

THE PIERS PLOWMAN CONTROVERSY

BY

MAX SHPELLER, B.A.

A thesis presented to the Department  
of English of the University of Man-  
itoba, in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts.

May 1929.



TABLE OF CONTENTS.

CHAPT. I	GENERAL INTRODUCTION.	page 1 .
CHAPT.II	INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTROVERSY .	page 4.
CHAPT.III	DIVISION OF THE CONTROVERSY.	page 7.
CHAPT.IV	THE BURDEN OF THE PROOF.	page 8.
CHAPT.V	THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A1 AND A2.	page 10.
CHAPT.VI	THE EVIDENCE OF JOHN BUT.	page 18.
CHAPT.VII	THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A AND B- THE DISPUTED PASSAGES.	page 25.
CHAPT.VIII	THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A AND B- THE ALLITERATION.	page 48.
CHAPT.IX	THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A AND B- THE DIALECT PROBLEM.	page 50.
CHAPT. X	THE WEIGHT OF THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF.	page 55.
CHAPT. XI	THE TESTIMONY OF THE AOTHOR HIMSELF.	page 61.
CHAPT. XII	DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE IMMEDIATELY WE ASSUME A PLURALITY.	page 68.
CHAPT. XIII	THAT PORTION OF B NOT IN A.	page 70.
CHAPT. XIV	GENERAL LITERARY ARGUMENTS.	page 75.
CHAPT.XV	CONCLUSION.	page 76.
BIBLIOGRAPHY.		page 78.

## THE PIERS PLOWMAN CONTROVERSY.

## CHAPTER I GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

The work we are concerned with is that known as

"The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman"

and it comprises in general:

- (1) The Vision of The field Full of Folk, of Holy Church, and of Meed;
- (2) The Vision of the Deadly Sins and of Piers Plowman proper;
- (3) The series of visions known in general as "Vita de Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest".

The Three Texts. There are 45 MSS. of the poems listed by Skeat. These MSS. are divisible into three main groups or divisions, called the A, B, and C texts respectively. Within the various texts there are subgroups, but in general the MSS. conform to the three groups as follows:

10 MSS.	A text.
14 MSS.	B text.
15 MSS.	C text.
4 MSS.	Mixed A and C texts.
3 MSS.	Mixed C and B texts.

From internal evidence the composition of the texts has been dated as follows:

A text	1362-3.
B text	1377.
C text	1390, or later.

Roughly speaking, we may say that there was an interval of 15 years between the successive texts.

The Text Here Used. We shall use in this thesis the text of the poem known as the two volume text of Skeat, 1866, which presents the three texts in parallel columns. All our references to the text shall refer to these volumes.

The MSS. from which this text was prepared are:

(a) For the A text,

- i. from the beginning to XI 180 (where the MS. ends) Vernon MS.(V);
- ii. from XI 181 to XI 303 , Trinity MS.R.3.14.(T);
- iii. From the end of XI to the end of XII, MS. Rawlinson, Poet. 137 (the only MS. containing this passus) .

(b) For the B text,

MS.Laud Misc. 581 (L).

(c) For the C text,

MS. Phillips 8231.

In every case the MSS. have been collated with the other MSS. and edited by Skeat. In no case did Skeat discard a line of passage which might possibly been written by the author of the poems. To the excellence of Skeat's work no scholar has yet failed to pay tribute; unfortunately, however, the edition was published before the controversy arose, and reexamination of the MSS. was undertaken at different times by different scholars for special purposes of the controversy. These latter in no way impugn the authority and value of Skeat's work.

Description of the Three Texts. It is generally recognized by scholars that the A text is the original text (i.e. the one first written). The B text is regarded as a revision and

continuation of the A text at a date approximately fifteen years after the A text was published. The revision is not uniform, but varies from single word changes to changes of whole passages and incidents of the poem; moreover, although as a whole the B text is ampler than the A text, yet in certain places the case is reversed, and there are more lines of A than of B. The C text is in turn a revision of B, and here the changes are even greater than before, being most often, the bodily transference of whole passages.

The A text consists of a Prologue and twelve passus. Of these the last passus is unique in that it is entirely omitted in both B and C. The B text follows A more or less ~~slowly~~ for about eleven passus of A (there is a slight difference in the passus divisions of A and B, A passus VII being considered as the latter half of passus VI in B), and then continues the story of Dowel, Doget, and Dobest till passus XX, where it ends. Similarly the C text follows the B text; but again as in the other case the passus numbering is different, The prologue of A and B is numbered passus I in C throwing the whole alignment of the passus out; and there are several other changes in C, so that at the end C has XXIII passus for only XX in B, although both cover practically the same ground.

Authorship of the Poem. Before the controversy it was universally accepted that the poem was the work of one man. There seemed no reason to doubt that his Christian name was William, (the only possible alternative is Robert) for there are many allusions in the poem to that name. Time and again in the col-

ophons he is referred to as William Langland; several times he is spoken of as Robert Langland; once he is called Will-elmus W. Professor Pearson suggests that his name may have been Langley instead of Langland. A full discussion of his name will be found below. For the purposes of convenience he will be referred to in this thesis as William Langland.

## CHAPTER II - INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTROVERSY.

Until the time of Professor Manly's studies,<sup>(1)</sup> the poem had been accepted as the work of one man. Indeed Skeat, so far from dividing the poem, actually added to it as the work of the same man "Richard the Redeless". I quote his reasons:

"As to the authorship of the poem, I have not the slightest hesitation in ascribing it to William, the author of Piers the Plowman. That it must be his and only his was suggested to me years ago, on first perusal of it; and after considering the question with the utmost care, from every point of view, not only once, but many times, I am not only satisfied on this point in my own mind, but considerably surprised to think there could ever have been a moment's doubt about it, or any place for a contrary opinion. . . . . I have shewn further that the internal evidence on this subject is fully sufficient; and the only argument I shall adduce here is by appealing to the evidence of originality in the

---

(1) Manly began his studies in this direction about 1906.

poem of 'Richard'. An imitator of William might have copied his phrases, but how was he to attain his genius? It is a great satisfaction to find, moreover, that William's power did not fail him in his old age. There are some passages in his last poem which exhibit him almost at his best . . . . The supposition of such passages being written by a poet of less power than William is like supposing that there may have been two Shakespeares."<sup>(1)</sup>

In view of the controversy the above quotation is of the greatest importance; it places Skeat without qualification on the side of the single authorship; and in itself it forms a very powerful argument for the single authorship, and one too often overlooked by the disputants. (Skeat did not himself enter the actual controversy, and therefore we have put his remarks in this introduction, as being made before the controversy arose.)

In January, 1906, there appeared in Modern Philology an article by Prof. Manly entitled "Lost Leaf of Piers Plowman", which brought forth a suggestion later to be of material assistance to him in the controversy. Some two years later Theophilus D. Hall<sup>(2)</sup> argued that the C text was not by the author of the other visions, at the same time maintaining that A and B were by the same author. In the same year was published in the Cambridge History a chapter<sup>(3)</sup> which precipitated the whole controversy. This chapter,

---

(1) Skeat (the two volume edition) II. lxxiv.

(2) Mod. Lang. Review, Oct. 1908.

(3) Vol. II, Chapter I.

"Piers Plowman and its Sequence", by Prof. Manly, set forth his multiple authorship theory at some length (but did not prove it) and accepted it, not at its face value, as a theory, but as true. Censure is due to Prof. Manly for putting what was after all an unproven theory and a matter of personal opinion into as authoritative a book as the Cambridge History; it is also due to the editors for accepting the theory; and yet it is a great tribute to Manly's reputation as a sound scholar that it was accepted.

Opposition was not long in forthcoming. In Jan., 1905, Modern Philology published an article by Dr. J. J. Jusserand entitled "Piers Plowman, the Work of One or of Five", which refuted what of Manly's arguments there was to refute, and placed his authority on the side of the traditional single authorship. Two months later appeared Manly's answer to Jusserand, a capable and scholarly work setting forth, for the first time, his arguments for the multiple authorship. Jusserand's refutation soon followed. Meanwhile, other scholars had been drawn into the controversy; Chambers and Grattan studied the A text in this connection, and set forth their results. Again, Chambers argued for the single authorship from a standpoint Jusserand had not been able to assume. Mary Dakin made an exhaustive and thorough study of the alliteration of the poem. Besides these main

---

(1) "Answer to Dr. J. J. Jusserand" Mod. Philol. June, 1909.

(2) "Second Reply to Prof. Manly", Mod. Philol. Jan., 1910.

(3) "I The A text", Mod. Lang. Review. July, 1909.

(4) "The authorship of Piers Plowman" Mod. Lang. Review. Jan. 1910

(5) "The Alliteration of Piers Plowman." " July, 1909.

articles there are many others of lesser importance; below I add a bibliography, as full as I have been able to make it.

### CHAPTER III- DIVISION OF THE CONTROVERSY.

By a careful and detailed study of the three texts of the poem, with the assistance of his pupils, Manly arrived at the conclusion that the poems were the work, not of one man but of five. This was not a hasty conclusion, jumped at in a moment as the easiest way of accounting for several difficulties, but one which Manly was hesitant about adopting, and did not adopt, as he himself assures us, without careful deliberation and study. The evidence on which this conclusion was founded, was, except for one case, wholly internal; it consisted of differences of literary merit, of opinion, of metre, and dialect between the various portions and texts of the poem; and of some passages of the poem where it seemed as if the continuator or reviser had misunderstood his original, the most important of these latter being the "reddite" passage. The one case of external evidence was that of the testimony of John But. His conclusion was that the poem was the work of five persons whom he named A1, A2, B, and C, and John But, and to whom he allocated the poem as follows:

- (1) A1 / The prologue and the first seven passus of the A text, namely the vision of the field full of folk, the vision of Lady Meed and Holy Church, and the vision of

Piers the Plowman.

(2) A2 - Passus VIII and to the end of the A text, namely, the various visions comprising Dowel.

(3) John But - Roughly speaking the lines from 100 to the end of passus XII ( the unique passus) of the A text. The extent of his work is uncertain, and will be considered below.

(4) B - The whole of the B text , which besides a revision of A1 and A2 (omitting only passus XII of A2), contains a continuation of A2 , namely , Dowel and Dobest.

(5) C- The whole of the C text , which is a revision of the B text.

Under these separate heads I shall treat the controversy , in so far as is practical.

#### CHAPTER IV - THE BURDEN OF THE PROOF.

Before proceeding to the actual arguments of the controversy, however, it is necessary to determine on which side the burden of the proof lies. Manly assumes that it lies with the exponents of the single authorship to prove that the poems are the work of one man; reasoning doubtless by analogy from science, where reason for classifying two phenomena together must be shown. Jusserand, on the other hand, holds the opposite view: that it is necessary for Manly to Prove plurality of authorship, else his case does not hold; and as for himself proving singularity, that

is entirely optional on his part. That is to say, he considers disproving Manly's case for plurality as tantamount to proving singularity of authorship. This claim is, of course, based on the fact that there is a well established tradition for the single authorship; and unless the multiple authorship is proven, the traditional view must have precedence. Thus we find each party of the disputants taking the view most favourable to itself.

(1)  
S. Moore was the first to recognize explicitly this difficulty; and his conclusion was that it is necessary to prove singularity else multiplicity held. In his most scholarly and masterful exposition he analyses the tradition which credited the poems to one author, and finds that it is valueless, on the grounds, mainly, that the scribes of the fifteenth century, and the editors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had not available the methods of modern scholarship. Had the poems been found separately from each other, and were they not avowed transcriptions and continuations of each other, such a conclusion had been valid. But surely, where the case is so, and where it took the best efforts of that modern scholarship to discover a difference, and that difference disputed, his conclusion can hardly be called valid. The only consistently logical course is to hold the opposite view, that, on their face value, the poems are the work of one man; and until proven otherwise, as such they must be regarded. Any person acquainted with the poems, or with their

(1) "Studies in Piers Plowman." *Mod. Philol.* XI, 117.

general nature, and not influenced by the controversy, will agree with this conclusion. Taking the other view is placing the exponents of the single authorship under a most unfair <sup>dis</sup>advantage; for as in mathematics, so in any other branch of logic, the most obvious things are the ~~easiest~~ hardest to prove. To show that two different things are similar is, strictly speaking, impossible.

The above, however, is abstract reasoning. For the purposes of the controversy I shall assume a relation satisfactory to all, namely:

that to prove multiplicity, it is necessary, besides showing reason for that multiplicity, to account satisfactorily for all reasons advanced to show singularity of authorship; and vice versa. No one, I think, will quarrel with this allocation of the difficulties.

#### CHAPTER V- THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A1 AND A2.

According to Manly this difference is mainly structural. I append Jusserand's resume of his statements, which is eminently fair and very compact:

"Concerning differences of literary merit and mental power, Prof. Manly declares that the first part of A (episode of Meed and Piers) is the best ~~of~~ in the work; and not only the best, for after all it must happen to any author that one of his poems or cantos is the best, but so far above all the rest as to imply a difference of authorship. Those first eight passus are remarkable, he says, for their "clearness and definiteness of structural ex-

cellence'; they are conspicuous for their 'unity of structure'; the writer never 'forgets for a moment the relation of an incident to his whole plan, ..... Only once or twice does he interrupt his narrative to express his own views and feelings. .... There is nowhere the least hint of any personal animosity against any class of men as a class.' The style is of unparalleled 'picturesqueness and verve'; the art of composition is 'one of the most striking features' of this portion of the poem.

"In the latter part of A on the contrary, that is, the Dowel passus, and into the additions introduced into versions B and C, those qualities disappear to a large extent; we have much more 'debate and disquisition' than 'vitalised allegory'; The author is interested in casuistry, in theological problems, predestination, etc.: the 'clearness of phrasing, the orderliness and consecutiveness of thought are entirely lacking.'" <sup>(1)</sup> Although Prof. Manly devotes more time to B and C than he does to A1 and A2, I think he would have been wiser had he stressed the difference between A1 and A2 more than he does, because this difference strikes at the root of the controversy, being a difference in conception and execution. Arguments based on single passages, on "mistakes, misreadings", or "slight but significant changes", can never be convincing in a controversy as vexed as this; for there is always the possibility of a scribal error to be pleaded, or, failing that it is possible to accept the error as stated, and yet argue very reasonably for single author, who, being human,

made mistakes and forgot, and was inconsistent; and for the support of this view there is all the evidence literary history affords. The difficulty of Manly's position is that it may be attacked from two fronts; his facts may be refuted, thus dissipating his argument entirely; or his facts may be accepted, and yet his general position stormed. It is very dangerous to reason from single passages, even though they be fairly numerous, or from alternative readings, or conjectural emendations, or other such minutiae, as Manly does; in the latter cases he is piling conjecture on conjecture, and it must be remembered that the probability of the whole being true (which is the product of the separate probabilities, and not the sum as so many people assume) is very small. Had he, on the other hand, taken the position merely that A2 as a whole differs considerably from A1, and shown that the difference was sufficient to postulate a multiple authorship, it would have followed, immediately and by easy steps, that B differs from A2, and C from B, nor would it have been hard to establish that A1, A2, B, and C were distinct. That is to say, had his first step been firmly established, the rest would have followed mutatis mutandis.

Let me make this clearer. The subject matters of B and C are, with the exception of the omissions and additions, the same as those of A1 and A2 combined. <sup>(1)</sup> Now in a

---

(1) I am not, of course, referring here to the latter part of B, Dobet and Bobest, to which the same argument applies as to A2, for the establishment of A2 would ipso facto establish B.

revision where the subject matter is the same, it is hard, almost impossible, to tell whether the revision is the work of the original author, changed of course by age and intervening experience, or of some one else. But where a continuation by someone else is undertaken there must of necessity be a great difference in construction and execution, the only two features of a work which cannot be affected by the so-called minutiae; and especially must this be the case where the first man is a man of genius; and where the genius is wholly original the case is even more so. Of the author of A we know that he was first in the field; and that nowhere in the field of all literature is there record, before or during his time, of any work remotely resembling his in spirit and conception. Jusserand mentions this point conclusively, nor is there any refutation forthcoming. <sup>(1)</sup> He was a man of originality and individuality, the latter in the most marked degree. Both Manly and Jusserand would agree that there is no possible doubt that the author of the prologue, say of A1 is the same as the author of passus VII and VIII. Asked the reason for their belief, both would reply that the considered passus bore the marks of the same individuality. It follows, therefore, that in Manly's opinion, the work detailed as that of A2 does not bear those marks, and does bear the marks of another and different individuality; and in

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 b p.2. Jusserand applies the remark to all the poems, and therefore means to apply it to A1 as stated.

serand's opinion it does not bear the marks aforesaid. (1)

The solution of this part of the controversy is, therefore, a matter of opinion, the value of the opinion being determined not so much by scholarship, as by literary appreciation and familiarity, a much more intangible essence. (2)

To enable the casual reader to form some opinion of his own as to the uniqueness or otherwise of the construction and execution of the poems, I refer him to Skeat's summary of the corresponding portion of the C text; this summary is by far the best I have seen, and possesses the advantage of having been made before the controversy arose. (3)

I offer some criticisms on the basis of this summary of A1 and A2:

(1) There can be no doubt that the second is more abstract than the first. Instead of diggers and delvers, lawyers and sergeants, we are presented mostly with personifications of ideas. There are no crowds treated in the second, whereas the first treats of many.

(2) The nature of the personification is different. In the first, generally speaking, we are dealing with realism and actuality with some personification thrust upon it. In the second the realism and actuality are not so apparent.

---

(1) This latter is in part stated by Jusserand when he remarks that the autobiographical features of the poems agree remarkably well with each other. E.E.T.S. 139 b, p. 52

(2) I here differ completely with Moore, who rejects the opinions of Whitaker and Skeat on this subject as valueless because formed before the facts of the controversy were known.

(3) Skeat Vol II p

(3) There are disquisitions in both, but those in A1 can, with some difficulty, be related to what has gone before; in A2 the relation is much more difficult.

(4) Both are alike in that they retain a figure only as long as it suits their purpose or fancy.

(5) It is very significant that passus XII, from the introduction of omnia-probate till the death of the dreamer is strongly reminiscent of passus VII and VIII of A1.

(6) The machinery about which the poem is hung is the same in both, that of a dreamer going about the world, meeting the characters of the action.

(7) The vividness lacking from the figures in A2 is somewhat made up for by the rapidity with which they change.


(8) The character of the narrative of A2 is different from that of A1; this may have influenced some of the differences noted above.

I leave it for the reader to decide for himself whether these differences are due to a difference of authorship, or merely to the differences of the subject matters.

I shall conclude this discussion of A1 and A2 by a brief recapitulation and a statement of my own opinion. First then, I have tried to emphasise the fact that in this part of the controversy no scholarship is necessary, but only a fairly good acquaintance with the poem and an ordinary literary appreciation. As there are no parallel differences to be drawn the discussion is raised from particularities to generalities, which latter, though more abstract, are more conclusive.

I may as well state here that I do not favour the multiple authorship theory. I place but doubtful value on single passage arguments, because, with Jusserand, I hold that an author must not be absolutely consistent at the risk of being bodily quartered. But on the other hand, I do agree with Manly that there is a notable difference between A1 and A2; and whether that difference is great enough to postulate a multiple authorship is a nice point on which I hesitate to commit myself. The principal criticism I have to offer of all the disputants in the controversy is that each took a definite side in the controversy (consciously or unconsciously) before starting in it; and then marshalled all the arguments for that side, omitting carefully any that did not conform; and finally, instead of admitting a good argument for the other side when they saw it, obscured it, refuted it on some trivial ground, or ignored it. Thus both the reply of Manly and the second reply of Jusserand contain a great deal of matter of no value to the controversy. Particularly is this true of Manly's reply, which instead of building up a case for the multiple authorship, attacked Jusserand's case point by point. The result is that in certain places he is arguing against his own interest; and that in others he introduces arguments, which, being relevant only to certain arguments which Jusserand introduced as relevant to the controversy, are wholly irrelevant to the controversy itself.

---

(1) It is interesting to note some of these. The reference is in every case to E.E.T.S.139 .

(a) Reference to Alain Chartier (p3) and Marsiglio of Padua (p 4).

(b) Peasants Revolt (p.5). Here Manly argues against his own interest. He says that it is strange that the single author did not mention the revolt, which occurred during his lifetime. How much stranger then would it not be for four authors of whom the same is true, to make the same omission ?

(c) Montaigne (p.2). I may here say that it is hardly profitable to attack particular examples drawn from general literary history, for other examples of the same things can always be found.

(d) Manly remarks that there are many spurious additions to the MSS. (p.11). Here he plays directly into Jusserand's hand, for he could argue that a great deal of the differences objected to could be ascribed to this cause.

(e) Speaking about Shakespeare's Hamlet Manly is arguing in the best vein of Jusserand himself.

In his zeal for the multiple authorship Manly denied what was perfectly obvious to everyone, that there was a great similarity between A1 and A2. Similarly Jusserand denied what was equally obvious, that there was also some difference between them. Both were eager to convince, but not to be convinced. For my own part I see no reason for believing that B and C are different from A1 and A2; but I will admit that there is good ground for believing that A1 and A2 are different; and I will further admit that, having proven A1 and A2 different, it is hard to resist the conclusion that B and C are different also.

#### CHAPTER VI-THE EVIDENCE OF JOHN BUT.

I have put this immediately after A2 because John But is a part of A2. At the end of the twelfth passus of A is a passage we know to have been written by John But because it tells us so. The twelfth passus is, of course, the last of A. Where the B text continues this passus has been entirely omitted, and the narrative continued as at the end of A XI. This conclusion is found only in one MS. (MS. Rawlinson 137), the only MS. containing the whole of A. For these reasons A XII is known as the unique passus. It is believed that John But, finding that the poem ceased abruptly, hanging, as it were, in the air, added on his own initiative a conclusion of his own, wherein he states certain facts, or what he thought to be facts, about the author of the original. I here append a

summary of the passus.

A passus XII. Clergy acknowledges that his duty is to teach the dreamer where Dowel is to be found; Scripture interrupts, saying that Clergy should not do so without first shriving him, quoting as authority David and Theology; the case of Pilate is recalled as to the impossibility of knowing truth. The dreamer asks Scripture where Kind Wit dwells. Clergy, shamed, creeps into a cabin, leaving the dreamer to his own resources, Scripture kindly tells him where Kind Wit resides, and calls Omnia-Probate to be his guide.

Many wonders befall him in later days; there was the meeting with Hunger, for example, and the subsequent surfeit; then Fever came and greeted him handily, and with him were two, Cotidian and Tercian. Asking for Death he was advised to live and follow Dowel; he went about the world and wrought this and other works; when the work was finished Death drove Wille under the ground. When John But saw these saws (which saws is uncertain) he made this end to the work; then follows a blessing, a prayer for King Richard, and an Amen.

I add below the lines of the passus from 89 to the end. This extract contains twelve final lines which are not printed in Skeat's edition, and are somewhat hard of access in our library.

"Nay Wille" quod that wygt "wend ou no ferther 89  
But lyue as thie lyf is ordeyned for e,

Thou tomblest with a trepget if thou my tras folwe;  
 And mannes Merthe wrou3te no mor than he deseruyth here,  
 Whil his lyf and his lykhamē lesten to-gedere.  
 And therefore do after Dowel-whil thi dayes duren;  
 That thy play be plenteuous in paradys with aungelys!  
 Thoe shalt be lau3t into li3t with loking of an eye,  
 So that thou werke the word that holy writ techeth,  
 And be prest to prayeres and profitable werkes!"

Wille wist through in-wit (thou wost wel the sothe!)  
 That this speche was spedelich and sped him ful faste,  
 And wrougte that here is writen and other werkes bothe  
 Of Peres the Plowman and mechel pape al-so;  
 And when this werke was wrou3teere Wille my te aspie,  
 Deth delt him a dent and drof him to the erthe,  
 And is closed under ȝolm Christ haue his soule!  
 And so bad Iohan But busyly wel ofte,  
 And when he saww these sawes busyly alegged  
 By Iames and by Ierome by Iop and by otheres,  
 And for he medleth of makyng he made this ende.  
 Now alle kenne creatures cristene were euere,  
 God for his goodnesse gif hem swyche happes,  
 To luye as that flonde lyketh that lyf in hem puttē,  
 Furst to rekne Richard king of this rewme,  
 And alle lordes that louyn him lely in herte,  
 God saue hem sounde in by se and by lande;  
 Mary moder and may for man thou beseke;  
 That barn bryng us to blys that bled on the fode!  
 Amen.                      Explicit Dowel.

Three questions immediately suggest themselves: who was John But, how much did he know, and how much did he add?

(1) Who was John But? To put it blankly, we do not know. But there are some interesting conjectures to be considered. Henry Bradley <sup>(1)</sup> suggests that he may have been a certain John But, king's messenger, of whom there is record at about the time the A text was published. Edith Rickert <sup>(2)</sup> expands upon this conjecture in a scholarly manner. We know John But to have been dead before April 17, 1387, making him eligible chronologically for our John But. Moreover, Miss Rickert adduces some internal evidence in support of this belief. Lines 83 and 84 of the passus make (or so she claims) a fine distinction between a King's messenger and a courier, of a sort to be known only to a messenger:

"I am a messenger of deth men haue I tweyne,  
That on is called Cotidian a courour of our hous."

Moreover the messenger of death is given in this case powers of arrest; and it is known that the king's messenger had such powers and was frequently called upon to exercise them. She reasons also that But, a man probably of limited ideas, would mention, when he maddled with making, the one occupation he was well acquainted with. This reasoning is based, of course on the assumption that This Butw wrote the lines in question.

(2) How much did he add? Different scholars hold different views on this point, I list the more important.

---

(1) "Who was John But" Collected papers of Henry Bradley, 1928.

(2) "John But messenger and maker" Mod.Philol. XI 107-16.

Chambers            All of XII, or only 84- 112.  
 Manly                57- 112  
 Older view i.e. Skeat    100- 112.  
 Rickert              77- 112.

That he wrote all of XII I think we may throw out at once. (Chambers would concur readily with this.) The first part of XII is undoubtedly by the author of A2. And strangely enough the episode of Hunger and Fever is strangely reminiscent of the author of A1. I think we may agree in allotting as little as possible to this meddler, say 84-112. There is, however, a great deal to be said for Manly's allocation of 57-112. <sup>(1)</sup>

(3) How much did he know? Rickert suggests that, being a king's messenger, he would probably be well informed: a possible answer to this is so obvious that I refrain from giving it. The advocates of the multiple authorship would have it that

(a) John But knew what he was talking about, and

(b) meant, when he wrote

"And wroughte what here is writen, and other werkes  
 Of Peres the Plowman, and mechel peple al-so." <sup>(bothe</sup>

if possible

i. that he wrote A2 (not A1) and other works, or at least

ii. that he wrote A2 and other works, not including B and C (for But was dead before 1387.)

This reasoning is then used to establish a multiple authorship.

---

(1) From this point of view the idea of a forced ending is very probable.

on the grounds that the author must have been dead when the C text was written. There are, however, too many if clauses in the chain to make it of much value. And yet it is indicative of the intensity of the controversy that there was much MSS. searching to try to show either i, or ii. above.

The only element of importance John But adds to the controversy is admirably summed up in the two following sentences: "John But's continuation, slight as it is, is of importance because it shows that men did not hesitate to continue or modify a text that came into their hands. And this conclusion is abundantly supported by the 19 MSS. which contain variations and additions." <sup>(1)</sup> Jusserand laughingly exiles John But from the controversy, and so may we.

Accepting the view that But wrote as little as possible, an interesting question arises: what is the significance of the twelfth passus, written as it was by the author of A2?

I think the author of A2 (the same as of A1) when he started passus XII had every intention of continuing the story of Dowel. And continue it he did in the story of Clergy, scripture, Kind-Wit, the shaming of Clergy, and the entrance of Omnia-Probate. But when he came to Omnia-Probate, he decided to discontinue the story; perhaps he was impatient to publish it, or perhaps, voluntarily or otherwise, he found it necessary to discontinue publication for some years.

---

(1) "Manly's Answer to Dr. Jusserand" E.E.T.S. 139 bp. 17.

It is possible to suppose that he was dissatisfied with the present state of what he had written, and resolved to revise it radically, and to postpone the continuation until the revision was completed. But this resolve left him with a problem: here he was in the middle of a story; he could not leave it hanging in the air; besides the incongruity of the thing, it was dangerous, for who could tell but that someone else would finish it for him? Therefore he introduced the forced conclusion of the many wonders (where the paragraph division occurs in the summary above) the meeting with Hunger, and then with Fever, Cotidian and Tercian, and the asking for death. And he concluded the poem, for the time being, with Fever's admonition to Follow Dowel and be "prest to prayeres". At this point the poem ended, for the time being. Then John But happened along, and being, as Jusserand says, but a fool, finished the poem completely by burying the author.

This reconstruction labours under no conjectures or textual emendations or interpretations. It is based simply on what is in the text itself. The marked difference between the portion of the passus until Omnia-Probate and that after Omnia-Probate was noted by Manly when he suggested that John But's addition may have been from line 57 (the Omnia-Probate line) to the end. There can be no doubt that to line 57 the passus does continue Dowel; and likewise there can be no doubt that from line 57 there is a forced conclusion. Hunger and Fever are not at all congruent to the situation; what we should expect to find is that Omnia-Probate leads Will to Kind Wit. Our only assumption is that these lines

were written by the author of A2; and surely they were above the ability of the meddler John But.

Moreover, if we assume the multiple authorship, this reconstruction accounts perfectly for B, and for the differences in B. It also accounts for the failure of B to incorporate passus XII in his revision. When we consider the mass of conjecture attendant on all the other suggested explanations with probability here, and more probability there, does not this simple reconstruction, with its single unpresumptuous assumption, account for the facts most readily? And does it not do least violence to the text?

#### CHAPTER VII- THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A AND B: THE DISPUTED PASSAGES.

Under this head I intend to marshal most of the arguments of the controversy. It is of course understood that a great deal treated here also applies to A1 and A2; and that a great deal more applies to B; and I take it for granted also that what I have said of A2 applies to that portion of B not in A.

I The disputed passages. Manly's stand on the passages is simply this: that the way in which the passages were re-written shows conclusively that the reviser misunderstood his original, and therefore cannot have been the same man. (1)

(1) Lewte. "In II 21 ff. Lewte is introduced as the leman of the lady Holy Church and spoken of as feminine." (2)

---

(1) "Piers Plowman and Its Sequence" , C.H.E.L. II p.32

The lines are as follows:

"y lakked my lemman that Lewte is haten  
And bilowen hire to lordes that lawes han to keep" (1)

That is to saym, Manly interprets Hire as referring to Lewte, and claims that this is a mistake, since, Holy Church being feminine, her lemman, (sweetheart) must be masculine. Jusser- and accepts Manly's interpretation but argues:

(1) There cannot be any question here of B having misunderstood A as the passage is quite different in both texts, and there is no mention at all of Lewte in A. (2) 'Lemman does not necessarily mean a man and a paramour; to use it otherwise is not to commit an error; a lemman is a tenderly loved being of any sex: Spenser's Proteus asks Florimel 'to be his leman and his lady trewe'. If Florimel could play the part of a leman, why not Lewte? And, as the pelure purfiled lady in the visions was Holy Chordh, we may take it for granted that a difference of sex had little to do in her choice of a 'lemman'. (3) Very possibly there may be nothing in the passage but a scribe's error, 'hire' being put instead of 'hym'; the more probable correction is made in C:

"And lakked hym to lordes that lawes han to kepe".  
Of B having failed to understand, of of having committed any mistake there is nor trace." (2)

Manly's answers to these arguments are not convincing, as pointed out by Chambers. (3) There is, however, another way of interpreting the passage which both have overlooked

---

(1) B II 21 seq.

(2) E.E.T. S. 139 b p.33. (3) E.E.T.S. 139 e p.16-17.

but which avoids the difficulty entirely. If we read hire as reflexive, referring back to Meed herself, the passage makes perfectly good sense, and there is no difficulty. Further, the change in C may be interpreted as an entire change of the meaning of this point, of which there are many in C.

(2) Fals. "In II 25 Fals instead of Wrong is the father of Meed, but is made to marry her later."<sup>(1)</sup>

Jusserand answers this argument completely and satisfactorily:

"Without doubt, when writing B the author decided to modify entirely the family connections of Meed, and not without good cause. In the first version, so highly praised, the incoherence was such as to make a change indispensable."<sup>(2)</sup>

Then he goes on to show how Wrong was unsuited for the position, and how Favel is much more suitable; and it is possible to suppose that Fals was confused for Favel in this one case; a slip very easy to be made in view of the alliteration and the similarity of the names. Jusserand concludes: "The author of B has certainly neither 'misunderstood' nor spoilt A in this passage; just the reverse; he has made sense out of what was very near to being nonsense."<sup>(3)</sup>

(3) "In II 176, B has forgotten that the bishops are to accompany Meed to Westminster, and represents them as 'borne abrode in visitynge'".<sup>(4)</sup>

I shall not give the various arguments for and against this trivial point. Were we to look for such inconsistencies, in what portion of the poem would we not find them?

---

(1) C.H.E.L. II p.32.

(2) C.H.E.L. II p. 32.

(3) E.E.T.S. 139 b p.35.

v(4) " 32.

(4) The 'reddite' passage. This is the most complicated and vexed part of the controversy. I shall divide the argument into three parts, according to its relation to the three texts, as this greatly simplifies it.

(a) In relation to the A text. In the A text, passus five, there is a list and description of the seven deadly sins as follows: Pride, Lechery, Envy, Avarice, Gluttony, Sloth, and the famous Robert the Robber passage, beginning:

"Robert the robbour on Reddite he lokede,  
And for there was not wherewith he wepte ful sore." (1)

It will be noticed that there are only six deadly sins, the seventh, Wrath, being missing. It was from this fact that Manly evolved the lost leaf theory as follows:

- i. Wrath is missing. Perhaps this is due to the loss of a whole leaf.
- ii. The Robert the Robber passage seems hardly congruent to what has gone before; what has Sloth to do with Restitution? and what has robbery to do with Sloth? Surely Robbery should be connected with any other sin rather than with Sloth, being an act of commission, and not of omission.
- iii. Let us suppose, then, that Wrath was lost from among the other sins, say between Gluttony and Sloth. Let us also suppose that there was a transition passage between Sloth and Robert which is now lost. Then it is possible to suppose that

---

(1) A V 242-3.

(2) "Lost Leaf of Piers the Plowman", Mod. philol. 3-359.

iv. Both losses were occasioned by the loss of one sheet of MS. The sheets were folded in the middle to form a quire. This being so, the loss of the next to the innermost sheet of the quire would occasion the double loss. Calculation, of some sort, shows that the proportion of the passages is favourable to this supposition. The probability, moreover, of the loss of one sheet is quite good; but to plead the loss of two separate leaves is gratuitous. The above is the famous lost leaf argument, without any conclusions as to the authorship yet drawn. To Dr. Furnival's objection that it is hard to conceive of the loss of the next to the innermost sheet, without the loss of the innermost sheet, especially where the sheets were sewn, Manly gives three more or less parallel examples. These are, respectively, the loss of the next to the outermost pair of leaves, the loss of an inner pair of leaves, and the loss of an outer pair of leaves. <sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(2)</sup> Henry Bradley objects that it is hard to conceive a passage making transition from Sloth to Robert that would be at all satisfactory, and that if Robert belongs anywhere it is after Covetousness; and he modifies the theory somewhat. His theory is that the cause of the trouble was to be sought "not in a MS. written on parchment arranged in quires or gatherings, but in the 'copy' (to use the word in the modern printer's sense) handed by the author to the first transcriber.

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 c p. 59-60.

(2) Athenaeum, April 21, 1906.

This would no doubt be written on loose leaves of paper". And, Bradley argues, we can conceive Robert misplaced and Wrath lost. (The invocation of two such accidents, so closely together, is straining probability beyond all reason.)

Jusserand agrees with Bradley in that Robert was misplaced, but he is sceptical as to the loss of Wrath. The author or authors are geometrical mentally, he points out, and he adds a list of the occurrence of the seven deadly sins that bears him out:

AI	AV	BXIII	BXIV	CXVII
Pride	Pride	Pride	Pride	Pride
Envy	Lechery	Wrath	Wrath	Wrath
Avarice	Envy	Envy	Gluttony (1)	Gluttony
Gluttony	Avarice	Lechery	(Sloth)	Avarice
Lechery	Gluttony	Avarice	Avarice	Lechery
Sloth	Sloth	Gluttony	Lechery	Sloth
(Wrath miss.)	(Wrath miss.)	Sloth.	Sloth	(Envy miss.)
			(Envy miss.)	

(Note. This list is of the first occurrence of each respective sin list. Thus AI is corrected in B and C; AV is also corrected in B and C; but BXIV is not corrected in C. Jusserand's conclusion is, however, that whenever for the first time the author attempted to list the sins, with nothing to check the list against, he failed, four out of five times.)

In view of the above table it is entirely gratuitous to argue that Wrath was included but was lost. Therefore Jusserand substituted Bradley's shifted leaf for Manly's lost double leaf.

---

(1) I have put Sloth in Brackets because it is not specifically mentioned at this place; it is, however, implied beyond any doubt.

"The author of B, the same I think, as the author of A, issued, after a dozen years or more, a new text of his poems, a text which he had more or less constantly before him, making changes, corrections and additions as it occurred to him, the usual way with authors of this sort, capable of extension. The copy he used was naturally a copy of A, as there was no other text then in existence, with the twenty-four lines certainly in the wrong place, since he left them there. His changes which transformed a poem of 52599 lines into one of 7241, were very numerous; sometimes slight ones were made, sometimes new quotations were added, sometimes new matter was added on a considerable scale: the very way another writer, Montaigne, also absorbed in his thoughts actually worked. Preceded by some lines on the necessity of giving back ill-gotten goods, the passage on Robert the Robber, a logical sequence to Coveteise, forms a separate incident not at all necessary to make the confession of the Seven Deadly sins complete; it has all the appearance of an afterthought; such afterthoughts as the author, or anyone in his place, would write on separate slips of paper left loose or which might get loose, and which <sup>an</sup> Adam Scrivener of sleepy pen would copy anywhere. And as Scrivener in this case did not know what to do, he put the stray lines at the end of the passus when the rest of the confessions were finished so Robert would come just before the 'thousent of men' who 'mourned for their sins' 'weopyng and weyling.'

For what concerns the author himself, maybe, while making so many change in so many places, he never paid any

attention to this passage (in which, as a matter of fact, he introduced no change at all); maybe also he thought of transferring it to its proper place and neglected to mark it accordingly, or to see that the removal was made. The fact that the confession of Coveteise, as remodelled in version B, contains a passage not in A, where restitution is insisted on at great length, in most pressing language, lends probability to the latter hypothesis."<sup>(1)</sup>

I have quoted this passage at great length because it is here that the argument of Jusserand falls down most grievously; in the last sentence he plays right into the hands of the multiple authorship proponents.

This omission of restoring "reddite" to its right place, overlooked in B was corrected in C and the lines added: "Then was there a Walishman was wonderliche woryy He hight van- eld-ageyen if ich so moche have."<sup>(2)</sup> Jusserand further goes on to say that the description of the sins in A has all the appearance of being sketchy and incomplete -i.e. some sins are just memoranda to be developed later. <sup>A</sup>gainst this argument and the shifted leaf argument Manly has some telling arguments to prefer:

"Before discussing the criticisms of this passage I wish to point out that even if they did hold good, even if we had to conclude that this passus as it stands in

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 b p, 17.

(2) C VII 309-310.

A is sketchy and unfinished, this conclusion would leave the failure of B to notice and correct the confusion concerning Robert the Robber as much in need of explanation as before. The question is not, how did this confusion occur, but, why did not B notice and correct it?"<sup>(1)</sup> This argument, in the opinion of R.W.Chambers, who reviewed the discussion afterwards, is very powerful against Jusserand's hypothesis.<sup>(2)</sup>

(b) In relation to the B text. So far I have only given the theories of the disputants as to the disposition of "reddite". No connection between these disputes and the multiple authorship has been shown. When we consider the B text this connection becomes evident.

In the B text the sins occur as follows: Pride, Lechery, Envy, Wrath, Covetousness, Gluttony, Sloth, Robert the Robber.

(1) The following are Manly's conclusions on this point:

i. Wrath has been supplied by the continuator, but in style and manner it is totally different from the other sins as described in A.

ii. B did not know where to put the "reddite" passage, so he left it where it was in A; but he did include in the earlier part of Sloth a confession that he had withheld wages from his servants, as if thus to account for the passage. "the omission of Wrath and the confusion as to

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 b p.20.

(2) E.E.T.S 139 e p.2.

Sloth were noticed by B and he treated them in rather ingeniously. He introduced into the earlier part of Sloth's confession a declaration that he had been so slothful as to withhold the wages of his servants and to forget to return things he had borrowed. To supply a confession of Wrath he himself wrote a Confessio Irae, totally different in style from the work of A, and indeed more appropriate for envy than wrath, containing as it does no very distinctive traits of Wrath." (1)

If we accept the above premises, it follows at once that B misunderstood A, and showed that misunderstanding in his attempt to correct A, and therefore cannot have been the same man as A.

(2) If we accept Bradley's theory of the shifted passage:

we avoid the objections to the loss of the next to the innermost innermost leaf of aquire (which loss to Dr. Furnival is hardly conceivable) and yet the conclusions as to the multiple authorship are the same.

(3) If we accept Jusserand's modification of Bradley's theory:

the same conclusion seems equally inevitable. Jusserand reasons, however, that the way in which the passage was finally corrected in C shows that the author of C must have been the same as the author of A, and therefore of B. By adding a single line, and changing the first half of the next line, he makes the "reddite passage follow clearly and naturally upon Covetousness. In Covetousness mention was made of restitution to which, ostensibly, Covetousness as

---

(1) Mod Philol. 3- 365. (Lost Leaf of Piers Plowman.)

sented. Immediately afterwards these lines follow:

"Then there was a Walishman was wonderliche sory,  
 He highte yvan-3eld-ajeynn if ich so moche have,  
 All that ich wickeddliche wan sytthen ich witte hadde,  
 And paugh my lifelode lacke leten I nelle,  
 pat eche man shal have his er ich hennes wende.

Robert the ryfeler on reddite he lokede

And for there was not wherewith he wepte ful sore." (1)

It will be remembered that this passage in both A and B began:

"And git I chulle 3elden ageyen if I so moche haue." (2)

Now this single alteration is so simple and satisfactory, that it is only possible, says Jusserand? for the original author to have written it.

Of the confession of Wrath in B, Manly says it is "totally different in style from the work of A, and indeed more appropriate for envy than for wrath, containing as it does no very distinctive traits of wrath. The additions . . . are confused, vague, and entirely lacking in the finer qualities of imagination, organization and diction shown in all A's work. In A each confession is sketched with inimitable vividness and brevity." (3) This, according to Jusserand, is entirely a matter of opinion, and he holds the opposite opinion. He goes on to show that Pride, as in A, could be described as more appropriate to Envy; and Pride in still another part of A, as wholly inappropriate to itself; Wrath in A has some of the attributes of Envy. Further he shows that the distinction between Wrath

---

(1) C VII 309 seq. (2) AV 235. (3) Mod.Philol. 3-365.

and Envy was never very exactly observed, and the two were  
 often confused. <sup>(1)</sup>

Some Remarks on Manly's Statement of the Additions.

(1) the addition about Sloth's servants This passage begins:

"And my seruantz some tyme her salarye is bihynde

Reuthe is to here the rekenynge whan we rede acomptes" <sup>(2)</sup>

If this passage were the only thing added by B, we might credit his avowed purpose to account for Robert and "red-dite" in this manner, but it is not; it is added in the midst of much more matter, not at all about restitution, to which it is quite subsidiary.

(2) The difference in style of the additions in B. The added matter, in my opinion, is in the best style of A. Jusserand and Chambers, although they do not say so explicitly, are of the same opinion. We must remember that A wrote the description of Glutton's excess, called Hogarthian by Skeat. I append a summary of Glutton, and one of the added part of Sloth, for the purpose of comparison. No one can contend that so outstanding a passage as Glutton is not a fair representation from A.

---

(1) E.E.T. S.139 b p.31

(2) B V 433 -4

Gluttony. Glutton is on his way to church to be shriven when he is accosted by Betun the breustere, and invited to sample her ale, her spices, and other of her dainties. Glutton is allured, and joins a company comprising a souter, a warinar, a tinker, a hackneyman, a nedler, a clerk of church, "Sir Pers of Pridye, and Pernel of Flaundres", a digger, a rat-catcher, a rake, a riding-knight, etc. Clement the cobbler, Hikke the ostler, Bette the butcher, and Robin the ropemaker play for our edification a game called handicapping<sup>(1)</sup> over Clement's cloak and Hikke's hood. Then Glutton began to gorge himself with food and drink, until, trying to stand, he collapsed, and his wife and daughter had to bear him home, where he slept through Saturday and Sunday to overcome the excess. Then Repentance came upon him, and he vowed never to eat out of moderation again.<sup>(1)</sup>

Sloth. "Thanne came Sloth al bislabeled with two slymy eijen:

'I moste sitte', seyde the seggen 'or elles shulde

I nappe'!"

And straightway he fell asleep. Repentance waked him to hear confession. During his life he has been so slothful that he does not know his paternoster thoroughly; but he does know rhymes of Robin Hood. "I haue made vowes forty and forgete hem on the morwe." All his time is occupied with idle tales, and he would rather belie his neighbors than read the scriptures; he performs his prayers in a half-hearted manner. Although he has been priest and parson these thirty years, he cannot do all his devotions,

(1) See Skeat's interesting note on line 377 p.92.

(2) A V 146-222.

but he can hunt and hold love-days. He forgets to pay the money he has borrowed, and his servant's wages are sometime behind. He repays kindness with unkindness, and much valuable produce has been lost through his remissness.

"'Repentestow the noughte' quod repentance, and righte with that he swowned" is the masterly finishing touch to this addition. (1)

Some parallels may be drawn; both are equally lively. Both contain a rare sort of realism. Both contain a satirical and pawky humor. Both contain a strong sense of the ludicrous.

As to why this second realistic passage was not included in A, I have an interesting surmise to offer. It would be too much to expect of any man, genius though he be, that he could write two such passages at one time; after Gluttony, into which he put all his powers, he needed some time for recuperation. Hence the somewhat sketchy sins in A. After such a tour de force as Gluttony, we may forgive a sketchiness arising from exhaustion.

Now we come to Wrath as supplied in B. My purpose here is to show the strong similarity that exists between all the sins, whether in A, B, or C. We must expect some difference, of course, owing to the different nature of the sins described. But, allowing for that difference, the similarity of Wrath to the others is remarkable. I shall have room to trace the similarity in only one feature. It is noticeable, that whenever there is some personal description of the sin at the beginning, that description is very well done, and

---

(1) B V 392- 449.

stand out from its context. I give a list of the sins as they occur with this description extracted:

(1) No personal description in Pride.

(2) No personal description in Lechery.

(3) Very good personal description in Envy:

As pale as a pelet in a palseye he semede  
 I-clotheð in a caurimary I couthe him not discæue;  
 A kertel and a courtepy a knyf be his side  
 Of a freres frokke he wore the fore sleves  
 As a leek that had i-leighen longe in the sunne  
 So loked he with lene chekes; loured he foule.  
 His body was for-bolled for wraththe he bot his lippes  
 Wrothliche he wrong his fust, he thought him awreke."<sup>(1)</sup>

(4) Very good description of Covetousness:

"Thanne came Couetyse I couthe him not discreue  
 So hungri and so halewe sire Herue him loked.  
 He was betel browed with twei blered ei en,  
 And like a leathern purs lullede his chekes;  
 In a torn tabast of twelve winter age;" etc.<sup>(2)</sup>

(5) None in Glutton.

(6) None in Sloth as in A; That in B, however, is equally good.

(7) In Wrath, as suppléed in B, "which is totally unlike all the sins in A" there is some of like quality:

"Now awaketh Wratthe with two white eyen,  
 And Nyuelynge with the nose and his nekke hangyng."<sup>(3)</sup>

(1) A V 61-68. (2) AV 107-196. (3) B V 134-135.

These two closely compacted lines give as complete a description as any other, and one of the same genre of description.

A brief recapitulation of the "red dite" controversy is now in order.

- (1) Manly's lost double-leaf will not hold water, but
- (2) Bradley's shifted leaf theory is just as efficacious to show B different from A.
- (3) Jusserand's shifted leaf theory does not help him much.
- (4) Jusserand's argument from the C text is significant and important.
- (5) Manly's supposition of the loss of Wrath from A is not substantiated; nor is his statement of the difference of Wrath as in B.

(c) In relation to the C text. We have already mentioned Jusserand's inference from the correction of "red dite" in C. "One particular which has not been noticed, deserves, however, special notice. The twenty-four lines consist, as we know, of six verses on the necessity of making restitution, followed by what concerns Robert the Robber; the six lines cannot be properly attached, such as they are, to any part of the poem, neither where they stand in A and B, nor where the confession of Coveitise ends, which is their real place. Professor Manly supposes, as we have seen, a big gap supplying room enough for a transition from Sloth to Robert and restitution. C who, being, as I think, the author, knew better, not only transferred the passage to the end of the confession of Coveitise, but supplied what was lacking to make it fit. What was lacking was not eighty

lines, as Mr. Manly would have us believe, but one." (1)

There is one objection to all the above theories, whether they be for or against the multiple theory. The disputed passage as it stands in C makes good sense, and very good sense, nor does anyone deny this, but is it safe to conclude, as everyone before has concluded, that the passage as it stands in A and B is so impossible of sense that re-allocation is necessary? "Reddite" has been assumed out of place in A and B; but is it out of place? R.W. Chambers was the first to call attention to this possible point of view. (2) Arguing for the single authorship himself, he saw the fallacy of Jusserand's stand on "reddite"; "M. Jusserand, however, labours under the difficulty that he accepts the theory of the lost leaf, while denying the consequences drawn from it by Prof. Manly. He is thus in a disadvantageous position. For if we once accept the view that passages have been misplaced or lost, Prof. Manly's deductions seem to follow naturally. It is not merely that B accepted what in that case we must admit to be a defective text of A. This he might have done had he been A. But B also attempted to remedy the defect. Hence the parallel instances of authors which have been quoted, who in revising their works, have failed to notice blemishes, are hardly to the point. B did notice the incoherency, and he remedied it, but in a way which shows that no suspicion that a leaf had been lost or shifted ever crossed his mind." (3)

Chambers' conclusion about the "reddite" passage is that "There would then seem to be no ground for disturbing the order of the MSS, in so far as Robert the Robber is con-

(1) E. E. T. S. 139b p.21. (2) E.E.T. S.139e p2. (3) Ibid p6.



cerned." <sup>(1)</sup> and his reason is, mainly, that "to our author then, a Robert's manor a Wastour would seem to convey the notion of vagabondage, leading to ribaldry, gluttony, and theft. Would the confession of a Robert - for it must be noted that in this passage Robert is used almost as a common noun - who had not even been an industrious robber, seeing he has amassed nothing, be an unfit sequel to the confession of Sloth." <sup>(2)</sup> That the author regarded Robert as a vagabond is established by the various passages of the poem where the terms are used. An instructive parallel to the treatment of Sloth in the Parson's tale is then drawn. "We may imagine our Robert as an idle apprentice, who from idleness has fallen into Wanhope; he has become an avowed outcast from society, a felon as Accalls him. Robert consoles himself by calling to memory the penitent thief. Now Skeat pointed out long ago that the right place for the penitent thief is under Sloth, under the subheading Wanhope, which always belongs to Accidie." <sup>(3)</sup>

That is to say, Chambers shows that the passage as it stands offers no startling incongruity. Moreover he shows that the proposed rearrangements themselves are not without disadvantages. Finally he concludes: "Bref Prof. Manly's supporters, must I think, allow that the element of certainty, which is necessary before we can use the shifted leaf theory as a basis on which to build other theories is wanting. Which is putting it mildly."

---

(1) E.E. T. S. 139 e p6.

(2) *ibid.* p.5. (3) *ibid.*

I have been careful to quote Chambers's own words, because what immediately follows is based on his conclusions. If we accept Chambers's conclusions, which, after all, are not very startling, merely allowing us to read the texts as occur without emendation, we can as in the case of John But, reconstruct the processes in the author's mind. For this reconstruction we assume, as we did before, that one author wrote the poems, and that he was dissatisfied with the earlier versions (Jusserand's hypothesis). Then we can reason as follows:

- (1) The author put "reddite" and "geld ageyen" where they occur in the A text, and where they make good sense.
- (2) being dissatisfied with A as a whole, he re-wrote it. And he amplified Sloth, just as he amplified the poem as a whole. Nor was there any attempt to justify "reddite" by this amplification, for he was aware of no incongruity.
- (3) When he made the C revision, this same author, as modified by age and intervening experience, was much given to rearranging and shifting passages (showing a spirit kindred to those of Bradley and Jusserand). He removed the passage from where it made good sense to where it made better sense. This reconstruction accounts for the passages as they occur in the three texts. It calls in no conjecture with reference to allocation of emendation whatsoever, taking the text at its face value, and less conjecture with reference to intention than any other possible reconstruction. It is not based on probability or possibility; it is logically and psychologically sound, nor are the premises extravagant. The result of this reconstruction is to reduce the multiplicity

value of "reddite" to an absurdity; on the basis of this reconstruction we may conclude that, if anything, "reddite" is in favour of the single authorship.

(5) Sloth's Wicked Winnings. Correctly speaking, this is a part of the "reddite" controversy, but I have separated it for the purpose of simplicity. According to Bradley's modification of Manly's view, the concluding lines of Sloth are more appropriate to Covetousness, and should really be placed under that sin. The lines referred to are those immediately before "reddite" and beginning:

"And yet I chulle zelden ageyen if I so moche haue  
 Al that I wikkedliche wan, (1)

Chambers answers this argument on every ground.

First, he investigates the meaning of wicked winnings.

"'Wicked winnings' seem inappropriate to Sloth. But does win in the language of Piers Plowman necessarily convey any idea of great gain? It may mean simply working for one's daily bread; indeed to labour is the primary meaning of 'win' (cf. O.E. winnan to toil)."<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover, by an investigation of Sloth he comes to the meaning of wicked winnings. "Now Accidie being the neglect of honest industry, it follows that the slothful above every man wins wickedly". And last, by a scholarly and thorough investigation of the provinces of the seven deadly sins, he shows that wicked winnings are quite appropriate to Sloth.

---

(1) A V 236-7.

(2) E.E. T.S. 139e p.6.

(6) Kitte and Calotte.

Manly had taken for granted Prof. Jack's conclusion that all the autobiographical references in the poems are fictitious. <sup>(1)</sup> He adds, moreover, "Were any confirmation of his results needed, it might be found in the fact that the author gives the names of his wife and daughter as Kitte and Kalote .... typical names of lewd women, and therefore not to be taken literally as the names of the author's wife and daughter." <sup>(2)</sup> These lines occur at B XVIII 226, and C XXI 473 in the two texts.

As to whether the names are the invention of a reviser of of the original author, Jusserand's argument is somewhat beside the point, for Manly's only argument is that the opprobrious names are a sign of fiction. Jusserand, however, impugns the opprobrious character of the names. "Names for which such a bad fate is in store always begin by being honourable; then comes a period during which they are used in the two senses; then arrives the moment of their definitive doom." <sup>(3)</sup> Jusserand gives examples of the use of the two words in support of his view. It is, however, significant, as Manly points out, that both these terms are used together. <sup>(4)</sup> But he does not answer Jusserand's argument that before such names become definitely opprobrious, there is a long period when they are used in both ways. <sup>(5)</sup>

---

(1) Jack, J.E. "The Autobiographical Elements in Piers Plowman"  
Journal of Germanic Philology III 393-414.

(2) C.H.E.L. II Chapter I.

(3) E.E.T.S. 139 b p. 55.

(4) " " c p. 55.

(5) " " d p.37.

(7) Piers' wife and children.

According to Manly the lines

"Dame werche whanne tyme is Piers wyf hatte,

His doughter hatti Do riȝt so or þi damme shal þebete,

And his sonne hatteth Suffe i souereignes th̄ haue here wille

And deme hem nou t for if ou dost ou shalt it dere a biggen."<sup>(1)</sup>

are misplaced in A, for they interrupt Piers' speech before his journey. Both Jusserand and Manly overlook this point in their later arguments. Chambers, however, challenges the statement that these names interrupt the remarks about preparations for the journey. "The lines immediately preceding the names are an admonition to work, and this admonition is then emphasised and summarized in the names of Piers' family, 'Dame-Work-When-Time-Is' and 'Do-Right-So-Or-Thy-Dame-Shell-Thee-BEat'. There isn't nothing wrong with the text here; for this introduction of remarks about persons and things, which seem quite irrelevant, until we scrutinize their names, is a favourite trick of our author's."<sup>(2)</sup> This answer snubs Manly (by implication) most severely. Chambers gives several examples from other parts of the poem.

(8) Segges.

This is an example of "C's failure to understand B", but I have included it among the disputed passages for ease of reference. This word occurs in the incident of belling the cat, introduced for the first time in B. "A raton of renon most

---

(1) A VII 71.

(2) E.E.T.S. 139 e p. 10.

renable of tonge" declares "I haue ysein segges, in the cite  
of London".<sup>(1)</sup> These segges wear collars about their necks,  
and go free in warren and waste. In C this line is changed  
to "Ich haue yseie grete syres in cyties and in tounes".<sup>(2)</sup>  
According to Manly's interpretation segges means dogs, and  
therefore C spoiled the intention of B by changing them to  
men. Jusserand, however, claims that segges does mean men,  
and that wearing collars was a very well known custom of the  
time. He does not, however, account for the warren and waste.  
Manly answers "That in the ultimate intention they were men  
and the cat and kitten a king and prince is no doubt true.  
But this is a beast fable. What have men to do in it, among  
the rats and mice and cat and kitten? and above all why the  
warren and waste?"<sup>(3)</sup> Men it is true, do not run about in war-  
ren and waste, but rats do; and so naturally would the rats'  
conception of men. Thus segges in B may be interpreted, not  
as dogs (why dogs anyway?) but as rat citizens, who combine  
at once the man attribute of wearing collars and the rat at-  
tribute of running about in the warren and waste. But why s  
should "Men wite where thei went and awei runne"? If we ac-  
cept this interpretation of segges the line is not clear;  
perhaps that is why in C it was changed to "grete syres",  
from whom the humble rat citizens would have a natural reason  
for trying to escape; i.e. when the passage was first written

---

(1) B Prol. 158-9.

(2) C I 177.

(3) E.E.T.S .139 c p. 49.

the author meant segges to express the more elevated rat citizens and rat nobility; when he was revising the passage he saw the lack of meaning in the passage, and changed it to grete syres. This accounts for the change in C, and makes that change perfectly logical and useful. That segges meant dogs there is no reason for believing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A AND B - THE ALLITERATION.

The alliteration of the three texts was carefully examined by Mary Dakin, who arrived at the following general conclusion: <sup>(1)</sup> "Professor Manly has said that an examination of the alliteration would help him to prove his theory of the fivefold authorship, but the result of this investigation tends rather in the opposite direction." The alliteration shows a steady development along general lines, even with the additions of C regarded separately.

The study of the alliteration is of course based on deviations from the normal line, whose scheme is aa:ax. throughout, however, there occur lines with no alliteration at all, with the form aa.bb, and the form ab.ab. I append a summary of her results below:

(1) Increase of the number of rhyme letters:

(a) More than two rhyme letters in the first half verse; evenly in A B C<sub>1</sub> C<sub>2</sub>. Never below 8% or above 9%. There is a gradual but slight increase: A<sub>1</sub> 8.04, A<sub>2</sub> 8.58, B 8.73, C 8.63, C<sub>2</sub> 8.92.

(b) More than one rhyme letter in the 2nd half verse; here

---

(1) "The Alliteration of Piers Plowman" Mod. Lang. Review,

there is less agreement: A<sub>1</sub> 5.74, A<sub>2</sub> 6.58, B 6.49, C 5.28.

(2) Decrease of the number of rhyme letters.

(a) First rhyme letter missing (xa·ay) decreases from 2.7% in A to 1.86% in C.

(b) Second rhyme letter missing (ax·ay) regular decrease from 2.43% in A to 1.86% in C.

(c) Third rhyme letter missing (aa·xy) ranges from 4.52% to 2.48%. Gradually decreases, but rises somewhat in C<sub>2</sub>.

(3) Lines having two rhyme letters (aa·bb) decreases with perfect regularity from 2.09% to 1.11%.

(4) "H" rhyming with a vowel. Increases steadily from 2.74% to 4.31%, except for a slight decrease in A<sub>2</sub>.

(5) "S" rhyming with "sh" or "sch" regular decrease, 1.53% to .14%.

(6) Rhyming "f" and "v". Never very frequent, but found throughout. Skeat judges this a connecting link, for it is rare in other alliterative poetry.

(7) Lines without any rhyme letter, increases from .35% to .89%, but rises a little in C.

(8) Irregular lines .1%.

(9) Intricate alliteration present throughout. eg. aa·abb, aa·bab, aab·ab, aab·abb, etc.

(10) Rhyme on weak or secondary stress, increases in frequency with remarkable regularity.

"This examination of the alliteration tends to prove that the alliteration gives no support to Prof. Manly's theory. The differences between the texts are never very

striking, even if they stood alone and wholly unexplained, while the similarities are many, the gradual increases and decreases being very striking and suggestive of the gradual development of a single artist."<sup>(1)</sup>

Although she does not actually commit herself to the one side, there is no doubt that Miss Dakins's findings are without qualification in favour of the single authorship.

#### CHAPTER IX.

#### THE DIALECT PROBLEM AND THE CORRECT DETERMINATION OF THE A TEXT.

These two problems are closely related, as shown by Chambers: "The twelve unprinted MSS. of A differ widely in point of dialect from the printed text and from each other -we have a Southern text, a Northern text, and many varieties of Midland, besides texts which it is difficult to classify. The B and C texts also vary in the different MSS. The four printed texts were selected for publication on grounds quite other than those of dialect: indeed, in one case, that of the Vernon MSS, it has always been recognized that the dialect is the scribe's, not the author's."<sup>(2)</sup> Manly's statement on the dialectal differences is as follows: "A careful study of the MSS<sup>2</sup> will show that between A b and C there exist differences incompatible with the supposition of a single author". This can be easily tested in the case of the pronouns and the verb are"<sup>(3)</sup>

A somewhat hasty review of the MSS. of A was undertaken

---

(1) Ibid.

(2) E.E.T. S. 139 e p.21.

(3) C.H.E.L. II Chapt 1.

(1)  
 taken by R.W.Chambers and J.H.G.Grattan with the purpose of ascertaining the true basis of the various MSS., and of forming a text that as closely as possible would approximate the author's holograph. They also worked with the avowed end of showing that the difference between A and B is not as great as averred by Manly. A resume of their findings follows:

The A text as in Skeat is not a reconstruction of the MS. of the author, but a reprint of the Vernon MS. as edited by Skeat; it is printed with as few corrections as possible, and therefore contains many inferior readings. In some 200 cases Vernon was corrected; we may conclude that the A text was not a reproduction of the author's exact words, and that we are more or less at the mercy of the scribe. Where A is inferior to B in metre and style it is often the case that the inferior reading is found only in a small minority of the A MSS. and the bulk of the MSS. have the so-called B reading.

eg. A Prol. 76.-9 of 11 A MSS. agree with the better reading in B.

eg. A I 17-21. -9 of 11 A MSS agree with better reading in B.

Thus in many cases the inferiority of A is due to corruptions of Vernon MSS. On the whole, however, Vernon is exceptionally good, and much smoothed by the scribe: "It is natural that a scribe engaged in copying and turning into his own *dzazsdt* speech poems often written in widely different dialects should become something of an editor."<sup>(2)</sup> An example of scribal emendation

(1) I the A text. M.L.R. April 1909 (2) E.E.T.S. 139e p.20.

is A VIII lo7, which each scribe corrected in a different way, of which Harleian and Vernon alone are plausible.

Then follows an attempt to weigh the MSS. to arrive at the correct basis of the A text. I give a list of the abbreviations for the four most important MSS. The others are to be found in Skeat's introduction.

V Vernon MSS

H Harleian MS.

T Trinity MS.

U University College MS., Oxford.

From similarities between V and H it is to be concluded that they had the same edited MS. to work from. For example the scribe of the original MS. had a penchant for substituting synonyms for each other, often ruining the alliteration.

T and U are similarly related .

The following table shows the values of the four MSS.:

	V	H	T	U
(1) Necessary words of lines omitted	32	18	17	34
(2) Good words or lines omitted	33	20	18	29
(3) Reading distinctly inferior	208	194	131	217
(4) Reading somewhat inferior	44	42	42	47
(5) Errors distinct	240	240	148	264

(The figures in 5 are averaged to allow for missing lines).

VH have 63 errors in common (taken from ancestor f, say).

TU have 22 errors in common (taken from ancestor t, say).

These are the two main traditions of A MSS. t is nearer the original tradition than f and therefore greater weight rests on the TU tradition.

Now follows a relation of the other MSS. to these two traditions.

H<sub>2</sub> is closely related to t, and it enables us to eliminate

some of the worst errors of t, and get nearer to t's original. D (Douce) follows t closely, but is choked with gross errors. Yet it may help in tracing t's errors.

Dig is an attempt to combine an A and a C text, and both are contaminated.

W also is contaminated.

R and E are closely related to U.

The group of MSS. in the TU tradition is TH<sub>2</sub>WDig RUE, subdivided as shown.

There are also to be considered:

L (Lincoln's Inn) much corrupted due to an inordinate love of alliteration. L is a garbled copy of a MS. independent of both types.

I (Inglby MS.) is not connected with VH group, and slightly only with TU group; contaminated from C.

As (Ashmole 1468) has all possible faults.

H<sub>2</sub> (Harleian 3500) is a B MS. to passus V, and from V a contaminated A MS.

Their conclusions are as follows:

"A nearer approximation to the original A text can be drawn from the MSS. of the TU (original t) group, than from the VH (original f) group.

(2) Any text aiming to reproduce the original must be founded primarily on TU, and to a lesser degree, on VH. MSS. belonging to neither group must be used to turn the scale in doubtful cases.

(3) The A text thus arrived at will be found to approximate much more closely to the received B text than the received A text does.

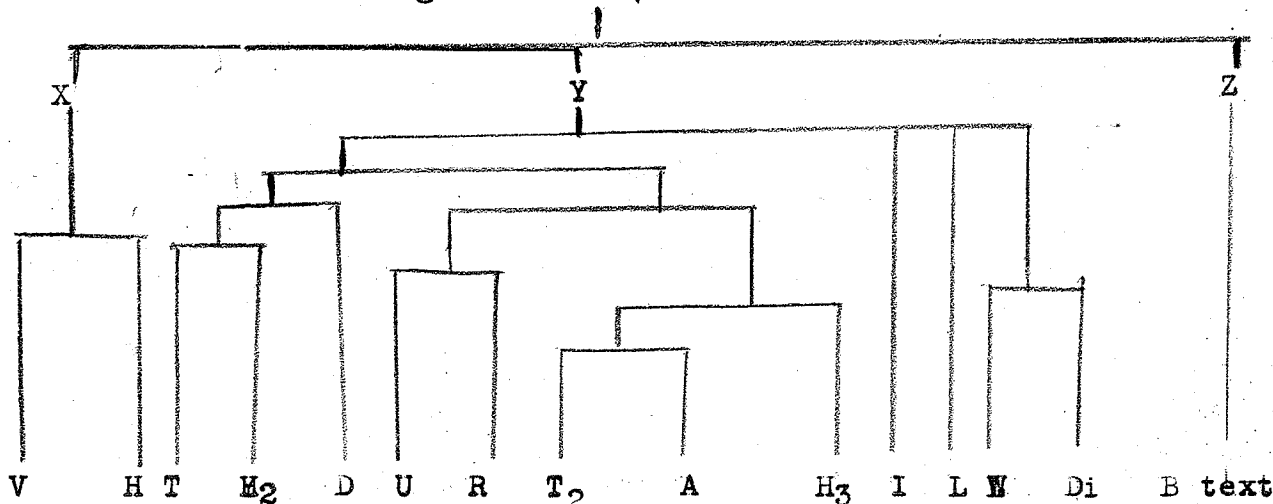
(4) Only when we know what is the diction, metre, and

sentence structure of the original A text can we argue with certainty whether these are or are not materially different from those of the B additions, or decide whether B's treatment of the A text is really inconsistent with the unity of authorship."<sup>(1)</sup>

I understand that Chambers is at present working on this determination of the A text. His conclusions, as stated above, are extremely favourable to the single authorship.

An independent study of the A MSS. was undertaken by T.A.Knott<sup>(1)</sup> who inclined to the multiple authorship. He claims that Chambers and Grattan are wrong because they pursued the wrong methods of MS. weighing. Yet his allocation of the MSS. is remarkably like that of Chambers and Grattan:

Original text (not author's holograph)



This table is much more elaborate than that of Chambers and Grattan. T and U seem somewhat separated at first sight, but when we remember that H<sub>2</sub> and D were so related by Chambers and Grattan, the relation is clearer. Chambers seems to impugn the value of such MS. investigation, for he says: "No doubt Prof. Manly will ultimately defend his view of the dialect after an examination of all the MSS. Yet this will be but Jedburgh justice, if, as seems to be the case, he has arrived at his conclusions before arriving at the evidence."<sup>(1)</sup>

#### CHAPTER X

##### THE WEIGHT OF THE TRADITIONAL BELIEF.

The full force of this argument was first brought to bear by Jusserand on the controversy. I must here pause to pay the tribute owing him: although he was the first to attempt to build up a case for the single authorship, and refute that for the multiple authorship, yet throughout all the subsequent controversy there was not a single argument raised for or against his view which he did not anticipate in his first article: this first article is remarkable for its logical completeness; every aspect of the complicated situation was realized and stated by him as completely and searchingly as an intricate chess problem is analyzed by a master. And although in some of his details he may have been wrong, or mislead on one or two points, yet his analysis of the controversy is everywhere recognized as just. For instance, in this one sentence he states what is to be the present and immediately following portion of our argu-

ment: "For Piers Plowman we have what the manuscripts tell us in their titles, colophons, or marginal notes; what the author tells us himself in his verses; and what tradition has to say, being represented by one man at least, whose testimony is of real weight.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) The titles, colophons, and marginal notes. Again I quote Jusserand: "Without exception, all those titles, colophons, and marginal notes and testimonies agree in pointing to the succession of visions, forming, at first, 8 or 12, and lastly 23 passus, as being ~~the~~ work, ~~as if~~ having for its general title Piers Plowman, and written by one author. MSS. containing the three episodes of Meed, Piers Plowman properly so called, and Dowel, begin thus: 'Hic incipit liber qui vocatur pers plowman'; and end thus: 'Explicit tractatus de perys plowman'. The continuity of the work is also shown by the numeration of the passus in several MSS.: the MS. Add 3528<sup>7</sup>, for example, of text B, where we are told, at the end of the Piers plowman episode, that the new passus now beginning is at the same time the first of Dowel, and the eighth of the tota work."<sup>(2)</sup> etc

The obvious answer to this evidence of colophons etc. is that the fifteenth century, as did the subsequent centuries, held the mistaken view that the visions were the work of one man; and if they had any reason for that view we do not know of it now. This evidence does show, however, that throughout the time the poems were read, it was the

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 b p. 8.

(2) 2 " p. 8.

natural thing to think them the work of one man; and that no such flagrant differences were seen as to suggest a multiple authorship to readers, who, although lacking the modern critical faculty, had at least this advantage over the modern reader, that they read in their own language things which must have found some parallel in their own experience, and thoughts which were natural to their way of thinking. Thus this portion of the controversy may be of great or little importance, depending on how the controversy is settled; but as to the settling of the controversy itself, it yields nothing definite for either side, although it adds to the already imposing array of evidence for the single authorship.

(2) "What tradition has to say, being represented by one man at least, ..." The "one man at least" is John Bale; he collected, with much trouble, all the information available concerning English authors, in the form of a "Catalogue"; and of Langland he assures us that the greater part of his information is the result of his own researches, and therefore reliable. He re-wrote his discoveries on the cover of a B MS. (Ashburnham CXXX): "Robertus Langlande, natus in comitatu Salopie in villa Mortimeris Clybery in the Claylanda and within viii miles of Malvern hills, scripsit Piers Plowman" An objection to this testimony is that Cleobury is well over twenty miles from the Malvern hills. Some new evidence, just discovered, seems to account for this mistake,<sup>(1)</sup> and gives a new significance to the testimony of John Bale.

---

(1) See below p.

(3) The fullest and most satisfactory treatment of the tradition is that of S. Moore, to whom we have referred to once above. He sets forth the tradition, and his conclusions are, on the whole, just. I append his information, with my own comment on his conclusions.

Till 1802 the poem was known only on the B text, even though there was a C text available.

Crowley, in 1550, had also an A text, but did not realize the intrinsic difference. Bale, Stow, Selden, Pittswood, all speak as if they only knew of the B text.

Tyrhwitt, in 1775, noticed the variations in C, but his collation was not careful enough to realize the intrinsic difference.

Ritson, in 1802, did discover the difference in C, although he did not know A; but he saw no reason for a multiple authorship, proving himself less astute than T.D.Hall in more recent times. Moreover, it was his opinion that B was the work of a single author, and we must remember that BB contains A1 and A2. It is claimed that he did not know which was the earlier text, but how that accounts for his failure to see the most obvious differences is hard to see; for surely, if x and y are different, then (excepting the higher mathematics only) y and x are also different.

Whitaker, in 1813, decided perversely enough that C was the earlier text; yet he too favoured a single authorship. He is quoted as saying: "All these varieties, however, bear marks, not of the same spirit and genius only, but of

the same peculiar and original manner, so that it is scarcely to be conceived that they are interpolations of successive transcribers. Whatever be the cause, however, it may be confidently affirmed, that the text of no ancient work whatever contains so many various readings of varies so widely from itself. To account for this phenomenon, however, in the penury, or rather absence of original information pertaining to the author, we are at liberty to suppose that the first edition of his work appeared when he was a young man, and that he lived and continued transcribing to extreme old age. But a man of his genius would not submit to the drudgery of mere transcription; his invention and judgment would always be at work; new abuses and therefore new objects of satire would emerge from time to time: and as the new language began to be spoken, he might, though unwillingly, be induced to adopt its modernism in order to render his work intelligible to a second or even third generation of readers. In this last respect, it is not impossible, however, that his transcribers might use some freedom; for while we deny them invention to add, we may at least allow them skill to translate."<sup>(1)</sup>

Moore rejects this opinion as worthless because the facts were wrong. Yet surely it has some value; from the tone of Whitaker's words we may gather that he studied the poem very carefully; and if there were any great difference he must have been struck with it, even though he looked at the case backwards. It has at least as much value as any

---

(1) Whitaker's *visio Willi de Petro Ploughman*, p. xxxiii.

other unprejudiced opinion, and much more than any opinion influenced by a stand on the controversy.

Price, in 1824, demonstrated that B was antecedent to C. He argued for the multiple authorship "but it is my impression that the first was the one published by the author, and the variations were made by some other person, who was perhaps induced by his own political sentiments to modify passages, and was gradually led on to publish a revision of the whole."<sup>(1)</sup>

Skeat, the last and greatest critic before the controversy, held the opposite view. I re-quote his opinion, as it is hardly available in our library: "That most of the additional matter in both of the later forms of the poem was by Langland himself I have little doubt; his style is very peculiar, and many of the subsequently interpolated passages are the best of the whole. It is easy to say that many others have been added to it; but the question is, who could have done so? There were not two Langlands, surely; and though there are otherX(anom.) alliterative poems of considerable merit, such as, for instance, "William of Palerne", I greatly doubt if they reach the high standard of poetical power which is conspicuous in Piers Plowman."<sup>(2)</sup>

Moore discredits Skeat's opinion, because he did not know the immediate facts of the controversy, and because there are in the poem many lines in the style of the author ejected because of MS. authority. But surely Skeat

---

(1) "Vision and Creed of Piers Plowman", Wright (L 1856) xxii,

(2) E.E. T.S. Piers Plowman pt 1, xxxiii.

knew of these ejected lines when he formed his opinion;  
 and we know that he thought long before arriving at it;  
 (his passage, already quoted, on Richard the Redeless,  
 shows that his reasons were not hasty, but well considered);  
 and we must respect any opinion advanced by Skeat a trifle  
 more than the opinion of anyone else.

All this tradition is under the disadvantage that its  
 importance cannot be determined conclusively until the con-  
 troversy itself is determined; and when the latter is done,  
 of what use is the former? <sup>(1)</sup> Unfortunately, too many argu-  
 ments of the controversy labour under the same disadvantag-  
 es.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TESTIMONY OF THE AUTHOR HIMSELF.

#### I. The author's name -the case for William Langland.

(a) From the colophons etc. The manuscript additions, as  
 pointed out above, seem to indicate that the author's  
 name was William Langland.

(b) From internal evidence. There are many references to  
 the name Will throughout the poem as follows:

1. Simply Will.-A IX 118, XII 51, 89, 103.  
                   B  
                   B VIII 124, XI 144, V 62.

---

(1) This may seem to be an attempt to be paradoxical,  
 but is not really so. What is implied in the statement is  
 that these arguments are by nature only of secondary im-  
 portance, and that the controversy cannot be settled by  
 any number of them.

C II 5, XI ~~71~~ 71, VII 2.

2. William. - A V 44 (but cf. B V 62, which has Wille.

3. Long Wille. - B XV 148. Also C VI 23, although the name is not given it is stated that the author is too long to stoop.

4. Will Langland (or Longelonde) B XV 148 has been interpreted as stating that the author's name is such.

"I have lived in londe, quod I, my name is Longe Wille."  
As the passage is a famous crux I give all possible interpretations of it:

i. It can be interpreted as a play on the name Wille langlande. There are several indications in the MSS. to show that such an interpretation was placed on it during the fifteenth century.

eg. MS.Laud 581. "Opposite the before quoted verse occur the words in a fifteenth century handwriting "Nota the name of thaut(our)".<sup>(1)</sup>"

eg. MS.Additional 35287. " The rule followed in it is that Latin words or names of real personages are written in large letters and underlined in red, and the names of imaginary beings are not distinguished in any way from the rest of the text. Thus the names of Meed, Holy Church, Robert the Robber, etc. are written like any other word. But the names of Samson, Samuel, Seneca, Kings Edmund and Edward are underlined in red. The name Longe Wille is underlined in red and written in longer letters than the

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 b p. 9.

( 2) Ibid. p.10.

rest of the line, thus taking rank in those of real and not of imaginary beings." <sup>(1)</sup> Jusserand accepts this interpretation of the line.

ii. It can be interpreted as a manner of saying that one has cut his eye teeth and is not to be taken in. "I have lived in londe" is to say "I have had experiende in the world of men." This is Manly's interpretation. <sup>(2)</sup>

iii. It can be interpreted as meaning "I have lived in London", for we know that the author lived in London, and it is changed to this in the C text. <sup>(3)</sup>

iv. It can be interpreted at its face value - simply as "I have lived in this land". No one in the controversy has thought it worth his while to consider this interpretation, possibly because it is the simplest and most satisfactory.

(c) From external evidence. The note in MS. Dublin d.4.1., that the author's name was William de Langland, and his father's name Stacy de Rokayle, pointed out by Skeat, has received some new confirmation lately. Allan H. Bright, in "New Light on Piers Plowman" <sup>(4)</sup> has discovered some facts that seem to have a bearing on the case. His book is not yet available, nor will it be available in time for this thesis, but the review in the Times Literary Supplement, (which I take to be fairly representative) says:

Just under the hills, five miles from Great Malvern

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139 b p. 10.

(2) C XVII 286.

(2) " " c p. 14.

(4) Ox.Univ.Press, London, 1929.

priory was an ancient farm of the Manor and parish of Colwell named Longlands, lying about the boundary of the parish of Ledbury. A "mile wei" from Longlands is the Primeswell brook, the scene, he submits, of the dream. 'On high to the east' rises the Herefordshire beacon with its crown of Norman work; In the vale beneath is the old castle whose 'deep ditches and darke' still may be seen. Between is a fair field. After making his discovery Mr. Bright found that it had the sanction of an old local ~~legend~~ tradition.

"The earliest and best evidence of Langland's authorship is a note in the Dublin MS. that the writer of the poem was William Langland, son of Stacy de Rokayle. By showing that the Rokayles were active supporters of the Dispensers, lords of the neighboring stronghold of Hanley Castle, and patrons of Malvern Priory and Tewkesbury Abbey, Mr. Bright strengthens the probability of his conjecture that the illegitimate child adscriptus glebae, took his name from the lands on which he was brought up. But this farm was in the parish of Colwell, and in 1348 William de Colwell was ordained acolyte by the bishop of Hereford; and Mr. Bright believes that this was the poet. On the other hand, Crowley, a late witness, who says that the poet's name was Robert, makes two incompatible statements about his birthplace - (a) that it was Cleobury, (b) that it was eight miles from Malvern hills. As the distance of Cleobury is well over twenty miles, the eight has usually been treated as a 'scribal error'. Mr. Bright suggests that

the scribe's figure was right, but that for Cleobuty we should read Ledbuty. As for the name Robert, Professor Chambers has provided Mr. Bright with direct manuscript confirmation, hitherto unnoted, of the conjecture that the name arose from a misreading (I, Robert for y-robed) of the incipit of a section of a poem."<sup>(1)</sup>

If this new evidence does establish that there was a William Langland, the facts of whose life agree with those of Will as set forth in the poem, then the arguments of Jusserand on this point, to be set forth immediately below, become irresistible. I would point out, however, that the evidence must be weighed most carefully.

In this connection I cannot do better than quote Jusserand: "At various places in each, and with more abundance as time passed, the author gave some details about himself, his train of thoughts, and his manner of life. All these details are simple, plain, clear, most of them of no interest whatever, if untrue; they are not meant to show the poet to advantage, but have, on the contrary, often the tone of a confession; video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor. Localities are mentioned with a precision and definiteness unequalled in the ample dream literature of that period, where poets usually go to sleep by the side of an anonymous brook, in a nameless country. Here two regions, one a very unusual one in poetry, are named so as to draw special attention, Malvern with her hills, her mists

---

(1) Times Literary Supplement, Feb. 7 1929, p. 94.

ant the vast plain at the foot of the slopes; London with its cathedral of many chantries, its great people wearing bright collars, its poorer ones in their 'cots', its principle suburbs and thoroughfares, Cornhill, Cheapside, Cock Lane, Garlickhithe, Southwark, Shoreditch, 'where lives Dame Emme', Westminster with the king's palace and the law courts."<sup>(1)</sup>

"All those personal notes, scattered in various versions belonging, as everyone acknowledges, to dates far apart, accord quite well with one another. If Mr. Manly's four anonymous authors are responsible for them, they showed remarkable cleverness in fusing into one the various personalities, to the extent even of growing more talkative, 'cautious', and 'pedantic' as the years passed, so as to convey the impression of one man growing older - the more meritorious too, as the taking up of another man's work to revise it is rarely a task to be assumed at the end of one's life, so that the chances are that the supposed reviser of C was not an old man; yet he cleverly assumed Eld's habits and ways of speech."<sup>(2)</sup>

"How extraordinary is such minute care in four different anonymous authors, who cannot have acted in concert, as each must have died to allow the other to do his revising unimpeded! Such minute care in order to give the impression of only one man revising his work as he lived on and grew older! - much less extraordinary, and therefore more

---

(1) E.E.T.S. 139b p.52

(2) Ibid p. 53.

probable, if the whole was, as I believe, the work of the same writer."<sup>(1)</sup>

"Not only do the personal intimations scattered through in the three versions fit well together, but they fit ~~in~~ such a manner as would have composed such a poem, a man of enthusiasm and despondency, of a great tenderness of heart, in spite of a gaunt exterior and blunt speech, a man of many whims which he may have occasionally have obeyed, only to feel afterwards the pangs of remorse, as if he had committed the worst crimes; describing himself then in the worst colours, and., what is well worthy of notice, giving throughout the impression of one who would attempt much in the way of learning without reaching complete proficiency in any one branch, of one with an ungeometrical turn of mind, who could let many errors slip in the midst of his grand visions, pregnant sayings, vague dreams, and vain disquisitions."<sup>(2)</sup>

Jusserand questions Prof. Jack's stand that there is no autobiographical significance in the personal details of the poem i.e. that they were inventions of the author or authors, and as purely fictional as the other portions of the poem. It will be remembered that Manly had used Jack's views, which he accepted without question, as one of the main supports of his theory when first advanced. In his reply to Jusserand, he no longer insists on Jack's conclusions, but points out that the references, which Jusserand had built into a logical and consistent chain

---

(1) Ibid p.53.

(2) Ibid p.54.

can bear a much less consistent construction. i.e. the localizations, excepting that of Malvern mentioned by A1, are not at all definite throughout the poems; and the mention of London is not at all remarkable, considering the size and importance of that city. The Kitte and Calotte incident we have referred to already. Thus two constructions are built from the same material which differ widely in substance.

## CHAPTER XII

### DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE IMMEDIATELY WE ASSUME A PLURALITY OF AUTHORS.

We have seen that on the hypothesis of the single authorship the facts of the poem assume a perfectly simple and natural explanation; now let us see what difficulties arise immediately we assume a multiple authorship. These were first mentioned by Jusserand.

(1) This argument has been referred to already in passing. "The tone of the work and the nature of the additions denote that B was written by an older man than A, C by an older man than B." (2) Now if there was a multiplicity of authorship, it would be patently impossible for the successive contributors to produce such an illusion; and to argue that the successive continuators may have been successively older is ridiculous. Manly counters this argument by denying the premises. Jusserand, however, shows fairly conclusively that his premises are just:

---

(1) Ibid, p54.

(2) Ibid p. 53.

"At the beginning of passus XII in B, Ymaginatyf, besides telling us that the author has followed him 'fyve and fourty wyntee' (which one is free to take literally or not), specifies that the poet is no longer young, and that he has reached middle age, though not yet old age. ....

"In C written many years later, the 'fyve and fourty winter', which could no longer be even approximately true, are replaced by the vague expression 'more than fourty wintre', and in the long and very interesting passage, reading like a sort of memoirs, added at the beginning of passus VI, the author speaks of himself as 'weak' and his youth long passed:

'Whanne ich ong was" quath ich "meny er hennes ..."' (1)

It is dangerous to reason from such passages with any finality, but Jusserand's point seems well taken. It is simply absurd to reason that this congruence was arranged by the multiple authors, and it is hard to deny that the congruence exists. Moreover we must remember that it was by arguments such as this that Manly arrived at his conclusions, and it would come with bad grace from him to object to this one.

(2) Supposing four authors, it is necessary to suppose each dead before the other began to write, else would there not have been reprisals from the others? Manly claims that it is necessary to suppose only the first one dead, and considering the high mortality of the plagues, the probability of this is quite good; as for the others, they would have no right to protest an intrusion, being themselves intruders. His theory, however, presupposes that each writer must have stopped writing before the other began, which

is just as improbable as their successive deaths would have been.

(3) The anonymity of four men would be harder to keep than that of one man. Not at all, mainly answers, for the continuators would have good reason to keep themselves in the background. Where the work of a continuator is slight, it is probable that he would remain anonymous; but where each continuator made literally a life work out of his continuation, which is equal to the original in size and quality, the probability is wholly the other way. A man spending years at a work of this nature must necessarily become associated with that work in people's minds. This we find to be the case with the single author; and how the multiple authors could have escaped a like fate I fail to see.

#### CHAPTER XIII

##### THAT PORTION OF B NOT IN A.

What we have said about A2 applies in even greater measure here. Surely if the author of B were not the same as that of A, his conclusion of the poem, comprising as it does *Dobet* and *Dobest*, (some ten passus, as much again as in all of A) should show differences which it would be quite easy to point out. Instead the poem continues with power at least equal to that of the beginning, and rises to heights higher than any attained by his predecessors. In passus XVIII, XIX, and XX, dealing respectively with

the visions of the triumph of Piers Plowman (the history of Jesus who is associated with Piers in this portion of the poem), of Grace, and of Anti-Christ the poem ends in a burst of glory. It is very improbable to suppose, as the multiple authorship would have us suppose, that there could exist together two men of genius, so similar in nearly all respects.

Again, we should be able to draw some difference from the additions and passages interpolated in A, were there a multiple authorship. They should be either superior or inferior to the rest of the text; moreover, there should be some reason easily seen for the interpolation. It is perfectly easy to list these interpolations; and it would be a very good argument if the exponents of the multiple authorship had listed these and shown how they were different. No such compilation has, to my knowledge, been made; and why it was omitted is hard to conjecture, unless we suppose that examination of the passages showed that there was no fruitful source there for their side.

We have already referred to the state of the text as at the end of A. Chambers makes some very interesting remarks on this point which bear out rather well the reconstruction we attempted (see John But below). Reasoning from the nature of the poem where it breaks off in A, he arrives at a possible reason for the break. Moreover, he shows how in B that reason was overcome; and he attempts to show that there is an apology for the long interval of non-

(1)  
production. I shall take all the more pleasure in going over his arguments as they are based on a study of the nature of the poem, which I held more conclusive than arguments based on conjectural emendation.

At the end of the vision of Peirs Plowman proper, the author had taken the position that salvation by works (i.e. Dowel) is preferable to salvation by dispensation, although both are possible. But as he proceeds with Dowel, the problem of predestination enters the ~~prax~~ question, and seems to impugn the value of the good works; for after all, were not all our actions preordained for us? and therefore thereremains no merit in good works, as ther remains no demerit in evil. A comparison of the cases of Aristotle and the penitent thief, shows the problem clearly. Here we find Aristotle literally damned despite his good works and his learning, and the thief, a miscreant all his life, saved by a miracle of grace. The question then arises whether "learning furthers a man's salvation at all: whether blind fate of an ignotant man repeating the pater noster by rote is not perhaps better." (2) Faced by this dilemma, which has puzzled the best philosophers of all times, the author came to an impasse; being unable to answer them, he was unable to proceed with the poem and therefore appended the forced conclusion.

In the B continuation the difficulty is overcome in rather an ingenious way. Most of the twelfth passus of A is cancelled; the scorning of Scripture is reduced to two lines, and the answer to the questions is ignored; and in

---

(1) "Long Wille, Dante, and the Rigueous Heathen" Essays and studies, vol IX. (2) Ibid.

the next two passus these two problems are discussed, but no definite answer is insisted upon. This is the only possible way of facing the difficulty.

Now directly after Scripture's scorning, there follows a passage which can bear a significant interpretation. In what formerly had been held to be a most inconsequential intercalation, the poet speaks of himself as being led away by Lust of the Flesh and Lust of the Eyes (the vision of the Mirror of Middle Earth), and leading a life the opposite of Dowel. Despite his maturity, the sins of his youth mislead him. "In place of seeking Dowel he is advised to make money, no matter how, and confess to some friar - the very solution he had rejected so emphatically at the end of the former vision."<sup>(1)</sup> That is to say, he, personally had abandoned ~~grace~~ salvation by works (Dowel) for salvation by Grace (confession to a friar). But when old age came upon him he found the friars unsatisfactory, and came again to Dowel.

"Now this vision, telling how the poet in his youth abandoned the search for Dowel, and as old age approached he was urged to avow his vision among men, and to reprove deadly sin, but on condition that he should publish no private scandal, and neither show favour nor envy - what can it be but an apology for the fifteen years interval between the A text and the B text."<sup>(2)</sup>

It means this and probably more. A possible inter-

---

(1) Ibid p. 56

(2) " 57.

pretation of the Middle Earth vision is that it is the expression of a state of mind into which the poet fell when he was confronted with the insoluble problems which caused him to break off the <sup>A</sup> version. I do not suggest that the vision is autobiographical in its literal significance, and that the poet did actually follow the ways of the world, and seek for money relying on dispensation, as there stated. But I do suggest that the vision of Middle Earth is a symbolic representation of the state of mind into which the poet fell at the time he broke off the <sup>A</sup> text, and added the forced conclusion. A mind as vivid and constructive as that of our author would easily translate what was existent only in itself into actuality, and relate its spiritual experience as the actual physical experience of the man. Indeed it is wholly consonant with the author's method to treat the subject in this way. If we accept this interpretation of the interpolated vision, we may add to our knowledge of the life of the poet the fact that he passed through a spiritual crisis at about the time he broke off the <sup>A</sup> text.

Chambers goes on to show how ~~the~~ problem of predestination is attacked in the two following passages, and solved, mainly by the case of Trajan (whom the dreamer stated to have been saved by his own good works, and not at all by Grace, never having been a Christian)<sup>(1)</sup> in the passages

---

(1) Trajan is the "righteous heathen" referred to in the title of Chambers' article, i.e. he had earned heaven for

about Imaginatif. He draws an interesting parallel from Dante in support of his view, and shows how remarkably coherent and consequential the author is in this portion of the poem, thus refuting the alleged inconsequence.

#### CHAPTER XIV

##### GENERAL LITERARY ARGUMENTS.

For these arguments we are indebted to the ingenuity of Jusserand. He mentions cases in the history of literature, more or less authenticated, of works which we know to be by the same author, and which show differences similar to those pointed out between the various portions of our poems. Among the examples quoted by Jusserand are Hamlet, the first three acts and the last two; Chaucer, the Miller's tale and the Parson's tale; Montaigne, the original and the revised essays; Defoe, the first part of Robinson Crusoe and the second part. <sup>(1)</sup> Manly attempts to answer each of these; in this he is very unwise, for such examples

---

himself by his own good deeds, thus showing that *Dowel*, even without Christianity, is a sure way to heaven. This is the thesis the poet has maintained throughout his work and to his mind the example of Trajan is a triumphant vindication of his stand.

(1) E. E.T.S.139 b p.52.

from literary history are like Hydra's heads; for every one cut off, two grow in its place. The only thing an exponent of the multiple authorship can do when presented with such examples is to grin and bear it; the position can only be attacked as a whole, not at all piece by piece. Jusserand, not at all daunted by Manly's refutation of his selections, brings forth more in his second reply. Here he states as examples Ronsard, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Jocelyn, etc. <sup>(1)</sup> Jusserand concludes by saying, "Yet again all those men were artists (which Langland was not), that is men, who, if anything would have preserved the artistic products of their pen. Time and again they did not; much more could Langland act likewise without Professor Manly being justified in cutting him to pieces." <sup>(2)</sup>

#### CHAPTER XV

#### CONCLUSION.

Above I have presented the arguments for and against the multiple authorship theory, and have, I think, established a sound and consistent case for the single authorship. The arguments for the multiplicity have been refuted wherever they were of a sort to bear refutation. I have shown how the differences do not necessarily postulate multiplicity, and how the differences are not as great as stated. By several reconstructions of the processes in the author's mind, I have attempted to show that the hypothesis of a single author best satisfies the facts of the case. The

---

(1) E.E.T. S. 139 d, p.32.

(2) Ibid, p. 33.

new facts discovered by Mr. Bright give us separate reason to believe that there actually was a Wille Langland, the story of whose life coincides too closely with that of the traditional Wille, to be different. This new evidence alone seems to be conclusive, without even the many other facts we have adduced in support of the single authorship. The more the nature of the controversial and theological passages in the latter part of A2 and B is studied, the less reason there seems to <sup>be to</sup> believe a multiple author necessary. Whether the case for the single author is proven I leave to the reader's judgment, but there can be no doubt that Manly's case for the multiple authorship is totally and completely disproven..

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE PIERS PLOWMAN CONTROVERSY.

Bradley, Henry: The Misplaced Leaf of Piers the Plowman.

Athenaeum, April 21, 1906.

Bradley, Henry: The Authorship of Piers Plowman.

Mod.Lang.Review, V, 202.

Bradley, Henry: Lost Leaf of Piers Plowman.

Nation 88 436-7.

Bradley, Henry: Who Was John But?

Collected papers of Henry Bradley, 1928.

Brown, C.F.: Lost Leaf of Piers Plowman.

Nation 88:298.

Chambers, R.W. and Grattan, H.G. I The A Text.

Mod.Lang.Review, April 1909.

Chambers, R.W. The Original Form of the A Text of Piers Plowman.

Mod.Lang.Review, VI 302-3.

Chambers, R.W. The Authorship of Piers Plowman.

Mod.Lang.Review, Jan. 1910. (also E.E.T.S. 139 e.)

Chambers, R.W. Long Wille, Dante, and the Richeous Heathen.

Essays and Studies Vol. IX p. 50.

Bright, Allan H. New Light on Piers Plowman. London 1929.

Bakin, Mary: The Alliteration of Piers Plowman.

Mod.Lang.Review, July 1909.

Dobson, Mary: An Examination of the Vocabulary of the A Text.

Angl. 33. 391.

Gosse, E.: Books on the Table- Winner and Wastour. p. 209.

- Hall, Theophilus D.: The Misplaced Lines, Piers Plowman.  
Mod.Philol. VIII- 327.
- H all, Theophilus D.: Was Langland the Author of the CC Text  
of "The Vision of Piers Plowman"?  
Mod. Lang. Review, Oct 1908.
- Hanscome, Elizabeth: The Argument of the Vision of Piers  
Plowman. Publ.of Mod Lang Assoc.Am. IX 403 .
- Heath, H.F. Traill's Social England. vol.II 225 ff.
- Hopkins, : Who Wrote Piers Plowman?  
Kansas Univ, quarterly, April 1898.
- Jones, Prof.H. S.F.: "Imaginatif" in Piers Plowman.  
J Journal of Eng. and German. Philol. XIII 583.
- Jack, G.E. The Autobiographical Elements in Piers Plowman.  
Journal of Germanic Philol. III 393.
- Jusserand, J.J.: L' epopee mystique de W.Langland. Paris, 1893.
- Jusserand, J.J.: Piers Plowman, The Work of One or of Five.  
Mod.Philol. Jan. 1909. (also E.E.T.S. 139 b.)
- Jusserand, J.J.: Dr. Jusserand's Second Reply to Prof Manly.  
Mod.Philol. Jan 1910. (also E.E.T.S.139 d.)
- Knott, A.: Lost Leaf of Piers Plowman.  
Nation 88 482-3.
- Knott, T.A.: An Essay Towards the Critical Text of the A  
Version of Piers the Plowman.  
Mod.Philol. XII 389-421.
- Macauley, G.C.: The Name of the Author of Piers Plowman.  
Mod.Lang.Review, V- 195.

Lawrence, : Criticism of the Cambridge History Chapter.

Journal of Eng. and Germanic Philol. 8. 607.

Manly, J.M. Lost Leaf of Piers Plowman.

Mod.Philol. 3 395-66.

Manly, J.M.: Piers Plowman and Its Sequence .

Camb.Hist. Eng. Lit. Vol.II Ch.1 (1908).

Manly, J.M.: Prof. J.M.Manly's Answer to Dr. Jusserand.

Mod. Philol. June 1909. (also E.E. T.S. 139 c.)

Manly, J.M. : Authorship of Piers Plowman, with a Terminal Note  
on The Lost Leaf.

Mod. Philol. July 1909.

Mensendieck, O. : The Authorship of Piers Plowman ..

Journal of Eng. and Ger. Philol. IX 404-420.

Moore, S. Studies in Piers Plowman.

Mod.Philol. XI 117-193.

XII 19-50.

Rickert, Edith, : John But, Messenger and Maker.

Mod. Philol. XI 107-16.

Skeat, W. : Text Piers the plowman. 2vols. 1886.

Times Literary Supplement: Review of "New Light on Piers Plowman"

Feb.7. 1929 p 94.