

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

Nick Gray, 'The Clemency of Cobblers: A Reading of "Glutton's Confession" in Piers Plowman', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 17 (1986), 61-75

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=123665&silos_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

THE CLEMENCY OF COBBLERS: A READING OF "GLUTTON'S CONFESSION" IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*

By NICK GRAY

Towards the end of the celebrated confession scene in *Piers Plowman* B Passus V there occurs perhaps the most famous passage in the whole of Langland's poem - the most famous, and perhaps the most misunderstood. Glutton, on his way to church to be the sixth of the deadly sins to make his confession, is sidetracked into a tavern; and there, in spite of his sober purpose to confess his "coupe", he is very soon in his cups:

- 296 Now bigynneb Gloton for to go to shrifte
And kaireþ hym to kirkeward his coupe to shewe.
Ac Beton þe Brewestere bad hym good morwe
And heo asked of hym whiderward he wolde.
- 300 'To holy chirche,' quod he, 'for to here masse,
And siþen I wole be shryuen and synne na moore.'
'I haue good Ale, gossib,' quod she, 'Gloton, woltow assaye?'
'Hastow,' quod he, 'any hote spices?'
'I haue pepir and pione and a pound of garleek,
- 305 A ferþyngworþ of fenel seed for fastyng dayes.'
Thanne goþ Gloton In and grete opes after.
Cesse þe sowestere sat on þe benche,
Watte þe warner and his wif boþe,
Tymme þe Tynkere and tweyne of his knaues,
- 310 Hikke þe hakeneyman and hugh þe Nedlere,
Clarice of Cokkeslane and þe Clerk of þe chirche,
Sire Piers of Pridie and Pernele of Flaundres,
Dawe þe dykere and a doþeyne opere,
A Ribibour, a Ratoner, a Rakiere of Chepe,
- 315 A Ropere, a Redyngkyng and Rose þe dysshere,
Godefray of Garlekhipe and Griffyn þe walshe;
Of vpholderes an heep, erly by þe morwe,
Geue Gloton wip glad chere good ale to hanselle.
.
- 336 There was lauyngge and louryngge and 'lat go þe cuppe!'
Bargaynes and beuerages bigonne to arise,
And seten so til euensong and songen vmwhile
Til Gloton hadde yglubbed a galon and a gille.
- 340 Hise guttes bigonne to gobelen as two gredy sowes;
He pissed a potel in a paternoster while,
And blew þe rounde ruwet at þe ruggebones ende
That alle þat herde þat horn helde hir nose after
And wisshed it hadde ben wexed wip a wispe of firses.
- 345 He hadde no strengþe to stonde er he his staf hadde,

And þanne gan he to go lik a glemannes bicche
 Som tyme aside and som tyme arere,
 As whoso leiþ lynes to lacche wiþ foweles.
 Ac whan he drouȝ to þe dore þanne dymmed hise eiȝen;
 350 He þrumbled on þe þresshfold and þrew to þe erpe.
 Clement þe Cobelere kauȝte hym by þe myddel
 For to liften hym o lofte and leyde hym on his knowes.
 Ac Gloton was a gret cherl and grym in þe lifyng;
 And kouȝed vp a cawdel in Clementes lappe.
 355 Is noon so hungry hound in hertford shire
 Dorste lape of þat leuynges, so vnlouely it smaȝte.¹

It has been very widely agreed - by critics, social and literary historians, and readers of the poem generally - that this episode is to be acclaimed as an example of vivid comic realism. Already in 1908 J.M. Manly could remark that it had "often been cited as one of the most remarkable pieces of genre painting in our early literature"; it presented, he thought, "the veritable interior of an English ale-house in the fourteenth century, with all its basenesses and its gross hilarity". T.P. Dunning was reminded of Hubert and Jan van Eyck, and the "new realism" of the Flemish school; David Daiches found "the interior of a medieval tavern . . . described with Hogarthian realism"; and Morris Bishop called the passage an "authentic report" of life in such a tavern, reeking with genuine atmosphere, noisome and unventilated.²

There is much, indeed, to be said for this view of the episode. Syntactically the passage is marked by co-ordinate constructions heaping up the concrete details of the scene (one critic calls it an "onslaught of physical detail"):³ it begins with a swift roll-call of lowlife names and occupations as Gloton enters the tavern and takes in its crowded interior and the faces which turn to greet him (306-18); thereafter the verse becomes equally crowded with tactile objects ("cloke", "hood", "cuppe"), with the sounds of song, laughter, oaths and argument, and with a welter of precise spatial adjuncts (e.g. "on þe þresshfold . . . to þe erpe . . . by þe myddel . . . on his knowes . . . in Clementes lappe", 350-4), as the brief scene reaches its hectic climax. In this climax Langland exploits scatology, animal imagery, and above all the potential of alliterative verse for portraying gross physicality, brilliantly to depict the sight, sounds and stink of a staggering drunkard voiding bodily products by the bucketful through every orifice. The whole passage, culminating in the superbly echoic "kouȝed vp a cawdel" (354) and the sickened squeamishness of "þat leuynges, so vnlouely it smaȝte" (356), is as effective an evocation of gluttony, drunkenness and its consequences as one could find anywhere in English literature, and it comes as no surprise to find that later poets who described the glutton and the drunkard were apparently indebted to it.⁴

If this were all, however - if the passage were no more than a full-colour-plate of gross realism - then it would surely be open to a charge often levelled at other parts of Langland's poem, that of digressiveness. The tavern episode interrupts a scene set in church⁵ which is just as much concerned with repentance as it is with sin - perhaps more so: after all, of the eight "sinners" who come forward

in the scene, the first (Pernele Proud-Heart) tells us hardly anything about her sins, and the next (Lecher) and the last (Robert the Robber) tell us nothing at all. Instead, the lines devoted to them (62-74, 461-76) are taken up with their cries of penitence, pleas for mercy and vows of penance and amendment.⁶ Thus the scene begins and ends with a clear dominant emphasis on repentance; and in between, all those who come forward, including (eventually) Glutton, evince the same emotion, promise works of penance, and so forth. In addition to this, the confessor Repentance is made to deliver several speeches of advice and exhortation on the subjects of contrition, restitution and penance, and to conduct the confessional as the confessor's manuals required, with a mixture of threats, blandishments, and interrogation; and wherever in all this the material of the sacrament of penance, sin, is described, it is not (Glutton's apart) portrayed directly, but reported in the context of dramatised confessions which themselves are modelled on the requirements for actual confessions laid down in the manuals.⁷ The whole scene is a detailed and often highly technical account of the sacrament of penance and its various parts, through which sin (and the sinners' own sense of sin) is portrayed, as John Lawlor has noted, with a subtle and penetrating irony.⁸ But from all this the tavern episode seems to present a great danger of diversion. Lawlor, aware of the danger, warns that "the outright comedy of situation and act . . . in the never-to-be-forgotten progress of a repentant Gluttony not to the church but homewards by way of the ale-house . . . should not divert us",⁹ but this - to the present writer at least - looks like a warning that comes too late: like all those admonitions against change in linguistic usage,¹⁰ it is the kind of warning which serves only to confirm that the course we are warned against is already being generally taken. Many readers, it seems, feel (with D.J. Williams) the "incongruous irony" of a situation where "in the midst of what appears to be a basically abstract allegorical framework, the reader [is] overwhelmed by an unwelcome onslaught of physical detail".¹¹ Read literally, the tavern episode is incongruous, is a diversion; if "outright comedy" and "physical detail" is all the episode contains, then - no matter how vivid and amusing it may be - it is most certainly a gross digression.

But this is not all; the realistic physical detail is not the whole picture, and the tavern episode - as I hope to demonstrate - is not just a marginal grotesque.

Consider, for instance, the temporal adjuncts. Whereas the spatial adjuncts, as we have seen, serve to fill out the physical detail of the tavern and the bodies populating it, depicting a resolutely secular space quite different from the church to which Glutton had been heading, two of the adjuncts of time (in contrast) put tavern and church in parallel:

[They] seten so til euensong and songen vmwhile . . .
 [Gloton] pissed a potel in a paternoster while . . .¹²

These phrases refer us back to the church observances from which the delights of the tavern have enticed Glutton away; and they indicate that the tavern scene is conceived at least partly as the "devil's

chapel" of pulpit tradition, as a travesty of church rites, with drinking songs for hymns, the sound of urination for prayers, and a circulating ale-pot ("lat go þe cuppe!", 336) for a chalice.¹³ Nor is this a mere homiletic wash on the surface of a deeply realistic canvas: for, as we shall see, the climactic moment of the whole episode, Glutton's sickness, is basically a travesty of church observance - specifically, it travesties the penitential observances in which Glutton would have been participating at the very same time if he had not strayed in space, from church to tavern.

In a recent study Myra Stokes has tentatively suggested that Glutton's regurgitation of his excesses (354) may be taken to represent, in the manner of a "grotesque parody", the restitution of ill-gotten gains which sinners were required to make as part of the sacrament of penance.¹⁴ She notes that "vomiting as restitution is actually an image used quite seriously on occasion", and quotes John of Salisbury:

a government which is corrupted by luxury . . . will vomit forth under the pressure of God's judgment whatever it has drunk down with immoderate luxury.¹⁵

The metaphor of vomiting is, however, used more than occasionally, in works which Langland may well have known, with a different tenor: it is used as a metaphor for confession, for the voiding of sins by their oral recreation before the priest. It is used thus in another comic "Glutton's confession", the famous twelfth-century Latin Goliardic poem *Estuans intrinsecus* of the Archpoet:

Sum locutus contra me quicquid de me novi
et virus evomui quod tam diu fovi
[I have uttered openly all I knew that shamed me,
And have spued the poison forth that so long defamed me.]¹⁶

The metaphor also occurs in three penitential texts - texts of a kind I have argued elsewhere for Langland having known.¹⁷ The earliest, a twelfth-century Cistercian tract, urges the sinner not to delay "in vomiting out completely, by the vomit of pure confession, whatever oppresses the stomach of conscience".¹⁸ The other texts were written early in the thirteenth century by two disciples of Peter the Chanter of Paris; Robert Courson, who taught that the sinner should dwell on his sins in confession so that they might "be vomited forth after the most diligent and meticulous examination";¹⁹ and Thomas of Chobham, who likened mortal sin to a poison "which one must, as it were, vomit out through confession".²⁰ And finally, the figure occurs in one of the sermons of MS Royal 18 B xxiii, which likens sinners to drunkards and prescribes for their cure "þis womyte of þe sacrament of confession".²¹

The same metaphor is also found in embryonic form in the standard exegesis of a biblical text - i.e. Proverbs xxvi 11, where the dog is said to return to his vomit; this was commonly glossed as repented sin to which the penitent goes back.²² It would not, I think, be unreasonable to argue that Langland meant to recall this text and this interpretation of it when he compared Glutton to a dog

(346), then wrote that his vomit was too foul for even the hungriest hound to lap up (355-6), and added in the C text that he vomited "as an hound þat eet gras" (C VI 431); but the case for a figurative reading of Glutton's sickness rests for the most part on very much clearer cues than this. Not least among them is the fact that Glutton is sick in a kneeling position ("on his knowes", 352); the detail is gratuitous if the sickness is merely literal, but if it is a metaphor for confession, then the posture meaningfully mirrors that which the penitent was required to adopt before the confessor.²³ Furthermore, Clement the Cobbler - to whom falls the quasi-confessorial office of raising up the fallen Glutton ("to liften hym o lofte", just as the confessor was required to raise up the sinner)²⁴ and of receiving his outpouring - cuts a curiously apposite figure as a mock-confessor. The name Clement, for one thing, aptly suggests the merciful and benevolent disposition which it was proper for the confessor to have²⁵ (and which has been exemplified shortly before by Langland's confessor Repentance [280-95]); and his attire, too - specifically the hood for which he has earlier exchanged his cloak (319-33) - may be meant to recall the garb of an earlier confessor of dubious credentials, Mede's "Confessour coped as a frere" (B III 35). Then again, it is Clement who, according to the drinkers' "couenaunt", fills the "cuppe", the chalice of this "devil's chapel" - of which clearly he is the minister.²⁶

Most suggestive of all, however, is Clement's trade. For cobblers were, it seems, notorious in fable and proverb for pretending to stations above their own - for failing to "stick to their lasts" - consistently type-cast (all the way from Pliny's famous anecdote about the cobbler who found fault with Apelles' painting, through Chaucer's Host's exclamation that "The devel made a reve for to preche, / Or of a soutere a shipman or a leche", right up to relatively recent folk-literature) as dabblers and meddlers in matters way beyond them.²⁷ For Clement's pretensions to the office of confessor, to the exercise of the "art of arts", the cure of souls,²⁸ there are, it is true, no clear literary antecedents; not until Shakespeare will a cobbler call himself "a mender of bad soules".²⁹ It is possible, however, that Langland may have had a model in real life. For among the charlatans to whom Hawkyn resorts, scorning the church's ministry, to get a cure for the effects of his sin in B Passus XIII, is "þe Soutere of Southwerk", one (as Skeat suggests) "probably famous in [his] own day",³⁰ and perhaps even one and the same as Clement, who after all consorts in the tavern with several notables of districts close to Southwark, "Clarice of Cokkeslane", "Godefray of Garlekhipe", and "a Rakiere of Chepe".³¹

Read metaphorically, then, the episode of Glutton's sickness can be seen as a fitting climax to the whole scene in the "devil's chapel"; it emerges as a figurative mock-confession, made to a characteristically irregular cobbler. Moreover, in the light of this reading of the climax, the earlier lines describing Glutton's drunkenness are thrown into sharper relief, and their figurative substructure revealed, as I hope now to show.

Now of course it is perfectly possible, and on one level perfectly satisfactory, to explain all the details in this portrait of

the drunken Glutton - his physical incapacitation, his staggering and stumbling, the impairment of his eyesight (and indeed his nausea itself) - as the actual, literal effects of inebriation.³² But it is striking that these same details can also be found in the general currency of figurative language in the Middle Ages, and indeed in Langland's own usage, as metaphors for sinfulness. In *Piers Plowman* B Passus IX, for instance, Langland's personified Wit takes gluttons and "glubberes" to be *exempla* of sinful man:

Muche wo worþ man þat mysruleþ his Inwit,
 And þat ben glotons, glubberes; hir god is hire wombe:
Quorum deus venter est.
 For þei seruen Sathan hir soules shal he haue;
 That lyuen synful lif here hir soule is lich þe deuel.
 And alle þat lyuen good lif are lik to god almyȝty:
Qui manet in caritate in deo manet &c.
 Allas þat drynke shal fordo þat god deere bouȝte,
 And dooþ god forsaken hem þat he shoop to his liknesse.
 (B IX 61-7)

Like Wit's "glubberes", and like also the people addressed in the MS Royal sermon already quoted,³³ Glutton in B Passus V is "drunk on sin". He is the archetypal sinner, the negation of *caritas* (wasting what "myȝte be spared and spende on som hungry", 373), erring from the straight way "som tyme aside and som tyme arere" (347); his sight is dim, like that of the blind sinners blindly led by ignorant priests until they fall into the ditch³⁴ - and of course Glutton, too, is "fallen": specifically he stumbles and falls and needs help to stand (345-52), just like the later *exemplum* of sinful man in B Passus VIII, the man "in a boot amydde a brood watre", who stumbles and falls "þoruȝ þe fend and þe flessch and þe false worlde" but whom charity "strengþeþ . . . to stonde" (B VIII 29, 42-6). And lastly Glutton's indigestion - that internal turmoil which issues in flatulence and farts before it finally makes him vomit (340-4) - emerges as only a less explicit echo of the indigestibility of sin suffered by Envy:

. . . enuye and yuel wil is yuel to defie.
 May no sugre ne swete þyng aswage my swellyng,
 Ne no Diapenidion dryue it fro myn herte,
 Ne neiþer shrifte ne shame, but whoso shrape my mawe?³⁵

The whole portrait of Glutton under the influence, finally, is usefully compared with a fifteenth-century confessional lyric which renders feelingly the physical ill-effects of the sinful state:

My fete, sume tyme more
 and lesse, they do swete;
 my hert ys very pore,
 and besyly doth bete;
 my hed ys all macy,
 and meruelowsly dothe werke;
 myn yene dyme and dasy,
 my neke ys full sterke;

Thys haue I full surely
 for that I was vniust
 to god, the sune off mary,
 and leuyd after my lust. Now mercy, Ihesu.

My hondys do me no good
 ne-dys must I ly so
 and take no erthly fode

 now helpe me, goode lorde,
 my stomake ys full faynt;
 I make to the acorde
 Vppon payne off a-taynt;
 I wyll no more suerly
 to the be so vnjust
 butt kepe thy lawes truly
 And put a-way false lust. Now mercy Ihesu.³⁶

Unlike the lyricist, however, Glutton in his wretched state is not able to make his confession - only, for the time being, to parody it. Then for the next two days he sleeps (another possible metaphor for sinfulness!)³⁷ before finally his wife and Repentance together drive him to confess (359-66). His confession, when at last he makes it, is as fully realised in terms of actual sacramental practice as any in the series in B Passus V:

'I, Gloton,' quod þe gome, 'gilty me yelde
 That I haue trespassed with my tonge, I kan noȝt telle
 how ofte;
 Sworen goddes soule and his sydes and "so me god helpe"
 There no nede was nyne hundred tymes;
 And ouerseyen me at my soper and som tyme at Nones
 That I, Gloton, girte it vp er I hadde gon a myle,
 And yspilt þat myȝte be spared and spended on som hungry;
 Ouer delicatly on feeste dayes dronken and eten boþe,
 And sat som tyme so longe þere þat I sleep and eet at ones.
 For loue of tales in Tauernes to drynke þe moore I hyed;
 Fedde me bifore noon whan fastyng dayes were.'

(B V 367-77)

Here Glutton confesses to the very sins about which, according to the penitential manuals, the confessor was to interrogate the penitent:

Gluttony is committed principally in time, that is, when one eats very early in the morning . . . Secondly it is committed in quality, that is, when one seeks over-delicate foods . . . Thirdly it is committed in quantity, that is, when one eats or drinks too much, for this may lead to vomiting; and this is the vilest kind of gluttony . . . Buffoonery, loquacity and many other evils arise from it . . . [The confessor asks:] Have you ever eaten more than you ought, or more than was naturally expedient, especially to the point of vomiting? Have you ever broken a fast, whether a

customary fast or one imposed on you, or prescribed on account of your gluttony, by drinking wine, beer or water before mealtime without just and necessary cause, as these inn-keepers and boozers do in Lent? . . . Have you eaten too early, that is, before noon [*ante horam nonam*], at a time when you should have been fasting?³⁸

Glutton's confession is also particularly rich in references to the "circumstances" of sin, such as where, when and how often a sin was committed, which the same manuals also required the confessor to ask about:

The confessor should consider the time at which a sin is committed, that is, whether on a feast day or another day, or in Lent, or at a time of prayer or fast, or at some other time; and whether by day or by night . . . You should inquire where it was committed, that is, whether in a sacred place or a profane one . . . and how often the sin was committed, because you ought to inquire not only about the sins themselves, but about how they were committed time and again; and the sinner ought to confess this, if he can recall, so that for instance he should confess how often he was drunk.³⁹

The response of Repentance, the confessor, to this long-delayed but technically correct confession, is suitably encouraging: "*This shewynge shrift*", he says, "shal be meryt to þe" (378, my emphasis). But Glutton's demeritorious mock-confession in the tavern does not only serve as a stark contrast to the "proper" one which follows (in the manner perhaps of Mak's mock-nativity which precedes the real thing in the Wakefield *Second Shepherds' Play*);⁴⁰ it also reminds us that in B Passus V Langland is not merely depicting sins, in the hallowed tradition of personification allegory: he is depicting sins confessing, sinners in the act of repentance, in the act of ceasing to be sinners. And so, even at the very moment when one of the sins seems to have escaped the confessional context to be picturesquely elaborated - in a way which is, on one level, so redolent of *genre* painting, the Van Eycks, and "Hogarthian realism" - even at such a moment Langland returns us, however obliquely, to the idea of confession. At one moment, as in Avarice's confession immediately before, a sin creates itself on the page by virtue of repentance; sin materialises only within the dramatic confession. At the next moment a sin turns aside from confession to realise itself dramatically by actually sinning, only for a curious parodic confession to materialise as part of the sin. Langland, in short, presents sin and confession as mirror-images of one another; whichever one we look at, we see in it the inverted image of the other. The whole episode of Glutton's tavern visit, I believe, should not charm us as an example of Langland's vivid but digressive and ingenuous imagination, as it seems to have charmed the critics, but should rather impress us with evidence of his ingenuity, even his wit. It is an integral part of his peculiarly brilliant achievement in B

Passus V - the bringing together, into dynamic contact, of the ideas of sin and repentance, a conjunction which, far from being forgotten or laid aside in the tavern scene, is there subjected to a kaleidoscopic variation. Perhaps, in the end, the tavern scene - with its grotesques, its parody and its central mirror-image - should remind us less of Van Eyck than of Dali; perhaps it should be acclaimed not for its realism, but for its anticipation of the surreal.⁴¹

NOTES

- ¹ B V 296-318, 336-56 (omitting the lines in which Clement the Cobbler exchanges his cloak for Hikke the Ostler's hood). All references to the B text are to *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London, 1975). For the A text I cite *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, ed. George Kane (London, 1960); and for the C text, *Piers Plowman by William Langland: An Edition of the C text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (London, 1978). The C version of the passage quoted (C VI 350-414) is a slight expansion of B (C VI 352, 368 and 370 are additions). The A text (A V 146-98) corresponds quite closely with B up to B V 350, but lacks the climactic (and for the present purpose crucial) episode where Glutton vomits in Clement's lap (B V 351-6), except through memorial contamination from either B or C, in five MSS (Kane, pp.31, 292, 443). There is no trace at all of the tavern episode in the version of MS Bodley 851, which its editors claim to be an authorial version predating A (*Piers Plowman: The Z Version*, ed. A.G. Rigg and Charlotte Brewer, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts, 59 [Toronto, 1983] p.82).
- ² See J.M. Manly, "Piers the Plowman and its Sequence", in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol.II (Cambridge, 1908) p.16; T.P. Dunning, *Piers Plowman: An Interpretation of the A text*, 2nd ed. rev. and ed. T.P. Dolan (Oxford, 1980) p.150 (and cf. p.126); David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature*, 4 vols. (London, 1960) I, pp.124-5; Morris Bishop, *The Pelican Book of the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, 1971) p.277; and for similar views cf., e.g., W.W. Skeat (ed.), *The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman . . . Text A*, EETS OS 28 (London, 1867) pp.vi-vii, xli; idem, *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1886) II, pp.xxxix, xli, lxxxviii; Bernhard ten Brink, *Early English Literature (to Wiclif)*, trans. H.M. Kennedy (London, 1883) p.359; D.W. Robertson, Jr., and B.F. Huppé, *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition*, Princeton Studies in English, 31 (Princeton, 1951) p.247; Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan, 1952) p.198; Robert W. Frank, Jr., "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory", *ELH* 20 (1953) p.243; Pietro Cali, *Allegory and Vision in Dante and Langland* (Cork, 1971) pp.183-5; Elizabeth D. Kirk, *The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman*, Yale Studies in English, 178 (New Haven, 1972) pp.56-7; A.C. and J.E. Spearing (eds.), *Poetry of the Age of Chaucer* (London, 1974) p.140; D.S. Brewer, *English Gothic Literature* (London, 1983) pp.185, 203, 205.
- ³ D.J. Williams, "Alliterative Poetry in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", in *History of Literature in the English Language*, Vol.1, *The Middle Ages*, ed. W.F. Bolton (London, 1970) p.139.
- ⁴ Compare, for example, B V 357-62 with Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VI, 53-60 (ed. G. Macaulay, *The English Works of John Gower*, EETS ES 81-2, 2 vols. [London, 1900-1] II, p.168); and B V 353 with *Pierce the Ploughmans Crede*, 221 (ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS OS 30 [London, 1867] p.9).
- ⁵ For indications that B V 10-509 should be regarded as taking place in church see B V 1-2 ("The kyng and hise knyghtes to be kirke wente / To here matyns and masse"); 297-301 ("kaireþ hym to kirkeward his coupe to shewe. / Ac Beton . . . asked of hym whiderward he wolde. / 'To holy chirche,' quod he, 'for to here masse, / And siþen I wole be shryuen"); and 505-6, where the confession scene concludes with a reference to the three modes of sin (thought, word and deed) and with the versicle "Deus tu conuersus" - just like the conclusion of the general confession in the mass: see *The Lay Folk's Mass Book*, B 71-2 (ed. T.F. Simmons, EETS OS 71 [London, 1879] p.8); *Sarum Missal*, ed. J. Wickham Legg (Oxford, 1916) pp.216-17; and Pearsall's note to C VII 152.

- ⁶ This is true not only of the B text but also of A (V 45-57, 233-50) and Z (V 78-90, 131-50); in Z, indeed, the scene consists entirely of penitent outcries, pleas for grace and promises of penance and amendment. In C, on the other hand, further material on sin is introduced (from B Passus XIII), so that Pride and Lechery now describe their sins (C VI 14-60, 175-95); nor is Robert the last to come forward in C (VI 316-30).
- ⁷ Langland's use of the manuals in the confession scene is discussed briefly by Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (London and Toronto, 1983) pp.72-7; for fuller discussion see my unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "A Study of *Piers Plowman* in relation to the Medieval Penitential Tradition" (University of Cambridge, 1984) pp.101-31, 136-41, 288-350; and see also below, pp.67-8 and notes 38 and 39.
- ⁸ John Lawlor, *Piers Plowman: An Essay in Criticism* (London, 1962) pp.48-50.
- ⁹ Lawlor, p.50.
- ¹⁰ See, e.g., C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1967) p.18: "Statements that honour, or freedom, or humour, or wealth, 'does not mean' this or that are proof that it was beginning to mean, or even had long meant, precisely this or that. We tell our pupils that *deprecate* does not mean *depreciate* or that *immorality* does not mean simply *lechery* because these words are beginning to mean just those things . . . We do not warn our pupils that *coalbox* does not mean a hippopotamus".
- ¹¹ Williams, loc. cit.; cf., e.g., P.M. Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*, 2 vols. (London, 1972) II, p.97; Brewer, p.185.
- ¹² B V 338, 341 (my emphases). With reference to the latter line, Spearing and Spearing (p.161) comment: "The whole of this highly secular episode is timed in religious terms".
- ¹³ On the homiletic tradition portraying the tavern as a "devil's chapel", see G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1961) pp.93, 438-9.
- ¹⁴ Myra Stokes, *Justice and Mercy in Piers Plowman: A Reading of the B Text Visio* (London, 1984) p.172. On restitution see *ibid.*, pp.166-70, 175-7; Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977) pp.340-3; and my dissertation, pp.209-50.
- ¹⁵ *Policraticus*, IV, xiv; cit. Stokes (in translation), p.189.
- ¹⁶ *Estuans intrinsecus*, st.22, ll.1-2 (ed. H. Watenpuhl and H. Krefeld, *Die Gedichte des Archipoeta* [Heidelberg, 1958] p.76); trans. J.A. Symonds, in *Twenty-One Medieval Latin Poems*, ed. Edward J. Martin (London, 1931) p.89. On the poem see Francis Cairns, "The Archpoet's Confession: Sources, Interpretation and Historical Context", *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 15 (1980) pp. 87-103; and for a suggested reminiscence of it in *Piers Plowman*, see E.T. Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: The C Text and Its Poet*, Yale Studies in English, 113 (New Haven, 1949) p.154.
- ¹⁷ Nick Gray, "Langland's Quotations from the Penitential Tradition", *Modern Philology* 83 (forthcoming).
- ¹⁸ *Tractatus de Interiori Domo* : "quidquid conscientiae stomachum gravat, totum

vomitū purae confessionis evomere non differas" (PL 184: 539; cit. Cairns, p.102). Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

- 19 Robert Courson, *Summa*, cap. IV(i): "[Penitentia sit] Morosa . . . ut . . . cum maxima diligentia et morositate perscrutata euomantur" (ed. V.L. Kennedy, "Robert Courson on Penance", *Medieval Studies* 7 [1945] p.301). On Courson and his *Summa*, see John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1970) I, pp.19-25.
- 20 Thomas of Chobham, *Summa Confessorum*, Art. VI, Dist. II: "Mortale autem peccatum est quasi venenum mortiferum in anima quod oportet quasi evomere per confessionem . . . Iudas noluit evomere peccatum suum per humilem confessionem . . . Dicendum est [penitenti] etiam quod omnis turpitudō peccati evomenda est" (ed. F. Broomfield, *Thomae de Chobham Summa Confessorum*, *Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia*, 25 [Louvain and Paris, 1968] pp.263-4). On Thomas and his *Summa*, see Baldwin, I, pp.34-6.
- 21 Sermon 40: "it is tauȝth in fisike þat a vomyte is a profitabull medecyn to suche dronkon men. And þis vomyte to oure porpose is þe sacrament of confession . . . For Ihesu Cristes loue, remebur invarldy on þise peynes [of hell], and I trust to God þat þei shall stere þe to a vomyte of all þi dronkenlew lyvyng. And ziff þou haue þis womyte of þe sacrament of confession, Godes Sonne with-owten question dwelliþ þan with þe . . ." (ed. Woodburn O. Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, EETS OS 209 [London, 1940] pp. 240-1).
- 22 Prov xxvi 11: "Sicut canis qui revertitur ad vomitum suum, Sic imprudens qui iterat stultitiam suam" ("As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" [Authorised Version]); and see, e.g., Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, Lib. IV, Dist. XIV, cap. ii: "canis reversus ad vomitum, et poenitens ad peccatum" ("the dog has gone back to his vomit, and the penitent to his sin") (*Petri Lombardi Libri IV Sententiarum*, 2 vols. [2nd ed., Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), 1916] II, p.820); *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, Lib. II, cap. lix: "Si quis pro peccatis suis sollempniter penituerit, et peracta penitentia ad peccata sua, tanquam canis ad uomitum, redierit . . ." ("If someone does solemn penance for his sins, then having done penance goes back to his sins, like the dog to his vomit . . .") (MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 148, f.44r). On the *Memoriale*, a manual for confessors written for an English audience c.1344, see W.A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955) pp.205-11; and for further examples of the relevant interpretation of Prov xxvi 11, see, e.g., 2 Peter ii 21-2; Gratian, *Decretum, de penitentia* Dist. III, c. xi (ed. Aemilius Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, 2 vols. [Leipzig, 1879; repr. Graz, 1959] I, col. 1213); Alain de Lille, *Liber Poenitentialis*, Lib. II, cap. cxi (ed. Jean Longère, *Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia*, 17-18, 2 vols. [Louvain and Lille, 1965] II, p.118); Courson, *Summa*, cap. XII(b), (k) (Kennedy, pp.325, 336); Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, Lib. V, cap. iii(viii), and cap. vi(x) (ed. J.J.F. Firth, *Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts*, 18 [Toronto, 1971] pp.242, 271); and Chaucer, *Parson's Tale*, 138. (All references to Chaucer are to *Works*, ed. F.N. Robinson [2nd ed., Cambridge (Mass.), 1957]).
- 23 See B III 43 ("Mede for hire mysdedes to þat man kneled"); V 386-7 (where Sloth recognises the requirement but is unable to comply: "I moste sitte to be shryuen or ellis sholde I nappe; / I may noȝt stonde ne stoupe ne wiþoute stool knele"); Chaucer, *Parson's Tale*, 991 ("sholde nat the synnere sitte as heighe as his confessor, but knele biforn hym"); John Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 699-700 ("when any mon I-schryue wole be, / Teche hym to knele downe on hys kne") (ed. G. Kristensson, *Lund Studies in English*, 49 [Lund, 1974] p.109); and see Tentler, pp.82-3.

- ²⁴ See, e.g., Gratian, *Decretum, de pen.* Dist. VI, c. i(3), where the confessor is required to be benevolent ("beniuolus") towards the sinner, and to be ready to raise him up and share his burden ("paratus erigere et secum onus portare") (Friedberg, I, col. 1243). This canon is very frequently quoted or paraphrased in penitential texts; see my dissertation, p.129.
- ²⁵ See, e.g. *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* (Munich, 1967-) s.vv. *clemens* I A 2, *clementia* II; and on the proper disposition of the confessor see the preceding note; my dissertation, pp.128-35, 198; and Tentler, pp.84-5, 95-6. John de Burgo, in his penitential manual *Pupilla Oculi* (c.1385; see Pantin, pp.213-14), Pars V, cap. xii(H), permits the confessor to make a dispensation in a certain case "out of the clemency of mercy" ("ex clementia misericordie") (print of A.A. Haius, Paris, 1510, f.44r). Moreover, if B V 351-6 are new in the B text (as Kane maintains; note 1 above), then the elaboration of the cobbler's mock-ecclesiastical role may also be meant to recall his namesake, the newly elected antipope Clement VII. (On the dating and other possible references to the Schism in B, see J.A.W. Bennett, "The Date of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*", *Medium Aevum* 12 [1943] pp.55-64, esp. pp.56, 60-1, 62-3.)
- ²⁶ B V 332. Langland tells us that the cup is filled as part of the bargain struck between Clement and Hikke over the exchange of cloak and hood. In the light of 324, however ("Whoso hadde þe hood sholde han amendes of þe cloke"), it appears that Hikke ought to be standing Clement a drink, not vice versa. Stokes (p.171) explains this in realistic terms, as "the result of drunken fuddledness"; but perhaps Langland has here deliberately violated the literal logic of the scene in order to bring out all the more clearly a figurative meaning.
- ²⁷ See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Lib. XXXV, cap. 10(85) (explaining the origin of the proverb "ne supra crepidam sutor iudicaret" ["let the cobbler stick to his last"]) (ed. C. Mayhoff, *C. Plini Secundi Naturalis Historiae Libri XXXVII*, 5 vols. [Leipzig, 1875-1906] V, p.260). The anecdote is repeated by Valerius Maximus in his *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, Lib. VIII, cap. XII, ext. 3 (ed. C. Kempf [stereotype of 2nd ed., Stuttgart, 1966] p.405), and (long after Langland wrote) by Erasmus in his *Adagia*, I, VI, XVI (*Desiderii Erasmi . . . Opera Omnia*, II [1703, repr. London, 1962] col. 228A). See also Phaedrus, *Fabulae*, Lib. I, 14 (the story of a cobbler who pretended to be a doctor - probably the source of the following instance) (ed. B.E. Perry, *Aesopica*, I [Urbana, 1952] p.557); Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I(A) 3903-4; *Thirty-Seven Conclusions of the Lollards*, Art. 28 (ed. J. Forshall, *Remonstrance against Romish Corruptions in the Church* [London, 1851] p.93); the Grimms' tale of Meister Pfriem the cobbler (e.g. in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* [London, 1975] pp.720-4); and the Italian novella of the cobbler who criticised his lord's rule cited (under J 1289.5) by Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*, revised and enlarged ed., 6 vols. (Copenhagen, 1955-8) IV, p.101.
- ²⁸ See canon 27 of the Fourth Lateran Council: "Cum sit ars artium regimen animarum" ("since the cure of souls is the art of arts") (ed. J. Alberigo et al., *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* [3rd ed., Bologna, 1973] p.248).
- ²⁹ *Julius Caesar*, I, i, 14 (Folio spelling). The cobbler goes on to claim innocence of his trade's proverbial meddlesomeness: "I meddle with no tradesman's matters, nor women's matters" (21-2).
- ³⁰ B XIII 336-9; Skeat, parallel text ed., II, p.76.
- ³¹ B V 311, 316, 314; and on the places mentioned see J.A.W. Bennett (ed.), *Piers Plowman: The Prologue and Passus I-VII of the B text* (Oxford, 1972)

pp.173-4.

- ³² Perhaps this hardly needs to be exemplified; but see, e.g., Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, Lib. IV, cap. vii: "Gula . . . introducitur . . . nauseam, vomitum; aufert usum pedum . . . et obtundit ingenium et visum" ("Gluttony leads to nausea, vomiting; takes away the use of the feet; and dulls the wits and the sight") (Firth, p.195).
- ³³ Note 21 above; e.g. "muche peple of þis world . . . ben dronkenlewe and vnclenly . . . See, man, what myscheff spirituall drokennes drawep mannes in . . . The first drynke is þe drynke of pryde" [i.e. the first of the seven deadly sins] (Ross, pp.230-1). Cf. also Is xix 14, xxiv 20.
- ³⁴ B V 349, and compare B X 272-81a, XII 170-85; and on Langland's citation of Matthew's blind-leading-the-blind metaphor, see Gray, "Langland's Quotations" (see above, n.17).
- ³⁵ B V 122-5; compare the "crampe" and the "Cardiacle" from which the envious Hawkyn suffers in B XIII 334, and which drive him to consult the "Soutere of Southwerk".
- ³⁶ Ed. Carleton Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century* (Oxford, 1939) no. 139, ll.13-36 (pp.213-14). Line 28 was skipped by the scribe in the sole surviving MS.
- ³⁷ See, e.g., B XX 369-70, 377-9: "Contricion hadde clene foryeten to crye and to wepe / And wake for hise wikked werkes as he was wont to doone . . . 'He lyp adreynt and dremep,' seide Pees, 'and so do manye opere. / The frere wip his phisyk þis folk hap enchanted, / And dop men drynke dwale; þei drede no synne"; and cf. the narrator's "sleep of sin" in B Passus XI (5ff).
- ³⁸ *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, Lib. I, capp. vii, xix: "Gula enim principaliter peccatur in tempore, quando scilicet quis comedit nimis mane . . . Secundo peccatur in qualitate, scilicet cum queruntur cibaria nimium delicata . . . Tercio peccatur in quantitate, quando scilicet nimis comeditur uel potatur, quia forsan ad uomitum proceditur, quod est uilissimum genus gule . . . Scurilitas . . . multiloquium . . . et multa alia mala inde oriuntur . . . Comedisti unquam ultra quam deberes uel nature expedit, maxime usque ad uomitum? Fregisti unquam ieiunia tibi iniuncta uel consuetudinaria, uel propter gulositatem tibi indicta, bibendo ante horam comestionis uinum, ceruisiam, uel aquam, sine iusta et necessaria causa, ut faciunt isti tabernatores et potatores in quadragesima? . . . Comedisti nimis propere, id est ante horam nonam, tempore quo deberes ieiunare?" (MS Camb. CCC 148, ff.4r, 8v). (On the translation of *horam nonam* by "noon", see Bennett, p.184; and cf. B V 371, 377, 488, 492.) For further references to the manuals see my dissertation, pp.333-9.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, Lib. I, capp. xi, xxiv: "oportebit attendere . . . tempus in quo peccatur, scilicet an in die festo uel alio die, uel in quadragesima, aut tempore oracionis, seu ieiunii, uel extra; et an de die uel de nocte . . . Tu confessor . . . inquirere debes . . . ubi fuerit commissum, scilicet an in loco sacro uel profano . . . Item quociens fuit peccatum commissum, quia non solum debes querere de ipsis peccatis principaliter, sed de uicibus et iteracionibus eorundem factis; et peccator debet hoc confiteri, si recordetur, ut scilicet confiteatur dicens . . . quociens fuit ebrius" (MS Camb. CCC 148, ff.5v-6r, 12v). See further my dissertation, pp.114-24; D.W. Robertson, Jr., "A Note on the Classical Origin of 'Circumstances' in the Medieval Confessional", *Studies in Philology* 43 (1946) pp.6-14; Tentler, pp.116-20; Braswell, pp.74-5.

- ⁴⁰ *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, ed. A.C. Cawley (Manchester, 1958) pp.43-63; for discussion, see, e.g., Homer A. Watt, "The Dramatic Unity of the *Secunda Pastorum*", in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York, 1940) pp.158-66; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972) pp.188-91; Linda E. Marshall, "'Sacral Parody' in the *Secunda Pastorum*", *Speculum* 47 (1972) pp.720-36; Lois Roney, "The Wakefield First and Second *Shepherds Plays* as Complements in Psychology and Parody", *Speculum* 58 (1983) pp.696-723 (esp. 714-21).
- ⁴¹ Cf. John Burrow's comment on the "phantasmagoric effect" of B V 346-8 (*Ricardian Poetry* [London, 1971] p.135).