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Soul-Making in *Piers Plowman*

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This essay is dedicated to the memory of Sister Mary Clemente Davlin.[1]

On April 21, 1819, John Keats wrote a letter to his brother and sister-in-law in which he presented his alternative to the prevailing view of salvation: "The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and the superstitious is 'a vale of tears,' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven—what a little circumscribe[d] straightened notion! Call the world if you please 'The vale of Soul-Making.'"[2] The fourteenth-century poem, *Piers Plowman*, anticipates Keats's ideas about the place of the soul in the world, and presents, I argue, a history of the protagonist Will's soul-making. Critics have warned against identifying the "I" of the poem with a single, consistently developing subject, asking us instead to consider the poem as proffering a number of subject positions made up of a variety of dialogic discourses.[3] But whoever we deem the protagonist of the poem to be, whether a person who in some form reflects the historical author of the poem named William Langland, as W.W. Skeat asserted, or a subject made up of dialogic discourses, as David Lawton argued, it is crucial that we

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[1] This essay was originally delivered as a plenary at the *International Piers Plowman Society Meeting* in Miami, Florida on April 4, 2019. I thank Emily Steiner, Fiona Somerset and Tom Goodmann for the kind invitation to speak and the YLS editors for their helpful editorial comments on the expanded version.
[2] Keats, "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats," 21 April, 1819, in *Letters*, II, pp.101-102.
[3] See Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity,* and Lawton, "The Subject of Piers Plowman."

recognize that the speaking subject of the poem is not just a person, however complexly presented, but a person with a soul.[4]

Through the representation of a series of instances of soul-making, the poem, I suggest, records the growth of a person with a soul named Will as he comes to understand the nature and function of the power of the soul within him. Over the course of the poem, Will develops consciousness of the powers of his soul, but above all, the power of his will, a faculty that has the potential to lead him to develop an ethical form of consciousness, that is, a conscience. *Piers Plowman* charts the making of Will's soul as it moves from its first glimmer of recognition of its value to a dynamic idea of its function in the messy world. *Piers Plowman* is England's *Divine Comedy*, but unlike Dante who progressively moves us from the world to heaven, Langland leaves us firmly in the world of everyday experience.[5] The poem, I argue, dramatizes both the desire for the transcendental finality of that "arbitrary interposition" and the resistance to it that finds (if not for the protagonist of the poem, then for the reader) not salvation, but an ethically sound and consciously derived pursuit of value in the given world.

That *Piers Plowman* is a poem concerned with understanding the soul's powers has not gone unnoticed in Langland criticism. Most notably, Mary Carruthers and James Simpson show Langland's broad indebtedness to Augustinian and Thomistic thought in their comprehensive treatments of Will's cognitive and affective

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[4] Skeat, "The Author's Name," and "The Author's Life," in *The Vision, Volume II*, pp. xxvii-xxxviii; Lawton, "The Subject of Piers Plowman." Manly attributes the poem to five different authors in "*Piers the Plowman* and its Sequence,"p.1.
[5] The comparison of Dante to Langland was made some time ago in Langland criticism. See for example, Calì, 1971 and Boitani, 1982.

development.[6] The two primary faculties that were understood in the period to govern the soul, Reason and the Will, have also received in-depth detailed analysis in their own right. In a separate earlier study, Carruthers sketched the basic contours of the character of reason in action, that is, Conscience, in the poem and Sarah Wood has more recently charted Langland's development of Conscience across the poem's A, B and C versions.[7] The poem's representation of the ultimately indiscernible faculty of the Will, known primarily through its repeated failures, has been explored extensively in very different treatments by Nicolette Zeeman and John Bowers.[8] Masha Raskolnikov's far-ranging consideration of the gendered representation of the soul in Middle English poetry including *Piers Plowman* helps us understand the hermeneutic complexity of Langland's representation of the soul as abject in Passus 15.[9] It is she who has drawn our attention to the concern of those who compiled devotional writings with providing guidance for the health of the soul as indicated in titles such as this one found in the Vernon manuscript, a collection that includes a copy of *Piers Plowman*: "Here bygynnen þe tytles off þe book þat is cald in latyn tonge salus anime. and in englyhs tonge sowlehele."[10] Relatively little attention, however, has been given to the soul itself as the driving force of the poem.

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[6] Carruthers, *The Search for St. Truth*; Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge," and *Introduction to the B text*.
[7] Carruthers, "The Character of Conscience " and Wood, *Conscience and Composition.*
[8] Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire;* Bowers, *Crisis of Will.*
[9] Raskolnikov, pp. 168-196.
[10] See folio 1r of the Vernon manuscript edited by Doyle and Raskolnikov's discussion of the significance of the term, pp.1-30 and her discussion of the Vernon title in particular, pp. 6-10.

Drawing on these indispensable studies, I shall focus attention here on Langland's specific representation of the constitution of the soul as it grows to recognize its capacities through its experiences in day-to-day life. Keats concurs that the soul grows only through such interactions: he asks, "how then are Souls to be made . . . but by the medium of a world like this. . . Do you not see how necessary a world of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand divers ways!"[11] Keats goes on to write, "[salvation] is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years—these three Materials are the *Intelligence*, the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the *World* or *Elemental space* suited for the proper action of the *Mind and Heart* on each other."[12] As we shall see, Langland's map of the soul's parts runs very close to Keats's. Langland, too, presents the soul's salvation as effected by the interactions over time between intelligence (what he calls Wit), the heart (what he calls Will), and the elemental space of the world. He presents a vision of an individual in relationship to the collectives of the laboring community and of the Church when interacting with the elemental space of the earth through plowing, an activity that accrues meanings at both the literal and allegorical levels as the poem progresses.

Langland's conception of the soul differs from that of Keats in a number of significant ways, of course. Where Keats suggests the soul only comes into being through making, Will begins his journey with a soul, even though he has to "make" it

[11] Keats, "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats,"21 April 1819, in *Letters*, p. 102.
[12] Keats, "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats," 21 April 1819, in *Letters*, p. 102.

as he progresses. Furthermore, the journey of Will's soul, unlike that of Keats's soul, is inflected by a theology of grace, although what Langland's concept of that theology is remains controversial among critics.[13] Most noticeably Langland's idea of the soul is influenced by his absorption of and response to Augustine and Aquinas whose views about the nature and function of the soul predominated in the period. He also, I shall show, engages voluntarist ideas about the soul in which the Will, the very name of the poem's protagonist, is given primacy over reason. Drawing on his knowledge of these commonly available theological views of the soul, Langland, in sum, delineates Will's soul as constituted of the primary faculties of will and reason, but one in which will takes priority over reason. Voluntarist thought in which God is hidden (the *Deus absconditus*), his will unknowable because of his *potentia absoluta,* and the nature and power of the will in general ultimately indiscernible, is consonant with Langland's representation of the restlessness, uncertainties and failures Will experiences throughout the poem in trying to learn how to save his soul.[14] In keeping with voluntarist developments of an essential Pauline proposition that the will is the locus of the self and moral worth, the poem shows, as Pasnau has suggested, "the human search for truth is not chiefly an intellectual one but a volitional one."[15]

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[13] Most agree with Adams view that Langland is sympathetic to the semi-pelagianism of the voluntarists, although Aers challenges that view in "Sacrament of the Altar." See also, Coleman's discussion of the voluntarist view. Grace plays a much more prominent role at the end of the poem than at the beginning.

[14] For these basic principles of voluntarism see Bonnansea, *Man*, Kent, *The Virtues of the Will ,* Courtenay, *Nominalism,* and Oberman, *Theology* and *Harvest* , Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni*, and Pasnau, "Voluntarism and the Self."

[15] Pasnau,"Voluntarism and the Self," XXX. For St. Paul, see Romans 7:15-23: "For that which I do, I do not understand. For I do not do the good that I will, but

Debates about the responsibility of the soul to prompt the individual to criticize the world around it, articulated especially forcefully by Ockham, have notable features in common with the end of the poem where the poem affirms the efficacy of the individual soul when guided by Conscience (who is in turn motivated by the Will) as a power for social and political critique. Langland engages these various theological positions not as a theologian, however, but as a poet, a position that allows him to test their resiliency in lived experience.

Langland's protagonist is initially less concerned with what the soul is than how he might save it, but he comes to realize that the first step to saving his soul involves becoming conscious of its powers. Everything in *Piers Plowman*, every encounter with a personified abstraction, every inner dream, outer dream and moment in the waking world, every image, dialogue and dramatic event, is an episode in Will's progressive understanding of both what it means to have a soul and of the salvific potential of its powers. Instead of describing Will's journey in terms of progress, however, it is more accurate to consider its development within the framework of the medieval concept of *informatio*. Rather than grow, Will's soul becomes *informed.* According to medieval theology, *informatio* refers to the soul's

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the evil that I hate, that I do. If then I do that which I will against, I consent to the law, that it is good. So then it is not I who do it, but the sin that dwells within me. For I know that the good does not dwell within me, that is, within my flesh. For to will the good is present to me, but to achieve the good, that I do not find. For I do not do the good that I will, but the evil that I will against, this I do. But if I do that which I will against, then it is not I who do it, but the sin that dwells within me. Therefore I find a law, that while I am willing to do good, evil is present to me. For, with respect to the interior person, I am delighted with the law of God. But I see another law in my limbs, fighting against the law of my mind and imprisoning me in the law of sin that is in my limbs." translated from the Latin vulgate by Pasnau in "Voluntarism and the Self."

acquisition of accidents which enhance its attempts to reach its ideal form; the substance of the soul itself never changes or grows, but instead every "accident," that is, every thought or desire or even experience informs the soul; when these thoughts or desires leave traces, they become habits or dispositions, which include intellectual habits (such as knowledge), moral habits (that is, virtues and vices) and theological habits (that is, faith, hope and love.)[16]

Such habits are ultimately actualizations of the powers of the soul. Because voluntarists understood the virtues to emerge from an autonomous will, they did not view the will as constrained by habit. Within a voluntarist frame, as Pasnau points out, "moral goodness applies first and foremost not to our external actions, nor to our rational deliberations or to our acquired habits, but rather to the will's choices."[17] Given the instability of Will's progress in the poem, the voluntarist understanding of the habits seems more apt than the more determinative role granted to them by Aquinas.[18]

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[16] The information of the soul ultimately stems from Aristotle's conception of the soul as a form and is articulated in Aquinas, *Summa theologiae 1a75.* See Pasnau's translation, *The Treatise on Human Nature*, pp. 10-13. I am grateful to Robert Pasnau for discussing the process by which the soul becomes informed. See also his *Theories*, pp. 51-55. The first critic to consider information in terms of literary texts was James Simpson in his important book *Sciences and the Self*. See pp. 7-10 and 168-72. His discussion points out the relationship between information and literary forms: " a poem will take its own shape and style according to what faculty of the soul is being instructed." *Sciences*, p. 28. He correlates the genres of *Piers Plowman* with Will's development in *From Reason*. I suggest Will's spiral-like or cyclical and repetitive development is especially suited to the poem's emphasis on the primacy of the will over reason.
[17] Pasnau, "Voluntarism and the Self," XXX.
[18] For a discussion of the movement of the virtues from reason to the will in voluntarism, see Kent. For a discussion of varying views of habitus in the period, see Chapter Two of Breen, "Medieval Theories of Habitus," pp. 43-79; especially p. 79, where she summarizes the voluntarist position: "Scotus and Ockham break

Will's soul is informed, I suggest, by his acquisition of knowledge, then by his procurement of moral habits through his development of Conscience, and finally by his attainment of the theological habits--faith, hope and charity--especially the last, charity or love. Although critics such as C. David Benson, Lawton, A.C. Spearing and Wood have rightly taught us to resist attributing a smooth narrative development to this unruly poem, we nonetheless can trace Will's acquisition of some habits or dispositions as his soul is informed.[19] The poem charts the soul's acquisition of information as it experiences suffering in the world and comes to realize the nature and the ethical responsibilities of its various powers. This is not at all to say that the poem presents Will's increasing withdrawal from this world and ascent to the realm of the spirit; on the contrary, Will stays firmly rooted in the world throughout.

The theological notion of information can help us resolve the critical puzzle that Will seems to progress at the same time that he seems not to change. Will's soul-making, although improved by its acquisition of accidents, nonetheless is both enriched and impeded by his continual return to the problems of embodiment posed by everyday life. Will's soul becomes informed in a spiral-like process ---or perhaps more precisely in an episodic cyclical pattern like that of the liturgical year-- in which he accrues accidents incrementally that leave significant traces on his soul even

with Aquinas by locating all virtuous habitūs in the will itself, reasoning that the will alone is capable of choice, and thus of vice or virtue."

[19] Benson, *Piers Plowman*; Lawton, "Subject;" A.C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivities*; Wood, *Conscience and Composition.*

though again and again he seems to have returned to almost exactly the same place.[20] Soul-making then is an immanent activity that never ceases in this world.

Will's soul-making occurs in encounters that Keats would call "circumstances." At the conclusion to his letter, Keats writes, " I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances—and what are circumstances?—but touchstones of his hearrt—and what are touchstones?—but proovings of his heart—and what are proovings of the heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? And what is his altered nature but his soul? And what was his soul before it came into the World and had These proovings and alterations and perfectionings?—An intelligence(s) –without Identity—and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?"[21] Keatsian circumstances in Langland are those daily experiences that contribute to the information of his soul. As Will acquires accidents, his soul nonetheless cannot settle in his apprehension of a solitary or a collective truth but instead, as it experiences the world in the body it inhabits, must repeatedly assess its place in and ethical responsibilities within it.[22]

While Will's soul becomes informed through his interactions with a variety of experiences and encounters with allegorical personifications and persons he meets

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[20] Dante's *Commedia* also has a spiral-like structure but it moves progressively from this world to heaven, whereas this poem begins and ends in this world. Middleton importantly delineated the episodic structure of *Piers Plowman* in her essay "Narration and the Invention of Experience."
[21] "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats,"21 April 1819, in *Letters*, pp.103-4.
[22] See Strohm's brief but pointed discussion of this faculty as it appears in *Piers Plowman* as a forerunner of modernity's conception of conscience as a private and internal stand alone phenomenon in *Conscience*, pp. 14-16. For a discussion of the chief virtues of the will as charity and justice, see Pasnau, "Voluntarism and the Self," p. XXX.

from day to day, it also does so through his encounters with allegorical representations of the soul itself in the form of images of it that impress upon him --or inform him with-- its nature and function. *Piers Plowman* is perhaps more visual than it at first seems; as Benson has shown in his study of the poem and medieval English wall paintings, it is immersed in the pervasive visual culture of the time.[23] In this essay, I shall trace the growth of Will's discovery of the nature and powers of his soul in his interactions with four images—some that explicitly represent the soul and some that represent aspects of the soul: a lady within a castle; an allegorical figure of the soul called a "thing"; a tree; and a plow.[24] Each of these images brings to the fore aspects of the soul associated respectively with Augustine, Aquinas, and Jerome, and as I move from image to image, I will outline the major elements of those theological positions.

By focusing on these images, I shall show how Will learns a particularly Langlandian theology of the soul. Through his engagement with the first of these images, the Castle of Passus 9, Will, as we shall see, learns a basic Augustinian

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[23] Benson, "*Piers Plowman* and Parish Wall Paintings."

[24] In this essay, I shall be focusing attention almost exclusively on the B text, even though Langland's change of the speaker who introduces the vision of the tree of charity from *Anima* to *Liberum Arbitrium* in his representation of the tree of charity is important to his developing idea of how the soul functions and hence to an enriched concept for Will to grasp. Since *liberum arbitrium* was understood as a capacity we possess in virtue of both will and reason, the change might be said to provide a more balanced vision of the relationship between will and reason at this point in the poem than we have in the B text where a dream within a dream seems to place emphasis on the activities of the will. The import of this change for Langland's purposes vis à vis the place of the will in the C text as whole awaits a fuller treatment beyond the scope of this essay. For a discussion of the distinction between free will and free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) see Kent, "From Free Decision to Free Will," pp. 98-110.

lesson that he has a soul within that needs protection from the dangerous intrusions of the world upon it, an image that focuses Will's attention inward. Through his subsequent meeting with the soul itself as a thing in Passus 15, Anima, he learns, however, predominantly Thomistic propositions, that despite its status within, the soul only has meaning through its outward actions in the world; the soul manifests itself in performance. His encounter with the tree of charity in Passus 16, an implicit image of the soul that brings to the fore more voluntarist concepts of the soul, turns him at once inward and outward by showing him the place of charity at the center of the human being and the power of its action outwards to love. When he subsequently witnesses the plow in Passus 19, working literally to cultivate the land and allegorically to cultivate souls, Will discovers the power of a soul inflected with Jerome's notion of its structure, guided by grace and united with others to form a collective, the Church.

As we shall see, the poem does not end with that vision of collective strength, however, but instead returns us to the quest of the still inquiring soul frustrated in its search for truth. While the images of the soul Will encounters inform him about aspects of his soul, his understanding of those powers is continually negated as each vision dissolves and is replaced by further encounters in the world. Indeed, these repeated negations go hand in hand with what seem to be weakness of will in our protagonist, Will. Bowers argues that Will's principal sin is *acedia*, a failure of will. Zeeman, in contrast, sees Will's misdirection as a an aspect of Langland's particular form of 'voluntarism', which she describes as "dark and supremely optimistic."[25] I understand Will's irregular progress—or rather his step by step (passus by passus)

[25] Zeeman, p. 21.

acquisition of information-- as his growing recognition that not only does he have a soul, but that he has one that is dominated by the will which repeatedly prompts him to make and remake his soul. For Langland, then, soul-making involves a growing consciousness of the soul's powers—and especially the power and resilience of the will-- even as those powers are repeatedly shown to be inadequate in the face of experience. As I suggest in my concluding discussion of the ending of the poem, despite the seeming negation of the lessons taught by the powerful images of the soul including that of the plow, the soul's faculties are nonetheless shown to be resilient even as the poem approaches its apocalyptic ending.

The culminating image of the plow takes us back to the plow we saw in the first part of the poem and brings to the fore yet another dimension of soul-making, writing, an activity suggested by the link commonly made in the period between plowing and writing. Although Langland does not make this link explicitly, given that Will is presented in the poem as a writer, plowing, I shall argue at the end of this essay, has special significance for our understanding if not of Will then certainly of William Langland

Will's experiences of frustration, failure and renewed hope as he seeks to understand his soul, reflects what Vance Smith has described as the poem's negative theology.[26] As Smith writes, "We ought to embrace the poem as a failure, as a poem that not only engenders negativity but that is deeply formed by negation."[27] In Hegelian terms, such experiences of negation are, as Smith points out, fundamental to the "energy of thought, of the pure I," and to Heidegger, "a negation of a negation is

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[26] Smith, "Negative Langland."
[27] Smith, p. 41.

nothing less than the 'essence of spirit.'"[28] Will approaches an understanding of his spirit, his soul, through his experiences of such negative dialectics.[29] That the purpose of this dialectics is to focus social and political critique suggests that an Adornian as much as an Hegelian dialectics is at work in the poem.

Although negative dialectics are clearly fundamental to the poem's methods, Smith's proposition that the poem is apophatic seems uconvincing. Fundamental to the poem's dialectical method is an oscillation between the self and the world, and the world continually comes into focus for Will as the source of new knowledge; in the apophatic, both the self and the world ultimately disappear as the contemplative unites with God. In my view, Langland is too concerned with the exigencies of daily life—most urgently of hunger and thirst—to be described as apophatic. Even as the information Will gains in his journey leads him to a more expansive understanding of his own soul and to the development of his own conscience, it also continually points him to the ways in which the soul is made, unmade and made again through its encounters with the world, or more specifically what Adorno would call the "social antagonisms" of the world: from legal corruption and the problems of maintenance, to labour unrest and famine, to the inadequacies of institutional learning, and finally to the corruption within aristocratic households reliant on confessors and within the

[28] Smith, p. 41.
[29]Aers was one of the earliest critics to discuss the poem in terms of its dialectical method, a method he investigates in detail in the last section of his *Beyond Reformation*? pp. *161-173.* Zeeman in her book on Will and in a forthcoming book also explores the negative dialectical methods of the poem.

Church itself.[30] Given his concern with social critique and his eschewal of the transcendence sought by both Hegel and apophatic medieval mystics, Adorno in his form of negative dialectics more aptly points to the social critique that is a fundamental part of Will's soul-making.

1. The Nature of the Soul as Presented in the Poem

That the agent Will has the capacity for soul-making is made clear in his first encounter with Holy Church when he asks "how I may saue my soule?" [31] This opening scene awakens in Will a desire to know what his soul is and how he can save it; it might be described as Will's *confirmation* for it presents a formal interaction in which Will kneels ("courbed on my knees") before Holy Church (B1, 79). Holy Church reminds him of his earlier baptism when she says "þow oughtest me to knowe/I vnderfeng þee first and þe feiþ tau3ht/þow brou3test me borwes (that is, pledges at baptism) my biddyng to fulfille/And to loven me leelly þe while þi lif dureth."(B 1, 75-78). What then does the scene present but Will's coming to consciousness of the presence of a soul within him and his need to take responsibility for it, his recognition that he has within him what Jerome and Thomas called synderesis and what Bonaventure defined as "the spark of the soul"-- that is, a disposition to do good?[32]

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[30] Wood discusses in detail the problems of maintenance both in the lord's retinue and in large land-owning households in her book. For Adrono, see "Lyric Poetry in Society," p.

[31] Schmidt, B I, 84. All quotations are from the B-text of Schmidt's parallel edition of all four texts. All further quotations will be taken from this edition and line numbers will be given in parentheses in the body of my text.

[32] See Potts's discussion of each of these authors and selected translations of texts in *Conscience*: on Jerome, pp. 1-11 and pp.79-80; on Aquinas, pp. 45-60 and 122-126; and on Bonaventure, pp. 32-45 and 110-121. See also Hort, *Religious*,

Will's question "how may I save my soul?" presupposes that he knows what the soul is. The idea that a person has a soul generated numerous questions in the medieval period. What is the soul made of? Where is it located? What are the powers of the soul and how do they interact with the powers of the body? Which entity has control over the person, body or soul or both? What is the soul's nature when separated from the body at death? Is the soul gendered? The answers that theologians, philosophers and artists provided to these questions shape Langland's representation of Will's soul. The prevalent artistic and popular view of the soul was that it took the shape of a homunculus as shown in this typical image from British Library MS Additional 37049 of the soul leaving the body **[figure 1: @The British Library Board, Additional MS 37049, f. 19r]**

Langland shows no particular interest in the soul's appearance, or indeed in its makeup after death, but, as we shall see, he is interested in the constitution of the soul and its location, gender, and powers and many of the answers he finds are consonant with those given in contemporary theological discussions and debates. As Greta Hort explained long ago, Langland is a profoundly theological poet rather than a devotional or even a religious one.[33] In order to appreciate Langland's poetry of soul-

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on synderesis, pp. 71-76 and on the "spark of the soul," p. 74. Wood, p. 2. summarizes: "Bonaventure and other Franciscan writers defined conscience as an act of judgement directed towards behavior, synderesis as the bias of the will towards the good. Aquinas described synderesis as a disposition of the practical reason by which theoretical principles are known and conscience as an actualization, the application of knowledge of principles to particular cases." See also her summary of critical opinions about the Dominican versus Franciscan emphases in the poem itself, p. 3. In Langland's representation here we seem to see a spark of what later will become Conscience for Will. Notice, however, that Langland does not draw on the imagery of the spark.

[33] Hort, *Religious*, pp. 15-16.

making, we need therefore to become aware of his sophisticated knowledge of the developing theology of the soul. This does not mean, however, that we can reduce that poetry to these theological precepts; indeed, it is through poetry that Langland variously engages, resolves or exposes the contradictions in theology that emerge in the midst of lived experience.

Will's encounters with images of the soul teaches him aspects of the three dominant theological models of the soul current in the period in which Langland wrote that I mentioned above: an Augustinian soul, a Thomistic soul, and a voluntarist soul. The medieval theological models of the structure of the soul that influence Langland's representation of it can be epitomized in these phrases: 1. The Body is the Prison of the Soul (Augustine) 2. The Soul is the Form of the Body (Aquinas) 3. The Will is the Ruler of the Soul (Ockham). Foucault[34] responded to these ideas of the soul with his own well-known formulation: 4: The Soul is the Prison of the Body.[35]

To address the last of these first: we might concur with Foucault that the soul often serves regulatory and repressive functions, but in *Piers Plowman*, I suggest, the soul, far from imprisoning the body, expands its reach. The medieval idea of the soul has not only spiritual but material consequences for the individual, and does indeed regulate the individual by placing a person firmly in space and time –for example, it organizes a person's year around the liturgical calendar, marks quotidian temporality

[34] For a cogent critique of Foucault's conception of the Middle Ages, see Karma Lochrie,"Desiring Foucault," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997), 3-16

[35] For Augustine, see *Soliloquies*; for Aquinas see *Summa theologiae* 1a 75; for Foucault see *Discipline and Punish,* p. 30; for Ockham see Adams.

with bells, and grants the person a place in a graveyard associated with a parish. But, as we shall see, the powers of the soul that Langland demonstrates—particularly conscience and the drives of the will-- also provide a means to expand time and space by guiding the person to embrace, organize and critique the social, political and material world he inhabits. Furthermore, rather than repress desire, the soul in Langland enables desire for the good and channels and directs it to its fulfillment in love.

2. The Body is the Prison of the Soul

Let us consider first Will's first encounter with an image of the soul as a castle, an image that expresses predominantly an Augustinian understanding of the soul epitomized in the phrase, *The Body is the Prison of the Soul*.[36] Before turning to the image, let me summarize the contours of Augustine's definition of the soul. To Augustine, the person is a body/soul composite in which the soul takes primacy over the body. He sets out a definition of the soul that persists throughout the Middle Ages and that answers most of the questions about the soul I listed earlier. He defines the soul as an incorporeal, wholly incorruptible and immortal substance located everywhere in the body which survives death in the form of what was called a *separated* soul.

Augustine establishes these attributes of the soul in his *Soliloquies,* a text highly distinctive among philosophical writings in that it is the first to present a dialogue made up of parts of the self; the dialogue is between Augustine and a part of

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[36] Hort points out how Thomistic the model of the soul provided in Passus 9 becomes in its later discussion of faculties; however, its image of a soul within to be guarded from the onslaughts of the flesh is Augustinian in its emphasis.

himself presented as an interlocutor, Reason.[37] It is unusual for the inner self to be split in this way in philosophical discourses—though such a self-division is represented here in this image of David playing the lyre for his own soul **[figure 2: David playing the Cittern to his soul. With permission, Stuttgart, Wuerttembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. bibl. fol. 23, f. 55r]** The *Soliloquies* is perhaps, as Zeeman also observes, a more important source for Langland's representation of Will's journey than has been fully recognized.[38] Although other texts such as the *Psychomachia* and *Sawles Warde* also present allegories of the soul in which different faculties of the soul debate with one another, *Piers Plowman*, like the *Soliloquies*, places an inquiring protagonist at the centre of narrative who seeks to find out about the nature of his soul.[39]

Augustine's emphasis on the soul's desire to escape the body draws on Plato's understanding of the soul as an entity enclosed and constrained by the body and thus blames the body as the source of sin. Adopting a trinitarian notion of the soul as made up of will, understanding and memory, Augustine describes the difficulties he faced in abandoning the habit of lust and focussing his soul on God as a struggle between two wills, one carnal and one spiritual. This neoplatonic model of the body as the prison of the soul predominates in early medieval literary representations of it.

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[37] Augustine, *Soliloquies*.
[38] Zeeman, pp. 97-99.
[39] For a discussion of these allegorical models for *Piers* see Raskolnikov. Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* similarly presents the person in debate with an entity that might be considered an aspect of himself, but Lady Philosophy is not presented as an interior faculty. In these works, parts of the self debate with one another.

Typical of such representations is the Anglo-Saxon poem known as Soul/Body I in which the Soul passionately castigates the body for drawing them both into sin and damnation as indicated in this excerpt:

Eardode ic þe in innan. No ic þe of meahte,
flæsce bifongen, ond me firenlustas
þine geþrungon. þæt me þuhte ful oft
þæt wære þritig þusend wintra
to þinum deaðdæge. Hwæt, ic uncres gedales bad
earfoðlice. Nis nu se ende to god!
Wære þu þe wiste wlonc ond wines sæd,
þrymful þunedest, ond ic ofþyrsted wæs
godes lichoman, gæstes drinces.
þær þu þonne hogode her on life,
þenden ic þe in worulde wunian sceolde,
þæt þu wære þurh flæsc ond þurh firenlustas
stronge gestyred ond gestaþelad þurh mec,
ond ic wæs gæst on þe from gode sended,
næfre þu me swa heardra helle wita
ned gearwode þurh þinra neoda lust.
Scealt þu nu hwæþre minra gescenta scome þrowian [40]

I dwelt within you. I never could exist without you,
enclosed in flesh, and your criminal desires
crushed me. It very often seemed to me
that there would be thirty thousand
winters until your death-day. Ever I begged
miserably for our parting.
Indeed that end has not turned out too well!
"You were proud at your feast and sated with wine,
prominent, majestic, and I thirsted
for God's body, for the drink of souls.
You were never mindful in those moments, here in this life,
since I had to dwell with you in the world,
so that you were guided eagerly by your flesh
and your criminal desires, and strengthened by me,
and I was the ghost sent within you by God—
you never preserved me from the compulsion,
from the torments of hell so harsh by your lust for pleasure.
"You must suffer the shame of my ruination."[41]

[40] *Soul and Body II,* in Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 175-176.

In keeping with Augustinian ideas about the body and soul, only the soul has a voice in this poem and it longs to flee the body in which it is imprisoned.

Will encounters such a neoplatonic model in Passus 9 when Wit shows him an image of the soul as a courtly lady protected in the castle of flesh. We might think of this castle in terms of the well-known image of the Castle of Truth from Douce 104.

> "Sire Dowel dwelleþ," quod Wit, "no3t a day hennes
> In a castel þat Kynde made of foure kynnes þynges.
> Of erþe and eyre is it made, medled togideres,
> Wiþ wynde and with water wittily enjoyned.
> Kynde haþ closed þereinne craftily wiþalle
> A lemman that he loveþ lik to hymselve.
> *Anima* she hatte; to hir haþ envye
> A proud prikere of Fraunce, *Princeps huius mundi*,
> And wolde wynne hire awey wiþ wiles and he my3te. (B 9:1-9)

I have written elsewhere about the gender of the soul in this image and the image of the soul in Passus 15, and have considered a variety of its details; here I will focus only on those aspects that reveal Langland's use of the image as a step in Will's understanding of the constitution of his own soul.[42] Clearly the idea that the soul needs vigilant protection is reinforced by its gendered representation as a precious treasure within a highly defended castle. This image recalls those such as the castle of the soul in *Sawles Warde,* in which the castle is governed by Wit but potentially led to ruin by his unruly Wife, Will and the Christ-Knight allegory of the *Ancrene Wisse*

[41] *Soul and Body II,* Hostetter translation, lines 36-49.
[42] The analysis of this passage as well as of the image of the soul in Passus 15, draws on my differently focussed and more extensive analysis of the gender implications of these passages in my essay, *Souls that Matter.*

in which Christ fights on behalf of a lady in a castle under assault by the Devil.[43] The image is common in the period. Here is one example: (**figure 3**) (Soul as Castle: from a Carthusian miscellany, executed in Northern England in the second or third quarter of the 15th cent @The British Library Board, Additional MS 37049, f. 71r.)

Drawing on pervasive Aristotelian notions of the feminine as inherently passive, the soul here, called Anima and gendered as female, is described as placed within the castle by Kynde and subject to the active assault by the devil. Described only with passive verbs-- she "is called" Anima; she "is loved and protected by" Kynde; she "is envied by" the devil-- we never see her performing an action. Will learns that the primary feature of the soul is that it is a precious treasure deep within that requires protection from the continual assault of the Devil. He has yet to learn, however, that the soul's actions are as important as its preciousness.

Will is introduced here to a prominent faculty of his soul, a form of reason called Inwit, and in this emphasis on reason and in his description of the senses as powers of the soul, Langland brings to the fore ideas of the soul's constitution consonant with Thomistic rather than Augustinian thought. It is perhaps not surprising that the ruling knight of the castle should be Sir Inwit, since the vision of the castle is provided by Wit.

> "Ac the Constable of þat castel, þat kepeþ hem alle,
> Is a wis kny3t withal—Sire Inwit he hatte,
> And haþ fyve faire sones bi his firste wyve:
> Sire Se-wel, and Sey-wel, and Sire Here-wel þe hende
> Sire Werch-wel-with-þyn-hand, a wight man of strengþe,
> And Sire Godefray Go-wel—grete lordes alle.

[43] For the Christ-Knight allegory see *Ancrene Wisse,* pp 198-199. For *Sawles Warde,* see Huber and Robertson, pp. 249-266.

> Thise fyve ben set to save þis lady *Anima*
> Til Kynde come or sende to kepe hir hymselve."
> (B 9: 17–24)

It is not entirely clear what *Inwit* means. First used in English in the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* and appearing later in the fourteenth-century title the *Ayenbite of Inwit*, the word, according to Hort might simply refer to the *sensus communis* but Randolph Quirk argues that Inwit means here Conscience.[44] He writes, "the *agens* aspect of *intellectus* in Thomist terms. … is concerned with the apprehension of truth. . .with the distinction between true and false, good and evil—hence its [Inwit's] functions can come near to, and be confused with, those of Conscience." [45] Tracing the shift in diction from the word Inwit to conscience, R.D. Eaton argues that the term suggests a concept closely linked to the self, perhaps self-awareness, self-consciousness or moral awareness, that, over time, shifts in meaning to refer to a concept of moral authority increasingly detached from the self called conscience. Langland uses the word conscience, then, during a period when "a fundamental shift was taking place in the conceptualization of conscience and its social realization."[46] He explains further that as Inwit comes to be " assigned a more precise psychological role . . .*inwit* is represented metaphorically as a defensive agency that negotiates the boundary between the self and the outer world, controlling

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[44] Hort, p.95 ; Quirk, pp. 185-187; The *Ancrene Wisse* introduces the word Inwit as an alternative for conscience: "ure ahne conscience, thet is ure inwit." See Tolkien's edition of MS CCCC 402, p. 157, but the OED points to other early usages of the word that seem to focus on mental activity or reason alone. See the OED entry for *Inwit*.
[45] Quirk, p. 187.
[46] Eaton, p. 424.

what goes in and goes out."[47] Inwit here seems the represent an inner mental faculty that simply registers information as it enters the soul. Conscience becomes of increasing importance to Will, but, at this point in the poem, this narrower form of conscience, Inwit, rather than being presented as enabling the growth of the soul, is presented as passive, as merely a porter who protects the soul from encounters with the outside world.

This image of the soul reveals the powerful but limited notion of the soul that Will at this stage of the poem comprehends. At this stage of his journey, Will is able to understand only that his soul is deep within himself, that it needs protection from the intrusions of the world and the devil, and that it is governed by a relatively passive form of reason. Will's immersion in the courtly convention that a woman is a prized object to be immured in a highly defended castle blocks his ability to see that the soul is not an object but rather a subject. That is, he has yet to learn that the soul is not only precious and something to be loved but also one from which love emanates and whose powers must be actively engaged. It takes a more shocking encounter to shake Will/us out of a complacent understanding of the nature of the soul that is located not just within but everywhere in the body.

3. ***The Soul is the Form of the Body***

Langland's understanding of the soul is not only similar to that of Augustine but also, and more fully as the poem unfolds, to that of Aquinas whose ideas about the soul are expressed in his extensive commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*. Aquinas introduces Aristotle's definition that "The soul is the first grade of actuality of a natural body having life potentially in it," and his assertion that the "soul is the form

[47] Eaton, p. 438.

of the body."[48] The latter obscure Aristotelian formulation in which soul and body are understood to be inseparable from one another has important consequences for literary representations of the soul which present debates between the soul and body in which each bears equal responsibility for the fate of the person. For example, in the Middle English soul/body debate poem "Als I lay in a Winteris Night" the body responds to the Soul's accusations that it has brought them both to ruin by proclaiming that it should have done a better job of regulating the body: "þou berst þe blame and I go quite,/ þou scholdest fram schame ous have yschilt."[49] The idea that the body and soul debate equally with one another is conveyed in this image of the soul in conversation with the body; the raised hands of each indicates that they are both speaking [**figure 4: 'A dysputacion betwyx the saule & the body when it is past oute of the body', from a Carthusian miscellany, executed in Northern England in the second or third quarter of the 15th cent., @ The British Library Board, Additional MS 37049, f. 82r].**[50]

That the soul and body are inextricably intertwined profoundly shapes Langland's representation of the soul, for every spiritual impulse in the poem is entwined with the impulses of the body. Indeed, it becomes difficult to determine where the body ends and where the spirit begins. This is nowhere more evident than in Langland's representation of Need where the spiritual impulse to seek the truth

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[48] Aquinas, Summa theologiae 1a 75. See also Aristotle, Book II, Chapter One, pp. 656-659.
[49] Als I Lay in a winteris nyt," lines 182-184.
[50] That this gesture indicates speech is reinforced by the accompanying poem, which recounts the debate of the body and the skeleton and which is accompanied by additional images; when the debate ends, the skeleton drops its formerly raised hand. For a discussion of this poem, see Robertson, "Kissing."

continually reverts to the pressing problem of the individual and the society's need for food. Indeed, food--how and what we eat—is a recurrent site in the poem for the investigation of the ever-shifting border between the material and the spiritual. [51]

In addition to adopting this obscure concept of the soul as the form of the body, Aquinas also follows Aristotle's more lucid and accessible delineation of the powers or faculties of the soul. In what is known as faculty psychology (a term emerging from the meaning of *facere*, to do, as Raskolnikov points out), Aquinas explains that the soul performs both appetitive and cognitive activities emanating from its two major faculties, will and intellect.[52] In Aquinas's view of the soul, reason takes primacy over the will, understood as an appetite or a power that inclines or moves the person to action. Will is made up of both choice—*Liberum Arbitrium* in C. 16-- and enjoyment, that is, delight in having obtained what was sought. The remainder of the faculties, given different names at different times, includes the internal and external senses and the sensual appetitive aspects of the soul, that is, the concupiscible and irascible appetites. The inner senses, all of which mediate between the outer senses and reason, include some that Will meets elsewhere in allegorical form, such as *Imaginatyf.*

Although the soul Langland presents in Passus 15 outlines this familiar Thomistic faculty psychology, Langland radically defamiliarizes this model of the soul in his paradoxical representation of the soul as a *thing* with no tongue or teeth, which nonetheless speaks. Will tells us he was rocked to sleep by Reason: "Til I sei3,

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[51] See Mann's superb discussion of this dialectic in her *Eating and Drinking,* and *Need.*

[52] Raskolnikov, p. 14.

as it sorcerie were, a sotil þyng wiþalle— / Oon withouten tonge and teeþ, tolde me whider I sholde / And wherof I cam and of what kynde."(B 15: 12-14). In contrast to the familiar image of the soul as a castle, this peculiar image, produced as if by magic, registers, as we shall see, the radical transformation of the idea of the soul from a static entity governed by hierarchically arranged powers hidden from the world to one that is dynamic, non-hierarchical and fully immersed in the world. The poetry then shifts from a description of a weird creature to that creature's presentation of an unexpectedly restrained and systematic inventory of his faculties:

> "The whiles I quykke þe cors," quod he, "called am I *Anima;*
> And whan I wilne and wolde, *Animus* ich hatte;
> And for that I kan and knowe, called am I *mens*, 'þoughte';
> And whan I make mone to God, *Memoria* is my name;
> And whan I deme domes and do as truthe techeþ,
> þanne is *Racio* my righte name, 'Reson,' on Englissh;
> And whan I feele that folk telleþ, my firste name is *Sensus*
> And þat is wit and wisdom, the welle of alle craftes;
> And whan I chalange or chalange noght, chepe or refuse,
> þanne am I Conscience ycalled, Goddes clerk and his notarie;
> And when I love leely Oure Lord and alle oþere,
> þanne is 'Lele Love,' my name and in Latyn *Amor;*
> And whan I flee fro the flessh and forsake the careyne,
> þanne am I spirit spechelees--and *Spiritus* þanne ich hatte.
> Austyn and Ysodurus, eiþer of hem bothe,
> Nempnede me thus to name—now thow myght chese
> How thou coveitist to calle me, now thou knowest alle my names."
> (B XV, lines 23–39)

The soul then recapitulates this naming sequence in Latin: "Anima pro diversis accionibus diversa nomina sortitur; dum vivificat corpus, Anima est; dum vult, Animus est, etc." (B 15, insert after line 39).

Langland's use of Latin and English in this passage makes the static list of the faculties dynamic by replacing forms of the verb "to be" with active verbs and changing the agent of the verbal clause. When the creature describes itself in Latin,

its attributes are designated as permanent states of being; for example, the soul states, "dum vivificat corpus Anima est" and "dum vult, *Animus* est," but when it describes those attributes in English they manifest actions performed by an embodied first-person individual: "whan I wilne and wolde, *Animus* ich hatte." [53] Langland here associates the activity of the will with *animus*, a word often used to designate the mind alone, but here, following the author of *De spiritu et anima*, he calls it *mens*.[54] *Spiritus* is a word referring to the soul after it has left the body. Langland here concentrates his attention on the powers of the soul as they function within the body. In contrast to the soul of Passus 9, this embodied English soul performs actions in daily life. Theological principles gain meaning, then, as the individual enters what Keats called the elemental space of the world.

What appears to be a static list is transformed into a dramatic biography of an agential soul, from birth, when a person is informed with a soul called *anima,* to the manifestation of its most important faculties, to death when it leaves the body and is simply known as *spiritus*.[55] The form of the passage as a paratactic list in which no

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[53] For a more detailed discussion of the interplay between Latin and English in this passage see my *Souls that Matter*, pp. 178-179.

[54] In late medieval philosophy, the relationship between mind and body was conceived as one between soul and body, even though there was a consideration of actions we usually associated with the mind alone such as thinking, called *mens* here. It is Descartes who can be singled out as the person who made the shift from soul to mind. He expressly says that he prefers the latter word, because he wants to limit the soul to the powers of the RATIONAL soul. He doesn't believe in animal souls, let alone plant souls, and since that leaves only the rational soul, it's more apt to refer to it as the mind, which had always been another way of referring to the rational parts of the soul – viz., intellect and will.

[55]Notice that in *De Spiritu et anima* the will is called *voluntas* and is associated with consent as it is in St. Bernard on Conscience. It is worth noting that Langland's seemingly authoritative summary is not a translation of his Latin, but rather a translation of his English list into Latin.

one power is more important than another reinforces the idea that the soul accumulates rather than develops traces of the habits it acquires. In addition, it reinforces its vision of the protean character of the soul as it shifts and changes according to its embodied experiences. Although no one faculty takes precedence over another in this passage, the emphasis in the English on embodied action brings out the inherent meaning of faculty psychology that the soul's powers exist only as they are performed. That such a list occurs relatively late in the poem suggests that a level of self-consciousness is necessary even before such a list is conceivable.

While this section of the poem follows well known Thomistic descriptions of the soul's faculties, Langland's specific sources for this passage are Isidore of Seville's seventh-century *Etymologies* and the twelfth-century pseudo-Augustinian *De Spiritu et Anima*.[56] Isidore tells us the soul is one entity, which we can rightly think of as having parts only inasmuch as we use different terms for the soul "according to the effect of its causes."[57] The later voluntarists return to and develop this Isidorean proposition: the emphasis on the faculties as mere names rather than as really distinct parts becomes of paramount significance to Ockham, who stressed that there is merely a conceptual distinction between the soul and its powers—in his view,

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[56] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* and *De Spiritu et Anima.* Isidore's Latin says, "Pro efficientiis enim causarum diversa nomina sortita est anima…. Dum ergo vivificat corpus, anima est: dum vult, animus est: dum scit, mens est: dum recolit, memoria est: dum rectum iudicat, ratio est: dum spirat, spiritus est: dum aliquid sentit, sensus est. Nam inde animus sensus dicitur pro his quae sentit, unde et sententia nomen accepit." And the list appears in *De Spiritu et Anima*, "Anima nominatur totus homo interior, qua vivificatur, regitur et continetur lutea illa massa, humectata succis, ne are facta dissolvatur. Dum ergo vivificat corpus, anima est; dum recolit, memoria est; dum judicat, ratio est; dum spirat vel contemplatur, Spiritus est; dum sentit, sensus est"(PL 40.803).
[57] Isidore, *Etymologies.*

while one can speak of a will and intellect, the soul is simple, with no distinct parts.[58] Langland's representation of the soul here reflects the idea of a simple soul although that very simplicity is made strange in Langland's presentation of an image of a soul as a thing with no tongue or teeth.

Langland significantly adds to his Latin sources in both English and in his Latin summary the faculty of conscience, although in his version it serves a relatively minor function. Conscience is presented as one who challenges or "chepe," using language that Wood points out is associated with day-to-day legal or mercantile practice, that is, diction associated with the soul as it acts in the world. [59] Later in the poem, conscience will accrue more complex meanings. In his developing representation of the character Conscience, Langland shows features in common with Aquinas, who defines it as "a correcting and guiding spirit accompanying the soul by which it is led away from evil and made to cling to good. …Through the conscience we judge that something should be done or not done, and in this sense conscience is said to excuse, accuse or torment…. all these things follow the actual application of knowledge to what we do."[60]

It is part of Will's soul-making that he learns to let conscience be his guide. Presented in a number of the manuscript[61]s of the poem with a capital C, the character Conscience comes and goes in the poem, but the activities associated with it of "excusing, accusing and tormenting" permeate it. In keeping with Aquinas who argues that the character Conscience develops as it is informed, we see this character

[58] See Pasnau's discussion of the simple soul of the voluntarists, pp. XXX.
[59] Wood, p. 4.
[60] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, 1a 79.13.*
[61] See Wood.

expand from a purely rational faculty unguided by grace (as Carruthers points out), to a faculty at work in the marketplace, to one that takes center stage as it guides the will to witness Christ's suffering, the foundation of the Church and the rise of Antichrist. We also see, however, that it is fallible—just as Aquinas had said it could be-- as it succumbs to Friar Flattery at the end of the poem.

Like Piers Plowman, the character Conscience appears and disappears in the poem and given that Will observes him act in various contexts from the law court to the Church, Conscience can be said to function as a principle in the world not unlike Reason, who John Alford persuasively argues is not meant to indicate the reason of any particular person but rather an idea of reason as a transcendent and absolute moral principle in the world. Conscience is presented as a principle whose strengths and limitations Will needs to come to know. But just as reason is not only a principle in the world but also an aspect of Will's soul, so the character Conscience, too, in the dialectics that are characteristic of the poem's methods, is as much a faculty within Will as one in action in the world without.[62]

Langland adds not only conscience to the list of faculties in the Latin sources, but also and most significantly, Amor, an act of the will.[63] In his version of the faculties, then, Langland highlights the two faculties of the soul that become of

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[62] Alford, pp. 199-216.

[63] In a footnote to his essay on Piers Plowman B, Wittig observes these additions but underestimates their importance as an anticipation of Langland's development of each of these faculties as the poem progresses. He writes, "One might simply suggest that Langland adapts a traditional list of names and powers of the soul without attempting to present a rigid faculty psychology. In the spirit of this tradition he can add Amor and Conscientia in to emphasize the roles of charity and disciplined judgment, and sharpen the role of free choice in C by adding Liberum arbitrium to the list." See Wittig, p. 213, n. 9.

paramount importance as the poem develops: conscience and love. By harnessing conscience as its guide, the will can even more powerfully enact its characteristic powers, to love, to enjoy, and to choose. By giving a privileged role to conscience, a form of practical reason, rather than to reason alone, Langland creates out of prevailing ideas about the soul an embodied vision of the soul whose faculties emerge as they perform socially meaningful actions in daily life.

But before the character Conscience can fully direct the will, our protagonist, Will, must learn, first, that the will's primary activity is to love, and, second, that he has to search for both faculties, conscience and will, deep within himself.

4. The Will is the Ruler of the Soul

It is through his engagement with the much critically analyzed image of the tree of charity that Will discovers that the soul within him, made in the trinitarian image of God, is ruled ultimately by the Will in the form of love.[64] In this image, as well as the next one of the soul as a plough, Langland shifts attention from one element to another in what is a metonymic chain–that is, from the tree to the ground to the apple on the tree, and later, from the plough to the ground to the harvest. Unlike the castle and the thing, the tree of charity is not explicitly an image of the soul *per se*, but implicitly it conveys the essence of the soul as a force for love (also called caritas or charity) that is located deep within the individual but that also emanates outwards beyond itself and into to the world. As we shall see, this image conveys a voluntarist understanding of the soul in which the will, the source of love,

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[64] Particularly illuminating analyses of this image are those by Salter, Pearsall, Aers and Simpson. Aers in *Piers Plowman and Allegory,* pp. 77-109, provides a particularly extensive and sensitive analysis of the passage.

predominates over reason. In this section of the poem, then, in keeping with definitions of the soul articulated by Ockham, "Will is the Ruler of the Soul."[65] Will's contemplation of the image furthers his soul-making, as we shall see, by teaching him that his soul is not only the simple strange entity that must perform various acts, including thinking and judging that he learned about during his encounter with the soul as thing, but also is a substance that is both nourished by and nourishes others through the primary activity of the will: love.

Anima explains the meaning of charity—synonymous with the word love-- through his powerful image of charity as a tree. The tree recalls the many kinds of tree images readily available in the period, from trees of virtue to trees of life including the image that appears in British Library MS Additional 37049 that presents charity as a leaf on a tree of life **(figure 5: The Tree of Life, from a Carthusian miscellany, executed in Northern England in the second or third quarter of the 15th cent.,@The British Library Board, Additional MS 37049, f. 25).** Each of these images provided visual guides to moral development in terms of vegetal growth. Anima describes the tree as if he were looking at just such an image:

> 'It is a ful trie tree,' quod he, 'trewely to telle.
> Mercy is þe more þerof; the myddul stok is ruþe;
> The leves ben lele wordes, þe lawe of Holy Chirche;
> The blosmes beþ buxom speche and benigne lokynge;
> Pacience hatte þe pure tree, and pore symple of herte,
> And so þorugh God and þorugh goode men groweþ the fruyt Charite'

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65 Will asks about the nature of charity at the same moment in the poem when he first names himself. This is an ironic moment in that he does not realize that his identity is not as much revealed by his name as by the charity that is within him and something he must enact, a fact he learns by an encounter with yet another image of the soul as a tree. For Ockham's emphasis on the primacy of the Will in his idea of the soul see Kent.

(B16:4-9).

Told first in the outer dream that charity is the Church, Will must enter a dream within a dream, even further from ordinary consciousness, to realize that charity is also the most significant aspect of his inner self and the primary activity of the will. Anima explains:

> ‘It [Charity] groweþ in a gardyn,' quod he, ‘that God made hymselve;
> Amyddes mannes body þe more is of þat stokke.
> Herte highte þe herber þat it inne groweþ,
> And *Liberum Arbitrium* haþ þe lond to ferme,
> Vnder Piers the Plowman to piken it and to weden it.'
> ‘Piers þe Plowman!' quod I þo, and al for pure joye
> That I herde nempne his name anoon I swowned after (B 16: 13-19).

Piers's name precipitates Will's entry into a different state of perception. Anima had, in fact, told Will earlier that Piers could grant him deeper perception of the will: “Clerkes have no knowing… but by werkes and by wordes./ Ac Piers þe Plowman parcayveþ moore depper/ That is the wille”(B 15, 198 Will is told to gaze on the tree intently: “Piers the Plowman . . ./ . . .bad me toten on þe tree, on top and on roote. /Wiþ þre piles was it underpight--I parceyved it soone. “ (B 16: 21-23). The alliterative stress on the word “toten” in the line signals the intense state of absorption in the image that Will must enter into in order to apprehend what is impossible to comprehend, a total cosmic vision, one from the top of the tree to the root, and one that encompasses all of human history.

As numerous critics have observed, Anima's initial tree image is transformed into a moving image, which unfolds before Will over time.[66] Will first engages in a dialogue with Piers who explains how the trinitarian props of the tree protect it from forces that threaten its growth, from wicked winds and worms of fleshly sin to the more grievous forces of the devil that attack the root itself. Engaging directly with the practices of fruit cultivation, including staking the tree and carefully preparing and weeding the ground beneath it, the image shows Will how the tree grows over time as it first produces fragile blossoms and then plump and tempting apples. Not only does the tree suggest the soul within but also it produces fruit the devil wishes to possess and that Will himself wishes to eat. Told that the fruit is under the special care of *Liberum Arbitrium*, Will, as he becomes a participant in this scene, comes for the first time to perceive the motivating power of the will within his own soul. As Zeeman writes, "In the vision of a Tree of Charity that grows in the human heart the seeker of *Piers Plowman* gets a sudden sight of the spiritual potential of the soul. When he asks to taste the apples of the tree he expresses his desire to comprehend and absorb this vision in every way, spiritually, 'inwardly,' even physically."[67] The temporal scheme of his own biography as he comes to desire the apple is mapped on to the larger temporal scheme of salvation history as the drama evokes the temptation of Adam and Eve and the devil's acquisition of the souls, which in turn prompts Will's desire to learn more about the nature of God's love for humanity.

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[66] See especially discussions of the image by Pearsall, Aers, "Piers Plowman," and Simpson, "Introduction."
[67] Zeeman, p. 2.

Powerfully invigorating an image common to Christian iconography, Langland simultaneously situates Will within the Christian collective, invites him to witness Christian history and teaches him not only that his own soul is made in the image of God but also that he needs to learn how to love through witnessing God's suffering as well as the salvation made possible through it.[68]

4*. Soul as Plow and the Fallibility of Conscience*

The image of a fruit tree cultivated by Piers anticipates the final image of the soul in the poem, one that takes us right back to the poem's beginning: the soul as plow. In Passus 19, in a Pentecostal vision filtered through Conscience, Grace gives to Piers a plow as a weapon with which to fight Anti-Christ and gives him oxen to draw the plow:

> Grace gaf Piers a teeme--foure grete oxen.
> That oon was Luk, a large beest and a lowe chered,
> And Mark, and Mathew the þridde--myghty beestes boþe;
> And joyned to hem oon Johan, moost gentil of alle (B19: 264-267).

The plow has various significations from a literal tool of agricultural labour to an allegorical instrument for the cultivation of the soul, but the discussion of the four evangelists in connection to this entity might also recall Jerome's explanation of the structure of the soul itself in his commentary on Ezekiel in which he parses the four beasts associated with the four evangelists as follows: "Most people interpret the man, the lion, and the Ox as the rational and appetitive parts of the soul…And the fourth part, that which the Greeks call *synteirisis*, the spark of conscience—this is the eagle which is not mixed up with the other three, but corrects them when they go

[68] For a discussion of the soul's shape as an historical phenomenon see Simpson, *Introduction*, pp. 167-245.

wrong."[69] Thus, the plow with its oxen at one level signifies the soul itself marshaling all its powers to engage in both literal and metaphorical plowing. Given the fact that Langland focuses attention not simply on the oxen, but specifically on the cultivation the plow enacts, that is, the cultivation of souls, Langland's oxen-led plow in Passus 19 stands not only for the individual soul, but also for one in the community of souls that makes up the Church.

This section of the poem presents an extended metaphor of plowing, then sowing and then harvesting, basic labour in the production of food, as aspects of the Church's role in the cultivation of souls. These fundamental agricultural activities are beautifully illustrated in the Luttrell psalter. (**figures 5,6,7: 5.Plowing with oxen, from the Luttrell Psalter, executed in England, c. 1320-1340, @ The British Library Board,, Additional MS. 42130, f. 170r 6. Man sowing, from the Luttrell Psalter, executed in England, c. 1320-1340, @ The British Library Board, Additional MS. 42130, f. 170v7. Harvesting, from the Luttrell Psalter, executed in England, c. 1320-1340,@ The British Library Board, Additional MS. 42130, f. 172v)**, As Stephen Barney and Carl Schmidt have explained with reference to hundreds of agricultural images in the Bible, plowing was understood allegorically as "the preaching of the gospel [through what Barney tells was known as the 'plowshares of the tongue'] through which the 'earth' of human hearts is prepared to receive the 'seeds' of the virtues."[70] Salter and Pearsall describe the presentation of the plow as a "diagrammatic allegory…[that] lacks in evocative power."[71] Yet the

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[69] Potts, p. 79.
[70] Barney, and Schmidt, Notes to B 19, p. 708.
[71] Salter and Pearsall, *Introduction*, p. 15

image becomes richer when it is considered not only in terms of its biblical references, but also in terms of the layers of meaning it accrues as agricultural images accumulate in the poem from the plant of peace in Passus 1 to the plowing of the half-acre to the tree of charity.

The plow of Passus 19 clearly recalls the plow we encounter in the *visio* and both the earlier and later plows interweave literal and allegorical significations although in different ways. Aers argues that Langland "deprives" the *visio's* plow of its allegorical signification and that it only gains meaning after Will has experienced Christ's suffering.[72] As he writes, "The Incarnation, life of Jesus, Passion, Resurrection and *Harrowing* of hell and Ascension, followed by the Pentecostal gifts, release the allegorical potential of the agricultural images."[73] Although Will does not yet see the allegorical signification of the *visio's* plow, I suggest that it is as *available* in the earlier image as it is in the later one. Similarly, even though the later image seems to emphasize its allegorical meaning, its literal meanings are just as important. The cardinal virtues, for example, are explained in literal and allegorical terms (in 19:283-298): Temperance, for example, avoids spiced meat and fine cloth; fortitude will keep a person from illness. In this climactic vision, as Aers points out in a later study, "the acquired cardinal virtues enable someone to flourish as a human being and achieve an end proportionate to created nature. . . Characteristic of Langland's theology of grace, humans are passive receivers of divine gifts beyond

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[72] Aers uses this word frequently throughout his analysis of the plow image, *Piers Plowman and Allegory*, pp. 109-131; see especially, pp. 118, 124, 130.
[73] Aers, p. 113.

comprehension or merit *and als*o active agents."[74] Grace's gifts include the clerical, commercial, manorial and contemplative crafts, that is, activities to do with everyday labour.

The fair field full of folk has become a fair field full of souls in need of cultivation. Will's soul now embraces the perspectives of the individual, the historical and the collective. His understanding of the soul has expanded from a recognition of the need to act, to an appreciation, through his witnessing of Christ's suffering, of the need to act with love, and finally to an acknowledgment of the power of acting in concert with others in the formation of a well-functioning and integrated society of souls under the guidance of the Church.

5. The Resilience of the Will

Arriving at Passus 20, we seem to have returned to a Thomistic view of the soul that Will learned about earlier in that a form of reason, Conscience, guides the soul. Yet the will as it emanates in love is not subordinate to this form of reason. Although the entire last vision is dominated by Conscience, and he is the final character we see in the poem as he sets off on his pilgrimage, Kynde reminds Will before he enters the Barn of Unity that it is his will that should predominate in his soul-making activities: "'Counseille þe me, Kynde,' quod I, 'what craft be best to lerne?'/'Lerne to love,' quod Kynde, 'and leef alle oþere.'" (B 20, 207-208). Love, or charity, is one of the primary virtues of the will, not of reason. In recounting the breakdown of the smoothly functioning Barn of Unity, this *passus* returns us again to the energies of the voluntarist soul, one in which the stumbling but motivating faculty of the will takes charge, for it is ultimately the force of his will that overcomes

[74] Aers, *Beyond Reformation*? p. 33.

Conscience's fallibility in having succumbed to Friar Flattery and which leads him away from the world of corruption and out into the world again. Such energies, then, become available to Will who witnesses here the force of the will as it redirects Conscience away from the corrupt institution.

The concluding lines of the poem are obscure for we do not know where Will is located: is he still inside the Barn of Unity and simply witnesses Conscience's departure? Is he among the company of fools who do not follow the devil? Or at the moment he wakes up (the very last line of Passus 20) is his own conscience awakened? The poem concludes:

> "By Crist!' quod Conscience þo, " I wole bicome a pilgrym,
> And walken as wide as þe world lasteþ,
> To seken Piers þe Plowman, þat Pryde myghte destruye,
> And þat freres hadde a fyndyng, þat for nede flateren
> And countrepledeþ me, Conscience. Now Kynde me avenge,
> And sende me hap and heele, til I have Piers þe Plowman!'
> And siþþe he gradde after Grace, til I gan awake. (B 20-381-387)

Is the cry for grace here a sign that Will has finally recognized his dependence on grace (recalling a late Augustinian emphasis on the inadequacy of human efforts) or does this passage simply a renewal of a search for grace that has always been in progress? Conscience recognizes is dependence on grace; Will's understanding of his need for grace is obscure. Regardless of Will's place either within or without the Barn of Unity and of the degree to which Conscience's pilgrimage to some extent signifies Will's own, we have returned to the beginning of the poem where the narrator, like Conscience, who announces that he will "walken as wide as the world lasteth" (B 20, 382), searches "wyde in the worlde."(B 1.4) Just as soul-making for Keats involves immersing oneself in the immanence of the world, so the ending of Langland's poem directs the dreamer, Will's, and our attention outward to seek

salvation "wide" in the world. There is no reason to view this conclusion as an end, when it takes us back yet again to the beginning of the poem. Indeed, we have learned to expect infinite oscillations between ends and beginnings through the negative dialectics of the poem but spiral-like, Will here returns to a beginning that is shaped by his experiences of the world ("circumstances") in which he has acquired accidents, that is, if not moral habits, at least predispositions towards them

The ending of the poem makes clear the fallibility of conscience, a revelation that yet again suggests Langland's engagement with voluntarist thought. Although Aquinas discussed the fallibility of conscience, Langland, as Aers has shown in his groundbreaking book, *Beyond Reformation?,* demonstrates significant commonalities between Langland's vision of the failure of the Church in Passus 19 and Ockham's affirmation of evangelical freedom in his account of the individual's responsibility to speak the truth in the face of institutional, even ecclesiastical, corruption. Ockham's discussion emerges from his consideration of a long-standing discussion of the predicament of the friars told that they must submit their will to a superior *unless* it contradicted their soul's health.[75] Ockham's emphasis on the obligation of the individual to speak out against corruption, as Aers has shown, "clashes sharply with the hierocratic ideal of comprehensive direction of man's spiritual life from above."[76] As Shogimen explains, Ockham's vindication of the right of any Catholic to dissent from a heretical pope has implications for the place of the layman, even a layman such as Langland's protagonist Will, in pursuit of knowledge, for "Ockham makes clear that ultimately any individual Christian can take such radical action. Should all

[75] The history of the debate is summarized in Shogimen, pp. 123-131.
[76] Aers, *Beyond Reformation?*, p. 31.

the experts in theology, the pope and the cardinals teach that the Christian faith is false, an 'illiterate' individual who has the correct knowledge of faith could act as judge over them."[77] Ockham's position, however, is not as individualistic as it might seem. As Shogimen writes, "This is not to say that Ockham is a preacher of rebellious anarchism. On the contrary, his programme of radical action is anchored in a renewed vision of the Christian community where the authority of an individual's conscience is ensured and the individual's commitment to the common good is enshrined."[78] Ockham's assurance that the Christian community can be renewed by the assertion of an individual's conscience helps us see beyond the seemingly apocalyptic ending of the poem.

At the end of his poem, then, Langland seems to be dramatizing the far-reaching effects of political theory like that of Ockham on his representation of the status of the soul within a corrupt institution. It is possible that Langland knew not only Ockham's political commentaries but also his discussions of the will, and indeed the works of a number of voluntarists. But given how little we know about Langland's education, we can only for the moment point to commonalities between Langland's thought and that of the voluntarists. The similarities between Langland's commitments and those of the voluntarists have only begun to be studied. Voluntarism has many guises, as Bonnie Kent has explained, and is associated with the thought of numerous theologians who vary greatly in their consideration of the

[77] Shogimen, p. 144.
[78] Shogimen, p. 153.

nature and function of the will.[79] Just as the poem is not simply Augustinian or Thomistic, so it would also be a mistake to deem it simply voluntarist. Nonetheless the poem's engagement with a number of issues like those found in voluntarist commentaries deserve further careful scrutiny.

Among the issues worth pursuing further are those raised by critics such as Janet Coleman who proposed some time ago that the poem demonstrates its embrace of the voluntarist principle of the widely read Dominican Robert Holcot that "*facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam.*"[80] In his more recent book, *Salvation and Sin*, Aers argues that such an emphasis conflicts with the Christocentrism of the poem; yet his discussion elsewhere of the presence of absence in the poem is in keeping with voluntarist discussions of God's hiddenness (in their discussions, for example, of the *Deus absconditus*).[81] However, Langland seems less interested in exploring voluntarist inquiries into the nature of an arbitrary and indiscernible God than in their assertion on the resilience and autonomy of the individual will (taken up by voluntarists following Scotus) as well as their acknowledgment of the frustrations experienced by the viator who cannot know whether or not he is saved. That the protagonist of the poem is named Will points us towards a voluntarist focus in the poem.

We might, in addition, explore the particularly voluntarist emphasis of the poem's eschewal of the soul's mystical union with God. As Heiko Oberman

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[79] Kent surveys the varieties of voluntarist thought in the period in the introduction of her *The Virtues of the Will*, pp. 1-38.
[80] Coleman, p. 24.
[81] See Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, pp. 83-131; for his studies of the presence and absence of Christ in the poem, see his "Sacrament of the Altar," and *Beyond Reformation?*

explains, for many voluntarists "intuitive knowledge of God is strictly the prerogative of the *Beati*, the members of the Church Triumphant."[82] It is consonant with voluntarism that Will reaches no final or secure vision of God. Langland does not end his poem with the triumphant Eucharistic celebration of union with God that we experience at the end of Passus 18; indeed, Will falls asleep in the middle of the Easter mass. (Will's falling asleep cuts two ways, however—on the one hand it is a sign of his spiritual failure; on the other, it allows him to perceive more deeply.) Yet, as Aers has argued in his discussion of the sacrament of the altar, the elusiveness of the Real Presence does not mean that Langland does not believe in it.[83] Will's search for union accords with a different kind of affective mysticism possible in voluntarism, one, as Oberman explains, that involves "the outreach of the soul to a union with God through the desire of love which resides not in the intellective but in the affective power of the soul and has not the *verum* but the *bonum* as is object."[84] This kind of affective desire to do well in the world drives Will in *Piers Plowman* but the ending affirms the power of the will-- to propel the individual to channel that desire.

It is difficult not to see the conclusion of the poem as profoundly apocalyptic with its representation of the rise of Antichrist and the corruption of the Church and all its officials. Yet, even though, as both Bowers and Zeeman have shown, the poem charts one moment after another of the failures of the will, it also affirms its

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82 Oberman, *Harvest*, p. 329.

83 As he writes in *Sanctifying Signs*, p. 32, "to discern the body of Christ in *Piers Plowman* we will have to follow a complex dialectic of absence and presence, a dialectic which is inseparable from Langland's representation of the mystical body of Christ, the Church."

84 Oberman, p. 331.

resilience.[85] Expressing a radical skepticism and resisting the impulse towards finality or closure, the poem emphasizes not the end of the quest, but its renewal. Langland emphasizes that aspect of the will that take prominence in voluntarist thought: its freedom. As the forerunner to voluntarism, Peter Olivi, wrote, " nothing is as beloved and as dear to us as freedom and power of our own will."[86] Will's soul-making seems consonant with the ways in which voluntarists "treat the will as an autonomous object that may or may not follow the advice of the intellect, or the dispositions ingrained through past action."[87] As Aers points out, though, Langland repeatedly rejects the speculation of the friars; he articulates, rather, a dialectical relationship in which he rejects the speculation of the voluntarists at the same time that he embraces the autonomy and resilience of the will they embrace.[88] In sum, soul-making for Langland involves a continual reaffirmation of the ineffable force of the will as it engages the elemental space of the world.

6. Writing Poetry as Soul-Making

In the spirit of Will's defense of his poetry or "makynge" (12. 23) as play (12.24) (and therefore as especially well suited to the ineffable and changeable soul he represents and of the freedom of the will that defines that soul), I conclude now by turning to three medieval riddles that reveal another vital aspect of soul-making

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[85] Such a renewal of the will is in keeping with both voluntarism and Augustinian theology; Zeeman points out p. 30, " as Augustine and Gregory argue: the soul's experiences of itself as tempted and at risk enables it to apprehend its own nature and its relation to God: the experience of failure and loss is often connected to the renewal of spiritual desire."

[86] Olivi, *De perfectione evangelica*, q. 5. Cited in Pasnau, XXX.

[87] Pasnau, XXX

[88] For Aers repeated references to Langland's dismissal of the speculation of the friars see his *Beyond Reformation*?

associated with plowing that is implicit throughout *Piers Plowman*: writing. These riddles are, of course, in a distinctly different mode from that of Langland's poem, but his delight in riddling wordplay is precisely what Sister Mary Clemente Davlin brought our attention to in the poem and Langland would certainly been aware of the plow's association with writing from classical times.[89] Here are Tatwine and Eusebius's eighth-century riddles: Tatwine's:

> Effferus exuviis populator me spoliavit
> Vitalis pariter flatus spiramina dempsit
> In planum me iterum campum sed verterat auctor
> Frugiferos cultor sulcos mox irrigat undis,
> Omnigenum nardi messem mea prata rependunt
> Qua sanis victum et Izesis praestabo medalam.
>
> A fierce robber ripped off my hide
> Plundered the breath-pores of my skin.
> I was shaped by an artist and author
> Into a flat field. Furrowed and wet,
> I yield strange fruit. My meadows bloom

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[89] Davlin, *Game.* John H. Henkel tells us that Isidore of Seville was the first to draw an etymological link between plowing and writing, but also gave evidence that it was known in the first century. Isidore claimed the ancients used to write as they plowed (in a kind of writing from left to right and then alternately from right to left called *boustrophedo*n, from the Greek for ox-turning) and that rustics "to this day" call furrows, verses (*Etymologies* 6,14.). Virgil uses the association of the plow with writing especially in his *Georgics*. See Henkel, "Plowing as a Metaphor for Poetic Composition," and his
Writing poems on trees. There is another eighth-century late Latin or early vernacular Italian version of this riddle called the *Veronese Riddle*:

"se pareba boves
alba pratalia araba
et albo versorio teneba
et negro semen seminaba"

Paraphrased as "He held the oxen in front of him with/white lawns/and had a white plow/and a black seed sowed"
See https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indovinello_veronese.
My thanks to Stefano Milonia for alerting my attention to it.

Food for the healthy, health for the sick.[90]

And Eusebius:

Antea per nos vox resonabat verba nequaquam,
Distincta sine numc voce edere verba solumus;
Candida sed cum arva lustramur milibus atris;
Viva nihil loquimur, responsum mortua famur.

Once silent, voiceless, wordless, dumb—
Now voiceless, silent, bearing words we come,
White fields crossed by myriad black tracks:
Alive we are dumb—dead, answer back. [91]

These two riddles about parchment together tell of the transformation of the once three-dimensional animal into a two-dimensional surface, which when unfolded, becomes three-dimensional again—a fertile meadow—marked by the furrows made by the scribe's pen. Like the Tree of Charity, that plowed field then produces "fruit." The authors draw on a common metaphor of verse as a plow's furrow: just as a farmer turns his plow to make furrows in the field, so the lines of poems themselves, the black tracks, create turns at the end of the lines, that is, verse. A more compressed form of these themes can be found in a traditional Scottish Gaelic lyric:

Treabhadh dheibh
All Talamh geal
Is tug a chur
Le d'inntinn[92]

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[90] Enigma from Wright, p. 526; translation from Williamson, p. 178.
[91] Enigma from Bitterli, p. 183; Translation from Williamson, p. 178)
[92] Kathleen Reddy of the University of Glasgow introduced me to this riddle, which is commonly available on the Internet as a Scottish Gaelic proverb. See , for example, the last entry on this website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/tbh/beulchainnt/pages/index.shtml?page=toimhseachain

("Black plowing on the white ground/ you push it with your mind.") Drawing on the image of writing as the production of black lines on a white surface, this riddle emphasizes the power of the mind—or what in the middle ages would be called the soul-- that drives the body in the production of writing. Just as a plowman guides the plow, so the mind or soul pushes the pen across the page producing words that take on a life of their own, flowers that blossom in the plowed field, expressions of the soul that transcend death. Just as Langland's plow is both structured like a soul and engaged in the activity of the cultivation of the soul, so the plow in these three riddles is guided by the soul/mind to produce the "strange fruit" of verse.

William Langland, if not the character Will himself, is engaged in an activity of writing commonly associated with plowing in the period. That Will himself was understood as a writer is asserted, as I mentioned above, in B 12, when Imagynatyf scolds him for writing verse when he could say prayers: "thow medlest thee with makynge-- and my3test go seye thi Sauter" (B12, 16.) Furthermore, in the C text when Will is interrogated by Reason about his laziness he is accused for writing rather than not performing proper work. Lamenting his life of idleness, he comments "For I made if tho men as resoun me tauhte," which Donaldson translates as "For I wrote rhymes of those men as Reason taught me," and which Pearsall glosses "composed verses about."[93] Anne Middleton suggests, that "Langland imagined and presented his writing as work analogous to agricultural labor, a notion that would

[93] See Donaldson, *Appendix*, l. 5, and Pearsall, C-text, line 5, note p. 98. In support of his translation, Pearsall cites Kane, 1965, p. 4.

seem to imply the text is not merely the result of, but is in some sense constituted by, the history of the poet's activity."[94]

Langland's particular mode of poetry—personification allegory—heightens the soul-making capacities of his verse by animating language: he gives words like Conscience, Reason, Need, and Hunger souls which allow them to speak and interact with the world.[95] We have seen how the dialectical method of the poem suits the uncertain development of the will in the poem. The change of genre as the poem, progresses as Simpson has shown, marks the poem's shift from reason (one consonant with a Thomistic intellectualist model of the soul) to the affective (one consonant with a voluntarist one).[96] We have also seen how Will's encounters with images of the soul and its faculties have progressively informed him, that is have made him progressively conscious of what it means to be a person with a soul. This consciousness furthermore has taught him the primary activity of the soul should be to love and to seek love, a primary activity of the will.

Poetry, with its arational, non-verbal dimensions (what recent poets have called its non-semantic elements, such as rhythm, meter, line length, and sound) is particularly well suited to an exploration of the ineffability and unpredictability of the soul in which the will predominates.[97] Even the alliterative line itself seems apt for the earthly focussed soul-making Langland presents. Langland's long line, saturated with alliteration, is inherently thick, and thus apt for the image of the furrow that

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[94] Paraphrased by Justice, p. 2. See Middleton, "Acts of Vagrancy," pp. 208-17.
[95] I am grateful to Kate Crassons for suggesting this further link between the soul and writing in the very form of the poem.
[96] Simpson, "From Reason to Affective Knowledge" and *Piers: An Introduction*.
[97] For a paradigmatic essay on the non-semantic elements of poetry see McCaffery, pp. 201-221.

Isidore tells us "rustics" called verse; just as the soil resists the plow that turns it over, so the four beat alliterative long line with its variable alliterative patterns mimics the uncertain progress of the will as it slows reading down.[98] Furthermore, the slow reading the line requires helps make the reader conscious of the poet's craft.

What does writing do but bring us to consciousness of ourselves, our place in the world, and of the world itself, precisely what Will learns as he is informed in the poem? Furthermore, in Langland's vision—and it is significant that he calls the parts of the poem we have been considering, a vision---writing brings us to a particular form of consciousness, one guided by conscience; that is, for Langland writing is both an ethical act and a means to impart ethics to others. Will's process of becoming informed then has taken him from an understanding of his own divinely inspired nature and out into the world where he has witnessed a supreme act of love and has learned that this is the primary act his soul must perform. And then he has learned that his actions in the world, even acts of love, must be guided by conscience. He moves in a cyclical negative dialectical process of soul-making that will continually recur just as the episodes of Christ's life continually recur in the liturgical year, even as he himself moves forward in a teleological process from life to death.

But of course it takes the reader to reanimate the once living words of the author/scribe when he or she infuses those words with his or her own breath. Not only does the act of writing and rewriting cultivate the field of the page for Langland and cultivate in us that primary act of the soul, love, an act motivated by the will and

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[98] See note 84.

guided by conscience, but also we, as readers, engage in our own soul making as we read and reread this magnificent poem.[99]

[99] This essay could never have been written without the thorough and generous philosophical guidance of Robert Pasnau, the intellectual direction and encouragement of James Simpson in person and in his published work. I am also grateful to Nicolette Zeeman for a timely and engaging conversation about my proposed paper and for her discerning comments on my revised draft, to Kate Crassons, David Benson and Jeremy Smith for their careful and challenging readings and to David Aers for kindly reading the essay at a late stage. Adrian and Streete also gave encouraging responses to the talk version of this essay. Georgina Wilde, Mark Amsler and Kristin Morrison also made invaluable suggestions for revision. I would also like to thank the loyal attendees of the *University of Glasgow Piers Plowman Reading Group*: Sophie Conaghan-Sexon, Johanna Green, Pamela King, Diane Scott, Fraser Dallachy, Kristin Morrison, Lynn Verschuren and the late brilliant Desmond O'Brien. Above all, I am grateful to Jeffrey Robinson for his continual support during the production of this essay and for his illuminating insights into the nature of poetry.