Among the many great accomplishments of Ralph Hanna (including the EETS editions that have enabled renewed study of the Speculum Vitae and The Pricke of Conscience), perhaps the Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman, volume 2 will be considered one of his finest achievements, considering the degree of detailed labor, acute reading, and the generous sense of pastoral care that animates the volume. One is moved here by Hanna's sense of service to the academic community, which will find unlimited delight and information, very beautifully written and clearly presented. The 5-volume set has divided the labors among what Hanna calls the Gang of Five, and this volume, with lemmata keyed to the C version, addresses C passūs 5-9, A 5-8, and B 5-7, thus covering the famous scenes of the confession of the seven deadly sins, the plowing of the half acre, and the Pardon scene. This book is an immediate classic and essential to all future study of Piers Plowman.

The book begins with a substantial apologia for the Penn Commentary, addressing the reality that volume 2 is coming out a decade after volumes 1 and 5 (by Andy Galloway and Steven Barney), and that the remaining volumes, one assigned to the late Anne Middleton, "remain actively 'in progress'" (vii). Since exactly how the contributors' work in the Commentary "is to be construed remains slightly opaque," Hanna provides a preface that "substitutes for what we might, and probably should, have made clear to all our readers at the outset" (vii). He recounts how the group decided to follow Skeat in annotating all three versions (and defends the exclusion of Z, deeming it a scribal performance). Importantly he notes that Skeat, who saw Piers "as if it were a document, but never quite as a poem," tended to address Piers "as a series of bits" (ix) that needed clarification. This would not serve the Penn Commentary crew at all because the poem works both episodically and "in a vast mélange of conflicting voiced opinions," a reality that compelled the authors to "strive for a system of extensive cross-references" beyond their assigned chunks (xi). The issue is particularly acute, Hanna notes, in his assigned passūs because of the extensive revisions and front-leading of materials in C. Therefore, an ongoing awareness of the whole must animate any system of glossing and commentary.

This Preface will appeal to readers who have been using--and also tracking the process of--the volumes, for Hanna's detailed, forthright discussion of the origins, debates, intentions, and apparent virtues and vices of the entire enterprise offers some welcome transparency. As Hanna explains the principles upon which they agreed and which he here practices, he also discusses how his own choices differ from those adopted by his co-contributors. He also makes a short, sharp declaration about the continued use of the Athlone editions, which, one might object, are out of print, hard to find, etc. Hanna simply prefers the Athlone method to that of Schmidt, whose work (both text and commentary) he praises and refers to, but whose decisions "rely too heavily upon attestation/stemmatic reasoning," rendering a product "less cogent" than one "thought through on a variant-by-variant basis" as in Athlone (xxii). Hanna will dispute readings in the Athlone texts if they are not warranted, explaining the better manuscript reading that was perhaps adopted by another editor, and he will often lay out the
fascinating textual situation and the meaningful diversity of viable readings, as in the case of C5.21, a famous crux that old hands will recognize as varying in the x and p branches of the C-text tradition. Hanna is equally clear about the shared vision of audience, as these volumes are not designed for new readers but for colleagues and advanced graduate students. The commentary is described as "unabashedly interpretive" (xvii) and based on the awareness that simply identifying source materials is inadequate, because the uniqueness of *Piers Plowman*, what makes it a poem, is that it adapts and re-reads its "inherited materials in a newly imagined context" (xiv). With target audience and text specified, and with the intention, mode, and scope of commentary all transparently stated, and with the whole venture's ongoing and complex history openly confronted, Hanna gets to work, humble imagining himself "as any active and inquisitive reader" (xvii).

Hanna practices particular care in crafting the headnotes that preface each passūs, which situate the reader in the dramatic moment in the relevant versions (though Hanna cautions against seeing or creating continuities in a poem that works by resisting them). Headnotes survey the major themes apparent in the episode at hand and foreground the upcoming glosses that will elaborate upon the various topics provoked by the target section of the poem. The *mise-en-page* is excellent, with plenty of space and clear margins (compare the discouraging experience of navigating Schmidt's densely cramped commentary). The lemmata (like Galloway's and unlike Barney's) helpfully cite the corresponding passages (when they exist) in A and B, as Hanna has done everything to promote usability and access. Hanna translates all Langland's Latin (or provides the Vulgate translation where the scriptural source is clear).

As a reviewer I learned something in everything I read, not only gaining information (textual, literary, historical) but developing awareness and sensitivity. I enjoyed getting to know Will better by experiencing his moods and querulousness through Hanna's eyes, as if he were an avatar for the author, especially since the C version, at least in part, is "much more overtly dreamer-focused" than AB (ix). As Hanna treats all local sections, he ever enhances the reader's awareness of the whole, and learning is not confined to particular effects or events. What Hanna teaches reverberates across the entire, strangely unified corpus. Instead of plot summary (what I have called "navigational summary") Hanna offers mature meditation for the advanced reader, engaging the global implications of the poem's particular development and revision. He traces, as very few scholars are able, the resonances of discourses and episodes along the entire *Piers* continuum (actualizing Sarah's Wood's sense of the poem as an evolving whole) and in relation to Middle English literature, scripture, and medieval culture more generally.

After the head notes, we find bolded line references to the particular extended span of text under study with a descriptive rubric, as, in the first instance, "1-108 The dreamer's defense of his life" (3). That range then is further divided, as in the sub-heading, "1-11 The dreamer wakes in London" (5) and then finally divided into the smallest particle, the individual line, phrase, or word: "1 This y awaked" (6). And then after 12 pages on individual moments within lines 1-11, we reach the next division note "12-21 Reason on tasks" (18), and so forth, with the pattern unfolding like Dante's *terza rime* until the next passūs division. The reader must distinguish the "division notes" (in Hanna's voice) from the lemmata within the subsections, which use the actual words of the poem. Hanna humbly acknowledges putting "unaccustomed burdens" on his readers (xxiii), but it's really a clear and efficient system once identified. No one claims the poem is orderly, but an ordered approach to its tides and eddies is essential, and Hanna's quiet mastery of form is one of the book's great virtues.

What's most distinct about the commentary at every level is the clarion urgency of the commentator's interpretive voice, as here in addressing Will's self-defense against Reason: "most obviously this waking interlude disrupts the poem as it had stood in AB and significantly changes how we might read it. Through this intrusion the entire standing text is completely reconfigured. No longer can one read C all together profitably in parallel with AB; the waking interlude introduces new terms of engagement, with projective effects throughout the second vision--and extending into the third" (3-4). This directness animates the entire volume, though at times the density of critical references and allusions naturally interrupts the author's powerful guiding voice. For the purposes of review I was not using the volume as a research tool, which would necessitate stopping and considering each bibliographic citation and all the references to Scripture and to hundreds of other texts and documents, pulling the Julian of Norwich off the shelf, etc. Readers not at the moment requiring that painstaking activity will naturally find some of the exposition overladen, as it were, but brimming with useful tools and suggestions, there when needed for advanced study. Providing those tools is the work, the labor inherent in this volume, and Hanna's allusions will lead to untold treasure hunts and abundant fruit, but his discursive meditations in the interpretive commentaries are pure gold, to airy thinness beat for 348 pages.

The volume ends with a hearty 20 page bibliography of primary and secondary works; an "Index of Historical Works, Authors, Persons and Topics," that includes books of the Bible; and then a cross-referencing "Index of Passages and Notes Mentioned in the Commentary," which lists by version all passages from the text when they appear in the commentary, helpfully spanning the entire poem, not just Hanna's chunk, which is of course itself addressed in the parallel commentary "in the expected numerical order" (380). Hanna's vast learning is matched only by his generosity to his readers, whom he is most eager, and uniquely destined, to serve. One finds endless streams of insight and wisdom here, including many generous references to the legacy of Anne Middleton, acts of humble honor to Hanna's friend and only peer.