

The Archpoet as Poet, Persona and Self: The Problem of Individuality in the Confession

STEVEN SHURTLEFF

The twelfth century witnessed renewed interest in the Delphic injunction "Know yourself": literature of the period shows a conspicuous increase in concern regarding the inner workings and motives of the mind. As might be expected, twelfth-century penitential hymns, secular poetry, and autobiographical works, genres which naturally lend themselves to inward examination, bear the mark of this introspective tendency. This attempt to articulate and define the self appears suddenly and dramatically enough to prompt some scholars to call the phenomenon the "discovery of the individual" or of the "self."¹

The Archpoet's Confession (*Estuans intrinsecus*, 10),² written in the second half of the twelfth century, is particularly relevant to the issue of twelfth-century self-definition in that it incorporates elements of all three of the genres mentioned above. Within the framework of a secular poem, the Archpoet writes an autobiographical defense and a penitential confession. And like many twelfth-century works, the Confession is informed by a concern for self-definition.

The Archpoet writes poems which address the problem of man's place in the world and of the world within man. In this respect, the Archpoet exemplifies the preoccupations of his time. But the Archpoet's poetry is also an atypical, or at least a problematic, example of self-definition in the twelfth century for two reasons.

First, however autobiographical the Archpoet's work may claim to be, and there are doubtless truly autobiographical elements present, the Archpoet employs two literary devices which posi-

tion him at some distance from his own statements. The Confession is "spoken" in the first person; but there seems to be a plurality of I's in the poem. The "I" who begins the poem in uncontrollable anguish, the "I" who delivers the highly controlled and unrepentant middle, and the "I" who ends in apparent penitential contrition are not one and the same speaker. Because none of these personae may be identified with the other, it is equally difficult to identify any of these with the Archpoet. The distance between the Archpoet and the "I" speaking the poems is increased by the poet's use of typological allusions which act as a kind of commentary on the poems. As will be shown below, the first-person voice of the Confession is to be understood in relation to the figure of Job. By eliciting a connection between the speaker of the poem and the character Job, the Archpoet implicitly suggests that a comparison of the two "characters" informs the Confession. This identification of a type with a persona is highly literary, removed and impersonal, qualities not ordinarily associated with autobiography. The Archpoet's Confession is concerned with understanding the self; but, in the midst of this multitude of I's, is it the Archpoet's self that is being understood? Is the Archpoet the object of self-knowledge in the poem? Or does the Confession seek knowledge of a fictional self?

The Archpoet's implicit view of what constitutes the self is also problematic. The Confession speaks of *mens*, *anima*, and *spiritus*; yet the self, the inner life, and the functions which combine to make an individual are described in a mechanical, physical manner. The expected picture of the self in the twelfth century would place the body in subjection to the soul, and a description of the self is usually synonymous with a description of the soul or the mind. In this expected scheme, the soul is the self, the body its vehicle. The Confession, on the contrary, portrays the body as the site of the self; in fact, the Archpoet describes spiritual processes in terms of the body. The "soul" has been relegated to a secondary function of the body. The body has become the self; or if not the self, the body has become much closer to the self than the soul.

Little historical information about the Archpoet has survived. His name, like his poetry, is more meaningful than informative.³ No contemporary sources refer to the Archpoet. Unlike Abelard's autobiography, the Archpoet's statements about himself cannot be measured by secondary sources. Whatever bio-

graphical knowledge of the Archpoet we may acquire must come from his own poems. At first reading, these poems seem to lend themselves readily to biographical analysis: they are written in the first person, and they are addressed to historically verifiable individuals. Poems such as the Confession or *Fama tuba*(2) speak with apparently genuine emotion and desperate pleas. And the poems contain personal touches behind which we think we see an individual: *vatem decalvatum*,⁴ "bald bard" 2.56; *pre multa pauperiei nudis laudo pedibus*, "because of great poverty, I praise barefoot" 7.9, 2; or the nearly fatal fever in 6. But deeper familiarity with the Archpoet's poetry reveals that he is presenting not himself but a string of personae, each of them claiming to be "I," by which the poet expresses his ideas. One moment the speaker is an abject beggar; the next he is an inspired *vates*; one moment he is repentant for an indulgent life, suing for forgiveness; the next he defiantly defends or explains away his loose living, asserting that he cannot live otherwise.

In the Confession alone, the first-person speaker changes at least four times, frustrating any attempt at reading the poem as straightforward autobiography. The Archpoet begins by representing himself as an out-of-control, nearly raving victim of his own nature. The poet describes himself as *factus de materia levis elementi* (st. 1); that is, whatever he does, he does in accordance with a nature imposed on him from without. An external force seems to master the poet:

Feror ego veluti sine nauta navis,
ut per vias aeris vaga fertur avis.
non me tenent vincula, non me tenet clavis.

[I am carried along like a ship without a pilot, as a wandering bird is carried through the ways of the air. Chains do not hold me, a key does not hold me. (st. 3, 1-3)]

These violent descriptions in the first three stanzas are suddenly broken in the fourth by a light-hearted acceptance of his lot:

Michi cordis gravitas res videtur gravis,
iocus est amabilis dulciorque favis;
quicquid Venus imperat, labor est suavis,
que nunquam in cordibus habitat ignavis.

[Seriousness of heart seems too serious a thing to me; a joke is agreeable and sweeter than honey. Whatever Venus commands, the labor is sweet—Venus, who never dwells in lazy hearts. (st. 4)]

Without transition, the poet moves from the raving plaything of Nature to the well-prepared legal defendant. The poet addresses the three accusations made against him: lechery, gambling and drinking. The answer to this last charge consists of the Archpoet's famous ode to the tavern, the *Meum est propositum* (st. 11-12), a satirical interlude neither out-of-control nor dry and logical. The ode to the tavern gives way to a considered discussion of the two schools of poets and the Archpoet's theory of inspiration via wine (st. 14-19).

Nothing has prepared the way for the Archpoet's confession and "conversion" at the end of the poem (st. 20-25). The poet has countered each of his accusations (lechery, gambling and drinking) with an excuse. The poet explains that his nature compels lechery (*Res est arduissima vincere naturam*, st. 7). Gambling, more precisely losing, inspires the poet:

sed cum ludus corpore me demittit nudo,
frigidus exterius mentis estu sudo;
tunc versus et carmina meliora cudo.

[but when the game sends me away with a naked body, although I am freezing on the outside, I sweat from a burning in my mind; then I forge better verses and poems. (st. 10, 2-4)]

In all three instances, the Archpoet answers his accusations with explanations, not apologies. The main body of the Confession is more of a defense than a confession. Therefore, it is all the more confusing that the poem ends in penitential mode. The Archpoet does not present any of his "sins" as particularly blameworthy; yet the poem ends on a note of apparent repentance:

Iam virtutes diligo, viciis irascor,
renovatus animo spiritu renascor;
quasi modo genitus novo lacte pascor,
ne sit meum amplius vanitatis vas cor.

[Now I love virtues, I am angered by vices; made new in soul, I am reborn in spirit; as though new-born, I am nourished by new milk, lest my heart should any longer be a vessel of vanity. (st. 23)]

The defensive drinker and the repentant poet stand in opposition to one another; but both are represented as "I" in the poem. The Confession ostensibly is autobiography or personal confession (*Sum locutus contra me, quicquid de me novi*, st. 22); but the presence of personae, of literary I's which speak the poem, suggests a contrived distance between the Archpoet and his poem. The poetic strategy of the Confession is sophisticated and

detached, a mode of composition inconsistent with straightforward autobiography. The Archpoet manipulates the poem's personae to achieve a poetic effect: sincerity, and therefore autobiographical "truth," is absent. The Confession does not convey any reliable information about the Archpoet himself, except what may be inferred about him by observing his literary motives. This sophistication makes the Archpoet a difficult specimen of twelfth-century self-expression. The Confession is concerned with self-expression, confession, self-knowledge; but it is uncertain whose *if anyone's* self is the object of this expression, confession, and knowledge.

The search for the self in the Confession is further complicated by the Archpoet's use of typological models. In *Fama tuba* (2), the Archpoet explicitly identifies himself with Jonah: the poem must be understood in the context of the Book of Jonah. The Confession also contains another Old Testament figure: the speaker of the poem is identified with Job. The Archpoet does not explicitly name Job, but announces this type by verbal allusion at the beginning of the poem. Although short biblical and classical allusions are not unusual in the Archpoet's poetry,⁵ the meaning of the Confession as a whole suggests that the poet intends this allusion to the Book of Job to influence the audience's reception of the poem. The Archpoet subtly suggests that the "I" who speaks the Confession should be identified with Job. By placing words from the first-person speeches of Job in the mouth of the poem's speaker, the comparison between Job and the "I" of the Confession becomes inevitable. The poem is therefore not only concerned with defining an "I" who is not the "I" of the poet, but part of the method of definition is typology, a mode of interpretation which understands one self in light of another. The use of typological interpretation in itself does not contradict the personal authenticity of an author. But the presence of a first-person persona in a "confession" considerably distances the Archpoet from the third figure, the type.

The first two stanzas of the Confession contain two verbal reminiscences of the Book of Job:

Estuans intrinsecus ira vehementi
in amaritudine loquor mee menti:
factus de materia levis elementi
folio sum similis, de quo ludunt venti.

Cum sit enim proprium viro sapienti
supra petram ponere sedem fundamenti,
stultus ego comparor fluvio labenti,
sub eodem aere numquam permanenti.

[Burning inwardly with violent anger, I speak in bitterness to my mind: made from the material of a light element, I am like a leaf with which the winds sport. For, while it is appropriate for a wise man to place his bottom on a rock, I, an idiot, am like a flowing stream, never abiding under the same sky.]

The first of these is an approximation of a phrase in Job 10.1. I here give 10.1-2 to show the context.

taedet animam meam vitae meae; dimittam adversum me eloquium meum,
loquar in amaritudine animae meae. dicam Deo: noli me condemnare; indica
mihi cur me ita iudices.

[My soul is weary of my life, I will let go my speech against myself, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: Do not condemn me: tell me why thou judgest me so.]⁶

More than verbal allusion connects the Confession to the Book of Job. *Estuans intrinsecus* has acquired the name "Confession" because of its frank admission of weaknesses and because of the confessional vocabulary of stanzas 21-24. But the poem is also, even primarily, a defense. The Archpoet portrays the "poet" of the Confession answering for himself before his accusers. Job defends himself before his accuser-friends, longing all the while for a hearing before God, just as the poet of the Confession defends himself before his patron. This identification of the poet with Job suggests a network of related identifications. If the "I" of the Confession is a kind of Job, the servants of Reinald correspond to the misled "friends" of Job. Reinald himself corresponds to the God to whom Job makes his appeal.⁷

The other two echoes to the Book of Job further amplify the helpless state the Archpoet wishes to evoke:

folio sum similis de quo ludunt venti

[I am like a leaf with which the winds sport (st. 1, 4)]

contra folium, quod vento rapitur, ostendis potentiam tuam, et stiplam siccam persequeris.

[Against a leaf, that is carried away with the wind, thou shewest thy power, and thou pursuest a dry straw. (Job 13:25)]

sub eodem aere nunquam permanenti

[never abiding under the same sky (st. 2, 4)]

homo, natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, repletur multis miseriis, quasi flos egreditur et conteritur, et fugit velut umbra, et numquam in eodem statu permanet.

[Man, born of woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as shadow, and never continueth in the same state. (Job 14.1-2)]

The Book of Job, and Job himself, is concerned with defining man's place in the world. Job's very search for justice is a process of defining himself in relation to his "punishments" or tests. The Confession offers a contrast to Job's predicament: the "trials" of the poem's speaker are not imposed by an adversary but by his own nature; and therefore the justice he seeks is the recognition that his actions are not in his control. The Archpoet uses this greater framework of the Book of Job to define the self—if not his own self, the self of the persona "poor bard."

Twelfth-century concern for the inner self did not eclipse the use of types as a tool for understanding others and oneself. Another twelfth-century confession, Abelard's *Historia calamitatum*, utilizes typological models to define the self. For this reason, Abelard presents another example of how difficult it is to abstract a twelfth-century "individual." Because of what seems to be great candor about his mistakes and their consequences, Abelard strikes the reader as an individual. The *Historia* reads as an *interior* narrative, the goal being self-knowledge. Yet Abelard prefers to understand himself by means of the typical; his appeal to *auctoritas* is what we have come to think of as typically medieval: submersion of the individual in religious and cultural prototypes. Abelard, who seems to understand his own particular motives and actions with keen insight, defines himself by means of a type: St. Jerome, advisor of women.⁸

The analogy of Job illuminates another problematic aspect of the Confession. The Archpoet presents a picture of the self which is predominantly physical and only secondarily spiritual. This picture reverses both the implicit idea of the self presented in the Book of Job and the dominant notion of the self current in the twelfth century. The speaker of the Confession and the character Job are in a process of defining themselves in relation to their bodies. But the resultant definitions sharply contrast. God allows Satan to afflict Job. All of the tests of Job are external, physical. Job's wealth, his children, and finally his own physical well-being are taken from him. All of these "possessions" are out of Job's control. Satan governs and tortures Job's body: Job is left with only his inner power of choice. That Job might exercise that power is perhaps God's motivation for testing Job, for God would have Job define himself not by outward prosper-

ity, which was never really in Job's control, but by his faith in God. The Archpoet, by alluding to the character of Job, has evoked this body/mind dichotomy in Job's story. By contrasting the narrator of the Confession with Job, the Archpoet is able to provide subtle and telling information about the *kind* of self he is describing. Job is left with nothing but his reason; the lower nature has been subjugated by force. The speaker of the Confession, whose body is as mastered by Nature as Job's is by Satan, finds himself unable or unwilling to control his body by means of the soul. Job's struggle with the flesh results in a stronger assertion of his inner will, of the soul as the site of the self. In contrast, there is no struggle with the body in the Confession; the poet submits to the will of Nature. The "I" of the Confession is an "I" of flesh.

Whereas Job's defense against his accusers is his past and continued submission to the will of God, the poet's answer to his detractors is his past and continued domination by Nature. The speaker of the Confession never attempts to defend his actions logically or by authority. When called upon to defend his love of the tavern, he offers a panegyric to the tavern, instead of delivering a reasoned response. The speaker's real defense against the accusations of lechery, gambling, and drinking colors the entire poem and may be said to be the true subject of the Confession. That defense is simply that the "nature" within him and *Natura* outside of him are responsible for his actions. The external force Nature rules over the speaker of the poem. That *Natura* has power over the body (as Satan does over Job's) is not an unusual idea in the Middle Ages. But that we have no other power to resist Nature (as Job resists Satan's trials) is not the expected view. The *ego* of the Confession does refer to himself in both physical and spiritual terms. The inside world, the *anima*, *mens*, and *spiritus*, is capable of reflecting on past actions and repenting. But this "spiritual" side of the self is represented as a passive observer of the more real world of physical Nature. The sublunar world is wholly governed by Nature, which determines the movements of this world—including the actions of the body. The actual defense of the Confession is that the speaker cannot be blamed for what "he" did not do.

The carnal self does not have free will, as Job does. Job cannot choose his external situation, but can choose his inner relation to God. In contrast, the "poet", as powerless over Nature's rule as

Job is over Satan's, does not resist inwardly, will not or cannot exercise his reason. He is a Job who has learned to love and to use Satan.

But the Confession depicts a situation more complicated than the mere rejection of the higher nature: the scheme of the self which the poem implies is the reverse of what we might expect. In the more common medieval view of the self, the spiritual part should rule over the body and its passions. The Confession suggests not only that the body does happen to govern the poet's soul, but that it must. The Archpoet describes the human being (even the higher, spiritual parts) almost as a physical mechanism. Poetic inspiration is a mechanical effect of alcohol introduced into the system:

Tales versus facio, quale vinum bibo.

[The quality of the wine I drink determines the quality of poetry I write. (st. 18, 1)]
The process by which the wine produces its inspiration is as predictable as digestion:

Mihi nunquam spiritus poetrie datur,
nisi prius fuerit venter bene satur;
dum in arce cerebri Bachus dominatur,
in me Phebus irruit et miranda fatur.

[The spirit of poetry is never given to me unless my stomach is first well filled; then Bacchus rules in the citadel of my brain, Phoebus rushes into me and speaks marvels. (st. 19)]

What is remarkable in this description of—or rather prescription for—inspiration is the degree to which *spiritus poetrie* is subservient to *venter*. The scheme of the self is not just upside-down; the lower has risen to the throne, reducing terms that describe the higher (*spiritus*, *mens*, *anima*) to mere synonyms for a passive observer of what *happens* to the self as a whole. The Archpoet has not removed the spirit from the self dominated by the body. But the spiritual part of the self is severely marginalized. As the poet states: *Mortuus in anima curam gero cutis* ("being dead in my soul, I look out for my skin," stanza 5). In the Archpoet's scheme, the body is the self. Because the body is the self, and Nature rules the body, the underlying argument of the Confession is that the poet cannot be expected to strive against his vices.

This view takes the post-lapsarian scheme of sublunar Nature a step further, setting it up as nearly all-powerful. The Archpoet accords *Natura* the dignity and power usually reserved for God:

Unicuique proprium dat Natura munus
Unicuique proprium dat Natura donum

[To each Nature gives a proper gift (st. 16, 1; 17, 1)]

God wields power over the soul; Nature over the body. But if the body is the *site* of the person, Nature usurps God's omnipotence. The Confession defines the self as primarily body with a "ghostly" element. Nature is the god of such a self. As a result of this new god, the feigned repentance stanzas (20-24), which pretend to acknowledge the spiritual side of the speaker's self, refer to God by his pagan, poetical name:

homo videt faciem, sed cor patet Iovi.

[Man sees the face, but the heart is revealed to Jove. (st. 22, 4)]

The God who turns the sinner to repentance, and who communicates with man by means of reason, is not present. The pagan Jove is a much more "natural" god, and stands less in opposition to the goddess *Natura*. Jove, unlike God, is certainly no threat to the natural man's pagan life-style.

The Archpoet is a problematic example of twelfth-century individuality. But the difficulty he presents makes him particularly relevant to the subject, for precisely his deviations from expected norms reveal the Archpoet's individuality. The Confession is the Archpoet's "autobiography"; yet the sincerity regarded as essential to that genre is absent. We do not feel confident that it is the Archpoet "himself" speaking. The sincerity of the poem therefore becomes insincerity; the emotion is a calculated strategy. Nevertheless, the Archpoet's work reveals something about the self. The technique of the Confession is evidence of a distinct self-awareness; the sophisticated stance toward his own work speaks of the Archpoet's individuality. A remarkably original mind pulls the levers behind this machine of personae and types.

The twelfth century experienced renewed interest in self-knowledge; but it also gave birth to new ways of conceiving the self. The great increase of secular knowledge in the eleventh and twelfth centuries brought with it a skepticism concerning the traditional scheme of man. An alternative to this traditional view appears in the Confession. The Archpoet represents the self in an almost modern, physical manner, marginalizing the higher functions in favor of the lower. In the Confession the body achieves a decisive, if defensive, dignity.

The Archpoet's significance for the study of medieval individuality lies in his partial adherence to and partial apostasy from traditional expression. On the one hand, the Archpoet writes in autobiographical mode; on the other, he cannot be easily identified in his work. The Archpoet, like many of his contemporaries, is concerned with self-knowledge; yet the literary "distance" he maintains from his poem raises questions about the Archpoet's relation to the "self-knowledge" in the poems. These problems themselves suggest a distinct self behind the poet's work. His sophistication, his critical stance toward the I's who speak his words, and his willingness to define the human being by means of the body are all evidence of the Archpoet's individuality.

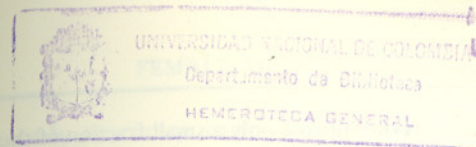
University of Oregon

NOTES

- 1 See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (U. of California Press, 1982), 82-109; John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Harvard U. Press, 1982), 263-295; and Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200* (U. of Toronto Press, 1987).
- 2 I would like to thank Martha Bayless for her helpful advice during revisions of this paper.
- 3 *Der Archipoeta: Lateinisch und Deutsch*, ed. Heinrich Krefeld (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992). I cite from this edition throughout. I have, however, omitted half-line spaces.
- 4 "Most of the poets of the High Middle Ages are anonymous in the sense that of their lives we know nothing. But of the Archpoet we know less than nothing, for even his name is a mocking travesty of a title, probably a play on that of his patron, the Archcancellarius, Reinald von Dassel, Archbishop of Cologne." W. T. H. Jackson, "The Politics of a Poet: The Archipoeta as Revealed by His Imagery," in *Philosophy and Humanism*, ed. Edward P. Mahoney (Columbia U. Press, 1976) 320.
- 5 *Decalvatus* may also mean "tonsured." This reading has the added advantage of stressing the tension between the clerical and secular worlds which has such a central place in the Archpoet's poetry. For the significance of baldness in this poem (2), see Krefeld, op. cit., 93: "In der mittelalterlichen Kunst wurde der vom Walfisch ausgespiene Jonas gern glatzköpfig, *decalvatus*, dargestellt, so vor allem in der Buchmalerei, aber etwa auch am Dreikönigsschrein in Köln (um 1200) und in den Chorschranken des Bamberger Doms (um 1220)." Whatever the exact meaning of *decalvatus*, its

ambiguity and its poetic suitability to the medieval figure of the *glatzköpfig* Jonah simply emphasize the difficulty of extracting factual information about the Archpoet from his poems.

- 5 These are fully cited in Krefeld's edition. See also Peter Dronke, "The Archpoet and the Classics," in *Latin Poetry and the Classical Tradition: Essays in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Peter Godman and Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 57-72.
- 6 Biblical citations are from *Biblia sacra vulgata iuxta vulgata versionem*, ed. R. Weber OSB (3rd edn., Stuttgart, 1983). Translations are from the Challoner-Douay text.
- 7 The Archpoet's accusers are more explicitly identified with a biblical passage (John 8:7) in stanza 21, where the poet speaks as Christ to the Scribes and Pharisees who test him. I think the fact that Job's "friends" and the Pharisees of John 8 have a certain cruel legalism in common supports the less obvious reading of Reinald's servants as Job's accusers. Poem II (*Fama tuba*) forces Reinald into the typological position of God by making the poet a Jonah who prays for his freedom, just as here in the Confession the Archpoet as Job turns Reinald as judge into God.
- 8 *Hieronymus, cujus me praecipue in contumelis detractum haeredem conspicio* (*Historia calamitatum*, PL 178:180). See Bynum, op. cit., 96.



Flesh and Food: The Function of Female Asceticism in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*

SUSANNAH MILNER

Traditionally the subject of studies concerned with staging and provenance, the Digby *Mary Magdalene* has, in recent years, become the focus of arguments over its unity of character, plot, and theme.¹ Not surprisingly, this shift in the play's critical focus has led many recent scholars to examine the central character in much greater depth than did earlier scholars. Mary Magdalene—in Digby a composite character drawn from traditional folklore, biblical and liturgical sources, and medieval saints' lives such as *The Golden Legend*—was a popular and familiar saint, well known to a fifteenth-century English audience.² Because of Mary's widespread popularity in the late Middle Ages, today's scholars of the Digby play find her to be an important symbol for spirituality. Clifford Davidson tells us, "During the Middle Ages . . . she had become the standard example of the serious sinner's repentance and ascent to bliss," and, "for many Christians in the late Middle Ages, Saint Mary Magdalene might even have been described as the paradigm of God's mercy to penitent sinners."³ Davidson sees Mary, then, as a model for other sinners to imitate when seeking redemption; she serves as a point of identification for members of the audience. David Bevington describes Mary as a female type of Christ: "Mary Magdalene's temptation in the wilderness and her ascension into heaven are patently modeled on those of Christ."⁴ As a female and more human version of Christ, however, Mary offers a more accessible model for behavior. Victor Scherb also associates her with the Son of God:

In portraying Mary's success as a Christian *nuntia*, the dramatist stresses how Christian speakers could become "a vessel of the Spirit, bearing the Word to mankind," in their turn allowing others to internalize the Christian message. . . .