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## Langland Parrhesiastes

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### Recommended Citation

Ian Cornelius, "Langland Parrhesiastes," in *Medieval Literary Voices: Embodiment, Materiality and Performance*, ed. Louise D'Arcens and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 111–30.

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# Langland parrhesiastes\*

Ian Cornelius

2021-09-26

## Abstract

The ancient Greek word *parrhēsia* designates speech that is bold, frank, and free, holding nothing back; a *parrhēsiastēs* is a person who gives voice to such speech. Although the word was little used in Latin literature and had no precise Latin equivalent, the concept was transmitted to medieval western Europe in rhetorical theory and the New Testament. In this essay I propose that the concept of *parrhēsia* may help to register the irruptive force, pointedness, risks, and complexity of certain acts of saying in *Piers Plowman*, a fourteenth-century English vision poem. For most of this essay, I focus on a single discursive feature of *Piers Plowman*: moral admonishment addressed in the second person to audiences outside the represented world of the poem. I argue that monitory address is an important and well-defined feature of *Piers Plowman*, that the poet's confidence in his monitory voice grows during his composition of the poem, and that this feature of the poem culminates in Conscience's parrhesiastic addresses to bishops and the King in the C Version Prologue. As a coda to this argument, I propose a reading of the dreamer as a figure of wisdom-seeking *parrhēsia*.

keywords: address, censorship, English literature, fraternal correction, *parrhēsia*, philosophical dialogue, *Piers Plowman*, poetry, versions

## 1 A missing term

*Parrhēsia* means outspokenness, frankness, or boldness – literally, speech that says all there is to say, holding nothing back (<  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$  'all, whole' +  $\rho\acute{\eta}\eta\sigma\upsilon\varsigma$  'speech'). A *parrhēsiastēs* is a person who gives voice to such speech. First recorded from fifth-century BCE Athens, *parrhēsia* named the right of Athenian citizens to speak their minds in democratic assembly, or, more darkly, the loud and unhinged voices that may take over such a platform of free expression. The word was a contested site in fourth-century debates about Athenian democracy. Around the same time, it was transposed into other contexts, where it underwent corresponding developments in sense. For Plato's Socrates, *parrhēsia* could name an unwavering commitment to say what one believes, however unpopular the belief and regardless of consequences. So conceived, *parrhēsia* became an attribute of moral character necessary to the pursuit of wisdom. It was cultivated as a virtue by the Hellenistic and late antique philosophical schools and

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\*This is the author's typescript of an essay published in *Medieval Literary Voices: Embodiment, Materiality and Performance*, ed. Louise D'Arcens and Sif Rikharðsdóttir (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 111–29. Please cite the published version.

recognised as an essential component of philosophical friendship. The concept was also adapted to political expression in non-democratic polities, where the courtier or advisor who confronted a king with a hard truth was said to enact *parrhēsia* at risk to himself. In this and other senses, *parrhēsia* was explicitly opposed to flattery, that is, feeding listeners the words they may want to hear. Yet students in the schools of rhetoric were taught to assume the trappings of *parrhēsia* for calculated advantage. Christianity transposed all these usages into a new register. In the New Testament and subsequent Christian writings, *parrhēsia* names the righteous boldness of the faithful in petitionary prayer, proclamation of Christ, correction of errant brethren, and martyrdom – hence courage facing God, community, and persecutors.<sup>1</sup>

*Parrhēsia* is a missing term in David Lawton's capacious recent study of literary voice. For Lawton, 'voice' names 'the human agency of words, that which is capable of translation from text to reader'.<sup>2</sup> It is what binds textuality, interiority, and community. Lawton's pursuit of this concept begins with the apostle Paul, a choice 'all but inevitable, for it is Paul who determines the bounds of a medieval view of voice, and whose example is finally most vociferous'.<sup>3</sup> What interests Lawton in Paul's voice-laden epistles is the tension between unity and multiplicity – between the unique voice of the Spirit and 'many kinds of voyces in the world' (1 Cor. 14:10; KJV). Paul exhorts and instructs; he 'attempts to hold together the disparate and scattered communities of his followers around the Mediterranean' and he constructs for this purpose 'an authoritative voice' that 'is nonetheless supremely self-conscious'.<sup>4</sup> In passages quoted by Lawton in the King James translation, Paul writes of using 'great plainness of speech' with his followers in Corinth (2 Cor. 3:12) and proclaims, 'Great is my boldness of speech towards you' (2 Cor. 7:4). The Greek expression is πολλή παρρησία, 'much boldness'. The rendering 'great plainness' is justified at 2 Cor. 3:12 by the rhetorical conception of *parrhēsia* as undisguised truthfulness. Though Lawton parses with care the Greek and Latin texts of 1 Cor. 14:10, he does not reach behind the King James translation of the passages from Second Corinthians, so *parrhēsia* remains an absent presence in his literary history of voice. To unfold the meaning of these passages would require a long commentary and is not my intention.<sup>5</sup> *Parrhēsia*, as used by Paul, is underwritten by his evangelical mission and perhaps not unconnected to his self-proclaimed foolishness. I retrieve the Greek word in the present context because I wish to recommend it as an addition to our critical

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<sup>1</sup>For various aspects of *parrhēsia* see K. Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*, trans. R. Franciscano, first English ed., revised and updated (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 221–5; I. Sluiter and R. M. Rosen (eds), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Philodemus, *On Frank Criticism*, eds D. Konstan et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); E. Schleier, 'Παρρησία, παρρησιάζομαι', in G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds), G. W. Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 9 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), v, 871–86; S. B. Marrow, 'Parrhēsia and the New Testament', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 44:3 (1982), 431–46, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43716236> [accessed 21 December 2019]; and I. van Renswoude, *The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Michel Foucault demonstrates the vitality of the concept. His principal lectures on this topic are published in English as M. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*, ed. F. Gros, trans. G. Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (the Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, ed. F. Gros, trans. G. Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); see too M. Foucault, *Discours et vérité: précédé de 'La parrhēsia'*, eds H.-P. Fruchaud, D. Lorenzini, and F. Gros (Paris: Vrin, 2016); and É. Balibar, 'Dire, contredire: sur les formes de la parrhēsia selon Foucault', in *Libre parole* (Paris: Galilée, 2018), pp. 81–120.

<sup>2</sup>D. Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>See V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 206–7, 229–33, 237–8, 385.

vocabulary for a literary history of voice. More narrowly, I suggest that the word may help us to register the irruptive force, pointedness, and complexity of certain acts of saying in the great fourteenth-century English vision poem *Piers Plowman*. William Langland, the presumed author of that poem, was a parrhesiastes in more senses than one.

## 2 *Piers Plowman* and *parrhēsia*

The voice of *Piers Plowman* has always seemed at least double. Edwin D. Craun, quoting an early study by Lawton, remarks that the ‘general voice’ of the poem ‘is public, retaining “the social activism, the militant readiness to rebuke high and low on issues of public policy or spiritual welfare, that we associate with late medieval teaching and preaching.”’<sup>6</sup> This is the element of Pauline *parrhēsia*, refracted through medieval Christianity. In a second aspect, the voice of the poem is more searching and tentative, expressed as a *dialogus* and *inquisitio*, that is, a quest undertaken in discourse. Inquiry is driven by the narrator-protagonist’s relentless dissatisfaction with received wisdom and his often-belligerent contradiction of tutelary interlocutors; the poem speaks with a voice that is multiple and provisional, fractured by the discourses that it successively inhabits. This second aspect of the poem’s voice is demonstrated in influential studies by David Aers, Anne Middleton, and Lawton, and it exists in tension with the first.<sup>7</sup>

In *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature*, Lawton continues to push readers towards deeper apprehensions of the tension between the hortatory and inquisitive voices of *Piers Plowman*. In a telling moment, Lawton avers that his early demonstrations of the dialogism and fractured subject of *Piers Plowman* are ‘more unexceptionable in today’s critical climate than I might have anticipated or wished’; he now throws the emphasis toward the other pole of voice, urging that, ‘as it goes on – at least from the Feast of Patience onwards – *Piers* makes the highest demand of all its readers, that they should somehow undergo or participate in the experience of the poem, which aims to have an effect, as well as affect, on them’.<sup>8</sup> In this short essay I shall offer three interlinked responses to this claim. First, I aim to show that the moral claims of the poem are present from the beginning; second, that the development recognised by Lawton within the fictive narrative of the poem (‘at least from the Feast of Patience onwards’) is a function of the poet’s process of writing and rewriting; third, and finally, I offer the term and concept of *parrhēsia* as a way of thinking the connection between the two contrasting qualities of voice. *Parrhēsia* is a capacious category, encompassing acts of warning and reproof, corrective satire, polemics against flattery, zeal for truth, and earnest, bad-mannered, agonistic voice. Beside the Pauline *parrhēsia* of teaching and admonishment, there is a Socratic *parrhēsia* of investigation and self-reflection. Both varieties use speech as a goad.

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<sup>6</sup>E. D. Craun, *Ethics and Power in Medieval English Reformist Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 60, quoting D. Lawton, *Chaucer’s Narrators* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1985), p. 13. See also D. A. Lawton, ‘The unity of Middle English alliterative poetry’, *Speculum*, 58:1 (1983), 72–94, doi: 10.2307/2846614 (pp. 77–80).

<sup>7</sup>See D. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), chaps 1–2; A. Middleton, ‘Narration and the invention of experience: episodic form in *Piers Plowman*’, in L. D. Benson and S. Wenzel (eds), *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1982), pp. 91–122, 280–3; and D. Lawton, ‘The subject of *Piers Plowman*’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 1 (1987), 1–30, doi: 10.1484/J.YLS.2.302966. For the designations *dialogus* and *inquisitio*, see R. Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 247.

<sup>8</sup>Lawton, *Voice*, pp. 108, 119.

A final prefatory remark: the word *parrhēsia* was little used in Latin literature, which resorted instead to attenuated or one-sided translations. In Latin rhetoric and in the philosophical works of Cicero and Seneca, the notion may be rendered as *licentia*, *licentia dicendi*, or *libertas*.<sup>9</sup> Isidore of Seville retained the Greek word *parrhēsia* in his account of the devices of rhetoric in book 2 of the *Etymologiae*, defined the figure as *oratio libertatis et fiduciae plena* ('speech full of freedom and boldness'), and warned that it 'should be used with caution, as did Cicero, for he explained his conduct beforehand'.<sup>10</sup> Langland could have encountered this passage; I will not claim that he did. The most significant feature of Isidore's entry on *parrhēsia* is perhaps the gloss *fiduciae plena*, for *fiducia* is the usual rendering of *parrhēsia* in the Latin Vulgate.<sup>11</sup> In the Vulgate text of 2 Cor. 3:12 and 2 Cor. 7:4, Paul proclaims his *multa fiducia* 'great confidence or boldness'. That rendering introduces a decisive shift with respect to the Greek text, for *fiducia* invites association with *fides*, the first of the theological virtues articulated by Paul in 1 Cor. 13. (Paul's Greek lacks that etymological association.) In the Anglo-Norman French and Middle English Biblical versions, the Vulgate's *fiducia* could be rendered as *fiaunce*, *foi*, *trust*, and *faiffulnes*. Those renderings place us within the general semantic field of Langland's personified Lewte.

For most of this essay, I focus narrowly on a single discursive feature: moral admonishment addressed in the second person to audiences outside the represented world of the poem. Stephen A. Barney, who collects many of the relevant instances, remarks that 'such addresses lend [*Piers Plowman*] largely the character of a work of monitory counsel to the rich, the clerical, and the powerful'.<sup>12</sup> I will argue that monitory address is an important and well-defined feature of *Piers Plowman*, that the poet's confidence in his monitory voice grows during his composition of the poem, and that this feature of the poem culminates in Conscience's parrhesiastic addresses to bishops and the King in the C Version Prologue. As a briefer coda to this argument, I propose a reading of Wille's *inquisitio* as wisdom-seeking *parrhēsia*. Both forms of *parrhēsia* – admonishment and quest – originate in the opening of *passus* 1 of the A Version, in Wille's dialogue with Holy Church.

### 3 Moral admonishment in the sequence of composition

#### 3.1 The A Version

In *passus* 1 a female figure named Holy Church, the first of Wille's personified guides, descends from a tower, glosses the allegorical landscape stretched out before Wille, and unfolds Truth's claims on the conduct of his life. Wille is the intradiegetic recipient of her instruction and she addresses him with the singular/familiar pronoun *þou*, as fits his subordinate status. Near the end of the *passus* she pitches

<sup>9</sup>H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, eds D. E. Orton and R. D. Anderson, trans. M. T. Bliss, A. Jansen, and D. E. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1998), sec. 761, pp. 337–8; G. Scarpata, *Parrhesia greca, parrhesia cristiana* (Brescia: Paideia, 2001), pp. 131–7, 141.

<sup>10</sup>Isidore, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001221010> [accessed 12 June 2021], § 2.21.31. I have revised slightly the translation in Isidore, *The 'Etymologies' of Isidore of Seville*, trans. S. A. Barney et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 78.

<sup>11</sup>Scarpata, *Parrhesia*, pp. 142, 163–9; L. Engels, 'Fiducia dans la Vulgate: le problème de traduction *παρρησία- fiducia*', *Graecitas et Latinitas Christianorum Primaeva: Supplementa*, 1 [Festschrift Christine Mohrmann zum 60 Geburtstag] (1964), 97–141.

<sup>12</sup>S. A. Barney, *The Penn Commentary on 'Piers Plowman'*. Volume 5: *C Passūs 20–22; B Passūs 18–20* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 72.

her tutelary voice over Wille's head and outside the poem, towards an audience whom she addresses as the *riche*:<sup>13</sup>

Forþi I rede þe riche · haue ruþe of þe pore  
Þeiȝ ze ben miȝty to mote · beþ mek of ȝour werkis  
For þe same mesour ze mete · amys oþer ellis  
Ȝe shuln be weiȝe þerwiþ · whanne ze wende hennes (A.1.149–52)

As printed by George Kane, the first line of this passage extends the prior discursive scheme, in which Holy Church has spoken about the people of the fair field in third-person reference. Yet, in place of *þe riche* we should probably read *ȝow riche*, with second-person plural address. *ȝow riche* is securely established as the reading of the corresponding lines in the archetypes of *Piers Plowman* B and C, and it is the reading of three copies of the A Version (three other A-Version copies have other unambiguous second-person pronouns). Textual variants elsewhere in the poem show that switches from third-person reference to second-person address are vulnerable to scribal smoothing.<sup>14</sup> The second-person pronouns in subsequent lines of this passage are secure in all versions of the poem. The lines are occasioned by Wille's questions and spoken before him, but addressed to a class, the *riche*, that never includes him elsewhere in the poem.

The identity of the *riche* may be inferred from the fact that Holy Church addresses them specifically in their capacity as social agents with superior access to the force of law. *To mote* (150) means 'bring legal charges'. The *riche* are the class that Anne Middleton names 'possessioners' and, in a fundamental study, identifies as the principal 'audience and public' of *Piers Plowman*: laymen and churchmen distinguished by their privilege and concomitant responsibilities, encompassing 'all those tasks and offices where spiritual and temporal governance meet'.<sup>15</sup> Speakers in *Piers Plowman* regularly address themselves in apostrophe to audiences located somewhere beyond the frame of the poem, and these apostrophised addressees are often identifiable with Middleton's 'possessioners'.

In the A Version of *Piers Plowman* there are six further instances of extradiegetic admonishment, employing second-person plural pronouns in address to *curatores* (1.169–73), *lordes* (3.60–4L), *werkmen* (7.302–7), lawyers (8.62–3), the *riche* again (8.165–78), and *alle cristene* (10.197–201). The addresses to *werkmen* and *alle cristene* are anomalies in several respects. Address to the *werkmen* is oriented restrictively downwards, whereas that to *alle cristene* is inclusive, lending itself to first-person

<sup>13</sup>I quote from the Athlone edition but impose metrical punctuation on the model of J. A. Burrow and T. Turville-Petre (eds), *Piers Plowman: The B-Version Archetype (Bx)*, XML version 2.0 (Raleigh, NC: The Society for Early English and Norse Electronic Texts, 2018). For quotations from the B Version I consult the edition by Burrow and Turville-Petre and restore the archetypal reading in one passage where Kane and Donaldson's emendations are doubtful. See the note to B.19.302–7, below. The 'Athlone edition' is G. Kane (ed.), *Piers Plowman: The A Version: Will's Visions of Piers Plowman and Do-Well. An Edition in the Form of Trinity College Cambridge MS R.3.14 Corrected from Other Manuscripts, with Variant Readings*, rev. ed. (London and Berkeley: Athlone Press and University of California Press, 1988); G. Kane and E. T. Donaldson (eds), *Piers Plowman: The B Version: Will's Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best. An Edition in the Form of Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17, Corrected and Restored from the Known Evidence, with Variant Readings*, rev. ed. (London and Berkeley: Athlone Press and University of California Press, 1988); and G. Russell and G. Kane (eds), *Piers Plowman: The C Version. Will's Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best. An Edition in the Form of Huntington Library MS HM 143, Corrected and Restored from the Known Evidence, with Variant Readings* (London and Berkeley: Athlone Press and University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup>An example is A.9.84–5 (B.8.94–5, C.10.91–2), where the second-person address translates a Biblical quotation.

<sup>15</sup>A. Middleton, 'The audience and public of *Piers Plowman*', in D. Lawton (ed.), *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982), pp. 101–23, 147–54 (p. 104).

plural pronouns elsewhere in the poem.<sup>16</sup> The usual form of extradiegetic second-person address in *Piers Plowman* is oriented upward, pitched towards the *riche* or another elevated status group, and it consists of admonitions to live better.

This recurrent motif remains unreflective and untheorised in the earliest version of *Piers Plowman*. There is no personified representative of public reproof in *Piers Plowman A* and no discursive reflection on brave truth telling. The character Sothnesse, one possible site for this, is not, in fact, an agent of public truth telling, but rather a ‘quiet informant to the powerful’.<sup>17</sup> In later versions, the poet expanded his use of the admonishment motif and also offered theoretical reflection on it. The key developments may be seen if we read in the presumptive order of composition: first, the continuation of the narrative beyond the point at which the A Version ended (the ‘B continuation’); then new passages and other revisions in the segment up to the end of A.11 / B.10 (the ‘B revision’); finally, the new and revised passages in the C Version. This genetic approach is pioneered in Middleton’s writings; Sarah Wood formalises the approach and extends it into a reading of the poem in all three versions.<sup>18</sup> Reading the poem in the presumed order of its composition allows us to trace the poet’s developing use of and thought about gestures of monitory address.

### 3.2 The B continuation

The B continuation contains over a dozen instances of extradiegetic admonishment. These are especially frequent in Anima’s long discourse on the clergy in B.15.<sup>19</sup> Twice in this sermon, Anima pairs a stern rebuke to clergy with an address to secular *lordes*, urging them to discipline the clergy if the clergy will not reform themselves. In the first iteration of this double address, Anima admonishes ‘ye Religiouse’ to live on plain and inexpensive foods and drink (B.15.315–17), quoting a scriptural proof-text against luxurious diets. He then pivots to *lordes and ladies*, whom he urges not to bequeath their lands to the religious orders, who are already sufficiently endowed (B.15.322–5). The theme is amplified in its second iteration. Anima denounces the covetise of ‘ye clerkes’ and warns ‘ye bisshopes’ that they will be deprived of ‘The lordshipe of londes’ if the secular powers govern as they should (B.15.551–6L). This is followed by a single-line emphatic address to the secular *lordes*: ‘Takeþ hire landes ye lordes · and leteþ hem lyue by dymes’ (B.15.564). The danger that *Piers Plowman* is thought to incur in these passages is a reason for treating them as *parrhēsia*, for danger follows *parrhēsia* as its shadow. *Parrhēsia*, in turn, supplies an alternative to the analytic of censorship. *Piers Plowman*’s direct and passionate criticism of ecclesial and secular authorities has led modern critics to frame the poet’s

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<sup>16</sup>With Wit’s counsel at A.10.197–201, compare the colophon-like lines at the end of the *Visio* (A.8.179–84). For commentary on Wille’s prophetic grandstanding (A.7.302–7), see R. Hanna, *The Penn Commentary on ‘Piers Plowman’*, Volume 2: *C Passus 5–9; B Passus 5–7; A Passus 5–8* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. 276–9.

<sup>17</sup>See A.2.150–3, lines substantially unchanged in later versions. I quote A. Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on ‘Piers Plowman’*. Volume 1: *C Prologue–Passus 4; B Prologue–Passus 4; A Prologue–Passus 4* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 234.

<sup>18</sup>A. Middleton, ‘Acts of vagrancy: the C version “autobiography” and the Statute of 1388’, in S. Justice and K. Kerby-Fulton (eds), *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 208–317; and S. Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of ‘Piers Plowman’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 13–19, 82–6, 134–59. For the relation between the B continuation and B revision see R. Hanna, *William Langland* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 12–13; and Barney, *Penn Commentary*, p. 102.

<sup>19</sup>See T. Lawler, *The Penn Commentary on ‘Piers Plowman’*, Volume 4: *C Passūs 15–19; B Passūs 13–17* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 159, 163, 221, 275–6.

work in relation to the historical possibility of its censorship.<sup>20</sup> The concept of *parrhēsia* refocuses attention on the locutionary act itself – its truth, force, and the dramatics of its production, including its discursive address, my focus in this study. Anima’s abiding concern is with the clergy, yet the final instance of extradiegetic admonishment in the B Version is spoken by the Good Samaritan and probably targets lay possessioners (B.17.262–6). Addressing ‘ye wise men · þat wiþ þe world deleþ / That riche ben and reson knoweþ’, the Good Samaritan reiterates and amplifies the admonishments delivered by Holy Church at the beginning of the poem.

In addition to new and intensified instances of reproof, the B continuation includes two theorisations of the act, placed near the beginning and end of the new *passus*, and concerned with reproof of clergy and secular authorities, respectively. At the beginning of the continuation, Langland scripts a little drama in which his fictional avatar gives up the search for a righteous and salvable form of life. Wille commits himself to Fortune and her party and he easily buys absolution from the friars. When the money runs out the friars abandon Wille, who then erupts in indignant anger against them. Enter Lewte, a new actant. Lewte fixes his eyes on Wille and asks him ‘Wherfore lourestow?’ Wille’s answer – he wants to know whether he may ‘þis metels auowe’, that is, recount his dream-vision – conjoins the poet and protagonist and receives hearty approval from Lewte: ‘3is by Peter and by Poul’, he exclaims (B.11.85–7). The topic of Lewte’s and Wille’s subsequent dialogue is the legitimacy of public corrective speech. In an instructive commentary, Craun shows that Lewte’s defence and justification of public reproof, and the limits that Lewte places on this activity, transmit protocols for ‘fraternal correction’ set out in late medieval sermons and treatises of pastoral theology.<sup>21</sup> Elaborating a hint first made by W.W. Skeat, Craun reads Lewte’s citation of Peter and Paul as a reference to Paul’s reproof of Peter in Antioch, recounted in Galatians 2:11–14; this was a central proof-text in late medieval discussions of the ethics of fraternal correction. The name ‘Lewte’ has been glossed as ‘loyalty, fidelity, justice, “faith” in the sense of “keeping faith”’.<sup>22</sup> Given Lewte’s fundamental connection with bold corrective speech, we should perhaps also think of *fiducia* and *fiaunce* – the Latin and French renderings of Pauline *parrhēsia*.

The other theorisation of reproof appears in the narrative of the foundation of Christendom in B *passus* 19. The Holy Spirit designates Piers the Plowman as pope (‘my procuratour and my reue’ (258)) and instructs the people to make Conscience their king. To Piers Grace gives four oxen (the evangelists), four draft-horses (the Church Fathers), and four seeds to sow (the cardinal virtues). Our interest is in the last of the seeds, called *Spiritus iusticie*:<sup>23</sup>

*Spiritus Iusticie* · spareþ no3t to spille  
Hem þat ben gilte · and for to correcte  
The kyng if he falle · in gilt or in trespas

<sup>20</sup>J. Simpson, ‘The constraints of satire in *Piers Plowman* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*’, in H. Phillips (ed.), *Langland, the Mystics, and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), pp. 11–30; Middleton, ‘Acts of vagrancy’, pp. 276, 279; R. Adams, *Langland and the Rokele Family: The Gentry Background to ‘Piers Plowman’* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 97–105, 116–20.

<sup>21</sup>Craun, *Ethics and Power*, pp. 71–9; E. D. Craun, “‘3e, by Peter and by Poul!’: Lewte and the practice of fraternal correction’, *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 15 (2001), 15–34, doi: 10.1484/J.YLS.2.302655.

<sup>22</sup>Quoting Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, p. 123; see also J. A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), s.v. *leaute*; and Craun, “‘3e, by Peter and by Poul’”, pp. 22–3.

<sup>23</sup>I restore the readings of the archetype in the first three lines of this passage and in 306. See Burrow and Turville-Petre, *Piers Plowman*, ad loc.



For counteþ he no kynges wraþe · whan he in Court sitteþ  
 To demen as a domesman · adrad was he neuere  
 Neiþer of duc ne of deeþ · þat he ne dide þe lawe  
 For present or for preiere · or any Prynces lettres (B.19.302–7)

The *Spiritus justicie* is distinguished by unwavering fairness in courts of law and readiness to *correcte* the rich and powerful, at risk of incurring their violent displeasure. This evocation of danger resonates with Anima’s bold sermon in B.15. The verb *correcte* occurs in only one other passage in *Piers Plowman* (B.10.289; see below), yet the theme is pervasive. As Barney remarks, the poet here ‘returns to a repeated topic, the need for courageous figures, usually clergymen (esp. bishops) but here the Spirit of Justice itself, to chastise wrongdoers, even the nobility, when needed’.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.3 The B revision

The poet’s revision of early *passus* – those already extant in the A Version – prepares the way for the new emphasis on corrective speech in latter *passus*. Lewte’s important speech in B.11 is underlined by the poet through internal prophecy: in lines new in the B Version, Holy Church tells Wille to observe misbehaviour but keep his distance and hold his tongue ‘til leaute be Iustice / And haue power to punysshem’ (B.2.48–9).<sup>25</sup> Lewte will not be made Justice, unless the *Spiritus justicie* of B.19 be Lewte under a new name. What is clear is that, when Lewte enters the poem in B.11, he speaks to precisely the question that Holy Church raises at the outset – when and how to reprove sinners.

Lewte and the *Spiritus justicie* are likewise anticipated by the poet’s more thoroughgoing revision of a second speech, near the point where the A Version breaks off. This is the speech of Clergie, to whom Wille appeals for instruction in the three grades of righteous Christian life, Do-well, Do-better, and Do-best. In the A Version, Clergie identifies Do-best as a virtuous prelate, ‘a bisshopis pere’ (A.11.197). In the B Version, the highest grade of life is imagined in much fuller detail and with surprisingly precise reference. ‘Dobest’, Clergie proclaims, is ‘to be boold · to blame þe gilty’ (B.10.264).<sup>26</sup> Clergie immediately ring-fences that bold identification with a limiting condition. Citing the Gospel parable of the mote and the beam, he warns that correctors must purge their own sin before correcting the sins of others. The speech culminates in corrective address to would-be correctors:

Forþi ye Correctours claweþ heron · and correcteþ first yowselue  
 And þanne mowe ye manly seye · as Dauid made þe Sauter  
*Existimasti inique quod ero tui similis; arguam te & statuum contra faciem tuam*  
 (B.10.289–91)

Like Holy Church in *passus* 1, Clergie pitches his voice towards an extradiegetic audience, this time conceived as an audience of clerical correctors. The story of Ophni and Phinees (1 Samuel: 1–4) illustrates the dangers of lax correction, but also confirms that Clergie is here speaking to bishops: they are responsible for correcting clerical subordinates, a responsibility that requires them to keep themselves free of sin.

<sup>24</sup>Barney, *Penn Commentary*, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup>See Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, pp. 123–5, 246–7; and Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, pp. 154–6.

<sup>26</sup>See Craun, *Ethics and Power*, pp. 65–9; and A. L. Kellogg, ‘Langland and the “canes muti”’, in R. Kirk and C. F. Main (eds), *Essays in Literary History Presented to J. Milton French* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), pp. 25–35.

Clergie's conception of *correctio* as clerical prerogative supplies the context in which Wille asks Lewte whether he is permitted to reprove sin in a clerical superior, and Lewte's affirmative reply releases parrhesiastic speech from the status-bound restrictions placed on it by Clergie. If the poet wrote Clergie's speech precisely to set up a contrast with Lewte, he subsequently decided that a perfectionist and status-based account of corrective speech was not useful even as a point of departure. In the C revision the poet cancelled Clergie's discourse on Do-well, Do-better, and Do-best.

### 3.4 The C Version

With few exceptions, the new passages of extradiegetic address in the B Version are in the 'continuation' – that is, those *passus* that did not yet exist in A.<sup>27</sup> In the C Version, the poet's approach to the early *passus* changes, for he now intercalates several new passages of monitory address. I shall discuss two *loci* of revision: the cluster of new passages of second-person address in the pardon *passus* (C.9) and Conscience's speeches to bishops and the King in the Prologue.<sup>28</sup> These passages clarify the poet's thinking about the targets, tenor and agents of admonishment.

Revisions to the pardon *passus* are important because they show the poet distinguishing between classes of people he may talk about and those he talks to. A series of distinguished studies have shown how Langland's attention gravitated powerfully towards the poor, occasionally with poignant sympathy.<sup>29</sup> Yet there is a gap between the direction of attention and the direction of address. The poem speaks memorably about the poor, but its address is oriented preferentially towards persons of considerably more elevated social and economic station. In the C Version of the Pardon *passus*, the celebrated portraits of patient poverty appear alongside three new passages of extradiegetic second-person address, addressed to people whom Middleton terms 'possessioners' and Langland himself routinely calls the *riche*. A diatribe addressed to bishops denounces their failures of responsibility as governors of the Church and shepherds of the people (C.9.259–80).<sup>30</sup> This speech concludes the entire pardon episode – it immediately precedes the priest's demand to read the pardon – and forms a ring structure with a passage on bishops at the head of the *passus* (C.9.13–21). That earlier passage, rewritten and expanded in C, likewise focuses specifically on the bishop's duties of *correctio*. The other two passages counsel the *riche* (C.9.134–8; C.9.101); both concern their dealings with the poor. The poet's sharpened sense of his 'audience and public' in the C Version is further demonstrated by his treatment of a passage that, in the B Version, addressed the poor themselves:

Forþi biddeþ noȝt ye beggers · but if ye haue nede

<sup>27</sup>Exceptions are B.7.84–8 (discussed below), B.10.88, B.10.289–96 (discussed above), and B.10.418–19.

<sup>28</sup>For discussion of some other passages, see Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, pp. 303–4 (on the address to mayors at C.3.108–11); and M. Calabrese, 'Langland's last words', in C. M. Cervone and D. V. Smith (eds), *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A.C. Spearing* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2016), pp. 65–81 (on the address to *wyse clerkes* at C.20.350–8).

<sup>29</sup>G. Shepherd, 'Poverty in *Piers Plowman*', in T. H. Aston et al. (eds), *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R. H. Hilton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 169–89; D. Pearsall, 'Poverty and poor people in *Piers Plowman*', in E. D. Kennedy, R. Waldron, and J. S. Wittig (eds), *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Wolfeboro, NH: D.S. Brewer, 1988), pp. 167–85; D. Aers, '*Piers Plowman*: poverty, work, and community', in *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing, 1360–1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 20–72, 185–95; A. M. Scott, '*Piers Plowman* and the Poor' (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup>For commentary see Hanna, *Penn Commentary*, pp. 321–7; and R. O'Neill, 'Counting sheep in the C text of *Piers Plowman*', *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 29 (2015), 89–116 (pp. 92–3, 108–11), doi: 10.1484/J.YLS.5.110096.

For whoso haþ to buggen hym breed · þe book bereþ wisse  
He haþ ynou3 þat haþ breed ynou3 · þou3 he haue no3t ellis (B.7.84–6)

This is an exceptional passage and an anomaly within the poet's general program of address. In the C Version these lines are re-assigned to Piers, but also transposed into third-person reference (C.9.159–61). The voice of the C-Version pardon episode speaks to bishops, lawyers, and the *riche*; it speaks about the poor.

The narrator's rebuke to bishops in the pardon *passus* is anticipated in the C Version by Conscience's surprising intrusion into the Prologue. In earlier versions of the poem, Conscience appears first in *passus* 3; his irruption into the C-Version Prologue is a narrative swerve characteristic of *Piers Plowman* and it establishes monitory address as a central component of the poem's discourse at almost the earliest moment possible. Unlike most other instances of monitory address examined in this essay, the speeches of Conscience have intradiegetic audiences: his targets are present in the Prologue's fair field of folk. Yet the conceit of the Prologue is that its diegesis coincides with and encompasses the entire world outside the poem.

Narrative context for Conscience's first speech is supplied by lines that date back to the earliest version of the poem and criticise, in third-person reference, clerics who abandon their pastoral duties for lucrative posts in the royal administration. The B Version elaborates the profane administrative services performed by clerics and warns, 'drede is at þe laste / Lest crist in Consistorie · acorse ful manye' (B.P.98–9). In the C Version, these lines are assigned to an intradiegetic speaker – Conscience – and probably transposed into second-person address, as required by their new setting within Conscience's speech to clerics.<sup>31</sup> The lines that introduce Conscience into the poem establish his discursive address and state that his speech is public, heard by the *comune*:

Conscience cam and accused hem · and þe comune herde hit  
And seide ydolatrie 3e soffren · in sondrye places manye  
And boxes ben yset forth · ybounde with yren  
To vndertake þe tol · of vntrewe sacrefice (C.P.95–8)

*Accused*, a legal word, chimes with the poet's evocation of the Last Judgment as Christ's *consistorie* court at this point in the B Version. Conscience's accusation that the clergy accept payments from *vntrewe sacrefice* raises a familiar complaint in *Piers Plowman*, namely that, in pursuing their own material enrichment, the clergy neglect, abuse and mislead the souls of people in their care. They suffer – that is, permit – the laity's misdirected worship (*ydolatrie*), rather than rebuking and correcting them.<sup>32</sup> In this opening statement, the target of criticism may be any friar or parish priest who hears confession and grants an easy absolution in exchange for a donation. As the speech develops, its focus narrows to bishops, who, Conscience complains, neglect to exercise their corrective function facing subordinate clergy. The words *ydolatrie* and *sacrefice* give the speech a Hebraic costume that anticipates the biblical exemplum of Ophni and Phinees (C.P.105–17), previously seen in Clergie's B-Version instructions on the ethics of correction. Conscience appropriates Clergie's exemplum, but not the restrictions that Clergie had placed on corrective speech. His bold words instead enact Lewte's advice (B.11) and the *Spirtus justicie* (B.19).

<sup>31</sup>The evidence of surviving copies is inconclusive: *of 3ow acorse manye* is the reading of the P family of copies; the X family has a third-person pronoun (C.P.127).

<sup>32</sup>Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, pp. 108–11, emphasises the theme of 'suffraunce' in Conscience's speech.

Conscience's speech is rough poetry. The exemplum of Ophni and Phinees lacks the poet's customary alliteration, and this fact invites speculation that the poet left the passage incomplete. The unevenness of revision in *Piers Plowman C* is undeniable, and we cannot be certain that we have any passage in a state that the poet would have considered final. Yet the very prominence of Conscience's speech – its placement in the Prologue at the culmination of the survey of the fair field of folk – makes interpretation unavoidable. In Galloway's apt formulation, the speech exhibits 'a looseness of form that matches the directness of its statements'.<sup>33</sup> If these qualities are deliberate, the speech exemplifies the figure termed *licentia* in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and its tradition and *parrhēsia* by Isidore: an expression that eschews courtesies and customary decorum for the sake of direct, frank statement of the matter at hand.

The roughness of Conscience's speech is further emphasised but its juxtaposition with his next speech in the C Prologue, for this second speech is the longest passage of Latin verse in the whole poem (C.P.153–9). The verses are addressed to the King and they counsel just and pious administration of his realm; in the B Version these lines were spoken by an angel who descends from heaven for this purpose. By reassigning the Latin verses, the poet gives Conscience a voice that ranges over much of the poem's stylistic repertoire; he also shifts moral authority from a divine visitant onto a literary character created by the poet himself in earlier versions of the poem. This last point is especially important and brings us back to the poet's sequence of composition. Conscience's moral authority in the C Prologue grows out of the action of the final *passus* of the B continuation, where Conscience tutors Wille on the life of Christ, is nominated by the Holy Ghost to be king over the primitive Christian community, and – in the last lines of the poem – inherits Wille's quest for Piers the Plowman.<sup>34</sup> These later developments show us why the poet selected Conscience for a new speaking role in the C Prologue but they should not reduce the impact of his words there. Within the narrative sequence, Conscience remains as yet an unknown quantity. More precisely, he is known only by name. Speaking without evident authorisation, this character named Conscience explodes into the world of the poem and, in lines that seem initially to lack proper polish, exercises a parrhesiastic function in relation to both ecclesial and secular government, joining in his person the poem's twin vectors of corrective address.

In the C Version, all subsequent instances of corrective address read as call-backs to this moment in the Prologue. Conscience enacts, within the represented world of the poem, the type of brave corrective speech that other characters will later direct to audiences outside the poem. For instance, the dreamer's aggressive criticism of bishops in the C-Version pardon *passus*, discussed above, emulates Conscience – whose authority *vis-à-vis* Wille has, in the interim, been established by their encounter in the C.5 waking interlude.<sup>35</sup> Taken together, these new passages in the C Version clarify the poem's moral claims at an earlier point and show that the poet has progressively found his parrhesiastic voice over the course of revising his poem. Yet the primal scene of the poem always remains the encounter with Holy Church in *passus* 1. As a coda to my argument, I consider a second line of development from that passage.

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<sup>33</sup>Galloway, *Penn Commentary*, p. 101.

<sup>34</sup>See Wood, *Conscience and the Composition*, pp. 111–2, 135–8, 153–4.

<sup>35</sup>R. Hanna, 'The "absent" pardon-tearing of *Piers Plowman C*', *The Review of English Studies*, 66:275 (2015), 449–64, doi: 10.1093/res/hgu111, emphasis the voicing of these passages.

## 4 Coda: *Parrhēsia* of inquiry

If Holy Church is the first of the poem's parrhesiastai, there is a sense in which Wille, too, is a parrhesiastes in this opening scene. The sense is this: Wille's obdurate refusal to say he understands. His complaint 'Ȝet haue I no kynde knowyng' (A.1.127) earns a pedantic rebuke from Holy Church. It is denounced as the confession of a dullard and ne'er-do-well, but this purportedly unjustifiable ignorance is also the motivating force of the entire poem. As Lawton suggests in another context, dullness may function as the form of acceptability of truth telling.<sup>36</sup> The implication of Wille's complaint is that the traditional religious teaching is not adequate; it does not provide knowledge truly possessed, claimable as one's own. The poet invites – or dares – readers to identify with Wille's complaint and thus to join him in a risky search still underway in the final lines of the poem.

Much of *Piers Plowman* expresses an investigatory or wisdom-seeking *parrhēsia*. For that general category readers are referred to Michel Foucault's final series of lectures at the Collège de France.<sup>37</sup> Wisdom-seeking *parrhēsia* is distinguished from the *parrhēsia* of counsel and moral correction in several respects, yet shares the qualities of embodied truthfulness, orientation towards another person, concern with ethics, independence from external authorising supports, and personal risk. The characteristic expression of investigatory *parrhēsia* in *Piers Plowman* is Wille's refrain-like complaint that his would-be teachers leave him without *kynde knowyng*. That complaint is confessional, expressing a truth about a subject. Yet the truth expressed here is not merely personal or narrowly subjective. It is enacted and undertaken in what Foucault might term a 'dramatics of discourse' and Lawton terms a 'public interiority' – an interiority that hails a community and makes itself available for adoption by readers of the poem.<sup>38</sup> It is an invitation to a brave inquiry with an unknowable end.

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<sup>36</sup>D. Lawton, 'Dullness and the fifteenth century', *English Literary History*, 54:4 (1987), 761–99, doi: 10.2307/2873098; and see Lawton, *Voice*, p. 123, in connection with *Piers Plowman*.

<sup>37</sup>See the programmatic statement at Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, pp. 86–9 (lecture of 15 February).

<sup>38</sup>Lawton, *Voice*, chap. 3; Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, pp. 67–9 (lecture of 12 January). — I thank Rosemary O'Neill, Sarah Wood, and the volume editors for comments that improved this essay. They bear no responsibility for errors.