Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

English: Faculty Publications and Other Works

Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department

8-2022

Language and Meter

Ian Cornelius
icornelius@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/english_facpubs

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, and the Medieval Studies Commons

Author Manuscript

This is a pre-publication author manuscript of the final, published article.

Recommended Citation

Cornelius, Ian. "Language and Meter." In What Kind of a Thing Is a Middle English Lyric?, edited by Cristina Maria Cervone and Nicholas Watson, 106–34. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2cw0rwx.10.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
© University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022.

Language and Meter*

Ian Cornelius

Abstract

From a visual standpoint as well as a semantic and functional one, Middle English lyrics were often absorbed into their co(n)texts. In what sense, then, is a "Middle English lyric" a thing? I seek in this essay to show what metrical analysis may contribute to that question. Context is not all. If contextual analysis has tended to dissolve the presumed thing-hood of Middle English lyrics, metrical analysis shows that verses are robust enough to sustain that. Metrical structuration sets verse apart from its surround; it defines the verse object as a distinct entity, distinguished by a specifiable compositional craft.

Previous chapters have begun to unpack the challenges that Middle English lyrics pose to readers. As Ardis Butterfield shows, these poems require us to read from several disciplinary perspectives simultaneously and they trouble the basic text-critical distinction between *Textträger* and the wider assortment of documentary witnesses that may sometimes attest to the former existence of a literary work without, however, transmitting *ipsissima verba*. Even when documentary records transmit the words and music of a Middle English lyric, we may retain a powerful sense that the thing itself has escaped, inapt to be carried on any substance except air. Subsequent chapters have explored the "polyvalent potential" of Middle English vocabulary and the polyvalent generic affiliations of verse technique. In different ways, Cristina Maria Cervone and Christopher Cannon show that the techniques of versification by which language is bound into a discrete thing also invest that thing with resonant meaning. Like these two previous chapters, the present one explores the intersection of verse technique and linguistic medium. My topic is the metrical shape of verse lines in Middle English lyric and the use of Middle English as a medium for verse composition.

Within the critical tradition to which we owe the term,[1] "lyric" has been centered on metered compositions, to which unmetered compositions are adduced by family resemblance. The advent of international free verse changed this field of play but has not yet neutralized the critical heritage, for

*This is the author's typescript of an essay published in *What Kind of a Thing Is a Middle English Lyric?*, ed. Cristina Maria Cervone and Nicholas Watson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 106–34, 415–24, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2cw0rwx.10. Please cite the published version.

[1]See, for two perspectives, Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 826–34; and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). I acknowledge with gratitude the volume editors and fellow participants in the Radcliffe seminars; audiences in St. Louis, Chicago, and Kalamazoo, 2016–17; and conversation with colleagues and students at Yale University, 2010–16, especially Ardis Butterfield and Eric Weiskott. As always, errors are mine.

which the most lyrical lyrics—the ones enlisted to exemplify the category—have embodied a metrical design.[2] Yet versification does not receive adequate attention in the standard reference tools available to students of Middle English lyric. Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins devoted only sporadic and incidental remarks to meter in their field-defining anthologies and bibliographical guides.[3] Progress has been made in recent decades, but much remains to be done.[4] To facilitate communication between lyric studies and prosodic studies, I shall employ a deliberately unrestrictive definition of "lyric," using this term to designate any "short composition in verse."[5] This is not a judgment against the contextual utility of richer definitions of lyric. My aim is just to get a clear and unobstructed view of my topic, versification. Illustrations will be drawn from the English verses sometimes embedded within the texts of Latin sermons and related preachers' books.

What Kind of a Thing is Middle English?

Though I have adopted a minimalist definition of "lyric," the other element of our title question requires a fuller treatment at this juncture, for the varieties of English spoken and written between about 1150 and 1500 afforded historically delimited modes of metricality. For the term "Middle English" and this historical delimitation of it our volume is indebted to philology and historical linguistics, the disciplines to which we also owe whatever may be known about the prosody of the language.[6] At its lower boundary, Middle English is distinguished from Old English by the reduction of weak final syllables. It is distinguished, too, by the diversification of local spelling systems in the surviving record, and by a massive assimilation of vocabulary items of Dano-Scandinavian and French provenance. The upper boundary is distinguished by reorganization of the system of long vowels (the "Great Vowel Shift") and by progressive elimination of regional spelling systems developed in the Middle English period. These changes were distributed in time and place; the boundaries are clinal, not abrupt. Middle English nev-

[2]For this way of stating relations between lyric and meter, I adapt the non-Aristotelian logic of "prototype theory": see John R. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[3]Brown remarks on meter only in exceptional circumstances in his first anthology volume: see, for examples, Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 267, 278 (notes to items 69 and 103, respectively). Comments on English meter remain rare in later volumes except where an English poem may be compared with the meter of its Latin source, usually a hymn. For examples, see Carleton Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), xviii–xix, xxv, and the notes to items 45 and 47. The only summative treatment occurs in Rossell Hope Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), xlvii–li, based on a 1932 dissertation by Beatrice Geary. Brown and Robbins's *Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) will be the target of sustained critique later in this essay.

[4]Salient among recent studies of poetic meter in Middle English lyric are Thomas Cable, "Foreign Influence, Native Continuation, and Metrical Typology in Alliterative Lyrics," in *Approaches to the Metres of Alliterative Verse*, ed. Judith Jefferson and Ad Putter (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 2009), 219–34; Thomas G. Duncan, "Middle English Lyrics: Metre and Editorial Practice," in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 19–38; and Thomas G. Duncan, ed., *Medieval English Lyrics and Carols* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 40–45, 454–56. I dissent from Duncan's syllabic interpretation of Middle English meters, but the editorial reconstructions detailed in his 2005 essay are illuminating.

[5]Brown and Robbins adopt a similarly capacious definition. See Robbins, *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, v, where Robbins states that he has "accepted Brown's definition of a lyric as any short poem." For comment, see Rosemary Greentree, *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 5–13, 32–35.

[6]Lynda Mugglestone, ed., *The Oxford History of English*, updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), is a good introduction. For Middle English, see R. D. Fulk, *An Introduction to Middle English: Grammar; Texts* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012).

ertheless emerges as a robust object of inquiry, and the features by which it is customarily identified in historical linguistics have implications for the use of the language in metered compositions.

In recognition of this linguistic framing, the adjective "English" refers in this chapter to a language, not a nation, culture, people, or territory. This specification could be construed to foreclose extra- and multilingual dimensions of our topic; on the contrary, it provides a foundation from which to approach the fact that Middle English verse developed within an intensely multilingual society and owes many of its distinctive features to that dynamic milieu.[7] Dano-Scandinavian speech communities had probably assimilated linguistically by the early twelfth century, ending some 250 years of English/Norse societal bilingualism.[8] Celtic languages remained a living presence; Welsh hosted a richly developed literature in prose and verse.[9] For a period of more than two centuries, ending in 1290, many English towns were home to communities whose formal written language was Hebrew. Ports at London and elsewhere afforded further language contact, with Dutch and Italian, for example. Yet enumeration brings its own distortions, tending to obscure the structuration of cultural practices: if one adopts a communicative perspective ("What languages did participants in literary culture expect their peers to engage?") one may describe the literary culture in late medieval England as trilingual, constellated from English, French, and Latin. Latin was the cosmopolitan language of learning, affording access to the widest spatiotemporal horizons. English was the principal demotic vernacular. French was at first a superposed vernacular: it was the spoken language of the Norman colonists. The chronology of Norman linguistic assimilation remains a matter of conjecture, but seems likely to have conformed to generational patterns attested in more recent immigrant communities. By the end of the twelfth century participants in literary culture (a rarified social stratum) would typically have spoken English in childhood.[10] During the same period of linguistic assimilation, and increasingly in the thirteenth century, French acquired the status of an elite or learned vernacular, employed in the domains of law, commerce, government, religion, and secular aristocratic literature. The result was a trilingual literary culture: during most of the Middle English period, most persons who could engage written English could probably also engage French and Latin, the two languages of social consequence. Literate habitus, as incorporated by boys in grammar school, was triune, and literate uses of English were shaped by the more prestigious and authoritative members of this unequal trinity.[11]

[7]Multilingualism has received much attention in the past two decades. See Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter, eds., *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066–1520): Sources and Analysis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); for general orientation, see John Burrow, "The Languages of Medieval England," in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, vol. 1, *To 1550*, ed. Roger Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7–28; and Elaine Treharne, "The Vernaculars of Medieval England, 1170–1350," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 217–36.

[8]On this assessment, the massive influence of Norse on the English language becomes evident in written records around the time that Norse ceased to be a discrete, living language in Britain. See Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations Between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 189, 201–10, and references there.

[9]See, for a fifteenth-century English lyric in a traditional Welsh meter, E. J. Dobson, "The Hymn to the Virgin," in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1954): 70–124.

[10]This assessment is hard-won and not uncontroversial: see William Rothwell, "A quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler français en Angleterre?," in *Mélanges de philologie romane offerts à Charles Camproux* (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 1978), 2:1075–89; and Ian Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2007), 12–17, 21–28. Compare Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066–c.1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 377–88.

[11]See Ralph Hanna, *Patient Reading/Reading Patience: Oxford Essays on Medieval English Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 21–23, 34–40; Ralph Hanna, "Lambeth Palace Library, MS 260, and the Problem of English

Sheldon Pollock, one of the greatest recent theorists of premodern literary cultures, would recognize this complex language situation as especially conducive to literary innovation: "literatures," Pollock remarks, "typically arise in response to other literature *superposed* to them in a relation of unequal cultural power."[12] Pollock's dictum is exemplified—though not neatly—by the way that the English language acquired new metrical forms at the turn of the thirteenth century.

Verse Forms in Middle English: What and Whence?

The history is clear enough, at least in outline. At the beginning of the twelfth century, there was one basic way of writing poetry in English; this was the "alliterative" meter, inherited from common Germanic. Late in the twelfth century, at the dawn of the period we designate as Middle English, poets began to experiment with new English line types, modeled on the forms then current in the superposed Latin and French literatures. Accentual Latin verse, perhaps the goliardic meter, supplied a model for the English septenary line, as employed in *Poema morale* (ca. 1170–90) and the *Ormulum* (ca. 1175). A century later, this line type was used in the *South English Legendary*, one of the first large works of Middle English poetic literature to circulate widely. About the same time that Orm and the *Poema morale*–author were crafting their septenaries, other poets were taking cues from French *vers octosyllabe*. The result was a short English line with approximately alternating beat and offbeat, four beats to a line, and a good deal of variation around an eight-syllable norm. An early instance, probably from the end of the twelfth century, is the exposition of the Pater Noster in London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 487 (*DIMEV* 4305). By the end of the following century, the short four-beat line with alternating rhythm had become the most productive meter in Middle English. It is employed in poems of religious instruction and biblical history (*Genesis and Exodus*, *Cursor Mundi*, *The Northern Homily Cycle*, *The Prick of Conscience*, and *Speculum Vitae*), romances (*Sir Orfeo*, *King Alisander*, and *Havelok the Dane*), works of literary fiction (*The Owl and the Nightingale*, *Pearl*, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and *The House of Fame*), and numerous lyric poems. In the fifteenth century this line type was eclipsed, incompletely, by Chaucer's invention, the five-beat decasyllabic line. That form, the progenitor of English iambic pentameter, was likewise inspired by verse in Romance languages.

This basic narrative is readily available in histories of English poetry, all of which are now rather dated.[13] In a recent bibliographic survey, Thomas Cable observes that "there is no general treatment of medieval

Vernacularity," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd ser., 5 (2008): 131–99, at pp. 163–73; and, for reassessment of fourteenth-century evidence, Christopher Cannon, *From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300–1400* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[12] Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 26 (emphasis in original). Two other of Pollock's concepts are worth noticing here. Pollock proposes the term "literization" for the process by which a language comes to be committed to writing and "literarization" for the process by which a language comes to be employed in literary composition. Vernacularization of literary culture and literarization of a vernacular language are linked processes, but they are asymmetrical: one and the same text may constitute a significant event in the literarization of English without constituting a significant event in the vernacularization of the cultural space to which it belongs.

[13] See Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); Jakob Schipper, *A History of English Versification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910); Max Kaluza, *A Short History of English Versification from the Earliest Times to the Present Day: A Handbook for Teachers and Students*, trans. A. C. Dunstan (London: George Allen, 1911); and George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, vol. 1, *From the Origins to Spenser*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1923).

English prosody that takes into account the discoveries made during the past forty years."[14] The only book that might challenge Cable's assessment is Martin Duffell's *New History of English Metre*, billed as a single-volume update to George Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody*.[15] Duffell offers a valuable guide to modern linguistic metrics, and he excels in description of the English accentual-syllabic forms. Moreover, Duffell's *New History* is the first general treatment of English prosody to give more than perfunctory attention to the Latin, French, and Italian meters that influenced versification in Middle English.[16] His book suggests a small but important revision to received narratives of the genesis of Middle English meters.

At issue is the French *octosyllabe* and handling of it by English writers. By comparison with continental productions, the verse written in insular (or Anglo-Norman) French is not a true octosyllable. Fluctuations in syllable count were once construed as sloppy versification (or, alternatively, as pervasive scribal corruption), but Duffell holds that syllabic fluctuation expresses, accurately, a prosodic feature of the insular language. Continental varieties of French lost demarcative word stress in the High Middle Ages, and this development made purely syllabic meters a good fit for the linguistic prosody.[17] In Britain, however, the development of French was probably affected by a phenomenon designated by linguists as substratum interference.[18] When persons whose first language was English came to speak French, they projected English articulatory habits into the French language. That is, they spoke French with an English accent. Comparable substratum effects are responsible for the distinctive prosodies and phonologies of many present-day varieties of global English. In medieval Britain, the result of substratum interference was a variety of French that, by the second half of the twelfth century, had probably acquired, among other changes to the system of speech sounds, a "heavy expiratory word-stress."[19] As such, insular French was ill-suited to the purely syllabic meter employed by continental poets. Duffell contends that the short line employed in insular French verse is beat-counted, not syllable-counted, with four beats per line: poets in medieval England "versified in the same manner in two different languages."[20] The verse form appeared in insular French at the beginning of the twelfth century, fifty or seventy-five years before the earliest surviving instances in English—and with much greater assurance and accomplishment. The standard account of prosodic history therefore remains

[14]Thomas Cable, "English Prosody," *Oxford Bibliographies*, Medieval Studies (Oxford University Press, 2010), http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780195396584-0035.

[15]Martin J. Duffell, *A New History of English Metre* (London: Legenda, 2008). Duffell is not recommendable on alliterative verse. On that, see Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); and Geoffrey Russom, *The Evolution of Verse Structure in Old and Middle English Poetry: From the Earliest Alliterative Poems to Iambic Pentameter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Eric Weiskott, *Meter and Modernity in English Verse, 1350–1650* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), which appeared after this essay was written, is a valuable new survey of major verse types in Middle English and their postmedieval legacies. See note 27, below.

[16]See Duffell, *A New History of English Metre*, 35–46 (surveying "Foreign Influences on English Metre"), 75–77 ("Versifying in Insular French"), and 83–92 (on fourteenth-century Francien *vers de dix*, Italian *endecasillabo*, and the verse of Chaucer and Gower).

[17]On the prosodic system of continental French, see Alfred Ewert, *The French Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 104–8; and Ernst Pulgram, "Prosodic Systems: French," *Lingua* 13 (1965): 125–44.

[18]See P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), s.v. "substratum."

[19]Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, 24.

[20]Duffell, *A New History of English Metre*, 77. See too Roger Pensom, "Pour la versification anglo-normande," *Romania: Revue trimestrielle consacré a l'étude des langues et des littératures romanes* 124, no. 1 (2006): 50–65, showing that insular French alexandrine verse exhibits patterns of avoidance consistent with an accentual construction.

accurate in outline: the short English four-beat line was modeled on a superposed French form.[21] Yet the French form that served in this way as a model for new English productions probably owed its distinctive metrical configuration to the articulatory habits of an English substratum. Vectors of influence ran in both directions.

One would like to have a name for the short-line beat-counted meter that emerged from this field of French-English language contact. Duffell's name for it is "dolnik." Russian in origin, the term *dol'nik* was introduced into English metrics by Marina Tarlinskaja to name a meter that is beat-counted, in which weak positions are usually monosyllabic, but a significant minority are disyllabic and some are void.[22] The essential feature seems to be a "rhythmic pulse," or undulation of beat and offbeat, with twice two crests per line.[23] Derek Attridge has contributed a transhistorical survey of the English dolnik; his principal illustration of the form is the Middle English lyric "Nou goth sonne vnder wod" (*DIMEV* 3742).[24] The poem dates from the thirteenth century and forms the opening item in Carleton Brown's anthology of the earliest Middle English lyrics. I quote from that anthology with typographical additions that aim to represent metrical structure:[25]

> **Nou** goth **son**ne / **vn**der **wo**d<e>, —
> me **re**weth, Ma**ri**e, / þi **fai**re **ro**de.
> **Nou** goþ **son**ne / **vn**der **tre,** —
> me **re**weþ, Ma**ri**e, / þi **son**ẹ and **þe**.

My presentation marks the caesura with a virgule ("/") and places beat-bearing syllables in bold. The <e> at the end of the first line is an inflectional syllable omitted by the scribe whose spellings Brown reproduces in his edition of this lyric; the underdotted *ẹ* in the last line marks a graphic syllable elided with the following vowel. The prosodic shape of "Marie" could be queried, as could the syllabification of "reweth." Other scansions would be possible, as usual in English verse. Yet there remains ground for judgment, and Attridge rightly emphasizes that a foot-based scansion of this poem generates artificial difficulties. The lines could be described as a mix of iambs, trochees, and trisyllabic feet. Read the poem aloud, however, and you will hear a much simpler principle, consisting in "rhythmic doubling": "a beat is added to a beat to form a two-beat group ('nou goth sonne'); to this is added another two-beat group to form a four-beat group," or complete line; "to this is added another four-beat group,

[21] My account omits the influences of Latin hymns on vernacular versification. See Margot Fassler, "The Religious Lyric in Medieval England (1150–1400): Three Disciplines and a Question," this volume; and the summary account in M. L. Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, ed. G. S. Smith and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, trans. G. S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 125–29, 179–80. For commentary (not prosodic) on some Middle English translations of Latin hymns, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), chap. 2.

[22] Marina Tarlinskaja, "Meter and Rhythm of Pre-Chaucerian Rhymed Verse," *Linguistics* 12, no. 121 (1974): 65–87; Marina Tarlinskaja, *English Verse: Theory and History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976); Marina Tarlinskaja, *Strict Stress-Meter in English Poetry Compared with German and Russian* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1993). Duffell summarizes Tarlinskaja's contributions and analyzes Middle English dolnik at *A New History of English Metre*, 24–25, 65–66, 79–80, 85.

[23] I quote G. V. Smithers, "The Scansion of *Havelok* and the Use of ME *-en* and *-e* in *Havelok* and by Chaucer," in *Middle English Studies: Presented to Norman Davis in Honour of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Douglas Gray and E. G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 195–234, at p. 196.

[24] Derek Attridge, "An Enduring Form: The English Dolnik," in *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147–87.

[25] Carleton Brown, *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, 1. I impose modern English capitalization. For the manuscript context of this lyric, see Brown's notes at pp. 165–66.

producing the first two lines of the poem."[26] This simple meter is employed in countless Middle English lyrics; I give a fuller description later in this chapter.

Tarlinskaja and Duffell apply the term "dolnik" equally to four- and five-beat verse. I shall instead follow Attridge in reserving the term for four-beat verse and the ballad measure to which it is closely affiliated. So defined, English dolnik is bordered on one side by the smoothly alternating octosyllabic meter first seen in English in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.[27] There, weak positions are invariably monosyllabic. On the other side, English dolnik is bordered by a line type with a higher proportion of disyllabic intervals, combined with a stronger caesura and more consistent patterning of weak syllables in the second half of the line. This line type is instanced by several of the Harley lyrics[28] and remains poorly understood. It is affiliated to the traditional alliterative meter, but simpler than that line type, with a more predictable rhythm.[29]

The historical relation between alliterative verse and the verse form I here designate as "English dolnik" is an area for future research. Older studies, including those of Tarlinskaja, confidently attribute the fluctuating syllable count of English dolnik to the influence of alliterative verse: English dolnik thus figures as the halfway house between the untamed alliterative long line and the politely syllable-counting verse of Chaucer and Gower. This account is plausible and may be correct, but there are difficulties. Studies that posit alliterative verse as the source of syllabic irregularities in English dolnik have thus far failed to appreciate the rule-governed syllabic patterning of alliterative verse.[30] They have also failed to take account of the multilingual literary culture. Received histories of Middle English versification should be revised to accommodate new understandings of English alliterative meter and of versification in insular French. What is clear is that English verse forms diversified prodigiously during the century after about 1170, and that English dolnik emerged as the most productive of the new forms.

Middle English Spellings

To describe the thirteenth century as a Cambrian explosion in English verse forms would be unjust to the stylistic range and accomplishment of Old English poetry.[31] Still, the Middle English period witnessed a rapid diversification of metrical forms. The ground shifted, posing significant challenges to modern readers of medieval poetry, as it surely also did to some medieval readers of medieval poetry. Interpretative challenges are compounded by the brevity of lyric poems, for a short poem gives readers

[26] Attridge, "An Enduring Form," 151.

[27] See Duffell, *A New History of English Metre*, 90–91. Weiskott, *Meter and Modernity in English Verse*, 74–89, subsumes "dolnik" within "tetrameter" (for him a big-tent category).

[28] These are "Ich herde men vpo mold make muche mon" (*DIMEV* 2198); "Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht" (*DIMEV* 2324); "Mon in þe mone stond ant strit" (*DIMEV* 3362); "Ne mai no lewed lued libben in londe" (*DIMEV* 3683); and "Of rybaudȝ y ryme ant rede o my rolle" (*DIMEV* 4202).

[29] See Cable, "Foreign Influence"; Eric Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse: Poetic Tradition and Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 103–6; Ian Cornelius, *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse: The Pursuit of a Medieval Meter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), chap. 5; and Ian Cornelius, "The Text of the *ABC of Aristotle* in the 'Winchester Anthology,'" *Anglia* 139, no. 2 (2021): 400–18.

[30] A concise overview is Thomas Cable, "Progress in Middle English Alliterative Metrics," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 23 (2009): 243–64.

[31] For stylistic developments in late Old English poetry, see Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 223–37.

little opportunity to work into the verse form, as they may do in a longer poem.

Medieval readers had one great advantage: Middle English was for them a living language. If they cared to read verse in this vernacular medium, they had probably grown up speaking the language in one of its regional dialect forms and they had probably absorbed English verse through the ear long before they came to read it in books.[32] Modern readers of this literature are in an inauspicious position, dependent on written records alone.[33] These records can be difficult to interpret. Middle English spellings are more nearly phonetic than those of the modern language, but the comparison is as likely to mislead as to enlighten. Speech sounds are underdetermined by the marks on the page, which presume a reader who knows the language and can select, at the speed of performance, among the array of possible speech forms fuzzily encoded by a given graphic form.

This reading experience is not wholly foreign to modern readers: when we read sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poetry, we select between mono- and disyllabic forms of "heaven," "spirit," "ever," "never," and "over," for example, and between syllabic and nonsyllabic *-ed*. The operative form is often cued by meter, not spelling. Thus, "innocent" is trisyllabic in the line "That from the blood he might be innocent" but disyllabic, as "inn'cent," in "And fro me hid: of whose most innocent death."[34] The same principle holds in Middle English, where, however, poets and readers had a much richer field of variation at their disposal.

Many doublet forms had wide, overlapping geographical distributions. A good example is "without" and its trisyllabic variant "withouten": the Edinburgh dialect atlas shows that di- and trisyllabic forms of this word were available to poets and readers throughout most of the geographical ambit of Middle English.[35] Other syllabic variants were more restricted in geographical distribution. Syncopated, nonsyllabic forms of certain verbal inflections (namely, the second- and third-person singular present indicative) were already a feature of southerly dialects in Old English and continued to be an option in these areas in Middle English.[36] Chaucer used both the full and syncopated forms, *metri gratia*. Past

[32]Aspects of oral performance are explored by Ad Putter, "Middle English Romances and the Oral Tradition," and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou, "Popular Song and the Middle English Lyric," both in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 335–51, 555–80.

[33]See, for a technical exposition of this historical condition, Thomas Cable, "Philology: Analysis of Written Records," in *Research Guide on Language Change*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), 97–106.

[34]Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, 1.2.44.7 and 1.2.24.3, respectively, from Early English Books Online (EEBO)'s images of the first edition: Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene Disposed into twelue books, Fashioning XII. Morall vertues* (London, 1590), sig. C1r and B6r, respectively, https://www.proquest.com/books/faerie-queene-disposed-into-twelue-books/docview/2240874158/se-2. See the list of "words and word groups sometimes reduced, sometimes used in full, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English verse," printed as an appendix to Edward R. Weismiller, "Triple Threats to Duple Rhythm," in *Phonetics and Phonology*, vol. 1, *Rhythm and Meter*, ed. Paul Kiparsky and Gilbert Youmans (San Diego: Academic Press, 1989), 288–89, and discussion at pp. 269–71, 275 n. 15, and 276–78.

[35]The principal reference source for Middle English dialects is M. Benskin et al., *An Electronic Version of "A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English"* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2013–), http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html (hereafter *eLALME*), revising Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, and Michael Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986). For "without(en)," see *eLALME*'s maps of survey item 295; the form with *-n* is comparatively infrequent in the southwest, while the form without *-n* is comparatively infrequent north of the Humber. Some other survey items exhibiting syllabic variants are 70 ("about"), 206–9 (negative particles in contracting position), 212 ("never"), 221 ("or"), and 238 ("self"). For final *-e* see the next notes. A good introduction to Middle English dialectology is Fulk, *An Introduction to Middle English*, 112–28.

[36]See *eLALME*'s dot maps for survey items 61-30 (3sg. pres. ind., contracted) and 160-40 ("has" 3sg., variants with syllabic inflexions).

participles with prefixed *i-* or *y-* (< OE *ge-*) are likewise a feature of southern dialects in Middle English: this verbal prefix was lost first in the north, where language change was accelerated by contact with Old Norse. Diatopic and diachronic variation intersect, and the linguistic situation is complicated further by the probability of differentiated sociolinguistic registers, some colloquial, others formal and conservative. In studies of literary Middle English, sociolinguistic register is increasingly recognized as an important dimension of linguistic variation, alongside and intersecting the dimensions of time and space.[37] Literary traditions may sustain linguistic repertoires differentiated from the surrounding language, and this consideration is probably relevant to one of the most important and difficult topics in Middle English prosody, namely, the status of weak final *-e*.

Much of the syllabic variation in lexical words in Middle English derives from the coexistence of relatively conservative and relatively innovative forms of the same word, differing in the retention or loss of weak final *-e*. This syllable had several sources and has been subject to numerous studies.[38] I supply a few exemplary illustrations. Some nouns ended in a weak vowel in Old English and retained a by-form with final *-e* in Middle English; thus, Middle English *herte* (< OE *heorte*) may be monosyllabic or disyllabic, whether or not the final *-e* is written. Other nouns, such as "gold," are monosyllabic by derivation, yet may acquire an inflectional *-e*, and thus disyllabic shape, when the object of a preposition. Some adjectives, of which *swete* (sweet) is an example, ended in a weak vowel in Old English and maintained a by-form with *-e* in Middle English. Other adjectives, of which "old" is an example, are monosyllabic by derivation, yet regularly acquire inflectional *-e* when modifying a plural noun or in definite usage. The verbal system is affected by a different series of considerations. The first- and third-person preterit singular indicative of strong verbs is always inflectionless, but most other verb forms had an inflection of some sort in Old English and could retain an inflectional syllable in the fourteenth century. Thus, the verb in "she drank" is securely monosyllabic, but the verb in "thei drunk" is entitled to an inflectional *-e* or *-en*. The form with *-en* is protected from elision. A historical grammar will indicate what form(s) one may expect for any given grammatical category and usage.[39] The poems examined later in this essay will supply concrete illustrations.

Stepping back from this detail, one may say that literary English of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries exhibits a degree of linguistic variousness unparalleled in later periods in this language prior to the twentieth century. Whereas the global diversification of English in the twentieth century has tended to favor the discontinuation of traditional poetic meters, linguistic variation in Middle English split significantly between the alliterative and accentual-syllabic traditions. Alliterative poetry tended to

[37] See M. L. Samuels, "Chaucerian Final '*-e*,'" *Notes and Queries* 19, no. 12 (1972): 445–48; Cable, *English Alliterative Tradition*, 76–78; and Robert McColl Millar, "Language, Genre, and Register: Factors in the Use of Simple Demonstrative Forms in the South-West Midlands of the Thirteenth Century," in *Laȝamon: Contexts, Language, and Interpretation*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry, and Jane Roberts (London: King's College London, Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2002), 227–39.

[38] On weak final *-e* in Middle English poetry, excluding alliterative, see Donka Minkova, *The History of Final Vowels in English: The Sound of Muting* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), esp. 75–80; Samuels, "Chaucerian Final '*-e*'"; Smithers, "Scansion of *Havelok*"; and E. Talbot Donaldson, "Chaucer's Final *-e*," *PMLA* 63, no. 4 (1948): 1101–24, esp. 1110–16. On final *-e* in Middle English alliterative poetry see Cable, *English Alliterative Tradition*, chap. 3; Ad Putter, Judith Jefferson, and Myra Stokes, *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse* (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2007), 19–117; Nicolay Yakovlev, "On Final *-e* in the B-Verses of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," in Jefferson and Putter, *Approaches to the Metres of Alliterative Verse*, 135–57. Hoyt N. Duggan, "The End of the Line," in *Medieval Alliterative Poetry: Essays in Honour of Thorlac Turville-Petre*, ed. John A. Burrow and Hoyt N. Duggan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 67–79, attempts to reconcile conflicting data from the two poetic traditions.

[39] See note 6 above.

retain a conservative grammar of final *-e*, while the dolnik and other approximately accentual-syllabic verse made heavy use of forms without that syllable.[40]

Faced with this linguistic variation, some scholars have advocated an ambitious program of spelling correction in modern presentations of Middle English poetry.[41] Per this policy, the manuscript spelling *neuer* would be emended to *ner* whenever the meter calls for a monosyllable; similarly, final *-e*'s would be added and deleted (always within the bounds established by historical grammar) to fix metrical form in orthography. Syllabic variants would be disambiguated, guiding the reader to the operative form in each case. Such treatment may be justified in student anthologies. It is harder to justify in scholarly editions, for it is not clear that the form *neuer*, written where the meter calls for a monosyllable, is an error, nor that an infinitive verb, written without its inflectional syllable where the meter calls for that syllable, is a scribal mutilation of a correctly spelled authorial text. The alternative possibility is that Middle English spellings are a fuzzy record of speech forms: they cue the word, leaving readers to select the operative prosodic form. This procedure was workable because poets and their scribes wrote for native speakers of the language, a fact that, again, places modern readers at a disadvantage. The metrical regularity of Middle English poetry is often perceptible only through the continuous activation of and selection between the array of variant forms available in the contemporary language as possible realizations of a given manuscript spelling.

The *Index of Middle English Verse*

In the preceding pages, I have sought to unpack what it means to say that Middle English served as a medium for composition of metered verse. In the second half of this chapter, I hope to demonstrate that the principal bibliographical reference guide for study of Middle English verse has not paid adequate attention to metrical form. Begun over a century ago and now available in five incarnations, the *Index of Middle English Verse* intends to supply a comprehensive bibliographical registry of the surviving archival records of verse composition in Middle English. Poems are listed alphabetically by first line, and each entry is assigned a unique bibliographic number; the medieval manuscript witnesses are listed, as are any printed editions. I here list the five versions of the Index, together with abbreviated titles that I will use in subsequent discussion:

1. *Register* = Carleton Brown, ed., *A Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916–20)
2. *IMEV* = Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, eds., *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943)
3. *Supplement* = Rossell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler, eds., *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965)
4. *NIMEV* = Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, eds., *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London: British Library, 2005)
5. *DIMEV* = Linne R. Mooney, Daniel W. Mosser, and Elizabeth Solopova, eds., *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse: An Open-Access, Digital Edition of the Index of Middle English*

[40] See the studies in note 38.

[41] See the argument of Hoyt N. Duggan, "Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors: Meditations on Textual Criticism and Metrics," in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 219–37.

Verse, http://www.dimev.net/.

By "Index" I refer to the whole enterprise, without discrimination between versions.

The Index is an indispensable research tool, enabling access to a corpus of poetry widely dispersed in surviving records and insusceptible to bibliographic organization by author, date, or title.[42] My criticism may be stated briefly: the Index never, in any of its iterations, states what it means by "verse." My argument to this point should establish that the category "verse" is not self-evident in Middle English. One may add that lineation—a feature of graphic presentation by which modern readers often distinguish verse from prose—cannot serve that discriminatory function in the records of medieval English. Scribes in early medieval England wrote their vernacular poetry in continuous format ("as prose"); lineated formats were adopted in the thirteenth century as part of a more pervasive reconfiguration of English literary culture under the superposed literatures of French and Latin, but continuous format remained an option for scribal presentation of English verse through the fifteenth century. A significant minority of surviving copies of Middle English alliterative poems are written in continuous format.[43] Continuous format is much more frequent, approaching the level of a presentational norm, for short English poems (alliterative or not) embedded in Latin prose.

Why has the Index been able to do without a definition of verse? Perhaps Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody* made the definitional question appear moot when Carleton Brown began work, for Saintsbury stated authoritatively that the earliest rhymed verse of the Middle English period already exhibits "*rhythm* of a kind roughly similar to that of English poetry as it has been known ever since"—or, more forcefully, that the "metrical rhythm" of the English verse of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is "not distinguishable, except in accomplishment, from that of Lord Tennyson or of Mr. Swinburne."[44] These pronouncements would seem to absolve a bibliographer of Middle English verse from making any particular account of Middle English versification: acquaintance with the verse forms of modern English would suffice to guide judgment through the earlier materials. Only alliterative verse should present any challenge. Saintsbury acknowledged that alliterative verse is peculiar, and, true to Saintsbury's assessment, alliterative materials have provoked the Index's few remarks on verse definition.

In a preface to the *Register of Middle English Religious and Didactic Verse* (1916), Brown observed that "among the earliest compositions of this period it is not always easy to draw the line between irregular alliterative verse and prose" (vii). That difficulty called for special notice of editorial decisions: Brown reports that he excluded the early Middle English *St. Margaret*, *St. Juliana*, and *Sawles Warde* from the *Register*, for, though these works have a lot of alliteration, "they afford only slight traces of metrical form" (vii). "Metrical form" is here affirmed to be the sine qua non of verse identity, but treated as self-evident. Readers are simply expected to share Brown's unstated understanding. Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins offered no further discussion in their *Index of Middle English Verse*, published

[42]For a survey of the manuscript record, see Julia Boffey, "Middle English Lyrics and Manuscripts," in Duncan, *Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, 1–18. Greentree, *Middle English Lyric*, emphasizes the importance of the Index as a research tool: see pp. 1, 19, 21, 37.

[43]For examples and references, see Ruth Kennedy, "'A Bird in Bishopswood': Some Newly-Discovered Lines of Alliterative Verse from the Late Fourteenth Century," in *Medieval Literature and Antiquities: Studies in Honour of Basil Cottle*, ed. Myra Stokes and T. L. Burton (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1987), 71–87; Susanna Greer Fein, "A Thirteen-Line Alliterative Stanza on the Abuse of Prayer from the Audelay MS," *Medium Aevum* 63, no. 1 (1994): 61–74; and Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse*, 84–85.

[44]Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody*, 41, 49. Emphasis in the original. These passages are unchanged from the first edition, published in 1906. The pages between these two quotations are of first importance.

in 1943, nor did Robbins and John L. Cutler in their *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (1965). Versification resurfaces as a problem in the 2005 *New Index of Middle English Verse*, but the problem is once again posed in its narrowest form and accorded purely negative attention: "Some entries," Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards remark, "especially ones added in the *Supplement* ... seem to make gestures towards the alliterative line as part of a more general strategic use of alliterative prose" (xiii). As illustration, Boffey and Edwards point to a nine-line alliterative lyric intercalated into Richard Rolle's *Ego Dormio*, beginning "Al perisshethe and passeth þat we with eigh see" (*Supplement* 197.8, *DIMEV* 357). They are surely wrong to delete it.[45] More troubling is the fact that the category of "verse" continues to be treated as self-evident, even as successive editorial teams disagree about which Middle English items qualify. The chronological delimitation of "Middle English" is accorded due attention in the *Supplement* and *NIMEV*. Users are, however, provided no comparable discussion of the features that qualify a given Middle English text as verse.[46]

Nor, on closer inspection, can the Index's undertheorization of verse be construed as deference to Saintsbury. Saintsbury held that rhyme played a decisive role in establishing the modern English prosodic system. Brown, Robbins, and their successors seem instead to have taken rhyme as a proxy for meter, and there are historical reasons why this should work. Like the French and Latin forms that inspired them, the new Middle English forms employed end rhyme, almost without exception. The persistence of rhymeless alliterative verse during the Middle English period might have inspired poets to drop rhyme from their French- and Latin-derived meters, but in fact the opposite happened. Many alliterative poets adopted end rhyme, while almost no poets in the new forms dispensed with end rhyme. (The salient exception is the *Ormulum*.) Apart from alliterative verse, English poetry between circa 1170 and circa 1540 nearly always rhymes. This verse practice provided compilers of the Index with a clear and relatively simple modus operandi. Items without rhyme may be excluded from the Index, unless decorated with alliteration, in which case a finer discrimination becomes necessary. Items with rhyme are counted as verse and recorded in the Index, excepting very brief snatches of rhymed English embedded within Latin sermons. These are treated inconsistently, exposing weaknesses inherent in the failure of the Index catalogers to define just what they have been cataloging.

Verses in Sermons

Latin sermons and other preachers' materials from late medieval England not infrequently contain segments of English within their texture.[47] The English segments vary in extent, function, and overall

[45] Andrew Albin discusses this lyric elsewhere in this volume ("The Sound of Rollean Lyric, ???"); see also Derek Pearsall, "The Origins of the Alliterative Revival," in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), 5; for analysis of the meter, see Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse*, 96–97. The fundamental bibliographical treatment of Middle English alliterative verse, with special reference to the cataloging efforts of the Index, is Ralph Hanna, "Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry," in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina and R. F. Yeager (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 43–64. See also Eric Weiskott, "A Checklist of Short and Fragmentary Unrhymed English Alliterative Poems, 1300–1600," *Notes and Queries* 67, no. 3 (2020): 340–47.

[46] So far as I can see, the *DIMEV* has yet to make any public statement regarding its procedures.

[47] Alan J. Fletcher, "The Lyric in the Sermon," in Duncan, *Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, 189–209, is a good introduction. For the procedures of Brown and Robbins when faced with sermon materials, see Hanna, *Patient Reading*, 58 n. 9 (reporting conversation with Robbins). Hanna's studies supply instructive illustrations, often leveraged towards criticism of the Index. See *Patient Reading*, 56–63, 66–91; Ralph Hanna, "The Verses of Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc.

aspect. Some are clearly verse, others clearly not verse, and others seem to place the category *en abyme*. Lineation is no help, for in these contexts English verse is typically written without line breaks, in continuity with surrounding Latin prose. Rhyme also fails as a criterion, for scholastic sermons typically analyze their thema into rhymed clauses, each expressing an aspect or implication to be elaborated in the main body of the sermon.[48] Rhymed sermon divisions are a regular feature of Latin sermons of the scholastic type; in sermons intended for delivery in English, the sermon division may be recorded in English, even when most of the remainder is recorded in Latin. These rhymed English sermon divisions have been the cause of much grief (should they be included in the Index, or excluded as prose?), but the problem has been posed too narrowly to admit solution. Absent a working definition of Middle English metrical forms, scholars have relied too heavily on rhyme to identify verse.

To spot the bugs in the code, it suffices to watch the criterion of rhyme in action, as it parses Latin text for embedded English verse. A good initial exhibit is the treatise *Fasciculus Morum,* a collection of *praedicabilia* compiled by an English Franciscan, probably early in the fourteenth century; twenty-eight surviving manuscript copies testify to wide circulation. The treatise has received exacting attention from Siegfried Wenzel in a series of publications, including an edition of the embedded English items.[49] These Wenzel divided into "verses" (of which he found sixty-one) and a smaller number of "other English phrases." Although Wenzel does not say so, his binary distinction relies on the presence of rhyme, and this alone, to distinguish verse from prose. That criterion decides correctly in all but a few cases.

One of Wenzel's "other English phrases" is a line of septenary verse.[50] I mark the caesura with a virgule and print the strong constituents in bold:

> "**Who**-so **woll** noȝt **when** he **may** / he **schall** noȝt **when** he **wol**de."

A cycle of modal auxiliaries—"will," "may," "shall," and "would"—stake out the moral message and four of seven beats. A variant of this verse proverb is displayed in raised relief on the Asante Ewer (ca. 1390–99; *DIMEV* 1911), discussed by Aden Kumler elsewhere in this volume.[51] In that version, a pair of infinitives sharpen the message of the proverb and swell it into a different metrical shape:

> He that **wyl** not **spa**re **whan** he **may**
> He **schal** not **spen**d **whan** he **wold**

77," *Notes and Queries* 63, no. 3 (2016): 361–70; and Ralph Hanna, "Verses in Sermons Again: The Case of Cambridge, Jesus College, MS Q.A.13," *Studies in Bibliography* 57 (2005–6): 63–83 (esp. pp. 71–74). The most intrepid navigator of mixed-language preachers' materials is Siegfried Wenzel. See his *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), esp. 13–28; and Wenzel's earlier treatments: *Verses in Sermons: "Fasciculus Morum" and Its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1978), chap. 2; and *Preachers*, chaps. 1 and 3.

[48]See Siegfried Wenzel, *Medieval "Artes Praedicandi": A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 73; and Karl Polheim, *Die lateinische Reimprosa* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925), 456–57. The thema is the sermon's principal reference passage, usually taken from the Bible and quoted at the beginning of the sermon.

[49]Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*. Wenzel has also edited and translated the full text: *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989).

[50]This is Wenzel's item C, printed as two lines at *Verses in Sermons*, 205, with commentary on p. 191. The line is recorded as verse in *IMEV* (4151) and *DIMEV* (6647), but regarded as prose in *NIMEV*.

[51]Kumler, "Lyric Vessels," this volume, ???.

The Asante Ewer version is probably best parsed as an unrhymed dolnik couplet: the infinitives "spare" and "spend" are each entitled to an inflectional syllable; if sounded, that syllable supplies an offbeat between the second and third beats in each line.[52] The absence of rhyme is odd, however, and the opening of the first line is metrically ambiguous. These peculiarities suggest that the ewer's couplet may go back to a form like that in *Fasciculus Morum*—a speculation that receives support from Bartlett Whiting's *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases*, the standard reference work on this subject. Whiting records both forms of the proverb, but whereas the form in *Fasciculus Morum* is widely attested (W.275), the form on the Asante Ewer is recorded by Whiting only there (S.553).[53] It seems that someone involved in the making of the ewer recast a traditional proverb to address the problem of "wise measure in expenditure," as Kumler suggests.[54] Whiting also shows that the form of the proverb in *Fasciculus Morum* can be traced back, in that metrical shape, to the *Poema Morale*, possibly the first Middle English poem in the septenary meter.[55] In *Poema Morale* the line participates in rhyme, as expected. The version in *Fasciculus Morum* and the remetered version on the Asante Ewer are reminders that one cannot depend upon rhyme to identify poetry in Middle English.

False positives are more pernicious, for they inevitably cloud the category to which they are assimilated. Four of the rhyming English items in *Fasciculus Morum* instance no poetic meter that I can discern. Wenzel's number 55, a mnemonic on the *signa mortis*, may serve as an example.[56] Like the other English items in *Fasciculus Morum*, this one is usually written in continuous format; I reproduce Wenzel's lineation:

> When þe hede quakyth
> And þe lyppis blakyth
> And þe nose sharpyth
> And þe senow sta[r]kyth
> And þe brest pantyth
> And þe breþe wantyth
> And þe teþe ratelyȝt
> And þe þrote roteliþ
> And þe sowle is wente owte,
> Þe body ne tyt but a clowte.
> [And after be hyt in þe pyte
> And with erth fast ydit.]

[52]Despite appearances, the spellings "spare" and "spend" probably do not represent an inconsistent graphic registration of verbal inflection. The *-e* in "spare" indicates that the preceding vowel is long; on this interpretation, both spellings are graphic monosyllables. The words acquire grammatically justified inflectional syllables in vocal enunciation, if at all.

[53]Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 537, 642–43. Parenthetical references in the main text are Whiting's alphanumeric identifiers.

[54]Quoting Kumler, "Lyric Vessels," this volume, ???. The poem "Summe men sayoun," discussed by Cristina Maria Cervone elsewhere in this volume, supplies another instance of a versified Middle English proverb. See Cervone, "Wondering Through Middle English Lyric," this volume, ???.

[55]"Þe wel ne deð, þe hwile he mai, ne scal he wenne he walde." This is line 35 in the text of London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 487; I quote from Fulk, *An Introduction to Middle English*, 167, but print *w* in place of the letter wynn.

[56]The other nonverse items are Wenzel's numbers 18 (*DIMEV* 3521), 44 (*DIMEV* 4516), and 46 (*DIMEV* 6592). For discussion of the "signs of death," see Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 197–99; Rossell Hope Robbins, "Signs of Death in Middle English," *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970): 282–98; and Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 78–82.

Sone be it so stekenn
Þe sowle all clene ys forȝetenn.

This text is recorded in *IMEV* (4035), *NIMEV* (4035), and *DIMEV* (6461), there designated as rhyming couplets. The first eight clauses exhibit what I would term local prosodic regularization, with reiterated xxSxSx or xxSSx stress contours: "And þe **ly**ppis **bla**kyth." These clauses could be construed as a peculiar spin-off of alliterative verse, but any narrower association would misunderstand how that meter works. Indeed, the most distinctive pattern here, besides the insistent feminine rhymes, is not prosodic at all, but syntactic: the drumming of parallel clauses.[57] The accompanying Latin text, for which this English is a translation, is likewise marked by emphatic parallelism, isocolon, and feminine rhyme: "Quando nasus frigescit, facies pallescit, oculi tenebrescunt, aures surdescunt, nervi et vene rumpuntur, cor in duas partes dividitur. Nichil vilius vel abhominabilius cadavere mortuo."[58] As in the English, the staccato Latin clauses are arranged in couplets: first, a couplet with inflectional rhyme supplied by inchoative verbs of singular number, then the same in plural number; a pair of passive verbs supply approximate rhyme in the third couplet. How should we understand the rhymes in this pair of texts?

The use of rhyme in Latin prose was designated an aspect of the "Isidorian style" by medieval rhetoricians, who traced it to Augustine's *Soliloquies*.[59] Modern commentators have not adopted that term but agree that Augustine provided an important model and inspiration for the ornate Latin prose, rich in parallelism, isocolon, and figures of sound, crafted by some monastic writers in the twelfth century and exemplified especially in Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs.[60] Bernard and his followers crafted vivid evocations of spiritual experience, measured out in short, paratactic clauses. These stylistic preferences distinguished Bernardine devotional prose in the field of Latin letters and supplied an unusually apposite model for writers in vernacular languages: here was a Latin style that showed how parataxis and unsophisticated diction could be turned to advantage. Arrayed in parallel, cut to equal length, and ornamented with rhyme and alliteration, the clauses of English prose became a powerful communicative instrument, as exhibited in parts of the *Ancrene Wisse* and in the Katherine Group of saints' lives and devotional treatises.[61] These thirteenth-century texts should cast doubt on any judgment that Middle English prose was underdeveloped, or that ornate Latin prose could be rendered into Middle English only as verse. A prototype theory of categorization such as John Taylor's, endorsed at the outset of this chapter, would permit us to designate artful, emotional, and intricately patterned prose as lyric, but we should consider alternatives. Would the English clerics who composed and copied little blooms of rhymed English have thought of themselves as writing verse? What else might "When þe hede quakyth" be, if not a lyric, and why should it be recorded in *Fasciculus Morum*?

[57] Gasparov's capacious perspective is helpful here: "Readers accustomed to the classic European literature of modern times usually imagine that the main feature opposing prose to verse is the absence of rhyme. This is not true. The main distinctive feature is … the fact that verse is segmented into equivalent and commensurable segments independent of syntax, and prose only in relation to syntax." Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, 97.

[58] Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons,* 198; Wenzel, *Fasciculus Morum,* 718.

[59] John of Garland, *Parisiana poetria*, ed. and trans. Traugott Lawler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 178–81, 474.

[60] Christine Mohrmann, *Études sur le latin des chrétiens*, vol. 2, *Latin chrétien et médiéval* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1961), 351–67; Polheim, *Die lateinische Reimprosa*, 389–90.

[61] See the discussions of Cecily Clark, "As Seint Austin Seith …," *Medium Aevum* 46, no. 2 (1977): 212–18; and Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England*, ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 70–74.

Fasciculus Morum is a preacher's reference book, consisting in an ordered repository of preachable materials, and it is accompanied in fully half of surviving medieval copies by a set of sermon outlines that show how its materials could be employed in sermons preached on specific days of the church calendar.[62] In the sermon outlines a preacher would find a thema, usually derived from the gospel or epistle lection for the day in question, a division of that thema, and precise cross-reference to appropriate materials in the *Fasciculus Morum*. The outlines are written in Latin, like *Fasciculus Morum* itself, but the sermons were probably delivered in English. This disposition of languages was evidently very common for sermons preached to the laity in England in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries: though preached mostly in English, the sermon text would be recorded mostly in Latin.[63] Sermon scripts and preachers' handbooks are texts susceptible to textual analysis, but they are also the written counterpart to a distinct semiotic performance, executed in another language and sited in the pulpit.

Modern linguistic anthropology has developed intricate conceptual frameworks for analysis of text-supported practices of oral semiosis like preaching a sermon or reciting a poem. I draw on this literature at the close of this chapter; my present argument requires only the traditional framework of classical rhetoric. From the perspective of classical rhetoric, a Latin script destined for vernacular delivery performs only *inventio* and *dispositio*: materials suitable for a sermon have been identified (that's *inventio*) and arranged into a workable sequence (*dispositio*). The resulting sermon structure could be highly intricate, but its verbal texture might be left in note form.[64] Only at exceptional moments, when the details of wording are too important to be left to improvisation, does the script descend to matters of *elocutio*, or the provision of wording in the language of delivery. English verse is often—not always—set down in English.[65] Sermon divisions are treated with the same care, and so are translations of biblical and patristic quotations. These elements are often recorded in English in sermon texts otherwise Latin. As Holly Johnson explains, a scribe may switch to English at points where "verbatim" wording is desired: preachers could generally preach "prose sections" from Latin notes "but could hardly be expected to generate Middle English rhymes on the spot."[66] This insight gets us halfway to an explanation of the bits of rhymed English that one finds embedded in Latin sermons. It tells us why these materials have been recorded in English. To explain what the bits of

[62]Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 47–49.

[63]Qualifications in this sentence register the nuanced treatment of the language of preaching in Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 119–23; compare Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 86–88. For evidence that *Fasciculus Morum* was intended to support preaching to a lay audience, see Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 50.

[64]Hanna, *Patient Reading*, 87–91, analyzes a sermon script consisting of "notes awaiting fuller performative enactment" (87). For the intricacies of scholastic sermon structure, see the sermon analyzed at Wenzel, *Medieval "Artes Praedicandi,"* 89–103; and discussion at Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 74–79. A good account of *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio* may be found in Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, ed. David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson, trans. Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, and David E. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

[65]Wenzel reports English verses noticed but not recorded, or recorded incompletely, in Latin sermons (*Verses in Sermons*, 84 and 94). And see the examples discussed at Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 97–98; and Hanna, *Patient Reading*, 60 (two lines of verse in triple time), 89–90. Ardis Butterfield, "Poems Without Form? *Maiden in the mor lay* Revisited," in *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing*, ed. Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), 169–94, at p. 189, illustrates similar problems of inscription and performance.

[66]Holly Johnson, *The Grammar of Good Friday: Macaronic Sermons of Late Medieval England* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), xxiii. Similarly, Wenzel likens such sermon texts to the notes "of an experienced lecturer who usually speaks extempore and requires only a brief outline, yet who will jot down his best jokes verbatim to make sure that he gets them right." Siegfried Wenzel, "Poets, Preachers, and the Plight of Literary Critics," *Speculum* 60, no. 2 (1985): 343–63, at p. 350.

rhymed English are, we need a theory of Middle English prosodic forms.

As further illustration of the problem, I turn to a second bit of rhymed English, sometimes described as a Passion lyric. Though not in *Fasciculus Morum*, this second example circulated widely; I quote from Wenzel's edition and translation of a fourteenth-century bilingual sermon for Good Friday, on the biblical thema *amore langueo* (Song of Songs 2:5):[67]

> Nam ista benedicta passio Christi isto die trahere debet lacrimas de oculis et singultus de corde cuiuslibet boni Christiani sicud testatur beatus Augustinus sic loquens de passione Christi: "Memoria passionis tue, o bone Iesu, lacrimas allicit, oculos confundit, faciem inmutat, et cor dulcorat."
>
> Þe mynde of þy swet passion, Iesu,
> teres it telles,
> eyen it bolleȝ,
> my vesage it wetes,
> and my hert it swetes.
>
> Et ideo sicut dicit idem Augustinus, "semper fit tibi fixus in mente qui pro te semel fuit fixus in cruce."
>
> (For the blessed passion Christ suffered on this day should draw tears from the eyes and sighs from the heart of every good Christian, as Augustine witnesses when he speaks of Christ's passion: "The memory of your passion, oh good Christ, draws tears, clouds the eyes, distorts the face, and sweetens the heart."
>
> The memory of thy sweet passion, Jesus,
> it draws tears,
> makes eyes run over,
> bedews my face,
> and sweetens my heart.
>
> And as Augustine further says, "Let him always be fastened in your mind who was once fastened for you on the cross.")

The Middle English is recorded in *IMEV* and its successors, but has no metrical structure that I can discern: though the passage divides neatly into two-beat segments punctuated with rhyme, the patterning of weak syllables is rhetorical, not metrical. Wenzel, guided by rhyme, sets it out in lines as verse. For an alternative interpretation, one needs to look more closely at the Latin quotations that precede and follow, attributed here to Augustine. These feature parallel clauses and inflectional rhyme

[67]Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 218–21. On this sermon, see Wenzel's discussion; and Holly Johnson, *Grammar of Good Friday*, 61–66. The quality of language-mixing instanced in *Amore langueo* is unusual and its relation to oral performance disputed. For discussion and a variety of opinions, see Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 65–129; Alan J. Fletcher, "Written versus Spoken Macaronic Discourse in Late Medieval England: The View from a Pulpit," in Jefferson and Putter, *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain*, 137–51; Herbert Schendl, "Code-Switching in Late Medieval Macaronic Sermons," in Jefferson and Putter, *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain*, 153–69; and Ardis Butterfield, "Fuzziness and Perceptions of Language in the Middle Ages," part 3, "Translating Fuzziness: Countertexts," *Common Knowledge* 19, no. 3 (2013): 446–73, at pp. 455–62. For the particular English item I discuss, see Carleton Brown, *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, 113; Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 128, 131; and Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 20–21, 370–71, 373.

(*similiter cadens*). In the first quotation—the one translated into English—the four short clauses have been arranged such that the first two have verbs of the third conjugation, with *-it* inflection, and the second two have verbs of the first conjugation, with *-at* inflection. These are two couplets of prose clauses. The only stylistic difference between this Latin *auctoritas* and its English rendering is that the English employs full rhyme rather than inflectional rhyme, for the neutralization of weak final vowels in late Old English meant that repetition of inflections alone could not in English achieve the effect it did in Latin. (The spelling *telles* is an error for *MED* "tollen, v.1," meaning "to draw, beckon, entice"; see sense 1[c].) The English translation is impressive, representing both the idea of the Latin text and its elegant expression. It is poetic, lyrical, and must have been valued by preachers, but it is not verse. It is instead a little pearl of rhetorical *elocutio*, a flower to be pinned into the oral text of a sermon preached on Good Friday. Some of the other flowers so recorded are indeed verse, but this one is just a flower.

For a Typology of Middle English Meters

The Index has operated without an adequate set of categories. This is evident from its treatment of rhymed English in Latin sermons; it is also evident in the notes supplied by the Index on the form of individual items. Rhyme scheme is duly recorded, as is the count of lines per stanzaic unit; if there is alliteration, its presence is often noted. Formal description proceeds no further: the field for "versification" in *DIMEV* makes no comment on the metrical structure of verse lines. So, for example, the Harley lyrics "Weping haueþ myn wonges wet" (*DIMEV* 6186) and "Ich herde men vpo mold" (*DIMEV* 2198) are recorded as having an identical verse form ("12-line alliterative stanzas" rhyming abababababcdcd), yet their respective meters are not at all alike.[68] The lines of "Weping" alternate smoothly between beat and offbeat. The first eight lines of each stanza are standard Middle English dolnik, with four beats to a line; the last four lines of each stanza have three beats to a line. The lines of "Ich herde men" are uniformly four-beat, but the rhythm is more complex than dolnik: double offbeats are more frequent in this poem and disposed in accordance with the practice of alliterative verse.[69] Both poems employ alliteration, but only "Ich herde men" is alliterative. The two poems exemplify the differences in metrical design that hide behind an identical "versification" field in *DIMEV*.

By neglecting to distinguish one metrical design from another, editors of the Index place themselves in a poor position to distinguish metered from unmetered language. That problem cannot be fixed in the space of an essay, but corrective efforts should probably begin with the Middle English dolnik, the most numerous line type in the surviving records. To that end, I here offer a metrical analysis of the English verses in the sermon *Amore langueo*. In an appendix I make a similar analysis of the English verses in *Fasciculus Morum*. The verses of *Fasciculus Morum* are more various than those of *Amore langueo*, and more instructive as well.

DIMEV records thirteen verse items in the copy of *Amore langueo* employed by Wenzel as his base

[68] On the meter of these two poems, see Hanna, "Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry," 46–47. Compare Cable, "Foreign Influence," 230–31.

[69] The best candidate for alternating rhythm in the second half-lines of "Ich herde men" is "nou wereþ ragges" (36). This half-line could be scanned "nou **were**þ **ra**gges" (xSxSx), except that contrastive stress probably throws the first beat to the adverb *nou* ("now"). (The first half of the line reads "Þat er werede robes.") I quote from Thorlac Turville-Petre, ed., *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).

text (Oxford, Balliol College, MS 149, fols. 31–38v).[70] This count includes two variant appearances of *DIMEV* 1367 but omits a second appearance (with slight variation) of *DIMEV* 1371. I have argued above that one item (*DIMEV* 5404, the translation of Pseudo-Augustine) is not verse. I would also exclude *DIMEV* 880, which commemorates the seven torments of the Passion: "blod-[s]wetyng, hard byndyng, gret traualyng, smert betyng, long wakyng. Croys-beryng, scherp prikyng." These are rhymed cola, not verse lines. The remaining eleven items recorded by *DIMEV* in the Balliol copy of *Amore langueo* are all in a single meter, the ubiquitous English dolnik. The two versions of "For loue I morne & sorowe make" (*DIMEV* 1367) are an instructive quasi-exception: the version in the main text is severely compressed. In the bottom margin a later hand entered the full text of the lyric (virgules are my addition, marking the caesura; linguistic material in bold fills strong metrical positions; segments enclosed within parentheses are omitted in the compressed version of this lyric transmitted in the main text):

> For **loue** I **morne** / (& **sor**owe **make**)
> (For **morn**inge) y **pe**rische / **for** þi **sake**
> (**Though** y **pe**rysche) / y **hope** þi **grace**
> My **lyue** (my **hope**) / ys **in** þi **face**

Repetition and grammatical transposition of the key words ("morne"/"morninge," "y perische"/"y perische," "y hope"/"my hope") yields metrical verse; it also yields an elegant rendering of the concatenated Latin tags that precede this English item in the sermon: "Amore langueo ... Langore pereo ... Pereundo spero ... Sperando reuiuisco." Given this Latin source, one should probably read "Y lyue" for "My lyue" in the final line.

The other English lyrics in the Balliol copy of *Amore langueo* give fifty-six lines of metrically homogeneous verse. Marginal or interlinear additions unique to Balliol twice spoil the meter.[71] Rhythmical alternation is the general principle and it operates most strictly at the close of the line. The interval between the third and fourth beats is monosyllabic in each line of the poem quoted above and in all but four lines in the other poems of *Amore langueo* (citations are to line numbers in Wenzel's edition of *Amore langueo*):

1. Wo and peyne and gret blame (459)
2. For þis day wondris he wroth (637)
3. Qwan þou scholdes þi liff lete (655)
4. Lorde þat lete oute blode of þi side (766)

In line 637 one might suppose that an auxiliary verb has gone missing; reading "For **þis** day **wond**ris / [**hath**] he **wroth**" would yield metrical verse.[72] At line 655 the four copies of *Amore langueo* show much variation; reading "þi liff [for]lete" would yield metrical verse.[73] In the two remaining lines

[70] On the manuscript, see Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons*, 43–44, 177–80; and Hanna, *Patient Reading*, 57. I thank librarians at Balliol College Oxford, Trinity College Dublin, and the British Library for images of manuscripts in their collections.

[71] Delete "with his blode" (at line 639 in Wenzel's ed.) and "Lord" (line 656); both are pleonastic.

[72] See William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The A Version; Will's Visions of Piers Plowman and Do-Well, an Edition in the Form of Trinity College Cambridge MS R.3.14 Corrected from Other Manuscripts, with Variant Readings*, ed. George Kane, rev. ed. (London: Athlone Press; and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 122, for remarks on small grammatical variants in Middle English poetry.

[73] See *MED*, s.v. "forleten, v.," sense 6(a). The reading in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Kk.4.24

above, the copy of this sermon in Dublin, Trinity College, MS 277 gives a variant reading with regular meter. For "gret" in line 459, Trinity has the disyllabic synonym "mekyll."[74] In line 766 Trinity omits "blode," correctly. The Balliol line must be read in context with the following:

> Lorde þat lete oute blode of þi side
> Watur and blode þat sprede wide

Somewhere in the transmission of these verses a scribe intruded "blode" into 766, in anticipation of following copy. The Trinity reading, omitting "blode" from line 766, yields better meter and better syntax. The word "sprede" may have inflectional *-e* in line 767, but that syllable is precarious, vulnerable to loss.[75] Trinity renders the meter more secure by adding a throwaway intensifier: "þat spred so wyde."[76]

On seven other occasions in the English lyrics of *Amore langueo*, Trinity has readings metrically superior to Wenzel's base text.[77] If we permit these Trinity readings to correct Balliol, then we may construct a metrical profile as follows:

- About half of the lines are headless, lacking a weak syllable before the first beat. The others begin with a single weak syllable; runs of consecutive weak syllables do not occur in initial position.
- One line in seven has a disyllabic interval (that is, two consecutive weak syllables) between the first beat and the second.[78] All others have a single weak syllable in this position. Since disyllabic intervals are not restricted to headless lines, the feature cannot be reanalyzed as "trochaic substitution" or "initial stress inversion."
- About one line in five has a disyllabic interval between the second beat and the third; the disyllabic interval always straddles the caesura, with one weak syllable contributed from either side (an "epic caesura").[79] All other lines have a single weak syllable in this location; the weak syllable follows the caesura more often than it precedes it (the ratio is 3:2).
- The third and fourth beats are always separated by a single weak syllable. (Exceptions are lines 459 and 655, unless emended as suggested above.)
- I do not find convincing examples of stress clash anywhere in the line; nor of more than two consecutive weak syllables.

(Wenzel's sigil B) is also metrical.

[74]Trinity's spelling is distinctive of northern dialects, but disyllabic forms are geographically unrestricted. See *eLALME*'s dot maps for item 16, "much."

[75]Weak final *-e* separates the third and fourth beats on only four other occasions: 73, "swete" (< OE *swēte*); 545, "alle" (pl. adj.); 635, "new" (< OE *nēowe*); and 769, "wythoute" (< OE *wiþūtan*). I count weak final *-e* only where that syllable is justified by grammar or derivation and stands alone between beats. The relevant instances, in addition to those just listed, are 59, "hyme" (infinitive); 68, "loue" (< OE *lufu*); 201 and 716, "hert" (< OE *heorte*); 480, "serue" (infinitive); 717 and 747, "swete" (< OE *swēte*).

[76]At least one other scribe had the same idea, for the other two witnesses have "ful" for Trinity's "so."

[77]The other instances are (the Balliol reading precedes the bracket, Trinity follows): 69, "deye"] "drery"; 200, "tokenes"] "tokynys gret"; 479, "As"] "for as"; 544, "no"] "noght a"; 557, "þe"] *om*; 635, "we"] "to owre lorde"; 657, "þi"] *om* (*also* T). *B* and *T* are Wenzel's sigla for Cambridge University Library, MS Kk.4.24, and Oxford, Magdalen College, MS 93, respectively (these copies do not supply independent improvements, except for B at line 655). To this list one could add Trinity's rewritten lines at 654–55 and the following: 558, "Ioy"] "þe ioye"; 718, "me"] "me þi."

[78]These are 194, *198, 201, *337, *635, 657, *767, *769, and *DIMEV* 1367.2. An asterisk marks lines interpretable as having initial stress inversion.

[79]These are 73, 184, 196, 197, 336, 337, 478, 569, 636, 655, 747, and *DIMEV* 1367.3.

This description is based on too small a sample for numerical ratios to have authority. Moreover, some patterns not attested in the *Amore langueo* verses—stress clash and initial double offbeats, for example—occur as minority patterns elsewhere in Middle English dolnik, including the English verses of *Fasciculum Morum*.[80] Yet, the above metrical profile will at least serve to reiterate some theoretical features of my analysis, beginning with the question of footedness. The suitability of foot-based scansions remains an unsettled question in the specialist literature on medieval English meters.[81] I agree with the foot-prosodists that lines of Middle English dolnik are partitioned, but I see lines as dividing into two metrical cola, not four metrical feet. A foot-based analysis would always be possible, but presupposes greater structuration than I perceive in Middle English verse, and leads too easily into the conclusion that the verse is metrically sloppy.

My interpretation of the dolnik line as composed of two metrical cola may be controversial, but it is supported by poetic syntax. The midline division usually corresponds to an important syntactic break; among the verses of *Amore langueo*, the salient exception is line 195, where the caesura splits conjunctive "as" from the noun phrase it governs: "He syket as / a sorful man." The relevant patterns of poetic syntax become clearer at scale, when examined in a larger sample of verse. The 1,211 lines of *Pearl* contain numerous polysyllabic words—words that may, and often do, supply two metrical beats.[82] There are three possible placements within the line:

1. Of **cour**tay**sye**, / as **sayt3** Saynt **Poul**e (457)
2. To **suche** is **he**uen**riche** a**ra**yed (719)
3. For **ho** is **Quen** / of **cor**tay**sye**. (444)

When a polysyllabic word supplies two metrical beats, those beats may belong to the same colon, as in 1 and 3, or bridge the cola, as in 2. Line 719 is the single instance of a midline polysyllable in *Pearl*, whereas 1 and 3 are represented by forty-three and seventy-six instances respectively. This distribution could be credited to *Pearl*'s intricate device of verbal concatenation, which regularly places polysyllables at line end, but similar distributions recur at the level of the phrase. Consider, for example, the distribution of noun phrases in which an attributive adjective immediately precedes the noun it modifies, and the adjective and noun each supply one beat:

1. My **prec**ious **per**le / wy**thou**ten **spot**. (48)
2. He **se3** þer **y**del / **men** ful **stron**ge (531)
3. Ne **pro**ued I **neuer** / her **prec**ios **pe**re. (4)

The adjective and noun may be contained within a single rhythmical colon, as in 1 and 3, or they may bridge the two cola, as in 2. *Pearl* contains just eight instances of pattern 2, whereas 1 and 3 each occur over a hundred times. Finally, one may note that the colon boundary coincides with the boundary of a clause or a prepositional phrase in some 450 lines in *Pearl*—an average of one line in three. Against this figure, one may place forty-three lines in which a conjunction, relative pronoun, or preposition is divided from the clause or phrase that it governs. An example is "I **en**tred **in** / þat **er**ber **gre**ne" (38), and this is the same type of mismatch that I flagged above, in a single line of the *Amore langueo* lyrics: "He **sy**ket **as** / a **sor**ful **man**."

[80] On stress clash, see Tarlinskaja, *English Verse*, 92–93; and Smithers, "Scansion of *Havelok*," 218.

[81] For a sophisticated foot-based scansion of Middle English materials, see the chapter "The Birth of Iambic Meter," in Russom, *The Evolution of Verse Structure*, 259–71.

[82] I use the Oxford Text Archive's digital text of E. V. Gordon, ed., *Pearl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

The numerical data admit opposing interpretations. One may interpret rare mismatches of syntax and meter as evidence that Middle English dolnik lacks a caesura.[83] My preference is instead to interpret the mismatches as complex realizations of a bipartite verse design: precisely because the bipartite structure is so well established over long stretches of verse, poets can, on occasion, place a major syntactic boundary after the first beat, or place a word like *heuenriche* at midline, without damaging the legibility of their form.

Bipartite structure gives the line flexibility and perceptual clarity, allowing it to accommodate upward and downward deviations from normal syllable count. The meter admits least flexibility at its close, which is precisely what comparative and general metrics leads us to expect: poetic meters tend to be defined most strictly at the right edges of metrical units.[84] The Middle English dolnik admits disyllabic intervals and stress clash up until the close, at which point the basic principle of stress alternation reasserts itself. Even in *Pearl*, where disyllabic intervals are very frequent at earlier points in the line, and trisyllabic intervals not infrequent, the interval between the last two beats is monosyllabic in somewhere between 85 and 95 percent of all lines.[85] Behind the fluctuating syllable counts in Middle English verse there are robust prosodic regularities.

A future version of the *Index of Middle English Verse* should employ a typology of metrical forms and classify verse items according to metrical type. As a step toward that end, we need better articulated positive descriptions of Middle English poetic meters. Despite much excellent work by prosodists, much Middle English poetry remains uncharted territory.

Conclusions

In a preface to the *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse*, Rossell Hope Robbins remarked that a disproportionate share of additions in that volume were "verse items of only two lines, including many preachers' tags and proverbs, gnomic sayings, and English lines in Latin stories"—or "short proverbial tags and shards ... embedded in prose," as he put it a few pages later (xix, xxi). In subsequent decades, Latin preaching materials and other prose texts have continued to yield a steady stream of previously unrecorded Middle English, and this has rightly focused attention on questions of context. Scholars have inquired what English verses are doing in these manuscript and discursive contexts and how the textual ensembles worked. We have come to see embedded English items not as "shards" but as functionally integrated components of a larger bilingual construct. At the same time, increased access to archival documents has sharpened our sense that English verses in sermons are not much to look at on the manuscript page. They can appear to be dissolved in a bath of Latin. Most verse items in *Amore langueo* consist of a single couplet or quatrain, and the English verses in this sermon never hold forth for more than eight uninterrupted lines. The longest item, as indexed by *DIMEV*, is doled out, a

[83] This is the interpretation favored by Duggan, "Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors," 228–31, with reference specially to *Pearl*.

[84] See Russom, *Evolution of Verse Structure*, 20; Cable, "Progress in Middle English Alliterative Metrics," 257 n. 15 and references there.

[85] My count of unambiguous monosyllabic intervals (81 percent of the total) treats final *-e* as elided when followed by a vowel or *h-*. In an additional 4 percent of lines, the final interval may be contracted to one syllable (e.g., *euer* > *er*; *trendeled* > *trendel'd*; *precios* with consonantal *i*). In a further 9 percent of lines, election of a form without final *-e* would yield a monosyllabic final interval. Duggan likewise finds that the interval between the third and fourth beats is monosyllabic in "over 90 per cent" of lines in *Pearl* ("Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors," 223).

quatrain at a time, over the last nine manuscript pages of the Latin text; individual quatrains punctuate, reecho, and ornament the preacher's exposition. From a visual standpoint as well as a semantic and functional one, lyrics are absorbed into their co(n)texts. All this has led in recent decades to some anxious questioning about the character and even the ontological status of Middle English lyric. If "For loue I morne & sorowe make" is a lyric, in what sense is a "Middle English lyric" a thing?

I have sought in this essay to show what metrical analysis may contribute to that question. Context is not all: contextualization implies, as its dialectical counterpart, some grasp of the text as a unified thing among other things. Talk of the "unity of the poem" has become disreputable since the New Criticism, but we may benefit today from reflecting a bit on what, exactly, we seek to contextualize, and how those entities came into being. In performance studies and linguistic anthropology, one finds the term "entextualization" advanced as the technical counterpart to contextualization: contextualization names the ways that utterances accrue meaning from their discursive or pragmatic placement; entextualization names the ways an utterance binds itself to itself, and thus into an entity that may be repeated across multiple discursive and pragmatic placements.[86] Poetic meter is an important mode of entextualization in premodern literary cultures. If contextual analysis has tended to dissolve the presumed thinghood of Middle English lyrics, metrical analysis shows that verses are robust enough to sustain that. Metrical structuration sets verse apart from its surround; it defines the verse object as a distinct entity, distinguished by a specifiable compositional craft.

Appendix: A Catalog of English Verse Forms in *Fasciculus Morum*

Wenzel rightly describes the four-beat line as "the preferred verse form" in this collection; in a brief treatment, he also notices the presence of verse in a variety of other forms.[87] I offer an annotated catalog.

Four-beat lines (Middle English dolnik)

Fully half of the items designated by Wenzel as verse (32 of 61) conform to the metrical profile of Middle English dolnik.[88] Whereas the lyrics in *Amore langueo* avoid stress clash, those in *Fasciculus Morum* (henceforth *FM*) several times permit clashing stress at the caesura.[89] *FM* 43 makes especially effective use of this possibility:

> **That** y **ȝaf, / þat** ys **myn.**
> **Þat** I **eet, / þ*a*t** was **myn*n*.**

[86] See Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 72–78; and Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, eds., *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–14.

[87] Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 102.

[88] Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24A, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36, 38, 41A, 42A, 43, 47, 50, 51, 53, 56, 58, 59, 61. I take "Now" to be extrametrical at the head of 58.1. For 17.1, "executors," the meter calls for the aphetic and contracted form *sectores*. Contraction is represented in the spelling of one witness to this lyric, receives confirmation from meter in the *Cursor Mundi* (quoted in *MED*, s.v. "secutour, n."), and accords with well-established patterns of sound change in trisyllabic words of Romance origin. The spelling "executors," which is the form transmitted in most copies of *Fasciculus Morum* 17, might have been favored as graphically unambiguous.

[89] I find only five instances among the lyrics in the previous note: 9.4, 31.1, 43.1, 43.2, 50.2. At 31.1 two copies preserve a metrically regular variant.

That I **lefte** / be**hyn**de **me,**
Who **hit** schall **haue** / I **con** no3t **se**.

This lyric begins with the sparest possible realization of the English dolnik. In my scansion, the first two lines have just six syllables each and just a single weak syllable per half-line. That scansion is open to doubt, and it claims little authority beyond the force of expectation: dolnik is the most frequent meter in *FM*, and thus probably the first meter a reader will try out upon a new and unknown bit of embedded English. One attempts to parse the material metrically—that is, to make it into verse—and the first two lines of this poem leave one uncertain whether one has chosen a plausible or fitting target form. The next two lines offer confirmation. The third line, while still headless, adds a syllable at the boundary between cola. In the fourth line the lyric arrives finally at the rhythmic contour normative for the English dolnik. A clipped, staccato opening of the stanza unfolds into a ponderous, deliberate close. Contrastive stress between "ys" and "was" slows the pace at the end of the first couplet, syphoning prominence away from the rhyme word. The word "noght," in the last weak position of the last line, has a similar effect: it dampens the rhythmical bounce that would otherwise be afforded by the weak syllables in this line.

While closer to the dolnik than to any other form, eight lyrics have disyllabic intervals between the third and fourth beats, among other irregularities: *FM* 1, 10, 27, 32, 34A, 34B, 40, 48.[90]

Three-beat lines

The three-beat line type is instanced by *FM* 4, 52, 57, and 60 (the last line of 52 is irregular). I present *FM* 4 as an example.

Who-so **spe**kyth [**oft**]
Of **þyng** þ*a*t **is** vn-**wrest**
Þouh h*i*t **se**me **soft**
When he **spe**kyth **mest**
He **schal** hit **her**en on **l**[**o**]**ft**
When he **we**nyth **lest.**

Line 3 "seme" is subjunctive, with grammatically justified weak -*e*. Line 5 "heren" is an infinitive, and the -*en* inflection written by the scribe of Wenzel's base text may be realized as the reduced endings -*e* or -∅. The meter cues a form without -*n*, yielding regular alternation of beat and offbeat.

The three-beat line is too short to admit much variation, but lines may begin with or without a weak syllable. The poems in this form in *FM* show a distinct preference for disyllabic rhyme, perhaps as a way of adding weight to a very short line.

With two exceptions, to be treated at the end, all remaining lyrics in *FM* are constructed by combining three- and four-beat units.

[90] In *FM* 27.1 I take "man" to be extrametrical or an intrusion. *FM* 34A.3 might be regularized by reading "þat þou" for "þou." In *FM* 48.1 and 48.3 there is stress clash between the first two beats; these lines return to regularity in their second half.

Six-beat lines (3+3)

The six-beat line is instanced by *FM* 15, 37, and 41B, the last of which serves as my illustration:

> Thys **wor**dle **vs** de**fy**lyþ / *and* **clan**syth **but** a **ly**te.
> Of **filþe** þat **ys** þ*er***yn**ne / **who** can **hym** best **quy**te?

Wenzel prints this item in short lines, though it rhymes only at the end. Line 1 *wordle* (world) is disyllabic, as probably also in 33.1; the spelling is rare but authentic. The adverb *þerynne* (< OE *þærinne*) is a favorite of Middle English poets, useful for its xSx stress contour and minimal semantic content.

The six-beat line derives from the fusion of two three-beat units. The resulting medial caesura becomes a flex point, exactly as in the four-beat line: note the extra unstressed syllable at the caesura in the first line above.

FM 41A and 41B form an instructive pair, consisting of four- and three-beat versions of the same material. At 41A.2 "world" is disyllabic again—or else transpose "fyle ys" to "ys fyle" as in three copies.

Septenary and ballad measure (4+3)

The septenary and ballad measure forms are instanced by *FM* 11, 13, 14, 39A, 39B, 54, and item C in Wenzel's "Other English Phrases." Rhyme alone differentiates the short lines of ballad measure from the 4+3 units of septenary. One scribe turned 39A into ballad measure by introducing rhymes (though ineptly) at the ends of four-beat units in that poem.

Five lyrics in *FM* are constructed from units of 4+4+3: these are *FM* 7, 16, 21 45, and 49.[91] *FM* 16 supplies my example; I have indented the three-beat lines in accordance with conventions of modern print:

> **Was** þ*er* **neu*er*** / ca**ren** so **loth**e [SxS|xSxS]
> As **mon** when **he** / to **put** **goth** [xSxS|xSxS]
> And **deth** has **layd**e so **lo**we. [xSxSxSx]
> For **when** deth **dra**wes / **mon** fro*m* **o**þur, [xSxSx|SxSx]
> Þe **sus**ter **nul** / not **se** þe **bro**ther, [xSxSx|SxSx]
> Ne **fa**der þe **so**ne i-**kna**we. [xSxSxSx]

Disyllabic "neuer" would not spoil the meter in line 1, but the monosyllabic by-form "ner" is possible and I adopt it in my scansion. Later in the same line, "caren" presumably represents *MED* "careine, n.," from Anglo-French (= Mod. E. "carrion"). The word has etymologically justified -*e* and is so used by Chaucer and Langland, scanning xSx. In this instance, however, final -*e* would create an anomalous disyllabic interval in the second half of the line. The word "put" (line 2) may acquire inflectional -*e* here, as the object of a preposition. My scansion omits "þe" in line 6, where the article is grammatically superfluous and would contribute an anomalous extra syllable in a three-beat unit. The second branch of a parallel construction permits terser expression, optionally omitting particles understood from the

[91] *FM* 45 has suffered textual corruption in all copies of *Fasciculus Morum* and all sixteen witnesses for which the *DIMEV* supplies transcriptions (*DIMEV* 3167).

first branch. Scribes sometimes padded these constructions out, as if intending to clarify syntax on the page.[92]

The four- and three-beat units in septenary and ballad meter behave as expected. The four-beat units show the usual flexibility, with an extra syllable not infrequently appearing after the first beat or at the caesura. Exceptionally, there is an extra syllable at the head of 54.7. In 14 the four-beat units have stress clash at the caesura.

Hybrid alliterative-dolnik

Wenzel rightly describes the form of *FM* 25 and 26A as "peculiar."[93] The second of these serves as my example:

> Be**hol**de myne **woun**des, / how **sor**e I am **dyȝth**, [xSxxSx / xSxxS]
> For all þe **wel**e þ*a*t þ*o*u **hast** / I **wan** hit in **fyȝt.** [xxxSxxS / xSxxS]
> I am **so**re **wou*n***det, / be**hold** on my **skyn.** [xxSxSx / xSxxS]
> **Le**ue **lyf**, for my **lo**ue / **let** me comen **in**. [SxSxxSx / SxxS]

Like the septenary, this is a long-line form with fixed caesura. The line always has two metrical stresses in its second half; these are typically separated by a disyllabic interval. Accentual patterning in the first half-line is more various, but there are usually two metrical stresses and at least one string of consecutive weak syllables. When a half-line has three stressable words it is often possible to read one as demoted. In 26A.4 I would demote "leue." The verse form is seen also in the alliterative Harley lyrics, noted earlier in this essay. It developed in the thirteenth century, combining elements of the alliterative meter and the dolnik, and it remained in use throughout the fifteenth century, most often for short poems. It represents a significant innovation in the history of English verse forms: in these poems the alliterative meter was simplified, shorn of its layered complexity, and reinterpreted as accentual-syllabic.

[92]Compare 2.4 "a" (absent from most copies including Wenzel's base text prior to correction) and 15.2 "in."

[93]Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, 121. *FM* 26B is an unsuccessful and aborted effort to rewrite 26A in alternating-stress lines.