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Figuring subjectivity in 'Piers Plowman C' and 'The Parson's Tale' and 'Retraction': authorial insertion and identity poetics

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For some time, scholars and readers of Chaucer have pondered his knowledge about one of the major poets of his day: William Langland. Readers may typically find statements in scholarly discourse such as "We can now scarcely avoid considering the probability of Chaucer's having actually seen a copy of Piers Plowman in the interval between its first publication (c. 1370) and the beginnings of the Tales at least ten years later" (Bennett 321). Given internal evidence in the fifth passus of the C text - if we are willing to accept any connection between Langland's "autobiographical" confession/apologia and the writer - and documentary evidence of the historical Chaucer, we must assume that each poet was in London for at least a short time. Hypotheses about Chaucer's reading have always been at the forefront of scholarly debate. No one, however, has been about to demonstrate absolutely that Chaucer had knowledge of Piers Plowman.

In her closing remarks at the 1994 New Chaucer Society meeting in Dublin, Ireland, Anne Middleton challenged those present to "trouble Chaucer's silences." The present attempt to "trouble the silence" relates to the growth and development of major poetic projects: the C text of Piers Plowman (likely written in the 1380s) and the "final" shape of the Canterbury Tales. Nevill Coghill notes that "Chaucer's debt to Langland is almost entirely a debt of idea and not of phrase" (90). And there are indeed several similar ideas and postures. That the Canterbury project most likely took shape after the last version of Piers was circulating, that both poets were interested in the actions of people within a social body, that both writers questioned the "validity of the work's enterprise" (Lawton 17), and that both included in their visions of pilgrimage a restoration of society through spiritual forces beginning with a person may be in part coincidence or perhaps pan of shock waves of the growing apocalyptic doom in the last decades of the fourteenth century. Both poets inscribe something about their identities into their texts through subjectivity.

What has not been fully appreciated is that the inscription is a product in both cases of the penitential tradition whose focus is the generation of an oral text. Whether or not Chaucer knew the C text of Piers, which includes the "autobiographical" fifth passus, cannot be established with any certainty. It is just as possible he might have seen an earlier version, or perhaps one of the manuscript splices, which contains parts of the A, B, and C texts without any real rationale or distinction. Yet when we examine Piers C and the Parson's Tale and Retraction, we note several characteristics which Chaucer could most certainly have learned from the earlier work of Langland. Without pressing the "sources and influences" approach beyond a responsible level, we can see that the more somber sense of Langlandian voice can be discovered in the Chaucerian text, particularly in the voices of the religious. The present essay asserts that the Chaucerian gaps and silences in the Parson's Tale and Retraction find voice in Langland's text. In both cases, the writers have presented us with highly complex statements, generated .by the confessional and having ambiguous voices, whether those of the authors or narrators.

To establish a frame for looking at Langland's and Chaucer's texts, we need to examine the implications of the confessional and the notion of self that it attempted to produce and control.

I

Penance was an established part of the Christian tradition from the earliest days, but it was only with the mandate of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 that it became a yearly requirement. The decree required confession before a parish priest before the person could receive the eucharist at Easter. Failure to conform to the decree would result in excommunication and even keep a person from the rites of burial. Mary Flowers Braswell and Michel Foucault, working from different perspectives, see the canonical requirement as

one of hegemonic control, hence the manifestation of one particular kind of power. In his commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences, Thomas Aquinas noted that confession should be "simple, humble, pure, faithful, frequent, unadorned, discrete, willing, ashamed, whole, secret, truthful, prompt, strong, reproachful, and showing readiness to obey" (Tentler 107). As a result of the original decree and subsequent commentaries a vast body of literature arose, first in Latin and then in the vernacular, to aid confessors and penitents in even the minute details of administration and reception. Some manuals were organized according to the vocation of the penitent, hence seeing the person within a larger group of which he or she was a member. Some were organized around the principles of the Seven Deadly Sins. Some were highly self-conscious of the nature of penance itself, as can been seen in the subsections dealing with sloth in Fasciculus morum. Some include questions of the penitent; many encourage the penitent to make a good confession.

The product of the confessional in all cases, as Foucault notes, was "the production of truth" (58). He further notes that in the act of confession

the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonwealth (family, allegiance, protection); then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power. (58-59)

Although Foucault's principal interest in medieval confession is its functioning as a precursor to modern psychoanalysis, which does move toward the development of the individual conscience, his observations about truth are, however, valid. "Sin autobiographies," as we might term them, were intended to probe the conditions of the self, not as an autonomous whole, but as the ideological or spiritual battleground for the deadly sins. Langland's depictions of the sins, which are enmeshed in socio-economic institutions and professions, show this vision of subjectivity, even if from a polarized and negative perspective. The end of confession was the elimination of those characteristics which would individualize a person, so that the penitent could be reintroduced into the religious community; thus the process was designed to refashion a subject rather than to develop an individual. Leonard Boyle notes that the form of penance prescribed by the 1215 decree changed the order of penance from a "long process of satisfaction for sin" to "a cleansing of the heart" through verbal utterance (34). Such a shift has far-ranging implications when applied to writing. When a writer uses an homologous process - plunging himself through the literary equivalent of the confessional - he is figuring his own subjectivity within the frame of the text. Because the designations "individual" and "subject" are complex, they require further investigation.

Medieval studies in the last decade, under the influence of deconstructionists and New Historicists, have begun to investigate the notion of the individual. In his groundbreaking study of the twelfth-century French romance, Robert Harming contended that "individuality emerge[s] from the constant interplay between the chivalric hero's inner and outer (or private and public) worlds, each with its own standards and goals" (1). He relied heavily on literary and artistic notions for his position. Thus Hanning's assessment was based on the presence of a character's own psychologizing or the introspection in the text. In the area of historical/political discourse, Walter Ullmann, who was also working with the twelfth-century context, but outside the ideologically charged notion found in Hanning's study, noted only the very gradual development of the "citizen" as opposed to the "subject" by the late Middle Ages (7). More recently, Jacques Le Goff mediates somewhat between these positions with the assertion that the individual did not exist until the early modern period, but in the Middle Ages, the person developed "consciousness" through identification with a group (34). The confessional helped to solidify this vision of consciousness around these socio-economic groups.

Even more recently, H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., Lee Patterson, and Glenn Burger have begun to reshape our understanding of the subject through recourse to the studies of Jacques Lacan, Clifford Geertz, Anthony Giddens, and Louis Althusser. Leicester's distinction between the individual and the subject seems particularly insightful:

One advantage of the substitution [of subject for individual] is that the term emphasizes those aspects of someone's situation that he or she does not originate or fully control, those aspects of experience to which someone is subject. In modern theory the subject is not conceived as a substantial thing, like a rock, but as a position in a larger structure, a site through which various forces pass. (14)

With Chaucer and Langland, we encounter writers who enter their texts in two mutually exclusive ways. The narrators that both create have been investigated at length. E. Talbot Donaldson's distinction between Chaucer the poet and Chaucer the pilgrim is an important watershed in Chaucer criticism (928-36). The nature of Langland has been a more vexing question. George Kane's warnings against pursuing the autobiographical fallacy in Piers have not had quite the impact of Donaldson's (1-14). At the same time, the division between author and narrator has left our exploration of authorial voice incomplete, at least in terms of understanding the ideology that controls representation of the subject. When we examine The Parson's Tale and Retraction and Passus 5 of the C text of Piers, we find authors who are exploring ways through a literary homology to confession by which they may inscribe their identities in their texts and become themselves the subject of poetic reflection.

II

Throughout his career, Langland was keenly aware of the implications of the confessional both in its attempt to establish truth and its misuse by the fraternal orders. The confession of the Seven Deadly Sins is presented dramatically in the A text of the 1360s, the B text of the 1370s, and, with the greatest impact for the present study, in the C text written some time after 1381 but likely before 1387. Because of the text's appropriation by some of the peasants such as John Ball, Langland's place in public consciousness was already secure (Justice 102-39). It is important to remember that Langland knew the entire shape of his poem when he undertook the changes that generated the C text. That he inserts his "confession" before the sermon of Reason and before the questioning of Conscience is very significant. In his earlier versions, Langland was attempting to describe the anthropology of sin in the social body through the confession of the Seven Deadly Sins. In these earlier versions, Will is described as weeping at the conclusion of the call to repentance, an important gesture that ties up the notion of confession with outward signs of contrition. By authorially inserting his own identity into the text, Langland is accomplishing at least two major actions. First, he is identifying himself with an institutional form. Second, he is allowing that form to shape the nature of fiction-making, for he too must learn to make a good confession. That he is perhaps no more successful at making a good confession, overall, than are the Seven Deadly Sins underlines, even here, the notion that the entire society - including the poet - and even the text itself are in dire need of restoration.

Throughout the course of his career, Langland was in the process of inscribing a poetics of identity more deeply into his text. Anne Middleton has investigated this aspect in terms of poetic signatures, especially the mnemonics and descriptions of physical characteristics (15-82). The task here is to investigate the impact of the inclusion of the much disputed "autobiographical" passus in the C text. Whether or not the person describing his state is the poet William Langland, who, in a Trinity College, Dublin ms., is identified as William Langland, son of Stacy de Rokayle, is finally a matter of speculation. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton's study of the visionary tradition, of which Piers is a part, casts some new light on this moment in the text. She notes that "monkish autobiography," drawing on the tradition of Augustine's Confessions, has features found in texts as seemingly divergent as those written by Guibert of Nogent, Hildegard of Bingen, and Langland. The most significant feature is that God had a discernible mission for the writer, who functions under the characteristic pose of "self-deprecation" (70-71). This issue requires extended consideration.

The issue of self-deprecation can be read in the following lines:

Thus y awakede, weot god, when y wonede in Cornehull Kytte and y in a cote, yclothed as a lollare, And lytel ylet by, leueth me for sothe, Amonges lollares of Londone and lewede ermytes, For y made of tho men as resoun me tauhte. For as y cam by Consience with Resoun y mette In an hot hereust whenne y hadde myn hele And lymes to labory with and louede wel fare And no dede to do but to drynke and to slepe. (5.1-9)

These lines raise interesting issues about his material status. We have a poet whose experience appears to combine both rural and urban elements. Echoing the beginning of the poem, these lines lend the sense of new beginnings for deeper analysis. Looking carefully at these lines we see that they also refer to the poem's opening, and thus to the deceptive vestimentary codes that underlie the text. Part of the strategy of the passage is the further creation of binarisms that will help to differentiate the dreamer from those who would attempt to classify him either with the Lollards, from the time of the Peasants' Revolt, or with the shirkers of duty. As a

dweller in London, he resembles the "lollares" but is marginalized from them because he has written widely known satiric verses about them. Clearly, this autobiographical apologia brackets Langland as a speaking voice in the poem for analysis, for if his voice is not differentiated from those whose discourses are similar in both conservative and revolutionary senses, the poet cannot control the range of meaning. The intent is not to sabotage, or for that matter, deconstruct the authority of the speaker. Again an implicit distinctio is necessary to solidify his position as it would be later in the pre-pardon reading section of Passus 9, where true and false beggars are contrasted. A poet always concerned with the implications of social decay must free his speaker from this classification, an activity only possible through the confessional mode's probing questions. Will's sense of vocation and labor is strong, and he classifies himself by education and training as one on the margins, but one who uses that marginality as an important vantage point for imaging society and the self or subject. What on one level fulfills the demands of the discourse of spiritual autobiography ultimately supports his vocational position, one that he has actually fashioned for himself in the social order.

As the confessional section continues, Langland justifies his actions by linking himself with the religious community and, in doing so, relates his confession of misspent time to the notion of labor. The poet says:

"That is soth," y saide, "and so y beknowe That y haue ytynt tyme and tyme myspened; Ac zut, I hope, as he at ofte hath ychaffared And ay loste and loste, and at the laste hym happed A bouhte suche a bargayn he was the bet euere, And sette al his los at a leef at the laste ende, Suche a wynnyng hym warth thorw wordes of grace. Simile est regnum celorum thesauro abscondito in agro. Mulier que inuenit dragmam, etc. So hope y to haue of hym that is almyghty A gobet of his grace, and bigynne a tyme. That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne." (5.92-103)

The attitude toward labor in the Middle Ages is complex. In the early Middle Ages, under the influence of Benedictine thought, labor was perceived as a punishment for sin; labor was by nature a penitential act (le Goff 116-18). Throughout the Middle Ages, there were questions raised about the value of labor at all, especially in monastic settings. With the advent of yearly confession and the development of confessional manuals, ideas about the worth of labor improved, especially with the principal notion that "All labor deserves compensation: vocation and money" (Le Goff 118). With the notion that time equals money in the growing pre-capitalist society of the fourteenth century, and that all time is a grant from God at work, the speaker's confession is a significant one. He clearly problematizes himself in the ideology of labor. What he includes as constituting labor is unclear. In Passus 12 of the B text Will laments the time he has spent writing, but the elimination of the equivalent passage in the C text signals at least some change regarding the worth of writing. Here Langland's confession seems more basic. He calls for grace, an established part of the confessional. His plea echoes Conscience's cry at the conclusion of the B text, when he leaves the ruins of Holy Church to search for Piers. Given the overall description in the autobiographical portrait, Langland bears striking resemblance to sloth and avarice, as John Bowers observes (165-72). That several of the Seven Deadly Sins also call upon grace in their confessions does problematize the entire confession. Also that he is not granted absolution is significant, if we assume his confession is similar to those of the other sins. What seems more apparent, however, is that the autobiographical passage is more complex than the other confessions. The tone is a mixture of apologia - almost rising at times to self-assuredness - and regret.

With such a vexing presentation in the poem, it is not surprising that scholars are divided on the concept of how to classify this passage. Bloomfield sees it as autobiographical (7). Robertson and Huppe see the concentration on will as part of the text's psychological introspection (34-35). John Bowers takes a middle position, arguing that Langland modeled Will on himself (182-84). However we identify the passage, it still maintains aspects of autobiography linked to the confessional mode. The speaker identifies himself, including both his own perceived successes and failures, and then submerges himself with his fictive text. If the goal of the confessional is the reintegration of the penitent into the body of the Church, then Langland has performed a similar gesture in his poem. He has written into his own text his own subjectivity and, in the process, raised the concept of identity to the level of poetic contemplation. He is both bound by his own fiction and given voice or status as a subject through that fiction. Whether or not we meet the "real" William Langland here is an unanswerable question, but what we can be sure of is that the insertion collects a series of images for a discourse we can call "William Langland" both in textual and extra-textual tradition.

III

If the autobiographical section of the C text is problematic, the role of the Parson's Tale and Retraction in the entire Canterbury project has been even more vexing. Only in recent years have critics been willing to admit their own subjective judgments in assessing the quality, message, and placement of the tale. Issues of authorship, sources, placement, tone, cultural expectations, and the speaker's identity are still less clear. Part of the difficulty relates to the way readers have viewed the satiric and perhaps "secular" Chaucer. The latter term may appear impressionistic and anachronistic, even if we read the poet through those frames, as has been in practice among some formalist and exegetical critics. Perhaps even deeper is the implication of the artist's own judgment found in the Retraction. Can Chaucer really be serious here? Surely the humanist Chaucer would not reject his own works that we have come to value as some of his most prized texts. As a result, some critics have argued for an ironic reading of the Parson's Tale and Retraction. The major problem with such a reading is that the cultural and linguistic signs of irony are not present in the text. While the religiosity of the Monk, Friar, Pardoner, Summoner are clearly fraudulent, we cannot render the same judgment about the Parson. Even the charges that the Parson may be a "lollard" cannot be absolutely discerned from his tale, which provides an almost textbook explanation of penance and the Seven Deadly Sins. We never get the impression of Langland's crumbling and severely compromised Church in Chaucer's world. Clearly, Chaucer's vision of the fourteenth-century Church does show some corruption, but it does not contain Langland's vision of apocalyptic doom. Thus as J.A.W. Bennett once noted, it is surprising to readers that when we place Langland and Chaucer side by side in the final analysis - assessing a C text perspective - it is Langland who explains who he is and justifies poetry through Imaginatif and Chaucer who is more severe in his perception of language and the role of tale-telling from the Manciple's Tale through the Retraction (311). If we agree with Sigfried Wenzel that the Parson's Tale is a serious document, we must look further for an indication of what Chaucer is doing through instruction in the tale and in his confession in the Retraction (237-56).

With the Parson's Prologue, Chaucer begins a very significant reshaping of the Canterbury enterprise. Michael Olmert is, however, correct to assert that the concept of game is still present here, but the sense of competition, driven to some degree by the mercantile economy of Harry Bailey, is concluded (156-242). For readers who assert that Chaucer's plan for the number of tales as outlined in the General Prologue has changed as is noted in the Parson's Prologue, it is important to remember that attitudes toward the institution of pilgrimage were changing in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. In Piers Plowman, Piers promises to lead the pilgrims on the search for St. Truth after plowing the half acre; instead, as J.A. Burrow observes, he "substitutes" the plowing for the pilgrimage and converts the entire enterprise into an introspection of the individual pilgrim's own spiritual state as well as an attempt to reassert feudal order. In his prologue, the Parson is calling for a similar "substitution": the "Jerusalem celestial" (51) for Canterbury (85). And such a pilgrimage, as with Piers's pilgrimage, requires a different mental landscape. That the Parson rejects "fables" should remind us that Will notes that pilgrims "Wenten forth on here way with many wyse tales / And hadde leue to lye aftir, al here lyf-tyme" (Prol. 49-50). Chaucer must free the Parson from these associations just as Langland freed himself in the C-text passus. Lee Patterson notes "the certainties of the Parson's Tale render the complexities of the tales inconsequential and sophistical" (370). Constructing his "meditation," the Parson is asking for an introspection that will lead to another kind of "tale telling," the confessional variety. That Chaucer the poet is the first person or character to make such a confession in the form of his Retraction is no surprise. He is the nexus for all the voices in his texts. He has been experimenting with voices throughout his career as a writer. Now the time has come to step outside the perceivable Canterbury frame in order to create a new one. The Prologue sets the stage for such a shift by allowing an hegemonic shift from the expanding world of socio-economic discourses to an older, traditional one. With the Parson finally in control, Chaucer, under the guise of one of the most powerful medieval institutions, can bring at least some tentative sense of closure or perhaps a gathering before a new discourse is born.

In the Parson's Tale itself, the Parson presents an orderly progress designed to isolate the sinner from the sin - to isolate the subject for analysis and reform. The four-pan structure describing contrition, confession, the Seven Deadly Sins, and satisfaction generates an internal process leading to an outward manifestation of the progress of penance. As such, silent introspection, reflecting reason and thought, replaces other emotional responses. Olson argues that the attention to reason and law would have been of concern to

Chaucer's original audience, and thus the Parson's Tale conformed to those expectations (289). Of course, those aspects may account for the tale's poor reception in the late twentieth century. That Chaucer seems bound more closely here than in many other texts to his sources has been a frequent observation. The chief question that we must answer here is how such a programmatic text, focusing on the penitent rather than the actions of the priest/confessor, relates to a poetic contemplation of identity.

Since the Retraction is the location of the emerging poetics of identity, it seems prudent to look at it first and then to reflect on the substance of the tale. The identity of the speaker is of major concern. Wurtele proposes a multilayered Retraction, with lines 1080-84 and 1090-92 being part of the Parson's address and with lines 1085-90 being added at the request of Chaucer (340-43). While solving a certain number of issues, the dissection makes the text less coherent and raises further questions about the nature of its composition. What is perhaps more likely is that Chaucer the poet is picking up the language and tone he establishes in the Parson's Tale. His rejection of "the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; the book of the xxv. Ladies; the book of the Duchesse; the book of Seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes; the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen to synne; / the book of the Leoun; and many another book, if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a leccherous lay" (1085-86) suggests that he questions his own "entente," which is precisely what is asked of a penitent in the confessional.

Chaucer was aware of the sins of the tongue and pen; he was aware of the slippery nature of language. In the description of pride, the Parson notes, "Janglynge is whan a man speketh to muche biforn folk, and clappeth as a mille, and taketh no keep what he seith" (405). In discussing the nature of contrition, the Parson notes

that swiche wikked delites and wikked thoghtes been subtile bigileres of hem that shullen be dampned./ Mooreover, man oghte to sorwe for his wikkede wordes as wel as for his wikkede dedes. For certes, the repentaunce of a synguler synne, and nat repente of alle his othere synnes, or elles repenten hym of alle his othere synnes and nat of a synguler synne, may nat availle. (298-99)

The rejection of "many another book, if they were in my remembrance" (1086), according to Sayce, is an echo of the confessional formulae "whether remembered or unremembered," and is likely "humorous" (241). But there are alternative readings. It is also a commonplace in medieval wills for the testator to provide for any unpaid tithes that he may not remember. It is certainly possible in a single act of confession that Chaucer may not have remembered everything that he wrote. The formula is less "humorous" than it is an important tag for a good confession. However we view these lines, it is important to assert that conventional language by nature could hardly be said to be insincere.

Because the process of penance is to create sameness and to reassess subjectivity, the conventional provides such a gesture in the contemplation of the poetics of identity. That Chaucer accepts credit for Boece, saints' lives, and other religious writings suggests that, like the writer of a will, he is trying to shape an identity, to speak in his own voice through an institutional discourse. He is trying to do here what language by its fallen nature cannot do; it cannot resolve its own gaps and silences. Similar to the speaker in the autobiographical C-text passus, Chaucer is constructing an identity of apology under the guise of the confessional. The Parson notes that "he that yeveth hym remissioun of synnes shal yeve hym eek grace wel for to do" (287), so Chaucer prays "sende me grace to biwayle my giltes and to studie to the salvacioun of my soule, and graunte me grace of verray penitence, confessioun, and satisfaccioun to doon in this present lyf" (1089). The Parson's words contain an echo of the idea of Langland's "do well," and Chaucer - through the process similar to Piers's rejection of the active life on the half acre for one of prayerful contemplation - anticipates the beginning of a new discourse.

The "so-called" frame around the confession, lines 1080-84 and 1090-92, which is underwritten with the subject status of the entire Retraction, establishes an important frame for understanding. Authorized confession in the Middle Ages was conducted under both public and private circumstances, but required the statements to be made before a priest or friar, but clearly neither religious figure is here. We, as the audience of readers, must pass judgment on the poet's "entente" to assess the degree to which he has reached the end, "Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine" (1083), the same line found at the end of the Nun's Priest's Tale. Clearly one intention here is to develop a clerical discourse, yet the poet obfuscates the issue with "[I] wolde ful fayn have seyd bettre if I hadde

had konnynge" (1081), which sounds similar to the excuse of the Chaucer narrator for violating order in the General Prologue:

Also I prey yow to foryeve it me, Al have I nat set folk in hir degree Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde. My wit is short, ye may wel understonde. (743-46)

Of course, the poet is confessing a "literary sin," but for Chaucer and Langland, falling short of a goal or not having the intention recognized by an audience would be problematic. According himself a posture of importance by citing important auctores, he proceeds to write his own signature in his text with a voice that is a pastiche of voices, all of which have some claim to hegemony and control. Thus for Chaucer, the poetics of identity cannot be separated from institutions. That he concludes with the formulaic "Qui cum Patre . . ." (1091) ultimately inscribes his voice into his text, and in a new sense, the text becomes his own. Thus he is both controller of his text as well as a product of it. Such is the negotiation of power that authorial insertion attributes to the confessional.

Without question, penance occupied a visible place in late medieval culture and in literary texts. As an institutional discourse, based on the rules of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, shaped through numerous handbooks, and proclaimed through sermons, the confessional did, as Foucault observed, aim at the "production of truth" (58). For Langland, autobiographical confession was part of the search for St. Truth as much as it was for self-justification and the development of a poetic identity. For Chaucer, autobiographical confession did the same things as for Langland, but also allowed him to gain more control over his own texts. At once, these "confessions" could be seen as spiritually genuine as well as developing a sense of textual self-consciousness. For writers to join the two is less unusual than we might think. As Olson observes, Chaucer's intention was the redevelopment of the "good society" (276-99). Whether Chaucer learned this notion from William Langland cannot be determined. Whether Chaucer developed his voice from Langland cannot be determined, either. What we can say is that both William Langland and Geoffrey Chaucer were very much a part of their worlds, both materially and literarily. They recognized religious and social problems of their day. As a result of these keen perceptions, they developed the notion of the poetics of identity in ways that make them subject to their own grand designs for a new and as yet unknown discourse. Troubling Langland's and Chaucer's texts can only make these means and ends more apparent.

Notes

1 All quotes from Chaucer are taken from Benson, The Riverside Chaucer. All quotes from Langland are taken from Derek Pearsall's edition of the C-text.

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