

Horobin, Simon and Linne R. Mooney (eds). *Middle English Texts in Transition: A Festschrift dedicated to Toshiyuki Takamiya on his 70th birthday*. York: York University Press, 2014. Hardback; 359 pages; 20 colour, 20 black and white illustrations; RRP GBPE60.00; ISBN 9781903153536.



R e v i e w

Middle English Texts in Transition is a festschrift for noted manuscript scholar and collector Toshiyuki Takamiya, presenting essays on the manuscripts of English vernacular texts, 'their evidence of scribal practice, compilation, reading habits and reading communities' (xvi) and is, in short, a comprehensive and wide-ranging collection for scholars of book history.

The first section of four essays on canonical authors opens with Richard Firth Green's investigation of Adam Pinkhurst's signature in the official record of the London Scrivener's Guild. Green's chapter provides a refreshing behind-the-scenes perspective of scribal activities and business, and is a useful addition to scholarship on Chaucer's scribe. Simon Horobin's chapter on *Piers Plowman* in Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 201 is another valuable contribution to the collection, advocating studies of single manuscripts as the next step in *Piers Plowman* scholarship. The manuscript in question is often rejected as a witness, but Horobin suggests that its errors and place in the textual *stemma* are what make it valuable, deducing the existence of another scribal layer between this manuscript and the A-text. Terry Jones' chapter continues the high quality of this opening section, living up to its praise in the introduction. Jones re-examines the claim that Gower changed the dedication of *Confessio Amantis* from Richard II to Henry of Lancaster just prior to Henry's usurpation of the throne, concluding that evidence supporting this change is unreliable as it post-dates the usurpation. Finally, R.F. Yeager investigates the authorship and patronage of the French dream-vision poem *Le Songe Vert* in an

extended analysis of Ethel Seaton's previous study, considering the question of authorship more widely, and concludes that codicologically, linguistically and stylistically, *Le Songe Vert* does not appear to be the work of Gower.

The second section on lyrics and romances was particularly interesting, although variable. Phillipa Hardman opens with a detailed look at the sole manuscript of *Sir Fyrumbras*, examining the process of translation, revision and scribal correction – a fascinating insight into the experience of writing and reading in Middle English. John C. Hirsh's chapter focuses on Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D.913, a collection of Middle English and Old French secular lyrics showing evidence of performative usage and carefully constructed *ordinatio*. No examination of Middle English lyrics and romances would be complete without mention of London, British Library MS Harley 2253, however, both chapters to do so in this collection are disappointing. Gareth Griffith and Ad Putter investigate multilingualism in medieval English manuscripts, considering the ordering and grouping of texts in different languages. The chapter is intriguing but covers too much ground and fails to properly address the questions that it raises. For such a hugely significant conclusion – “Middle English romances...were not written to complement French matter but rather to take its place” (124) – the analysis that leads up to it sadly lacks in detail. Eric Stanley's chapter suffers from the opposite problem: although he provides a useful summary of poems written as prose in Harley 2253, he is ultimately unable to rationalise the layout choices of the scribe.

The next section on devotional writings has much to offer the reader, with discussions ranging from medieval bishops (Powell), their works, manuscripts and careers (Sargent), to studies of late medieval devotional manuscripts (Taguchi, Morse). A particular highlight is Mary Morse's examination of Takamiya 56, a late medieval prayer roll used as a 'birth girdle' to protect women in childbirth.

The final section on owners and users extends to look at the afterlives of medieval books in print, editions and collections. Carrie Griffin's opening chapter

focuses on three manuscripts and three owners – Samuel Pepys, John Dee and finally Toshiyuki Takamiya – to reflect on issues of book collection, distribution and provenance. Next, James J. Murphy’s chapter traces the texts of Laurentius Traversagnus in the intersection of printing and manuscript production. Natalia I. Petrovskaia tracks a manuscript fragment – a quire from *Imago Mundi* – which was preserved in the collection of the seventeenth-century historian Sir James Ware, suggesting that Ware obtained it (or at least heard of it) from Robert Cotton. Finally, Timothy Graham’s intriguing chapter examines Takamiya MS 129 – a transcription and draft edition of Old English legal texts by William and Elizabeth Elstob.

A final section provides a personal reflection on Takamiya’s career and his impact on the field of manuscripts studies – in scholarship (both in Japan and abroad), encouraging facsimile creation, and his work as the Director of the Humanities Media Interface (HUMI) Project promoting digitisation and digital humanities – as well as a bibliography of his work. This collection is a great contribution to manuscript studies, presenting fascinating and rigorous scholarship. The repeated connections to Takamiya – whether this be his research interests, publications, or studies of manuscripts from his collection – grants the collection an overarching cohesion, and it is certainly a worthy tribute to Professor Takamiya.

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