Early Incarnations of *Piers Plowman*

by

Brian James Morgan

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EARLY INCARNATIONS OF *Piers Plowman*

BY

BRIAN JAMES MORGAN

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ABSTRACT

During the past 15 years, scholars, especially those working in earlier historical periods, have begun to look at texts more than ever before as the results of a communal circulation over the course of the texts' histories, rather than as the products of a unique authorial impetus at a single point in time. D. C. Greetham has called this "democratic pluralism" a "characteristic feature of textual scholarship in the closing years of this century" (112). Medieval texts especially undergo a multitude of changes, presented in a variety of ways, in the process of their transmission. By directing attention to the textual history of *Piers Plowman*, the thesis attempts to (con)textualize the poem by exploring particular types of *Piers Plowman* texts in different historical periods.

The Introduction is a theoretical discussion of the manuscript and print cultures in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Drawing on the work of such scholars as Jerome J. McGann, Marshall McLuhan, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Robert Darnton, it establishes that media forms condition, if not determine, both the production and different reception of literature. The importance of avoiding *either-or* thinking is often made clear.

Chapter One considers the textual condition and bibliographical contexts of the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts, using the A-text of the Vernon Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian MS English Poetry a 1) and the B-text of Cambridge University Library MS Ll 4.14 as examples of the poem found in miscellanies.

Chapter Two examines rubrication and illustration, with much attention devoted to the seven deadly sins, in two C-text manuscripts: San Marino, Huntington MS HM 143 and Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 104. The annotation of CUL MS Ll 4.14 is also considered.

Chapter Three focuses on Robert Crowley's role as the sixteenth-century Puritan who first printed the poem, and his part in the contemporary vogue for texts related to the figure of Piers the Plowman. After a consideration of his editions' relationship to the manuscripts, especially CUL MS Ll 4.14, his first edition is compared with a later edition (*STC* 19907[a]).

The Conclusion suggests that media-conditioned receptions continue as *Piers Plowman* is textualized in the scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Besides this list, the reader is also referred to Appendix A, where a list of *Piers Plowman* manuscripts and early printed editions may be found, including sigils typically used to represent them. In the text, these are indicated by first the sigil, then the version or tradition to which the manuscript belongs, e.g., S(B) refers to MS S of the B tradition. Exceptions to this are Ht, which is conflated, and Z, which, owing to its uncertain status, I have rendered neutrally.

a	left column; Latin lines in some editions of *Piers Plowman*
b	right column
BL	British Library (London)
Bodleian	Bodleian Library (Oxford)
CUL	Cambridge University Library
EETS	Early English Text Society
ES	Extra Series
Huntington	Henry E. Huntington Library (San Marino)
IMEV	*The Index of Middle English Verse*, by Brown and Robbins
MÆ	*Medium Ævum*
MP	*Modern Philology*
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
N&Q	*Notes and Queries*
NS	New Series
OS	Original or Old Series
r	recto
STC	*Short Title Catalogue* item nos. by Jackson et al.
U...P	University. . .Press
v	verso
YLS	*The Yearbook of Langland Studies*

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I

Introduction

Ayant pris à la lettre le précepte platonicien («bannir les poètes de la République»), notre civilisation et sa science s'aveuglent devant une productivité: l'écriture, pour recevoir un effet: l'œuvre.

—— Julia Kristeva (147)

Texts and Modes of Textual Production

The context in which a given work is written and read has powerful effects on the way that work is later perceived and re-shaped for subsequent readers. The particular contexts I explore in this thesis are: the general modes of production and consumption of texts from the later medieval and renaissance periods to the modern era. *Piers Plowman* is one example of a medieval text that has come to exist, not just in a multiple variety of textual versions, but also in a variety of physical forms or media relying on different modes of production.

Since W. W. Skeat completed his task of editing the poem for the Early English Text Society in the nineteenth century, modern critics have agreed in principle that there is a poem called *Piers Plowman*, which exists in *at least* three distinguishable textual forms, each represented by roughly the same number of manuscripts: a shorter form often judged to be incomplete, called **A**;[1] a form three times longer which most students read, called **B**;[2] and what is generally thought to be an incomplete revision of the longer form, called **C**.[3] The sequence of composition of these versions has recently been questioned for the first time since the beginning of this century by Jill Mann. Similarly, the decades-

---

[1] The edition by Thomas D. Knott and David C. Fowler and the Athlone edition by George Kane are the latest editions since Skeat.

[2] The Athlone edition by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, and the Everyman edition by A. V. C. Schmidt are the latest editions since Skeat.

[3] Derek Pearsall's edition is the first since Skeat. The "amiable and long-suffering" G. H. Russell is to produce the third volume of the Athlone edition (Kane and Donaldson vi).

long acceptance of William Langland[4] as sole author has begun to diminish. According to the editors of the Athlone editions of *Piers Plowman*, this man wrote the shorter A version, revised and expanded it into the B version (using a scribal copy of A), and began to revise this once more into C (using a scribal copy of B), but was interrupted. Factors which undermine that belief include the known evidence of textual manipulation and editing by scribes, such as the textual extension by John But, author of much of the twelfth or "John But" passus of the A-text. Other factors which add further complications to the question include Bodleian MS Bodley 851 [Z], a conjoint AC manuscript whose A-text was usually thought of as conflated, but whose status has over the past dozen years altered due to the challenging arguments by A. G. Rigg and Charlotte Brewer, who advance a version anterior to A, called **Z** after the sigil assigned to the manuscript by Skeat.[5] Such uncertainty is not strange to *Piers Plowman* scholarship: G. H. Russell and Venitia Nathan demonstrated that another manuscript, Huntington MS HM 114 [Ht] was a version posterior to C; though it is not authorial,[6] we could call it **D**. Indeed, who is to say that such a 'D' version of the text is any the less valid for not having been written entirely by the first author? If scholarship should discover that the A version truly is an

---

[4] Only one *Piers Plowman* manuscript has a note outside of the text itself (buried at the bottom of the leaf) which makes a statement naming the author William Langland: Dublin, Trinity College MS 212 [V(C)] on folio 89^{v} (Kane *Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship* 32 and plate 1)

[5] See the edition by Rigg and Brewer; see also the first volume of the new parallel-text edition by A. V. C. Schmidt, presenting *Piers Plowman* in four versions.

[6] Few scholars would speculate that the original author would have begun yet another revision of his work, as it is assumed that the revision process from B to C was interrupted or aborted. See Russell, "The Imperative of Revision in the C Version of *Piers Plowman*," in Edward Donald Kennedy et al. 233-42.

editorially condensed version of an original B, as Jill Mann argues, scholars will not likely study it *less* than they already have; if anything, scholarly attention to the A-text would likely increase dramatically.

Each of the manuscript texts of these versions finds itself embodied or "incarnated" differently in relation to the others because of different processes which took place at the time of creation. In manuscript production, each of the manuscripts is produced by different people under different circumstances which have effects on both the "final" product and its consumption by readers over time. Each manuscript witness is unique, both textually and by virtue of the nature of the process itself: no two manuscripts can ever be the same, any more than two human hands or two human minds. As G. Thomas Tanselle says, "[b]ecause past events cannot be duplicated in every detail, regardless of the number of instructions provided, works that exist only through reconstruction will never assume precisely the same form on any two occasions. Such works are inherently indeterminate" (22). That texts produced and reproduced in manuscript are indeterminate is often forgotten when we create supposedly stable and fixed texts we call critical editions for our reading purposes. Elizabeth Eisenstein makes the case that each new edition of a work "makes it more difficult to envisage how a given manuscript appeared to a scribal scholar who had only one hand-copied version to consult and no certain guidance as to its place or date of composition, its title or author" (7). As Richard Dwyer early suggested, modern readers and critics may not always appreciate "scribal participation in the continuous recreation of literature transmitted by manuscript"

(222). If anything, there has often been contempt for scribes: to modern editors, they are "good" but "stupid" if they copy everything slavishly, and "bad" but "intelligent" if they show some initiative by making modifications. R. W. Chambers and J. H. G. Grattan are explicit in the modern attitude toward scribes, based on editorial goals and procedures:

> The modern editor asks of the scribe first that he be faithful; secondly that he be stupid; a scribe who uses his intelligence upon the text he is copying is only a source of trouble. [...] If the scribe could rise from his grave, he would of course reply that he had no thought of making things convenient for the modern editor; he was trying to make the text intelligible for the man of his own generation who would have to read it; but the fact remains that *for our purpose* the good scribe, like the good modern printer, is the man who follows his copy even if it flies out the window.
>
> (quoted in Chambers 7-8; his emphasis)

If we are to understand the conditions under which such texts were produced and the significance these had for people who regularly read manuscripts, we must learn to appreciate the very textual indeterminacy which has traditionally been seen as unworthy of — or even a hindrance to — study. We should also bear in mind that, contrary to what is suggested by Chambers and Grattan, this same indeterminacy also occurs, if in a somewhat less visible form, in printed texts. As the processes of putting together or presenting a text have changed, often becoming more and more collaborative (if sometimes only in a cumulative sense), more changes tend to occur in the presentation. Jerome McGann calls this "the law of change":

> Every text enters the world under determinate sociohistorical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life histories of different texts can play themselves out. The law of change declares that these histories will exhibit a ceaseless process of textual development and mutation—a process which can only be arrested if all the textual transformations of a particular work fall into nonexistence. To study texts and textualities, then, we have to study these complex (and open-ended) histories of textual change and variance.
>
> (9)

The older and more complicated the textual history of a given work, the more it must "suffer change" at the hands of those who would reproduce it for others to read in the present. Medieval texts can have particularly complex textual histories; yet until the past decade or so, readers of these texts have not been greatly encouraged to focus on this aspect of their condition as texts. The New Criticism tended to downplay indeterminacy in texts, because great literary works should be able to stand by themselves without the need for context. As a result medieval texts have tended to stand at the periphery of the canon. The more complicated a text's history, the more it is required that an archetype be determined for it, that it may take its place in the canon.

Traditionally, *Piers Plowman* is somewhat unusual in that its complicated textual history is actually emphasized to students, every new edition since Skeat *declaring* itself to be A-, B-, C-, and now Z-based in large capitals. An obvious reason for such a level of emphasis on the multiple nature of *Piers Plowman* is that, relative to other comparable texts, its history is especially complex, the B and C versions being so much longer than the A version. Here more than elsewhere readers and critics seem predisposed to accept the textual multidimensionality which McGann addresses. Yet the readiness on the part of critics to accept a definite assertion that the text exists in three, but only three, versions belies the actual textual condition of the manuscripts, and reflects a New Critical desire to create a canonical text within easily manageable bounds for the purposes of criticism and interpretation. With many medieval texts, *Piers Plowman* being but one example, it is not possible to reduce the textuality of the subject to such a unity as an eclectic or a

best-text edition seems to offer. Tim William Machan[7] cites the example of a fifteenth-century poem, "The Tale of Jack and His Stepdame" which exists "in five manuscripts and five early printed editions": only two lines in the whole poem are the same in each version (13-14). Confronted with texts which seem to change with every attempt to reproduce them, we must begin an attempt both to accept and to assess the impact of such diversity.

In order to talk about textual transmission in a manner that places equal importance on all versions of a text, including versions which may have had no value under an edition-oriented agenda of archetype determination, it is necessary to move away from the traditional concept of the author as the sole agent involved in producing texts, and the question "What did the author say?" must be altered to "What happened to the text?". As Mary and Richard Rouse point out, texts are certainly created "as a result of someone's decision" (3), but that decision, and the way it is carried out, is made by persons other than the author as soon as there is a copy in their hands. Before books can be acquired and read, they have to be made through a process, one which involves many people other than the author, and for which the classic communication model of reading, that which sees the author as an emitter of a message and the reader as its receiver, is, as Robert Darnton shows, inadequate. Darnton offers an alternative and holistic model of book production: a "communications circuit that runs from the author [...] [to] the reader" (111). Darnton also emphasizes the importance of the reader in affecting what the writer

[7] In "Middle English Text Production and Modern Textual Criticism," in A. J. Minnis and Charlotte Brewer 1-18.

produces: "The reader [...] influences the author both before and after the act of composition. Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style and a general sense of the literary enterprise, which affects their texts [...]" (111). In the case of *Piers Plowman*, it is often suggested that the C revision is the reviser's response to growing political tensions in England, i.e., that the C-text tends to tone down its social criticism or else make its aims more explicit.[8] Like McGann, Darnton sees the production of texts as a highly social activity, conditioned by the times in which the book is produced. Despite our tendency to make authors into "great men of history", they are in fact elements in a process of production, albeit very important ones. In the medieval situation, someone writes something which is noticed by others, who wish to copy it for themselves or for others still. In time, changes are introduced, accidentally or otherwise. At the end of it all, we no longer have a single text by the author in his autograph, but rather many related texts, shaped by the demands of particular situations. Even if we did possess an autograph of the author's text, we should be just as concerned to know the circumstances of dissemination of scribal versions of that text, because these can tell us much about what informed readers and the act of reading during the period.

Given the status of *Piers Plowman*, then, not as a text but as a collection of diverse texts, made and re-made by diverse people over time, the fact that they have been re-set since Crowley's first printed edition into the increasingly fixed and widespread form

[8] See Anna Baldwin, "The Historical Context," in John Alford 67-86, esp. 73. See also Anne Hudson.

of a printed book poses some problems. That change brought with it enormous consequences, in part because the sense of multidimensionality is largely lost,[9] but even more so because the entire mode of production is different, and so, ultimately, is the "end product". By now "end product" is seen to be a problematic term: if there is no original, or if the original was produced in a fundamentally irreproducible format like the manuscript, there can be no end-product when speaking of texts. It should never be forgotten that texts are not ideal creations of the mind, but physical objects in the real world; Darnton calls it "crucial" that we seize them "in all their physicality" (152). McGann also reminds us that "all texts, like all other things human, are embodied phenomena, and the body of the text is not exclusively linguistic" (13).

This is to say that the body of a text is like the body of a human being: just as one speaks with more than one's mouth alone (there is body language and the language of clothes),[10] so does the body of the book speak with more than just the linguistic text formed on the surface of its page; the design and layout of a book tend to define its origin and place in the social world. And just as clothes may be custom-designed or ready-to-wear, so may books be designed individually (manuscript) or be mass-produced (print); in spite of the fact that both are types within a class of objects (books), the nature of the way they were created, and so received, is significantly different. As McGann says,

---

[9] Of course an argument could be made that a reader of a manuscript of *Piers Plowman* may have been ignorant of its existing in other versions. We know, however, that some readers, such as the scribe of Huntington MS HM 114, knew of other versions.

[10] Marshall McLuhan suggests in *Understanding Media* that clothing "can be seen [...] as a means of defining the self socially" (114).

"[m]eaning is transmitted through bibliographical as well as linguistic codes" (57). A distinction is made between these two codes in order to gain "at once a more global and a more uniform view of texts and the process of textual production" (14). McGann demonstrates that the medium of a given work plays an important part in forming its messages, providing clues for us in determining attitudes towards this particular text, and towards the situation or condition of the kind of text which it contained. For example, the Vernon manuscript [V(A)] is a huge book of monastic origin, containing many orthodox religious works. The fact that its *Piers Plowman* was seen as acceptable enough to be included in the volume, suggests that *Piers* appealed to a wide cross-section of society,[11] and not only to neo-protestant and reformist movements, although there is certainly ample evidence that the text was important to many involved in those movements.[12]

If one thinks of the book itself as a significant part of what Walter Benjamin called the "aura" surrounding the text seen as a work of art, it becomes necessary to take into account the *form* of the book (materials, inks, general contents, bookhands, etc.) when assessing the impact of the text upon its readers. In the case of medieval texts, subsequent producers of books must invariably *change* that form to suit different purposes: the needs of the late fourteenth century monks who created the Vernon MS

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[11] In "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*," Anne Middleton calls the poem "the first in Middle English poetic fiction intentionally capable of a national resonance and reception" (118-19; in David Lawton 101-23). See Marie-Clare Uhart on the general early reception of the poem.

[12] See John N. King and the third chapter, as well as Sharon L. Jansen's article on a *Piers Plowman* fragment found in the context of a manuscript concerned with such movements.

were not the needs of Sir Adrian Fortescue, who created his manuscript, Bodleian MS Digby 145 [K(AC)], in 1531-32; in turn, this Catholic reader's needs differed radically from those of the Puritan Robert Crowley in 1550. Where under a New Critical system of inquiry one might have thought of the text, or content, as the only proper subject for literary study, we now see that the medium, or container, is every bit as significant, particularly manuscripts because of their uniqueness as artifacts. The uniqueness of manuscripts, the peculiarity with which each one may be organized, had and continues to have an effect on reading. This has been a concern of many scholars for some time. Julia Boffey finds that manuscript material "can supply a contemporary critical perspective of a unique kind, in the form of information about the reactions of copyists and readers to the texts with which they were confronted" (1). N. F. Blake points out that because "we rarely edit [individual texts] together with the other texts that accompany them in the manuscripts," "[w]e therefore think of such texts as completely independent units which exist in isolation" (61). Rouse and Rouse phrase the point very well:

> A manuscript is a unit, within which the written text and its physical surroundings interact. [...] To study any one element in isolation — the ruling, or the layout, or the form of the letters and the script, or the words of the text itself — without the others is to cut apart what was both conceived and perceived as a unit. Each of the three, the material base, the script or image, and the text, is a changing or evolving thing, a product of compromise between traditional forms and the contemporary needs of the audience which it was to serve.
>
> (2)

Literary criticism has traditionally done just what the Rouses describe: "cut apart what was both conceived and perceived as a unit". The object in the present and similar

studies is an attempt to arrive at a more complete picture of medieval texts and how readers of various periods have interacted with them.

Much of what can be said of the manuscript in this respect can also be said of printed books: "typography as well as style and syntax determine the ways in which texts convey meanings", and there are "ways that texts constrain readers as well as [...] ways that readers take liberties with texts" (Darnton 132). Printed books, like the manuscripts, are conceived of and ought to be studied as units. In fact, during the period when printing was introduced, manuscript production continued at least for a century and a half. *Piers Plowman* continued to circulate and be reproduced in manuscript form well into the sixteenth century, as Fortescue's MS above attests. Indeed, even after printed books became widespread, sometimes they were turned into manuscripts as well, including one of *Piers Plowman* based on the 1561 printed edition by Owen Rogers: Cambridge, Caius College MS 201 [Ca(B)]. Though printing was changing the way readers and writers thought about books, we see that during the period that *Piers Plowman* was still a living text, the situation of its production remained in a transitional phase, even up to and past the date of its first printing in 1550 by Robert Crowley.

We, on the other hand, no longer participate in a culture of books circulating primarily or even secondarily in manuscript form. For us, as Elizabeth Eisenstein puts it so well, "the conditions of scribal culture can only be observed through a veil of print"; they "have to be artificially reconstructed by recourse to history books and reference guides" which themselves are usually in the form of printed books (6). As McLuhan

suggests in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, it may be impossible for us to ever understand that culture: "When a society is enclosed within a particular fixed sense ratio, it is quite unable to envisage another state of affairs" (322). Yet defining change in such a before-and-after manner may also be problematic, if not dangerous, not because we are too distant in many ways from what went on before, but because, as we have just established, the technological change that has taken place is not as abrupt as we might have thought. As Michael Clanchy says, "Historians tend to overdramatize and to present the period in which they specialize [...] as the starting point of a new age" (7). Clanchy sees printing instead as "the endpoint or culmination of a millennium" of writing and book production (8).

Nevertheless we do know many changes in the history of books were brought about by printing in the late medieval period, and in many cases we can see the possible effects of printing in the design of later manuscripts. After printing was invented, it spread across Europe within fifty years, that is, by the end of the fifteenth century there were printers' workshops "in every important municipal center" (Eisenstein 12). In England, we know that Caxton began printing in 1475. Once printing was possible, there was a "marked increase in the output of books" and a "drastic reduction in the number of man-hours required to turn them out" (13). But even if the number of books were increased, the books themselves, it is important to note, did not look much different: "If one holds a late manuscript copy of a given text to an early printed one, one is likely to doubt that any change at all had taken place, let alone an abrupt or revolutionary one"

(19-20). This should not surprise us, as Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin point out: "How could they have imagined a printed book other than in the form of the manuscripts on which they were in fact modelled? And would not the identity of the book and manuscript be the most obvious proof of their technical triumph, as well as the guarantee of their commercial success?" (78).

Yet while little may appear to have changed on the surface, there are still the effects of the mode of production to think about. One principle difference between the two media forms is, while no two manuscripts are ever alike, there may be any number of copies made from a printed book which, barring accidents of poor inking, wear on the type, etc., are essentially the same.[13] McLuhan, in *Understanding Media*, says: "The message of the print and of typography is primarily that of repeatability" (147). It was that repeatability and uniformity of texts which led to modern concepts of standardized spelling, a standard language, and probably even our notion of "the text" itself. This can be seen to have developed, at least in some part, out of the procedures used in printing, which Eisenstein suggests were different from those of writing by hand:

> Concern with surface appearance necessarily governed the handwork of the scribe. He was fully preoccupied trying to shape evenly spaced uniform letters in a pleasing symmetrical design. An altogether different procedure was required to give directions to compositors. To do this, one had to mark up a manuscript while scrutinizing its contents. Every manuscript that came into the printer's hands, thus, had to be reviewed in a new way — one which encouraged more reviewing, correcting, and collating than had hand-copied text. Within a generation the results of this review were being aimed in a new

[13] It is true that once the printed book leaves the shop, it may receive handwritten annotations, marks, drawings, just like a manuscript might at some point in its history (such as the copy of Crowley's edition annotated by Andrew Bostock), but this just goes to demonstrate commonalities of consumption procedures, not production.

> direction — away from fidelity to scribal conventions and toward serving the convenience of the reader.
>
> (20)

J. R. Thorne and Marie-Clare Uhart believe they may have found one such "marked up" manuscript, and that it may have been one of the manuscripts which Crowley used in his printed edition of *Piers Plowman*, thought to have been lost. This manuscript, CUL MS Ll 4.14 [C_2(B)], has the beginnings of a word list formed for its *Piers Plowman*, as well as marginal glosses reminiscent of those in Crowley's editions.

Whereas one manuscript may have been affected by printing in that it may have served as an early copy-text, others show the effects of printing in that they tend to imitate printed books. The summaries of narrative events found in CUL MS Gg 4.31 [G(B)] are even more analytical than those found in Crowley's edition, dividing the poem into chapters. But it is misleading to say, as Eisenstein suggests above, that such readerly aids were unknown in the later Middle Ages before print, or that "serving the convenience of the reader" was not a consideration. M. B. Parkes has shown that by the thirteenth century "[a]cademic disucssion bent on more precise definition focused on the the ostensible arrangement of a work and formulated the concept of *ordinatio*, thus providing a theoretical foundation for attempts to meet the readers' practical needs" (121). An example of such late-medieval organizational tendencies is the table of contents found at the beginning of the Vernon MS, compiled some seventy years before Caxton introduced printing to England. It was the relative ease with which one could accurately reproduce such aids after the arrival of print that made them more desirable in books in general, and

so we tend to associate such aids with modern printed books: "The scholarly apparatus which we take for granted—analytical table of contents, text disposed into books, chapters, and paragraphs, and accompanied by footnotes and index—originated in the applications of the notions of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* by writers, scribes, and rubricators of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries" (Parkes 135).

The consequences of printing were important in that they exponentially increased the rate of organizational change in books. Aids designed to organize the contents of the book for easier reading and access to specific kinds of information included single-item publishing, clearer type fonts and especially title pages, which become increasingly part of the standard format of the book. The increased production of catalogues and book lists and the canonization of authors itself are at least partly a result of the activities of printers: there grew a commercially driven need to attract consumers with the names of favourite authors, now displayed with increasingly large and eye-catching fonts, as well as a need to be able to find titles associated with the same author. In fact, many of Crowley's editions bear not one, but *two* title pages.[14] Knowing the name of one's author — or, failing that, a title — could now help find other works in a similar vein, because names were a convenient way of grouping what was becoming a growing number of texts into something approaching an information retrieval system, in which discrete

[14] Although the author's name is explicitly stated as a point of interest by Crowley, the name of Piers the Plowman is much better known to his public and therefore serves the purpose of getting their attention more effectively.

works by specific authors were now being printed separately.[15] Prior to print, there had not really been as much of a need for such a system by most booksellers beyond the traditional colophon, because there simply had not been that many books to retrieve; more importantly, manuscripts did not have to be organized around any such principle: a manuscript miscellany may contain, like CUL MS Ll 4.14, alliterative poetry, philosophical and mathematical treatises in idiosyncratic order of preference. Buying a bound manuscript often meant investing in disparate works not necessarily desired by the purchaser. The alternative was to commission a work or works to be copied (and bound) specially. Keeping works separate from each other meant one could determine what sold well, and produce more copies of that work.

In brief, the "commercial character of the new mode of book production encouraged the relatively rapid adoption of any innovation that commended a given edition to purchasers" (Eisenstein 21). Through the standardization effect mentioned earlier, readers themselves brought new and previously unthinkable standards to the texts they were reading: "The very act of publishing errata demonstrated a new capacity to locate textual errors with precision and to transmit this information simultaneously to scattered readers" (50). Rationalization of the book in turn causes readers to expect the book to be rational, and to approach it in a rational manner: "Editorial decisions made by early printers with regard to layout and presentation probably helped to reorganize thinking of readers [...] the thoughts of readers are guided by the way the contents in

[15] Although, as is shown in the third chapter, similar titles need not imply genuinely related works.

books are arranged and presented" (63-64). Such standards, to which modern readers are now fully accustomed, tend to impede us when we approach manuscripts for which these standards (e.g., for spelling) are absent.

Therefore, the art of reading itself also cannot be understood as a single given practice at all times. The way in which a person read depended on how many books were available to be read, a number which sharply increased after printing. We may gather that the English reader of a medieval manuscript before print drew from a very different set of socially conditioned responses as compared to those evoked after printing was slowly introduced in the late fifteenth century. The responses must necessarily have changed still more as print gradually all but phased the manuscript out, even though, as McLuhan points out in *Understanding Media*, "[u]ntil 1700 much more than 50 per cent of all printed books were ancient or medieval", with the medieval texts "by far the most popular" (155-56). Readers acquired a new sort of cultural conditioning from reading printed books over time, accumulating slowly at first, but with time the function has become exponential, especially now as we read on screens forming a drastically different environment, though it too has begun to attempt to simulate its precursor, typography.[16]

Another way printing affected readers is the material on which texts were printed. Printing large numbers of copies could never have been achieved without an available, affordable supply of writing material, and so paper tended to be favoured over vellum by printers. Paper, however, had traditionally been seen as less durable and therefore less

[16] E.g., the Macintosh computer and, since the Nineties, Windows-based software.

desirable as a medium for writing in the Middle Ages, though of course paper manuscripts exist in large numbers. Johannes Trithemius argued that printed books were inferior to manuscripts because of what they were made of: "All of you know the difference between a manuscript and a printed book. The word written on parchment will last a thousand years. The printed word is on paper. How long will it last? The most you can expect a book of paper to survive is two hundred years" (63). Ironically, printing, because of its replicative powers, came to be seen as a great preserver of ancient texts: "After the advent of printing, [...] the durability of writing material became less significant; preservation could be achieved by using abundant supplies of paper rather than scarce and costly skin" (Eisenstein 78-79).[17]

It therefore follows that the process of setting a text into print form, as with reproducing it in manuscript form, has the effect of transforming it both linguistically and bibliographically, that is, both what the text says with words and what it says "with itself" as a cultural object. Even if *not one word* were to have been altered in either process, the shared social bibliographical meaning of the work, in this case a printed book with conventions more or less distinct from those of a manuscript, has been changed in a fundamental manner. The object of this thesis is to describe and discuss some aspects of these meanings with respect to copies of the text of *Piers Plowman*, by describing and

[17] Ironically again, however, notions of permanence sometimes gave way to a sense of indestructibility: once the copies of a book become so very common, the sense of urgency to take care of them wanes, since one can "easily" recover what was lost. As with so much else, if something is rare, it is valuable, and if it is common, its value is diminished. In this respect, print may also be responsible for the proliferation of such "ephemeral literature" as those texts found on broadsides, chapbooks, etc. (see Leslie Sheperd).

discussing some of its many "incarnations". Even now the process continues to take place as we enter a shift from print to electronic storage and electronic writing space: already there is at least one electronic version of *Piers Plowman* based on Schmidt's edition of the B-text; yet another by Hoyt Duggan and others, quite different, is on the horizon. As image-reproduction technology like the scanner progresses, one should not be surprised to find *Piers* manuscripts being offered to scholars for perusal on CD-ROMs, or on the World Wide Web; still, as Duggan admits, it "is early days" (71 n. 20).

As was mentioned earlier, it is also important to emphasize that there was (and always is) a certain amount of continuity and common points of reference between modes of production, particularly during periods of transition, and that they continued to coexist with one another well beyond the advent of the printing press. Too much has already been said about the transformative effect of printing upon the human mind by H. J. Chaytor, Marshall McLuhan, and others.[18] As Joseph Donatelli and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young have noted, "the notion of of a revolutionary media change, in which there is a dramatic and momentous shift from the old medium to a new one, is unnecessarily reductive, and often results in a distortion of evidence" (xx). In "Manuscript to Print," N. F. Blake draws a modern analogy to illustrate his point that there existed much contact for readers of manuscript and printed books:

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[18] Chaytor's assertion that the difference in "the mental attitude of the scholar and literary man in the ages before [and after] print" as being the same as "that between the medieval and modern world" (in Norman Cantor and Michael Werthman 267) is misleading and reductive, and obscures the fact that the introduction of print did not occur everywhere at once and overnight. McLuhan's very use of the phrase "Typographic Man" (as opposed to "Electronic Man") implies that the changes involved are of an immense, evolutionary scale by borrowing and modifying labels from the anthropology of his day.

> A book made up of xerox sheets will not to the average reader seem very different except perhaps aesthetically from one made of printed or photo-offset pages. We should always bear in mind then that the *beginning* of printing was seen only as a different way of writing, and although it affected the number of copies that could be produced, it did not *at first* influence the way one wrote or made books.
>
> (emphasis added; in Griffiths and Pearsall 403)

Blake's warning on overemphasizing differences between printed and manuscript books and the way they were read is well taken, especially with respect to books being read in cultures where print was introduced. But as we have seen, and as my emphasis of certain of his words suggests, we cannot ignore that changes did take place, gradual or rapid, evolutionary or revolutionary, and that, though these changes are difficult if not impossible to assign to specific points in time, they nevertheless occurred and are still occurring.

Though this study is informed by global effects of a medium and a change in medium, its main focus is with the potential local conditions and effects of the media on a particular literary text, *Piers Plowman*. The textual condition of the poem will now be considered, from its inception in the late fourteenth century, through its circulation in manuscript in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and its incarnation as a printed book with editions in the mid-sixteenth century.

II

Early Incarnations of *Piers Plowman*

I sometimes wonder whether the C-text, the B-text and even the A-text are not merely historical accidents, haphazard milestones in the history of the poem that was begun but never finished, photographs that caught a static image of a living organism at a given but not necessarily significant moment of time.

— E. Talbot Donaldson (211)

CHAPTER ONE

The Textual Condition and Bibliographical Contexts

> It is curious that there are some eminent scholars who do not know that, before disputing about a manuscript, it is desirable to have seen it.[1]
>
> —— R. W. Chambers (2, n. 1)

As was noted in the introduction, the most important aspect of the media context of manuscripts is that the process of manuscript production makes each of its products a unique specimen. Though tendencies and relationships can be found among certain manuscript groups, each member of those groups remains an individual witness. This becomes obvious in the textual condition of a work such as *Piers Plowman*, whose manuscript witnesses differ so vastly in their quality, size, format, and, of course, textual content, including rubrication and annotation. Nevertheless, some general trends are apparent when the manuscripts are examined as a whole or as groups within the whole, and may help illuminate the significance of individual variation within or from those trends.

Speaking very generally, surviving manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* appear to have been copied, for the most part, not by specialists, but by people who did not necessarily copy manuscripts for their regular living. Describing his overall impression of the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts, A. I. Doyle calls them "not conspicuously the type of book written by a clerk for himself, so much as one procured from copyists with some experience of

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[1] I have tried to follow the implicit advice in this statement to the best of my ability, but of all the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts, I have had access to only five, four of which in close to their entirety, in microfilm or facsimile reproduction. They are noted individually when discussed. Each is listed in the Works Cited under the name of the library owning the manuscript and responsible for the facsimile.

literary styles of script and presentation, but not in the higher grades" (38). While there are a few instances of *Piers Plowman* manuscripts receiving elaborate decoration, the overwhelming majority have only minor or no decoration. Marie-Clare Uhart observes that "the best of them are clear legible copies with some coloured pen flourish at the head of the work, at passus divisions, and at the explicit. The least decorated lack title, passus headings and sometimes divisions, and are uncoloured. There is however considerable variation within these broad limits" (29).[2] This leads her to conclude that "the lack of additional flourish to most of the organisational features does seem to suggest an emphasis on textual elucidation rather than display" (32). She believes this view is also supported by the size of the manuscripts. According to the statistical information compiled by A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall on the manuscripts of major Middle English poems,[3] *Piers Plowman* manuscripts tend to be smaller in size than contemporary vernacular texts of comparable length: if we compare *Piers Plowman* B- and C-texts, both about 7300 lines, to *Troilus and Cressida* (about 8200 lines) and the *Regiment of Princes* (about 5400 lines), the page area of *Piers Plowman* B and C manuscripts measure on average 490 cm^2

[2] Uhart notes that "of fifty-two complete MS[S], eighteen have either no annotation or very little. Seven of these have none at all or any other indication of readership such as signs or sketches "(111).

[3] "The Manuscripts of the Major English Poetic Texts," in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall 257-78, from which most of the information immediately following derives. The other literary texts in the study are *Troilus and Cressida, The Canterbury Tales, The Regiment of Princes, Confessio Amantis,* the *Troy-Book,* and the *Fall of Princes*. Manuscript fragments are not included in their study.

and 470 cm² respectively, compared to 500 cm² and 550 cm² for *Troilus* and the *Regiment*.[4]

Besides being found in relatively smaller manuscripts than other contemporary vernacular works, *Piers Plowman* is slightly less likely to have been produced by two scribes, only rarely by three (two instances are known for the B-text), and never by four or more.[5] Scribes of *Piers Plowman*, therefore, tend either to be individuals copying the text for their own purposes, such as Sir Adrian Fortescue (mentioned in the introduction), or else are assigned to do the work alone. This may account for some confusion over the format of the poem, in that there is a fairly good chance that any given scribe may make changes, based on idiosyncratic preferences, which may then become part of a tradition based on those preferences.

While modern editions of the poem in either of its versions tend to divide it after the introductory matter into sequential sections called "passus" — the A version having eleven (or twelve), the B version having twenty, and the C version having twenty-two — the majority of manuscripts of the A- and C-texts, including the conjoint AC-texts, as Lawrence M. Clopper shows, do not follow the sequential numeration of this format.

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[4] The average page area of the longer literary works (30 000 lines and up) is about 1000 cm². I have avoided mentioning the 2500-line A-text here, as it is less than half the length of the shortest of the poems in the study by Edwards and Pearsall; though it, too, tends to be found in smaller tomes, being 450 cm² on average, if one does not take into account the text in the Vernon MS, which has an average of 2137 cm². The second largest manuscript of *Piers Plowman*, CUL MS Dd 1.17 [C(B)] at 1342 cm², similarly tends to inflate the average measurements of the B manuscripts. The smallest *Piers Plowman* manuscripts are mentioned in the second chapter, n. 9.

[5] See however Uhart, who suggests that the Ingilby MS [J(A)] may have been copied by "several scribes" (243), and asserts that Huntington MS HM 128 [Hm(B)] was copied by "several hands, at least five" (257).

Instead they tend to divide the poem into a four-part structure (technically two in the case of A) of, first a *Visio*, and then a *Vita* of *Dowel, Dobet* and *Dobest*. Uhart maintains that some B manuscripts "have consecutively numbered headings, but even these almost invariably separate *visio* from *vitae*" (24). Clopper concludes that the sequential numbering of passus now used in modern editions "was not a part of Langland's marking system" ("Langland's Markings for the Structure of *Piers Plowman*" 245) and should be considered unauthentic. In "The Reliability of the Rubrics in the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*," Robert Adams holds the sequential numbering of passus is indeed authentic, it being the four-part structure which is "unauthentic, the wrong-headed offspring of some mediaeval editor rather than the author himself" (209). The fact of this basic dissimilarity in structure between the manuscript tradition of the B version and that of the other two versions may well provide an explanation for why C-text rather than B-text conclusions were so often attached to manuscripts of the A-text. However, the dissimilarity and critical disagreements over it are indicative of how transmission affects texts and their readers. Because Crowley's edition of the poem was a B-text, most readers of the poem from the mid-sixteenth century to today read B-texts in one edition or another, or else a modern English translation of the B-text. All of these editions, following Crowley, tacitly advance the notion that *Piers Plowman* should be read, studied, and discussed in terms of the twenty sequential divisions, essentially because human beings tend to prefer that which is familiar.

While the evidence is not conclusive enough to suggest that either one of the structures discussed above was intended by the author, there is no reason to reject either one of them out of hand, either. The passus divisions do not in any case correspond well between versions of the poem (and sometimes between witnesses of individual versions). They sometimes end abruptly, for example, in the middle of the characters' conversations. Regardless of which system is used, they tend to be incoherent as tools of organizing the poem, and should not be given any interpretive value. An alternative, and perhaps more objective, way of dividing the poem is into dream-visions, as described in a simplified manner for the B-text by Elizabeth Kirk and Judith Anderson, and more comprehensively and synoptically for A, B, and C by Alford,[6] taking into account the dreams within dreams of B and C (31). Unfortunately, the fact that the dreams of all three versions are somewhat confused makes this method of interpreting the poem suspect as well. The A-text seems to end without the dreamer-narrator waking up; the B-text allows him to dream within his dream on two occasions (XI.5-406, XVI.20-166); the C-text is even more confused, having the dreamer wake from his fourth dream twice, or, as Alford puts it, he awakes "from an inner dream that has no beginning" (in Alford 31).

At this point, the critic looking for a simple way leading into the poem might throw up his or her hands at the crowd of competing structures in the poem. In "Langland's *Ordinatio*: The *Visio* and the *Vita* Once More," Adams nicely makes the point that "despite Langland's apparent obsession with complexities of structure, few

[6] "The Design of the Poem," in Alford 29-65.

readers have ever suggested that he is a master of architectonics" (54). Adams here accidentally confuses the reconstructed text we read now in critical editions with the text written by the author, which is not likely ever to come to light. One scribe may have been responsible for Will's strange dreamings and awakenings (or lack thereof); another may have imposed the structure of the *visio/vita*; yet another the sequential divisions and the word *prologus*. What of the title? Most manuscripts, when they do have a title, identify *Piers Plowman* as part of the title, but could not other titles as easily (and arbitrarily) have suggested themselves to a scribe whose tradition became dominant? It is quite possible that scribes of *Piers Plowman* were sometimes confused when confronted with its structure. Both the B- and C-texts, for example, conclude with the suggestion of a renewed search for Piers the Plowman which never takes place; this may explain why ten of these conclude with an explicit referring to "passus secundus de Dobest",[7] possibly implying a copying activity in which the scribes had not yet finished reading their text, and expected another passus or formal conclusion was to follow.

Of the eighteen manuscripts which contain a substantial text of the A version of *Piers Plowman*, seven, or nearly 40 per cent, have C version continuations at some point (see Appendix A).[8] Of the remaining eleven, four are structurally incomplete, ending

[7] "One other MS has this wording, with the addition of 'et ultimus', which might refer to dobest, or to the poem as a whole" (Uhart 46).

[8] The uncertain status of the Z-text is discussed below. For our purposes we may treat it here as fitting within the pattern of AC-texts. If we were not to count it the ratio would drop to six out of seventeen, or 35 per cent. Although the prologue of the Ilchester MS [I(C)] is predominantly A-text, this manuscript is not counted, as it represents not a case of finding an ending for A, but a beginning for C. On this manuscript see Derek Pearsall, "The 'Ilchester' Manuscript of *Piers Plowman*".

earlier than the text as represented in the modern editions,[9] three have been completed with obviously scribal additions,[10] and another three contain a twelfth passus, which the two latest editions assign as a non-authorial appendage to the poem.[11] Unfortunately Skeat had access only to the manuscript with the smallest number of lines, and so did not include it in the first edition of his *Text A*, even though he was convinced of its authenticity from the beginning, even before he saw the entire passus:

> I had made out this much; (1) that there was once a Passus XII., or more strictly a *Passus tertius de dowel*, of which 18 lines were preserved in MS. U [...]; (2) that this Passus must have been the *concluding* one of the Poem of *Dowel* in its earliest form; (3) that it must have contained considerably less than 180 lines, as shown by the state of the Vernon MS.; (4) that it must, in fact, have consisted of less than 131 lines, as shown by the state of the University College MS.
>
> (142*)

While lines 106-15 are clearly by one John But, possibly the king's messenger, how much of the remaining 105 lines are by the author of *Piers Plowman* is uncertain. Anne Middleton argues[12] that the twelfth or "John But" passus is a "pastiche of Langland's work" (262), often demonstrating a familiarity with B or C passages.

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[9] The 'Erin' MS [E] has PRO.-VI.144, with VII.70-213[a] misplaced after I.182 (Uhart 241). BL MS Harley 875 [H] has PRO.-VIII.142, with VI.48-VII.2 missing (Uhart 242). London, Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150 [L] has PRO.-VIII.155, the last quire missing (Uhart 244). The fourth is the Vernon MS [V], which has PRO.-XI.183, missing the last leaf.

[10] Bodleian MS Douce 323 [D]; BL MS Harley 3954 [H_3(BA)]; London, Society of Antiquaries MS 687 [M]. The last MS has for its explicit: "Explicit prologus de dowel dobet & dobest", possibly referring to the whole A-text as a prologue to BC (Uhart 47). The endings are printed and discussed by Míċeál F. Vaughan, "The Endings of *Piers Plowman* A," in Vaughan 211-41.

[11] The Ingilby MS [J] has lines 1-88 (Uhart 243). Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poetry 137 [R] has the complete passus, including the name of "Johan But". Oxford, University College MS 45 [U] has lines 1-19[a] (Uhart 246).

[12] "Making a Good End: John But as a Reader of *Piers Plowman*," in Edward Donald Kennedy et al. 243-66.

That there should be so many additions made to texts of A is not entirely surprising, as the surviving manuscripts of the A version tend to be of later date than the B and C versions: some scribes must often have been aware of the longer forms of the poem and assumed the A version was either incompletely copied or else copied from a damaged exemplar with the remaining passus lost. However, such scribal activity points to a rather disturbing fact: although there are many manuscripts which contain the eleven passus which scholarship calls the A version of the poem, only one can actually be said to have survived "unmolested" enough so as to *present* the text in the manner which the editors would have us believe it should exist: Bodleian MS Ashmole 1468 [A], whose text does not begin until line 142 of passus I. Regardless of whether we have successfully "recovered" the A-text of *Piers Plowman* in the form of a critical edition, we do not ever seem to be reading it in the form to which most medieval readers had access; we read it divorced from those contexts. What we can say with certainty is that 13 out of 18, or over 70 per cent, of the A manuscripts which are extant were altered by people who were unsatisfied with the ending of the poem, since they undertook to complete it with either a C-text or their own attempts at closure, probably including the twelfth passus itself.

Because the A version is so much shorter than B or C, the A-text of *Piers Plowman* tends to be found in miscellanies, like most medieval writings. Yet there are some exceptions. The damaged BL MS Harley 875 [H] circulated alone. So did Bodleian MSS Rawlinson Poetry 137 [R] and Ashmole 1468 [A], the latter having been bound with two other manuscripts in the seventeenth century (Uhart 240). Bodleian MS

University College 45 [U] is also thought to have been bound with its other contents "at a late date" (Uhart 246). Manuscripts of diverse texts circulated in reading communities without binding until as late as the eighteenth century. It is therefore perhaps not so unusual for shorter texts like the A version of *Piers Plowman* (thirty to forty folios) to be found in some cases without other texts, presumably unbound, suggesting the poem was in fairly regular circulation.

Looking at the contents of manuscripts in which the A-text is often found, one is impressed at the number of specifically religious texts and associations which recur.[13] The Vernon MS [V], discussed in some detail below, is a book of monastic origin, and there are a few pages of monastic accounts in the Erin MS [E]. Both Vernon and Bodleian MS Douce 323 [D] contain *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost.* Vernon and the Ingilby MS [J] both contain *The Pistil of Susan* and *The Form of Perfect Living.* London, Society of Antiquaries MS 687 [M] contains a manual of confession and several religious texts in both Latin and English. Although the miscellanies sometimes contain other material — London, Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150 [L] is notable for being devoted entirely to romance — it is clear from these few examples that *Piers Plowman* had some place in the circulation of texts in religious communities. One consequence of a text being found in a miscellany is that everything which is already written (and which has yet to be written) influences everything else in subtle ways. For example, a reader of the *Piers Plowman* in the Lincoln's Inn MS might well read it as an alliterative

[13] See Uhart 240-75 for a general description of all *Piers Plowman* manuscripts and their contents.

romance like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Vernon MS serves as an indelible reminder of the effect of the context of the book as an imminent object.

The Vernon MS[14] is almost unique in the entire corpus of Middle English manuscripts. Physically it is one of the largest books ever made in Middle English, weighing 22 kg. It currently contains 350 of its original number of leaves (perhaps as high as 426), each measuring about 54.4 × 39.3 cm; its close relative, the Simeon MS (BL MS Additional 22283), is only slightly taller, but has never contained the same enormous number of leaves. Most of the copying in both manuscripts was done by one scribe, called B because his is the second hand to appear in both of the manuscripts.

In his introduction to the Bodleian facsimile, A. I. Doyle calls the Vernon MS "an exceptional enterprise of book-production for any era, by reason both of the cost of material resources devoted to [it] and of the time and trouble which must have been involved in assembling the contents", which are made up of "selections of English religious and moral literature [...] in the later 1380s and 1390s, when there was a great growth in its composition and copying for a widening public of readers and hearers" (1a). Many of these are texts "of considerable length" (2b), for example, the *South English Legendary* (folios 1-87) and the *Expanded Northern Homily Cycle* (167-227), and Doyle assures us that the format of the manuscript "was designed from its beginning on a large

[14] Available in the Bodleian facsimile edition. Skeat's edition of the A version is largely based on the Vernon MS, reproducing capitals and paraph signs in the MS, which he dates 1370-1380. Mary Serjeantson suggests a date of 1380-1400, and George Kane about 1400. As we will see below, the date of the manuscript may be at odds with the date of its contents due to the length of time needed to copy them. The information which follows derives from A. I. Doyle's introduction to the facsimile.

scale, to be capable of containing many texts," which were "to be grouped compendiously by column-width for differing metres (with some stanzaic shapes distorted) and prose" (2b). Normally, we would not suggest that what went into Vernon could have been determined very far in advance, as it is normally unlikely that so many exemplars of specific types of English texts could have been found in one location at one time. But if that location was a monastery with a large library, such a suggestion becomes plausible.

The sheer size of the Vernon MS suggests it was to be used by a community rather than by an individual.[15] Doyle makes note of the "amply-grounded assumption" that "any collection of vernacular religious literature of comparable scope was most probably made for nuns or other devout women", and that a number of items in Vernon were in fact composed for women, but he also notes that some texts in the manuscript "point away from that presumption, and some items (e.g. How to hear Mass) are couched specifically for lay listeners or readers. The sheer quantity of reading-matter [...] argues for an audience or readership expected to have sufficient regular time and interest to benefit from more than occasional browsing in it" (14b). The variety of genres and presentations, as Avril Henry shows,[16] highlight "the difficulty of associating it with any specific group of religious or of the pious" (113). Given the amount of time that would have been

[15] See P. R. Robinson, "The Vernon Manuscript as a 'Coucher Book'," in Pearsall *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* 17-28.

[16] In "'The Pater Noster in a table ypeynted' and Some Other Presentations of Doctrine in the Vernon Manuscript," in Pearsall *Studies* 89-113.

required to produce the book,[17] it is possible that the needs of the person or persons behind its creation changed or ceased. In fact, some parts of the manuscript have an air of being incomplete: some texts, such as the *Piers Plowman*, have escaped virtually all rubrication,[18] or even an announcement in the form of an incipit or a here beginneth, although spaces have usually been left by the scribe for rubrics. Perhaps, like the building of a cathedral, the making of this manuscript required a great deal of time.

The Vernon MS is usually divided by scholars into five different parts of unequal length, or six if one counts the preliminary quire (folios i-viii). These are broadly summarized as follows:

0. Title of the book (*Salus anime* or *Sowlehele*) and some other material
1. Legendary material (*South English Legendary* and *Vernon Golden Legend*)
2. Prayers and devotional material (mostly focusing on Mary)
3. General didactic material (*Northern Homily Cycle,* romances, debates, advice)
4. More mystical devotional material (mostly prose texts of greater difficulty)
5. Short devotional lyrics (sometimes called *Vernon Refrain Poems*)

(adapted from N. F. Blake in Pearsall *Studies* 47)

Of course, this account is overly generalized and even deceptive. For example, the A-text of *Piers Plowman*, neither prose nor particularly mystical, is found in Part 4. But it is

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[17] Doyle estimates four years as the shortest time possible for one copyist to have worked full-time on both Vernon and Simeon (6a, 15a), assuming the scribe had no other duties to perform; see also Doyle, "The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts," in Pearsall *Studies* 1-2. The length of time it would have taken a scribe to copy the manuscript makes it all the more difficult to accurately date its contents. *Piers Plowman* is one of the last texts to have been copied; therefore it is *at least* four years later than the volume itself, i.e., 1374-1404 and later, probably more towards the latter period. This would make it consistent with other manuscripts of the A version, which are also of late date.

[18] Kane notes in the description of the manuscripts in his edition the exception of passus IX: "in the hand and ink of the text, is the legend *Incipit hic. Dowel. Dobet. and Dobest*" (17). The only other manuscript to have virtually no rubrication is London, Lincoln's Inn MS Hale 150 [L] (Uhart 74).

impossible to list briefly the entire contents of such a compendium as the Vernon MS.[19] However, it may be useful to consult what contents there are in Part 4, so as to put the *Piers Plowman* text in context (see Appendix B). Such a consultation shows that Part 4 attempted to follow some organizational principles: "the Rolle texts are grouped, the Hilton texts follow each other (except for the *Prickynge of Love*), the *Charter* succeeds the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and the poems come at the end" (S. S. Hussey in Pearsall *Studies* 62). Near the end of Part 4, we find poetry beginning at f. 394^{v} in the form of two alliterative poems, i.e., *Piers Plowman* and *Joseph of Arimathea*, and two final entries from the *South English Legendary*.[20]

It is easy to imagine how Judas and Pilate could have accidentally escaped their proper inclusion in Part 1, and, given the poems follow closely after *The Life of Adam and Eve*, even *Joseph*'s story could be thought of as appropriate in that context (all straightforward narratives concerning biblical figures), but the A-text of *Piers Plowman* seems a little out of place at first glance, since it is, as A. S. G. Edwards points out,[21] less "readily capable of being read as an extension of Biblical narrative" (in Pearsall *Studies* 168). N. F. Blake sees its presence as simply a poetical approach to the general

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[19] Besides the table of contents at the beginning and the facsimile's fold-out outlining the contents, one may also refer to Serjeantson for a list of contents. For discussions of the contents in general, see Doyle, "The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts," N. F. Blake, "Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organisation," and, especially for our purposes, S. S. Hussey, "Implication of Choice and Arrangement of Texts in Part 4," in Pearsall *Studies* 1-13, 45-59, 61-74.

[20] Technically the poetry really begins at f. 393^{r}, for as Doyle notes, "the prose life of Adam and Eve which precedes *Piers Plowman* is apparently adapted from verse, and that of *Joseph of Arimathea* is written first as prose before falling into metrical lines, perhaps for reasons of space" (in Pearsall *Studies* 5 n. 16).

[21] In "The Contexts of the Vernon Romances," in Pearsall *Studies* 159-70.

tendency of this part of the manuscript: the prose texts and *Piers Plowman* all "exhibit a greater sophistication in approach and make greater emotional and intellectual demands on the reader than the texts in the other parts, even if they are among the more accessible mystical texts" (in Pearsall *Studies* 55).[22] Perhaps Avril Henry's point above needs to be re-emphasized: it is difficult to detect specific orientations within the whole of the Vernon MS, due to the "range of both material and approach" (in Pearsall *Studies* 112).

Henry also makes a very interesting point with regard to a number of texts in the Vernon MS, in almost an echo of McLuhan's maxim, that "their manner is partly the message" (113), by which Henry implies that the manner in which a text is received has as much to do with how it is presented as does the content itself. This is certainly true of the Vernon *Piers Plowman.* Although the reader might learn from the table of contents that the title of the work is "Petrus Plowman", there is no such guide in the text itself, which, as was mentioned earlier, is lacking almost all rubrics. It is not, for all that, poorly illuminated: the central margin of f. 396^{r} is "decorated with blue and red columns, with leaves in silver and gold" (Uhart 247). Most significantly, however, the final leaf is missing, "cut out of it with a sharp knife" (Skeat *Text A* xvii), like a number of others in the volume, perhaps because it had an illustration. Whatever the reason, we cannot know how this version of the A-text ended, as the text beginning after *Piers Plowman* is

[22] It may also be that the convention of dividing, even for the sake of comprehending, the admittedly massive Vernon manuscript into five distinct parts has had the effect of obscuring our vision of it as a whole. If we were to have divided the book more along the lines of literary genre, i.e., letting the very short Part 5 begin with the long narrative poems, we might perceive less of a problem, the book concluding with shorter lyric poems. Part 4 would then also seem more uniform.

the unique copy of *Joseph of Arimathea*: since we do not know how long the beginning of that poem is supposed to be, there is no way of knowing whether the Vernon *Piers* ended at the usual line, with a scribal ending, with the twelfth passus, or perhaps did not end at all but led right into *Joseph*, which is, after all, an alliterative poem. Neither *Joseph* nor any other item is mentioned after *Piers* in the table of contents at the beginning of the manuscript. While Doyle[23] notes that this "strongly suggests that *Joseph* and the following pieces were included at a very late stage in the compilation" (92), it is possible someone reading the text, the folio having already been cut out, might read on and assume the next text was at least connected to the first. A similar reading took place when Skeat encountered *Richard the Redeless* following *Piers Plowman* in CUL MS Ll 4.14 [C_2(B)], discussed below.

The B and C versions of *Piers Plowman* are each three times as long as the A version, when not completed by the C version. They are more likely to attract schemes of commentary, especially the C manuscripts; while no A-text manuscripts are heavily annotated, one of the B manuscripts, BL MS Additional 35287 [M] "attracts a large amount of annotation" (Uhart 120; full account 353-62). Such annotation, like pointing hands, arrows, and the like, can serve as a subject-index or highlighting tool for what an annotator thinks of as a point of interest, at times with a simple "nota", at other times with a full description of events. Perhaps the length of B and C tended to create a greater need for organization, prompting more of the readers to respond accordingly.

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[23] In "The Manuscripts," in David Lawton 88-100.

The B version of *Piers Plowman* continues to be the "standard text" read by most students of the poem. A difference between the manuscripts of the B-text and the other forms, possibly contributing to the favour it currently receives as a teaching text, is that most of its manuscripts contain considerably less variant lines overall than groupings of A or C: Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 201 [F] contains "the largest number of variant lines, and in addition alters many of the original B-lines; most other B-text MSS have only a few variant lines" (Uhart 200).[24] Uhart notes that B-texts also differ in that they "fairly consistently call the poem 'dialogus petri plowman', with the implication of philosophical debate, a term not used by any other text" (105).[25] Uhart suggests this "consistency" may reflect a sense of "completeness of the B version in comparison with the other two texts" (105). Any such sense may, of course, be thought of as entirely subjective; our familiarity as readers with the B version may well prejudice us to any deficiencies it shares in structure with the other two versions.

The manuscripts of B and C are far more likely than those of A to contain *Piers Plowman* as a single item, or else with fairly short items, due to the length of BC. The B-text and the C-text each occur alone in seventeen manuscripts and three more times

[24] We must bear in mind here, that lines can only be "variant" with respect to a standard edition of the poem. Editions are usually based on the β-subarchetype of the B-text. Therefore the above manuscript appears to have more variant lines when compared with most of them. Yet it may have fewer "variants" when compared to Schmidt's edition, as he introduces more readings from the smaller α-subarchetype of manuscripts (Schmidt xxxvi-xxxvii).

[25] Elsewhere, the work is *liber*, *visio*, *tractatus*, or *opus* (Uhart 48). It would appear that the medieval audience of the poem is as divided in providing it with a clear definition as is the modern one.

with only one other item.[26] We might, therefore, make less of any patterns to be found when the work occurs in a miscellany. To be sure, there are some more religious associations. CUL MS Dd 1.17 [C(B)] is, like the Vernon MS, of monastic origin; but it is mostly concerned with chronicles and histories. A *Form of Living* by Rolle occurs in Cambridge, Trinity College MS B 15.17 [W(B)]. There is a gospel history and an assumption of Mary in London, Sterling MS V 17 [St(C)]. Still other religious works occur in Huntington MS HM 114 [Ht], the Yates Thompson MS [Y(B)], and Bodleian MS Digby 102 [Y(C)]. However, we may also find, as before with the A-texts, legendary and romance material, such as *The Legend of Three Kings* and *Troilus and Cressida* in Huntington MS HM 114; the second poem also occurs as a fragment in Huntington MS HM 143 [X(C)].[27] BL MS Royal 18 B XVII [R(C)] justifies Owen Rogers' annexing of *Piers Plowman's Creed* to the poem for his 1561 edition by placing it before the longer poem, and giving it the title of "Piers Plouman" (Uhart 270).

There are some commonalities and discontinuities to be found, therefore, among those manuscripts of the poem found in miscellanies. They suggest an audience literate mainly in Latin and English, often showing interest in religious (mystical) texts, but also with a taste for miscellaneous poetry and that often confused collection of overlapping

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[26] FLMRS(B), GIKNPP$_2$QSUV(C), and BmBoCot(CAB) are all single items. G(B) and DX(C) contain respectively a prayer, a short poem and a long fragment. In addition, ChNTW(AC) also occur singly.

[27] This association may be added to the link between Chaucer and *Piers Plowman* that could be inferred from the apocryphal and anti-Catholic *Plowman's Tale*, ascribed to Chaucer but later confused with *Piers* by Leland, Milton, Dryden and others (Vincent DiMarco xii; on other Protestant associations see John N. King and the third chapter).

genres: romance, legend, history, and travel narrative. For example, some form of *Mandeville's Travels* occurs in manuscripts of all versions of the poem.[28] One with a rather odd assortment of texts is CUL MS Ll 4.14.[29] It is a paper manuscript of 160 leaves and five flyleaves, measuring 21 × 29 cm. The contents of its folios, eleven distinguishable sections, are as follows:

1. 1^{r}-107^{r} *Piers Plowman* (B version)
2. 107^{v}-119^{v} *Richard the Redeless*[30]
3. 127^{r}-148^{v} a prose treatise on arithmetic in English
4. 153^{r}-156^{v} "the wyse boke of philosophie and astronomye"
5. 156^{v}-159^{v} "Þe booke of phisonomye"
6. 161^{r}-163^{r} arguments of the Psalms in Latin distichs
7. 164^{r}-167^{r} sayings of the Latin Fathers, verse translations (*IMEV* 4128)
8. 167^{v}-169^{r} [blank]
9. 169^{v}-170^{v} glosses to words in *Piers Plowman* and *Richard the Redeless*
10. 173^{r}-174^{v} "a doctrine of Fisshing and Foulying" (*IMEV* 71)
11. 174^{v} a four-line prayer (*IMEV* 1686)

(adapted from Uhart 255)

It is very important to note about the text of *Piers Plowman* in this manuscript that the unique copy of *Richard the Redeless* follows it with no title. There is an explicit to the "dialogus Petri Plowman", but this does not necessarily mean that the scribe considered the whole poem to have reached its conclusion. The fact that *Richard* begins with no title on the next folio makes this manuscript of *Piers Plowman* unlike most others, which, as

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[28] CUL MS Dd 1.17 [C(B)], BL MS Harley 3954 [H_3(BA)], CUL MS Ff 5.35 [F(C)], Huntington MS HM 114 [Ht]. The second part of the Clopton MS, whose third part was London, Sterling MS V 17 [St(C)], contained *Mandeville's Travels*.

[29] Available in a microfilm edition with three other manuscripts from Cambridge University Library. Dated by Kane and Donaldson as "late in the first half of the fifteenth century" (4 n. 27).

[30] Sometimes connected with *Mum and the Sothsegger* due to what Dan Embree calls "a case of mistaken identity"; see also Helen Barr.

Uhart points out, usually distinguish it from the next work "by leaving blank at least the rest of the page [...] or clearly marking the start of the new work" (44). What is more, the second text "is in the same hand" as the first, "has identical layout and ornament, and is divided into passus with an identical format" (44). Words underlined in both texts can be found in the glosses on folios 169^{v}-170^{v}, reproduced in Appendix C (cf. Skeat *Text B* 421-24 and Uhart 394-95). One might add that the text itself is written in a style reminiscent of *Piers Plowman*, no doubt by either the same poet or an imitator like John But. There are even a few Latin quotations here and there, for example:

> Now Richard the redeles • reweth on ȝou-self,
> That lawlesse leddyn ȝoure lyf • and ȝoure peple bothe;
> ffor thoru the wyles and wronge • and wast in ȝoure tyme,
> 3e were lyghtlich y-lyfte • ffrom that ȝou leef thouȝte,
> [5] And ffrom ȝoure willfull werkis • ȝoure will was chaungid,
> And ffrom rafte was ȝoure riott • and rest, ffor ȝoure daiez
> Weren wikkid thoru ȝoure cursid counceill • ȝoure karis weren newed,
> And couetise hath crasid • ȝoure croune ffor euere!
> *Radix omnium malorum cupiditas.*
>
> (Skeat *Parallel Text* 606 I.1-8[a])

Thomas Wright, the first editor of *Richard the Redeless*,[31] did not include these Latin quotations. As Skeat explains, Wright naturally assumed the Latin quotations of *Richard* were scribal: "the scribe adopts the singular plan, apparent in no other copy of [*Piers*], of writing the Latin quotations *in the margin* of the MS., instead of leaving them in their proper place in the text. They thus have the *appearance* of being supplementary, or added as a commentary; they look like detached annotations instead of forming an

[31] Wright's first edition of the poem is *Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of King Richard II.*

integral part of the text" (his emphasis, *Parallel Text* lxxii-lxxiii).[32] Wright therefore speculates that the poem is "an imitation of the popular poem [...] intended as a continuation" noting that "it possesses much of the energy and spirit" typical of *Piers Plowman* (vi). Following Wright, Skeat originally assumed this poem was not by the author of *Piers Plowman* when he produced *Text B*. He later edited *Richard* for EETS in 1873 (later superseded with the EETS edition of *Mum and the Sothsegger*) and printed the text in *Text C* (removed from modern reprints) and in the *Parallel Text* edition.

Most medieval readers would have assumed the two poems were very closely related, as Skeat ultimately concluded, and for good reason: "A close relationship between the poems is either assumed or deliberately implied by the scribe, especially as the other items in the MS, all by the same scribe, are clearly distinguished from one another" (Uhart 44-45). Moreover, the textual similarities to *Piers Plowman* are striking: there are characters with names like Reason, the poem ends (imperfectly?) with a reference to Dowel (IV.93), and the opening lines of the prologue begin with an "And", clearly implying that the text which came before is related to the current one; the opening lines, on the verso appear to fit after the conclusion of *Piers Plowman*:

> And as I passid in my preire / þ^{r} prestis were at messe,
> in ablessid borugh / þ^{t} bristow is named,
> In atemple of þ^{e} trinite / þ^{e} toune eue*n* amyddis
> That cristis chirche is cleped / amonge þe comune peple
>
> (f. 107^{v}; cf. Skeat *Parallel Text* 603 PRO.1-4)

[32] Skeat appears unconcerned that the scribe did not place the quotations of *Piers* in the margin, thus implying that his copying of the poems was inconsistent, assuming the Latin quotations are indeed "integral parts of the text".

Approximately 120 out of the 160 leaves, or three quarters, of the manuscript are devoted to *Piers Plowman* and *Richard the Redeless*. Items 3-7 take up only another dozen leaves. Before the sixteenth-century annotator added the glossary, its space in the manuscript was as blank as that preceding it. The final two items are both short poems. It would be easy to make a case that this manuscript was originally copied out with the assumption that *Piers Plowman* and *Richard the Redeless* were one poem, and that copying this matter was the main objective of the scribe, the other items being rather incidental and of little consequence. An argument against this would be that the items are nearly all in English, and a number are also poems. The similarity between this manuscript and Oxford, Oriel College MS 79 [O] has been noted since Skeat's day (*Text B* xxi, *Parallel Text* lxxxii), but unfortunately much of that text is defective, including the ending, which breaks off at XX.386 (Uhart 260). Therefore we do not know if that manuscript or the common ancestor of both of them also contained *Richard the Redeless*.

Although we have been speaking of the versions of *Piers Plowman* as though each manuscript contained a relatively complete and "pure" version, it must be noted that some manuscripts cannot be classified readily into the four major categories of A, B, C, and conjoint AC. They have traditionally been allocated for the sake of scholars' convenience in ways that often obscure the facts about these manuscripts: namely, that three traditionally classified as simple B-texts are in fact very similar conjoint CAB-texts; that one classified as an A-text is similarly a BA-text; that one classified as a B-text has long been known to be a conflated version "edited" by someone with "phenomenal knowledge

of all three" other versions;[33] and that the A-text found in one of the AC manuscripts is very unusual, perhaps an authorial draft, as argued by A. G. Rigg and Charlotte Brewer, or perhaps yet another editorial reconstruction, i.e., the famous Z-text.[34] Crowley's editions are all based on more than one manuscript, with evidence he had access to texts of all three versions.[35] For example, in the second and third editions, although essentially B-texts, incorporate lines in the prologue usually found in manuscripts of the A-text.

The existence of these texts and others, like the Ilchester MS and Fortescue's MS, which may be classified in the regular places but often depart textually in significant ways, here because they contain C interpolations in the A sections, point to what might be seen as another disturbing fact. Of fifty-three extant manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*, at least fourteen, or close to a third, were either completed by, or deliberately mixed with, texts of another version of the poem. We are able to recognize such completions fairly easily; we are much less able to recognize that the text of a manuscript may have been

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[33] George Kane's description of Huntington MS HM 114 [Ht] (182; "The Text," in Alford 175-200). On this text see R. W. Chambers, G. H. Russell and Venetia Nathan, M. C. Seymour, Wendy Scase, and Ralph Hanna, "The Scribe of Huntington HM 114".

[34] Bodleian MS Bodley 851 [Z]. Rigg and Brewer are responsible for a recent facsimile edition of the Z section of the manuscript from the Bodleian Library (for review, see Ralph Hanna). For their arguments for the authenticity of the Z-text, see their original edition; for the opposite point of view, see George Kane's review, "The 'Z Version' of *Piers Plowman*". The other editor of the B-text, A. V. C. Schmidt, is convinced of Z's authenticity, and is producing a four-version edition of the poem.

[35] Skeat was the first to suggest "that Crowley had access to *four MSS. at least*" (*Text B* xxxv, n. 2; his emphasis). However, "he was not aware of three distinct versions in the modern sense, as he regarded the differences between the texts which he noticed as evidence that one of the versions was unoriginal" (Uhart 225).

copied from two or more damaged exemplars of the same version. How many such texts are there among the remaining manuscripts? Should we extrapolate another third? How should this affect our reading of *Piers* or any other medieval text?

Piers Plowman exposes in sharp relief the fundamental difference in the way manuscripts and printed books are made; the process of copying by hand produces unique specimens of a text which can never be re-produced exactly. In time such specimens may grow so "mutated" as to be almost unrecognizable. From the point of view of the editor, the medieval text is always suspect in this sense. Yet some texts are more suspect than others. *Piers* seems to invite response in a way many other texts do not. In some cases, this is due to the loose structure and malleability of the alliterative long line, but this does not explain the level of direct interaction often occuring in the poem, e.g., adding lines. George Kane has suggested that the nature of the content of the text of *Piers* itself led to a greater level of scribal interaction with the text because the text was concerned with matters "of direct concern to its scribes. Its relevance to contemporary circumstances would not merely distract them from the passive state of mind ideal for exact copying, but actually induce them, whether consciously or subconsciously, to make substitutions" (*A Version* 115). But where the editor might treat all such textual and extra-textual variations as suspicious at best, the student of cultural history finds in them evidence of past readers' "active participation in the literary and social experience" of the text (Kane in Alford 182). We shall now consider how some scribes and readers have responded to *Piers Plowman* through rubrication, illustration, and annotation of the text, and in what ways this reponse might have been, as Kane suggests, solicited by the text itself.

CHAPTER TWO

Interaction with the Text by Scribes and Readers

As was mentioned in the introduction, professional scribes had developed elaborate systems of organizing manuscripts of Latin texts called *ordinatio* and *compilatio*: as M. B. Parkes puts it, "[t]here was more 'packaging' of the text" (121). While this system was not consistently applied to vernacular works, over time certain expectations arose from copying and organizing books in certain ways, and certain aspects of a given work would elicit an almost reflexive response not only from a professional scribe, but also from a reader copying or annotating a book: "By the fourteenth century the reader had come to expect some of these features, and if they had not been supplied by scribe or rubricator the reader himself supplied the ones he wanted on the pages of his working copy" (135). The prime objective of people involved in copying, rubricating, or annotating is to make the text more clear and easier to use for oneself and other readers. Ultimately, *ordinatio* did influence vernacular works as well, as Parkes notes: "The indication of proper names, by underlining them or placing them in boxes, can be found in manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* and the English *Brut*" (133-34). In fact, the underlining of nouns in *Piers Plowman* is "a regular practice in seventeen B and C MSS" (Uhart 75).[1] This trend in book organization increases with the volume of printed books, the production of which probably influenced manuscript production.

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[1] $CC_2FLWY(B)$; $DMNPP_2QRStV(C)$. Uhart includes Bm(CAB) and Ht with the B MSS.

As with the miscellanies, if one looks for patterns in the *ordinatio* of *Piers Plowman* one is confronted with a striking diversity coupled with interesting trends. The A-texts are the least rubricated manuscripts. We may recall that the Vernon MS has virtually no rubrication at all. Only Bodleian MS Douce 323 has a "fairly large amount of Latin marginal rubrication" (Uhart 240). As has been mentioned, it is the B and C versions of the poem which attract the larger schemes of commentary. Reasons for this can only be had by conjecture, but it would seem likely that the shorter and less Latinate A version of the poem is, as Jill Mann suggests, a deliberate redaction designed as part of the education of a younger or less learned audience; an audience considerably less likely to write notes on books.

An example of an almost reflexive response among medieval scribes and readers is making Latin quotations distinct from the main text, especially if they are biblical or in some other way authoritative. Distinguishing Latin quotations from the vernacular text of *Piers Plowman* is an almost universal practice in the manuscripts, with the exceptions of the Vernon MS and the Z-text. There is not, however, any single preferred practice to be found among the manuscripts: they may underline, use a larger hand or a different script, write in red ink, rule it or create a box around it, signal it with a paraph, place it in the margin, or mark it; many alternate between one method and another (see Appendix D). By far the most common approach to the Latin is to signal it with red or actually write it out in red ink. After the use of red, the A manuscripts quite often have a larger

hand for Latin, while the B manuscripts box it fairly often, and the C manuscripts underline at least as often.

There is a practice among rubricators and annotators of actually identifying quotations and historical events in the manuscripts. As Uhart notes, this reflects the medieval reader's tendency to look for "the familiar" in the poem: "the search for novelty is not an important priority" (230). Although Uhart notes that the practice is "predominantly C-text", we should remind ourselves that the A-text contains significantly fewer Latin quotations than the B- and C-texts, even within corresponding passus. What such identifications also indicate, according to Uhart, is "the engagement of even late readers with the poem, which is seen to be of immediate relevance, rather than of antiquarian value. This shows both the readiness of readers to find their own relevance in the poem, and the adaptability of *Piers Plowman* itself" (231). As Kane noted, the readers of *Piers Plowman* become involved with the text at a very intense level.

The C manuscripts attract the heaviest amounts of rubrication and, as will be seen later, annotation. Based on what he calls the diverse testimony of its surviving manuscripts, G. H. Russell believes that, while similarities can be found among some manuscripts, the C version "began its circulation without having acquired an authorial, and hence authoritative, formal structure" ("Some Early Responses to the C-Version" 275). However, Uhart maintains that some aspects of the C manuscripts "show a remarkable conformity, not only sharing an interest in the kind of *ordinatio* associated with sermon literature, [...] but frequently using this kind of rubrication at precisely the same points

in the text" (87). As Uhart points out, annotation of C manuscripts is typically in the form of "identification of sermons, exempla, prophecy, and other structural aspects of the text as moral instruction"; in fact, Uhart notes that, with the exception of CUL MS Gg 4.31 and Huntington MS HM 114, "[a]nnotation and rubrication of prophecy in the text is almost exclusively confined to C-texts", and she believes that such response by book producers may reflect changes in C from B, such as the "greater concentration on ideological discussion" (226). Attention of two other kinds also occurs in the C manuscripts. Scribal correction "was especially frequent in the C tradition" (Kane in Alford 187). Possibly related to this is the "large scale censorship" which also occurs in C manuscripts and the C-text section of AC manuscripts, "usually concerning Thomas of Canterbury, by erasure or cancellation" (Uhart 226). We shall now consider Huntington MS HM 143 [X(C)], a manuscript with an advanced system of rubrication, including correction and some mysterious erasures.

Huntington MS HM 143 is a vellum manuscript containing 108 leaves and three flyleaves, and has been measured at 19 × 25.1 cm.[2] It contains a fragment of *Troilus and Cressida* on folios ii^{r}-iii^{v} and the C version of *Piers Plowman* on folios 1-106. In addition to this there are "four lines of *Piers Plowman* [...] on a blank folio at the front" (Russell "'As They Read It'" 184). These four lines have been identified as of the B version, so at least one reader of the manuscript had access to another text, but as Russell says, "we

[2] Available in a photostat reproduction by the Huntington Library. Dated "End of the fourteenth century" in the manuscript notes by the Library (Uhart 274).

have no way of knowing" what the lines meant to that reader or why they were written out.

Unknown to modern scholarship until 1924, MS HM 143 has long been considered the best candidate for the copy-text of any edition of the C-text of *Piers Plowman* since Skeat's edition. It has been used as the base for Pearsall's edition, and will be the base of the Athlone edition by Russell, who calls it "the most important and interesting of the C version manuscripts in terms of its medieval supply", and "the product of a practiced and competent scribe whose work has been scrutinized with care and corrected by another in order to bring accuracy to its text and supply its deficiencies" ("Some Early Responses" 276). Russell goes on to describe how professionally the manuscript was designed:

> Individual readings have been corrected; missing lines have been inserted, sometimes with warning to the reader to note the presence of the original error; running titles not included by the original scribe have been supplied; places for missing parasigns have been marked up and provision has been made for further embellishment and decoration of the manuscript; and, almost by way of an *imprimatur*, the corrector verifies his completed handiwork with his mark which appears, usually as *cor*, on many of the leaves.
>
> (276)

If, as Russell suggests, the C version circulated without an authoritative structure in its initial stages, the makers of this manuscript were certainly intent on providing it with one. Russell calls HM 143 "unique among the C manuscripts" in attempting "a formal presentation of the text of some elaboration" (277). Uhart suggests that this "is perhaps too large a claim", as a number of other C-texts "also demonstrate the beginnings of such organisation", although she suggests that the manuscript reveals "a more advanced form of organisation" for its "linking of most comments with paraphs dividing the text into

sense units" (93). Whatever the degree, the manuscript is a good example of someone trying to make reading the text an easier experience. The manuscript "differs from other MSS in the amount of rubrication, with extensive full commentary throughout", the only one comparable being BL MS Additional 35157 [U(C)], whose annotation is "late sixteenth to early seventeenth century" (Uhart 92). HM 143 differs here in that it is "an exclusively medieval witness" (Russell "Some Early Responses" 278).[3] Uhart goes so far as to call many of the comments "almost conversational, as at III 38 'a confessour as a frere comforted mede & sede as ye may rede.'":

> This gloss also has the effect of focussing the attention on the text rather than on the commentary. Other of the glosses in X at passus headings summarise freely quite large areas of text and are important aspects of organisation. [...] Another striking guide to the reader at the head of a passus in X is the gloss at XV 1: "hyer ȝe may se schortly rehersed þ^{e} visione in to fore sayd", signalling the summary of some of the themes of the preceding dream at this point in the text.
>
> (96)

Uhart suggests that the rubricator "seems to be aware of the possibility of these glosses being read instead of the text — hence the gloss at III 38 directing the reader back to the text" (107). Quite often the comments use the directional word "hyer". Of eight commentaries in the prologue as reported by Uhart, four begin with this word (95-96). On folio 3^{r}, there is a paraph indicating the beginning of the rat fable, as well as a gloss:

> ¶Than ran þ^{r} a route of ratones as hit were
> And smale muys with hem mo then a thousend
> Comen til a conseyl for here comune p*rofyt*
> ffor a cat of a co*urt* cam whan hym likede
> And ou*er*lep hem lightliche and laghte hem alle at wille — hyer made ratonyes

[3] It should be noted, however, that none of the scribal material in this manuscript is later annotation: "its extensive rubrication may have proved inhibiting to further annotation, possibly simply for reasons of space in the margins" (Uhart 111).

And playde with som*me* p*er*ilously and potte hem þ^{r} hy*m* lykede || a parlement

(cf. Pearsall *C-Text* PRO.165-70)

The beginning of the fifth passus, in which the Dreamer engages in what Pearsall calls an *apologia*, lines 7-9 are glossed "hyer concience & rayson aratyd Wille for his lolly*n*ge" (f. 20^{v}). On one occasion, a pointing hand is used, also directional: Meed's first appearance is indicated by a full (i.e., not stylized or simplified) pointing hand and the word "Mede" (f. 7^{r}).

There is one unusual feature about this manuscript which defies definitive understanding: the erasure of at least 80 references to Piers the Plowman. The erasures are known to have occurred thanks to examination under ultraviolet light done in the middle 1930s, but many are quite visible in the photostat edition. They occur in the text, in the marginalia, even in the underlined heading for passus I on f. 4^{r}. The person who did the erasing appears to have had specifically in mind the two words "Piers" and "Plowman", because many times when the name appears as "Piers the Plowman" only those two words have been erased, leaving us with a lonely "the" between two blanks. A particularly memorable example of this occurs in passus XX:

Is Peres in this place q*uo*d y, and he p*r*ente on me
[20] liber*um* dei Arbit'ium for loue hath vndertake
That this ihesus of his gentrice shal iouste in Pers Armes Ihesus
In his helm and in his habe*r*ion humana natura
That crist be nat y knowe, for consummatus deus
In plates the this prikiare shal ryde
ffor no doiu*n*t shal hym dere, as in deitate p*a*tris

(f. 88^{r}; cf. Pearsall *C-Text* XX.19-25)

Noting that this person either missed a number of places or else was selecting locations for erasure based on a system we have not recovered, why would someone have taken the trouble to go through 106 folios of manuscript to do this? Immediately one thinks of censorship or an attempt to conceal damning evidence, because of *Piers Plowman*'s later association with reformist movements. It is possible that the name of Piers, being a known derivative of Peter, could have been erased due to its association with the Pope; both "Peter" and "pope" have been erased in other manuscripts.[4] In those cases, however, the word "pope" has also been erased. Would a person erasing the name of Piers out of offense or fear of giving offense not also erase references to the pope as well?

Russell has suggested that the name may simply have been erased with the intent of rewriting in another colour: "Clearly the ink of the text was to be replaced by the red of the rubricator, and alongside the first erasure [on f. 98^{r}] appear in the margin the words *Hyer beginne* ȝ; these would seem to be an instruction, not to the reader, but to the rubricator that this is the place at which his work begins" ("Some Responses" 278). While I agree that there is a strong possibility that someone may have been trying to highlight references to Piers throughout the text, Russell's evidence is sadly very weak. In my own examination of the manuscript, even in photostat, I have been able to count 80 such erasures, beginning at folios 4^{r} and 28^{v}, the bulk between folios 32 and 44. After

[4] London, Sterling MS V 17 [St(C)], Huntington MS HM 114 [Ht], and Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poetry 38 [R(B)] all erase the word "pope"; BL MS Additional 10574 [Bm(CAB)] also erases "Peter" at C PRO.128; BL MS Harley 3954 [H_3(BA)] replaces "pope" with "busshop" at XI.204 (Uhart 148).

this they are sporadic, appearing at 64[r] and 88[r], before becoming numerous again from about folios 97 to 102, making final appearances on the verso sides of 105 and 106. Therefore we cannot prove, based on Russell's argument, that the erasures are not simply cancellations due to censorship. When one considers, however, the "user-friendliness" for which the manuscript seems to have been designed — one thinks again of the glosses directing one to the text, of the running titles, the commentary — I tend to favour the notion that such a rubricator would indeed have made the effort to begin a process of highlighting the text.

Another aspect of the rubrication of *Piers Plowman* that has been a matter of some controversy is the headings for the confessions of the seven deadly sins. Though not as commonly or automatically treated as the Latin quotations, their appearance "is given some kind of heading in 30 MSS, and they are fully rubricated in 21 MSS. [...] The sins form the most consistently rubricated part of the text with the exception of the passus headings, so much so that Skeat includes the headings for the sins in his text, adding 'confessio' [and the sin, in Latin] for the C-texts" (Uhart 76). It is once again among the C manuscripts that headings for the sins "have more extensive wording" (77); six consistently preface the name of one of the seven deadly sins with the word "confessio" (77).[5] In Huntington MS HM 137, the line between authorial text and editorial *ordinatio* appears to have been blurred:

[5] Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 656 [E]; Huntington MS HM 137 [P]; CUL MS Additional 4325 [Q]; BL MS Royal 18 B XVII [R]; London, Sterling MS V 17 [St]; Dublin, Trinity College MS 212 [V].

> the glosses are interlinear, and repeated so as to take up the same amount of space as a single line of text. The physical incorporation of this kind of rubrication into the text is a more marked interference than the usual marginal gloss. The interest in the sins is reflected in the passus headings at passus VII: "Incipit passus octauus de confessione. confessio accidie". Again, glossation and authorial material [...] have become intermingled and indistinguishable.
>
> (77)

This is the sort of effect on reading which later annotators cannot achieve, unless they are motivated to produce a new copy of the work themselves, actively taking control of the process of transmission. It is an example of how the way in which the layout and presentation of the text "can affect — even determine — future readings" (Uhart 98). In this case, the effect may have been unintended, but no less far reaching; as this manuscript was Skeat's copy-text, he printed the interlinear glosses in his *Text C*.

MS HM 143 is "the seventh C-text with extensive wording at the sins" (Uhart 77). Uhart describes how in the margins "additional glossation about each confession is given, as well as the basic heading [...] Additional subject headings appear, such as '[R]ose þe regrater' at VI 232, 'Walsh man' at VI 309, 'Robert ryffler' at VI 316, and what is perhaps the most striking part of Glutton's confession, at VI 412, is glossed: 'Glotoun cowede a caudel in Clementis lappe'" (77-78). Uhart does not fail to observe that these marginal glosses are in English, something "particularly noticeable" because "although the sins are named in English in the text, the vast majority of MSS gloss them with their Latin names", suggesting that the rubricator's intention "is to guide the reader in the clearest possible way" (78).

On f. 26^{r} there is a small sketch of Avarice — a balding man with a long, thin beard — placed next to the marginal gloss, "hyer cam couetyse to schreft hard" (see

Appendix E, fig. 1). Both the sketch and the marginal gloss come *before* the text to which they point, before a new reader has had a chance to even begin to digest what he or she is about to read, again demonstrating the power the rubricator has. While there are other such little sketches in HM 143, they are usually drawn inside of decorations already in the manuscript. Meed's face, for example, is in an initial N marking the beginning of passus III on f. 10^{v} (Appendix E, fig. 2). Other little faces are found inside of round spaces formed — accidentally or for that purpose — by the twisting and twining leaf-and-flower ornamentation so prevalent in the manuscript (except, perhaps revealingly, in the *Troilus* fragment). These are usually at passus divisions, such as some found near Meed's face; another is found at f. 17^{r} (passus IV); there may be another two at f. 23^{r} (passus VI) and f. 44^{r} (passus X), but the lines are ambiguous and could just be variations on the leaf-and-flower ornamentation. A notable sketch which is unambiguous is an aged and wearied face on 87^{v} (Appendix E, fig. 3), stemming from the large initial W of the *passus tercius de dobet*, i.e., passus XX, which opens with the lines:

> Wollewaerd and watschoed wente y forth aftur
> As a recheles renk þat recheth nat of sorwe,
> And ȝede forth ylike a lorel al my lyf-time
> Til y waxe wery of the world and wilnede eefte to slepe
> And lened me to lenten and long tyme y slepte.

(Pearsall *C-Text* XX.1-5)

It would appear that the sketch-artist was so impressed by these lines that he felt they deserved expression in the form of the tired face drawn about six lines above them. We might well ask what prompted someone, who Uhart suggests may have been the main

rubricator (131), to add this and other such sketches. In the case of Avarice's confession, perhaps it is because it is "the longest of all the confessions of the sins" (Pearsall *C-Text* 117, n. 196). Uhart suggests that such sketches of allegorical figures work against the text they are attempting to illuminate:

> The statement at the start of the description, "y can hym nat descreue" (VI 196) is refuted even before it is read by the presence of the sketch, while the cumulative effect of the listing of Avarice's physical characteristics, each with a moral implication, is destroyed by the immediacy of a single visual image. The moral implications of the physical attributes of the sins are of greater importance to the poem than a coherent visual image.
>
> (131)

Of course, one might argue that VI.196 is also refuted by the description itself, the claim of inability to describe something being rather conventional. What Uhart says here may be true, but I do not think that visual images — striking and memorable as they may be — are any *more* misleading to new readers of a text than are the scribal rubrication and annotation one is more likely to find in manuscript texts, particularly, as we have seen, when material is placed before or even within the relevant text. Nevertheless I agree that "[t]here are differences - the single impact of a visual image is distinct from a written text; the transition from one medium to another represents an interpretation in a way which the selection of subject headings *from the text* do not" (Uhart 134, my emphasis). I would point out that subject headings do not *have* to come from the text itself; as we shall see later in CUL MS Ll 4.14, they can be re-worded very easily, summing up the action in a given scene, all the while using language which *also* "represents an interpretation" of the text.

Such small sketches as those in MS HM 143 represent an elaboration upon and interpretation of the text of the poem, though not nearly to the same degree as the fully developed series of illustrations in Bodleian MS Douce 104 [D(C)]. Of all the illustrations in that manuscript, perhaps the most brilliantly executed are the figures representing, once more, the seven deadly sins. But before we can compare the treatment of the sins in this manuscript, we need to have a fuller understanding of the manuscript itself.

Bodleian MS Douce 104,[6] dated by the scribe in the sixth reigning year of Henry VI, i.e., about 1427, stands out among other manuscripts: besides having its share of annotation,[7] it contains 72 marginal illustrations,[8] most of which are coloured and finished. In his introduction to the facsimile, Derek Pearsall describes it as "vellum, poor thick membrane, not of high quality" (x), containing 112 folios measuring about 21.5 × 15 cm,[9] some of which "are badly stained by damp damage" (xii). It contains only one

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[6] Available in a facsimile reproduction by the Bodleian Library, with a separate section devoted to partial reproductions in colour. Ralph Hanna recently described MS Douce 104 as "the 'hot' manuscript of this moment" ("Studies in the Manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*" 1); notes like John Friedman's on an individual illustration will likely appear regularly.

[7] For a full account, see Uhart 363-73; see also Russell, "Some Early Responses".

[8] References to the illustrations will be first to the manuscript folio, then to descriptions and figures first given in Kathleen Scott's article in *YLS*, then to Pearsall's figures in "Manuscript Illustration of Late Middle English Literary Texts, with Special Reference to the Illustration of *Piers Plowman* in Bodleian Library MS Douce 104", in Vaughan 191-210. Some which appear, to my knowledge, nowhere else but in the facsimile are reproduced in Appendix F.

[9] These measurements make it "one of the smallest manuscripts" (Pearsall xxii). It is interesting that the smallest tend to be C-texts or related to C-texts: Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 656 [E(C)] "has exactly the same page-dimensions" (xxii), while the smallest is Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS 733B [N(AC)]. Slightly larger are BL MS Harley 6041 [H_2(AC)], Huntington MS HM 114 [Ht], Bodleian MS

(continued...)

other item besides *Piers Plowman*, "a short macaronic poem of 12 lines in English and Latin on 'Tutiuillus þe deuyl of hell'" (x; *IMEV* 3812). The text of *Piers Plowman* is "written throughout by one scribe" who, though "practised and 'professional'", was apparently not copying "for commercial reasons" (xiv). The dialect of the text in Douce 104 has been identified as Hiberno-English, "the dialect of English developed among English settlers in Ireland" (xii). Pearsall suggests that the possibility that it was made in Ireland is quite strong, partly based on evidence that the illustrations were "done by a competent professional illustrator with the idiosyncracies of style that might derive from isolation [...] tend[ing] to support a provincial origin for the manuscript" (xii-xiii). Aspects of style suggestive of such isolation might include the hair style for Meed in the first two of her four representations, which, as Kathleen Scott points out, "is much out of fashion for the date [...] and probably indicative of the earlier period in which the artist was trained" (20).[10] Testimony to the skill of the artist is made by the fact that "there is evidence that outline sketches for the pictures were done in silverpoint or crayon before the text was written, and that these outlines were subsequently inked in and the pictures painted after the text was written" (Pearsall xx). Even if the book producer(s) were to have acquired sheets of vellum exactly the same size as in the exemplar from which they

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[9](...continued)
Oriel College 79 [O(B)], and C-texts BL MS Harley 2376 [N], BL MS Additional 35157 [U], and Bodleian MS Digby 102 [Y].

[10] The hair style, about twenty years out of date, appears on f. 8^{r} (Scott #2) and f. 10^{r} (Scott #4, fig. 4). Meed reappears on 11^{r} (Scott #5) and 11^{v} (Scott #6, fig. 5, full page). More is said of these illustrations below.

were working, the scribe would have had to copy the lines exactly as they had been for the illustrations to fall into place with the relevant text.[11]

Whatever its origins, MS Douce 104 represents a medieval reader's response to *Piers Plowman* which is unique, not merely to this text, but, as Pearsall maintains, to medieval English texts as a whole: "The programme of illustration is unique in the surviving history of English medieval secular book-illustration, both in the persistence with which it follows through the whole poem, and also in the intimacy with which it records the involvement of the illustrator [...] with his reading" (x).[12] An example of the illustrator's "involvement" with the text is that in each of the four portrayals of Meed (see note 10), a different aspect of her is emphasized. Meed is first portrayed with her fine gold goblets, which, along with the dress she is wearing, are not mentioned until later in the text (Scott 20). The second illustration sees her being carried by a sheriff, wearing clothes less sumptuous and of a different colour (yellow); there is a "nota de med" written just above her head (II.177-79), noting how she "is horsing to Wyrschup hyr Wedyng". Pearsall notes that this is one instance where the artist chose to follow neither tradition nor the text in his representation:

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[11] Such assessments of this manuscript show how scholarly opinion improves with knowledge. Prior to Scott's article, little was said concerning the illustrations in the manuscript that was not derogatory: "It abounds with rudely drawn pictures" (Skeat *Parallel Text* lxxi); "All are executed with some skill, but they are clearly not the work of a professional illustrator" (Uhart 363).

[12] Pearsall acknowledges that someone may have been giving instructions to the illustrator, but argues against this notion: "The interpretative subtlety of the illustrations [...] the attention to the detail of the thematic continuities of the text, are unlikely to have been communicated to the illustrator by verbal instruction, and it is therefore probable that it was the illustrator himself who was reading and responding to the text" (xix).

> The well-established allegorical motif in which the sins ride upon wicked men is explicitly one in which the wicked men are described as saddled horses: Meed, we are told, is riding "softliche in saunbure" (II.178), comfortably in a saddle, upon the Sheriff. But the illustrator chooses instead to show her being realistically carried on his shoulders, like someone being hoisted aloft after a sporting triumph.
> (in Vaughan 203)

Given the marginal format of the illustrations in MS Douce 104, it is quite probable, in my view, that the artist could find no space with which to draw the scene as it typically would have been done. In the third illustration, Meed is in "virginal white with a [red] garland-like headdress" (Scott 23). Here Pearsall suggests the picture shows Meed "looking innocent and pretty" (203) and he compares her to Mercy on f. 94^{r} (Scott #61), who does indeed wear a strikingly similar white dress. To Pearsall, this illustration is "eminently appropriate to the allegory", as "Meed should be represented thus as an attractive and sympathetic figure and not as a vice" (203). In the fourth she is once again in yellow, this time with hair long and kneeling before a confessor. As Scott notes, the artist "apparently saw no purpose in coordinating the colors and design of Lady Meed's costume in her several representations [...] prefer[ing] to pick up on the changing nuances of the character" (23). Meed is the only character in the poem to be represented so often by the artist. More often the artist will repeat visual aspects between characters, perhaps, as Pearsall suggests above, to suggest links between those characters.

An example of repetition of characteristics between figures is the appearance of a royal forked beard on two men other than the King, whom Scott identifies as Conscience and Reason. Conscience appears first on f. 15^{r} (Scott #7, fig. 7), looking rather ghostly due to the contrast between the deep colours of his blue robe and muddy

orange chaperon, as compared to the "pen work and light tint of the face, hands, gown, and feet" (Scott 27). Like the King, some aspects of Conscience may not have been completed. The figure is placed "near the end of Lady Meed's litany of occupations that 'crauen mede' [...] [III.274-94] overlapping the beginning of the rebuttal by Conscience", and thus is fairly easily identifiable (Scott 26). The King appears next on f. 18^{r} (Scott #8, fig. 8), sitting, his ermine cope ending almost exactly in line with the beginning of the ornamental initial S marking the beginning of passus IV (particularly well brought out in Scott fig. 8). The third figure appears on f. 19^{r} (Scott #9, fig. 9), "located one verse below the beginning of Peace's complaint before the king and Reason, it could be taken as a representation of Peace", but as Scott points out, there are several visual clues suggesting that it is Reason (28). The presence of the same beard on Reason and Conscience as the King would seem to reinforce their roles "as the essential advisors or attributes of the King" (Pearsall in Vaughan 205).[13]

We can now consider how the seven deadly sins are treated in this manuscript. It is interesting to note that six out of seven of the sins are wearing blue or red, with four wearing a combination of both, two wearing parti-coloured tights (Pride and Wrath). The blue is of a particularly deep shade, a sort of navy blue colour, unlike the more indigo robe worn by Conscience. The red is striking as well, and is also worn by Piers the Plowman on f. 35^{r} (Scott #21, fig. 13). Two sins, Pride and Lechery, wear the same "decorative cut of material", i.e., a doublet with a V-opening (Scott 31). It is possible

[13] We should note that a forked beard also appears on an unfinished pen-drawing of a knight on f. 35^{v} (Scott #22).

that, consciously or otherwise, the artist was conveying certain underlying convictions about the nature and interrelatedness of sin and sins.

The first sin to appear is Pride, on f. 24^{r} (Scott #11; Pearsall in Vaughan fig. 3). In *Piers Plowman* this sin is clearly a female character ("Purnele proude-hearte"), but the common iconography at the time for Pride was a male (Scott 31; Pearsall in Vaughan 202-3). The general consensus is that the figure of Pride in MS Douce 104 is a male, but in my opinion Pride's face and upper body are sufficiently androgynous to at least suggest femininity. Certainly Pride is one of the more attractive of the sins, the face and general attitude of the body not immediately suggestive of immorality, at least to a modern eye.[14] Elsewhere among the sins, as will be discussed below, the artist has followed the text when the gender of the allegorized sin conflicts with traditional iconography.

The second sin is Envy, on f. 25^{r} (Scott #12, fig. 11). Envy is the only sin depicted without any blue or red, and is so light in colour, like the King and certain aspects of Conscience before, that one might again suspect the illustration is unfinished. Scott notes that the leaping figure with clenched fist, here also tearing at his shirt opening, "has a long pictorial history in England in a variety of contexts, usually connoting aggression" (31), and that the artist likely drew from the description, "A wroth his fust vppon Wrath" (VI.66). Envy's face is contorted in a sort of incomplete grimace suggesting pain or an emotional outburst.

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[14] Scott suspects the "gesture that Pride makes, in curling his right arm around and into the (right) arm pit, may have had a specific meaning to the medieval reader, which is now lost; the left hand, hooked over his belt, probably represents a stance assumed to radiate his superiority" (31).

Wrath is the third sin, on f. 26^{r} (Scott #13; see Appendix F, fig. 1). Scott affirms quite candidly that he has "ugly features" (32). Drawn for the most part from the opening of Wrath's speech (VI.103-4), the description of "Wrath's 'two whyte eyes' may be depicted in the eyes rolled far to one side, and his action of 'nippynge his lippes' may have been intended by the open, rather thick-lipped mouth with teeth visible; but the 'niuilynge nose' is not apparent" (Scott 32-33). The type of features belonging to Wrath most closely resemble those of the phantom-like Death on f. 71^{r} (Scott #53; Appendix F, fig. 2): the skull's face has the same eyes rolled to the left, the rounded head, and of course, the teeth showing. Similar features may be found in Hunger's face on f. 38^{r} (Scott #24, fig. 15): the eyes are again rolled to the left[15] and the face has a definitely skeletal look to it, likely meant to suggest starvation, even though Hunger is depicted here as feeding himself.

The fourth sin is a kneeling Lechery with arms raised high, on f. 26^{v} (Scott #14; Appendix F, fig. 3). The traditional iconography of Lechery during this period was female (Scott 34), whereas the sin is here depicted as a male, although again, I would suggest that, as with Pride, this representation is suggestive of both feminine and masculine features. The curly blond hair is in a style similar to that of Meed in her first two depictions. The face is really without any distinguishably gender-specific

[15] It should be noted that many characters' eyes are depicted as looking to one side for a different reason: they "look into the text - the layout of the illustrations on the page encloses the text, and the figures are occasionally represented as if addressing the text, giving the impression of careful and deliberate arrangement" (Uhart 133). For example, on the facing page from Hunger, f. 37^{v}, the Breton (Scott #23, fig. 14) appears "looking (with bulging eyes) and gesturing at the text" (Scott 40). Most of these characters' eyes are less "bulging" than those of the Breton.

characteristic, although the lips are perhaps a little full. The presence of a sword on the belt is certainly evidence that the character is male, but it is possible nonetheless that the traditional iconography of Lechery as a female influenced the artist unconsciously while he was drawing this illustration.

Avarice, the fifth sin, appears on f. 27^{r} (Scott #15; Appendix F, fig. 4). Easily three quarters of the page or more in length, it is the largest illustration of a single figure at 10.9 cm, and the second largest illustration overall in the manuscript, the illustration on f. 10^{r} of Meed carried by the sheriff being the largest at 13 cm (Scott #4, fig. 4). Probably the reason this illustration is so large is that Avarice's confession is the longest of all the sins, as was mentioned before in the context of the small sketch of Avarice in Huntington MS HM 143 (Appendix E, fig. 1). It is worth comparing the two pictures, for they represent quite different responses to the text. The drawing in HM 143 represents Avarice with a long, thin beard, whereas the beard in Douce 104 is mostly stubble: "not even in growth of hair could Avarice be generous" (Scott 34). Generally speaking, the depiction of Avarice in HM 143 is of a crotchety-looking old man, while the Avarice of Douce 104 could be young, although unambiguously ugly — moreso, I would say, than Wrath, above — the artist having, as Scott says, "followed the text closely", if not slavishly: "[t]he lips and lower eyelines are emphasized with a heavy application of red pigment to equal the odious impression of the poem: 'barburlippid, with two blered eyes' [VI.198]" (34).

The sixth sin, Gluttony, appears on f. 29^{r} (Scott #16; Pearsall in Vaughan fig. 1). The only figure among the sins completely in red (counterpointing Sloth, below, who is completely in blue). Gluttony is a rather comical figure, sort of half kneeling, half standing, "holding a bowl or cup to his mouth with both hands, wearing a short gown open half-way up the front to show a distended stomach" (Scott 34). Whether the protuberance shown by the open gown is a navel, as Scott originally assumed, or "an exposed penis", as Pearsall suggests (in Vaughan 199), the figure is reminiscent of grotesquely excessive characters from Rabelais. Gluttony's stance is certainly consistent with Pearsall's suggestion, and the image would be perfectly fitting, given a character who spends all his time eating and drinking, he must therefore spend a large amount of the same time relieving himself.

Sloth is the seventh and final sin, pictured almost as if leaning on the text of f. 31^{r}, head in hand (Scott #17; Appendix F, fig. 5). Sloth is so lazy that he is barely clothed: "his gown rumpled and open casually down the front, with one foot bare" (Scott 35). Like Gluttony, this sin is comical rather than immediately disturbing; if anything, the sleepy or sleeping face is almost angelic. Scott notes, however, that there are visual cues which may have been more striking to a medieval reader, for example, "the foot without a boot may be a visual reference to [gout], a boot being impossible to wear during an attack" (35). Nevertheless, Sloth, like Pride and Lechery, is much less repulsive than Avarice or Wrath.

A glance through the illustrations of MS Douce 104 provides one with a valuable sense of one medieval reader's fairly consistently close attention to the text of *Piers Plowman*. Uhart, however, again voices a concern with such drawings:

> Where physical characteristics in the text are contradictory, an illustrator must choose a single image, thus losing some of the quality of the text. In the case of an allegorical text, illustration is particularly problematic; the written text can sustain several levels of meaning simultaneously, whereas an illustrator must choose whether to depict the literal or the allegorical sense of the text. This problem (probably not perceived as such) is faced by the illustrator of D.
>
> (132)

The drawings of Meed would seem to contradict this, representing a very conscious attempt at creating a multidimensional allegorical figure who is not to be reduced to the limitations of one single picture. Similarly, there are many images of friars and beggars, both "true" and "false", so that one does not come away from the book with a single image of what constitutes either the clergy or the poor. There is a very consistent attempt at what Pearsall calls cross-referencing: the "use of pictures to structure the text by association", which he calls the "most important" characteristic of the illustrator (in Vaughan 205). Like all such scribal interaction with the poem, the illustrations in MS Douce 104 act as commentary, guide, and enhancement to the text.

Up to now we have considered mainly the activities of producers of books, in the form of rubrication, illustration, and to a lesser extent, annotation. The C manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* "seem to attract the highest level of annotation" (Uhart 225).[16] At first

[16] Three "have something approaching a formal scheme of commentary, which is carried out by a single commentator"; they are Bodleian MSS Douce 104 [D] and Digby 102 [Y], and the Chaderton MS [Ch(AC)]. CUL MS Ff 5.35 [F(C)] is also "fairly heavily annotated, but for the most part with single word subject headings" (Uhart 120).

thought, there is no reason why manuscripts of the C version should have significantly more annotation than those of the B version. In spite of the direct implication many readers experienced when reading the poem, Uhart suggests that "as early as the production of the C-text, the poem was already gaining the kind of status associated with antiquity" (91). This might explain why a greater proportion of C manuscripts versus B manuscripts have large amounts of annotation, but not why A manuscripts, which are generally of late date and would presumably have shared something of the "status" of the longer texts, have so little. It is possible that the shorter A-texts were not recognized as the same poem, or were considered less worthy of annotation as incomplete versions of the work; or we may again look to their suggested association with religious communities and Jill Mann's proposed audience for the A-text, noted in the first chapter.

We will now consider the relatively late annotation of the B manuscript discussed near the end of the first chapter. The kind of glossation of vocabulary that occurs in CUL MS Ll 4.14, i.e., not simply occasional words, but a "deliberate scheme", is found only in one other *Piers Plowman* manuscript: Dublin, Trinity College MS 212 [V(C)] (Uhart 155). Of the two, Uhart calls the system in the B manuscript "a more ambitious scheme" (156). There are 95 words for which the glossarist intended to find definitions; 69 actually have definitions, sometimes more than one (see Appendix C). Many of the words listed here can be found underlined in *Piers Plowman* and/or *Richard the Redeless*, probably an indication that the annotator, as in all likelihood the scribe, believed the two poems to be one text. In any case, "the glossarist's interest seems to focus on [passus]

X, XIV, XVII and XVIII, with some interest in the prologue and I, a little in VI-VIII, and minimal interest in II-V" (Uhart 156). It seems to me we should be careful how we interpret "interest" here: it may be that the glossator was more attracted to these sections of the poem; it may also be that he believed these sections would cause the most trouble for readers, as he evidently could not find definitions for almost a third of the words he transcribed.

Some of the annotation in the manuscript seems meant to act as a subject-index, summarizing key images or actions. For example, the glosses "A towere on a tofte", "A Dongion in a Dale", and "A ffaire ffelde bitwynne": each of these, found in the right-hand margin of f. 1^{r}, is a shortened, reworked form of the line it summarizes. The text in the manuscript reads:

see	trikanlie
I Sau$_{3}$t a tow*er* on a tofte : reallecle y makyd	**A towere on a tofte**
A depe dale beneþ^{e} : a dongionn **Therinne** [overwritten]	**A Dongion in a Dale**
With depe dichis & derke : and dredffulle of Sy$_{3}$th	
A ffair ffeld ffull of ffolk : ffonde I þ*er* bitwynne	**A ffaire ffelde bitwynne**

(cf. B PRO.14-17)

As the text of the prologue continues on to f. 1^{v}, enumerating people in various classes and walks of life, the annotator places in the right-hand margin one-word glosses describing passages marked for specific content, e.g., "pylgrymes" at 46, "heremytes" at 53 (54 has been underlined), "ffrers" at 58-59 (marked with "{"), and "p*ar*doner" at 68 (66-67 marked with "{"). There is a strong sense that the text is being prepared for use by someone who needs to find specific points of interest in the poem.

An example of areas of "a little" interest shown by the annotator-glossarist from passus VI to IX are the figure of Piers the Plowman, his pardon from Truth, and Dowell, Dobet, and Dobest, beginning shortly after the first appearance by Piers at V.537. The first half of VI.3, "Quod p*er*kyn þ^{e} plowman" is underlined (f. 28^{v}). When Piers describes what he will do on the pilgrimage to find Truth, the annotation "how peers gooþ^{e} on pligrimage" appears in the right margin at VI.57-58 (f. 29^{v}). On the same leaf, his wife's name is glossed at VI.78 ("peers plowman wyfes name"). At about VI.85 the glossator writes "Testamentum petri plowman" (f. 30^{r}). When the pardon is sent to Piers at the beginning of passus VII the name of Piers Plowman is underlined at VII.8. In the scene in which the pardon's contents are revealed and Piers subsequently tears up the pardon — an image controversial to modern critics of the poem — the annotator is interested only in the contents of the pardon, in which Dowell is defined, and leaves the pardon-tearing lines as they are:

and peers at his p*r*ier : þ^{e} p*ar*don vnffoldyn
and I behynde hem boþ^{e} : behelde all þ^{e} bulle
alle in two lynes it lay : & not a leef more **Trew p*ar*don is**
[110] and was wrettyn ry3th þus : in wittenesse of truþ^{e} **Do Well**
Et q*ui* bona eg*er*u*nt* ibu*nt* i*n* vita*m* eter*n*a*m* q*ui* v*er*o mala in igne*m* eter*n*u*m*
Pet*er* quod þ^{e} prest þo : I can no p*ar*don ffynde
{ but do well and haue well : and god shall haue þi soule
and do yuell and haue yuell : hope þ^{u} no*n* oþ*er*
But aft*er* þi deþ day : þ^{e} deuell shall haue þi soule
[115] and peers ffor pure tene : pullide it atwynne
and sayd si ambulau*er*o in medio vmbre mortis no*n* timebo q*uoni*am tu mecu*m* es

(f. 35^{v}; VII.107-17)

We may note that this annotation, "Trew p*ar*don is Do Well" — placed, as in MS HM 143, *before* a new reader would have a chance to read the relevant text — represents an

interpretation on the part of the annotator. He assumes that the actions by Piers below validate, or at least do not negate, the pardon's validity, since it comes from Truth. Interest in the pardon returns at VII.192, underlined and annotated "of p*ar*don" (f. 36^{v}). Thought's descriptions of Dowell, Dobet and Dobest are glossed in passus VIII: l. 79 has "Do Well", l. 85 "Do bett", and l. 96 "Do beste" (f. 38^{r}); Thought himself is glossed at l. 77 ("Thoughte") on the same folio. Uhart suggests that we may think of such annotations as "supplements [to] scribal rubrication" (152). The largest grouping of annotations in a single section of text in this area of the manuscript is found near the beginning of passus IX:

	And þ^{e} cunstable of þ^{t} Castell : þ^{t} kepeþ alle þ^{e} wecche	
	Is a wise kny3te w^{t}all : sir Inwitte he hatte	**Inwytte**
	And haþ^{e} ffiue ffayr sones : bi his ffrist wijf	**See Well**
		Saye Well
[20]	Sire se well & saie well : & here well þe ende	**Here Well**
	Sire werche well w^{t} þin hand : a wy3te m*an* of strenþ^{e}	**Werke Well**
	And sir godffrey go well : grette lordis ffor soþ^{e}	**Goo Well**

(f. 39^{r}; IX.17-22)

The poet of *Piers Plowman* often seems to introduce allegorical characters or places, such as the ones above, with a speed that defies the mental capacity of many a reader. Here three sons' names come rushing within one line, and the annotator has to squeeze the three names into the margin of two lines of text. He presumably does this because he thinks these aspects of "doing well" are important but could easily be missed, and so he signals this area to himself or another reader.

CUL MS Ll 4.14 is a text with more annotation in it than can be dealt with here exhaustively. The examples I have provided are sufficient to demonstrate how readers may be influenced by the principles of organization involved in its early reception; these principles can be highly contradictory in manuscript texts, as scribe, compiler, and annotator may be operating at a distance of a century or more from each other, as is likely the case here. In the next chapter, more will be said of this manuscript as it relates to Crowley's editions of the poem.

CHAPTER THREE

Editio Princeps: The Legacy of Robert Crowley

Robert Crowley (1518?-1588) was a radical Protestant reformer living in London at a time when *Piers Plowman* was still circulating in manuscript. In the late 1540s and early 1550s he began to lead an increasingly active life, as John N. King[1] notes: "By turns a pamphleteer, stationer, poet, and clergyman [...] cultivat[ing] an audience in London's growing middle class and among pious aristocrats for his biblical poetry, Protestant tracts and polemics, and editions of the riddling poem that William Langland had written" (319). He ultimately became a Puritan, but was never part of the movement which attacked poetry and fiction. If anything, he was a very prolific writer, producing in a very short time "a body of verse that, for sheer bulk and variety, was extraordinary at a time when prolix theological tomes crowded most other texts out of the bookstalls near St. Paul's Cathedral" (320).[2] From 1548 to 1551 alone he wrote or translated about a dozen works. King notes that *Piers Plowman*, which Crowley printed in 1550, influenced Crowley's writing. He uses "personifications derived from *Piers Plowman*" (320); the poem is "the formula for all his Edwardian poems: prophetic estates satire. He

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[1] All references to King, unless otherwise noted, are to *English Reformation Literature*, which incorporates much, though not all, material from his article, "Robert Crowley's Editions of *Piers Plowman*: A Tudor Apocalypse".

[2] A bibliography of Crowley's own works, as well as works he printed or with which he was possibly involved, appears in King 473-77. Some of these are printed in Crowley, *The Select Works of Robert Crowley*.

even attempted to imitate Langland's alliterative long line in *One and Thyrtie Epigrammes*" (340). This is easily seen in the opening lines of one of these, "Of Marchauntes":

> If *M*archauntes wold *m*edle | wyth *m*archaundice onely,
> And *l*eaue fermes to such men, | as muste *l*yue thereby;
> Then *w*ere they moste *w*orthy | to be had in price,
> As *m*en that prouide vs | of all kyndes *m*archaundice.

(41, lines 1193-1200; I have rendered the EETS format into long lines)

King considers Crowley to be "the most significant poet between Surrey and Gascoigne" (320). His literary activities were interrupted by the death of Edward VI: under the Catholic Queen Mary, many reformers went into exile, Crowley residing in Frankfurt until Elizabeth ascended the throne. During her reign he became a popular and controversial religious and political figure, alternately gaining and losing favour within different circles:

> Crowley achieved his greatest fame late in life not as a poet, but as a Puritan clergyman, an energetic pamphleteer, and an arbiter of public morality. Although he lost his benefices in 1566-67 because of his agitation, he never joined the separatist Puritans. Despite the displeasure of the bishops and queen, he retained the favor of the City of London authorities [...] He was restored to some of his earlier benefices in the late 1570s. After regaining his position as a St. Paul's prebendary, he acted in 1582 as a censor on behalf of the Bishop of London [...] The measure of Crowley's Elizabethan popularity is suggested by the dedications he received and the prefaces that he contributed to other men's books.
>
> (King 432-33)

Crowley comes across as a fiercely religious, moral, and patriotic man, who never lacked for energy or conflict with others. Though most of the major events of his life took place in the years after he printed *The Vision of Pierce Plowman*, these aspects of his life are still relevant to our study, in that they reveal much about the person who was the main force behind the first edition of the poem.

Thus the first edition of *Piers Plowman* must be placed within the context of a mid-sixteenth-century printer who was himself interesting and who lived in interesting times, to paraphrase a Chinese curse. The edition "was designed explicitly for the sixteenth-century reading public" (A. J. Colaianne 24). There is evidence that Crowley was conscious of the need to be careful in rendering potentially dangerous lines of *Piers Plowman* acceptable to his reading public. Crowley prints a line which in CUL MS Dd 3.13 [G(C)] is erased: "Ve terre ubi puer rex est" (cf. B PRO.195[a], Pearsall C PRO.206). The problem is that the line, written in reference to the youthful reign of Richard II, seems to a sixteenth-century audience to question the authority of Edward VI. Crowley is careful — very careful — to add the following marginal note, marked with a cross (✠): "Omnium doctissimorum suffragio, dicuntur, hec de lassiuis, fatuis, aut ineptis principibus, non de etate tenellis. Quasi dicat, vbi rex puerillis est" (*STC* 19906, A3[v]). This does not appear to have been sufficient, as Crowley had to add yet another explanation in his synopsis for the second and third editions, this time in English: "And herein it lamenteth the state of that realme, wherein the kinge is childishe, & so euerye wycked man getteth rule vnder hym" (*STC* 19907[a], *3[r]). Other differences between the first and later editions will be discussed below.

Crowley was not the only printer interested in the figure of Piers the Plowman, or plowmen in general. In 1510 Wynkyn de Worde printed the "little geste" of *How the Plowman Learned his Pater Noster* (*STC* 20034). In 1531-32 two editions of *The Prayer and Complaint of the Plowman unto Christ* appeared (*STC* 20036, 20036.5). At about the

same time that Crowley published his editions of *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* (1550), Copland printed two editions of *A godly dyalogue & dysputacion betwene Pyers plowman, and a popysh preest...* (*STC* 19903, 19903.5). Two editions of *I playne Piers which can not flatter* (*STC* 19903[a], 19903[a.5]) also appeared, as well as *Pyers plowmans exhortation, vnto the lordes, knyghtes and buroysses of the parlyamenthouse* (*STC* 19905).[3] *Pierce the Ploughmans crede* (*STC* 19904) was first printed by Wolfe in 1553. Crowley's *Pierce Plowman* ran through three editions in one year (*STC* 19906, 19907, 19907[a]).[4] Eleven years later, Owen Rogers reprinted 19907[a] along with Wolfe's *Crede* and a glossary of difficult words (*STC* 19908), although as Skeat noticed, the *Crede*, "though mentioned in the title-page, is not always found in the volume" (*Text B* xxxvi).

Clearly there was great public interest in texts concerning the figure of Piers the Plowman by the mid-sixteenth century, and Crowley's decision to print his text must be seen as part of what we might call a Piers the Plowman "vogue" in which many readers and printers participated. King suggests the reason texts like *Piers Plowman* had not been printed before about 1550 was their having been previously banned as "Wycliffite" until then ("Robert Crowley's Editions" 342 and n. 5). Uhart is skeptical over whether *Piers Plowman* was perceived as radical prior to the beginnings of the reformation in England: "Many books are specifically named as heretical by the various Synods through the

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[3] "Attributed to Crowley by Barbara Johnson" (King 474).

[4] "The second and third editions agree closely, embodying essentially the same revised text, and *STC* 19907 may actually be the third edition" (King 327). The fact that some unsold first editions are fitted with the "summe" from *STC* 19907 leads me to support the opposite view.

fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; *Piers Plowman* is not among them. Either it was considered orthodox and approved, or simply not regarded as important enough to warrant ecclesiastical examination" (5). In any case, many printers were, like Crowley, Protestant reformers, and their use of the Plowman figure was due to its having "undergone by Crowley's time a metamorphosis into a harsh anticlerical spokesman. Sixteenth-century reformers mistakenly identified the *Piers Plowman* tradition with the Wycliffite movement, reinterpreting these medieval appeals for reform as Protestant propaganda" (323). This does not mean, of course, that all or even most readers of *Piers Plowman* in the sixteenth century perceived it as being part of the tradition King identifies. Uhart points to the example of Sir Adrian Fortescue's MS [K(AC)], copied in 1531-32; he "interpreted the poem as orthodox Catholicism" (4).[5]

A problem arises, however, with the introduction into the reading circulation of numerous, well-selling copies of a printed edition, edited and presented from a historically inaccurate (and biased) perspective.[6] Crowley's edition had the effect of standardizing *Piers Plowman.* No other printed edition appeared after the Rogers edition, which is essentially a reprint of Crowley's third edition, until the nineteenth century. Crowley's preface clearly indicates that he sincerely believed the author of *Piers Plowman* was a Wycliffite, and many of his marginal glosses, as King demonstrates, point to a Protestant

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[5] See Uhart 112-20 for a discussion of this manuscript, as well as 340-52 for a complete account of its annotation.

[6] Uhart describes marginal rubrications of late manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* as "comparable to those of Crowley's editions, though Crowley's comments are a little less objective, taking into account the contemporary situation" (104).

interpretation of the text. Nevertheless, as King points out, Crowley's apparatus did not sway every reader: a copy of *STC* 19907[a] is annotated by another Catholic, Andrew Bostock, who "saw through the editorial distortions and entered a private protest in his marginalia" (338).[7] We must assume, however, that less educated readers of the text took it (as readers tend to do) at face value, putting as much trust in the editor as readers of a given book do today. The printed page has authority, borrowed at once from its replicative ability — when so many hundred editions all agree, this implies an accuracy not achievable by manuscripts — and from official printers' colophons, like Crowley's *Cum priuelegio ad imprimendum solum.* As we shall see, of everything Crowley published, he seems to have done his utmost to invest *Pierce Plowman* with the most authority.

Crowley's editions of *Pierce Plowman* are all quarto editions. They were his "most ambitious project" (King 326); he "published only one other quarto volume (the *Psalter*)" (326-27). It is probably wise to bear in mind that Puritanism generally frowned on excess of any kind, whereas here Crowley appears to have made an exception: "All of his other publications were plain and inexpensive octavo editions aimed at a broad, popular audience. The title page, borders, and typefaces of *Piers Plowman* are the most elaborate of all his publications" (327). Crowley seems to go out of his way to emphasize in his preface that the poem's language is ancient, but worth the trouble of reading it. His remarks concerning the antiquity of the poem seem part of a deliberate attempt to add to

[7] Bostock's copy is in the Bodleian Library, Douce L 205; for some of his comments, see King 338-39 and n. 20.

its authority in a typically medieval way. King notes that "Crowley gave it the appearance and apparatus of contemporary editions of the Greek and Latin classics; evidently he wanted the poem to be appealing and acceptable as a trustworthy ancient authority" (328). For this reason, we should be careful not to take Crowley's statements as "evidence" that the poem's language was very dated by the time he printed it, though there is evidence that some contemporary readers had difficulty with "what the poem meant" (Vincent DiMarco xiii).

Crowley's "copy-text", assuming he did print mainly from one manuscript, is "closely related" to Cambridge, Trinity College MS B 15.17 [W];[8] the second and third editions add "three entire lines that are absent from both Crowley's first edition and MS W" (King 329).[9] There is a guarded sense, as Eric Dahl[10] points out, in which Crowley's edition is simply one more text to add to the list of *Piers Plowman* texts:

> It has been suggested that medieval scribes who altered their exemplars to suit their expectations or those of their patrons, or combined several texts to form more complete versions of a work, are the "medieval editors" of those works. We might as easily suggest that editors like Crowley who revised or recombined varying texts of medieval poems in more recent times are actually "modern scribes."
>
> (in Vaughan 57)

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[8] Used by Wright and both of the modern editions of the B version.

[9] King refers to William R. Crawford's PhD dissertation, "Robert Crowley's Editions of *Piers Plowman*: A Bibliographical and Textual Study" (Yale University, 1958), 58-59, when suggesting that Crowley "haphazardly corrected his first edition" with a manuscript "closely resembling" CC_2OY(B) and BmBoCot(CAB).

[10] "*Diuerse Copies Haue It Diuerselye*: An Unorthodox Survey of *Piers Plowman* Scholarship from Crowley to Skeat," in Vaughan 53-80.

Crowley's texts are often described as having "manuscript status" where *Piers Plowman* is concerned, and indeed, there are many points of correspondence between the apparatus in Crowley's *Pierce Plowman* and certain of the poem's manuscripts.

Scribes tend to highlight Latin quotations in the poem in some way. Crowley sets them off by printing them in a smaller font; this is interesting, as none of the extant manuscripts do this, although some write the Latin in a larger hand. Crowley also sometimes indents the quotations as well. His marginal glosses and the text of the passus divisions are slightly larger than the quotations, but still smaller than the text of the poem. The capitals of the first letter of the passus divisions are usually large (three lines) and ornamental. The principal difference we must keep in mind, of course, is that whereas there can only be one manuscript copied in a certain way, Crowley can print numerous copies of his book if he so chooses, and so disseminate a certain kind of text and apparatus at a phenomenally faster rate than any scribe.

In one case, as was mentioned in the introduction, someone placed an elaborate "table of contents" in a paper manuscript of the first half of the sixteenth century, i.e., contemporary with Crowley's edition, and quite like his "summe" of the passus. Here is the beginning of the table in CUL MS Gg 4.31 [G(B)] as reproduced by Uhart:

[f. 101^{v}]	here ynsuethe ye table off pyers plowman		
pilgrims	ye furst passe off ye vysone conteynethe iij chapters ye furst chapter treatethe what he sawe yn mydle yerthe amongest ye lered & ye lewde	)))	fo 1
pardons & prestes	ye second chapter declarethe ye deceat of the pre lates off holycherche & off pardoners	))	fo 1

profecy a profecy	ye thyrd chapter declarethe ye profycye off ye catt ye ratt & ye mysse/ all this marke	)) fo 3
mater ecclesia	ye iiij chapter declaryth how money ovght to be bestowed & to whom yit belongeth & off ye borowys yat the church receyvd off vs at our baptyme	)) fo 4

(99-100)

It is interesting that the person who formed the table at first wrote "passe" to describe the poem's sections, but then subdivides the text into units smaller than the passus, which are called chapters, whereas Crowley retains the passus divisions for the structure of his text and summaries. From folios 101^{v}-102^{r} of the manuscript there are twenty such distinguishable sections, ending with the end of the "visione" (passus VII). A second table "de dowell", containing eight chapters begins on f. 102^{v}; "tabula de dobett" contains five chapters, while the "tabula de dobest" has only one (Uhart 101-3). In Uhart's judgement, the table "demonstrates a close attention to the text and a shrewd ability to classify the material" (103). More than anything, it demonstrates a continuity, in which the tendencies of *ordinatio* to clarify and edify matter, in this case by providing a summary for the reader, develop into a more and more elaborate editorial apparatus with the appearance of the printed book. We might say that one species of book has evolved out of and alongside with the other, without actually replacing it, at least in the initial stages.

J. R. Thorne and Marie-Clare Uhart count thirty correspondences between annotation by Crowley in his edition and annotation in the B manuscript discussed in the first two chapters, CUL MS Ll 4.14 [C_2] (249). Moreover, there are "a few other comments by the glossarist/annotator which, while having no direct correspondence to Crowley's text, imply a concern with topical issues shared by Crowley" (251). Thorne

and Uhart have revived Skeat's suggestion that the annotator and Crowley may have been the same person, or at the very least, that "the glossarist/annotator was of the same frame of mind as Crowley"; they admit that "there is insufficient evidence to decide the matter either way" (251). They discuss a piece of evidence in particular which seems to me to contradict the theory that Crowley was the glossarist:

> A comparison between Crowley's texts and the glossary reveals that Crowley almost invariably uses the words in the same form as they appear in the text of the poem in CUL MS Ll.iv.14. If Crowley was the glossarist and the words appearing in the glossary were the ones he considered to be difficult, then we may note that in his text he decided, for whatever reason, to let them stand in their original form. (248)

More than that, if he was glossarist, then "for whatever reason", he chose not to include the glossary in his edition. In the 1561 edition by Rogers, there is such a glossary.[11] Why would Crowley have begun to compile such a list, if he did not intend either to substitute the difficult words (which he did not) or to make the list available to his readers? As will be seen below, he spares few pains making access to the text easier for his readers, making improvements on his edition that would have required as much effort, if not more, as compiling the glossary. Moreover, the printing of such a list, even a short one, would be consistent with his portrayal of the poem, mentioned earlier. We should also recall that, as Thorne and Uhart point out themselves, the glossarist of CUL MS Ll 4.14 "continues his work through the following text", i.e., *Richard the Redeless* (253 n. 4). If Crowley had been the glossarist, he likely would have believed that *Richard* was

[11] I regret that it has not been practically feasible for me to see this edition, as it would be very interesting to compare the Rogers glossary and that in CUL MS Ll 4.14 for similarities.

a continuation of, or at least was related to, *Piers Plowman*, and likely would have printed it as well.

Crowley's statements in his preface clearly show he was in possession of "diuerse copies" of the poem (*STC* 19906, *2^{v}). I think it likely that CUL MS Ll 4.14 was one of those copies. It need not, however, have been Crowley's "copy text", and he need not have been the annotator or glossarist of the manuscript. The only scenario I can imagine whereby Crowley would have been the glossarist would be if it had been the first manuscript he had come across: if he learned of others and examined them while still in the process of glossing the first manuscript, then he would have concluded that *Richard* was apocryphal, and perhaps, would have ceased to bother with it further. This still leaves the question of why he did nothing with the glossary. A far simpler theory is that Crowley used the manuscript, which had already been annotated and glossed, either by one of his like-minded associates or by someone whose annotations made some impression on him, thus explaining why there are correspondences between the manuscript and his editions.

Although they are often discussed as though they were one edition, the changes between Crowley's first and later printings are many.[12] There are too many minor bibliographical changes between them, such as whether a fleur-de-lys or an asterisk is

[12] *STC* 19906 and 19907^{a} are available in a microfilm collection from the Huntington Library, listed in the Works Cited under Crowley. One of the unsold first editions, later supplied with the title page and "summes" from *STC* 19907, is available in facsimile form edited by J. A. W. Bennet. The first edition is dated 1505 (an obvious misprint), while the others are dated "M.D.L." Citations from a later edition are from *STC* 19907^{a} unless specified otherwise.

used on a given page,[13] to go into them here, so we will restrict ourselves to more meaningful changes. Crowley switched from his first title page, a rectangular illustration of a Greek pillar enclosure surrounding the title and colophon, to a simple text title page, with only the words "The vision" large enough to attract attention. He abandoned this illustration largely, I think, because of the added description of the book on the title page. Here is the text on Crowley's original title page:

THE VISION
of Pierce Plowman, now
fyrste imprynted by Roberte
Crowley, dwelling in Ely
rentes in Holburne.
Anno Domini,
[1505 crossed out]

Cum priuilegio ad im=
primendum solum.

And here is a facsimile of Crowley's title page for the second edition (*STC* 19907):

¶ The vision of

Pierce Plowman, nowe the seconde tyme imprinted
by Roberte Crowlye dwellynge in Elye rentes in Holburne.
Whereunto are added certayne notes and cotations in the
mergyne, geuying light to the Reader. And in the begynning
is set a brefe summe of all the principal matters spoken of in
the boke. And as the boke is deuided into twenty partes cal=
led Passus: so is the Summary diuided, for euery parte his
summarie, rehearsynge the matters spoken of in eue=
ry parte, euen in suche order as they
stande there.

(⁎)

¶ Imprinted at London by Roberte
Crowley, dwelling in Elye rentes

[13] Kane and Donaldson were "conscious of the many differences between copies of the three impressions", and find much of "great bibliographical interest", without there being "a single new reading of significance" (7).

EDITIO PRINCEPS

in Holburne, The yere of
our Lord, M.D.L,

[decorative icons and symbols]

¶ Cum priuilegio ad imprimendum
solum.

There are many possible commercial reasons for such a change, such as increased competition from other booksellers. In any case, the new title page offers much more description of the material inside. There is a definite increase from *STC* 19906 to *STC* 19907[a] of devices meant to serve the reader better. For example, where *STC* 19906 had one running header throughout the text, "The vision of Pierce Plowman", *STC* 19907[a] has headers with passus numbers. Coupled with this is a desire to leave the *lines* of the text as undisturbed as possible, even as Crowley changes the text itself quite freely: spelling of words is changed regularly between all three editions, and the words themselves are either corrected or emended, while paragraph indentations are often removed.

Of particular interest is what Crowley does when confronted with having to add six lines, probably from a new manuscript discovered since the original printing, after B PRO.216 to the text of the two new editions. The lines are described in Kane and Donaldson's appendix of unoriginal lines (221-24), and closely resemble A PRO.90-95:

> I sawe bishops bolde, and bachilers of diuine Byshops
> Become clarkes and accountes, the kynge for to serue
> Arcke deakens and deanes, that dignities haue
> To preache to the people, and pore men to fede
> Ben ilope to London, by leaue of her bishop
> And ben clarkes of the kynges benche, the contrye to
> (shend
> (A4[r]; cf. Kane and Donaldson 221)

Although Crowley does re-set the entire text in both the second and the third editions, he attempts to keep the contents of each page as consistent with the original edition as possible. Adding these lines must have been important to him, as doing so forced him to crowd considerably the text of the next page in order for it to assimilate the new lines. Whereas the first edition has two blank lines surrounding the title of the first passus, the new editions have none at all, text crowding around the small "Passus primus de visione". Crowley moves one line from A4^{v} to B1^{r}, successfully avoiding any more disturbance to the print correspondences between editions. This tendency, even as Crowley attempts to improve his edition, is seen again in the change in I.52: *Reddite Cesari* becomes the shorter *Redde Cesare*, with the result that a space appears between the words in the new editions. Crowley also identifies the quote as being from Luke 20 in the new edition.

There are many new marginal glosses added by Crowley to the new editions: "In the first there are fewer than 60 annotations, in the second and third about 500 each. Nearly half of these additions consist of biblical references" (Thorne and Uhart 248). For example, between A4^{v} and K3^{v} (passus I-VII) Crowley identifies some 47 quotations which had gone unglossed in the first edition. Like any good publisher, he responds to the demands of his market, supplying the audience with references which are useful in their reading of a text which quotes the Latin Bible quite often. Besides identifying many quotations, Crowley also adds to the explanatory commentary and "narrative" glosses (i.e., glosses which function to mark significant events in the narration). Very occasionally he omits glosses from the original edition, e.g., "Co*n*fessors" at III.35 (C4^{r}), and "Gloton" at

v.296 (G1^{r}). Some or all of these may have been errors of omission when the text was re-set.

Meed has clearly attracted much interest between the editions. There are no fewer than ten new glosses concerning her from passus II-IV. The first two are straightforward descriptions of the content of the text: "The discription of Mede" (B4^{r}, II.7-9) and "Medes charter" (C1^{r}, II.69-70). Crowley's language becomes slightly more interpretative and even playful with "What horses they þ^{t} ride with Mede" (C2^{v}, II.162-65). The fourth comment, "The king wil know of Mede whom she loueth best" (C3^{v}, III.2-5) is again straightforward, and uses lines from the text as a base for the gloss, whereas the next one, "Conscie*n*ce forsaketh Mede for hir euyl condition" (D1^{v}, III.120-23), is arguably less objective, framing Meed's "condition" solely from Conscience's own perspective. The next four glosses are all objective descriptions of events in the text: "Mede hath leue to speake" (D2^{r}, III.173-75); "Mede reherseth what she hath done" (D2^{v}, III.189-91); "Mede telleth how needful she is to all men" and "Conscie*n*ce telleth þ^{e} king of .ii ma*n*ner of Medes" (D3^{r}, III.211-14 and 230-33). Crowley's tenth gloss, "Mede stoppeth Peaces mouth" (E3^{r}, IV.100-2), is a clear interpretation of the text; indeed, it is a full departure from his usual treatment of Meed. What in fact happens is Peace is given restitution in the form of gold by Meed to speak on Wrong's behalf to the King. She has in fact not merely "stopped" his mouth, but rather turned him into a sort of accomplice with Wrong. It is interesting to note how meticulous Crowley is in re-setting his edition:

> Than came Mede to meue*n* hir, & mercy she besought,
> [95] And proferd Peace a present, all of pure gold
> Haue this man of me, quod she, to amend thy scathe

For I wyl wage for Wronge, he wyl do so no more
Pyttuouslie Peace than prayed to the Kynge
To haue merci on that man, that misdid hym so oft
[100] For he hath waged me wel as wisdome hym taught
And I forgeue him that gylte wyth a good wyll
So that the assente, I can saye no bettre
For Mede hath me amends made I mai no more aske

(*STC* 19906, E2^{v}-E3^{r})

Than gan Mede to meuen her, & mercy she besought
[95] And profred Peace a present, all of pure golde
Haue thys man of me, quod she, to amend thy scath
For I wyll wage for Wronge, he will do so no more
Pituouslye Peace than, prayed to the kinge
To haue mercy on þ^{t} man, that misdyd him so oft
[100] For he hath waged me wel, as wisdome him taught — Mede
And I forgiue him that gylte, wyth a good wyll — stoppeth
So that the kinge assent, I can say no better. — Peaces
mouth

For mede hath me amends made, I mai no more aske

(*STC* 19907^{a}, E2^{v}-E3^{r})

Crowley's gloss is all the more interesting for its placement far away from Meed's action; instead it is placed next to the words spoken by Peace, perhaps as a reminder that his testimony has been bought, or perhaps to create a better symmetry on the pages (there are four glosses including this one on E2^{v}-E3^{r}, each two a mirror of the others in position).

Sometimes the new glosses are redundant. In the first edition, Crowley had glossed I.137-40 with "Truth is the greatest treasure" (B2^{v}); now, he adds a new gloss to lines 85-87: "Treuthe is the best treasure" (B1^{v}). It is true that the poem makes these assertions on both occasions, but it is not clear how the additional gloss is helpful. Two lines from Psalm 13 are cited by the poet at IV.36^{a}-37^{a}. Having left them unidentified in the first edition, Crowley now decides to identify them individually, each given its own gloss of "Psa. xiii" (E2^{r}). It is easy to forget that Crowley's editions appeared

successively in the space of a single year, and that mistakes, oversights, and plain bad judgement were bound to occur. To paraphrase Elizabeth Eisenstein, we see the textual past through a veil of print. It is precisely for such reasons that we must be careful in the making of comparisons like Dahl's. Crowley is a "modern scribe", but he is *not* limited to the tools of the scribe. His decisions alone, and the speed with which he could effectively execute them combined with the sheer numbers of people who could be influenced by them, would determine much of how *Piers Plowman* would be read and interpreted for the next three hundred years. Dahl describes the situation very effectively:

> While Crowley's methods for deriving the editorial particulars of his text can be understood as similar to those of his medieval scribal predecessors, the effect of his work upon subsequent literary scholarship can only be understood in terms of a quite different technological context. [...] Crowley produced, in the terminology of our own era, a "definitive edition." Except for the "careless reprint" of Rogers and the misgivings of one or two particularly perceptive scholars, the Crowley editions went unchallenged until the nineteenth century.
>
> (in Vaughan 58)

In this sense, Robert Crowley's edition truly was *princeps*, and reigned with all the *de facto* right accorded an usurping monarch. Crowley's interpretation of the text primarily as anti-Catholic satire tended to shape readers' responses: "It is not much of a simplification to say that until the rise of antiquarian studies in the Restoration, such literary-critical comments on the poem as one finds are grounded in an appreciation of the poem as satire and seldom pass beyond this estimation" (Vincent DiMarco xii). It is not until the mid eighteenth century that there is "a more familiar kind of literary criticism of the poem" (xiv). It was at this time that editorial theory and practice resembling modern procedural tendencies began to develop.

III

Conclusion

Plantari non possunt arbusculae, rigari nequeunt sata, neque aliquid ruralis operis exerceri, reclusione perpetua prohibente, sed quod est utilius, pro aratro conuertatur manus ad pennam, pro exarandis agris, diuinis litteris paginae exarentur, seratur in cartula uerbi dei seminarium, quod maturatis segetibus hoc est libris perfectis, multiplicatis frugibus esurientes lectores repleat, et sic panis caelestis laetalem animae famem depellat.

— Peter the Venerable (38)

Books are like seeds. They can lie dormant for centuries and then flower in the most unpromising soil.

— Carl Sagan (233)

Modern Incarnations of *Piers Plowman*

> It is possible to trace an evolving sense of the function of the editor, not as restorer, but inventor of the forms of the text he seeks to edit.
>
> — A. S. G. Edwards (46)

The editorial methods which we may infer were practiced by Crowley, that is, fairly hit-and-miss idiosyncratic attempts at correction and emendation of manuscript witnesses with unknown relationships to any one or all versions of a text, remained more or less the same for the duration of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A. S. G. Edwards observes that editors of medieval texts, like the earlier scribes, were mostly concerned with providing readable texts for their own audiences; however, there was also a concern that the text itself not be lost through modernization or editorial intervention: "on the one hand, the perceived need to make Middle English texts accessible to audiences with little or no knowledge of their grammar, orthography or syntax and, on the other, the need to retrieve and preserve the text" (36). By the eighteenth century, the concern had shifted from *preserving* existing manuscript texts in print form to *reconstructing* a hypothetical original text. This was perhaps because, by this time, the language of many Middle English texts would be read less and less by anyone not an enthusiast of the language; moreover, as more manuscripts were discovered, catalogued, and read, the disparities between texts became more apparent than they had been even to printers like Crowley. Unlike most medieval scribes (the exception of Huntington MS HM 114 is noted), who generally saw themselves as contributing to a work's dissemination and commentary, modern editors sought to restore the author's actual words based on evidence from multiple manuscripts.

Despite the unanimity of goal, however, there was very little unity of practice. Edwards observes that there continued to be a "randomness of editorial method, combined with considerable care and restraint in the execution of that method" among these later editors; the method of "Middle English editing stands in striking contrast to the editing of classical texts" (41). We might consider many editors of this period, for approaches vary widely, but of greatest concern to us is Thomas Tyrwhitt, "a pivotal figure" in the tendency to *invent* rather than *restore* the form of the text, as cited above (46). Edwards describes him as "much more interested in the *interpretation* of manuscript evidence than its presentation and hence more preoccupied with emendation than with fidelity to a particular manuscript form of his text" (47, his emphasis). Edwards calls W. W. Skeat, the major editor of *Piers Plowman* in the nineteenth century, the "intellectual heir" to Tyrwhitt. Prior to Skeat's editorial enterprise, there appeared two earlier editions.

T. D. Whitaker's 1813 edition of the C-text of the poem[1] was apparently not designed for easy reading or general public consumption: firstly, the text of the poem was "in black letter, with Paraphrase below it" (Skeat *Parallel Text* lxxix); secondly, it "appears that it was published by subscription, the number of subscribers (whose names are given) being two hundred" (lxxix, n. 2); thirdly, it was made very expensively, "on very stout paper". It is for this reason that I asserted at the close of the third chapter that Crowley's edition dominated *Piers Plowman* studies for some three hundred years:

[1] Not called such, and thought to be the original version by him.

Whitaker's edition was both rare and, as Charlotte Brewer notes,[2] no more accessible for reading than Crowley's: "Whitaker's edition was unsatisfactory for several reasons. The black-letter type probably made it less accessible to some readers; while the text itself was transcribed from the MS with marked inaccuracy, rendering a good deal of it unintelligible" (3). In addition, Skeat notes that booksellers' catalogues slandered Whitaker's edition in an attempt to defend their monopoly (lxxix-lxxx, n. 3). Whitaker's is the first modern edition of the poem, but its overall appearance and apparatus seem not much different from the Crowley-Rogers editions: both quartos, in black-letter type, with introductions, commentary, annotations, and like the Rogers edition, a glossary. It would appear that, once again, Crowley influenced the reading of *Piers Plowman* even so far as the physical format of the next edition.

Thomas Wright's 1842 edition of what has since come to be known as the B-text broke new ground, so to speak, by presenting the poem in a duodecimo format in two volumes. This was a questionable decision, as it all but forces him to cut the long alliterative lines in half and to crowd lines from below into those above:

> "I kan noght construe al this,"
> quod Haukyn, [lissh."
> "Ye moste kenne me this on Eng-
> "In Englissh," quod Pacience,
> "It is wel hard wel to expounen ;
> Ac som deel I shal seyen it,
> By so thow understonde : 9466

(Wright 290, lines 9461-66; cf. B XIV.276-78)

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[2] In "The Z-Text of *Piers Plowman*," in the Bodleian facsimile of the Z-text, 1-21.

Wright's edition has plenty of white space for notes by the reader, as one might imagine given such a cramped production of the text. The editor has done much here to distort the text as it appears in the manuscripts, essentially re-inventing the rules of metrical representation to suit the circumstances of publication. One cannot help but read the text differently when the lines are presented this way. Nevertheless, the edition is called "excellent and well-known" by Skeat, who confesses his "*very great* obligations to it. Without its help my work would, at the least, have been doubled" (*Parallel Text* lxxvi-lxxvii, n. 5, his emphasis). We may note that Wright prints the *Creed* after *Piers Plowman* in the second volume, as Owen Rogers did in 1561.

Skeat continues to be regarded with reverence as the editor who solved the *Piers Plowman* puzzle, at least in so far as he was the first to distinguish three distinct versions of the poem, however we may disagree on the order in which they were written, or by whom. Skeat is the first to edit the poem "in any real sense" (Edwards 46). With his editions, since he set the standard for modern editors of the poem, we are less concerned with the physical format of the poem than with the procedures he used to edit and emend the texts. In the article recently cited, Brewer demonstrates that Skeat was initially lacking in experience, and so judgement, when he undertook the project, but learned much from the process as the work continued. An example of this might be his assumption that the A-text preceded the other versions, based mostly on the authority of the Vernon MS,

which Skeat thought was very old, and which he chose as his copy-text.[3] He seems to have been susceptible to trusting his copy-texts implicitly, once they were chosen. As was mentioned in the second chapter, he prints the interlinear glosses from Huntington MS HM 137 for the seven deadly sins in *Text C*. He interprets the presence of corrector's marks in his copy-text for *Text B*, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 581 [L] to be the author's own: "they *mark the passages which the author intended to alter, and, in every case, actually did alter*, viz. in the C-text" (ix, his emphasis). In time, as Edwards points out, he gained "[s]uch confidence in his own powers that he did not need to present evidence or offer cautionary indications of his activities"; an admirer of Thomas Tyrwhitt, he developed "many of the tendencies inherent in Tyrwhitt's work, so that editorial method becomes further subordinated to the manifestation of editorial genius" (47).

So powerful has Skeat's personal aura been that there is a tendency among scholars to regard the modern editions of *Piers Plowman* by the Athlone Press as "definitive", not merely because they are very complete and "magisterial" editions of the versions' extant manuscripts (excepting a few rejected texts, of which the Z-text is the most controversial), but also, almost, as though they have ascended to this position by a sort of right-of-succession, first from Skeat to Chambers and Grattan, and now "under the

[3] Skeat's priorities in choosing this manuscript over others would seem questionable today: "This MS. was taken for its *text*, not solely because it is the oldest and best written, but also because a careful collation of it has shewn that its readings are, on the whole, better than those of any other. It seems to me to be the best known MS. of "Piers Plowman" *in every respect*" (*Text A* xvi, his emphasis).

general editorship of Chambers's student, George Kane" (A. J. Colaianne 26).[4] Moreover, as Edwards points out, certain editorial attitudes seem to have survived this "line of descent from Tyrwhitt and Skeat" unchanged; in the Kane and Donaldson edition of the B version, "[e]ditorial method - the use of recension - is abandoned in preference to editorial judgement. This involves extensive emendation, and the establishing of a number of readings unsupported by any authority" (47).

When Robert Crowley published the first printed edition of *Piers Plowman*, he set in motion a chain of events which continues to our present day. So long as there is a readership which will consume it in an edited format such as we have come to expect, this process may never end. Modern editions of *Piers Plowman*, despite their claims to the contrary, can never really succeed in reaching back to an original, authorial text. In many ways, both in terms of what they attempt to do and what they can expect to achieve, an edition of *Piers Plowman* today is really no different in its essentials from that first one of 1550. This is true insofar as it represents (depending on one's point of view) an attempt at *restoration* of the text of an author's original intentions based on textual evidence, an *intrusion* upon the integrity of the "real" text which is used to create an imaginary "restored" text, or an *addition* to the tradition of texts which proliferate around

[4] For example, until the recent collection of essays edited by Vaughan in honour of David C. Fowler appeared, it has been unheard of to cite from the Knott and Fowler edition of the A-text. Schmidt's edition of the B-text is cited often, and one wonders if, given his approval of the Z-text, if scholars who cite from either it or Kane and Donaldson are effectively "choosing sides" in that debate. One is almost thankful that Russell's edition has yet to challenge Pearsall's.

the first copies made of the original.[5] Whatever an "edition" of a text is, it is not the restoration that its editor would like it to be: "The eclectic edition is by definition *not* a single authorial construct but a polyglot formation imagined by the editor" (McGann 71). These same editions can, however, only be seen as intrusions if we take a position which ascribes total authority to an original (imaginative and therefore transcendental) form of the text, something we cannot know of beyond what we can see or touch. It therefore follows that modern editions, no differently than their predecessors, are essentially additions to the general accumulation and diffusion of texts surrounding the hypothetical archetypes, and might in fact be studied as such, in no different a manner than we might study manuscripts.[6] There is, in a sense, as much that can be learned from studying modern *Piers Plowman* printed editions as there is to be learned from studying manuscripts of the text.

Editors of medieval manuscripts in earlier, less skeptical days, would sometimes, like Skeat, speculate that they held in their hands "the author's autograph," as if this alone would be sufficient for our understanding of the text. It may well be under a New Critical approach to the text, which seeks nothing more than an authorial text upon which

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[5] This is true even from the point of view of general physical appearance. The book has had, since the mid-sixteenth century, as Febvre and Martin point out, "an appearance which is essentially the same as the one it has today" (78). While this may indeed vary from country to country, e.g., Germans were still using black-letter (Gothic) type well into this century, we may still say that there is more in common between texts such as Crowley's and the modern texts consciously produced as *editions*, i.e., as printed books, than between the same books and their handwritten counterparts, due to the differences in process.

[6] This is not meant to devalue or invalidate the work done by editors to provide readers with coherent and accessible texts, but rather to recognize that such work is part of a general pattern of activity in a larger historical process.

to perform operations, not taking into account its wider context, such as what it meant to its first readers. We must be careful, however, not to repeat the same kind of mistake, for example by assuming that an interface with a facsimile somehow surmounts all cultural and historical barriers between us and the past. Christopher De Hamel notes the difference in texture between manuscripts and printed books: "No facsimile can ever give the tactile experience of handling and running one's own fingers across soft leaves of medieval parchment. Even the smell is quite different from that of paper, and in fact varies enormously from one country to another" (13). It might be argued that my study suffers from the deprivation of such contact. There is probably nothing any medieval scholar would love more than to be able to peruse the manuscripts of such famous libraries as the Bodleian or the Bibliothèque Nationale. Yet once more, it is possible to read too much into such experiences, as Ralph Hanna argues:[7]

> The possibility of some unmediated contact with The Medieval seems to me a foolish nostalgia and longing for what cannot be attained [...] Further, the notion that a manuscript provides some unmediated contact is [...] quite simply unsustainable. And the claim that a facsimile or diplomatic presentation allows such direct contact with the past ignores rather different mediations - a facsimile does not mean in modern book culture what the manuscript would have meant in fifteenth-century book culture, for example.
>
> (in Minnis and Brewer 128-29, n. 48)

We, of course, are not seeking "unmediated contact with The Medieval"; nor am I claiming to contact the past through investigations of manuscripts in facsimile. Like biologists who examine microorganisms under a slide through a beam of light, we must

[7] In "Producing Manuscripts and Editions," in A. J. Minnis and Charlotte Brewer 109-30.

keep in mind that our instruments tend to have effects on the very phenomena we are trying to observe. This does not invalidate the attempt to make observations where we can and to share them with others for discussion. Jacques Derrida pointed out to us that language itself is also problematic as a tool; yet it remains the only tool we have.

Recently Hoyt Duggan and others have begun a collaboration toward a new electronic edition of the B version of *Piers Plowman*, one which Duggan claims may well make irrelevant the arguments that have arisen over the Athlone editions and other debates in medieval textual studies, the history of which in the twentieth century is, in his words: "an unhappy one of rancorous quarrels between 'best text' editors and the more venturesome interventionist 'critical' editors who attempt to reconstruct from the manuscripts the precise wording of an author's original" (55-56). Duggan argues that both viewpoints are correct and only mutually exclusive within the narrow confines of the printed book, due to both practical and economic considerations: for example, Kane and Donaldson's B version would be much larger if they printed both subarchetypes of B along with their emended text. Unlike the electronic version of Schmidt's B-text, the one Duggan describes will not be a simple transcription of such an edition and incidental concordance: "the electronic edition makes it possible for us to attempt a text answering the demands of some scholarly readers who want texts of manuscript versions as well as of those readers who want the closest approximation to Langland's original that can be achieved" (66). It will contain transcriptions of eight manuscripts (CFGHm/Hm_2LMRW) for the construction of the archetype, include annotations, describe physical features,

scribal additions and corrections "and any other codicological information the editors deem relevant to potential users"; photographic copies may also be recorded "in full graphic form" (67). Most significantly, readers will be able to manipulate the texts (70). The new *Piers Plowman*, then, is not simply one new edition; it exists as a *potential* of editions, an infinite number of incarnations for every reader who wishes to invoke them. The "first bare-bones edition" was to appear in 1996 or 1997, assuming full funding could be secured (Duggan 70 n. 19).

Though it is a little early to comment about a new addition to the media forms of *Piers Plowman*, especially one that has yet to appear, I think it is at least worth considering Duggan's claim that such editions will render former arguments over editorial procedure irrelevant. Personally, I do not think they will. Though readers may some day be able to make their own decisions about what they read and how, those decisions still have to be made, and they will be informed by the same implications, if not followed by the same effects. If I, as a reader of *Piers Plowman*, am able to produce my own text based on different choices than those made by Kane, Schmidt, or Pearsall — the reader becoming the editor-inventor of his own text — then I must still explain (and justify) my decisions, one way or another, to those readers whom I ask to read it or, for that matter, accept any interpretation I have of it. The electronic text may clear up problems from the point of view of mass production and mass distribution, but at the level of common discussion of a text or texts between scholars, there must still be an agreed upon base-text, a known quantity, from which the discussion starts; or failing this, a new, made-up text, whose status must still be explained if not defended.

IV

Appendices

A

List of *Piers Plowman* Texts (Manuscripts and Early Printed Books)

Fragments preceded by an asterisk.

A-text MSS

	A	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Ashmole 1468
	D	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Douce 323
	$E(T_2)$	Dublin	Trinity College	213 (Erin MS)
	H	London	British Library	Harley 875
	J(I)	New York	Pierpoint Morgan Library	M818 (Ingilby MS)
	L	London	Lincoln's Inn Library	Hale 150
	M	London	Society of Antiquaries	687
*	Pem	Cambridge	University Library	Pembroke College s312 c6
	R	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Rawlinson Poetry 137
	U	Oxford	Bodleian Library	University College 45
	V	Oxford	Bodleian Library	English Poetry a 1 (Vernon MS)

Conjoint AC-text MSS (not inlcuding Z)

	Ch	Liverpool	Sidney Jones Library	F 4.8 (Chaderton MS)
	H_2	London	British Library	Harley 6041
	K(Di)	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Digby 145
	N	Aberystwyth	National Library of Wales	733B
	T	Cambridge	Trinity College	R 3.14
	W	?	privately owned	(formerly the Duke of Westminster's MS)

B-text MSS

	C	Cambridge	University Library	Dd 1.17
	C_2	Cambridge	University Library	Ll 4.14
	Ca	Cambridge	Caius College	201 (transcript of Rogers' ed.)
	F	Oxford	Corpus Christi College	201
	G	Cambridge	University Library	Gg 4.31
	Hm	San Marino	Huntington Library	HM 128
*	Hm_2	fragments in Hm		
	L	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Laud Misc. 581
	M	London	British Library	Additional 35287
	O	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Oriel College 79
	R	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Rawlinson Poetry 38
	S	Tokyo	T. Takamiya's collection	23 (formerly the Sion College MS)
*	Sl	London	British Library	Sloane 2578
	W	Cambridge	Trinity College	B 15.17
	Y	Cambridge	Newnham College	Yates Thompson MS

Conjoint BA-text MS (B PRO.-V.127 + A V.106-XI)

	H_3	London	British Library	Harley 3954

C-text MSS

*	Ca	Cambridge	Gonville and Caius College	669*/646, fol. 210[r]
	D	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Douce 104
	E	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Laud Misc. 656
	F	Cambridge	University Library	Ff 5.35
	G	Cambridge	University Library	Dd 3.13
*	H	Cambridge	privately owned	formerly Prof. John Holloway's MS
	I*	London	Sterling Library	V 88 (Ilchester MS)
	K	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Digby 171
	M	London	British Library	Cotton Vespasian B xvi
	N	London	British Library	Harley 2376
	P	San Marino	Huntington Library	HM 137
	P_2	London	British Library	Additional 34779
	Q	Cambridge	University Library	Additional 4325
	R	London	British Library	Royal 18 B XVII
	S	Cambridge	Corpus Christi College	293
	St	London	Sterling Library	V 17 (third part of former Clopton MS)
	U	London	British Library	Additional 35157
	V	Dublin	Trinity College	212
	X	San Marino	Huntington Library	HM 143
	Y	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Digby 102

Conjoint CAB-text MSS (C PRO.-II.131 + A II.90-198 (expanded) + B III-XX)

Bm	London	British Library	Additional 10574
Bo	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Bodley 814
Cot	London	British Library	Cotton Caligula A xi

Conflated 'D'-text MS of A, B, and C

Ht	San Marino	Huntington Library	HM 114

The Z-text MS (Z PRO.-VIII.92 [≈ A PRO.-VIII.88] + A VIII.89-184 + C IX-XXII)

Z	Oxford	Bodleian Library	Bodley 851

Early Printed Editions by Robert Crowley (1550) and Owen Rogers (1561)

	STC	
Cr_1	19906	*The vision of Pierce Plowman, now fyrste imprynted by Roberte Crowley...*
Cr_2	19907	----------, *nowe the seconde tyme imprinted by Roberte Crowlye...*
Cr_3	19907[a]	----------, *nowe the seconde time imprinted by Roberte Crowley...*
Cr_4	19908	----------, *newlye imprynted after the authors olde copy... Whereunto is also annexed the Crede of Pierce Plowman...* [2 vols.; rpt of Cr_3 + *STC* 19904, *Pierce the Ploughmans crede* (1553)]

* The Prologue of the manuscript is mainly A-text with interpolations from later parts of C. See Derek Pearsall, "The 'Ilchester' Manuscript of *Piers Plowman*".

B

List of Texts in Part 4 of the Vernon Manuscript

319^{r}	*Stimulus Amoris* (*Prickynge of Love*)
334^{r}	*Nine Points Best Pleasing to God*;
	Unkind Man;
	Rolle, *A Commandment of Love to God*
334^{v}	Rolle, *Form of (Perfect) Living*
338^{r}	Rolle, *Ego Dormio*
339^{r}	Hilton, *Qui Habitat*
341^{r}	Hilton, *Bonum Est*
343^{r}	Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*
353^{v}	Hilton, *Mixed Life*
356^{r}	*Mirror of St. Edmund*
359^{r}	*The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*
361^{r}	*The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*
363^{v}	*The Spirit of Guy*
366^{v}	*A Form of Confession*
367^{v}	*A Talking of the Love of God*
371^{v}	*Roule of Reclous (Ancrene Riwle)*
392^{r}	*The Pains of Sin and the Joys of Heaven*
393^{r}	*The Life of Adam and Eve*
394^{v}	*Piers Plowman* (A version)
402	*Joseph of Arimathea*
404^{v}	Judas and Pilate, from *The South English Legendary*

(adapted from S. S. Hussey in Pearsall *Studies* 61-62)

C

'Glossary' from Cambridge University Library MS Ll 4.14

169^{v}	Rapely	quickly
170^{r}	FFreyne	aske
	Rape	hie wente spedyly
	lo	
	carpe	talke
	clutche	scratche
	preynte	
	Quaue	shake or tre*m*ble, quake
	thole	suffre
	hoved	stode abode
	Cheve	Thryve
	tyne	loste
	ffordo	dist^{o}yeth [i.e. destroyeth]
	wyn or wen	goo
	ffrete	taste
	tynde	light
	louke	w^{t}draw. lose
	Þole	Open. entre. suffre/
	besquatt	broke
	Affrounte	
	Auntre	ventre
	Rome	goo/ passe
	Swynke	Labo^{r}
	Rytte	
	Lake	playe
	Courbe	knele downe
	Appende	appertaigne
	Steke	Shytt
	Thyrle	perced
	Comsid	spake
	Ffonge	take
	vnderfonge	vnd*er*take
	latch	catch or take
	nymme	take
	Wysse	tell or teach
	Yeme	guide or rule
	Worthe	is worthy. com*e* happen or befall to
	lythe	here
	Byd	praye. aske
	Bekenne	
	Broke	
	hote	
	hale	drawe
	pylte	thruste or caste
	Nempne	call or name
	Shende	blame
	Welde	
170^{v}	lewte	
	Endaunte	
	Segge	Man
	Blasen	
	Mechell	bygnes
	alther	Elder
	lollynge	
	Rapeliche	quickly
	Wightliche	
	3eme	heede
	lorell	lyers
	liode	p*er*sone
	Sparliche	
	Stalworthe	
	Skyll	
	loyall	
	Smache	
	Glede	
	Glowynge	
	kyse	
	Merke	darknes
	Smolder	smoke
	doel or doule	Sorow
	palcot	
	Bale	Sorow
	kene	sharpe
	witterly	well
	Ffelly	
	Fferly	m*er*vaile
	leeme	brightnes
	merkenes	darkenes
	May*n*pren*o*ur	
	Queyntyse	crafte. soteltie
	Gobelyn	Deule
	lusarde	
	Thralle	bonde
	Crokke	pott
	Yerne	
	Shene	bright. clere.
	Gresly	ferefull
	Boorne	Ryvere Wat^{r}
	Tofte	a hyll. mountayne
	Loby	
	Renable	
	Bie	a coler or cheyne
	hals	hele
	hoove	Robe coyfe
	lere	Countenaunce. chere

D

Treatment of Latin Quotations in the Manuscripts

A	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
A		YES	YES			YES		
D	YES		YES			SOME		
$E(T_2)$		YES						
H	SOME	YES	SOME					
J(I)		PERHAPS						
L		YES						
M			SOME			SOME	SOME	
R	SOME		YES					
U			YES					
V	*Latin not distinguished*							

AC	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
Ch			YES					
H_2		YES	SOME (initial)					
K(Di)		YES						
N			YES	SOME		SOME		
T			YES	YES				
W	SOME					SOME		

B	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
C		YES	YES	YES				
C_2	YES		YES					
F	SOME	YES	YES					
G			YES			SOME		
Hm								SOME
L			YES	YES				
M			YES	SOME				
O	YES		YES			SOME		
R			YES	YES				
S		YES						YES
W		YES	YES	YES				
Y			YES	SOME				

BA	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
H_3			YES					

	C	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
	D	YES		YES					
	E						SOME	SOME	
	F						SOME	SOME	
	G	YES	YES	YES					
*	H			YES					
	I			YES					
	K			YES					
	M			YES	SOME (lines above/below)				
	N			SOME	SOME				
	P			YES					YES
	P_2			YES					
	Q	YES		YES					
	R	YES	YES						
	S			YES					
	St			YES					
	U	SOME	YES	YES				SOME	
	V			YES	SOME		SOME		
	X	YES		SOME		SOME			
	Y	YES	YES	YES					

	CAB	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
	Bm	YES		YES					
	Bo	YES		YES		YES			
	Cot							YES	

	Other	UNDER-LINED	LARGER HAND	RED	BOX	PARAPH	RULED MARGIN	MARK	OTHER SCRIPT
	Ht			YES					
	Z	ONCE (in C-text)							

E

Illustrations from Huntington MS HM 143

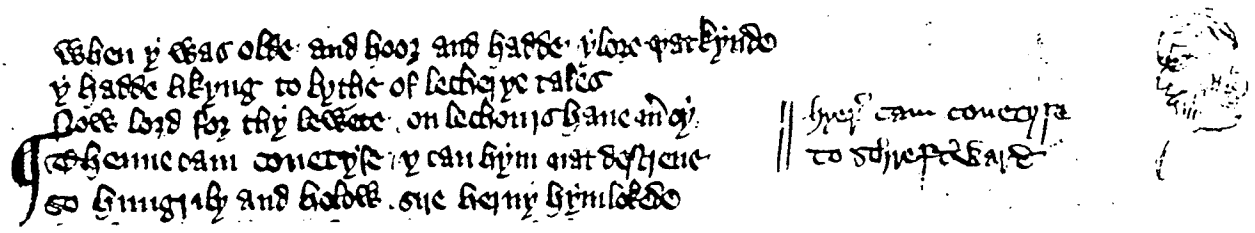

Figure 1. Avarice

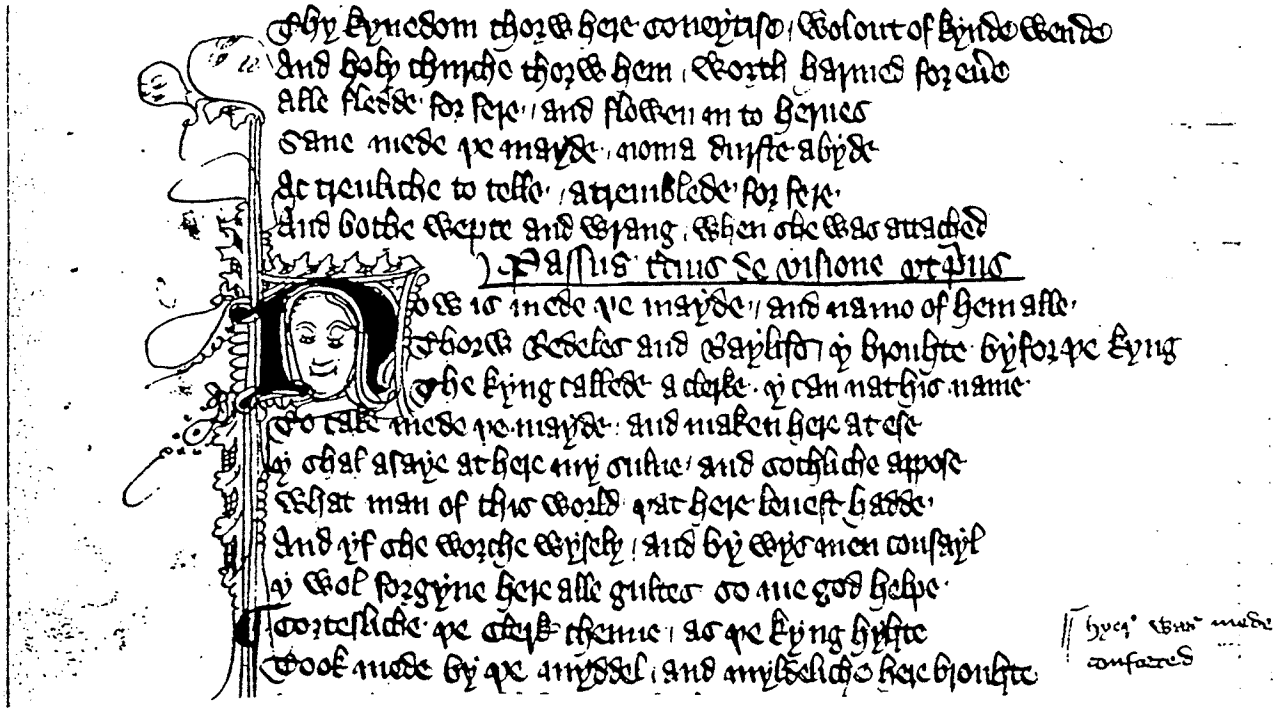

Figure 2. Meed and Faces

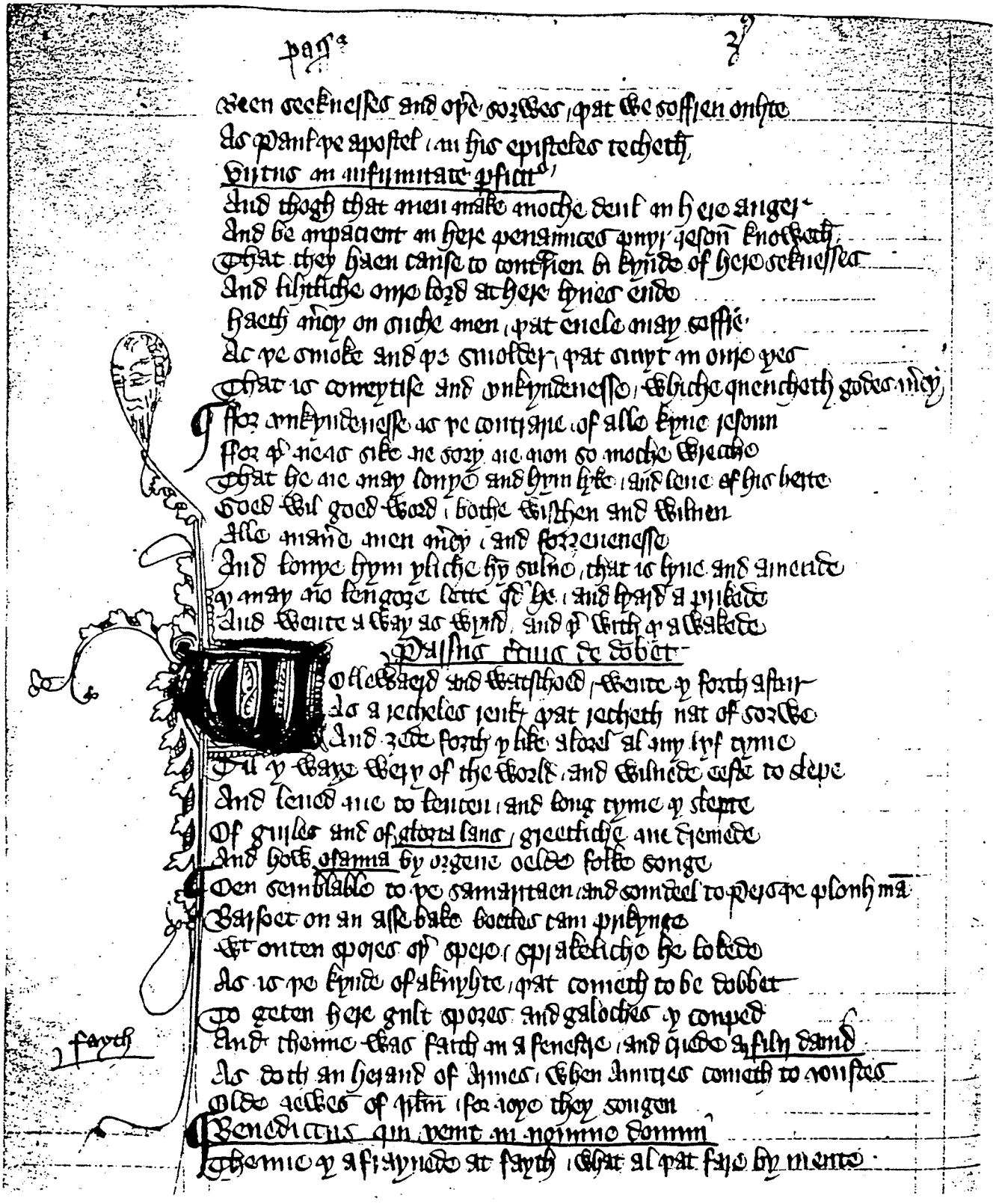

Figure 3. The Dreamer

F
Illustrations from Bodleian MS Douce 104

Figure 1. Wrath

Figure 2. Death

Figure 3. Lechery

Figure 4. Avarice

Figure 5. Sloth

V

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