

Cleanness

A Diplomatic Edition with Textual, Codicological and Paleographical Notes

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PREFACE

British Library MS. Cotton Nero A.x. is the only known manuscript containing four of the most important Middle English poems: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Cleanness*. This edition offers a new diplomatic edition of *Cleanness*, including textual, codicological and palaeographic notes. It is my hope that this new edition will provide a manuscript-based understanding of *Cleanness*, as a resource for further research by the literary, cultural and textual scholars who are increasingly turning to the poem for study.

The form of this new edition is unlike any previous edition of *Cleanness*. It is based on repeated study of the manuscript itself – not the 1923 facsimile as has been the case with editions after 1923 – and further informed by high-resolution photographs (TIFF images) made available to the Cotton Nero A.x. Project in 2011. Despite its increased fading and fragility, the manuscript is often (but not always) a more reliable or discernable witness to the text than the facsimile and the digital photographs offer significantly greater resolution than what can be achieved with the naked eye in the Manuscripts Reading Room of the British Library. The edition presented here therefore offers several readings and some interpretations of the manuscript context that differ from assertions previously made by editors.

This diplomatic edition is a fully revised edition of the diplomatic edition presented as part of my 2007 doctoral thesis, “An Edition of the Middle English Poem *Cleanness*, and a Study of its Writing System,” which also presented a facing page critical edition.

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