Prosodic Protocols and Interruptions of Them in Piers Plowman

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Prosodic Protocols and Interruptions of them in *Piers Plowman*

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Abstract

In premodern societies artificial prosody supplied an encoding protocol for the transmission of sound in writing. Focusing on the fourteenth-century English poem *Piers Plowman*, this essay examines mid-stream interruption, modification, or blending of prosodic protocols. In most cases the interruption takes the form of a mid-line switch from English verse to Latin prose. In a few cases, the switch is from English verse to Latin verse. These interruptions of protocol are part of the formal artistry and multilingual facility of *Piers Plowman*, encoding a great range of sound and some silence. They prompt readers to re-evaluate well-justified expectations that a line beginning in a given meter will end in that same meter. They also express Langland’s basic recognition that his English meter is bipartite, analyzable into constituent parts, which may be put to independent use. Langland’s use of independent half-lines remained unsystematic and experimental, and must sometimes be excavated from behind the normalizing tendencies of scribes and editors.

1 Communications Protocols

Within the general context of alphabetic systems of writing, inquiry into relations between writing and sound customarily focuses on the capacity of letters to represent the sounds of speech. Yet, while an alphabet may encode approximately the constituent segments of speech (vowels and consonants), prosodic or suprasegmental attributes (duration, pitch, and stress) are usually entrusted to the implicit knowledge of the reader, not to marks on the page. Indeed, a rough shorthand definition of “prosody” might be “those qualities of speech-sound that are not written,” or else, “qualities written by special supplementary notation.”¹ The prosodic dimension of speech illustrates neatly that alphabetic writing is only ever a series of cues; activation of them requires the performer to know rather more than the

¹This is the author’s typescript of an essay published in *The Sound of Writing*, ed. Christopher Cannon and Steven Justice (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023), 84–107. Please cite the published version.

¹Compare W. Sidney Allen, *Accent and Rhythm: Prosodic Features of Latin and Greek: A Study in Theory and Reconstruction*, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 3–12, observing that in Hellenistic grammatical theory the term prosody came to be extended from melodic accent “to certain other features which, like the accent, were not accounted for by the segmental analysis of speech into vowel and consonant phonemes (στοιχεῖα)” (3), or again, that prosody encompassed “relevant features ... not indicated in the segmental orthography of vowels and consonants — in fact anything which necessitated ‘marking the text’ (αριθμόν τῆς γραμματικῆς)” (10). Hence the close association between prosody and punctuation in ancient and medieval literary culture, as observed by M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect. An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
sound-values of individual written letters. If writing was nevertheless able to function as a phono-
graphic instrument in the cultural spheres of Greek and Roman antiquity, as Shane Butler argues, and
throughout the Middle Ages and early modernity, it did so on account of protocols additional to and
other than alphabetic literacy.2 One of those protocols of sound-transmission goes again by the name
“prosody,” though now in a sense different from the one I have employed in previous sentences. Beside
linguistic prosody there is artificial prosody, or the design of verse and rhythmical prose.3 Prior to
Thomas Edison’s wax cylinders, artificial prosody supplied what we may term an encoding protocol
for the transmission of sound in writing.

To appreciate Butler’s claim for the phonographic capacities of ancient writing, we need to acknowledge
that modern recording technologies have altered, perhaps irreversibly, the standards by which we
might judge two semiotic vocal performances to be “exactly alike.” This point is among the subtler
implications of the audio recordings of Serbo-Croatian singers made in the 1930s and 1950s by Milman
Parry and Albert Bates Lord. The singers describe their successive recitations of the same narrative
poem as “exactly alike,” “word for word and line for line.”4 Modern recording equipment — engraved
aluminum plates and magnetized spools of steel wire — exposed variants between the recitations, and
thereby supplied Lord with the evidentiary basis for his celebrated theorizations of oral-traditional
poetics. Lord’s focus was always resolutely on non-literate poetry, a fact that perhaps makes his work an
unlikely reference in the present context, yet his recording equipment has implications for a historical
assessment of literate as well as non-literate poetics. The wax cylinder and its successors changed
forever what it means for a vocal performance to be reproduced; rewind the tape of history to a earlier
era, and the situation is not that vocal performances were irreproducible, but that reproduction meant
something different. Writing has served often as a medium for the reproduction of vocal performances,
and artificial prosodies have been among the protocols of vocal reproducibility, in conjunction with
writing or not. This function helps to explain the prominence of verse and rhythmical prose in
premodern literary cultures.

In telecommunications and networked computing, a protocol is “A standardized set of rules allowing
different machines ... to communicate with each other.”5 The prefix “http” in web addresses stands
for Hypertext Transfer Protocol and forms an upper layer in a stack of protocols that enable you to
load a website to your computer. The term derives from late antique documentary culture, in which a πρωτόκολλον
was the first leaf of a papyrus roll, which may be inscribed to identify or authenticate the
contents of the roll or date its manufacture. The same term is applied also to the first text-element of
an official pronouncement of a medieval chancery, recording the names of the person or persons on
whose authority a pronouncement is issued and to whom it is addressed.6 Unlike the protocols of either
networked computing or diplomatics, prosodic protocols can function without being defined anywhere.
Many definitional efforts have been made, from antiquity forward, in studies and instructional manuals,
but prosodic protocols are a matter of human cognitive processing and they can be absorbed from

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3Allen, Accent and Rhythm, 5, traces this usage to fifteenth-century English grammar schools.


6Thomas Frenz, Papsturkunden des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit, Historische Grundwissenschaften in Einzeldarstellun-
example and in practice, much like the structures of natural languages. Like natural languages, artificial prosodies operate within communities. Writing can help to preserve and standardize the linguistic products of communities and extend them across time and space. Artificial prosodies supply a set of community rules that, among other things, serve to enhance the vocal component of written language.

The present essay is an inquiry into the prosodic protocols that help writing to encode sound, and especially the effects that may be derived from mid-stream interruption, modification, or blending of protocols. These take many forms. Prosimetrum and classical Greek tragedy are genres that enact multiple prosodic protocols within the compass of a single work. Lyric collections may do so as well, since each new poem may employ a prosodic protocol different from the last. Virgil’s fragmentary lines in the Aeneid are probably an artifact of the unfinished state of that poem, but they supplied an influential precedent to early modern English poets, for whom a fragmentary line became a device for creating meaningful silence. Silence, in this instance, is created by withholding the full complement of linguistic material stipulated by the protocol. The stream of discourse terminates early and the unfilled slots are transmitted empty. As this example shows, one of the chief operations of a prosodic protocol is the segmentation of discourse into what M. L. Gasparov terms “commensurable and equivalent” units. In modern English literary criticism the usual name for commensurable and equivalent units of metrical discourse is a “line.”

2 Lines and Halflines

“Packet” or even “chunk” might be better than “line” as a name for the constituent units of verse. As Steven Justice points out to me, the problem with “line” is that it designates its referent by a spatial figure; the word thereby invites a misapprehension that prose and verse could be distinguished by the ways they occupy the space of a page. Prose is usually made to flow across the full width of a writing column. Verse is usually lineated: each commensurable and equivalent unit is set on its own line of script or type. Yet prose may be cut at syntactic joints and displayed on the page per cola et commata, ‘by phrases’, to facilitate recognition of sense-groups. That presentation is employed in some early copies of Jerome’s Latin Bible and in some modern printed editions of the text. Likewise, we know that verse may be written unlineated. The most famous examples are perhaps manuscript copies of the earliest Germanic verse, subsequently termed “alliterative.” The chunking or packetizing operation is


11Parkes, Pause and Effect, 97–101, surveys conventions of lineation of verse in West European contexts.

12See Parkes, 15–16 and plate 10. A modern example of this format is the Latin Vulgate Bible printed by the Württemberg Bible Society.

what is essential to prosodic forms. Lineation is an optional graphic notation of the prosodic chunks—a form of punctuation or scansion.\textsuperscript{14}

We need still to make a distinction between verse and rhythmical prose. Gasparov, in a passage already quoted, locates the difference in the role played by syntax. If prose is chunked into equivalent and commensurable segments, this is done at syntactic joints; in verse the chunking operation is performed “independent of syntax.”\textsuperscript{15} It follows that non-alignment of prosodic and syntactic segments, termed enjambment, is a possibility inherent in verse. Moreover, the segmentation of verse is not only independent of syntax but also arbitrary, a matter of artifice and convention. Verse forms depend upon certain features of linguistic prosody—vocalic quantity or stress accent, for instance—but they are not derivable from or redundant with the linguistic features on which they depend. Non-redundancy is what enables verse form to enrich the encoding of sound and meaning.

If the fundamental operation of prosodic protocols in verse is to chunk discourse into equivalent and commensurable units independent of syntax, the next step is, often, to run the chunking operation again. The result is a bipartite line structure, composed of two metrical cola. Bipartite line structures are employed in many verse forms, including the poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible, most forms of classical Arabic verse, archaic Irish verse, ancient Greek and Latin dactylic hexameter, medieval Latin Goliardic verse, the classical French Alexandrine, English septenaries, and Germanic alliterative verse. The last of these forms is the one that will occupy my attention in the remainder of this essay.

Recognition of the half-line units of alliterative verse was an accomplishment of nineteenth-century philology. The earliest printed editions of Old English verse employed continuous format, imitating the presentation of the manuscripts. The verse was later lineated in short lines, one half-line per line.\textsuperscript{16} Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm introduced kurze Zeile and lange Zeile into the critical vocabulary (“long line” means a pair of half-lines or “short lines”; for analogous alternatives in the construction of troubadour verse forms, see Sarah Kay’s contribution to this volume, pp. 000–000). The Grimms adopted a long-line format for their edition of the Hildebrandslied (1812) and they offered arguments in support of that representation of verse structure.\textsuperscript{17} Rasmus Rask’s counterargument initially prevailed, with the result that the short-line format remained the preferred one among British and Scandinavian scholars in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{18} In 1868 Walter W. Skeat moved nimbly


\textsuperscript{15}Gasparov, A History of European Versification, 97.


\textsuperscript{17}Wilhelm Grimm and Jacob Grimm, eds., Das Lied von Hildebrand und Hadubrand und das Weissenbrunner Gebet (Kassel: Thurneisen, 1812), 37–39. For commentary see Jürgen B. Kühnel, Untersuchungen zum germanischen Stabreimvers, Göppingen Arbeiten zur Germanistik 209 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1978), 259–64.\textsuperscript{18}See R[asmus] K. Rask, Angelsaksisk Sproglære tilligemed en kort Lesebeg (Stockholm, 1817), 119–22; Erasmus Rask, A
between the two presentations. He made the short-line format the basis for initial remarks, in deference to the *mise en page* of Old English verse in recent English editions; yet his experience with manuscripts of Middle English led him to favor the long-line presentation, even for Old English verse. Skeat also saw, though imprecisely, what would become the decisive argument in favor of the long-line presentation: the short-line “couplets” of alliterative verse, linked by alliteration, do not have the same prosodic status as an end-rhymed couplet. Whereas the constituent members of an end-rhymed couplet are equivalent and commensurable, the paired short lines of alliterative verse are asymmetrical, differentiated from one another with respect to weight and rhythmical pattern. That perception had not yet been available to the Grimms. Eduard Sievers formulated the argument precisely: since the first half-line is rhythmically freer than the second, admitting a wider range of configurations, a coherent prosodic unit (*Einheit*) is accomplished only in the long line. This is the rationale that underlies the *mise en page* of alliterative verse in modern editions. By convention, the first half-line is termed the on-verse or a-verse, the second the off-verse or b-verse.

When the transmitted text of an alliterative poem fails to divide into paired half-lines, editors and textual critics usually suspect that something has gone wrong in transmission. A half-line can be omitted by accident. Eyeskip on a half-line-ending word can result in accidental fusion of an a-verse with the b-verse of a subsequent line, omitting intervening material. A half-line that is unusually short might have suffered a textual omission. Relineations and other metrical emendations aim to construct whole and well-formed lines from fragmentary or deficient ones. This endeavor is inherently justifiable, for prosodic protocols are a component of a poet’s usage, always a basic criterion in establishing the text of a poetic work. It is also possible, however, for a poet deliberately to interrupt, suspend, or vary the protocols that elsewhere organize their writing. Usage is hard to define.

### 3 Doing Different Voices at the Feast of Conscience

In a recent study, Ralph Hanna proposes that William Langland’s prosodic usage has been defined much too restrictively. Langland is known to modern readers as the author of *Piers Plowman*, a long
personification allegory and vision poem in English alliterative verse, with inset Latin and French, composed c. 1365–1390. The poem is transmitted in over fifty manuscript copies, generally taken to represent three authorial versions, the lifework of its poet. It is in many respects an untypical alliterative poem. Hanna suggests that Langland broke the standard alliterative longline into unpaired half-lines, and that his motive was to better express the sound of his poem’s competing voices.

Hanna’s argument takes the form of a local textual suggestion regarding an episode at a dinner-party hosted by Conscience. Wille, the poet’s fictional avatar, is a disruptive low-table guest at the party; he is engaged in baiting a friar who is Conscience’s guest of honor, and his attack is interrupted by the poet himself, apparently speaking in propria persona. I present the lines as they are printed in the recent semi-critical edition of the B version of Piers Plowman, edited by John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre. Middle points in the English text represent metrical punctuation of the half-line boundary in good early manuscripts.

Holywrit bit men be war · I wil nouȝt write it here
On englisch an auenture · it sholde be reherced to ofte
And greue þere-with þat good men ben · ac gramarienes shul rede
Vnusquisque a fratre se custodiat [·] quia ut dicitur periculum est in falsis fratribus
Ac I wist neure freke þat as a frere þede · bifor men on englissh
Taken it for her teme · and telle it with-outen glosynge (Bx 13.76–81)

(Scripture urges men to be on guard. I do not wish to write it here in English, lest it be repeated too often and the saying of it harm men who are good. Yet the literate should read Let everyone protect himself from his brother, for, as the saying goes, there is danger in false brothers. Yet I have never seen any man — I mean those who go about like friars/brothers — publicly take this as the theme of his sermon and preach it in English without evasion.)

As a report of the received text of Piers Plowman B, Burrow and Turville-Petre’s text is uncontroversial. The manuscripts that transmit this passage are unanimous with respect to the general shape of its English lines. There are few variants in wording. (The Latin quotation is split over two lines in several copies.) Moreover, while Burrow and Turville-Petre aim only to present the text of the archetype of surviving copies of Piers Plowman B, not the text as intended by the poet, the archetypal lineation of

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this passage is credited and approved by critical editors. Hanna, however, relineates and re-punctuates to emphasize dramatic action and abrupt shifts in voice:

“Holy writ bit men be war —”
I wol not write it here in englissh,
On aventure it sholde be rehearsed to ofte
And greue þerwþ þat goode men ben, ac gramariens shul rede:
Vnusquisque a fratre se custodiat, quia vt dicitur, periculum est in falsis fratibus.
“— Ac I wiste neuere
Freke þat as a frere yede before men on englissh
Taken it for his teme and telle it wiþouten glosyng”

In verse 76b of the archetypal text the poet interrupts the ranting of his fictional avatar, the dreamer; in 80a the dreamer resumes his rant. As relineated, these segments — “Holy writ bit men be war” and “Ac I wiste neuere” — form the corresponding halves of a single line, spoken by the dreamer and united by alliteration on /w/. The constituent parts of this /w/-alliterating line are separated, in Hanna’s proposal, by four intruded lines in the voice of the poet. Hanna states that he offers the relineation for the sake of argument: what concerns him is the play of voices in this passage. Yet he also offers some text-critical support for the conjecture. He observes that the relineation removes an enjambment, *write it here On englissh*, at lines 76–77 of the archetypal text; and he speculates “that an authorial version like the one I have constructed” could have been “assimilated in transmission to the long lines that represent the usual manuscript presentation of Langland’s poetry.” The claim is that relineation restores a poetic device that was misunderstood and suppressed by the poem’s first scribe.

I read Hanna’s relineation as a provocation to thought and I linger over it because I wish to separate the textual suggestion itself (which I reject) from an underlying insight that I wish to amplify. Evaluation of the textual suggestion must, as usual, take account of the usage and patterns of behavior of both the poet and the poet’s scribes. To begin with scribal usage, one might observe that Hanna’s relineation is suspect in its simplicity: elsewhere in the textual tradition of *Piers Plowman*, where scribes attempt to regularize a line that they perceive to be incomplete, they may shift the place of the line-breaks, but they also often add words, padding the lines out. This scribal behavior will be illustrated later in my argument. The form of the archetypal lines in this passage may indeed be peculiar in some respects, but the lines do not have the appearance of being padded out and they are not implausible as Langland’s writing.

To judge that the archetypal lines are not implausible is to turn from the usage of scribes to the usage of the poet — both what is customary and what is possible within his craft. Evaluations of the prosodic usage of Middle English alliterative poets tend to focus especially on patterns of alliteration and on the accentual contours of second half-lines. Both criteria can be helpful in particular situations, but neither is as helpful in application to *Piers Plowman* as in application to certain other fourteenth-century alliterative poems, for one must make allowances for Langland’s wider range of expression and greater

29 The Athlone editors and A. V. C. Schmidt assign the whole passage Bx 13.76a–83b to the poet’s voice. This is indeed likely.
30 Hanna, *Patient Reading*, 284.
permissiveness in prosodic usage. With regard to the half-line boundary, too, Langland's usage is distinctive: he makes some half-line divisions that are never made by, for instance, the Gawain-poet. Yet Macklin Smith's argument for Langland's “unruly caesura,” misses the mark. In what follows I give primacy to the half-line unit, as the basic building-block of Langland's verse. The half-line structure of Langland's verse will serve as a test of the credibility of the archetypal lines and Hanna's relineation of them.

The central peculiarity of the archetypal lines, as I read them, is that the half-line “On englisch an auenture” (77a) is composed from a pair of stranded prepositional phrases, the first belonging to the clause in 76b, the second to the clause in 77b. I cannot think of a precise analog for that verse structure in Piers Plowman, yet the individual enjambments are well supported. With “write it here | On englissh,” one may compare the poet’s later statement that during the assault of the Antichrist a remnant of faithful prefer “to deye þan to lyue | Lengore” (to dye than to live longer) (Bx 20.62–63). Turning to the second enjambment, I observe that adverbial “on auenture” appears most often at the head of the line, as in Hanna’s relineation. Yet the construction in the archetypal text is paralleled in, for example, the line “Nym it nauȝte an auenture · þow mowe it nauȝte deserue” (Don't take it, lest perhaps you not deserve it) (Bx 6.43). The enjambments in Bx 13.76–77 require interpretation, not emendation; they create an effect of a halting authorial voice, very different from Wille’s headlong rant in preceding lines. That is, the dramatic effects that Hanna would express by means of relineation and modern punctuation are already expressed in the archetypal text, which deserves to be recognized as the poet’s work.

Tests of usage should also be applied to the new lines and half-lines created by Hanna’s relineation. At the end of the passage Hanna creates a new half-line “Ac I wiste neuere,” splitting this segment off from the following line. The conjectured half-line is plausible: compare “for I borwe neuere” (for I never borrow) (Bx 19.489b). One should note, too, that the finite verb wiste is prosodically flexible: it may participate in alliteration, as it does in Hanna’s relineation, or not. (For unalliterating wiste, compare Bx 14.115a: “I wist neuere renke þat riche was” [I never knew a man who was rich].) The test of usage hits a snag, however, in the relineated string “I wol noȝt write it here in englissh, | On auenture it sholde be reherced to ofte.” As relineated, this string fails to chunk into half-lines, and this failure must be the principal objection to Hanna’s textual suggestion. One could perhaps divide the second line after the auxiliary sholde, on the model of lines like “Of þis matere I myȝte · mamely ful longe” (I could ramble on about this for a long time) (Bx 5.22). Yet “I wol noȝt write it here in englissh” offers no point at which it could divide into alliterative half-lines. It reads as prose, or else

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35 Compare also Bx P.89, Bx 10.152, and Bx 15.95. The Gawain-poet does not write lines in which an auxiliary verb is divided from an immediately following infinitive.
as iambic tetrameter, not alliterative verse.

On this analysis we can reject Hanna's conjectural relineation: it produces an unacceptable text and overlooks the effect of the enjamments in the archetypal text. Readers will notice that I take issue with the prosodic shape of the two full lines crafted by Hanna, not with Hanna's contention that Langland could have written unpaired half-lines. In what follows I argue that an unpaired half-line is plausible as a poetic innovation and has precedent within the tradition of alliterative verse. Once recognized as a device available to Langland, the unpaired half-line supplies a way of registering the difficulty of certain lines that switch from English into Latin. There is, finally, at least one passage elsewhere in Piers Plowman B in which scribal variants point towards an unpaired half-line, comparable to Hanna's conjectured “for I wiste neuere.” I take these points in sequence.

4 The Independent Careers of Half-lines

Wherever there is a bipartite line structure, there is latent possibility for the half-line unit to develop an independent career. The first half-line of a dactylic hexameter is doubled to form the so-called “pentameter” line of the ancient Greek and Latin elegiac couplet. In ancient Greek drama stichomythia, in which speakers alternate full lines in dialogue, could be varied into antilabē, in which the metrical line is split between two speakers. At first the change in voices was made to coincide with the medial caesura, mapping onto and emphasizing the bipartite structure of the iambic trimeter line. (The division then became freer, anticipating and supplying precedent for the multiform split lines of dialogue in Shakespeare's plays.) In alliterative verse a precedent for autonomous half-lines is set by the Old Norse ljóðabáttr stanza. In this verse form lines composed of paired half-lines of the traditional type, or nearly that, alternate with shorter lines that may be read as independent half-lines. Among the Old English poems, single half-lines appear in Wulf and Eadwacer and sporadically elsewhere, perhaps especially in metrical charms and gnomic verse. The Old Norse ljóðabáttr may have been an influence, yet the basic formal innovation could be expected to arise independently at several points. Single half-lines continue to appear in texts of early Middle English alliterative verse: for instance, in the prologue to Lawman's Brut and sporadically in alliterative portions of the Physiologus. In the fourteenth century single half-lines appear as regular constituents of a new stanzaic form. In this stanza an octave of long lines is followed by a five-line bob and wheel. The lines of the wheel usually

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scan as alliterative half-lines.\textsuperscript{41} I quote an example from \textit{A Pistel of Susan} (before c. 1400).\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{quote}
And tolde
How heor wikkednes comes
Of þe wrongwys domes
Þat þei haue gyue to gomes,
Þis juges of olde.
\end{quote}

(And [the Lord] said how their wickedness comes from the unjust judgments that they have given to men — these judges from long ago.)

Here a one-lift bob is followed by three lines composed in the form of the poet’s usual a-verses; the stanza is capped by a b-verse. The alliterative long line has been disassembled and its parts reused as short lines within a new stanzaic form. There were several variations on this form in the fifteenth century.

\section{5 Langland’s Polyglot Prosody}

Returning to \textit{Piers Plowman}, one observes that the poem’s Latin quotations can have the function of catalysts, binding with the line and splitting it into half-line constituents. \textit{Piers Plowman} is an alliterative poem, but also a polyglot collage. In the archetype of \textit{Piers Plowman} B, as edited by Burrow and Turville-Petre, there are fifty-three lines that switch from English to Latin at the half-line boundary.\textsuperscript{43} The switches take several forms and deliver a wide range of sonic effects. Often the Latin segment can be read as an ordinary alliterative b-verse incidentally composed of Latin, with no break in protocol:

\begin{quote}
A proude pryker of Fraunce \cdot \textit{prynceps huius mundi} (Bx 9.8)
(A proud French knight, \textit{prince of this world})
\end{quote}

Here the Latin segment is the right length for an alliterative b-verse and it continues the pattern of alliteration established in the coordinate a-verse. The Latin segment also has the paroxytone ending (\textit{mundi}) expected from Langland’s English lines. A switch between languages does not necessarily entail a switch out of alliterative verse. In a variation on this line type, a short English phrase or single English word may stand just after the half-line boundary, governing the Latin quotation that follows:

\begin{quote}
I drowe me in þat derkenesse \cdot to \textit{de[s]cendit ad inferna} (Bx 18.115)
(I betook myself in that darkness to [the passage] \textit{be went down to hell})\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{43}My study corpus is Burrow and Turville-Petre’s 2014 web edition of Bx (XML version 1.0). I follow the editors’ XML tagging of language identity, except that in Bx 15.580 I record \textit{metropolitanus} as Latin (cf. Bx 15.43, where the same word is tagged correctly). Individual lines are checked against the editors’ 2018 printed edition, which incorporates some corrections.

\textsuperscript{44}Helena Halmari and Robert Adams, “On the Grammar and Rhetoric of Language Mixing in \textit{Piers Plowman},” \textit{Ne-}
In the archetype of *Piers Plowman* B I find about thirty-five lines with this second disposition of languages. The English meter again retains both constituent half-lines; the second half-line just happens to be composed mostly of Latin material. Whether the switch to Latin occurs at the half-line boundary or just after, the effect is a domestication and vernacularization of Latin. This is especially appropriate when, as often, the Latin is a snippet of the liturgy or catechism or a much-used passage of the Bible. In Bx 18.115, the Latin is a clause of the Apostle’s Creed, an authoritative formula of Christian belief and “irreducible core” of Christian religious education, from the Carolingian reforms forward. The clauses of the Creed were integrated into a lifeworld as familiar objects and organic components of a multilingual sensorium. The assimilation of Latin words and phrases into the protocols of alliterative verse is an underexplored element of Langland’s usage. Yet my present argument directs attention to another set of multilingual lines, where the Latin element enacts a break with protocols.

When we read a long poem in a stichic verse form, our encounter with each new line is framed and conditioned by the protocols that we have assimilated in prior experience of that form. If a new line of *Piers Plowman* begins in English, we are well justified in assuming that the line is alliterative verse, and we are primed to apply the protocols of alliterative verse to whatever string of linguistic material follows, even if the string switches out of English. Sometimes, however, Langland writes lines in which the protocols operative at the beginning become untenable at the end. When the Paraclete descends in *passus* 19, Conscience commands the dreamer to kneel and sing:

Welcome hym & worship hym · with *veni creator spiritus* (Bx 19.215)
(Welcome him and worship him with *Come, Creator Spirit*)

*Veni creator spiritus* is the title verse of a hymn used throughout the year in or before Mass and at terce on Pentecost Sunday. The hymn is in accentual octosyllabics and most lines, including the first, end in a proparoxytone word (*spíritus*), yielding a line-ending contour unmetrical in the formal corpus of Middle English alliterative verse and usually also avoided by Langland. The proparoxytone ending could be described as an incidental violation of alliterative protocols; it seems preferable to recognize that the Latin hymn instances a prosodic protocol of its own and that Langland has switched protocols mid-line. Such lines may legitimately be termed polymetrical. There are not many. Langland twice splices the title verse *Gloria in excelsis deo* into a line that begins in alliterative verse (Bx 3.335, Bx 12.167). Two other lines switch at midline into Latin dactylic hexameter:

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Catoun and canonistres · conseilleth vs to leue
To sette sadnesse in songewarie · for sompnia ne cures (Bx 7.164–65)
(Cato and canon lawyers counsel us to stop granting authority to dream interpretation, for Do not concern yourself with dreams)

Catoun acordeth þere-with · nemo sine crimine viuit (Bx 11.423)
(Cato agrees with that: No one lives without fault)

The hexameter fragments are from the Distichs of Cato a basic school-text. The fragments participate in the alliterative pattern established in the conjoined a-verses (/s/ and /k/, respectively), and they end in a paroxytone word, as expected in alliterative verse. In Bx 11.423 Langland cleverly splices the two verse forms together at their respective caesuras; the final paroxytone viuit is the ending required by both the Latin and English meters. The distribution and quality of weak syllables in nemo sine crimine viuit would be irregular as a b-verse in the formal corpus of Middle English alliterative verse, though acceptable in Piers Plowman. In Bx 7.165, the hexameter fragment scans as a regular alliterative b-verse, yet the effect is of polymetrical collage, activating two metrical systems at once.

Another, different collage-effect is produced when an a-verse has, as its complement, a Latin quotation that is just too long to be parsed as an alliterative b-verse:

And þanne had pacience a pitaunce · pro hac orabit omnis sanctus in tempore oportuno (Bx 13.59)
(And then Patience had a little bit, For this [forgiveness] everyone holy will pray to you in a seasonable time [Psalms 31:6])

Here the a-verse is well-formed and the quotation from the penitential Psalms functions as an appositive variation of a pitaunce. Yet this Latin pitaunce is oversized, incommensurate with the poem's English half-lines. The English meter has been suspended at the half-line boundary and a longish quotation inserted in the place of an expected alliterative b-verse. I find seven other instances of this configuration in the B archetype of Piers Plowman. With two exceptions, all are in passus 13–15. In a few cases I quote the preceding line or two for context:

1. Þanne hent hope an horne · of deus tu conuersus viuificabis [nos] (Bx 5.525)
   (Then hope took a horn of God, you will turn and bring us to life [Psalms 84:7])

2. (Bx 13.59, quoted above)

3. Haued nouȝt [Marie] Magdeleigne more · for a boxe of salue Þan zacheus for he seide · dimidium bonorum meorum do pauperibus (Bx 13.205–6)
   (Did not Mary Magdalene receive more for a box of ointment than Zacheus for saying I give half of my goods to the poor [Luke 19:8]?)

4. As dauid seith in þe sauter · et quorum tecta sunt peccata (Bx 14.103)


50This construction is analyzed in Halmari and Adams, “On the Grammar and Rhetoric of Language Mixing,” 43–44.
5. And when he deyeth ben disalowed · as david seith in þe sauter
Dormierunt & nichil inuenerunt
And in an other stede also · velud sompnum surgencium domine in ciuitate tua & ad nichilum rediges (Bx 14.140–42)
(And he is dispraised when he dies, as David says in the Psalter: They slept and found nothing [cf. Psalm 75:6]. And in another place also: As in a dream of one waking, Lord, so in your city, and you will reduce [their image] to nothing [cf. Psalm 72:20])
6. For-þi seith seneca · paupertas est absque solicitudinse semita (Bx 14.331)
(Therefore Seneca says Poverty is a road without anxiety)
7. And sitthen þat þe sarasenes · and also þe iewes
Konne þe firste clause of owre bileue · credo in deum patrem omnipotentem (Bx 15.638–39)
(And since the Saracens and also the Jews know the first clause of our Creed, I believe in God the Father, Omnipotent)
8. The berdes þo songe · Saul interfecit mille · et dauid decem milia (Bx 19.137)
(The ladies then sang Saul killed a thousand and David ten thousand [cf. 1 Kings 18:7])

In (1) the switch to Latin occurs just after the half-line boundary; compare Bx 18.115 and Bx 19.215, quoted above. The English preposition of identifies the Psalm as the very horn grasped by Hope in the a-verse. A similar construction is adopted in (2) in several copies, in place of the appositive construction given in the archetypal text. Line (7) also places the Latin quotation in apposition with an element in the English a-verse. In each of the other lines the Latin quotation is the object of a verb of utterance. There are two basic patterns: in (3–6) the English portions adduce an auctoritas in running exposition; (8) quotes speech in diegesis. In each case the a-verse has the function of a speech tag, or lexical marker of direct discourse, and those in (3) and (6) are suspiciously light. These two lines could be read as entirely unmetered — that is, as Latin quotations introduced with a bit of connective English. If we are dealing with gradient variation around a set of prototypical line types, a type “a-verse + long Latin quotation” seems the unavoidable interpretation of at least (1), (2), and (7). That each of these lines opens with an alliterative a-verse seems clear. It is also clear that the segments after the half-line boundary are not alliterative b-verses. There is a basic incommensurability between constituent parts.

The line type “a-verse + long Latin quotation” seems to be an innovation in the B version of Piers Plowman. Hope’s horn does not appear in Piers Plowman A and the other lines with this pattern occur

51The construction may be termed an epexegetical genitive or a genitive of definition. Compare Tauno F. Mustanoja, A Middle English Syntax. Part I: Parts of Speech, Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki 23 (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1960), 81–82.
52In (5) the verb occurs two lines above, in 140b. For discussion of lexical markers of direct speech in written Middle English, see Colette Moore, Quoting Speech in Early English, Studies in English Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43–61.
53Elsewhere a minimal English speech-tag And seyde / seith may introduce a line of free-standing Latin prose: Bx 7.129, Bx 8.21, Bx 9.43, Bx 11.3, Bx 12.300, and Bx 15.57. Weiskott, “The End of the Line?” 239, lists some instances in the C version. A free-standing Latin auctoritas may also be adduced with For or þat is: Bx 3.337, Bx 3.357, Bx 10.396, Bx 12.313, and Bx 15.73. The implication is that a single English word or short English phrase may introduce an unmetered Latin quotation either at the beginning of a line or after the first half-line.
after the A version breaks off. In the C version four of the eight lines are retained in the form of the B archetype. Critical editors of the B version have accepted the line type. With one exception, the Athlone edition prints each of the eight lines in the form given above. The exception is (5), where Kane and Donaldson judge the English portion of Bx 14.142 to be a scribal intrusion and suppress it. Schmidt retains the English portion of that line but divides the Latin quotation over two lines, evidently to create chunks of text more nearly commensurate with Langland's English lines. Schmidt also divides the Latin quotation in (2), for the same effect. Yet the imbalance between English a-verse and Latin quotation seems to be deliberate and its effect should be respected. If a line like “I drowe me in þat derkenesse · to de\[s\]cendit ad inferna” has the effect of vernacularizing and assimilating Latin elements, (1-8) hold the Latin element apart from the English poem and exempt it from the chunking operation basic to verse. The English poem is, as it were, made to wait on a quotative voice that exercises an authority to speak for as long as needed.

6 The Responses of Scribes

Scribes responded to mid-line interruptions of protocol in two basic ways. First, where a line ends in a Latin quotation, the length of the quotation may vary: scribes may extend the quotation or truncate it, and they may enter an et cetera after whatever portion they have written. An example is supplied by Anima's catechism at the close of passus 15 of the B version. In the previous section I have already quoted one line from this passage, as (7). The passage joins the feast of Conscience as the two densest clusters of interrupted alliterative lines in Piers Plowman. It is printed as follows in the edition by Burrow and Turville-Petre:

And sitthen þat þe sarasenes · and also þe iewe
Konne þe firste clause of owre bileue · credo in deum patrem omnipotentem
Prelates of crystene prouynces · shulde preue if þei myȝte
Lere hem litlum & lytlum [·] & in ibesum cristum filium
Tyl þei couthe speke and spelle · et in spiritum sanctum
And re[d]en it & recorden it · with remissionem peccatorum
Carnis resurreccionem · et vitam eternam amen · (Bx 15.638–41)

(And since the Saracens and also the Jews know the first clause of our Creed, I believe in God the Father, Almighty, prelates of Christian provinces should try if they might teach them little by little and in Jesus Christ, his Son till they could speak and spell and in the Holy Ghost commit it to memory and repeat it with forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.)

54Bx 13.206 and Bx 14.103 are within passages dropped in the C version. See Lawler, Penn Commentary, 54–55, 92. The English portions of Bx 14.142 and Bx 14.331 are omitted in the cognate C-version lines. The first of these, C 15.306a, also truncates the Latin quotation. In the second, C 16.143a, the C-version archetype simply entered the name Seneca before the quotation, omitting the B version's speech tag. The C archetype also truncates the Latin quotation in C 17.316 (cognate to Bx 15.639), omitting omnipotentem. References to the C version of Piers Plowman are to George Russell and George Kane, eds., Piers Plowman: The C Version. Will’s Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best. An Edition in the Form of Huntington Library MS HM 143, Corrected and Restored from the Known Evidence, with Variant Readings, Piers Plowman: The Three Versions (London and Berkeley: Athlone Press and University of California Press, 1997).
Alliterative a-verses alternate with unmetered clauses of the Apostle’s Creed. There is some variation in the amount of Latin supplied by scribes. In one copy (Oxford, Oriel College, MS 79; sigil O), the first Latin quotation is given as credo in deum patrem & cetera, omitting omnipotentem.55 In another copy (San Marino, Huntington Library, MS 128; sigil Hm), the scribe writes the first clause of the Creed as printed above, but adds an & cetera after it, as if inviting readers to supply the continuation, creatorem celi et terre, for ourselves. Placed at the end of whatever stretch of Latin the scribe had copied, the notation & cetera directs readers to supply the remainder from memory.

As a feature of the presentation of Latin in Piers Plowman, line-terminal & cetera supports John Alford’s contention that Biblical quotations often imply their continuations.56 A line-terminal & cetera also confirms the authority of the poem’s quotative voices, noticed above, and it raises an awkward question for a metrical reading of Langland’s verse: where, in such cases, does the line end? This is not a question that should arise in verse; the fact that it does arise is another indication that the prosodic chunking operation has been suspended and the English meter interrupted midline. The scribes who supply or transmit & cetera at the end of Latin quotations demonstrate their evident acceptance of this complex line type.

Yet the line type was not accepted in every case and by all scribes. Variant readings in the English portion of the relevant lines sometimes exhibit a scribe’s discomfort with the text they encountered in their exemplar. An example is supplied by Bx 13.59, quoted in the previous section in the form printed by Burrow and Turville-Petre. That textual form is well supported in the beta family, the more numerous of the two great families of B-version copies. In the alpha family, one copy (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poetry 38; sigil R) has the English and the Latin on separate lines (fig. 000.1). That may have been the original reading of the alpha family, for there is some indication that the copyist of the alpha hyparchetype preferred to place a singleton a-verse on its own line, with the coordinated Latin quotation shunted off to the line below.57 So presented, the unpaired a-verse was vulnerable to misinterpretation as a deficient long line, which is what happened in the other alpha-family copy (Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 201; sigil F). The redactor responsible for F padded out the received a-verse, creating a full line with acceptable metrical shape: “& þan was brouht to pacynce · þis pytance ful soone.” The F-redactor’s response is paralleled by one other copyist, for the beta4 group of manuscripts all have a version of the line, “And thanne come to pacience · a pitaunce ybroughte.”58 The scribal revisions in F and beta4 are independent, yet they share a single motive: to

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57Other examples of this presentation are Bx 19.153–54 (discussed below) and Bx 15.639, where the two alpha-family copies treat the English portion as a full alliterative line (these two copies punctuate after clause, an inferior metrical division).
58Beta4 is composed of the group of manuscripts with the sigla GYOC2CBmBoCot. See Burrow and Turville-Petre, B-Version Archetype, 4.
turn “And þanne had pacience a pitaunce” into a full line of alliterative verse. I draw the following conclusion: in Piers Plowman an alliterative half-line does not invariably require another alliterative half-line as its complement, but lines that depart from the norm were vulnerable to “correction” and regularization, much as Hanna remarks in defense of his relineation of Bx 13.76–81. I now bring this conclusion to bear on a difficult passage that probably included an empty half-line.

7 An Empty Tomb and an Empty Halfline

Late in Piers Plowman Conscience instructs the dreamer in the life of Jesus. The lines that recount the resurrection are printed as follows by Burrow and Turville-Petre:

The knyȝtes þat kepten it · biknewe[n] hem-seluen
Þat angeles & c archangeles · ar þe day spronge
Come knelynge [·] to þe corps & songen
[Cristus resurgens · and he ros after]
Verrey man bifor hem alle · & forth with hem ȝede (Bx 19.151–55)

(The knights who guarded it testified that angels and archangels, before the day dawned, came kneeling to the corpse and sang Christ rising again and afterwards he rose, truly a man before them all, and he went forth with them.)

The knyȝtes (151) are the Roman guards of Matthew 27:65, stationed at the grotto to prevent the followers of Jesus from stealing his corpse (it 151). The B-version archetype, as presented by Burrow and Turville-Petre, differs from the critical editions only in a pair of readings in the mixed-language line 154.59 For Cristus resurgens, the Athlone edition prints Cristus [rex] resurgens, importing rex from C-version manuscripts, where this word is a minority variant. For he ros, Schmidt and the Athlone editors print it aroos, the reading of the C-version archetype. These are plausible restorations of the poet’s work.60 Yet I doubt that any editor has done more than smooth out the underlying metrical difficulties.

Re-analysis may begin with the bracketed punctus in 153. B-version manuscripts uniformly punctuate after corps. Burrow and Turville-Petre shift the metrical punctuation, evidently to produce a credible b-verse. This re-punctuation is inconsistent with the editors’ general practice and unjustifiable. In the editors’ base manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 581; sigil L), the line reads as follows, with the Latin quotation spliced onto the end of the line: “Come knelynge to þe corps · & songen cristus resurgens.” The line structure has close parallels earlier in the poem:

And saracenes for þat siȝte · shulle synge gloria in excelsis &c (Bx 3.335)
(And Saracens, on account of that sight, will sing Glory in the highest)

He sette a soure lof to-for vs · and seyde agite penitenciam (Bx 13.50)
(He set a sour loaf before us and said Do penance)

In these two lines and L’s version of Bx 19.153, an alliterative a-verse is paired with a Latin quotation; in each case the Latin quotation is governed by an English verb of utterance that stands after the

59The exception is 153 þe corps, for which Schmidt prints þat corps, in agreement with F and the C-version archetype.
60See Barney, Penn Commentary, 123; Russell and Kane, C Version, 124.
half-line boundary. At Bx 19.153, L probably transmits the original reading of the beta hyparchetype. The alpha hyparchetype probably placed the Latin on the subsequent line. Unfortunately, R has lost a quire at this point, so the alpha family is represented only by the eccentric and meddlesome F (virgules in the following quotation have the same function as middle points in earlier quotations):

    Comen knelynge to þat corps / & konyngly surgen.
    Cristus resurgens a mortuis / & a-noon he roos after.

F’s konyngly, a mortuis, and a-noon are padding. They have been intruded to fill out the lines. Yet F’s he ros after does seem to be necessary to the sense of the passage, as editors emphasize. It reports the resurrection. Beta copies uniformly lack this important clause, but firm textual support comes from the C version, where the clause is transmitted by all copies, with negligible variants, in the form and hit aroos after. Burrow and Turville-Petre describe and he ros after as a “detached b-verse” (Bx 19.153n) and that is how I would present it:

    Come knelynge to þe corps · & songen Cristus [rex] resurgens
        ⋆ ⋆ ⋆ [· and it aros after]
    Verrey man bifor hem alle · & forth with hem ȝede

Editorial asterisks would normally indicate a textual deficiency, yet the sense of this passage is complete and a detached b-verse, if original, would be vulnerable to precisely the regularizations seen in the manuscripts. Those scribal variants are the evidence from which we may infer an original state of the poem with an omitted a-verse. I hesitate to offer interpretation, but it seems right to acknowledge puzzlement at discovery of a space unexpectedly empty. Moreover, the effect is almost the opposite of the Virgilian type of line-fragment. In the Aeneid and its tradition, fragmentary lines begin well and abruptly go silent. By contrast, the line “· and it aros after” observes a interval of silence before resuming speech to state plainly a central miracle of Christianity.61

8 Conclusion

The B version of Piers Plowman has a small number of lines that switch conspicuously out of English alliterative meter mid-line. In most cases the switch is from English verse to Latin prose. In a few cases the switch is into Latin verse — either an accentual hymn or a fragment of dactylic hexameter. These switches are part of the formal artistry and multilingual facility of Piers Plowman. They also express Langland’s basic recognition that his English meter is bipartite, analyzable into constituent parts, which may be put to independent use. My textual proposal for Conscience’s narrative of the resurrection must remain hypothetical, but I hope to have demonstrated that this passage does not fall neatly into standard alliterative lines. The variant readings point instead towards an unpaired half-line. Precedents can be found in other alliterative poems; possibility was always latent in the form itself, yet Langland’s use of independent half-lines remained unsystematic and experimental, encoding a great range of sound and some silence.62

61 For additional discussion of this passage see my article “Some Corrections to the Notation of Verse Structure in Two Recent Editions of Middle English Alliterative Poems,” in Filologia Germanica 15.
62 For questions, criticism, and suggestions that improved my argument I thank Sarah Nooter and other participants in the Baltimore conference, participants in the Chicago Seminar on Medieval Culture and Intellect, Eric Weiskott, peer reviewers, and especially the volume editors. I have sole responsibility for deficiencies.