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Latin Composition Lessons, *Piers Plowman,* and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition*

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"THE *Piers Plowman* tradition" is a widely used label for alliterative poetry which is unmistakably informed by *Piers Plowman.* The most prominent examples of the *Piers Plowman* tradition are *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* (1393–1401), *Richard the Redeless* (c. 1400), *Mum and the Sothsegger* (c. 1409), and *The Crowned King* (after 1415).[1] Other composition in the tradition includes at least some of A-text passus 12, lines attributed to the self-proclaimed literary continuator calling himself "John But" and shorter pieces where scribes apparently make good perceived deficiencies in exemplars. It is with the stylistic relations between the model and *Piers*-tradition writing that the present essay is primarily concerned. I propose to offer a new contextual framework for analysing the ways in which the *Piers*-tradition poets use *Piers Plowman:* the arts of composition taught in the medieval classroom.[2]

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1. The dates are from Helen Barr, ed., *The Piers Plowman Tradition* (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), 9–10, 16, 23, 30–31. For reasons of space I shall omit *Crowned King* from analysis in this essay. All quotations of *Piers*-tradition texts in this essay are taken from this edition.

2. In the introduction to his essay collection *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary*

There has been considerable discussion of the thematic and ideological relations between *Piers Plowman* and the major works in the tradition and it is widely recognized that these works are informed by *Piers Plowman* on every compositional level, from structure and narrative to the recycling of alliterative collocations, and in some cases to the quotation of lines and half-lines. Anne Middleton's fine essay on the "John But" passus (*Piers,* A 12) is a distinguished example of such work, and one to which this and previous essays of mine are indebted.[3] Recognition of these relations is of course long-standing. Skeat, for example, argued that *Richard the Redeless* must be by the same poet as *Piers Plowman,* and painstakingly listed stylistic parallels and textual correspondences between the two texts.[4] Recent critics have continued to examine stylistic relations between *Piers* and the tradition poems. Blamires praises *Richard* and *Mum* as an "extremely fine effort in the Langlandian idiom,"

Background (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), David Lawton identifies the need for examination of "the medieval Latin background to Middle English alliterative poetry [including] . . . teaching of grammar" (15). Lawton deliberately excluded the topic from his collection, calling on scholars in medieval Latin to take up this work. Since Lawton wrote, much work has been done on medieval grammar by scholars of medieval Latin. The present essay seeks to use this scholarship to study a distinct corpus of alliterative poetry. My findings raise the question of how other works in the wider corpus relate to grammar teaching. There is a considerable body of work on alliterative meter: see, for example, Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1977), 48–68; Hoyt Duggan, "Alliterative Patterning as a Basis for Emendation in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 8 (1986): 73–104; and Duggan, "The Shape of the b-verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 564–92.

   3. Anne Middleton, "Making a Good End: John But as a Reader of *Piers Plowman,*" in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane,* ed. Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 243–67. Other important examples of work on the *Piers Plowman* tradition and its relations with *Piers* include Barr, *The Piers Plowman Tradition;* Barr, "The Relationship of *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger:* Some New Evidence," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 4 (1990): 105–33; Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the "Piers Plowman" Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994); Alcuin Blamires, "*Mum and the Sothsegger* and Langlandian Idiom," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 76 (1975): 583–604; and David Lawton, "Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition," *Modern Language Review* 76 (1981): 780–93. Unless otherwise stated, all *Piers Plowman* quotations and references in the present essay are taken from the Athlone Press editions: George Kane, ed., *Piers Plowman: The A Version* (London: Athlone Press, 1960); George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, eds., *Piers Plowman: The B Version* (London: Athlone Press, 1975); George Russell and George Kane, eds., *Piers Plowman: The C Version* (London: Athlone Press, 1997).

   4. Skeat argued that there could hardly have been two poets of such genius alive at the same time. W. W. Skeat, ed., *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts together with Richard the Redeless by William Langland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886), 2: lxxxiv–lxxxvi. The parallels are listed in W. W. Skeat, ed., *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, together with Vita de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest, Secundum Wit et Resoun, by William Langland, Part Three: Langland's Vision of Piers the Plowman, The Whitaker Text; or Text C,* EETS o.s. 54 (London: N. Trübner, 1873).

analysing that "idiom" in themes of themes and topics treated.[5] Helen Barr observes that the tradition poems she studies "quote lines of *Piers* verbatim" and include "quotations, or echoes"; that John But uses "selective readings of *Piers Plowman*"; and that none of the poems is "mindless pastiche,"[6] while *Mum* includes a "collage of episodes from *Piers.*"[7] David Lawton states that *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* "takes much of its colour . . . from *Piers* . . . developing these elements to serve its more immediate Lollard interests."[8] Thorlac Turville-Petre suggests that the tradition poems "show the influence of *Piers Plowman* . . . in their unadorned alliterative style."[9] To date, however, no investigation has been made of the compositional habits of the *Piers*-tradition poets in relation to the compositional techniques taught in the grammar school. The present study seeks to demonstrate that such an investigation may contribute substantially to our understanding of the *Piers*-tradition poets and to our knowledge of the cultural status and reception of *Piers Plowman.* At the end I shall make some proposals about the status of *Piers Plowman* among the tradition writers and reflect on its implications. By shedding light on the practices of the tradition writers, I hope to modify our understanding of the place of *Piers Plowman* in late medieval culture and in English literature.

Textbooks

There is abundant evidence for the textual resources used by schoolmasters. In the elementary stages of grammar-school education, the resources for teaching reading and composition seem to have been fairly uniform across medieval Europe.[10] Having introduced their pupils to Latin grammar and

5. Blamires, "*Mum and the Sothsegger* and Langlandian Idiom," 604.
6. Barr, *Signes and Sothe,* 13, 132, 21, 170.
7. Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition,* 28.
8. Lawton, "Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition," 787–88.
9. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival,* 31–32.
10. My outline of medieval grammar teaching is indebted to Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland, "Classroom and Confession," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature,* ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 376–406; Douglas Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose,* Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental, fasc. 59 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991); Martin Irvine*, The Making of Textual Culture: "Grammatica" and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Martin Irvine with David Thomson, "*Grammatica* and Literary Theory"; J. J. Murphy, "The Arts of Poetry and Prose"; and Vincent Gillespie, "From the Twelfth Century to c. 1450," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol. 2: The Middle Ages,* ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15–41, 42–67, 145–235; Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. 7–11; and Eva Matthews Sanford, "The Uses of Classical

the construing of Latin using the *Ars Minor* of Donatus, teachers provided texts for their pupils that offered short units of proverbial or sententious material.[11] The first texts included the *Distichs of Cato* (a collection of proverbs traditionally but falsely attributed to Cato), the *Eclogue of Theodolus* (an allegorical dialogue), and the fables of Avianus.[12] Textbooks of English provenance from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries often follow these texts with Alan of Lille's *Liber Parabolarum* (another collection of proverbs), *Facetus,* the *De Contemptu Mundi* (moralizing material), and materials attributed to "Seneca" and other authorities. For example, in 1358 William de Ravenstone, schoolmaster of the school of St. Paul's in London, bequeathed to the school many volumes, including texts of Cato, Theodolus, Avianus and other preliminary texts bound "in vno volumine," while another item in the same inventory is described as "librum Catonis cum aliis xij contentis infra."[13] Elementary work in grammar also included study of selected classical authors such as Virgil, Juvenal, Horace, and Ovid. A late-thirteenth-century book of school texts, Worcester Cathedral MS F. 147, for example, includes Cato, Theodolus, and other elementary reading texts together with Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus,* the *De Contemptu Mundi,* Perseus, Juvenal, Horace, and other classical authors.[14] Many of the manuscripts of the curriculum texts have glosses to assist the teacher.[15]

Given that all those who received a grammar-school education encountered this curriculum, it is not surprising that many vernacular authors, including Langland and his contemporaries, quote them or allude to them. Edith Rickert noticed that many of the classical writers with which Chau-

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Latin Authors in the *Libri Manuales,*" *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 55 (1924): 199–246.

11. Woods notes that "mnemonically effective tags of moral verse" constitute much of the material studied at the elementary level (Woods and Copeland, "Classroom and Confession," 385; cf. 381; cf. Gillespie, "From the Twelfth Century to c. 1450," 154).

12. A twelfth-century program of study attributed to Alexander Neckham prescribes "postquam alphabetum didicerit et ceteris puerilibus rudimentis imbutus fuerit, Donatum et illud utile moralitatis compendium quod catonis esse vulgus opinatur addiscat et ab egloga Theodoli transeat ad eglogas bucolicorum," quoted in George L. Hamilton, "Theodolus: A Medieval Textbook," *Modern Philology* 7 (1909): 175; for similar recommendations for elementary reading, see 176–79. The seminal study of the *Distichs of Cato* is M. Boas, "De librorum Catonianorum historia atque compositione," *Mnemosyne* 42 (1914): 17–46.

13. Edited in Edith Rickert, "Chaucer at School," *Modern Philology* 29 (1932): 266, 268.

14. Described in R. M. Thompson with Michael Gullick, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts in Worcester Cathedral Library* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 101–2.

15. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture,* 355–58; Reynolds, *Medieval Reading,* 11; Richard Hazelton, "The Christianization of 'Cato': The *Disticha Catonis* in the Light of Late Medieval Commentaries," *Medieval Studies* 19 (1957): 157–73.

cer shows acquaintance were standards of the curriculum.[16] More recently, Jill Mann has shown that Chaucer refers to many elementary school texts: Cato, the *Facetus,* Alan of Lille's *Liber Parabolarum,* Maximian, and Claudian's rape of *Proserpina* among them.[17] Richard Hazelton observed that "Deschamps, Langland, and Gower . . . employ Catoniana in their verse to the same degree that Chaucer does."[18] It is well recognized that Langland makes use of quotations from or alludes to several school texts, most recently by Christopher Cannon in an important revisionary study of the material.[19] In the B-text of *Piers,* Langland draws on the *Liber Parabolarum* (B 18.408a), Avianus (B 12.259), the *De Contemptu Mundi* (B 17.321–22), on Cato in numerous places (B 6. 314–15; 7.72, 155–56; 10.194–201, 343–4; 11.404; 12.21–23; 19.296–97), and on "Seneca" (14.309, 20.275).[20] Covetousness has used a special "donet" (B 5.207), and "Grammer, þe ground of al" (B 15.372) translates Isidore's definition of grammar as "origo fundamentum liberalium litterarum"; Isidore's *Etymologies* is also used at B 15.37–39, 372.[21]

The *Piers*-tradition poets also use grammar-school texts as a point of reference, explicitly acknowledging or drawing on school texts. With opening lines referring to the cross and the a.b.c., *Pierce* aligns itself with the most basic primer of all. *Richard* includes unattributed, but presumably familiar, proverbial material (I. 153–54, II. 138). *Mum,* which includes an amusing vignette about "Sire Grumbald the grammier" (330), draws on *sententiae* and proverbs (51–53, 70–71, 422, 1473–74, 1703) and cites and quotes Cato (289–91, 875, 1404, 1514), *De Contemptu Mundi* (1623), "Seneca," and other school authors (304–45, 422a, 1141, 1530a, 1538a). John But follows *Piers* in quoting "Omnia probate quod bonum est tenete" (A 12.50–57; cf. B 3.339–43; also in C, not in A). This biblical tag (I Thess. 5:21) was a commonplace classroom illustration of contradictory imperatives.[22]

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16. Rickert, "Chaucer at School."

17. Jill Mann, "'He Knew Nat Catoun': Medieval School-Texts and Middle English Literature," in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors, and Readers,* ed. Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2006), 41–74.

18. Richard Hazelton, "Chaucer and Cato," *Speculum* 35 (1960): 370.

19. Mann, "'He Knew Nat Catoun,'" 64–66; Christopher Cannon, "Langland's *Ars Grammatica,*" *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 22 (2008): 1–25.

20. It is not clear whether B IV.17 refers to Cato.

21. Cf. A. V. C. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker: Langland's Poetic Art* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), 21 n. 5.

22. It is quoted by Jerome (Epistle 119) in a letter expounding scripture to two monks, and (from Jerome) in *Sic et Non,* a teaching text by Abelard (d. 1142–43) written to support teaching of dialectic: Peter Abailard, *Sic et Non, A Critical Edition,* ed. Blanche B. Boyer and Richard McKeon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976–77), 103. Cf. K. C. Sidwell, *Reading Medieval Latin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 260–61.

Teaching the Arts of Composition

1. Translation

School Latin classes involved translation and glossing of school texts in the vernacular. John of Salisbury notes that translation into another language is one method by which the "splendor orationis" of a model can be understood.[23] Many glosses of school texts are in vernaculars.[24] A fair amount of Middle English composition looks to be translation of classroom texts, such as the translations of *Maximian, Pamphilus,* and so on.[25] Translations of Cato survive in many European vernaculars, including four in Middle English.[26] Translations of school texts in French, Anglo-Norman, and Spanish have been identified.[27] Students were required to construe Latin in vernacular language, and some of the bi- and tri-lingual collections of proverbs and distichs may be related to this kind of school exercise, which was probably usually Latin—English at the time *Piers* was composed (Anima regrets that pupils can no longer construe in French).[28] Langland and the *Piers*-tradition poets engage with the school texts in the manner taught in the classroom. *Piers* and the texts in the tradition provide many examples of the construing of short

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23. C. I. I. Webb, ed., *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Cartonensis Metalogicon Libri IIII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 55.

24. The classic study, with many examples, is Tony Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England,* 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); cf. Reynolds, *Medieval Reading,* 62.

25. *Pamphilus* was an erotic dialogue featuring a deceiving go-between; Middle English versions include *Interludium de Clerico et Puella* and perhaps *Dame Sirith* (J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose,* 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 77–95, 196–200). A Middle English *Maximian* is included in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86 and London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 (Carleton Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932], 92–100). For the Latin texts as beginners' school texts, see Gillespie, "From the Twelfth Century to c. 1450," 154–59. Gillespie notes that *Pamphilus* was dropped from the Oxford curriculum in the early fourteenth century (158). If this loss of favor was widespread, perhaps it would explain why there are no Middle English versions after 1340.

26. Hamilton, "Theodolus: A Medieval Textbook," 182.

27. See Ralph Hanna, Tony Hunt, R. G. Keightley, Alastair Minnis, and Nigel F. Palmer, "Latin Commentary Tradition and Vernacular Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol. 2: The Middle Ages,* ed. Minnis and Johnson, 364–65, 369–71.

28. B 15.375–76. Examples of bilingual proverb collections occur in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 328, ff. 140r–44v, ed. Sanford B. Meech, "A Collection of Proverbs in Rawlinson MS D 328," *Modern Philology* 38 (1940): 113–32; and in Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS Latin 394, ed. W. A. Pantin, "A Medieval Collection of Latin and English Proverbs and Riddles, from the Rylands Latin MS 394," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 14 (1930): 81–114. These manuscripts appear to be mid-fifteenth century. Trilingual parallel texts of Cato and other proverbial material occur in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts of *c.* 1390–1400: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1, ff. 309v–14r; and London, British Library, MS Additional 22283, ff. 118v–23r.

units of text in the vernacular. The quotations from Cato and other school authors are often translated in the following or preceding lines, as in the following example from the speech of Dame Study in *Piers:*[29]

> In ooþer Science it seiþ, I seiȝ it in Catoun,
> *Qui simulat verbis [nec] corde est fides amicus,*
> *Tu quoque fac simile; sic ars deluditur arte.*
> Whoso gloseþ as gylours doon, go me to þe same,
> And so shaltow fals folk and feiþlees bigile:
> (B 10.194–98)

The *Mum*-poet makes a rather elegant translation of a tag from Cato:

> And cleerly Caton construeth the same,
> And seyth soothly, I saw it in youthe,
> *Nam nulli tacuisse nocet, nocet esse locutum*
> That of "bable" cometh blame and of "be stille" neuer . . .
> (*Mum,* lines 289–91)

The *Mum*-poet neatly maps the chiastic structure of the Latin tag onto the alliterative line, and replaces the ornamental alliteration of the Latin (*Nam, nulli, nocet*) with structural alliteration, using the line to point up the key connections and antithesis (*bable, blame, be stille*).[30] It is possible that the *Piers*-tradition poets modeled their rendering of school texts in alliterative verse on the examples in *Piers Plowman*.

2. Imitation

Closely associated with translation in medieval and classical pedagogic thought, imitation was another important element in classroom study of curriculum authors and texts.[31] Bernard of Chartres, according to John of Salisbury, connected imitation with translation into another language in his teaching and is said to have recommended the educational benefits of imita-

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29. Cannon, "Langland's *Ars Grammatica,*" argues that the relationship between the Latin lines and their English equivalents in *Piers* should in some cases be understood in relation to the practice of "making Latins"—composing Latin lines on the basis of English prompts (19–25), but he also acknowledges that Langland is to be found translating Latin schoolroom texts (11).

30. He cites the first line of the distich at line 1404.

31. Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10.

tion of texts heard in lessons.[32] Pupils were expected to study closely small units of model text and to imitate them. Classroom texts were those thought to provide excellent and instructive models for composition. A preface to Vergil's *Aeneid* recommends the text for imitation, "Si quis vero hec omnia studeat imitari, maximam scribendi peritiam consequitur."[33] Classroom composition exercises—the *praeexercitamina*—required students to write on set themes in imitation of their model texts.[34]

Imitation was associated with techniques of recycling material in new compositions. Isidore described the technique in book one of the *Etymologies,* "De Grammatica," when explaining the term *cento:*

> Centones apud Grammaticos vocari solent, qui de carminibus Homeri seu Vergilii ad propria opera more centonario ex multis hinc inde conpositis in unum sarciunt corpus, ad facultatem cuiusque materiae.[35]

Cento means "patchwork," or "a garment of several bits or pieces sewed together."[36] Isidore gives the example of the *cento* of Proba, a late antique Christian poet who mixed lines from Vergil into a composition on biblical subjects. This work continued to be copied throughout the Middle Ages. In the thirteenth-century manuscript London, British Library, MS Harley 4967 it is found with texts associated with grammar teaching, including the *Liber Parabolarum* by Alan of Lille, and the fables of Avianus.[37] It also survives in a fourteenth-century manuscript from York, and in an anthology copied c. 1375 in the London area.[38] Clearly this example was available—perhaps

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32. Webb, *Ioannis Saresberiensis, Episcopi Cartonensis Metalogicon Libri IIII,* book 1, chapter 24, p. 55; cf. Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose,* 51 ("And since memory is strengthened by exercise and cleverness is sharpened, he set for imitation those things which they had heard").

33. Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose,* 61 ("Certainly, if anyone applies himself to imitate all these things, the greatest knowledge of writing follows").

34. Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose,* 50.

35. W. M. Lindsay, ed., *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi, Etymologiarum sive originum, Libri XX* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), vol. 1, book 1, chapter 39, line 25 (no pagination) ("Those used to be called patchworkers among grammarians who from the works of Homer or Vergil patched from many compositions into one in their own works in the manner of patchwork, to the enhancement of the subject-matter").

36. C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894).

37. Ff. 169r–74v. For a description of the contents of this manuscript, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the "Aeneid" from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 300–301.

38. London, British Library, MS Cott. Vesp. B. XXIII, f. 77v, owned by John Erghome, an Austin friar of York (d. 1386); see K. W. Humphreys, *The Friars' Libraries,* Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues (London: British Library in association with the British Academy, 1990), 124; London, British Library, MS Cotton Titus A. XX, ff. 69–78; for date and provenance, see A. G. Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066–1422* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 308. A further

to grammar teachers—while the technique (and its name) must have been known in the schoolroom through Isidore's mention of it. But the technique was also modeled by curriculum authors such as Juvencus, Avitus, Sedulius, and Arator. These authors imitated Vergil and other pagan epics, adapting their metre and figures to Christian subject-matter. Their works are commonly collected in manuscripts associated with the study of grammar.[39] These models of *cento* must have offered a specially extreme, virtuoso example of the kinds of imitative response to classical models which were taught in the schools. Although late medieval Latin poets do not often seem to have attempted to compose in this manner, it was not wholly defunct outside the classroom. Yeager has argued that John Gower's *Vox Clamantis,* as a Latin poem which patches together material from Ovid to create wholly new meanings, resembles the technique of *cento.*[40]

In the section on translation I suggested that it is possible that the *Piers*-tradition poets modeled their rendering of school texts in alliterative verse on the examples in *Piers Plowman.* But it is in their responses to lines, fragments, and short passages of *Piers* that the relevance of schoolroom pedagogy to their compositional practices is most marked. Just as schoolboys were taught to imitate their text-book models when composing on themes set by their schoolmaster, along the lines of Proba, Juvencus, Avitus, Sedulius, and Arator, so the *Piers-* tradition poets characteristically borrow fragments of *Piers* and redeploy them to develop their own distinctive themes.

In *Richard,* there are clear examples of whole lines from *Piers* being patched into new contexts with the minimum of adaptation required to align with the poet's own chosen topic.[41] "Trouthe hathe determyned the tente to the ende" (*Richard,* II. 97), takes over a line about the proper exercise of justice on transgressors in *Piers* "Til treuþe hadde ytermyned hire trespas to þe ende" (B 1.97; also in A and C), inserting it as a clause in a long sentence about truth's determining the intention of gifts in relation to law cases.[42] "But mesure is a meri mene though men moche yerne" (*Richard,* II.

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late medieval English manuscript is Cambridge, Trinity College 0.7.7, ff. 28–37 (R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for the New Arion* [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990], 55).

39. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture,* 160, 355–58.

40. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic,* 48–62; cf. Bruce Harbert, "Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower," in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century,* ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 83–97; and Andrew Galloway, "Gower in His Most Learned Role and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381," *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993): 329–47. Yeager struggled to explain Gower's evident knowledge of *cento,* not noticing its connections with the pedagogy of the grammar schools.

41. I am indebted to the identification of the sources of *Richard* provided in Skeat, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman.*

42. I quote the B-text for comparison because the evidence points toward the conclusion that the

139) appropriates a line in which Holy Church advises Will to observe moderation in drinking alcohol, "Mesure is medicine þouȝ þow muchel yerne" (B 1.35, also in A and C) to the topic of the king's unfairness to his subjects; he has not practised moderation, giving lavishly to some while dispossessing others. "For legiance without loue litill thinge availith" (*Richard,* I. 111) paraphrases Trajan's pronouncement on charity "'Lawe wiþouten loue,' quod Troianus, 'ley þer a bene!'" (B 11.171, also in C but not in A), adapting the line to the topic of Richard's oppressed subjects. There are several other examples of the patching in of whole lines with the minimal adaptation required for the new topic.[43]

By far the most usual kind of mixed-in material, however, is half-lines. The commonest kind of half-line intermixing is the recycling of *Piers* b-verses as b-verses in *Richard.* Examples include the b-verse in a line describing the king's crown, "It was full goodeliche ygraue with gold al aboughte" (*Richard,* I. 127), which redeploys the b-verse from Fauel's instructions "And bad gile '[go] gyu[e] gold al aboute . . . '" (B 2.145, also in A and C), and that in "Be preysinge of polaxis that no pete hadde" (*Richard,* I. 104), describing the behavior of royal officials, whose b-verse comes from "Or Poul þe Apostle þat no pite hadde" (B 10.430, also in A and C). There are many other examples. Other kinds of redeployment of *Piers* material are rarer. There are a few examples of an a-verse from *Piers* being redeployed as an a-verse in *Richard.* For example, the a-verse of a line about Lady Meed's bad influence, "*And* makeþ men mysdo many score tymes" (B 3.123, also in A and C) is patched into a line about the bribing of people with gifts of livery, "This makyth men mysdo more than oughte ellis" (*Richard,* III. 188).[44] On occasion the *Richard*-poet redeploys a b-verse from *Piers* as an a-verse. For example, when the reader is characterised as bewildered by the poem,

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Richard (and *Mum*) poets knew *Piers Plowman* in this version. However, it is not the purpose of the present essay to offer a definitive pronouncement on the question of which versions the poets knew. For this reason, in each case I indicate the status of the appropriated material in all versions. For reasons of space and economy, I do not attempt to describe the precise status of the material. "Also in" on occasion refers to readings that are substantially but not entirely the same.

43. "And letith lyghte of the lawe and lesse of the peple" (*Richard,* III. 284), referring to governance, craftily adapts Wastour's contempt for the knight, "And leet liȝt of þe lawe and lasse of þe knyȝte" (B 6.168, also in A and C); "Tho ben men of this molde that most harme worchen" (*Richard,* III. 316), transfers to the topic of those who corrupt justice with bribery a *Piers* line about dishonest traders, "For þise are men on þis molde þat moost harm wercheþ" (B 3.80, also in A but not in C); "Comliche a clerk than comsid the wordis" (*Richard,* IV. 35) describes the way a clerk addresses parliament using a line from the knight's discussion with Piers, "Curteisly þe knyȝt *þanne comsed* þise wordes" (B 6.33, also in A and C); here and below I use italics in quotations of *Piers* to indicate readings that I have restored from the manuscripts.

44. Other examples of a-verses redeployed in the same position include B 4.137 (also in A and C) in *Richard,* III. 124; and B III. 247 (in A but not in C) in *Richard,* III. 311.

"'What is this to mene, man?' maiste thou axe," *Richard,* III. 62, the *Richard*-poet adapts the slow-witted Will's question to Holy Church, "And seide 'mercy, madame, what is þis to mene?'" (A 1.11; B 1.11—in the unemended text; cf. C 1.11). Also rarely, two *Piers* lines are collapsed with carry over of the second *Piers* b-verse. When the positive figure of Wit/ Wisdom is exiled from court, his pursuit, "He was halowid and y-huntid and y-hotte trusse" (*Richard,* III. 228), is described in the same manner as that of the wicked Liar who is chased away from the king's court in *Piers,* "He was nowher welcome for his manye tales, Ouer al yhonted and yhote trusse" (B 2.220–21, also in A and C).

It is obviously not the case that the *Richard*-poet is simply using formulas that were also known to Langland. The many close correspondences between the two texts demonstrate that the poet has studied *Piers* closely (possibly in a B-text manuscript, given the data), adapting ready-made material to his own themes and topics. Furthermore, while some of the half-lines could be described as formulas or common expressions ("in lengthe and in brede" [*Richard,* I. 12, and II. 22] for example [cf. B 3.203]), many are distinctively Langlandian formulations, for example, "as his kynde wolde" (*Richard,* II. 142, cf. *Piers,* B 6.164).

Mum and the Sothsegger revisits many of the topics addressed in *Richard,* treating in particular the themes of corruption of justice and impediments to making complaint and speaking out about corruption. This text demonstrates similar practices to those observed in *Richard,* but in more highly developed form, making more intensive, varied, and creative use of verbal detail from *Piers* than is found in *Richard.*

As in *Richard,* there are several examples of *Piers* b-verses being redeployed as b-verses in *Mum.*[45] But redeployment of *Piers* a-verses is more in evidence here than in *Richard.* For example, "And yf ye willeth to wite what the wight hatte" (*Mum,* line 37), where the narrator addresses the reader and refers to the Sothsegger, uses the a-verse of "And if ye wilneþ to wite

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45. Examples include "alle the foure ordres," used three times in *Mum* (lines 392, 494, 864), twice with "freres" in the a-verse, redeploying "I fond þere Freres, alle þe foure ordres" (B Prol.58, also in A and C); also from the *Piers* Prologue (B Prol.84, also in A and C) comes "siþ þe pestilence tyme," *Mum,* line 1369; "and waitid aboute" (*Mum,* line 1289) is used to end the dream vision as in B 7.145 (also in A and C); "as the lawe asketh," a b-verse from a passage where the narrator addresses the king about correct rule (*Mum,* line 1677) is unusually from a later portion of the poem, from Conscience's address to the needy king, "as þi lawe askeþ" (B 19.479, also in C, not in A); "malgre his chekes" (*Mum,* line 1300) is admittedly a common formula, but Langland gives many examples of how to use it in alliterative verse (B 4.50 (also in A, not in C); B 6.40 (also in C, not in A); B 6.158 (also in A, not in C); B 14.4 (B only)); "and y-hoote trusse" (*Mum,* line 174); uses a b-verse to describe how the Sothsegger is sent away, with "y-huntid" in the a-verse, as Liar is chased in *Piers,* and Wit/ Wisdom in *Richard* (as discussed above).

where þat [wye] dwelleþ," where *Piers* addresses the folk and refers to Truth (B 5.554, also in A; C 7.198 has "hoso wilneth"). In "For go to the gospel that grovnd is of lore" (*Mum,* line 76) the narrator uses an a-verse from Holy Church's address to the dreamer, "'Go to þe gospel,' quod she, 'þat god seide hymseluen'" (B 1.46, also in A and C). There are some striking redeployments of a-verses to new, sometimes radically different, topics and purposes. Another a-verse from Holy Church's speech, from a line about love, "And ek þe plante of pes, preche it in þin harpe" comes in an a-verse in the *Mum* narrator's naive defence of priests, "And eeke the plantz of pees and full of pitie euer" (A 1.137; B-text MSS here read "also"—Kane and Donaldson emend to "ek," B 1.152; C 1.148 rewrites the a-verse; *Mum,* line 703). An a-verse in the *Mum* dreamer's greeting to the gardener, "And halsid hym hendily as I had lernyd" (*Mum,* line 972) recycles an a-verse from Envy's insincere greeting of his neighbour, "I [hailse[d] hym hendely as I his frend were" (B 5.102; also in A but not in C).[46] The *Mum*-poet's practice of assembling materials from different parts and contexts of *Piers,* rather than simply minimally rewriting a long sequence, is particularly clear from the passage in which the narrator muses on the reliablity of dreams (*Mum,* lines 1309–1333). This passage shows clear knowledge of B 7.154–72 (also in A and C), likewise citing the examples of Joseph (Genesis, 40–1) and Daniel as accurate interpreters of dreams. Yet it is a new composition with much restructuring of material and amplification. A b-verse in the *Piers* passage, "Ac for þe book bible bereþ witnesse" (B VII. 157, also in C; the A-text seems to be corrupt and scribally repaired here) becomes an a-verse here, "The bible bereth witnesse, a boke of bileue" (*Mum,* line 1314). The b-verse "or ellis the boke lieth" (*Mum,* line 1326) mixes in a b-verse from B III. 251, "or þe boke lieþ" (also in A, not in C; some A and B manuscripts read "or elles").[47]

Again as in *Richard,* there are several examples of whole lines from *Piers* adapted and patched into *Mum.* Piers's assurance that he is on intimate terms with Truth, "'I knowe hym as kyndely as clerc doþ hise bokes'" (B V. 538, also in A and C) is patched into *Mum* twice, first in the speech of a clerk who explains why being a "sothsegger" is not likely to lead to preferment, as clerks "Knoweth this as kindely as clerc doeth his bokes" (*Mum,* line 109) and then in the speech of the beekeeper who explains how bees are instinctively able to identify wasters, "For thay knowen as kindely as clerc doeth his bokes" (*Mum,* line 1016). The reference to the brevity in which the proper

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46. Other examples of *Piers* a-verses redeployed as a-verses in *Mum* include "And woneth at Westmynstre" (*Mum,* line 482, cf. B 3.12, also in A, rewritten in C); and "And thenne after oure deeth day" (*Mum,* line 1719, the speech of false executors; cf. B 7.118, also in A, not in C).

47. Cf. "or ellis þe bible lieþ" (B 6.231, also in A and C).

distribution of tithes can be described by the *Mum*-poet, "For in thre lynes hit [lith] and not oon lettre more" (*Mum,* line 655), re-writes minimally the line describing the pardon, "In two lynes it lay & nouȝt o lettre more" (A VIII.93; also in C; B MSS have "a leef" [B VII.111]; Kane and Donaldson emend to the AC reading.)[48] These examples show minimal adaptation (always remembering that we cannot know precisely the reading of the manuscript used by the poet). In other cases restructuring of a whole line takes place. "Sergeantz that seruen for soulde atte barre" (*Mum,* line 17) is rewritten slightly to dispense with the hesitancy of the *Piers* dreamer's "Sergeantȝ it [s]emed þat serueden at þe barre" (B Prol.212; some manuscripts and A and C read "seruen").

Sometimes the *Mum*-poet uses two or more *Piers* lines as a patchwork piece. For example, the lines in which a clerk addresses the narrator, drawing his attention to the practices of learned clerks, "And seide, 'soon, seest thou this semble of clercz, How thay bisien thaym on thaire bokes and beten thaire wittz'" (*Mum,* lines 366–7), adapt Holy Church's alerting of the dreamer to the moral meanings of his vision, "And seide, 'sone, slepestow? sestow þis peple, How bisie þei ben aboute þe maȝe?'" (B 1.5–6; in A, and in C which however names "Wille"). On occasion the *Mum*-poet creates a dense mixture of fragments from *Piers* that extends over several lines. One example is embedded in the narrator's warning about the consequences of suppressing truth:

> But hit be wel in his dayes we mowe dreede aftre
> Lest feerelees falle withynne fewe yeres.
> But God of his goodnes that gouuernith alle thingz
> Hym graunte of his grace to guye wel the peuple . . .
> (*Mum,* lines 221–4)

Patched into this passage are the *Piers* Prologue line which describes the evil which has resulted from the friars, "Manye ferlies han fallen in a fewe yeres" (B Prol.65, also in A and C), and the a-verse (and part of the b-verse) of "But [if] god of his goodnesse graunte vs a trewe" amplified over two lines (B 6.331; some MSS omit "if"; also in C but not in A).[49] The *Piers* Prologue

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48. If, as the balance of the comparative evidence seems to suggest, the *Mum*-poet is using a B manuscript, this particular piece of evidence suggests that his copy of B was less corrupt than the B archetype. The evidence for the manuscript used by the *Richard*-poet also points to the use of a B-text. This evidence supports Barr's hypothesis that the same person wrote both *Richard* and *Mum* (Barr, "Relationship").

49. The a-verse is used elsewhere in *Piers;* see B 1.122 (not in A or C); B 6.138 (not in C).

line is also patched into a later passage, where it is amplified over two lines, "Y-write ful of wordes of woundres that han falle, And fele-folde ferlees wythynne thees fewe yeris" (*Mum,* lines 1736–7).[50]

3. Composing Rhetorical Figures

Amplification by means of rhetorical figures was one of the schoolroom exercises. An epigram from a classical text would be given to students, who were then required to amplify the theme in order to practise employing rhetorical figures such as *interpretatio* (exploring etymology), *frequentatio* (describing something in different ways) and *circumlocutio.*[51] The relation of *Pierce* with *Piers* is perhaps best categorised as one of amplification. In its entirety, *Pierce* effectively amplifies the encounter of the Dreamer with the pair of friars at the beginning of the "Vita de Dowel" section (A-text passus 9, B-text passus 8, C-text passus 10). Will's critical questioning of the friars about how to find Dowel becomes four meetings with friars, followed by an encounter with Pierce Plowman, as the narrator attempts to find someone who can teach him his creed. The sequence is an opportunity for much amplification of material drawn from various parts of the model. For example, the friar's suggestion that Meed finance a window in his church and have her name written there (A 3.47–49, B 3.48–50, C 3.51–54), is amplified with detailed description of the church that is under construction and the possible design of the window that will depict the narrator (*Pierce,* 118–29). The description of Piers when he dons his poor, practical plowman's clothing (A 7.54–56, B 6.59–61, C 8.58–60) is vastly amplified in a passage that describes in detail the plowman's clothing, and that of his wife, twin children, and baby (*Pierce,* 422–39). The devices of amplification in *Pierce* owe much to the virtuosity of description characteristically displayed by ambitious alliterative poets, but here they are appropriated for satirical and ironic purposes. Although Langland shares the interest of the alliterative long-line poets in specialised and wide vocabularies, he eschews the art of alliterative "thick description." By contrast, the *Pierce*-poet takes Langland's brief, compressed, complex suggestions and amplifies them in the more traditional alliterative manner. For example, we could compare the description of the plowman's clothing with, say, the description of the arming of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green*

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50. Another example in which *Mum* amplifies one *Piers* line over two lines is *Mum,* 574–75 "Til I wiste wittrely who shulde haue The maistrie, Mvm or the sothe-sigger"; cf. B 18.66 (also in C), where a dead body says that no-one knows whether life or death will prevail during the Harrowing of Hell.

51. Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1924), 64–85.

Knight, or the description of the Minorites' church with the description of the Castle de Hautdesert.[52]

The *Richard*-poet may be using *Piers* as a model for structuring sequences of lines into rhetorical figures. One possible instance is the use of the "Rith as . . . Ryth so" collocation in *Richard:*

> Rith as the hous-hennes vppon londe hacchen
> And cherichen her chekonys fro chele of the wynter,
> Ryth so the hende Egle the Eyere of hem all,
> Hasteth him in heruest to houyn his bryddis . . .
> (*Richard,* II. 143–6)

This method of mapping a simile onto alliterative lines is regularly used in *Piers.* One particularly striking parallel occurs in the speech of Ymaginatif. Ymaginatif refers explicitly to the "ensamples" offered in the bestiaries, explaining how the peacock represents rich men:

> Right so þe riche, if he his richesse kepe
> And deleþ it noȝt til his deeþ day, þe tail[le is al of] sorwe.
> Riȝt as þe pennes of þe pecok peyneþ hym in his fliȝt,
> So is possession peyne of pens and of nobles
> To alle hem that it holdeþ til hir tail be plukked . . .
> Thus þe poete preueþ þat þe pecok for his feþeres;
> So is þe riche [reuerenced] by reson of hise goodes.
> (B 12.247–51, 262–63, in B only)

The parallel is particularly striking because *Richard* shares both bestiary material and the "right so" structure with *Piers* here. *Richard* draws extensively on bestiary material, here developing the example of the sharp-eyed and compassionate eagle as an image of Henry Bolingbroke, whose badge was the eagle.[53] But there are many other instances of this construction in *Piers* which the *Richard*-poet might have used as a model.[54]

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52. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* rev. Norman Davis, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), lines 566–99, 767–802. My suggestion that the poet amplifies in the style of the classic alliterative corpus is at odds with Turville-Petre's view that the *Pierce*-poet completely avoids "the high style of alliterative verse with its rich and elaborate diction and poetic expressions" and follows the plainer style of *Piers* (*Alliterative Revival,* 113–14). Turville-Petre's statement contradicts his own observation that "The Dominicans live in regal splendour, and their minster is described in all the detail we are by now accustomed to find in alliterative verse" (112).

53. Barr, *The Piers Plowman Tradition,* note to *Richard,* II. 8–9.

54. Examples include B 9.38, 42; 12.103, 104; 12.198, 202; 14.140, 143; 14.282, 284; 15.64,

4. Memorization

Memorization of texts was key to elementary classroom pedagogy.[55] Jill Mann notes that memorization began with basic devotional material (the Psalter, the Pater Noster, the Creed, etc.).[56] The *Distichs of Cato* were memorized, as well as being construed in the vernacular. Hazleton describes requiring schoolboys to memorize Cato as "a practice that seems to have been universal."[57] Cannon points out that memorization of a given prompt text would have preceded exercises in the classroom.[58] John of Salisbury, writing of the pedagogy of Bernard of Chartres, reports "hec . . . inculcabat mentibus auditorum," and "quoniam memoria exercitio firmatur, ingeniumque acuitur ad imitandum ea que audiebant . . . proponebatur."[59] Egbert of Liège created a collection of proverbs, fables, and short narratives for his eleventh-century pupils to memorize so that they could spend their time in profitable recitation when their teacher was absent.[60] There is evidence that some of the authors who imitated *Piers Plowman* were working on the basis of memorization of their model text. Examples of pastiche material suggest that the opening lines and other vision beginnings and endings were memorized and imitated by readers. For example, the person who patched together a version of the opening lines of *Piers* in a late fifteenth-century set of accounts was probably composing on the basis of memorized material.[61] John But may have fallen into this category of someone who had memorial knowledge of sections of *Piers*. It stands to reason that he did not have a manuscript of the complete poem to hand when he composed his completion of the A-text (otherwise he would not have needed to compose lines of his own). In general his work seems based on broad recollection of episodes rather than close verbal recall.[62] He does however on occasion mix in lines and half-lines from

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65; 15.470, 471; 15.474, 476; 18.160, 161. None of these instances occurs in the A-version. If the poet is modeling his practice of simile on *Piers* it must have been on a later version of the poem.

55. Reynolds, *Medieval Reading,* 29.

56. Mann, "'He Knew Nat Catoun,'" 42.

57. Hazleton, "Chaucer and Cato," 360.

58. Cannon, "Langland's *Ars Grammatica*," 20.

59. Webb, ed., *Metalogicon,* book 1, chapter 24, p. 55; cf. Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose,* 51 ("he forced these things into the minds of his audience"; "And since memory is strengthened by exercise and cleverness is sharpened, he set for imitation those things which they had heard").

60. Mann, "'He Knew Nat Catoun,'" 52.

61. Kew, The National Archives (Public Record Office), E 101/516/9; for transcription and discussion, see Wendy Scase, "*Dauy Dycars Dreame* and Robert Crowley's *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 21 (2007): 187, and for the manuscript, see fig. 3 (186); for other examples and discussion, see 188–90.

62. For example, the continuation of Will's encounter with scripture, A 12.38–47, seems to be based on Will's encounters with Dame Study (cf. A 11.100–5) and Holy Church (cf. A 11.77).

the poem. For example, "Many ferlys me byfel in a fewe ȝeris" (A 12.58), is clearly an adaptation, for quite different purposes, of the Prologue line "Manye ferlis han fallen in a fewe ȝeris" (A Prol.62). In the Prologue this line is a chilling warning about where the friars' corruption may be leading. In passus 12 it prefaces But's account of Will's adventures. This is precisely the kind of redeployment of material that we have observed in *Pierce, Richard,* and *Mum,* and it seems he must have been working with memorized material.

5. Composition Theory and Ethics

It is possible that *Piers* transmitted to the *Piers*-tradition poets a vocabulary for aligning their vernacular practice with that of the schoolroom. In his definition of the *conpilator* in the *Etymologies,* Isidore associates the word *conpilator* with the word *pila,* meaning a mortar in which materials are crushed into small fragments and mixed, "Conpilator, qui aliena dicta suis praemiscet, sicut solent pigmentarii in pila diversa mixta contundere" ("A compiler, one who mixes the sayings of others with his own works, just as pigment-makers are accustomed to crush various mixtures into small fragments in a mortar").[63] Isidore notes that a Mantuan poet who mixed lines of Homer with his own verse was identified pejoratively as a *conpilator* and was accused of having committed a morally bad act, "Hoc scelere quondam accusabatur Mantuanus ille vates, cum quosdam versus Homeri transferens suis permiscuisset et conpilator veterum ab aemulis diceretur" ("With this vice, a certain Mantuan poet was accused, since transferring certain verses of Homer he mixed them with his own, and he was called by his rivals a mortar-mixer of the ancients.") Isidore also records the Mantuan poet's defence, "Magnarum esse virium clavam Herculi extorquere de manu" ("It is to be of great strength, to seize the club from Hercules' hand"). Ranulph Higden referred to and quoted from this story in his own defence at the beginning of the *Polychronicon.* Higden's first Middle English translator, Langland's contemporary John Trevisa, translated Isidore's "immiscuisset" ("he mixed") using the Middle English verb *medlen:* "he hadde i-take som of Omeres [verse], and i-medled among his."[64] This was Higden's defence for his practice of add-

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63. Lindsay, *Etymologiarum,* book 10, line 44.
64. Churchill Babington, ed., *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer,* Rolls Series 41 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1865), 1:10–13. Cf. *MED, medlen,* 'to intersperse, mingle, intermingle,' http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/ (accessed 10 September 2008).

ing to the writings of *auctours,* when he "somwhat putt to and eche [amplify] writinge of auctours" ("quippiam adjiciam laboribus auctores").[65] Middle English "meddling" with making, therefore, in Trevisa's translation of Higden, denotes the activity of extracting fragments from an authoritative model of composition and mixing them into a composition of one's own, and is associated with the traditional objection and defence disseminated in Isidore.

The challenge to Will by Ymaginatyf and Will's own defence of his poetic practice may recall this tradition. In the famous and much-discussed "meddling with making" passage, when Ymaginatyf accuses Will of "meddling" with making, "þow medlest þee wiþ makynges" (B 12.16), *Piers* arguably aligns this Isidorean vocabulary with the practice of vernacular alliterative poetry.[66] Here Langland may draw on the tradition of comparing the activity of redeploying small snippets of the work of ancient poets with grinding up small fragments of material and mixing them in a mortar. We can be sure that at least one *Piers Plowman* tradition writer used the Isidorean vocabulary in Langland's formulation to describe his own poetic practice. John But records of himself, "for he medleþ of makyng [because he is a mixer of verses] he made þis ende" (A 12.109).

Conclusion

In this concluding section I shall draw together the analyses of the previous section, drawing some conclusions and considering their implications. I have been suggesting that the responses of the tradition poets to *Piers Plowman* were informed by the processes of composition taught in the grammar-school. I have proposed that, translating and imitating snippets of school texts in the classroom manner, *Piers* may have modeled for them how the vernacular alliterative line could be a vehicle for the arts of composition taught in school composition classes. The poem may also have vernacularized a vocabulary for thinking about compositional practice and ethics and authorised its association with alliterative verse-making. The *Piers*-tradition poets, I have suggested, perhaps worked with memorized passages. Imitating and amplifying fragments from *Piers,* and sometimes redeploying them in the treatment of wholly new material, it is evident that they studied closely

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65. Babington, *Polychronicon,* 1:14–15.
66. Ralph Hanna reads "meddle" here as "intermix," though he draws different conclusions from mine; see Hanna, "'Meddling with Makings' and Will's Work," in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle,* ed. A. J. Minnis, York Manuscripts Conferences: Proceedings Series 3 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 85–94.

the operations of lines and half-lines and rhetorical figures in *Piers.* The *Pierce*-poet and John But focus in particular on amplification of *Piers. Mum* and *Richard* operate more in the manner of *cento,* transferring fragments of material from their model to their own chosen themes of governance, corruption, and truthful, uncensored expression.[67] All of these observations suggest that the *Piers*-tradition poets were responding to *Piers* as if it were a classroom text for memorization, close study, imitation, and a model for composition on new themes.

Aligning the art of the *Piers Plowman* tradition texts with elementary school exercises might encourage us to view these writers as immature and uncreative. But to do so would be to miss a crucial distinction. The tradition writers made an astonishingly daring and original move. They practised the arts of imitative composition, but unlike their other Middle English counterparts they did not imitate a Latin author or text. Their principal model for study and emulation was, as we have seen, *Piers Plowman.* The astonishing move of these writers was to promote the vernacular, alliterative *Piers* to the status of *auctoritas. Richard, Mum, Pierce* and the other tradition texts provide our earliest definite evidence of an identifiable alliterative Middle English text being studied and imitated as a literary model in the manner of the curriculum classics.[68]

This conclusion raises some further intriguing possibilities. Was the work of the tradition writers conducted with the *aim* of actually making *Piers* a classroom "classic"—a canonical curriculum text? Or—an even more startling possibility, but the question is unavoidable—were these writers even working, perhaps, in the knowledge that *Piers Plowman* actually *was* taught by some masters? Could some kind of use of *Piers* as a teaching text explain the widespread knowledge and diffusion of the poem, and the development

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67. The art of the *Mum*-poet may have developed as he got to know and understand *Piers* in more depth. If, as Barr and others have suggested, the same poet wrote *Richard* and *Mum,* it would be reasonable to deduce that *Mum* was his second attempt at tackling the theme of good governance and corruption. The differences that I noted above between the response to *Piers* in *Richard* and that in *Mum* suggest that, if indeed the same poet is at work, by the time he wrote *Mum* he had much more detailed knowledge and understanding of the art of *Piers Plowman,* and he had become more adventurous and creative in his use of his model. For the case for common authorship, see Barr, "Relationship"; Day and Steele noted the *Mum*-poet's "advance" in his mastery of his medium (Barr, "Relationship," 129 n. 73).

68. Other Middle English alliterative poets must have learned their art from reading and hearing models, but the corpus does not—in the present state of our knowledge at least—provide evidence for the identification of specific vernacular texts as authoritative models. Whether Chaucer and Gower are treated in a similar way by their imitators remains to be explored. Chaucer was of course a "maister" for Hoccleve and the other poets who followed him, but his works taught them modes of response to models in Latin and other languages. Gower may have hoped—or expected—that the *Confessio Amantis* would provide a text for study, when he provided it with Latin glosses and comment in the scholastic manner.

of the tradition of imitation? Could this kind of use explain some of the oddities of the manuscript tradition? Could it, for example, explain the continuing and late copying of the A-text (more accessible and appropriate for the classroom, perhaps, than the longer text)? Might it perhaps explain the extract comprising a definition from Isidore, with Langland's alliterative amplification (C 16.182–201a) that is found on the fly-leaf of a manuscript written by John Cok, with the heading "nota bene de libero arbitrio secundum augustinum et ysidorum"—did the extract perhaps serve as an example of amplification using etymology? Could it possibly explain the presence of glosses to *Piers* and scholastic material in some of the manuscripts?[69] For now, these further possibilities must remain speculative. Before firmer conclusions can be drawn, further study is required of pedagogic practices in earlier fifteenth-century England, of the Latin and English literature of the schoolroom, and of responses to it by vernacular authors.

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69. The Cok manuscript is Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 669*/646, p. 210. Many manuscripts have glosses and analytical notes such as "exemplum" (e.g., London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespaspian B XVI, f. 50v; and Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS L1.4.14, ff. 48v, 51r).