



## WRITING STYLE OF THE POEM 'PIERS PLOWMAN'

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the writing styles, metaphors, symbolic characters and allegories from the poem "Piers Plowman". Additionally, this article delves into the moral, religious and social themes.*

**Key words:** *allegorical, metaphor, medieval, theological, authoritative, character, satire, manuscript, hypothesis*

Piers Plowman is a Middle English allegorical narrative poem by William Langland. "Piers Plowman" is a complex medieval poem that delves into moral, religious, and social themes through allegory and symbolism. It is written in unrhymed, alliterative verse divided into sections called passus.

In terms of writing analysis, Langland employs a dream vision narrative, where the narrator, Will, embarks on a spiritual journey guided by the allegorical figure Piers Plowman. This structure allows for the exploration of societal issues, such as corruption, greed, and the pursuit of justice. There exist three distinct versions of the poem, which scholars refer to as the A-, B-, and C-texts. The B-text is the most widely edited and translated version; it revises and extends the A-text by over four thousand lines.<sup>1</sup> The poem, a mix of theological allegory and social satire, concerns the dreamer's quest for the true Christian life in the context of medieval Catholicism. This journey takes place within a series of dream visions; the dreamer seeks, among other things, the allegorical characters Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.

All modern discussion of the text revolves around the classifications of W. W. Skeat. Skeat argued that there are as many as ten forms of the poem, but only three are to be considered authoritative—the A, B, and C-texts—although the definition of "authoritative" in this context is problematic. According to the three-versions hypothesis, each version represents different manuscript traditions deriving from three distinct and successive stages of authorial revision. Although precise dating is debated, the A, B, and C texts are now commonly thought of as the progressive (20–25 years) work of a single author. There is some debate over whether the poem can be regarded as finished or not. It entails additions, omissions, and transpositions; it is not significantly different in size from B. According to the three-versions hypothesis, the poem

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, James (2018). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Middle Ages* (Tenth ed.). p. 388.



runs to about 2,500 lines. The B-text revises A, adds new material, and is three times the length of A. It runs to about 7,300 lines. The C-text was written in the 1380s as a major revision of B except for the final sections.

The text is more or less intelligible to modern readers, but it has different spellings and many words that are not in use anymore. Rhyme was not yet a standard element in English poetry, but the poem does rely heavily on alliteration instead. It is helpful to look at an example to understand how the poem reads. Langland's language is rich and varied, employing poetic devices such as alliteration, metaphor, and symbolism to convey his message. The poem's use of allegorical characters and vivid imagery adds depth to its social commentary, making it a rich source for literary analysis. The scene affords some of the most obscure enlighten of the entire poem: it abounds in odd terms, university wit and learned analogies. I shall discuss only of these, Clergy's brief definition of the Three Lives.

Dowel and Dobet. aren't two infinities,  
Whiche infinities, with a faith. fynden oute Dobest.  
(B.XIII.127-28) <sup>2</sup>

An allegory is a form of literature that presents hidden meaning by using symbolic characters to comment on larger topics such as politics, religion, and morality. It's an indirect way for a writer to criticize or illuminate a subject they want to explore. A dream allegory uses the structure of a dream to present the story. In Piers the main character and narrator, Will, has a series of eight dreams, each one addressing different aspects and issues of Christianity and medieval society. In this kind of allegory ideas sometimes appear as characters themselves.

### Literary style

The Vision of Piers Plowman is best known as an allegorical narrative poem that explores religious themes while utilizing medieval literary forms, such as dream visions, Latin phrases, and unrhymed metaphorical prose. Dream visions were particularly popular during medieval times, giving poets the “opportunity to enter strange realms which bent the rules of time and space,” often making their messages timeless (Wellesley). William Langland expanded the medieval form of dream visions to espouse a political message while embracing the English tradition of alliterative poetry from the Anglo-Saxon tradition (“About Piers Plowman”). Satire of contemporary corruption in religion pervades the text, making it popular among later Church reformers and Protestants.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872241>. Two infinities Grammatical metaphor in Piers Plowman

<sup>3</sup><https://pressbooks.pub/earlybritishlit/chapter/from-the-vision-of-piers-plowman-by-william-langland/#:~:text=>

The%  
20Vision%20of%20Piers%20Plowman%20is%20best%20known%20as%20an,phrases%2C%20and%20unrhymed  
%20metaphorical%20prose. FROM THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN



Versions of Piers Plowman continued to be copied, read, and commented upon through the sixteenth-century, when it was read as a reformist Protestant text. By the seventeenth century, however, the poem was falling into obscurity, from which it emerged only at the end of the nineteenth century. It now holds an important place in the English literary canon. Moreover, the poem's open-endedness and multiple interpretations have sparked scholarly debate for centuries, contributing to its enduring significance in medieval literature. Overall, "Piers Plowman" stands as a testament to Langland's skill as a poet and his ability to engage with complex moral and philosophical themes.

In conclusion, different types of writing styles, allegories and metaphors are used in this epic poem. Many scientists consider the poem as a historical narrative from Medieval period. Additionally, the poem „Piers Plowman" is considered valuable and necessary poem which can be influential in religious and moral themes to our society.

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