Takamiya MS 23, its Exemplar, and the editio princeps of Piers Plowman

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Takamiya MS 23, its Exemplar, and the editio princeps of
Piers Plowman*

Ian Cornelius J. Eric Ensley

Abstract

New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Takamiya 23 is a mid sixteenth-century copy of the B Version of Piers Plowman, distinguished by pervasive linguistic modernization. The manuscript derives from a source very similar to that used by Robert Crowley for the editio princeps, a textual affiliation that remains unexplained. In their critical edition, George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson collated Takamiya 23 in full but did not print its unique variant readings and the manuscript has not figured in recent textual scholarship on Piers Plowman. This neglect has led to some conclusions that should be revisited, particularly regarding the place of Crowley’s editions in the B-Version stemma and the extent and character of Crowley’s use of manuscripts other than his principal one. On the basis of textual and material features, we sketch a possible production scenario for the Takamiya manuscript and re-evaluate its relation to Crowley’s sources.

1 Introduction

Modern reception of Piers Plowman has been informed at decisive moments by one subfamilial grouping of manuscript copies of the B Version of this poem. For the editio princeps, printed in 1550, Robert Crowley sourced a manuscript, no longer extant, from the genetic group termed “beta2” in recent discussions. Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.17 (sigil W), another member of the beta2 group, served as base text for the two great twentieth-century critical editions of the B Version. The membership of the beta2 group, textual relations among group members, and the place of beta2 within the general transmission of the B Version were established by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson in a chapter on “Classification of the manuscripts.” Understanding of the physical, textual, and linguistic

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2 Kane and Donaldson, Piers Plowman: B Version, 16–63. For a concise summary of the textual transmission of Piers Plowman B as now usually understood, see John A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, eds., Piers Plowman: The B-Version Archetype (Bx), XML version 2.0, PPEA Print Series 1 (Raleigh, NC: The Society for Early English and Norse
qualities of the medieval members of this group has been advanced by single-manuscript documentary editions published by the Piers Plowman Electronic Archive (PPEA). Meanwhile, R. Carter Hailey has done much to elucidate the physical and textual qualities of Crowley’s three editions (sigil Cr). Among the members of the beta2 group, the copy least well known today is New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya MS 23 (olim London, Sion College, MS Arc. L.40. 2/E; sigil S). It is the subject of the present article.

S is one of four complete or notionally complete manuscript copies of Piers Plowman to survive from the sixteenth century. The text is written on paper in a single hand, dated c. 1550, hence contemporary with Crowley’s editions. A fragmentary ownership note seems to say the book was written by George Hewlet and subsequently owned by Thomas Hewlet. The text is distinguished by comprehensive linguistic modernization. Kane described S as a “translation of Piers Plowman into Tudor English,” adding that the copyist “makes clear how much he failed to understand.” Kane and Donaldson collated S in full — an enormous undertaking that they conducted with customary care and thoroughness — but they did not print its variant readings in their lemmatized apparatus. The editors’ treatment of S as a rejected witness was justified by the aims of their edition and the constraints of a print apparatus, yet S has remained unstudied in subsequent contexts in which it might be more relevant. The manuscript

Electronic Texts, 2018), 3–6 (Introduction, section II.1). The first edition (XML version 1.0) is available on-line at https://piers.chass.ncsu.edu/texts/Bx/.


6For description of S see Kane and Donaldson, Piers Plowman: B Version, 15; C. David Benson and Lynne S. Blanchfield, The Manuscripts of “Piers Plowman”: The B-Version (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 113–15; and the Beinecke Library’s catalog, on-line at https://hdl.handle.net/10079/bibid/11736043. The Beinecke Library has produced a complete digital facsimile of the manuscript, linked from the on-line catalog record.

7Fol. 66v. This note prompts our use of masculine pronouns in references to the scribe. The family has not been identified.

was not consulted in the production of PPEA’s documentary editions of affiliated manuscripts. Nor does it appear in recent stemmatic representations of the textual tradition.\(^9\)

The salient outcome of Kane and Donaldson’s collation of S was to establish that S and Crowley’s first edition (sigil Cr\(^1\)) form a uniquely persistent variational pair within the beta2 group. (We use the sigil ‘Cr’ for Crowley’s three editions collectively, adding a superscripted numeral in references to a specific edition.) The Cr\(^1\)S pair is supported in Kane and Donaldson’s presentation by some 215 unique agreements in error (that is, variant readings shared by these two copies and no others) distributed throughout the length of the poem. An inspection of shared variant readings listed by Kane and Donaldson shows that many are modernizations or “chronological variants.”\(^10\) For instance, archetypal *forthi* sometimes appears as *therfor* in Cr and almost always does in S. Agreement in such matters is a regular consequence of linguistic modernization and useless for genetic classification. Other unique CrS agreements are plainly not modernizations of language. Yet Kane and Donaldson’s confidence in the genetic character of the Cr\(^1\)S pair is founded less on the quality of the shared variants than on the congruent nesting of this pair within larger variational groups, and the general coherence of the resulting overall classification of copies. The pair Cr\(^1\)S figures in their presentation as the invariant core around which W, Hm (San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 128), and M (London, British Library, MS Additional 35287) enter into varying configurations of affiliation.

In post-Athlone textual criticism of *Piers Plowman* B, neglect of S has led scholars to elevate Cr\(^1\) within the stemma, placing it nearer the shared archetype. Giving due attention to S puts Cr back in its correct place. That is our first order of business, and it prompts us also to reconsider the extent and character of Crowley’s use of manuscripts other than his principal one. We turn then to questions that join textual criticism with a history of books. A surprising feature of the classification mapped out by Kane and Donaldson is that Crowley and the S-redactor (as we will call him) seem to have sourced texts nearly identical as the basis for their independent contemporary endeavors. We attempt to show what can be known about the exemplar or exemplars sourced by these two mid-sixteenth-century text workers.

## 2 The Place of Cr in the B-Version Stemma

In the PPEA edition of the B-Version archetype (Bx), John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre describe Crowley’s first edition as the “most reliable witness” to the common ancestor of the beta2 group, adding that “account has to be taken of its modernizations and Crowley’s access to C-text manuscripts.”\(^11\) That summary evaluation is good, yet the editors of Bx and other contributors to PPEA have tended to underestimate the number of generations of copying in the line of transmission that terminates in Crowley’s first edition. Doubts regarding the stemmatic position of Cr\(^1\) seem to originate in the stemma drawn by Robert Adams as a step towards the PPEA edition of Bx. In this stemma Adams posited that Crowley’s exemplar was a first-generation copy of the beta hyparchetype,

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\(^10\)By “chronological variants” Kane and Donaldson mean unoriginal readings that “reflect the differences, lexical or grammatical, between the English of the 1370’s and that of the fifteenth century or even later” (*Piers Plowman: B Version*, 31–32).

collateral with Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 581 (sigil L) and M prior to M’s switch of exemplar, and that “all beta manuscripts except L and M are descended, at various removes” from the same copy subsequently used by Crowley. Adams did not support this statement with lectional evidence, but his reassessment of Cr\(^1\) was endorsed by Hailey. For the PPEA edition of Bx, Adams contributed a revision of his stemma, restoring Cr\(^1\) to the beta2 sub-family: Cr\(^1\) is identified as a direct descendant of beta2, hence separated from the beta hyparchetype by three identifiable generations of copying. In the stemma printed by A.V.C. Schmidt, Crowley’s manuscript source is identified not as beta2 itself (Schmidt’s “w”) but a copy of beta2, making Cr\(^1\) a fourth-generation copy of the beta hyparchetype.

Schmidt’s presentation is the only one consistent with the lectional evidence collected and analyzed by Kane and Donaldson, and we see no reason to question their analysis in this case. Persistent agreement between Cr\(^1\)S, joined by M late in the poem, demonstrates the existence of a lost copy, differentiable from the beta2 group ancestor. Convergent modernization in Cr\(^1\)S is a complicating factor, but M, an earlier copy, supplies a control for that. Our fresh collation of beta2 copies in passus 17–20 identifies 124 points at which MCr\(^1\)S agree in error while WHm transmit the archetypal reading or vary independently. These 124 agreements in error must derive from a copying generation subsequent to the one that produced the ancestor of the beta2 group.

Relations among beta2 copies bear restating because stemmatic constructions that reduce the number of copying generations behind Cr\(^1\) have required that aberrant Cr\(^1\)-readings be explained as individual products of Crowley’s consultation of multiple copies of the poem. Crowley certainly knew Piers Plowman in more than one copy, yet recent treatments, including the textual notes to the PPEA edition of Bx, overstate the extent to which Crowley engaged in cherry-picking of readings. An example is Bx 2.36 a lappe of caritatis. In place of lappe, CrS, joined by Cambridge, Newnham College, MS 4 (sigil Y) and the X-family of C-Version manuscripts, have lippe ‘A mouthfull; a little bit’ (MED Online, s.v. “lippẹ, n.2”). Burrow and Turville-Petre attribute Cr’s lippe to Crowley’s C-Version manuscript, but S indicates that the reading probably entered the tradition earlier, in the unique common ancestor of Cr\(^1\)S. (The reading was restored also, independently, in Y or its exemplar.) Similarly, at Bx 5.480, the Cr-reading knowe (the likely reading of Bx, against owe in most other copies of the beta family) should not be attributed to Crowley’s consultation of a manuscript other than his principal exemplar. S, which likewise reads knowe, allows us to infer that the archetypal reading was probably restored already in the common ancestor of these two copies. Like the scribal editions of


\(^{13}\)Hailey, “Robert Crowley and the Editing of Piers Plowman,” 145.

\(^{14}\)Many agreements are recorded at Kane and Donaldson, Piers Plowman: B Version, 42–43. Textual notes in Eliason, Duggan, and Turville-Petre, British Library, MS Additional 35287, identify about twenty agreements missed by Kane and Donaldson, though still not a complete record. The PPEA editors wrongly attribute the relevant readings to MCr\(^1\) alone, ignoring S. Our collations employ the PPEA editions of W, Hm, and M (see note 3, above) and the PPEA transcription of Cr\(^1\), published within the “collation window” in the on-line edition of Bx (see note 2, above). For S we use an unpublished transcription proofed by us against digital images of the manuscript.

\(^{15}\)Line-number references prefixed with ‘Bx’ are to Burrow and Turville-Petre, B-Version Archetype.

\(^{16}\)For readings of B-Version witnesses not yet published by PPEA, we depend on Kane and Donaldson’s apparatus. For readings of C-Version manuscripts we depend on George Russell and George Kane, eds., Piers Plowman: The C Version. Will’s Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best. An Edition in the Form of Huntington Library MS HM 143, Corrected and Restored from the Known Evidence, with Variant Readings, Piers Plowman: The Three Versions (London and Berkeley: Athlone Press and University of California Press, 1997).
Among the many manuscripts cited in Hailey’s list of “Corrections from other manuscripts,” two have (sigil G). The second of these identifications needs reassessment.

witnesses do not necessarily, or even probably, derive from direct consultation of those witnesses. The existence of three editions — and of stop-press corrections within these editions — ought to allow for narrower definition of Crowley’s editorial agency, yet the topic has not yet received the attention it requires. Hailey reports “readings in the Prologue and passûs 1–7 in which Crowley made changes in re-editing the poem for the second and third editions” and he sorts the readings into three categories: “Basic corrections,” “Correction from other manuscripts,” and “Restored readings.” The problematic category here is “Correction from other manuscripts.” Under this title Hailey reports 113 points at which (1) the later editions (sometimes the third only) differ from the first, (2) the first-edition reading does not appear to be a misprint or misreading of setting copy, and (3) the reading of the later editions is paralleled among other witnesses to the B Version. Where these criteria are met, Hailey reports the readings of the Crowley editions and the sigla of B-Version manuscripts whose readings are in substantive agreement with them (agreements with S are not recorded).

In form and derivation, the data are extracts from Kane and Donaldson’s apparatus, corrected where possible, but ignoring the model of analysis supplied by the editors’ chapter on “Classification of the manuscripts.” Certain of the variant readings in later editions indeed support a connection with Cambridge, University Library, MS Ll.iv.14 (sigil C2), as Kane and Donaldson observe. A few others could easily derive from Crowley’s principal manuscript. They belong in Hailey’s list of “Basic corrections.” The great majority of the variants listed are, however, indistinguishable from random background agreements in error, of the kind illustrated on every page of the Athlone apparatus. Most basically, variant readings in Cr1/Cr2/Cr3 show only that Crowley reset type; agreements with other witnesses do not necessarily, or even probably, derive from direct consultation of those witnesses. Among the many manuscripts cited in Hailey’s list of “Corrections from other manuscripts,” two have seriously been proposed as consulted by Crowley: C2 and Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg.4.31 (sigil G). The second of these identifications needs reassessment.

Piers Plowman studied by Sarah Wood, Crowley’s text is “the product not of a single moment or single agent, but of a multi-layered history.” Crowley was undoubtedly responsible for many of the peculiar readings in Cr1. Others, however, were inherited from the prior chain of scribal copies.

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18On Crowley’s use of a C-Version manuscript, see William R. Crawford, “Robert Crowley’s Editions of Piers Plowman: A Bibliographical and Textual Study” (Ph. D. diss., New Haven, CT, Yale University, 1957), 55–56, 63, identifying C-Version readings in the Cr1 text in lines corresponding to Bx Prol.2, Prol.26, 1.14, 1.22, 1.150, 1.154, and 1.156. These remain persuasive instances of Crowley’s editorial interventions: in each case except the two first, where S is absent, S transmits the major reading of B-Version manuscripts. The distribution in small clusters is significant: see n.20, below.

19Hailey, “Robert Crowley and the Editing of Piers Plowman,” 164–70 (quotation at 164).

20Kane and Donaldson, Piers Plowman: B Version, 19n13; Hailey, “Robert Crowley and the Editing of Piers Plowman,” 161. Crawford, “Robert Crowley’s Editions of Piers Plowman,” 59, had earlier documented agreements between Cr2,3 and the subfamilial group including C2. Since neither Kane and Donaldson nor Hailey indicate particular Cr2,3-readings that especially support their identification, we note a clutch of suggestive agreements in the confessions of Coveithe and Wrath. For instance, Bx 5.114 (KD 5.113) liketh myn herte] mine herte aketh Cr2,3YOC2. Bx 5.127 (KD 5.126) reede I OC2. Bx 5.140 (KD 5.139) listres] Legisters Cr2,3OC2. (In each case Cr1 is in substantive agreement with the lemma, supplied by Bx. Line-references prefixed with ‘KD’ are to Kane and Donaldson, Piers Plowman: B Version.) There is another clutch of suggestive Cr2,3/OC2 agreements in lines corresponding to Bx 6.202–32 (KD 6.198–227).

21For instance, Bx 5.32 other (conj.) in Cr1; or Cr2,3 (Crowley or his compositor failed to recognize the idiom other tweyne in the first edition and modernized the conjunction in the later editions). Bx 6.260 par] praye Cr1; pur Cr2,3 (the Cr1 reading was probably induced by attraction to prior copy). Kane and Donaldson attribute the second of these corrections to Cr3 only. For explanation of their error see Hailey, “Robert Crowley and the Editing of Piers Plowman,” 158.
The proposal that Crowley knew and used G was first made by Hailey in 2001 and receives support from Lawrence Warner and Judith A. Jefferson.\textsuperscript{22} The evidence cited in support of this proposal consists of shared readings and general correspondences in paratext. The correspondences in paratext are unimpressive. In his second and third editions Crowley supplies a \textit{passus}-by-\textit{passus} summary of the poem. G, uniquely among manuscript copies of \textit{Piers Plowman}, has a table of contents for the poem.\textsuperscript{23} Hailey observes “no verbal echoes of G’s ‘table’ in Cr” and acknowledges that the “respective arrangements differ.”\textsuperscript{24} Acquaintance with G was not required. Nor is there reason to think that Crowley’s annotation of the prophecy of disendowment in \textit{passus} 10 must derive from a corresponding annotation entered by a later hand in G. These marginalia flag a passage of persistent interest to sixteenth-century readers.\textsuperscript{25}

The burden of proof lies with the lectional agreements, and these are easily explained as convergent chronological variation between belated copies. One of the more interesting agreements concerns a line that in Cr\textsuperscript{1} reads “And I graunt quod the Kyng gods forbod it faile” (sig. E4\textsuperscript{r}; cf. Bx 4.196). This is very likely the form in which Crowley encountered the line in his principal manuscript. In Cr\textsuperscript{2,3} the second half-line is instead “god forbid it faile,” a reading in substantive agreement with MSGFH. Hailey remarks that “The conjunction of two corrections in this line strengthens the case for Crowley’s access to one of these manuscripts, probably G.”\textsuperscript{26} Yet there is only one “correction”: in place of the Middle English idiom \textit{gods forbod}, a noun phrase meaning ‘God’s prohibition!’, Crowley’s later editions have the easier reading in which \textit{forbid} is a verb and \textit{god} its subject. Several scribes did the same. They and Crowley were each capable of making this grammatical adjustment on their own, without copying from another book.

In the introduction to her edition of G, Jefferson observes that, whereas Hailey presented data only for the \textit{Visio}, “corrections bringing the readings of Cr\textsuperscript{2} and/or Cr\textsuperscript{3} into line with those of other B manuscripts including G ... in fact persist throughout the text.”\textsuperscript{27} This is what one expects of random convergent variation, and the examples offered by Jefferson from later \textit{passus} do not require any other explanation. Crowley certainly could have known and consulted G. Claims that he did so should give greater consideration to the polygenesis of innovative readings within textual traditions, and especially to the type of convergent variation that Kane and Donaldson termed “chronological.”\textsuperscript{28} S may be of use in this connection, for chronological variants are especially frequent in this copy.


\textsuperscript{23}See Jefferson, “Divisions, Collaboration and Other Topics”; and Benson and Blanchfield, \textit{The Manuscripts of “Piers Plowman”}, 133–36.

\textsuperscript{24}Hailey, “Robert Crowley and the Editing of \textit{Piers Plowman},” 162.


\textsuperscript{26}Hailey, “Robert Crowley and the Editing of \textit{Piers Plowman},” 169n67.

\textsuperscript{27}Jefferson, \textit{Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.4.31}, Introduction, II.2.1.

\textsuperscript{28}See Kane and Donaldson, \textit{Piers Plowman: B Version}, 31–32, quoted in note 10, above.
3 The S-Redactor’s Exemplar

As a step towards analysis of the S-redactor’s work, it is necessary to establish the status quo ante, that is, the form of the text encountered by him. Kane and Donaldson’s textual analysis raises a variety of questions regarding the material characteristics and identity of the manuscripts employed by the S-redactor and Crowley. If Cr₁ and S are a genetic pair, descendant from a unique common ancestor, how did this happen? Either a single exemplar passed between these two mid-sixteenth-century text workers, or they sourced a pair of very closely affiliated copies. If a single medieval manuscript passed between them, one might expect some evidence of cooperation or influence. If Crowley and the S-redactor sourced two different medieval manuscripts for their independent endeavors, it is surprising that they should have selected, by chance, a pair of copies so nearly alike.

S’s independence from Cr is seen clearly in cases where these copies present divergent responses to archaic language. A mundane and ubiquitous example is the conjunction ac, often rendered in S as but at points where Cr has and. Divergent modernizations of lexical words are also frequent. Such readings suggest that Cr₁ and S derive independently from an ancestor that retained the poem’s medieval English. Further evidence of S’s independence comes from lines and half-lines rewritten in Cr. S shows no knowledge of Cr’s innovative readings in these cases. A few apparent exceptions should instead be attributed to the unique common ancestor of these two copies, as we have argued above. Elsewhere, where a unique S-reading looks like a reflex of a unique Cr-reading, Cr probably transmits intact the variant reading of their common ancestor. An example is Bx 5.548 sitten, where Cr has be set and S has be. An example of the opposite relation — where S probably retains the reading of the common ancestor of Cr₁S while Cr varies further — is supplied by Bx 6.232 gracie to god. Here S reads gracie to goode; Cr₁’s gracious to do good looks like repair of the defective reading transmitted in S. Either copy may transmit an ancestral reading at points where the other shows further variation.

Whereas Cr provides, by far, the more faithful record of ancestral readings, S transmits more reflexes of the physical features of its medieval exemplar. Like medieval copies of the B Version, but unlike Crowley’s editions, S has metrical punctuation. Pages are unruled and the number of lines varies, yet there are suggestive indications of a more deliberate page-design in an earlier copy. In the first 18 quires (of 24) pages generally have 37–42 lines, tending towards the lower end of that range. Beginning in quire 19, the scribe writes 42–44 lines per page, rising to 46 lines per page in the final bifolium, for an average of 40 lines per page overall. The 40-line average is significant because it is a standard layout of B-Version manuscripts copied in the early fifteenth century. Like several of those early copies, S consisted originally of 92 leaves. The compression of writing in late quires suggests that the job was planned as a page-for-page copy of a 40-line exemplar.

Among beta2 copies, only Hm instances the 40-line/92-folio format. M’s pages are ruled for 39–42

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29 For instance, Bx Prol.150 lauȝte] caught Cr; lest S (or left?). Bx 3.32 leode] clerke Cr; thing S. Bx 5.532 couthe] could Cr; knewe S. Bx 18.232 lisse ’joy’] lyfe Cr; peyne S.

30 Cr, 3 have a reading very likely derived from C2. See Hailey’s collations for KD 6.227. Crowley’s dissatisfaction with the reading of his principal manuscript is specially apparent in this case.

lines, but the scribe uses a dozen more leaves than Hm, on account of blank lines between paragraphs. The W-scribe also separates paragraphs with blank lines, but uses still more parchment than M, on account of a larger script, permitting fewer lines per page. S has no blank lines and no paragraphing, yet there are a few suggestive traces of text segmentation. In S we find four lines in which the opening word or words are written in the scribe’s engrossing script, a treatment otherwise reserved for Latin, important names, and the opening words of the page and passus. The lines correspond to Bx 5.309 (fol. 19r), Bx 5.396 (fol. 20r), Bx 7.158 (fol. 29r; see Figure 1), and Bx 8.62 (fol. 31r). Each is an important juncture in the narrative. In W the lines corresponding to Bx 7.158 and Bx 8.62 have two-line blue initials flourished in red, while the lines corresponding to Bx 5.309 and Bx 5.396 have place-finding marginal annotations. These agreements between S and the medieval members of the beta2 group allow us to infer elements of the design of the beta2 group ancestor: it was probably written in a 40-line format, like Hm, with special decorative treatment of lines at a few important junctures within passus, like W.

Earlier stages of transmission can also be discerned in a few relict spellings that slipped through the S-redactor’s sieve of modernization. At Bx 9.115, S has the archaic spelling ofgon ‘earn’ (< OE ofgan) in agreement with Cr1W (ofgone Cr1; ofgon W), against agon/agoon/agone in other B-Version copies, including Cr2,3. The spelling ofgon should be attributed to the beta2 group ancestor.32 The S-spellings koused (at Bx 5.365) and nest (at Bx 11.394) agree with W against other beta2 copies. Three other instances of the Middle English character yogh (the sole other survivals of this letter in S) present more varied affiliations. The form zit, transmitted in the line corresponding to Bx 10.224, agrees with the spelling system of W, though not with the W-spelling in this instance; at Bx 13.256 the same word is transmitted by S as zet, a spelling not found in W.33 The S-spelling miȝte ‘mite (small coin)’ (at Bx 20.179) is eccentric, without parallel in early B-Version manuscripts, though it must derive from S’s medieval exemplar.34 Where the West Midlands feminine pronoun he survives in S (at Bx 1.144, Bx 5.317, and Bx 18.170, joined by Cr in the first two lines and by all beta2 copies in the last), S shows that the medieval ancestor of these two copies retained an authorial form recessive throughout the manuscript tradition and usually effaced in W.35 Such agreements show S’s proximity to a medieval copy of the poem.

32 Burrow and Turville-Petre attribute re-spelling to W. Cr1S indicate that the spelling ofgon entered the tradition earlier.
Production of S

Although modernized throughout, S is a neat manuscript with few scribal corrections. It is probably a fair copy, standing at one remove from a medieval manuscript in which the redactor entered the numerous textual alterations that distinguish S from other copies of the poem. Initial support for this production scenario comes from S’s retention of design elements characteristic of early manuscripts, discussed in the previous section. In the present section we adduce two other forms of evidence: the general character of S’s innovative readings and the character of scribal corrections.

The redactor worked in small compass and by substitution, not addition or rearrangement: textual alterations would have fit into the margins and interlinear spaces of a medieval copy of the poem, subsequently copied to produce S itself. Lexical substitutions are very frequent, as are small changes to phrasal grammar. Regularization of word order is not uncommon. Modernization of idiom is less frequent and marks the outer limit of the redactor’s work. Redaction very rarely extends beyond the half-line unit. There is a single intruded line: after Bx 19.426 (the lewed vycory’s quip that he knows no cardinals except those from the papal court) the S-redactor adds “And fewe vertues be there / or elles non” (fol. 86’). Even intruded lexical words are rare. The easiest way to enact these textual alterations would be to mark up a medieval copy of the poem, then make a fair copy of the result.

Redaction and subsequent writing of the fair copy were probably carried out by a single person. An argument against this view is that early passus are written in apparent ignorance of translation decisions and semantic inferences made later in the poem. That is, S preserves a learning curve, evident for instance in treatment of the Middle English words lacchen ‘catch,’ leode ‘man,’ and likame ‘body.’ Initial instances of these words are fumbled; later instances are handled with greater understanding. Other lexical items show other patterns of “working in.” If the redactor were also responsible for writing S itself, one might expect greater consistency, since writing the fair copy would provide opportunity for revision. Yet the redactor might have marked up and recopied a few pages at a time, thereby preserving his adjustment to the language, or the inconsistencies that we notice might be the residue that the redactor failed to catch and correct. Moreover, if the redactor and scribe were different people, the redactor did not check the scribe’s work, for corrections are in the main hand. Finally, corrections occasionally show the scribe engaged in precisely the type of work that we attribute to the redactor. In light of these considerations, our terms “S-redactor” and “S-scribe” should be understood to designate stages in the production of S, not necessarily a difference in persons.

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36 An example is the idiom come to pass (see OED Online, s.v. “pass n.”), established in literary English by William Tyndale and adopted by the S-redactor in reworked lines corresponding to Bx 7.172 and Bx 10.434. Another example is “maugre who-so bigrucchet it” (Bx 6.69), rendered in S as “in spight of who say naie” (fol. 24’). Oaths are often reworded.

37 Often the intruded word is a head-noun unexpressed in the received text or else an attributive adjective that yields a reading more emphatic than the received text. For instance, Bx 1.68 brother] naturall brother (the reference is to Cain and Able). Bx 1.205 alle] all thing. Bx 1.210 textis] true textes (padding an unusually short line). Bx 2.29 better] better stocke. (Such variation is well-documented in fifteenth-century manuscripts.)

38 For example, the redactor mistranslated the first instance of seuen ‘follow,’ rendered subsequent instances with contextually appropriate synonyms, then (beginning in passus 14) usually retained the Middle English word in the text. By contrast, segge ‘man’ was retained at the first instance, then (in all subsequent instances) replaced with an appropriate synonym or pronoun. For “working in,” a type of progressive adjustment to the language of an exemplar, see Michael Benskin and Margaret Laing, “Translations and Mischsprachen in Middle English Manuscripts,” in “So meny people longages and tonges”: Philological Essays in Scots and Medieval English Presented to Angus McIntosh, ed. Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh: Michael Benskin & M. L. Samuels, Middle English Dialect Project, 1981), 55–106, especially 65–69, 87–98, discussing behaviors of intralingual translation that contrast instructively with the much later S.
Most corrections redress ordinary minor acts of miswriting; instances of material revision are few in number but warrant special attention, for they show that the scribe retained access to the canceled readings of the exemplar and occasionally improved upon an initial rendering. At Bx 4.19 the scribe’s exemplar probably read as W, “And set my Sadel vp on suffre · til I se my tyme.” In place of *suffre*, the S-scribe initially wrote *my horse*, a literalism appropriate to the first half of the line but incompatible with surrounding context, which shows that *suffre* should be read as the first element of a compound allegorical name. The scribe seems to have recognized this, for *my horse* is canceled by strikethrough and *Suffre* is entered above the line in the main hand and ink (fol. 12v; see Figure 2). The correction demonstrates the scribe’s continued access to a reading presumably canceled by the redactor. A more extended example of the same situation may be seen in Bx 15.161, where the W-reading is “And wollent lene þer þei leue · lelly to ben paied.” The S-scribe initially wrote “And will gyue where they thinke / truly to be prayed for” (fol. 63r). This revision is difficult to explain and it was subsequently rejected: *gyue* and *prayed for* are canceled by strikethrough; in their place the scribe enters *lende* (supralinear) and *payd* again (at the right edge of the line, running into the margin). As at Bx 4.19, the scribe cancels a material revision and reverts to the received text, or its sense.

A second set of corrections move in the opposite direction, in that the scribe adopts an innovative reading in place of the received text. In a few instances, third-person plural pronouns in *b-* are visibly corrected to corresponding *th-* forms. At the line corresponding to Bx 13.132 the canceled word *at* agrees with the received text of this line, “And set alle sciences at a sop” (quoted again from W). Cancellation, by strikethrough, was organic to the writing process, for the line continues with the word *light*, a one-word gloss on the rejected phrase (fol. 52v). The scribe perhaps failed at first to see that the phrase *at a sop* had been marked for deletion. Other similar corrections could be cited, and some show progressive improvement of the rendering of Middle English. We also note a few uncorrected slips of the pen where the scribe miswrites, by homoeography, a small grammatical word elsewhere routinely translated out. The rarity of such errors and corrections indicates that the scribe was not redacting as he wrote; rather, he copied from a medieval manuscript that he or another had previously marked up.

5 One or Several Books?

We return now to the identity of the book or books sourced by the S-redactor and Crowley. If the S-redactor worked by marking up a medieval exemplar, as we have argued, that exemplar would have been little use to Crowley after the S-redactor had finished with it. Yet Crowley’s principal manuscript would also have received a layer of annotation in the course of service as setting copy. Some annotation

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39 We retain scribal punctuation marks. The middle dot represents a *punctus*.

40 For instance, two corrections show the scribe improving contextual translations of *connen* ‘know, know how to’ and *kithen* ‘tell’: Bx 5.183 *couth S before corr.; telle S by corr.* (fol. 17r). Bx 11.330 *conneth nouȝt S before corr.; cannot S by corr.* (fol. 45r). See also the previous note but one.

41 At Bx 2.64 the nonsensical S-reading *as* was probably induced by *ac*, the conjunction elsewhere rendered as *and* or *but*. At Bx 5.477 the nonsensical S-reading *to* was probably induced by *eto* (conj.), elsewhere rendered correctly as *when*.

would be purely formal — marking off units corresponding to the printed page — but Crowley would probably also have supplied lectional instructions to the compositor, that is, modernizations and other textual changes distinctive of his edition. It is possible that Crowley’s compositors worked from a fair copy, produced by Crowley or an assistant especially for use in the printshop, and that Crowley’s textual changes were entered into this copy rather than the medieval exemplar. Indeed, this possibility is mooted by Hailey, who suggests that S itself might be that commissioned copy, subsequently rejected by Crowley as “overly sophisticated.” Crowley or his assistant would then have started over with the S-redactor’s exemplar, presumably bearing the markings of redaction. We think this unlikely, given the often-trivial differences in modernization between S and Cr. If, however, Crowley’s compositor worked from a modern fair copy that has not survived, Crowley’s principal medieval exemplar could subsequently have passed to the S-redactor without also transmitting the readings peculiar to Crowley’s edition.

The alternative scenario is that Crowley and the S-redactor sourced a pair of very nearly related manuscripts, perhaps siblings or a parent–child pair. The chances of this outcome are increased somewhat if we suppose that they selected their exemplars from the same pool of London books and on the basis of general appearance and production values. We have suggested that S’s exemplar probably resembled Hm’s London exemplar in page format and W in some details of language and decoration. The scribes who produced these books would have produced other copies from the same fonds of exemplars and for the same clientele. Their products would have been attractive to sixteenth-century editors of Piers Plowman for some of the same reasons that W itself was attractive to twentieth-century editors of the poem: clarity of writing, metropolitan spellings, and a general impression of authority.

If Crowley and the S-redactor sourced a pair of sibling manuscripts, each would have worked with an exemplar having a unique layer of transmission error, the product of that most recent generation of copying. If they sourced a parent–child pair, the unique layer of transmission error would be limited to the child-manuscript. Confident identifications do not seem likely. A careful copyist might produce few unique errors. The problem of detection is compounded by the peculiar qualities of Cr and S. Crowley had access to multiple copies of the poem, a circumstance that will cast doubt on any particular reconstruction of his primary exemplar. (We have argued that Crowley engaged in less conflation than usually assumed, but the general point stands.) As for S, the redactor’s interventions are so pervasive that they may be expected to drown out any distinctive readings introduced by the copyist of the redactor’s exemplar.

In a sample consisting of the Prologue and first six passus of S, we nevertheless find two S-readings that perhaps indicate a distinct prior copy of the poem. The first case is a trivial example of smoothing. In S the lines corresponding to Bx 3.211 and 212 are fused into a single line, joining the first half of 211 with the second half of 212: “To giue Mede to men / & to honour them with giftes” (fol. 10v). The error has an obvious contextual trigger — eye-skip on pre-caesural men — and it appears in no other surviving copy. Yet the error is not readily attributable to S itself, for the connective & is also unique to S, and is best explained as a secondary deliberate effort to repair the roughness produced by the mechanical fusion of lines in an earlier generation of copying. The implication is that the lines were already fused in S’s exemplar. Since the lines are not fused in Cr, either the S-redactor and Crowley had different exemplars, or Crowley was able to restore the omitted half-lines by consulting another copy of the poem.

43Hailey, “Giving Light to the Reader,” 34.
A second piece of evidence for the distinctiveness of S’s exemplar involves a reading that is out of character for the redactor. At Bx 4.64, in place of luft ‘evil person,’ S reads wight ‘creature’ (fol. 13v). The archetypal reading is a rare substantive use of MED Online “lift, adj.” (sense 3b) and it was vulnerable to scribal substitution. Cr has the homoeographic variant luske; Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (sigil F) shows the same substitution as S; other copies have other substitutions. Whereas wight is an unexceptional easier reading in F, a copy produced a century before S, this word seems not to have been part of the S-redactor’s active repertoire. Where wight appears elsewhere in the received text of Piers Plowman, S sometimes transmits the word intact, but more often replaces it with man, a behavior that suggests the redactor was unlikely to introduce wight into the text. The word probably stood already in the S-redactor’s exemplar. Since the Cr-reading is only explicable as a reflex of luft, this line gives reason to think that Crowley and the S-redactor worked with different medieval texts of the poem.

Against this positive, though slight, evidence for different exemplars, we must report a negative finding. As we noted earlier in this article, the M-scribe switched exemplars at the end of passus 16, copying thereafter from a beta2 manuscript directly anterior to Cr¹S. If M were to show persistent agreement with either Cr¹ or S alone, the agreements would confirm the existence of separate medieval exemplars. Yet our fresh collation of the beta2 copies in the final four passus of the poem merely confirms Kane and Donaldson’s reports: M’s decisive affiliations are with Cr¹S jointly, not with one or the other of these copies. M’s beta2 readings fail to differentiate the source(s) behind Cr¹ and S.

6 Conclusion

In one of the few published discussions of the Takamiya manuscript, J. R. Thorne and Marie-Claire Uhart remark that it “serves to illustrate a range of potential alterations which were apparently open to Crowley but which he nevertheless chose not to employ.”⁴⁴ That remark identifies the area in which S has the greatest claim to attention: as a document of language change and literary reception. As a redaction, S needs to be read and evaluated against the form of the text encountered by the redactor. The present article lays a foundation for that comparative exercise, by showing what can be known about the medieval exemplar of this manuscript. S’s nearest relations — the other members of the beta2 group — are now well known and each, except the Crowley editions, is available in a diplomatic edition. Future study may be expected to elucidate further the S-redactor’s activities and the relation between this text and Crowley’s editions.⁴⁵

Figures

- Figure 1: New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya MS 23, fol. 29v (detail). Note the treatment of “Many tyme” at the head of Bx 7.158. Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁴⁵We thank Paul A. Broyles for technical assistance with XML and XSLT files and Timothy Stinson, Sarah Wood, and peer reviewers for comments that improved our text. They bear no responsibility for our remaining imperfections. We also thank organizers and audiences at the Seventh International Piers Plowman Conference and the 54th International Congress on Medieval Studies, where we presented early versions of this argument.
Figure 2: New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya MS 23, fol. 12v (detail). Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Bibliography


