Langland and the Bibliographic Ego', in *Written Work: Langland, Labor and Authorship*, ed. Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia, 1997), pp.67-143 (p.101). See also Wendy Scase, 'Two *Piers Plowman* C-Text Interpolations: Evidence for a Second Textual Tradition', *Notes and Queries* 232 (1987), 456-63; Derek Pearsall, 'The Ilchester Manuscript of *Piers Plowman*', *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 82 (1981), 181-92.

¹⁷ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis, English Works of John Gower*, ed. G C Macaulay (London, 1969), iii.2544, 2528-29 (p.294).

¹⁸ William E. Rogers, 'The C-Revisions and the Crusades in *Piers Plowman*', in *The Medieval Crusade*, ed. Susan Janet Ridyard (Woodbridge, 2004), pp.145-66 (p.155).

¹⁹ Anne McKim, 'Scottish National Heroes and the Limits of Violence', *A Great Effusion of Blood?: Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. by Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery and Oren Falk (Toronto, 2004), pp.131-43 (p.139).

²⁰ John Van Engen, 'Late Medieval Anticlericalism: the case of the new devout', in *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman, *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* 51 (Leiden, 1993), pp.19-52 (p.19).

²¹ 'Helia ensem exere/ Et impios tres contere...Ictu prosterne simplici': *The Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, ed. Thomas Wright (London, 1839), p.44.

²² V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1971), p.246.

²³ 'On the Minorites', *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossel H. Robbins (London, 1959), pp.163-4; Joseph Grennen, 'The "O and I" Refrain in Middle English Poems: a grammatology of Judgment Day', *Neophilologus* 71 (1987): 620-21.

²⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fables* (Chicago, 1986), p.63; Alison Williams, *Tricksters and Pranksters: Roguery in French and German Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Amsterdam, 2000), p.51.

²⁵ Morton W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, 1961), p.121; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman*, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 7 (Cambridge, 1990), p.4. See also Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, pp.62-79; Richard Kenneth Emmerson, 'The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic, and the Study of Medieval Literature', *Poetic prophecy in*

Western Literature, ed. Jan Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain (London, 1984), pp.40-54.

²⁶ Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Susan Noffke (New York, 1980), pp.235, 238; *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. and ed. Denis Searby and Bridget Morris, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2006), I, 156, II, 249.

²⁷ Fulgentius, *Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii V. C.: Opera*, ed. Rudolf Helm (Leipzig, 1898), p.9; Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Book Without a Name: a translation of the Liber sine nomine*, trans. Norman P. Zacour (Toronto, 1973), p.74.

²⁸ A.J. Minnis, *Magister Amoris: The Roman De La Rose And Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford, 2001), p.194; John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven, 1979), p. 4.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1991), p.34.

³⁰ Andrew Galloway and Stephen A. Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, 2006), V, 107.

³¹ Britton J. Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief* (Toronto, 1992), p.138.

³² Peter Haidu, *The Subject of Violence: the Song of Roland and the Birth of the State* (Bloomington, 1993), p.3.

³³ Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), p.2.

³⁴ David Aers, 'Visionary Eschatology: *Piers Plowman*', *Theology and Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. James Buckley and L. Gregory Jones (Oxford, 2001), p.11.

³⁵ Myra Stokes, *Justice and Mercy in Piers Plowman: a Reading of the B-text Visio* (London, 1984), p.74; Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge, 1991), p.24.

³⁶ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Piers Plowman', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), pp.513-38 (p.533).

³⁷ On the link between Langland's work and contemporary theories of satire, see Paul S. Miller, 'The Medieval Literary Theory of Satire and Its Relevance to the Work of Gower, Langland and Chaucer' (unpub. Ph.D. diss., Belfast, Queen's University, 1982), John Norton-Smith, *William Langland* (Leiden, 1983), p.47.

³⁸ Paul S. Miller, 'John Gower, Satiric Poet', in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: responses and reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge, 1983), p.82.

³⁹ 'Novi, qui et Satirici, a quibus generaliter vitia carpuntur... Hi enim universorum delicta corripunt': Isidori Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum sive originum*, VIII.vii.7-8, ed. W.M Lindsay, *Scriptorum classicorum bibliotheca Oxoniensis*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911), I, unpaginated. My translation. On the influence of Isidore's definition of satire on medieval commentary and literature, see Udo Kindermann, *Satyra. Die Theorie der Satire im Mittellateinischen. Vorstudie zu einer Gattungsgeschichte*, Erlanger Beiträge zur Sprach-und Kunstwissenschaft, 58 (Nuremberg, 1978), p.12.

⁴⁰ 'Illi enim poete romanorum, quos vocabant satiricos, fuerant fortes et acuti reprehensore vitiorum et carnalium delectationum': Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early XIVth Century* (Oxford, 1960), p.319. My translation.

⁴¹ Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, p.93.

⁴² 'Scribo novam satiram...Nullus dente mali lacerabitur in speciali/ Immo metro tali ludet stilus in generali': John of Garland, *Morale Sclarium*, ed. by Louis John Paetow (Berkeley, 1927) 1-4 (p.187). My translation.

⁴³ ‘Unde Burnellus...interiserit nolens jocosa quaedam insimulatione reprehendere, quae noverat aspera increpatione nequaquam se posse extirpare. Multa enim genera morborum sunt quae utilius unguentum quam cauterium ad medelam admittunt’: Nigellus Wireker, *Speculum Stultorum*, in *The Anglo-Latin Satirical Poets and Epigrammatists of the Twelfth Century*, ed. Thomas Wright, Rolls Series 58, 2 vols (London, 1872), I, 10. My translation.

⁴⁴ See for instance Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford, 1985), p.4.

⁴⁵ Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux* (New York, 1993), p.xviii.

⁴⁶ Alistair J. Minnis, ‘Langland’s Ymaginatif and Late Medieval Theories of Imagination’, *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981), p.94.

⁴⁷ Daniel E. Thiery, ‘Plowshares and Swords: Clerical Involvement in Acts of Violence and Peacemaking in Late Medieval England, c.1400-1536’ *Albion* 36 (2004), pp.201-22 (pp.214-15).

⁴⁸ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter, 2008), p.241, n.65; Langland, *Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, p.456, n.113, 125-5a.

⁴⁹ Palmer Allan Throop, *Criticism of the Crusade: a Study of Public Opinion and Crusade Propaganda* (Amsterdam, 1940), p.141.

⁵⁰ Denise N. Baker, ‘Introduction’, ‘Meed and the Economics of Chivalry in *Piers Plowman*’, *Inscribing the Hundred Years’ War in French and English Cultures*, ed. Denise N. Baker (New York, 2000), pp.1-16, 55-72 (pp.9, 67); Ben Lowe, *Imagining Peace: a History of Early English Pacifist Ideas, 1340-1560* (University Park, Penn., 1997), pp.93-94.

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