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Review Essay: An Edition of the Archetype of *Piers Plowman* B

Ian Cornelius

2019

John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, eds, *The 'Piers Plowman' Electronic Archive*, ix: *The B-Version Archetype*. PPEA Print Series, vol. 1. Raleigh, NC: SEENET, 2018. Pp. xi + 375. Available online at <http://piers.chass.ncsu.edu/texts/Bx>.

1 Introduction

This is the first scholarly edition of the B version of *Piers Plowman* to appear since the landmark editions of George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (1975, rev. 1988) and A. V. C. Schmidt (1978, rev. 1995 and 2011). Edited by John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre and drawing upon three decades of labour by many hands, this new edition embodies major advances over its predecessors, as one would hope. Although *The B-Version Archetype* will not stand on its own as a new citation text and is not intended to do so, it supplies the best record now available of the received text of *Piers Plowman* B and deserves close study by all scholars of Langland's poem. Published on-line in 2014, the edition has now appeared in print, as the inaugural volume in the *Piers Plowman* Electronic Archive Print Series.

2 The Text and its Annotations

Burrow, Turville-Petre, and their collaborators at the *Piers Plowman* Electronic Archive (PPEA) have produced an 'intermittently critical edition', in approximately the sense called for by Robert Adams in a major article that appeared in 1992, at the beginning of work on PPEA.¹ The target of Adams's critique was Kane and Donaldson's Athlone edition, which had attracted early criticism from several quarters. In advocating an intermittently critical edition, Adams objected to the Athlone edition's textual eclecticism, frequent conjectural emendations, and heavy importation of readings from the earlier (that is, A) version of the poem. Kane and Donaldson had maintained that these procedures, though extreme, were justified by the state of the text they undertook to edit: in their assessment, the common archetype of B-version copies was pervasively corrupt; moreover, the lineal relations between surviving copies had been so obscured by convergent variation as to render a stemma useless as a tool for editorial reconstruction of the text. Adams, among others, countered both claims: many archetypal readings rejected as scribal by the Athlone editors can be interpreted otherwise as 'minute, sporadic

¹Adams, 'Editing *Piers Plowman* B'.

authorial revision’;² moreover, the B version is indeed susceptible to conventional stemmatic analysis and is distinguishable from the A version in this respect. The founding objective of PPEA was to implement Adams’s analysis in a new text of *Piers Plowman* B.³ Burrow and Turville-Petre’s *B-Version Archetype* is the fruit of this team effort.

The new edition is guided by two basic rules, governing the method and target of editorial reconstruction, respectively. By renouncing the eclectic method, Burrow and Turville-Petre forbid themselves from emending their base text to any reading, however good, whose attestations among surviving witnesses cannot be traced back to their common archetype by standard procedures of stemmatic recension. By setting out to reconstruct only the common archetype of all B-version copies, the editors renounce emendation of their base text in any case where its error, however obvious, was present already at the start of the visible transmission of the B version. Accordingly, the text set by Burrow and Turville-Petre gives *Piers Plowman* not as Langland may be presumed to have wished it, but as the poem evidently existed when it began to circulate. *The B-Version Archetype* follows closely the three copies most proximate to the hypothesized common ancestor: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc. 581 (L), London, British Library, MS Additional 35287 (M), and London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 398, fols 77–80, continued in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poetry 38 (R). L is the base manuscript, selected for this purpose as complete, clearly written, early, and very careful (Introduction, § III.1 and V.1; pp. 10–11, 26–27).⁴

Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.17 (W), which served as copy-text for both Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt, is likewise a good early manuscript, but it is separated from the archetype by at least three additional copying generations (see Adams’s B-version stemma, reproduced at Introduction, § II.1, p. 4). W’s consistent and historically accurate spellings, rightly admired by previous editors, are an intelligent scribal sophistication and do not descend from the B archetype. The spellings of the archetype are largely irrecoverable: Burrow and Turville-Petre summarize what can be known (Introduction, § IV.1, pp. 16–19), drawing on a key study by M. L. Samuels and on subsequent work. One may prefer W’s consistency; L’s language is a salutary reminder that the poem does not inhere in any (ortho)graphic presentation of it, but rather in a reader’s informed and interpretative engagement with such spellings as are on offer. I return to this point below.

While following the rule of copy-text with respect to spellings, the editors handle punctuation and paragraphing exactly as they do substantive readings, aiming to reconstruct these features of the lost archetypal manuscript. This is unusual, and welcome. The paragraphing of the archetypal manuscript is usually reconstructible and seems occasionally to have induced text loss at the first post-archetypal stage of transmission, by eyeskip from paraph to paraph (Introduction, § II.2, § IV.3, and § V.2.2; pp. 6–7, 23, 27–8). Accidental and substantive features are intertwined; paragraphing constitutes a relevant component of the textual record.

The archetypal punctuation is likewise reconstructible, and its relevance to this edition is as a visual registration of metrical structure (Introduction, § IV.4 and § V.2.3; pp. 24, 28–9). Early copies of Middle English alliterative verse typically register the bipartite structure of the line with a mark of punctuation at the caesura. Walter W. Skeat respected this medieval practice; the twentieth-century

²Adams, ‘Editing *Piers Plowman* B’, p. 48.

³See the grant proposal, published as Duggan, ‘Electronic *Piers Plowman* B’.

⁴I cite the Introduction by section number and by page number in the print edition.

editors of *Piers Plowman* did not, to the detriment of their understanding of Langland's verse technique. Although L omits mid-line punctuation in about 5 percent of lines, punctuation may be supplied from other copies, especially R. The result is a highly accurate record of line structure. My understanding of this feature differs unequivocally from that of the Bx scribe only once in the first two dreams: Bx.7.100 divides after *wommen*.⁵ In another five lines in this stretch of the poem, the editors inadvertently misrepresented the evidence for punctuation of Bx in the first edition of the web publication. These errors were communicated to the editors and have been corrected in the print edition.

Following Adams's demonstrations, Burrow and Turville-Petre take the agreement of L and R to establish the reading of Bx.⁶ Where these two copies disagree or R is absent, the rest of the B tradition comes into play, of which the most important witnesses are M before correction, the beta2 group (which includes W), and R's eccentric twin, Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (F). In narrowly delimited circumstances, the editors also consult the substantive readings of cognate lines in the other versions of *Piers Plowman*: A and C readings may be admitted as evidence of Bx when the distribution of variants in the B tradition fails to establish any one reading as archetypal (Introduction, § V.3.2, pp. 30–1). Conjectural emendation also remains an editorial tool, but only where the best B-version manuscripts are all evidently in error and no reading is construable as the source of the others (Introduction, § V.3.3, p. 32). These procedures introduce vulnerabilities: consultation of A/C readings inevitably introduces the risk of versional conflation; by according primary authority to L and R, the editors expose their text to misdirection whenever those two copies independently coincide in error. Burrow and Turville-Petre are aware of the first vulnerability, which is why they place tight restrictions on inter-versional comparison. The second vulnerability is not likely to affect many readings. No set of editorial procedures will be fail-safe. The procedures adopted here are sensible and responsive to the circumstances. Among the happy results is a text free of the dubious conjectural emendations *alliterationis causa* that appear in the editions of Kane and Donaldson and Schmidt.⁷

As illustration of Burrow and Turville-Petre's editorial practice, I offer observations on passus 7, where R suffered no losses and most B-version lines have cognates in the A and C versions. L and R give divergent readings at eighty-two points in this stretch of text. For sixty-two of the L/R divergences, Burrow and Turville-Petre document their editorial reasoning in a note. (Of the twenty uncommented divergences, most are minor mechanical errors unique to R, and all receive notice from Adams in his copiously annotated edition of that copy.) Such documentation is, indeed, the principal function of the textual notes in *The B-Version Archetype*: where the editors were obliged to look beyond the

⁵I have not checked the later passūs with equal care, but Bx.12.281 divides after *pecok*, as several scribes recognized. A small handful of lines admit doubt. Corruption of the text prevents a confident division at Bx.1.210. Bx.5.526 is difficult because the line switches into Latin. Bx.5.646 is difficult because the phrasal construction *help out* was evidently not well established in Middle English, whereas the construction *help out of* was very common.

⁶R and L are the most faithful representatives of their respective families, representing the primary split in the stemma of B version copies. The alpha family consists of two copies only, R and Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (F). All other copies belong to the beta family. It follows that the editors' text is correspondingly less certain in those segments of the poem where R is absent. See Introduction § V.3.2, where the editors describe the passage from Bx.18.428 to 20.26 as 'the part of our text of which we are least confident' (p. 32).

⁷Where Kane and Donaldson conjecture rearrangement of sentence elements to fix the alliterative pattern (*Piers Plowman*, ed. by Kane and Donaldson, pp. 118–20 and 194), they produce ten lines ending in a stressed monosyllable — an astonishing incidence of a very rare prosodic contour. One may suspect that Langland wrote these lines as he did expressly to avoid the line shapes devised by the Athlone editors. Schmidt's emendations are more astute in this respect. Langland's avoidance of stressed monosyllables in line-terminal position is established by Barney, 'Langland's Prosody', pp. 82–85, supported by Burrow, 'Endings of Lines'.

most faithful manuscripts, they record their assessment of the evidence. Reciprocally, where L and R are isolated in their agreement, or joined by few other copies in preservation of a presumptively archetypal reading lost in the rest of the tradition, this situation may also be noted (e.g., Bx.5.561n, Bx.7.77 n. to *þe*, and Bx.14.116n). More rarely, notes offer discussion of ambiguous spellings (e.g., Bx.7.104 n. to A and Bx.14.211 n. to *penaunce*), or unusual syntax (e.g., Bx.7.20n and Bx.7.76n), or aspects of the archetype's inferential paragraphing and punctuation. Notes on paragraphing and punctuation show how these 'accidental' features may register anomalies in the transmitted text (e.g., Bx.7.188n), or, more speculatively, how they may have affected transmission of the text (e.g., Bx.9.172–3n and Bx.10.313–25n). Some few notes (more on these in a moment) offer an opinion on the original reading of *Piers Plowman* B.

The notes, then, record the editors' confidence — or the opposite — in their lection-by-lection reconstruction of the archetype. Readers who want to know where and how this reconstructed archetype departs from the published editions of *Piers Plowman* B will need to do their own work. The editors do not collate their text against previous editions, and their textual notes rarely cite the opinions of previous editors.⁸ At Bx.7.170, the editors implicitly dispute the judgement of Kane, Kane and Donaldson, and Schmidt, defending the reading *cleue* as archetypal in the B tradition and original to both the A and B versions of the poem.⁹ A pair of notes at Bx.7.138 and Bx.7.142 likewise take direction from Langland's scriptural intertexts, yielding opinions variously divergent from previous editions. I leave the second of these aside as straightforward. The first warrants closer attention because Burrow and Turville-Petre should probably have allowed their annotation to inform the text they print. The lines are spoken by Piers in his dispute with the priest, and they read as follows in L:

And but if Luke lye · he lereth vs bi foules
 We shulde nouȝt be to bisy · aboute þe worldes blisse
 Ne solliciti sitis · he seyth in þe gospel
 And sheweth vs bi ensamples · vs-selue to wisse
 Þe foules on þe felde · who fynt hem mete at wynter
 Haue þei no gernere to go to · but god fynt hem alle. (Bx.7.138–43)

In place of 'he lereth vs bi foules' (he instructs us by/with birds) RF have 'or lereth vs be foles' (or teaches us to be fools), which, as Burrow and Turville-Petre remark, 'cannot be the sense intended'. The editors follow copy-text, but an extended note offers what is, in effect, a friendly amendment to Schmidt's resolution of this crux: Langland's B version probably read 'And but if Luke lye · he lereth vs to be foles'. The line is a torqued reference to the *stultus* of Luke 12. 20, the doomed man who foolishly consoles himself with his amassed possessions. On this understanding, Langland's citation would, characteristically, shift the emphasis of his scriptural text, emphasizing that Jesus's instruction 'Ne solliciti sitis' (Matthew 6. 25–34; cf. Luke 12. 22) enjoins neither sanity nor prudence, but foolishness of another stripe, the unworldliness of Paul's *stulti* (I Corinthians 4. 10), termed '(goddes) foles' much later in development of the poem (Bx.20.60–79, RK.11.248).¹⁰ If Langland wrote 'he lereth vs to

⁸The notes to passus 7 refer to the Kane-Donaldson edition only three times: twice to flag rare transcription errors in the Athlone apparatus (Bx.7.62n and Bx.7.152n; see further the nn. ad loc. in *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive: R*, ed. by Adams) and once to offer an alternative interpretation of a scribal spelling (Bx.7.87n). The editions by Schmidt and J. A. W. Bennett are noticed, once each, for their efforts to construe the received text (Bx.7.99n and Bx.7.138n).

⁹Compare Schmidt's justification in his *Parallel Text Edition*, ii, 376. So far as I can see, the Athlone volumes do not comment on this line. (I consult these volumes with the help of Barney, 'Line-Number Index'.)

¹⁰Line references preceded by 'RK' are to *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Russell and Kane. Similarly, 'KD' refers to *Piers*

be foles’, then the infinitival marker *to* was lost already in the archetype, through scribal oversight, and Burrow and Turville-Petre should have printed ‘he lereth vs [be foles]’ as the reading of Bx. (For infinitival *to*, the editors cite the syntax of Bx.19.256; the construction without *to* is also acceptable and could be original.) An archetypal reading ‘he lereth vs be foles’ would have opened the way to homoeographic misprision in the beta hyparchetype (*be foles - bi foules*), induced by attraction to the *foules on þe felde* four lines below. (The spelling *be* may represent either the verb or the preposition.) The scribe of the alpha hyparchetype read ‘be foles’ correctly but — puzzled at what he took to be a misrepresentation of gospel teaching — voided Langland’s meaning. Kane and Donaldson accepted the beta reading ‘foules’ as the basis for intricate textual surgery, thereby bringing the B version into agreement with Kane’s *A Version*: ‘And but 3if luk lei3e · he lerip vs anoþer | [By foules, þat are not] besy...’ (K.8.111–12a, my punctuation; cf. KD.7.129–30a). The phrase ‘vs anoþer’, which is present in most A copies, looks suspiciously like scribal smoothing, as Schmidt suggests. It was probably introduced to pad out the line following mislineation early in the A tradition.

The crux at Bx.7.138 shows that, on occasion,¹¹ reconstruction of the archetype is a secondary endeavour, possible only after one has formed an opinion about what Langland is likely to have written. This is the way that opinions regarding the (authorial) authenticity of Bx crop up within the notes to *The B-Version Archetype*. At Bx.7.25 and its cognates, all three traditions show variation between singular and plural *wynnyng(e)*; Burrow and Turville-Petre concur implicitly with Kane and Donaldson that the distributive singular is the harder reading, more likely to generate the plural than vice versa.¹² They print the singular as the reading of Bx, but the logic by which they reach that conclusion also establishes the singular as the original reading in all three versions. (Schmidt prints the plural throughout, on the strength of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 851 [Z].)

On three occasions in their notes to passus 7, Burrow and Turville-Petre concur implicitly with Schmidt, supporting Bx as original at points where Kane and Donaldson emend. At Bx.7.20 *haliday* and Bx.7.76 *more nedier*, the Athlone reading looks like inconsistent application of editorial principles. *Haliday* is another distributive singular, hence probably the *lectio difficilior*. The double comparative *more nedier* may appear agrammatical, but if authentic it is also difficult; Kane and Donaldson accept double comparatives where they occur later in the poem, at Bx.11.165 (= KD.11.161) and Bx.15.206 (= KD.15.199). Interpretation of Bx.7.169, my last illustration, turns on alliterative pattern. The line reads ‘Daniel seyde sire Kynge · þi dredeles bitokneth’ and thus alliterates on /d/, as **ax/ax**, a pattern that Schmidt accepts as authentic but the Athlone editors did not. The pattern **ax/ax** is attested in about two hundred lines in Bx and was surely part of Langland’s repertoire.¹³

The notes singled out in the last three paragraphs are the ones in passus 7 in which Burrow and Turville-Petre offer an opinion on the authenticity of a Bx reading, and their opinion differs from one or both of the reference editions of the poem. Another fifteen notes in passus 7 may be construed to concur with both previous editions regarding the corruption (or not) of Bx.¹⁴ As I have emphasized,

Plowman, ed. by Kane and Donaldson, and ‘K’ to *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Kane. On *goddes foles* see *Parallel Text Edition*, ed. by Schmidt, ii, 376, 568; and Barney, *Penn Commentary*, p. 208.

¹¹That is, where alpha and beta are split, and assistance is not forthcoming from the A or C traditions.

¹²See the list of grammatically easier readings at *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Kane and Donaldson, p. 99.

¹³See Burrow, ‘Another Alliterative Pattern’. Kane and Donaldson defend their emendation of this line at *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Kane and Donaldson, p. 89.

¹⁴Notes to Bx.7.84, Bx.7.99 *3e*, Bx.7.104 *3oure*, Bx.7.115, Bx.7.152, and Bx.7.157 concur with Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt in judging Bx to be corrupt. Notes to Bx.7.21, Bx.7.24, Bx.7.31, Bx.7.60, Bx.7.68, Bx.7.74 *gileth*, Bx.7.117,

such notes represent exceptions to the editors' usual practice of annotation. My collation of passus 7 reveals 136 substantive divergences between *The B-Version Archetype* and Kane-Donaldson, or about one per 1.5 lines. I also find forty-nine divergences between *The B-Version Archetype* and Schmidt's text, or about one per 4.5 lines. Burrow and Turville-Petre annotate about a quarter of these divergences, but their focus is steadfastly on the quality of support for the reading presented as archetypal. They are austere faithful to their brief: to edit Bx, not Langland's B.

The 136 Bx/KD divergences are essentially what the published evaluations of the Athlone *B Version* would lead one to expect. In 112 instances, over 80 percent of the total, Kane and Donaldson replace the archetypal reading of the B tradition with the reading of the cognate line of Kane's *A Version*. This is the 'A radiation of B' diagnosed by Adams. In slightly over half of these cases, the rejected Bx reading is attested also in the A and/or C traditions. A special case, deserving separate notice, is formed by archetypal readings suppressed by Kane and Donaldson in the *B Version* yet present again, as archetypal, in the cognate C-version lines. (Typical examples may be found in Bx.7.6, 7.7, and 7.10; there are thirty instances in passus 7.) Though emended out in the Athlone *B Version*, such readings were generally admitted by Russell and Kane in the *C Version* — not because the editors changed their opinion of the readings, but because they believed Langland's second revision always remained incomplete, and that the poet never got around to ridding his text of inherited scribalisms. Critical responses to the Athlone edition did not fail to suggest alternative interpretations; *The B-Version Archetype* sets the evidence freshly open to scrutiny.¹⁵

Schmidt has always concurred with Kane and Donaldson in judging the B version archetype pervasively corrupt. Yet he intervenes less often than the Athlone editors. The forty-nine divergences between Schmidt's edited text of passus 7 and *The B-Version Archetype* comprise a subset of the *loci* identified as corrupt by Kane and Donaldson. I find three exceptions, where Kane and Donaldson agree with Burrow and Turville-Petre against Schmidt. One of these (Bx.7.25 *wynnyng*) I have already discussed. For Bx.7.8 (= KD.7.8) *pieres plowman*, Schmidt prints *Piers þe Plowman*; for Bx.7.214 (= KD.7.204) *while*, Schmidt prints *þe while*. In all three cases Schmidt follows alpha (R alone in 7.8), whereas Burrow and Turville-Petre present the beta reading. Schmidt and the editors of Bx simply reached different conclusions regarding which of the two families preserves the reading of the archetype. The triviality of these variants may support, *per contrarium*, Burrow and Turville-Petre's affirmation that 'the readings of Bx can usually be determined with confidence' (Preface to the Online Edition, p. ix). The editors further state that 'For what it is at this stage worth, we are of the opinion that Bx, though inevitably containing errors, is not a hopeless representative of Langland's B-version' (Introduction, § I, p. 3). In that judgement, they are closer to the position realized in Schmidt's edition than the PPEA team has been inclined to acknowledge. The new edition of Bx will challenge the romantic *Schwärmerei* of both Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt, but one result may be increased esteem for Schmidt's comparative editorial restraint.

Another result may be increased esteem for the A and C versions of Langland's poem. Langlandians

Bx.7.146, Bx.7.166, and Bx.7.196 implicitly concur with Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt in support of the reading inferred for Bx.

¹⁵It should go without saying that very many of Kane and Donaldson's emendations command respect. To give only one example: I thought that I could motivate the archetypal reading *gon faiten* (Bx.7.104) as a credible alternative to AC *gon and faiten*, but a reading of the entry for *go* in Wittig, 'Piers Plowman' Concordance, shows me that Langland's usage, as represented in the Athlone edition, conforms to *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, 'go. v.', 30a and 30c.

have long viewed the B version as the poet's greatest accomplishment — the polished jewel among the authorial versions of *Piers Plowman*, and the only version released to scribes in a finished state. The C version is characterized by incomplete revision and by its tendency towards flatter, more doctrinaire exposition. Yet the young poet may already have developed certain qualities characteristic of his older self: disinclination to put his work in a finished state; indifference to minor variation of his language; even an ability to discard a fine image. The postulate of B's artistic superiority figured in the Athlone edition as both an enabling editorial premise and an authoritative conclusion influencing subsequent critical work. *The B-Version Archetype* will encourage readers to rethink. Consider, again, the birds of the air and the provision of their nutriment. After 'The foweles in þe [firmament] · who fynt hem at wynter?' (KD.7.133, my punctuation; cf. Bx.7.142, quoted above), Kane and Donaldson import one line from the A version: 'Whan þe frost freseþ · fode hem bihoueþ' (cf. K.8.116). The editors attribute omission of this line from the B tradition to mechanical error at a pre-archetypal stage, 'caused by preoccupation with the answer to the question in 133, or by *fynt hem (mete)* 133, 135'.¹⁶ That explanation is plausible, but the line is not necessary to the grammatical or expository sense of the poem, and Langland might have cancelled it in revision, as Schmidt implies. If omission of this fine image is credited to the poet, his action would find parallels elsewhere, both in the A>B revision (for example, in excision of K.8.43–44) and, more extensively, in the B>C revision.¹⁷

Finally, there is the matter of author's variants, or 'rolling revision'. In narrowly defined circumstances, the editors of Bx have judged that more than one reading in the B tradition may have authorial status — that is, that some variants may represent not scribal error, but intraversional authorial revision. The editors permit this judgement to affect only very few readings, though they acknowledge the existence of larger theoretical ramifications (Introduction, § II.2, pp. 6–10). Passus 7 again supplies an example. At Bx.7.208–10 and its AC cognates, the authorial voice warns that membership in lay confraternities will be worthless at judgement day, unless supported by good works. At issue is the number of fraternal orders in which a charity-shy Christian might seek to enrol her- or himself as a lay member. Manuscripts of the A version, joined in the B tradition by F and the beta family, give four orders of friars, the usual count. R and manuscripts of the C version apparently add the crutched friars, for they count five orders. Burrow and Turville-Petre print both the beta reading *foure* and R's *fyue*, judging that R's count '[p]robably [...] represents a revision' (Bx.7.208n). At about thirty other points where all three versions are present, Ax and beta give one credible reading while another, equally credible reading is given in alpha and Cx. The textual situation at Bx.7.208 is complicated only by F's agreement with beta, an agreement that the editors attribute to misguided 'correction' by a scribe — F or the scribe of his exemplar — who failed to perceive that the crutched friars should be included in the count of fraternal orders. Informed by Ralph Hanna's analysis of alpha/beta divergences,¹⁸ Burrow and Turville-Petre describe these split readings as — at least potentially — evidence of rolling revision. The alpha copies would descend from a B-version copy that was already on its way towards becoming the C version, having received a layer of authorial revisions unavailable to the common ancestor of the beta family. In countenancing the possibility of rolling revision, Burrow and Turville-Petre come into conflict with a basic condition of their undertaking: an archetypal edition is appropriate only if the

¹⁶*Piers Plowman*, ed. by Kane and Donaldson, p. 85. And compare *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Kane, p. 125: 'The common elements in such omissions [...] are that each amounts to a jump over a syntactical unit which appears to delay or interrupt the flow of sense, and that the text, after the omission, still reads plausibly'.

¹⁷Derek Pearsall supplies a fine list: *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Pearsall, p. 3 n. 9.

¹⁸Hanna, *Pursuing History*, pp. 215–29.

copies on which it is based descend from a single common archetype (not two uncertainly differentiated archetypes).

The more consequential objection is that Burrow and Turville-Petre's mode of presentation mischaracterizes the scale and quality of possible intraversional revision. Minor variants of the *four/fyue* type are intruded into the reading text. Yet Hanna's analysis, confirmed by Burrow and Turville-Petre's collations, lends little support to a theory that divergences between alpha and beta derive from authorial tinkering with the details of wording. With few exceptions, variants between alpha and beta have the appearance of scribal error: they are undifferentiated in character from the patterns of scribal variation evident everywhere else in the manuscript tradition. The debate over alpha/beta divergences has centred not on minor variants, but on passages absent from one or the other of the two families. Since Burrow and Turville-Petre acknowledge the possibility of rolling revision, I would have preferred that they not limit notice of this possibility to minor variants: the grey highlighting that designates minor variants possibly authorial in origin should probably be extended to those passages in *passūs* 11–15 that are uniquely attested in the alpha copies and possibly originate in a stage of composition intermediate between B and C. Such treatment would remove the objection raised at the end of the previous paragraph (i.e., that the edition conflates two versions), for the text presented would then correspond to the document O_{rf}^2 in Hanna's scheme: a scribal fair copy commissioned by Langland for publication of his poem and which, subsequent to service as the exemplar for the beta hyparchetype, received a layer of additions distinctive of copies R and F.¹⁹ This, of course, is an area where experts disagree. The editors of Bx explain the pattern of complementary omissions in alpha and beta as the result of eyeskip from paraph to paraph. Yet the argument is reversible: though the verse paragraph is a plausible unit of scribal omission, it is also a plausible unit of authorial composition. One might imagine, with Hanna, that some alpha-only segments originated as newly composed verse paragraphs.

In an early study, Donaldson wondered whether the three authorial versions of *Piers Plowman* were 'not merely historical accidents, haphazard milestones in the history of a 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'.²⁰ The Athlone edition argued forcefully for the contrary position: that the B version of *Piers Plowman*, if properly restored, is a poem shaped at every level by a finalized authorial intention. Yet Donaldson's initial view was resurrected in responses to the Athlone *B Version* and receives new support from *The B-Version Archetype*. Genetic editing, a field of textual scholarship that concerns itself principally with authorial revision, may help us to restate the key problems. I return to this possibility in the conclusion.

3 Presentation and Textual Apparatus

Like the Athlone edition, *The B-Version Archetype* is unapologetically a text for scholars. It is, however, considerably more approachable. The PPEA team have always aspired to transparency and the edition of Bx succeeds admirably in this respect. The introduction is a magisterial distillation of complexity: it provides a clear and succinct treatment of the text and its presentation, with instructive illustrations and good bibliography. Every user of this edition will be able to read its introduction in full. The digital edition lives online in the handsome redesigned PPEA website now hosted by North Carolina

¹⁹Hanna, *Pursuing History*, p. 224. See too Adams, 'R/F MSS'.

²⁰Donaldson, 'MSS R and F', p. 211.

State University. (There is no paywall.) The interface will be intuitive to most users.²¹ Notes click open within the same viewing field as the text; users of Peter Barney's line-number indexes to the Athlone editions will especially appreciate this feature. In the print edition notes are disposed at the base of the page, and thus even more accessible than online, where they must be clicked open and closed individually. The digital edition supplies continuous cross-references to line numbers in the Kane-Donaldson edition. The print edition supplies Kane-Donaldson line ranges at the foot of each page.

The stand-out feature of the digital edition is surely the textual apparatus. Though not as full as the Kane-Donaldson apparatus (where one finds variants from eight copies not displayed in the new edition of Bx), *The B-Version Archetype* nevertheless provides, in full and without lemmatization, the readings of the most important witnesses to this version of the poem. Clicking on any line number opens a 'collation window' displaying transcriptions of that line as it stands in L, M, Cr¹ (Robert Crowley's first 1550 print), W, Hm (San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, MS HM 128), C (Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd.1.17), G (Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg.4.31), O (Oxford, Oriel College, MS 79), R, and F.²² The results of scribal rewriting are visible at a glance. PPEA's edition of Bx makes this data available for research as never before.

The advantages over a lemmatized apparatus are apparent. Lemmatization functions very well as a graphic technology for recording simple omissions, additions, and substitutions, but less well as a record of rewriting: the relevant variants are all there, but often split across several lemmata. PPEA's collation window has precedents in print editions: the German school of documentary editing likewise eschews lemmatization.²³ Yet the analogy is inexact, and PPEA's apparatus — the work of Paul A. Broyles — delivers functionality unachievable in print. Clicking on a line from L, M, W, Hm, G, O, R, or F in the collation window opens, in a new tab, PPEA's edition of that manuscript (editions of Cr and C are not yet published). Annotations to these single-text editions are accessible inside the collation window, without leaving *The B-Version Archetype*. PPEA's collation window lacks the analytic functionality and writability of the collating tool that Peter Robinson has built for *Textual Communities*, a new web-based content management system for construction of digital editions. Yet PPEA's simpler, read-only collating module remains an inspired use of digital technology: for each line of the edited text, the collation window does nothing more or less than display the reading of the corresponding line in each of the most important witnesses to the text.

Problems arise in the digital presentation of evidence for rolling revision, and these problems may illustrate limitations inherent in the XML-TEI framework employed by PPEA. In the previous section I suggested that certain alpha-only passages may justifiably be accorded the same visual treatment that Burrow and Turville-Petre accord to certain alpha-beta lexical variants. This editorial suggestion encounters resistance from the editors' interpretation of their text, but also from the markup language that they and other PPEA editors employ. To mark Bx.13.458–76 as an alpha-only passage using TEI variant tags would entail running an apparatus element across multiple line elements, a move forbidden within XML syntax.²⁴ The problem is general in scope: to record textual alterations that cross the

²¹Knowles and Stinson, 'Piers Plowman Electronic Archive', pp. 232–33, supplies guidance.

²²G, a sixteenth-century copy contaminated from the A version, is presented not for its value in establishing the text of Bx, but because Judith Jefferson's PPEA edition was complete at the time of publication of *The B-Version Archetype*.

²³The preeminent English-language product is J. C. C. Mays's edition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems. See *Poetical Works*, ed. by Mays, i.1, pp. cxx–cxxxv, and Eggert, *Securing the Past*, pp. 203–08.

²⁴The example is more complex than my description implies, for the alpha/beta variant at the head of 13.477 is organic

line boundary, PPEA editors have recourse to multiple independent <app> tags, or to textual notes. This technical limitation derives from XML's basic concept of text as a unitary ordered hierarchy of elements: a poem is parcelled into divisions and divisions into lines; each line encloses its own parcel of text, and consecutive lines are juxtaposed within the XML file structure as so many uncommunicating monads. Variance, as a quality of text, is recordable for units of text up to but not beyond the line, for running a lemma across a line boundary would generate a forbidden multiplication and overlay of hierarchies. The problem is well known among digital textuists; Elena Pierazzo concludes that there is 'no real solution' within the XML-TEI framework.²⁵ XML's strictly hierarchical document structure may become a significant impediment to digital presentation of the text of *Piers Plowman*, particularly when PPEA editors turn attention to the versional development of the poem.

Conclusions
In the same article that called for an 'intermittently critical' edition of *Piers Plowman B*, Adams affirmed that 'one would be remiss to aim at merely reconstructing the archetype'.²⁶ Burrow and Turville-Petre do not dispute this: they modestly offer their text as 'preparation for the final step' — that is, as preparation for a renewed effort to restore Langland's words at those points where Bx evidently failed to preserve them. It was always the intention of the PPEA team to challenge Kane and Donaldson on their own turf, and a new edition of *Piers Plowman B* remains a desideratum. Yet PPEA's hybrid documentary-critical editorial policy places that 'final step' many steps away: editors must first establish, in public form, the archetypal texts of A and C, as Burrow and Turville-Petre acknowledge when they caution that their 'references to Ax and Cx are inevitably provisional' (Introduction, § V.3.2, p. 30). Editions of A and C manuscripts are in progress for PPEA, including several of the manuscripts that will be of special importance for establishing the archetypes of those versions. The relevant materials are being collected, but the road ahead is a long one, and Langlandians should not be put off by the avowedly provisional nature of the product now on offer. *The B-Version Archetype* is the best record of this text presently available; where it differs from the offerings of Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt, it serves as a valuable check on editorial judgement. All this is delivered with a level of transparency enabled by digital media, but realized by the dedication, care, and ingenuity of the PPEA team.

Criticisms and objections, registered briefly in my foregoing exposition, may now be collected and drawn out. The editors' respect for L and R leaves them vulnerable to coincident variation in these two copies, an important consideration even if the number of readings affected is unlikely to be large. Kane's criticisms of recension retain their cautionary value; if Burrow and Turville-Petre have produced as good a text of Bx as one may reasonably expect, they probably also overstate the confidence that one may place in such a construction. (Some of Adams's textual notes to R should have been carried over into the edition of Bx, since they flag doubts that go unremarked by Burrow and Turville-Petre.) As I have already suggested, the editors adopt an unsatisfactory compromise on the question of 'rolling revision'; relatedly, they should probably have ventured a more concrete, historical identification of the document whose readings they aim to reconstruct. This criticism may seem unfair, for Burrow and Turville-Petre already offer a conception of the archetype far more concrete than any previous edition, most notably in their attention to punctuation and paragraphing. Yet they revert to abstraction on the crucial question of authorial revision, precisely where an abstract/stemmatic conception of 'the archetype' is least adequate. Hanna and Adams venture more concrete treatments; confrontation with

to the preceding omission/addition.

²⁵Pierazzo, *Digital Scholarly Editing*, p. 120.

²⁶Adams, 'Editing *Piers Plowman B*', p. 63.

this issue will be a central responsibility for any future editor of *Piers Plowman* B and may be expected to reduce the authority of Bx as a record to Langland's poem (this does not imply a return to the Kane-Donaldson position). A few other criticisms may be stated briefly. The links to the *Middle English Dictionary* promise more than they can deliver. Bx.7.74n mischaracterizes Thomas Cable's views on Middle English spellings. Similarly, I would not characterize the inflectional syllable added to plural *went* in Bx.10.115 as an emendation: regardless of scribal spelling, an inflectional syllable always exists as an option for plurals of Middle English verbs (athematic present tense forms and phonologically advanced registers of Northern dialects excepted); to read Middle English poetry with attention to its metre entails continuous activation of and selection between the array of prosodic shapes available in the language. As a service to readers, an editor may print the relevant metrical form, as Burrow and Turville-Petre do in Bx.10.115, but this is spelling correction or metrical pointing, not emendation.

Publication of Bx concludes one great cycle of PPEA's work. What follows? In early programmatic writings, Hoyt Duggan distinguished between two basic presentations of text: one documentary-archival, the other editorial-reconstructive, exemplified at their extreme poles by facsimile reproductions of single manuscript witnesses and by the Athlone *Piers Plowman*, respectively.²⁷ Duggan's insight was that electronic media released editors from an obligation to choose between the two poles of text-presentation: hyperlinks and style sheets would permit digital editions to honour both the archival documents and the literary works imperfectly transmitted in them. For the first three decades of its existence, PPEA managed a difficult balance between these documentary-archival and editorial-reconstructive missions: Duggan's team directed their documentary labours towards those B-version copies necessary for the editorial reconstruction of the B-version archetype. The balance is now likely to shift towards the documentary-archival pole. Comprehensiveness may supplant editorial reconstruction as the Archive's principal organizing objective. This shift is probably inevitable, but one hopes that the editorial impulse will not be lost. Ax and Cx await attention. I see two other areas for editorial work:

1. **Create a 'variorum' stylesheet for the digital edition of Bx.** The term 'variorum' is inexact, but I am uncertain what else to call the feature I have in mind: a document view that registers, perhaps through coloured highlighting, the points at which Kane-Donaldson and/or Schmidt depart from the archetypal text reconstructed by Burrow and Turville-Petre. The stylesheet would not need to report the actual readings adopted by Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt: users of *The B-Version Archetype* will have those editions on hand. One would like, however, to be alerted to differences. Production of a feature of this description would be drudgery, but it would facilitate use of the three editions in conjunction with one another.
2. **Prototype a digital genetic edition.** It is not too early to consider how one might employ digital media to represent the versional development of Langland's poem. PPEA editors have been thinking in text-genetic terms from the beginning: the editorial team responsible for the first published volume aspired to distinguish four layers of inscription behind the text of B sigil F.²⁸ That proved impracticable, but representation of A>B>C development affords more material to work with. The problem is positioned unsteadily between the domains of textual criticism and

²⁷Duggan, 'Electronic *Piers Plowman* B', pp. 57–59. Eggert, 'Archival Impulse', elaborates a general theoretical statement.

²⁸See the unnumbered section 'Presentation of Text: Levels of Inscription' in the introduction to *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive: F*, ed. by Adams and others.

genetic editing. In the absence of holographs, each of the versions must be an editorial construct. Yet the versions are constructed on the understanding that they embody three successive states in the creative activity of a single authorial agent. That creative development may be represented by printing the successive versions in parallel, as Skeat did in 1886 and Schmidt in 1995. Yet parallel-text format has drawbacks that extend beyond the basic fact that versions remain isolated within separate corners of a reader's visual field. (Hans Walter Gabler's synoptic and critical edition of *Ulysses* illustrates one alternative to the visual segregation of versions; digital media provide others.) From a text-genetic standpoint, the main problem with the existing editions of *Piers Plowman* (whether parallel-text or not) is that they do not present readers with the full set of versions necessary to appreciate the genesis of those versions which they do present. Kane and his co-editors documented the ways that scribal error could sometimes stimulate the poet to revise. By removing those errors which the poet himself encountered in his working papers, editors have suppressed the conditions in which the C version came into being. The readings of the C reviser's B manuscript are matters of conjecture, but a digital genetic edition might begin by prototyping passages where there is reason for confidence; the displacement of KD.1.98–99 is one such. The endeavour would be inescapably hypothetical, operating in the domain of 'probable truth', where the task is to distinguish, as best one can, between stronger and weaker constructions of the evidence.²⁹ The endeavour would also require some technical retooling, to identify and address limitations inherent in the XML-TEI framework. Someone with the requisite technical knowledge should make a review of recent digital editing projects that have supplemented or otherwise stepped away from XML-TEI, to consider what these technical innovations may afford to study of our poem.

In closing I return once more to the editorial matrix from which PPEA derived its initial stimulus and orientation. PPEA's focus on the B version has been justified by the peculiar editorial treatment of that version of the poem in the Athlone edition. Editions of Ax and Cx will illuminate in ways probably not foreseeable, but may have lesser consequence for our collective enterprise than the edition of Bx now published. Readers will want to use the online and print editions in tandem: the online edition for its collation window and cross-references to Kane-Donaldson line numbers; the print edition for improved access to textual notes.³⁰

²⁹Recent studies by Sarah Wood show what is required in discrimination between authorial and scribal versions of *Piers Plowman* and unpack crucial implications for study of the versional development of this poem: see 'Nonauthorial *Piers*', pp. 482–92, 'Langlandian Loose Leaves', and 'Monologic Langland'. Gabler, 'Genetic Texts', articulates a general approach towards multi-version works of literature, for which one 'must seek to enter into the essential dialogicity of the authorial writing in process' (p. 70). I draw the phrase 'probable truth' from Gillespie and Hudson, eds, *Probable Truth*.

³⁰I thank *YLS*'s readers, especially Steve Barney, for comments that improved this essay, Sarah Wood for correspondence on the text of *Piers Plowman*, and Paul Broyles, Paul Eggert, James Eric Ensley, and Peter Robinson for discussion of digital editing. They bear no responsibility for my failures.

4 Appendix. The Metrical Grammar of *þanne* in *Piers Plowman B*: A Demonstration Study Using PPEA's Edition of *The B-Version Archetype*³¹

'þanne come þere a kyng...' (Bx.Prol.112); 'þanne loked vp a lunatik...' (Bx.Prol.123), 'þanne greued hym a Goliardeys...' (Bx.Prol.139). As the operator of pure temporal succession, the little adverb *þanne* contributes mightily to the episodic form of *Piers Plowman*. *þanne* heralds the apparition of one thing after another, and of one new beginning after another: 'And þanne come pees in-to parlement · and put forth a bille' (Bx.4.49). In D. Vance Smith's memorable phrase, *Piers Plowman* is 'the book of the incipit'; *þanne* is the zero degree of inception, introducing anything from a speech act up to the visionary act itself: 'And þanne saw I moche more · þan I bifore tolde' (Bx.5.9). The visions of the biblical prophets are likewise strung together on the thinnest syncategorematic thread: *et...et...et vidi*. One might construe *And þanne* as the English translation of the paratactic biblical style of prophetic vision: 'þanne hent hope an horne · of deus tu conuersus viuificabis [nos]' (Bx.5.525).

In each of the instances quoted thus far, *þanne* stands at the beginning of the line, where it opens a clause, either alone or preceded by *and*. This is how one usually finds the word in *Piers Plowman*. In this position *þanne* is prosodically weak: in the a-verse 'And þanne saw I moche more', the first stressable word is the verb *saw*; the words *And þanne* form an initial dip. The only difference in Bx.13.37, 'Conscience called after mete · and þanne cam scripture', is that the clause-opening, prosodically weak element (*and*) *þanne* occurs at the head of the b-verse.

Yet *þanne* is more versatile, its prosody more various than these examples show. The word may occur at the end of the line, as in Bx.8.68, 'þe merueillousest meteles · mette me þanne'. When placed in terminal position, function words typically supply a lift. The word *þanne* suits this purpose well, for it is etymologically disyllabic. A disyllabic by-form, with weak final *-e*, evidently remained available to fourteenth-century poets, yielding an ordinary line-ending contour: 68b scans SxxSx.³² The metrically finicky editor who was responsible for B sigil F sometimes replaced line-final *þanne* with a word that receives categorical stress. An example is F's version of 8.68, which reads: '& þe mervylokest metelis | mette y þat stownde' (F.6.64). Elsewhere, however, the F redactor composed new lines with *þanne* in final position, so his objection to this construction could not have been strong. The construction itself is metrically unexceptional: *þanne* appears at line-end somewhat more frequently in the Cotton Nero A.x poems than in *Piers Plowman*.

þanne may also appear as the last word in the a-verse. Two examples:

¶ Wronge was afered þanne · and wisdom he souzte (Bx.4.65)

Fortune gan flateren thenne · þo fewe þat were alyue (Bx.20.110)

In Bx.4.65a, *þanne* stands at the end of both clause and hemistich, just as it does in Bx.8.68b, 'mette me þanne'. In Bx.20.110, the clause boundary occurs within the b-verse (after *þo fewe*), but adverbial *þanne*

³¹This appendix originated as 'The Electronic Archive and the Meter of *Piers Plowman B*', a paper presented at the Sixth International Conference on *Piers Plowman*, Seattle, 23–26 July 2015. I thank the organizers for that opportunity.

³²Judgements about the metrical form of Middle English poetry necessarily involve judgements about the value of historically and grammatically justified weak final *-e*. The definitive studies of this syllable in fourteenth-century alliterative poems are Yakovlev, 'On Final *-e*', and Putter, Jefferson, and Stokes, *Studies in the Metre*, chaps. 1 and 2.

groups with the verb in the a-verse. From the standpoint of phrasal grouping, the scribal punctuation in these lines makes sense: the adverb is assigned to the same hemistich as the verb it modifies.

Function words probably support a lift whenever they appear at the end of the a-verse, just as they do at the end of the long line; I would accordingly interpret 4.65a and 20.110a as having three lifts each, though alternative scansion is possible and would be preferred by other metrists.³³ In support of a scansion that assigns a lift to *þanne* in these two lines and others like them, one may note that Bx has many a-verses with three categorically stressed words, but none like **Wronge and Wit were afered þanne*, with three categorically stressed words and terminal *þanne*. Pre-caesural *þanne* never turns a three-lift verse into a four-lift verse. Langland did write a-verses with four-lift constructions, but he evidently avoided four-lift constructions in which the final lift is supplied by a word without categorical stress.

That metrical aversion is evident as well in the F redactor's rewrite of 4.65a, which reads 'Þanne wex wrong a-ferd' (F.4.409a). The redactor has clarified the alliterative pattern by replacing the function word *was* with the content word *wex*; the revised line has three words with categorical stress and would have instanced the excluded pattern (that is, three categorically stressed words plus a terminal function word) had the F redactor not advanced *þanne* to the head of the line, where it is prosodically weak. F's several adjustments function in concert, as a coherent and successful recasting of the received text.³⁴

There are other complications. Phrasal grouping assigns *þanne* to the a-verse in Bx.6.167, much as it does at 4.65 and 20.110:

Curteisly þe kny3te þanne · as his kynde wolde
Warned wastoure

Here the construction *þanne* + verb is bisected by an adverbial clause. If *þanne* belongs at this point in the syntagmatic chain, it belongs at the end of the a-verse, which is where scribal punctuation uniformly places it (F substitutes *þo*). Suppose, however, that 6.167–68 lacked the intervening adverbial clause, like so: **Curteisly þe kny3te þanne carped to wastoure*. In that hypothetical construction, would *þanne* belong in the a-verse, as it does in Bx.6.167, or in the b-verse with the verb? The caesural divide may appear to be in doubt.

The question is not hypothetical. The construction occurs ten times in Bx, clustered in the strongly narrative passages of passūs 2–6:

- ¶ Falsenesse for fere þanne · flei3 to þe freres (Bx.2.213)
- ¶ Mildeliche Mede þanne · mercyed hem alle (Bx.3.20)
- [¶] Hendeliche heo þanne · bihight hem þe same (Bx.3.29)
- ¶ Curteisliche þe kyng þanne · comsed to telle (Bx.3.105)
- ¶ Curteisliche þe kyng þanne · come a3ein resoun (Bx.4.46)
- Wisdome and witte þanne [·] wenten togideres (Bx.4.78)

³³Cornelius, *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse*, pp. 114–21.

³⁴I collect additional illustrations of the F redactor's metrical preferences at Cornelius, *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse*, p. 187 n. 81.

¶ Pitously pees þanne · prayed to þe kyng (Bx.4.100)

¶ Awey fro þe auter þanne · turne I myn eyghen (Bx.5.111)

¶ Curteislich þe kny3te þanne · comsed þise wordes (Bx.6.34)

[Drede of desperacioun · þanne dryueth away grace] (Bx.17.319)

With few exceptions, scribes who transmit the archetypal line intact assign *þanne* to the end of the a-verse. In 4.78 L omits punctuation and M punctuates before *þanne*, but the punctuation supplied by Burrow and Turville-Petre is supported by other copies, including R. The punctuation of C dissents from the majority in several lines, including 4.78. Bx.17.319 is the outlier. It occurs late in the poem, in a pair of lines transmitted only by the alpha copies, R and F. Burrow and Turville-Petre print the line as it stands in F, rejecting R's variant word order, 'dryueth a-weye þanne grace'. This editorial treatment may appear suspect, given that R generally transmits its exemplar faithfully and F often does not. Yet F's word order is supported by Cx, while R's word order is explicable in context as an error induced by the position of *þanne* in the b-verse immediately following. The two copies agree in punctuating after *desperacioun*.

Bx.17.319 aside, the punctuation of the ten lines is as precise and consistent as one could wish. Where mid-line *þanne* belongs to a clause in progress, the Bx scribe assigned the word to the end of the a-verse. The location of the verb is immaterial. The Bx scribe assigned mid-line *þanne* to the beginning of the b-verse only when this word opens a new clause, as for example in the correlative construction at Bx.Prol.172, 'And 3if him list for to laike · þenne loke we mowen'. If we accept the punctuation of Bx and accept also that function words probably support a lift when placed in terminal position, the following regularity emerges: with few exceptions, *þanne* occurs in Bx either in the first dip of the clause, or in stressed position at the end of a hemistich.³⁵

Though consistent with the traditional metre of alliterative verse, pre-caesural *þanne* is a complex, difficult realization of that metre. The construction was mostly avoided by the *Gawain*-poet.³⁶ It seems also to have exceeded the tolerance of the F redactor. Of the ten lines listed above, F transmitted only two in the archetypal form: Bx.17.319 (for which F is the principal witness to the archetype) and Bx.5.111, where R and F (and thus their unique common ancestor alpha) punctuate before *þanne*, placing this word at the head of the b-verse. In every other line, F's exemplar assigned *þanne* to the end of the a-verse and F responded with revision. Readers are invited to open the 'collation window' in *The B-Version Archetype* and inspect F's handling of these lines for themselves.

Analysis could stop here, except for evidence, already cited, that F's intolerance extended to any construction that displaces *þanne* from the head of the line. Table 1 summarizes the F redactor's handling of all archetypal instances of *þanne* which may be presumed to have stood in his exemplar. For the distinction between categories (3) and (4) I follow the scribal punctuation in F's putative exemplar. Thus, Bx.5.111 is classed in category (4), on the strength of punctuation in R and F, even though

³⁵I find seven exceptions, where *þanne* occurs in a dip not clause-initial: Bx.5.113a, Bx.5.631a, Bx.15.36b, Bx.15.407a, Bx.15.422a, Bx.17.153a, and Bx.17.320b.

³⁶I find this construction at *Cleanness* 385, *Patience* 429, and *Gawain* 578 and 1218. Putter and Stokes perhaps misdivide the first two of these lines. Division before *then* in *Cleanness* 385 would, however, create an exceptionally heavy a-verse. For additional comment on Putter and Stokes' half-line divisions, see Cornelius, *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse*, p. 183 n. 17.

panne surely belongs in the a-verse. Deference to scribal punctuation is justified because the F redactor took his cues from scribal punctuation, as shown by his treatment of this line and Bx.17.319.

Table 1: The F scribe's handling of *panne*, analysed by line position.

	present in F's exemplar	retained in F	retention ratio
1. opening of a-verse	152	123	0.80
2. within a-verse	5	0	—
3. end of a-verse	21	5	0.24
4. opening of b-verse	21	15	0.71
5. within b-verse	2	2	—
6. end of b-verse	10	5	0.50

Table 1 shows that the F redactor usually retained *panne* at the head of the line and retained *panne* somewhat less often at the head of the b-verse. Line-final *panne* was retained as often as not, while pre-caesural *panne* was usually revised out. What Table 1 does not show is that the F scribe is comparatively more interventionist in the earlier passūs: all instances in category (3) are revised out prior to Bx.11.451; just one instance in category (4) is revised out after Bx.13.37. This shift in treatment corresponds approximately to a break between stints of writing, identified in the PPEA edition of F on the evidence of page layout, decoration, and spellings.³⁷ Table 2 separates the data for the two copying stints.

Table 2: The F scribe's handling of mid-line *panne*, in segments before and after the evident break in copying at fol. 58^v/59^r. Numbers in parentheses report instances per thousand lines and thus normalize for the unequal length of the two segments.

	Prol. to Bx.14.210 (= F.10.675) present in F's exemplar	Bx.14.211 (= F.10.676) to end retained in F	present in F's exemplar	retained in F
close of a-verse	17 (3.6)	2 (0.4)	4 (1.4)	3 (1.1)
opening of b-verse	15 (3.1)	9 (1.9)	6 (2.2)	6 (2.2)

Interpretation is impeded by the small counts involved, the unequal length of the two segments, and the unequal distribution of the constructions of interest over these two stretches of Bx. The two constructions occur somewhat more frequently in the segment of Bx up to 14.210 than after that point, but the F scribe retained those few instances which occur in the later segment. An implication

³⁷The findings are reported in *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive: F*, ed. by Adams and others, Introduction, unnumbered section titled 'Collation'.

is that F's treatment of Bx.2.213 and the nine other lines like it may respond less to the specific syntactic frame instanced by those lines than to their placement early in the poem, during the F scribe's first stint of copying. The limitations of sample size prevent any more confident statement.

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