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Monologic Langland: Contentiousness and the ‘Z Version’ of *Piers Plowman*

Abstract:

The copy of *Piers Plowman* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 851, the so-called ‘Z text’, has recently attracted renewed attention as a scribal version of considerable intrinsic interest. I here reexamine Z alongside another notorious scribal version, the ABC splice in Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (Ht). The promulgation of *Piers Plowman* in multiple versions encouraged the scribal redactors of both manuscripts to reimagine the poem in creative ways. While the Ht redactor enhanced the role of Piers Plowman at the expense of the dreamer Will, the Z redactor offered a more sentimentalized version of Piers and often expanded the ‘I’ of the dreamer. By inserting himself into the ‘I’ of the dream vision, the Z redactor authorized his own compositions while simultaneously enhancing those ‘monologic’ moments at which the dreamer offers apparently authoritative interpretation of his visions. Z’s most notable textual omission, which concludes the poem just before the tearing of the pardon, belongs to a consistent pattern in which the redactor eliminates moments of debate and opposition and expands passages of monologic commentary. Rather than an authorial draft as sometimes argued, the Z text represents an intriguing scribal misapprehension of the original poet’s ‘contentious’ compositional style.

Even within the notoriously contentious field of *Piers Plowman* textual scholarship, few manuscripts have been the object of such intense controversy as the version of Langland’s poem in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 851 (sigil Z). George Kane, the editor of the standard critical edition of *Piers Plowman* A, pronounced the form of the text copied by Hand X of Bodley 851 ‘worthless for editorial use’.¹ Z catapulted from obscurity to notoriety in 1983 with the publication of George Rigg and Charlotte Brewer’s edition, which presented

it as Langland's earliest draft of *Piers Plowman*, rather than a particularly deviant copy of the A version.² Recently critics have turned away from controversies over authorship, however, to focus on the audience and transmission of the text in Bodley 851 as evidence for the poem's early reception. While the majority of Langland students rejects Rigg-Brewer's suggestion that Z represents authorial draft, the alternative proposal that this form of the text possesses intrinsic interest as a 'scribal version' continues to gain acceptance.³

I here reconsider Z alongside another notorious 'scribal version' of Langland's poem with which it has occasionally been compared, the ABC splice in San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (sigil Ht of B).⁴ A comparison of the two copies casts further light on responses to *Piers Plowman* in the labours of 'maverick' scribes working with more than one version of the text. In both manuscripts, the activity of 'collating' exemplars belonging to different textual traditions proved a stimulus to scribal composition. Sites of difference between versions apparently invited these scribes to intrude their own voices and textual improvisations, imitating in their own creative reworkings the activities of a ceaselessly revising poet. At the same time, the dream vision form itself seems to have encouraged the Z redactor's textual interventions. Whereas the Ht redactor enhanced the role of *Piers Plowman* at the expense of the dreamer Will, Z expands the role of the dreamer while using the first-person 'I' to develop his own authority against the direction of the original text. Ironically given the heated debate it once aroused, the 'Z version' emerges as a deliberately *uncontentious* form of the poem. A recent study of Z's unique lines observes a 'tendency to temper contentious religious ideas'.⁵ But Z removes or tempers not only contentious *ideas*, but contentiousness itself as a distinctively Langlandian literary style. Z's most notable textual omission, which brings the poem to a close just before the tearing of the pardon and Piers's dispute with the priest, belongs in my account to a consistent pattern in which the Z

redactor eliminates moments of debate and opposition and expands moments of ‘monologic’ commentary.

Scholars whose primary interests lie in *Piers Plowman*’s reception, rather than the project of recovering its authorial text, have offered increasingly sympathetic and revealing accounts of the particular emphases and interests of formerly scorned manuscripts like Ht and Z. Most subsequent scholars have distanced themselves from Kane’s hostile review of Rigg and Brewer’s edition—although, ironically, it remains an exceptionally astute reading of the particular concerns of the Z version as a scribal response to Langland’s work. Though Kane’s demolition of Z’s authorial status seems to me definitive, I maintain, unlike Kane, Z’s interest as an intriguing scribal repression or misunderstanding of Langland’s characteristic mode of composition. The poet proceeds by the repeated introduction of diverse and discordant voices and perspectives, while the redactor consistently suppresses such moments.

In examining these moments of repression as a unique scribal response to a ‘signature’ authorial unit of composition, the frustrated or unresolved episode, I draw here on a different kind of evidence than that customarily employed in debates about Z’s authorship. Since the publication of Rigg and Brewer’s edition, those who have maintained Z’s authorial status, notably Carl Schmidt and, more warily, Hoyt Duggan, have pointed to the presence in Z of specific metrical types otherwise rare or unique outside of Langland’s poetry.⁶ Duggan puts his argument cautiously, however, arguing that Z’s use of a b-verse pattern found only in *Piers Plowman* and *Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede* implies the authorial status of that version ‘so far as metrical evidence alone can serve’ (my emphasis). And as he makes clear, the metrical evidence he examines might equally point to Langland or to ‘another poet who imitated his idiosyncratic style’.⁷

The latter possibility, that Z reflects the work of a Langlandian imitator, appears by far the more likely on the basis of the evidence examined here. Metrical forms are perhaps

more easily imitated (and not necessarily with any comprehension of their rarity elsewhere in the alliterative corpus) than those aspects of ‘deep’ form such as the poem’s distinctively combative episode.⁸ However closely it may replicate Langland’s metrical idiosyncrasies, Z uniquely fails or refuses to reproduce the poet’s larger, ‘contentious’ compositional style. In promoting Z as authorial draft, Rigg and Brewer as well as Schmidt neglect to take account of the characteristic shape of the Langlandian narrative episode.

Two Piers Plowman redactions: The Z version and Huntington Library, MS HM 114

Z’s character as a scribal version of Langland’s work appears more clearly through comparison with other non-authorial *Piers Plowman* ‘makings’. In their edition, Rigg and Brewer argued that Z displays none of the signs of ‘conflation on a large scale’, including ‘marks of joining, repetitions, etc’ that characterize a manuscript like Huntington Library, MS HM 114 (Ht), a form of the text produced by a redactor who enjoyed access to at least one copy of each of the three versions of *Piers Plowman*.⁹ More recently, however, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has suggested that ‘work on maverick manuscripts like F [Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201] and N² [Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS 733B] potentially offers parallels to the crux of Z’.¹⁰ As one such ‘maverick’ manuscript of considerable interest in own right, Ht also offers a useful comparison with the Z version. In both manuscripts, the existence of the text in multiple forms seems to have provided one kind of inducement to ‘creative’ scribal intervention.

In a recent discussion of Z, Karrie Fuller properly draws a distinction between the Z redactor, who frequently composed his unique lines in extended passages, and Ht, whose unique lines often, though not always, take the form of brief insertions joining blocks of text compiled from exemplars of different *Piers Plowman* versions.¹¹ However, we can also observe many instances in which the Z redactor appears also to have composed his unique

lines as part of the labour of comparing more than one version of the poem. The Z version, that is, bears many signs of the same kinds of conflation known to have taken place in Ht's redacted text. Rigg and Brewer apparently overlooked such evidence because it did not always take the form of the obvious repetitions at points of joining that appear ubiquitously in Ht.¹²

We first catch a glimpse of Z composing as he compared two copies of the poem at Z.Prol.16-17. These lines also present one of the Z text's most notorious omissions, its failure to mention the donjon, the significance of which Holy Church later explains in passus 1:

A dep dale bynethe, **as dym as a cloude:**

Hit thondred, as me thouzte, there ant nawher elles. (Z.Prol.16-17)

For Kane, the omission of the donjon represents a prime instance of the Z redactor's embarrassing 'incompetence'. For Rigg and Brewer, the failure to mention the donjon is not necessarily an inconsistency—or else, they argue, it is one that the poet subsequently noticed and revised:

[W]hen Holy Church mentions it (Z Pr 100) she does not imply that the dreamer has already noticed it. On the other hand, the poet may have decided, in revision, to provide an early reference to the dungeon.¹³

I propose an alternative explanation for the disappearance of the donjon in Z, one that need not necessarily imply only 'incompetence', though certainly it shows the Z redactor, like other scribes who similarly meddled with Langland's makings, inattentive to narrative consistency.¹⁴ Since Z's unique line and b-verse appear at a point where C also revises (omitting, as Rigg and Brewer observe, all mention of the donjon), it appears that the Z redactor was here inspired to his small act of composition by comparing his A text copy with one of C. He had already incorporated the a-verse of C.Prol.5 into his line 5, and he now

found in his C copy a version of the ‘dungeoun’ lines that differed from his A exemplar as well:

A dep dale beneþe, a dungeoun þereinne

Wiþ depe dikes & derke & dredful of sizt (A.Prol.15-16)

And seigh a depe dale; deth, as y leue,

Woned in tho wones and wikkede spiritus (C.Prol.17-18)

Presented with two different versions of the same passage, and having no means to establish their relative authority, Z apparently decided he could do better by composing a little *Piers Plowman* of his own. His version suggests that he was rather carried away by his own atmospheric description, which bears little relation to Langland’s symbolic scene of earthly life poised between alternative eternal destinies. It also points, however, to what Kane describes as the redactor’s ‘retentive ear’ for Langlandian idiom, since his lines recall the ‘dym cloude’ in Meed’s memorable description of Conscience’s embarrassment in Normandy (A.3.180/B.3.193).¹⁵

Other examples where the Z redactor was apparently similarly inspired to eke out the poem with his own creative efforts as he compared multiple exemplars can be found throughout his text. The b-verse of Z.1.104, ‘Ant be as schast as a childe **ant do churches make**’, on the face of it an odd reading, perhaps reflects another substitution at a location where the redactor noticed that his C copy contained a different form of the text.¹⁶ In passus 6, the extended passage on the ‘powers of Truth’ (Z.6.68-72, 74-8) is followed by a pair of lines derived either from B or C (B.5.592-3/C.7.240-41). Here the redactor apparently expanded both with his own compositions and with authorial lines not found in A. In passus 7, a small substitution in the b-verse of Z.7.160 describing the effects of Hunger gives ‘He bete hem so bothe that he barst nere here **guttus**’, a BC reading where A.7.163 has ‘mawis’.

The redactor's unique b-verse a few lines later in Z.7.163, 'Ant hitte Hungur theremyde **that alle ys gottes swolle**', duplicates that earlier substitution.¹⁷ Here we find precisely the kind of 'repetitions' that according to Rigg and Brewer characterize redacted forms of *Piers Plowman*.¹⁸

The pattern in Z of unique lines appearing closely associated with comparison of different textual versions resembles exactly that found in other scribal redactions of *Piers Plowman*, including Ht. For example, the unique line Ht.3.282, inserted into Conscience's address to the king after B.3.230, appears to have been inspired by comparison with a C-text copy: 'By cours of her cunnyng clerkes wyte þe soþe' (Ht.3.282). Its b-verse derives from the C-text equivalent to the line it follows: "'Nay", quod Consience to þe kyng, "clerkes witeth þe sothe"' (C.3.286). Apparently the redactor had exemplars of at least two different versions in front of him that he compared as he composed his own intervention.

Similar instances of scribal composition associated with conflation of multiple textual versions can be seen in Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (sigil F of B), another 'maverick' manuscript whose redactor worked with a copy of A (and possibly C as well) alongside his B exemplar. In passus 9, F is the sole B-manuscript witness to a line that appears in its A-text form in Kane and Donaldson's edition and in an apparently corrupted form in F (B.9.33). Kane and Donaldson accept this line as part of the authorial B version, presuming it lost in all other B manuscripts but restored in F through access to a superior, pre-archetypal exemplar. The line is preceded in F, however, by two further lines not present in any other B copy and judged by the Athlone editors to be scribal. Apparently F's act of textual reconstruction (whether derived from a superior B copy or, the explanation preferred here, from an exemplar of A) inspired the redactor to eke out the passage with some further composition of his own.¹⁹

All three ‘maverick’ scribes, Z, Ht, and F, seem at times, in short, to have been inspired in their own compositions by the work of versional comparison. Sometimes, it seems, the presence of multiple competing versions of the same line or passage undermined, in their eyes, the authority of their exemplar(s). They were inspired, apparently, to ‘go rogue’ and substitute what they presumably imagined to be a form of the text superior to any actually at hand. The multiple forms in which *Piers Plowman* had been released by its author seem to have given it a particular openness to scribal creative activity. Redactors like Z were inspired to imitate the author’s own repeated efforts at producing ‘improved’ versions of the text.

The exact context in which the Z redactor carried out his work is unknown. Rigg and Brewer claimed that the text in Bodley 851 was copied in Oxford by John Wells, monk of Ramsey Abbey, Huntingdonshire. Hanna subsequently argued that the manuscript was compiled in the Ramsey area from ‘a neighborhood East Midland A archetype’ and that only the ‘original core’ of the book, to which the *Piers* was subsequently added, could be firmly associated with John Wells.²⁰ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has since attempted to link the original composition of the Z version with ‘London writing office culture’, though on the basis largely of ‘internal evidence’, that is, passages in which Z pays particular attention to broadly legal and documentary themes.²¹ More compellingly, Simon Horobin has shown that B-text readings in the related A-text copy Harley 3954 (sigil H³) were taken from the B manuscript that provided the opening section of this copy of *Piers* (it switched to A after B.5.127). Horobin argues that Z had access to that same B-text exemplar, which may have been produced either by a religious house or by members of the secular clergy.²² What seems clear is that Z, like other ‘maverick’ copies such as Ht and N², was produced in a situation where comparison of multiple textual versions of *Piers Plowman* was common.²³ The Z redactor’s unique lines are best understood in the context of other compositions and compilations

produced by scribes working with various textual traditions of Langland's poem. Their labours are only just beginning to be appreciated, in part because the editors of the standard critical edition of *Piers Plowman* consistently overlooked the extent to which Langland's scribes compared manuscripts of different textual traditions, regularly importing even small variants from one version into copies of another.²⁴ Langland's own multiple releases of *Piers Plowman* thus had a significant effect on its reception, since while medieval scribes may not have distinguished three distinct authorial versions, those with access to multiple copies must have been acutely aware of the variousness of *Piers Plowman*'s manuscript forms. Such variousness apparently meant that many scribes were capable of imagining forms of the text that were unavailable in any manuscript they possessed, but that they might bring into being by their own efforts.²⁵ The very existence of the text in multiple forms seems to have encouraged these scribes to reimagine *Piers Plowman* in creative ways.

The dreamer, the redactor, and the 'I' of the text

The variousness of *Piers Plowman*'s textual manifestations seems to have provided one stimulus to imaginative scribal reworking. For the Z redactor, the poem's dream vision form and its use of the first person 'I' further encouraged participation in the text. In this respect, Z presents a conception of *Piers Plowman* distinct from that implicit in other redactions by 'maverick' scribes. One of the Ht redactor's major interventions into the text, for example, enhanced the role of Piers as both a more authoritative and a more contentious voice, at the expense of the dreamer Will. The Ht compiler took C-text materials in which the dreamer aggressively denounces beggars and religious pretenders and transferred them to the ploughing of the half-acre scene, in order to create a version of Piers much more vehement in his denunciation of the wasters.²⁶ By contrast, the Z redactor offered a more placid, sentimentalized version of Piers and often expanded the 'I' of the dreamer.²⁷ By

interpellating himself into the ‘I’ of the dream vision the redactor simultaneously authorized his own compositions and enhanced those monologic moments at which the dreamer offers apparently authoritative interpretations of his own visions.

The Z redactor’s two earliest insertions indicate that it was in part *Piers Plowman*’s dream vision form that encouraged his textual interventions. He very quickly intrudes himself into the poem through the first-person ‘I’ of the observing dreamer. In Z.Prol.5, the redactor inserts a line based on C.Prol.5, but with his own unique b-verse echoing the use of *occupatio* in authorial lines such as B.2.62: ‘**Ant sey many sellys, Y can nat sey alle**’ (Z.Prol.5).²⁸ For Kane, Z’s b-verse represents another example of his incompetence: ‘why should there be an *occupatio* in the fifth line of this poem?’ he asks.²⁹ Certainly its inclusion implies Z’s poor understanding of larger narrative economy, but it also suggests his effort at imitating and extending Langland’s presentation of the poem as the direct experience of its dreamer-narrator. Z extends the poem’s use of the ‘I’ of dream vision again a few lines later in a passage where we have already observed the redactor revising at a point of versional difference:

A dep dale bynethe, **as dym as a cloude:**

Hit thondred, as me thouzte, there ant nawher elles (Z.Prol.16-17, my italics)

Another example of Z’s narrative inconsistency (the redactor has lost sight of the donjon under his added cloud-cover), the lines also indicate again a tendency to expand the role of the observing dreamer. The presentation of individual subjectivity in the dream vision form seems to have been one factor that encouraged the Z redactor to personalize the poem with his own materials.

The tendency to expand the role of the first-person narrator appears persistently through Z’s text. The unique line Z.2.45, for example, asserts the presence of the dreamer as witness to the unfolding vision, again with the implication that he observes more than he is

able fully to report: ‘**Sothnesse ant myself sey this ant more**’.³⁰ Z’s additional line here seems designed to confer additional authority on the dreamer, whom the redactor aligns with a righteous personification (though it unwittingly also diminishes Sothnesse’s omniscience by subordinating his observations, too, to the narrator’s limited report). Similarly, in passus 5, Z eliminates most of A’s description of Coveitise but retains the use of the first-person observer. Here, another instance of authorial *occupatio* in A becomes in Z a more direct statement of the dreamer’s eager observations: ‘**A haued a Northfolk nose, Y noem ful god hede**’ (Z.5.98).³¹ Z apparently recollected here the scene later in the B text where Conscience and the dreamer scrutinize Haukin’s coat with Patience: ‘I took greet kepe, by crist! and Conscience boþe, / Of haukyn þe Actif man and how he was ycloped’; ‘And he torned hym as tyd and þanne took I hede’ (B.13.271-2, 318). Such recollection vitiates, of course, any suggestion that the unique Z line might reflect authorial draft *prior* to A.³²

The interest the Z redactor took in the figure of the dreamer as observer can be seen most clearly where this interest also appears most ineptly, at the end of passus 4. In another piece of narrative inconsistency, Z’s dreamer reports here that the king and Reason retired ‘**Ant busked to boure; Y beheld hem no lengur**’ (Z.4.159). The insertion is unfortunate, since it contradicts what follows immediately in the next passus, where the same characters are in fact still present. But while it exposes once more the redactor’s inattention to consistent logic, Z’s insertion also illustrates his care to expand wherever possible the presence of the dreamer-narrator.

In extending the role of the dreamer in many of his unique lines, the Z redactor partly develops that which was already present in the authorial versions of *Piers Plowman*, but he frequently uses the dreamer against the direction of Langland’s own work. As Fuller observes, the Z redactor often frustrates Langland’s satirical purposes by inserting approving or neutral commentary that ‘interrupts the [...] negative flow’ of the original.³³ Often Z’s

writing against the satirical grain in such passages develops from the authorial text, but in inapposite new contexts, the posture of the narrator as an observer who carefully abstains from critique.

Langland had himself extended this pose of the narrator in the B version of the estates satire in the Prologue, as for example where he refuses to offer further commentary on papal election at B.Prol.111, or declines to expound the *moralitas* of his beast fable of the belling of the cat: ‘Deuyne ye, for I ne dar’ (B.Prol.210). The Z redactor apparently noted and extended this conceit of the uncritical narrator in his own passages, though he used it in such a way as to frustrate the original satirical intent of the authorial lines into which he intrudes.

Langland’s original attacks on friars, hermits, and pilgrims thus give way in the Z version to lines on ‘blessed bishops’, who receive the dreamer’s personal imprimatur: ‘**Y deme hem neen other**’; ‘**Y leue they lyue ant lere vs the same**’ (Z.Prol.54, 56).³⁴ An insertion on justices similarly refuses any critical comment, again opposing the direction of the preceding attack on lawyers who plead only for money: ‘**Forthy lak y nat tho lordus – lawes they kepe**’ (Z.Prol.72). A long insertion on doctors likewise expands the commentary of the dreamer, but refuses the role of satirist: ‘**I defame nat fysyk, for the science ys trewe**’ (Z.7.260). Perhaps the Z redactor had read the dreamer’s later conversation with Lewte (B.11.85-106α) and misinterpreted it as a blanket ban on satire. The Z redactor in any case frequently uses the ‘I’ of dream vision as a means of importing his own, usually approving, ideas and materials into the poem against its original sense.³⁵

At the same time as using the ‘I’ of the text to authorize his personal insertions, the Z redactor develops the role of the dreamer as an authoritative interpreter of his own visions. In introducing Holy Church in the Prologue (Z’s passus divisions here differing from the authorial versions), the redactor revises two lines of A into a new, unique line:

What þe mounteyne bemeniþ, & ek þe merke dale,

And ek þe feld ful of folk I shal 3ow faire shewe (A.1.1-2)

In Z these lines become a direct imperative addressed at the reader: ‘**Ac the heye hyl in the Est, here wat hit menes**’ (Z.Prol.94). Z subsequently recycled the previously rejected b-verse of A.1.2 in three unique lines at the beginning of passus 2:

Now haue Y told yow of trewthe, that no tresor ys bettre.

Yf ye wyl weten of Wrong, Y wyl yow fayre schewe

Bothe of Fauel ant Falsede that myche folk apeyreth (Z.2.1-3)

The redactor’s insertion here intensifies the presence of the dreamer in the mode of direct didacticism.³⁶ As David Lawton observes in his influential study of the first-person ‘subject’ of *Piers Plowman*, ‘the promised gloss on the Prologue with which passus 1 opens is surely straightforwardly authorial, a monologic moment’.³⁷ It is delimited and ‘overdetermined’, in contrast to the generally ‘dialogic’ mode of *Piers Plowman*, in which we find ‘plural and autonomous discourses freed from an author’s control’.³⁸ In duplicating the first lines of passus 1 at the start of passus 2, the Z redactor renders the poem more ‘monologic’ than Langland’s original.

Here, I think, we detect the broader purpose behind the redactor’s expansion of the role of the dreamer in these lines. The Z redactor sought, it seems, to delimit the poem’s openness and plurality of voices. He achieved this in part by extending those lines in which the dreamer intervenes directly to offer ‘monologic’ commentary upon his visions. He also, correspondingly, worked to excise many of the moments at which Langland moves freely between alternative voices and perspectives.

Cuts and contentiousness in the Z redaction

While enhancing the dreamer’s authoritative, monologic commentary on his visions, Z simultaneously diminished the dialogic form of *Piers Plowman* by eliminating many of the

points at which contentious voices or opposing arguments and discourses intrude upon the narrative. Moreover, at the same time as he expanded the role of the dreamer, he also offered a more sentimentalized version of Piers. His most notable omission from the authorial text, concluding his version of *Piers Plowman* before the tearing of the pardon, belongs to a pattern of both a less contentious plowman and a less contentious poem. Although Z's own intrusions often strike a discordant note, his omissions seem designed to suppress or silence those moments of disharmony that form the basic compositional mode of *Piers Plowman* in its authorial versions.

While Z worked to expand the presence of the dreamer as authoritative commentator on his visions, he also adjusted the text so as to emphasize Piers's simple piety. This at least is the effect of Z's interventions where, in a passage that attracted much scribal attention in *Piers* manuscripts, the humble ploughman prepares his testament:

He schal haue my sowle that beste hath deserued,
 Ant defenden hit fro the fend, for so Y byleue,
 Tyl **he come ant acounte**, as my crede telleth,
At domus day to do me dwelle wyth my sowle in his blisse,
For that Y labored in ys lawe al my lyf tyme. (Z.7.73-7)³⁹

Kerby-Fulton has suggested that the Z redactor displays a particular interest in legal and documentary aspects of the poem, wondering 'whether the Z redactor was himself connected to the legal community'.⁴⁰ Here, however, the redactor excises the specifically legal diction of the A version. His two unique lines replace one in A, 'To haue reles & remissioun, on þat rental I leue' (A.7.82), substituting for the legal vocabulary of 'reles & remissioun' and 'rental' the blander piety of the soul dwelling in bliss with God.⁴¹ Z's version certainly looks like a scribal substitution of the general for the specific, but it is a substitution that reflects a particular agenda: a more straightforwardly 'unlearned' version of Piers.

The same tendency towards a sentimentalized view of the poem's hero can be seen again in the unique lines Z.7.196-201, inserted into Piers's questions to Hunger concerning beggars:

“Now wold Y wytte, yf thow wistus, wat were the beste,
 How Y myghte amaystren hem ant maken hem to wyrche,
Tho that ben staleword ant stronge ant struyores beth holden.
For bedreden ant blynde ant broke-legged wreches
That ben syke ant sory, Y schal yse mysilf
That they haue bred ant brede beddyng ant clotus,
Ant kepe hem fro colde, so me Cryst helpe,
Ant eke fro hungur ant harme as myn owne chyldren.” (Z.7.194-201)

Like many of his expansions, the Z redactor's insertion here reverses the direction of the argument in the authorial text, or at least adjusts its balance. In the A version, Piers finds himself torn between his perception of blood brotherhood with the wasters (A.7.193) and his desire to ‘amaistrie hem & make hem to werche’ (A.7.197). Z's insertion seeks to mitigate the harshness of that final statement in A by elaborating Piers's care for the ‘deserving’ poor. In another instance of the redactor's tendency towards (characteristically scribal) duplication and repetitiveness, Z's addition essentially repeats Piers's earlier qualification that he will provide for the blind, lame, and for genuine religious (A.7.130-38=Z.7.127-35). It also displaces Hunger's exemption of the unfortunate from starvation tactics in the A text, a passage omitted from Z (A.7.204-11; Z drops 208-12α).

Z's adjustments give greater weight to Piers's compassion for the deserving poor, working somewhat against the grain of his question to Hunger at this point with its yearnings for justice against the undeserving, who are nevertheless recognized as ‘bloody brethren’.

The Ht redactor's insertion of foreign material at this point in the poem similarly introduces a

discordant note into the confrontation between Piers and the wasters. This redactor seems to have wished to present a generally more forceful Piers, assigning to him a long tirade from C passus 9 against beggars, here in its new context redirected at wasters. But in interpolating C materials, Ht also incorporated richly compassionate lines on the ‘deserving’ poor as well, lending Piers a note of pity, though one hardly relevant to a speech *attacking* wasters.⁴² Both redactors thus introduce a degree of inconsistency into their presentation of the plowman’s admittedly mixed feelings about the idlers. In general, however, the Ht redactor apparently intended to increase the mixture in the direction of condemnation, whereas Z offers a sweeter, kinder Piers.

It may be that the Z redactor’s compassionate insertion into Piers’s dialogue with Hunger was again inspired by comparison with another form of the text. Where the Ht redactor directly imported into the ploughing scene material taken from another part of the C version, Z’s emphasis on Piers’s compassion for the poor was perhaps influenced by revisions introduced into this same passage in its C-text form. In this version, Piers acknowledges that the wasters have been coerced into work by hunger, not out of love:

‘Hit is nat for loue, leue hit, thei labore thus faste

But for fere of famyen, in fayth,’ sayde Peres.

‘Ther is no fial loue with this folk for al here fayre speche

...

Now wolde y wyte, ar thow wendest, what where þe beste;

How y myhte amaystre hem to louye and labory

For here lyflode, lere me now, sire hunger.’ (C.8.213-15, 19-21)

Given the evidence elsewhere that Z’s unique lines were sometimes inspired by observing points of difference between textual versions, it seems possible that the redactor’s highlighting of Piers’s love and care for the poor was suggested by the new emphasis on love

in these lines in C. In any case, his general intention to present a sweeter version of Piers seems clear.

A general desire to present a more sentimentalized, pious picture of Piers may in part also explain Z's most obvious omission: its failure to include the tearing of the pardon. The Z version of the text copied by Hand X of Bodley 851 concludes at the equivalent of A.8.88, a line that echoes the formal ending of the A version (A.11.313) but leaves the pardon unchallenged by the priest and untorn by Piers. It would fall to a second scribe, Hand Q, to complete passus 8 from another source before adding a C version conclusion.⁴³ Various explanations have been proposed to explain why Hand X's text concludes where it does, and why Q copied his continuation from a different textual source. The most mundane would involve a defective exemplar of a once fuller form of the text.⁴⁴ Yet as Fuller indicates, given the evidence that the Z redactor knew the poem in its longer forms, the conclusion of X's text at this point would appear deliberate. Fuller notes that the text 'conspicuously concludes at the exact moment when Piers's character behaves most controversially'. She argues that the absence of the priest's challenge to Piers 'underlines the redactor's concerns about preaching and exegetical authority', concerns she detects in a Z-text addition to Hunger's speech.⁴⁵ Kerby-Fulton suggests, alternatively, that the Z redactor, 'likely a writing office man', preferred to keep the pardon intact because it included the 'new' social class of merchants with whom professional scribes were closely associated.⁴⁶ Both recent explanations, it seems to me, miss what is at stake, for the form of the poem itself, in the pardon scene that Z excises.

I suggest that it was neither the erasure of the 'merchants in the margin' nor concerns about who possessed authority to preach that prompted Z to exclude the scene in which Piers tears the pardon. The redactor in fact sought to remove contentiousness and debate itself from the conclusion of his *Piers Plowman*. Suppressing Piers's confrontation with the priest proves

consistent with the redactor's general interest in presenting a milder, more straightforwardly pious version of the character. It might also have been motivated in part by comparison with a C-text exemplar, in which the tearing scene is absent. But Z's removal of the tearing also belongs to a pattern throughout his version of the text of muting debate and dialectic on all subjects, while simultaneously extending 'monologic' moments such as the dreamer's new intervention at the head of passus 2.

The earliest instance where the redactor represses dialectic occurs at the end of passus 3, at the conclusion of what Rigg and Brewer term 'Meed's denunciation of Conscience for avarice'. Z again concludes a passus before an important sequence, here the lines in which Conscience responds to Meed's attack by elaborating, at increasing length in each successive version, the two different types of meed. Z's version concludes instead, after an extended attack on Conscience for his support of friars and covetous clergy, with a sudden capitulation. Meed concludes her attack, oddly, by acknowledging that Conscience in fact has mastery over her:

**“Conscience in couetyse clericus hath robed,
 Ant soyleth men for syluer, we sen wel ouresylue.
 Conscience ys the cumsyng of alle skynes werkus:
 Be hyt wel, be hit wo, a wot hyt at the furst.
 Ys maystry ys aboue me that Mede am yhote.
 Wythouten hys wyt wyrch Y not, God wot the sothe,
 That thow ne art furst foundur: god fayth it knoweth.”** (Z.3.170-76)

Meed's sudden collapse resembles the similar rhetorical inconsistencies introduced into Piers's questioning of Hunger and into the satirical passages of the Prologue. As Kane powerfully demonstrated, although the passage 'appears entirely without reasonable organization', it nevertheless reflects a redactor's attempt to make sense of the apparently

contradictory behaviour of Conscience in the B version of *Piers Plowman*. Z's insertion reveals 'his understanding of the personification reinterpreted in terms of the wrong decision about Friar Flatterer' in B passus 20.⁴⁷

The absence of any reply from Conscience to the tirade from Meed as it is expanded in Z cements the case for its status as scribal response. Rigg and Brewer note the elaboration of Conscience's reply, distinguishing the two different kinds of meed, in each of the A, B and C versions, implying that its absence in Z forms part of a consistent authorial trend of expansion.⁴⁸ Yet it seems simply inconceivable that Langland had composed a version of the text lacking that discussion of the just basis for reward. Such a theme is already implicit in Theology's objection to the marriage to False (Z.2.86-96, a passage which in fact incorporates a B-version line), and as the poem's foundational discussion of how (or whether) humans might merit God's reward, Conscience's discussion of the two kinds of meed forms the very basis for the ploughing and pardon scene that follows in the next vision.

The difference between the conclusion of passus 3 in Z and A therefore seems more satisfactorily explained as scribal excision than as authorial expansion. The absence in Z of the passage on the two kinds of meed seems consistent with the omission of the tearing of the pardon. In each case, the redactor suppresses difficult and inconclusive explorations of the nature of divine reward. But both absences also reflect a failure on the redactor's part to understand or reproduce the debate mode that is central to the Meed v. Conscience episode, and to the poem as a whole. In Langland's work, no statement, and particularly not an argument so clearly specious as that offered by Meed in Z's version, goes unchallenged.

That the redactor consistently suppresses this central dialectic mode of the poem can be seen again at the end of passus 6, which concludes with Piers Plowman's instructions on the way to Truth. Z expands this sequence with some unique lines on the 'powers of Truth' (Z.6.68-78) together with two added lines derived from either B or C (Z.6.79-80). Yet he

also, once again, cuts the discussion off before its A-text conclusion. Rigg and Brewer observe in their notes that A ‘adds VI 104-123 on the Seven Sisters that serve Truth’, but this is only a partial statement of the differences between Z and A. The omitted lines include not only Piers’s discussion of the seven sisters, but also a subsequent scene of dissent. In a pattern repeated throughout the poem, from the wasters on the half-acre to the Brewer’s rejection of Conscience’s injunction to repentance (B.19.396-402), a hard core of sinners rejects not just Piers’s community project, but the very discourse of religious instruction. Misunderstanding Piers’s allegorical conceit of spiritual kinship, a cutpurse, apeward, and waferer say they have no kin or connections who might give them an introduction at the great house of Truth (A.6.115-18). Perhaps Z omitted the scene because, like the priest’s challenge to the pardon, it seemed to undermine Piers’s authority as the pious hero of the poem. But like the cutpurse, the Z redactor misunderstood the very form of *Piers Plowman* when he omitted this passage—and so did Rigg and Brewer in imagining the Z-text form an authorial draft. The rag-bag of sceptical voices that intrudes at the end of the passus turns the scene of instruction into a characteristically Langlandian unresolved or contentious episode. As Anne Middleton shows, just such an ‘injection of a countervailing force’ repeatedly brings narrative episodes in *Piers Plowman* to an abrupt end; the ‘combat’ between Piers and the priest represents only the most memorable of many similar ‘scenes of dispute’.⁴⁹ In the case of this particular scene in its A-text form, the authoritative discourse of religious allegory/‘vernacular theology’ comes up against the stubborn literal-mindedness of the ordinary sinner and the language of the street (‘Be crist [...] I haue no kyn þere’, A.6.115). As he did with the pardon scene and the debate between Conscience and Meed, the Z redactor again cuts short the episode just before the intrusion of the ‘countervailing force’: immediately before Langland subjects Piers’s instruction to the dissenting voices of those resistant to moral effort and improvement.

The Z redactor's suppression of the poem's dialectic or contentious form appears most clearly in his omission of the conclusions of these three major episodes: the tearing of the pardon, the debate between Meed and Conscience, and the journey to Truth. But it also appears in more subtle ways in his other notable omissions. All commentators on Z have observed the dramatically reduced form in which the confessions of the seven deadly sins appear in this version. For those who accept the authorial status of Z, the brevity of the sequence in Z again reflects a consistent pattern of authorial expansion in each successive version.⁵⁰ But the difference between Z and A is not only a question of length, but of literary form. In Z, the confessions are not in fact confessions at all.⁵¹ We find no characterization of the sins through the descriptions of their bodily attributes, such as A's description of Envy (A.5.60-8).⁵² Instead, Z takes his cue from the rather straightforward promises of amendment offered by Pernel Proud-herte and Lecchour. Thus he substitutes for Envy's long confession (A.5.69-102) some bland pieties (Z.5.91-6) that lump together Envy and Wrath (famously omitted in A). The reader of Z misses, also, Coveitise's elaborately detailed account of his sins (A.5.114-41). In A this account already massively outweighs his brief promise of future amendment (A.7.142-5), the only part of his 'confession' (apart from the Norfolk humour otherwise present only in B) that Z reproduces.⁵³ And the reader of Z is denied access to the poem's most crowd-pleasing scene, Glutton's misadventures in the tavern. In Z, we find once more only the sin's promise to amend:

Thenne gan Gloten to grete ant gret sorwe made

Al for ys luyther lyf that a lyued hadde (Z.5.104-05)

Here again we can observe the tell-tale sign of scribal redaction in the inclusion of a line from another version at a point of revision and excision: Z.5.104 takes over the a-verse of B.5.379.⁵⁴ As such a scribal redaction, Z omits, critically, the dramatic dialectic between the sinful impulse and the desire for reform that sees Glutton so famously set out with good

intentions, only to backslide into his weekend bender, with its glorious parody of the confession he was supposed to render (rehearsing his sins replaced by literal spewing up).

In short, Z misapprehends or else refuses to reproduce the fundamental irony of the whole sequence of confessions, expressed most succinctly and wittily in A's exchange between Repentance and Envy. Envy cannot be other than 'sorry', though he misunderstands Repentance's use of the term (A.5.103-06). The drama of the scene turns on the fundamental tension between confession as an agent of inward reform and the resistance of embodied sin to be other than what it is. Z offers not simply a shorter form of the confessions, but a version that shows no trace of the dramatic *dialectic* of sin and reform essential to the sequence in all its authorial versions.⁵⁵

Conclusion: Scribal and authorial forms

Recent discussions of Z, in keeping with a general topical tendency in *Piers Plowman* studies, have cast further light on the redactor's response to the poem's subject matter—predominantly, of course, its anticlerical materials. But our own interest in such topics should not lead us to overlook scribal responses to the *formal* properties of Langland's poem. It was not only *Piers Plowman*'s treatment of themes of urgent contemporary concern, but also specific formal aspects of Langland's work, including its use of the dream vision genre, that seem to have invited scribal participation in the experience of the poem. At the same time, *Piers Plowman*'s idiosyncratic form as a series of multiple dreams and unresolved episodes appears to have been particularly susceptible to scribal resistance, misunderstanding, and reimagination, as we find also in the F redactor's reordering of the poem's dream and passus structure, for example, or in the confused rubrication at the start of passus 5 in Ht, which implies the scribe's hesitation about the status of the waking interlude that launches that passus in the C version.⁵⁶

Similarly, even as the Z redactor inserted himself into the 'I' of Langland's dream poem, his intrusions worked against the general dialogic tendency of the text, a feature of the poem in fact frequently occluded in its manuscript and print transmission.⁵⁷ It is not simply that the Z redactor omits contentious ideas; he suppresses authorial materials at all the major points in the first two visions where Langland moves to introduce a discordant note. Z's leaving the pardon intact stands as merely the most dramatic instance of the redactor's repeated resistance to the unresolved episodes that form Langland's basic unit of composition. Z may at times successfully recreate Langland's metre and vocabulary, but the redactor's work represents a fundamental misapprehension or misrepresentation of the original poet's larger idiom. Far from an early draft, Z witnesses an attempt to write out of *Piers Plowman* those moments of discord that, just as much as particular lexical choices or metrical patterns, are the poet's essential compositional signature.

¹ See William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London, 1975), 14-15, n. 95. Some time after Hand X wrote the ‘Z text’, equivalent to A.Prol.-A.8.88, a second scribe, Q, completed A passus 8 (this section of the text referred to as Q1) and then continued the poem in its long form with C passus 10-22 (Q2).

² William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The Z Version*, ed. A. G. Rigg and Charlotte Brewer, *Texts and Studies*, 59 (Toronto, 1983). All quotations from Z in this essay are from this edition, reproducing the bold face that Rigg-Brewer employ for unique lines and readings. Other quotations from *Piers Plowman* are taken from the Athlone edition: see note 1 and *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, ed. George Kane (London, 1960); *Piers Plowman: The C Version*, ed. George Russell and George Kane (London, 1997).

³ George Kane’s critical review of the edition rejected the Z version’s c. 200 unique lines as ‘bodger’s work’: see ‘The “Z Version” of *Piers Plowman*’, *Speculum*, 60 (1985), 910-30 (at 919). Ralph Hanna’s more temperate discussion rejected Rigg and Brewer’s claims for the early authorial status of the text in Bodley 851 largely on codicological grounds: see ‘MS. Bodley 851 and the Dissemination of *Piers Plowman*’, section two of ‘Studies in the Manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 7 (1993), 1-25 (at 14-23); reprinted as chap. 11 of *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts*, *Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford, 1996), 195-202. Carl Schmidt maintains the authorial status of Z and presents it alongside A, B, and C in his recently revised parallel-text edition: William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, revised edn (Kalamazoo, 2011), 2 vols in 3 parts (discussion of Z in vol. 2, pt 1, 211-30). For recent discussions of Z as a scribal version, see Karrie Fuller, ‘The Craft of the “Z-Maker”: Reading the Z text’s Unique Lines in Context’,

Yearbook of Langland Studies, 27 (2013), 15-43 and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Confronting the Scribe-Poet Binary: The Z Text, Writing Office Redaction, and the Oxford Reading Circles', in Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle (eds), *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall* (Notre Dame, 2014), 489-515.

⁴ Ht attracts increasing attention in its own right. The scribe of HM 114 was recently identified as Richard Osbarn, clerk of the London Guildhall, by Linne Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature 1375-1425* (York, 2013), 17-37. For discussion of this scribe's work, see Ralph Hanna, 'The Scribe of Huntington HM 114', *Studies in Bibliography*, 42 (1989), 120-33 and, more recently, Noelle Phillips, 'Compilational Reading: Richard Osbarn and Huntington Library MS HM 114', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 28 (2014), 65-104. The original discussion of his copy of *Piers Plowman* is G. H. Russell and Venetia Nathan, 'A *Piers Plowman* Manuscript in the Huntington Library', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 26 (1963), 119-30.

⁵ Fuller, 'The "Z-Maker"', 23. In contrast to earlier studies focusing on metrical aspects of the Z redactor's work, Fuller concerns herself largely with content, arguing that 'theme and content, as opposed to poetic imitation' are the redactor's own 'overriding concerns' (19).

⁶ Schmidt points to the presence in Z of what he calls the 'transitional' line type, where a 'mute' stave (bearing alliteration but not stress) carries the sound of the a-verse into a b-verse that contains two full staves with a different sound (thus scanning aa/[a]bb). Such lines, he argues, like C.5.23, '**Y am to wayke to wurrche with sykel or with sythe**', are unique to Langland. However, not all of Schmidt's examples of 'transitional' type lines in Z, as Duggan subsequently pointed out, convince. For instance, Z.5.144, 'That Y ne begged ne borwed ne in despeyr deyde', appears clearly, as Duggan argues, an example of the scribal,

not authorial, pattern aa/bb. Duggan nevertheless accepted Schmidt's case for the presence in Z of 'transitional' lines and for the uniquely Langlandian status of such lines. He also added further metrical evidence, the presence in Z of b-verses that contain two 'strong' dips (i.e., of two or more syllables). Again, such verses are rare in the alliterative corpus, otherwise appearing authorial only in *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*. See A. V. C. Schmidt, 'The Authenticity of the Z Text of *Piers Plowman*: A Metrical Examination', *Medium Aevum*, 53 (1984), 295-300; Hoyt N. Duggan, 'The Authenticity of the Z Text of *Piers Plowman*: Further Notes on Metrical Evidence', *Medium Aevum*, 56 (1987), 25-45.

⁷ Duggan, 'The Z-Text', 40, 25.

⁸ Cf. Kane's scathing assessment of Z's capacity for 'sequent discourse and narrative logic' versus his 'retentive' ear for Langlandian phraseology ('The "Z Version"', 925-6). John But's continuation, with its pastiche of earlier and later B-text episodes, similarly implies that scribes found it easier to imitate Langland's local idiom than to generate sustained narrative action in Langlandian style.

⁹ *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 11.

¹⁰ Kerby-Fulton, 'Confronting the Scribe-Poet Binary', 490-91.

¹¹ Fuller, 'The "Z-Maker"', 37-9. Ht's unique lines are listed by Patricia R. Bart, 'Intellect, Influence, and Evidence: The Elusive Allure of the Ht Scribe', in Michael Calabrese and Stephen H. A. Shepherd (eds), *Yee? Baw for Bokes: Essays on Medieval Manuscripts and Poetics In Honor of Hoyt N. Duggan* (Los Angeles, 2013), 219-43, Appendix 1 and 2 (line numbers for Ht's unique lines within the present essay follow numbers there). As Bart's appendices reveal, Fuller somewhat overstates the frequency with which Ht's unique lines simply stitch together compiled authorial materials.

¹² Just one example: in the confession of Wrath in passus 5, the Ht redactor copied both revised and unrevised versions of the same line in close succession (C.6.138 and B.5.163),

suggesting a high degree of tolerance for repetition: ‘Til þow lixt & þow lixt be lady ouer hem alle / Of wikkyd wordes y wratthe her wortes made / Til þow lies & þow lies lopyn out at ones (fol. 28r). For discussion of further examples, see Sarah Wood, ‘Confession and Compilation: The Seven Deadly Sins in Huntington Library, MS HM 114’, *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 29 (2015), 117-49. According to Rigg and Brewer’s unlikely hypothesis, readings in Z otherwise found only in B and C manuscripts are not the product of similar scribal redaction, but instead are ‘integral to the original draft of the poem, omitted by manuscripts of the A-tradition’; see *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 10-11.

¹³ Kane, ‘The “Z Version”’, 918; *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 13.

¹⁴ For similar inattentiveness in the work of the Ht redactor, see Wood, ‘Confession and Compilation’, 126.

¹⁵ Z also includes the reference to the ‘dym cloude’ in its authorially-sanctioned location in passus 3 (Z.3.131). Schmidt (*Parallel-Text*, II.1, 211-12), argues that Z represents the original, with A editing out the ‘dym cloude’ of the Prologue to avoid the repetition in passus 3. His argument assumes, however, that Z.Prol.16b-17 represent what Rigg and Brewer call ‘unmotivated imitation’, that is composition that does not occur at ‘points of omission’ from A (see *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 15). In my reading, the ‘imitation’ here of a later part of the poem *is* motivated: it was inspired by comparison of an A exemplar with a copy of C.

¹⁶ A here reads ‘þat in chirche weþip’ (A.1.154) where C has ‘And ben as chast as a child þat chyht noþer ne fyhteth’ (C.1.176).

¹⁷ A.7.166 reads ‘amydde hise lippes’.

¹⁸ Rigg and Brewer in fact themselves list various lines that ‘unnecessarily repeat or expand earlier lines or ideas’ and which in their view were subsequently cancelled by Langland (*The*

Z Version, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 16). But such duplications, while not wholly foreign to Langland's own work, resemble most closely other scribal renditions of the poem. For Langland's tendency to duplicate at points of revision, however, see Andrew Galloway, 'Uncharacterizable Entities: The Poetics of Middle English Scribal Culture and the Definitive *Piers Plowman*', *Studies in Bibliography*, 52 (1999), 59-87, at 74-7.

¹⁹ See *The B Version*, ed. Kane and Donaldson, 171; *The Piers Plowman Electronic Archive, Vol. 1: Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201 (F)*, ed. Robert Adams, Hoyt N. Duggan, Eric Eliason, Ralph Hanna, John Price-Wilkin, and Thorlac Turville-Petre, SEENET Series A.1, web edition (2014) <http://piers.iath.virginia.edu/exist/piers/main/B/F>, Introduction: Presentation of the text, section 4: The F-Redactor.

²⁰ *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 3-5; Hanna, 'Studies', 20-22 and *Pursuing History*, 200-01.

²¹ Kerby-Fulton, 'Confronting the Scribe-Poet Binary', 500. Kerby-Fulton misrepresents the dialect evidence in her observation that '*The Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* places the dialect of Z in Worcester, but, as Simon Horobin notes of so many Worcestershire *Piers* texts "suggestive of London interferences," I would suggest that Z's may have hailed originally from metropolitan circles, too.' In fact, there exists no evidence in Bodley 851 for London linguistic interference of the kind that occurs in a group of C-text manuscripts which derive their S-W Midlands forms from their exemplars. As Kerby-Fulton herself reports (513-14, n. 48), the X portion of Bodley 851 is in Worcestershire language, with Q1 originating from Suffolk or SE Norfolk and Q2 from Worcestershire. For the internal linguistic mixture appearing in C-text manuscripts produced in London to which Kerby-Fulton alludes, see Simon Horobin, "'In London and Opelond": The Dialect and Circulation of the C Version of *Piers Plowman*', *Medium Ævum*, 74 (2005), 248-69.

²² Simon Horobin, 'Harley 3954 and the audience of *Piers Plowman*', in Denis Renevey and Graham D. Caie (eds), *Medieval Texts in Context* (London, 2008), 68-84, at 78-9. H³ derives from South Norfolk, a location not far removed from the probable origin of Bodley 851.

²³ For the relationship of Ht and N², which share a C-text source originating in the London book trade, see Robert Adams and Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The London Book Trade and the Lost History of *Piers Plowman*', *Review of English Studies*, 65 (2014), 219-35. The scribe of HM 114 is a well-known metropolitan copyist whose hand has been identified in the *Liber Albus* and in London Letter Book I. There is, however, no corresponding evidence that Z derives from a similar metropolitan context. Z's textual relationship to the group EAMH³, three copies of which derive from East Anglia, points instead to its derivation from 'an offbeat neighborhood archetype' (Hanna, 'Studies', 21). For the scribal dialects, see M. L. Samuels, 'Dialect and Grammar', in John A. Alford (ed.), *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, (Berkeley, 1988), 201-21 (at 205-08).

²⁴ For discussion of Kane and Donaldson's failure to address the phenomenon of cross-versional conflation at the level of individual readings, see Robert Adams, 'Editing *Piers Plowman* B: The Imperative of an Intermittently Critical Edition', *Studies in Bibliography*, 45 (1992), 31-68, at 54-58.

²⁵ Daniel Wakelin has recently described how scribes worked to produce a 'complete' form of the text, either by consulting another exemplar or by improvising their own materials to fill in gaps they had deduced. Such efforts, he argues, demonstrate a 'worry that a better text might survive elsewhere, in books other than those they possess'; these anxieties are born of their experience of the vagaries of manuscript transmission. See *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375-1510*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 91 (Cambridge, 2014), 246.

²⁶ See Sarah Wood, ‘Nonauthorial *Piers*: C-text Interpolations in the Second Vision of *Piers Plowman* in Huntington Library, MS HM 114’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 114 (2015), 482-503, building upon the earlier discussion by John Thorne, ‘Piers or Will: Confusion of Identity in the early reception of *Piers Plowman*,’ *Medium Aevum*, 60 (1991), 273-84.

²⁷ Cf. Fuller, ‘The “Z-Maker”’, 23, noting that the Z redactor ‘emphasizes acts of preaching and teaching, imitation of Piers’s worthy lifestyle, and the rewards and consequences of sinful versus righteous living.’

²⁸ C here reads, ‘And say many selles and selkouthe thyngus’. Cf. B.2.62, ‘I kan noȝt rekene þe route þat ran aboute Mede’.

²⁹ Kane, ‘The “Z Version”’, 918.

³⁰ Cf. Z.Prol.93 (A.Prol.109), ‘Al this Y say **in my slep** ant seuene sithes more’.

³¹ Cf. A.5.107, ‘Panne com coueitise; I can hym nouȝt descryue’.

³² Coveitise’s ‘Norfolk nose’ also recalls B-text materials, in this case the personification’s claim that he knows only the ‘French of Norfolk’ (B.5.236). Z’s extension of the B-text’s Norfolk humour again points to production of this version in an East Anglian context in which B exemplars were available for comparison with A. The other unique Norfolk reference in Z, in which Meed tells Conscience, ‘**Out of Northfolk or Normawndye thy name was yfounde**’ (Z.3.148), tells against any authorial status for these unique lines. The reference to Norfolk is irrelevant to the original context and seems inspired only by alliteration with Normandy, already mentioned earlier (Z.3.127).

³³ Fuller, ‘The “Z-Maker”’, 19-22.

³⁴ For discussion of this insertion and its incongruity, see Kane, ‘The “Z Version”’, 918; Fuller, ‘The “Z-Maker”’, 20-21.

³⁵ A desire to develop a more approving posture for the dreamer also explains Z's omission of the episode (A.3.34-89) in which the friar shrives Meed in return for her gift of a window and the dreamer launches a long attack on mayors, a sequence expanded in each successive version.

³⁶ For the 'didacticism' of the Z redactor's additions to the text see also Fuller, 'The "Z-Maker"', 19.

³⁷ David Lawton, 'The Subject of *Piers Plowman*', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 1 (1987), 1-30 (at 8).

³⁸ Lawton, 'Subject', 4.

³⁹ Scribes quite frequently note Piers's testament in the margins of B-text manuscripts: see C. David Benson and Lynne Blanchfield, *The Manuscripts of Piers Plowman: The B-Version* (Cambridge, 1997), 22.

⁴⁰ Kerby-Fulton, 'Confronting the Scribe-Poet Binary', 501.

⁴¹ For the legal diction, see John A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge, 1998), s.v. reles and remissioun, rental. J. A. W. Bennett notes that at the end of Piers's testament the legal diction of 'the residewe ant the remanaunt' (which is preserved by Z), tends to 'dissolve' in any case into a more general concern with the poor for whom Piers will labour. See William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The Prologue and Passus I-VII of the B text as found in Bodleian MS. Laud 581*, ed. J. A. W. Bennett, Clarendon Medieval and Tudor Series (Oxford, 1972), 204, note on B.6.104.

⁴² Ht inserts after B.6.158 a unique form of C.9.66-87, 96-163, 189-280 plus C.Prol. 91, 95-127 that also appears in London, University Library MS S.L.V.88, the 'Ilchester' manuscript, where it is inserted into an A-text Prologue. See *The C Version*, ed. Russell and Kane, Appendix 2, and Wood, 'Nonauthorial *Piers*'.

⁴³ See *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 28-30.

⁴⁴ A theory proposed but ultimately rejected by Rigg and Brewer, *The Z Version*, 29.

⁴⁵ Fuller, ‘The “Z-Maker”’, 27 and n. 36; 29; 23-4. I am sceptical of Fuller’s claim that the redactor imagined that university readers might have ‘taken offence’ at Hunger’s scriptural quotations without the insertion of Z’s disclaimer about his lack of authority to preach. For the relevant passage, see Z.7.227-37. Z.7.230, described by Rigg and Brewer as a Z-unique line, derives from Wit’s speech, B.9.74. Possibly the discussion of preaching was inspired by C.9.112, where Langland emphasizes that ‘lunatic lollares’ resemble the apostles except that they do not preach.

⁴⁶ Kerby-Fulton, ‘Confronting the Scribe-Poet Binary’, 505.

⁴⁷ Kane, ‘The “Z Version”’, 922-4.

⁴⁸ *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 18; see also Charlotte Brewer, ‘Z and the A-, B- and C-Texts of *Piers Plowman*’, *Medium Aevum*, 53 (1984), 194-219: ‘[T]he major A revisions of Z in Passus III are of the same character as the major revisions between the A-, B- and C-Texts in the passus. They reflect Langland’s consistent and developing interest in the definition of Meed and her relation to Conscience’ (201).

⁴⁹ For the seminal discussion of the structure of the Langlandian ‘episode’ as a ‘combat’, see Anne Middleton, ‘Narration and the Invention of Experience: Episodic Form in *Piers Plowman*’, in Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (eds), *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield* (Kalamazoo, 1982), 91-122; reprinted in *Chaucer, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Literary History*, ed. Steven Justice, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Farnham, 2013), 143-71 (quotations from 147-9).

⁵⁰ See *The Z Version*, ed. Rigg and Brewer, 18.

⁵¹ Cf. Brewer, ‘Z and the A-, B- and C-Texts’, 205: ‘Z’s Sins do not so much confess their faults as implicitly acknowledge them through their resolution to behave better in future’.

⁵² Here again Z differs from the Ht redactor, who took a particular interest in the bodily representation of the sins; see Wood, ‘Confession and Compilation’.

⁵³ Malcolm Godden, who accepts the authorial status of Z, remarks that in A ‘the sinfulness becomes more apparent than the penitence’. See *The Making of Piers Plowman* (London, 1990), 43.

⁵⁴ Kane and Donaldson noted that some of Z’s unique lines ‘occur at points of omission, as where the confessions of Envy and Avarice are reduced to 13 lines of which ten are peculiar to Z’. *The B Version*, ed. Kane and Donaldson, 14 n.95.

⁵⁵ Fuller also remarks that in Z, ‘Only short and oversimplified versions of the sins remain, and they lose much of the irony and allegorical complexity found in Langland’s three versions of *Piers*’. She points out that in cutting the descriptions of the sins, Z also dispatches with much of the antireligious satire the confessions contain, in her view part of a consistent agenda in Z to reduce such critique for the benefit of a ‘monastic or university audience’. Such an argument overlooks, however, the extent of the satire aimed at non-religious targets in the confessions: Envy, for example, appears both in a friar’s clothing and subsequently as an ordinary parishoner eyeing a neighbour’s new coat in church. It must also ignore the ubiquity of anticlerical satire produced and consumed within the ‘target’ group. As Fuller subsequently acknowledges, the monastic readers of Bodley 851 in any case presumably enjoyed the manuscript’s other anticlerical materials. See ‘The “Z-Maker”’, 29-32.

⁵⁶ For which see James Weldon, ‘Ordinatio and Genre in MS CCC 201: A Mediaeval Reading of the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*’, *Florilegium*, 12 (1993), 159-75; Wood, ‘Nonauthorial *Piers*’, 502-03.

⁵⁷ Ralph Hanna describes how five London copies of *Piers Plowman* B contain blank lines setting off paragraph divisions, four of them also containing a colophon describing Langland’s poem as ‘*Dialogus Petri Plowman*’. These features, perhaps originating in

authorial papers, highlight the poem's profusion of speakers and its 'persistent refusal to settle upon the monologic closure of conventional dream poetry'. The blank lines are, however, Hanna observes, 'recessive everywhere within the tradition of *Piers Plowman*'. Moreover, as is well known, subsequent readers repeatedly collapsed the poem's multiple voices into a single authoritative voice, often identified with Piers the Plowman himself, suggesting that the dialogic mode of *Piers Plowman* was particularly difficult to assimilate. See Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 57 (Cambridge, 2005), 245-47; Thorne, 'Piers or Will'; Anne Middleton, 'The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*', in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge, 1982), 101-23, 147-54 (at 119-20).