Some Corrections to the Notation of Verse Structure in Two Recent Editions of Middle English Alliterative Poems

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Some corrections to the notation of verse structure in two recent editions of Middle English alliterative poems*

Ian Cornelius

Abstract

In Germanic alliterative verse the fundamental unit of meter and rhythm is the half-line. Editions of older Germanic alliterative poems now usually record this feature in their typographic design: the poetry is lineated and coordinate half-lines are separated with whitespace. For Middle English alliterative poems, the usual presentation has been in undivided long lines, but several recent editions separate half-lines with whitespace or punctuation-marks. The present essay examines the half-line divisions in John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre’s *Piers Plowman* B (2014/2018) and Ad Putter and Myra Stokes’s *Cleanness, Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (2014). Burrow and Turville-Petre aim to reconstruct the metrical markings of the archetypal scribe, whereas Putter and Stokes divide on the basis of their understanding of meter. I offer corrections to both editions, beginning with several lines in which Burrow and Turville-Petre misreport evidence for scribal notation of verse structure. In the edition by Putter and Stokes I find no misdivisions in *Cleanness or Patience*, but several errors and difficult cases in *Gawain*. I propose new emendations to *Gawain* 1281 and 1884.

Introduction

In Germanic alliterative verse the fundamental unit of meter and rhythm is the half-line. Lines are bipartite; each verse line is composed of a pair of coordinated unequal half-lines.1 Editions of older Germanic alliterative poems now usually record this formal feature in their typographic design: the poetry is lineated and coordinate half-lines are separated with several ems of whitespace. An early and influential example of this presentation is Moriz Heyne’s *Beowulf*, first published in 1863. Editors and publishers of Middle English alliterative poems have followed a different course. In editions published between 1867 and 1906, Walter W. Skeat separated half-lines with a middle point (·). In the twentieth century Skeat’s convention was abandoned in favor of undivided long lines. Exceptions, modernizing the precedent set by Skeat, are David A. Lawton’s edition of *Joseph of Arimathea* and Stephanie Trigg’s edition of *Wynner and Wastoure*.2 Here half-lines are spaced in the way familiar to readers of modern editions of Old English poems. Lawton and Ralph Hanna subsequently adopted the same treatment.

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1Sievers 1893, 24-25; Inoue, Stokes 2009, 1-2.
2Lawton 1983; Trigg 1990.
of half-lines for their edition of The Siege of Jerusalem. Recently the half-line boundary has been registered in the typography of two other editions of Middle English alliterative poems: an edition of the B version of Piers Plowman edited by John Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre for the Piers Plowman Electronic Archive (PPEA); and an edition of Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight edited by Ad Putter and Myra Stokes for Penguin Books.

The marking of half-line divisions in these recent editions is a welcome development and model for future editors. Readers of Middle English alliterative poems should not be denied the typographic notation of verse structure supplied to readers of earlier alliterative poems. The marking of half-line divisions also supports future inquiry, for these editions may serve as reference corpora for metrical analysis and bases for new assessments of text, meter, and syntax. The aim of the present article is narrow: to improve the usefulness of these texts by improving their accuracy. I offer corrections to half-line divisions in the PPEA edition of the B archetype of Piers Plowman (henceforth sometimes “Bx”) and the Penguin edition of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (henceforth “Gawain”). This narrow corrective exercise prompts broader observations about the metrical grammar of verb phrases in the poems under discussion and new textual suggestions for two lines in Gawain.

Before turning to editions it is necessary to add a few remarks on manuscript presentations. Most manuscript copies of Middle English alliterative poems are lineated, placing each pair of half-lines on their own line of the page. (The older format, in which verse lines flow across the full writing column, remained an option, employed for instance in the unique manuscript of Joseph of Arimathea.) Manuscripts of the B version of Piers Plowman have metrical punctuation, marking the boundary between half-line units. Half-line units are also delimited with punctuation marks in the unique manuscript of Joseph of Arimathea and several manuscripts of The Siege of Jerusalem. By contrast, the sole manuscript of Cleanness, Patience, and Gawain lacks medial punctuation. For these poems, an editor has sole responsibility for dividing half-lines.

An independent assessment of meter is always necessary, for where scribes punctuate for meter they sometimes punctuate incorrectly. Lawton silently corrects scribal misdivisions in his edition of Joseph of Arimathea. Skeat did the same whenever he edited from a manuscript with metrical punctuation. Hanna and Lawton report editorial corrections of this sort in their textual apparatus to The Siege of Jerusalem: they treat scribal punctuation of line-structure as a substantive feature of the text. Burrow and Turville-Petre do the same, but aim to reconstruct only the archetype of surviving manuscripts, not the text as composed by the poet. This deliberate limitation of editorial aim must be kept in mind by readers of the edition.

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5Putter, Stokes 2014; half-line divisions are not marked in Khalaf 2017, another recent edition.
6See for instance Turville-Petre 2013; and Russom 2017, chaps. 5–9.
8See the facsimiles published in Scase 2011; and Stinson 2013, on-line at <https://siegeofjerusalem.org/> (last accessed April 9, 2023).
10Lawton 1983, xxxix.
11See Burrow, Turville-Petre 2018, 3 (Introduction, section I).
**Piers Plowman**

**Editorial policy and changes between versions**

In the PPEA edition of Bx half-lines are separated with a middle point, the mark usually employed at that location in the base manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud misc. 581 (sigil L). In other manuscripts the corresponding location is punctuated with a punctus elevatus or a virgule. Although the form of the mid-line mark differs between copies, there is impressive consistency in the function for which scribes each employed their chosen sign: as a graphic mark of verse structure. Scribal treatments of any given line may be viewed and compared in the web version of the PPEA edition, thanks to a scoring tool or “collation window”, built by Paul A. Broyles.

Burrow and Turville-Petre judge that the scribe of the archetypal copy punctuated without fail the half-line boundary of English lines. That was surely the scribe’s intention. The scribe would on occasion have inadvertently omitted punctuation and such omissions could be corrected in the next generation of copying by scribes who would make occasional inadvertent omissions of their own. The editors respond to this situation by supplying mid-line punctuation in all English lines. When the scribe of the base manuscript omits mid-line punctuation or punctuates at an idiosyncratic location, the editors emend on the basis of other copies, taking account of the reconstructable genetic relations between copies.

The editorial policy on punctuation therefore combines elements of copy-text editing, intentionalism, and recension: the form of the mark is determined by copy-text; all English lines are punctuated, in keeping with the archetypal scribe’s evident intention; and the place of the punctuation is established by recension. Idiosyncrasies in punctuation of the base manuscript are readily accessible, for emendations are placed within square brackets.

The sanity of this editorial policy may be seen in contexts that bring its constituent principles into conflict. The most faithful members of the two great families of B-version copies are L and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson poet. 38 (sigil R). Where these two copies agree in substantive readings, Burrow and Turville-Petre usually accept the reading as that of the archetype, although there are exceptions where the editors assume convergent variation. The editors do not comment on LR agreements in omitted mid-line punctuation. I find four such lines, printed as follows:

1. And þe gret god [·] þat gynnynge had neuere (9.28)
2. Suffre sathan [·] his sede to bigyle (10.129)
3. Colde ne care [·] ne compaignye of theues (13.169)
4. Adam & Eue [·] & other moo in helle (18.182)

The location of the mid-line divisions is not open to doubt, but the opening half-lines are unusually short, which might have conduced a scribe to omit punctuation. (Elsewhere lines as short as these are punctuated by L and R in the usual way.) If L and R represent the archetype in (1)–(4), the archetypal scribe’s omission was promptly corrected by scribes elsewhere in the tradition, for other B-version manuscripts have the usual punctuation, with few exceptions. (Some scribes also added filler,

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12 See ibid., 28–29, the editors’ statement of editorial policy on punctuation.
13 For punctus elevatus see Parkes 1993, plates 20–24.
14 For explanation of this tool see Knowles, Stinson 2014, 232–233.
15 For the stemma see Burrow, Turville-Petre 2018, 3–6 (Introduction, section II.1), and references there.
16 See ibid., 5, 6, 11, 23.
attempting to produce lines with normative metrical rhythm.) Since L and R omit punctuation-marks independently, some random convergence is likely, and that should license an editor to discount the agreement of these two copies in (1)-(4), as Burrow and Turville-Petre do.

The edition now exists in two versions, designated by PPEA as “XML version 1.0” and “XML version 2.0”. The first version was published on-line in 2014; the second forms the basis for the printed edition, published in 2018. At time of writing, the first version remains the one published on-line, and therefore the only version publicly available in digital form. Until PPEA mounts XML version 2.0 to the web, the printed edition will be the authoritative one. It corrects editorial errors in the report of metrical punctuation in ten lines. The changes are uncontroversial.

**Corrections to the 2018 edition**

In a few lines the evidence of punctuation is misreported or misinterpreted in both the 2014 and 2018 editions. At 15.489, L lacks punctuation but other copies are unanimous that the line divides after *men*. Six other lines are more interesting and warrant individual commentary. For each, I give the line as printed in the 2018 edition.

(5) Þere he seyde [·] dixit & facta sunt (9.43)

In (5) the punctuation supplied by the editors is transmitted in copies separated from the archetype by four or more generations of copying. Among the copies usually considered nearest the archetype, two omit punctuation (MR), one punctuates after *dixit* (L), and one rewrites the line, attempting to turn its English portion into verse (*F*). (For these sigla see Burrow and Turville-Petre’s introduction, section III, “The Bx Witnesses”.) The line as transmitted in copies other than F is not verse: it consists of a short unmetered English speech tag introducing a Latin biblical quotation (Psalm 148:5). Elsewhere in the poem there are analogous constructions, though involving longer Latin quotations. In a note to this line Burrow and Turville-Petre judge the punctuation after *seyde* “more appropriate” than L’s punctuation after *dixit*. Punctuation after *seyde* can be justified as rhetorico-syntactic parsing of prose, but it is not likely to derive from the archetype. I would take MR as authoritative in this case and print the line without internal punctuation.

In (6)-(8), the editors follow copy-text and divide between a copular verb and predicate adjective or past participle:

(6) Þei prechen þat penaunce is · profitable to þe soule (13.82)
(7) And þanne wolde lordes and ladys be · loth to agulte (15.320)
(8) And counteth nouȝt þough crystene ben · culled & robbed (19.457)

The correct metrical division is before the copular verbs and there are grounds in each case for attributing that division to the archetypal copy. The strongest case is (7), where L’s punctuation is an isolated error: other copies divide before *be*. In (6) and (8) L’s punctuation is supported by most other copies of the beta family, but alpha divides before the copular verbs. (In (6) the alpha division is supported by M, an important beta-family witness; in (8) alpha is represented by *F* only.) I would accept alpha’s division as that of the archetype in all three lines.

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17The lines are 2.19, 3.48, 3.92, 6.125, 6.144, 8.74, 10.295, 13.29, and 17.64. I thank Timothy L. Stinson and Paul A. Broyles for the version 2.0 file.

18Compare 12.300 and 15.57. The first of these reads “And seyde saluabitur vix iustus in die iudicij”.

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In (9) the punctuation given by the editors is supported only by WC, two of the copies that punctuate after *seyde* in (5). These copies are not likely to represent the archetype on their own. L lacks punctuation; MRF punctuate after *forth*. There is little reason to doubt that MRF represent the punctuation of the archetype in this case. A harder question is whether their division is also credible for the poet. Division after *fyngres* yields a b-verse with normal rhythm and meter and this might have been the motivation for it.\(^\text{19}\) Division before this word yields an uncommonly heavy b-verse and an awkward enjambment between half-lines, but both features are within the scope of Langland’s usage. B-verses in *Piers Plowman* are often heavier than those in other Middle English alliterative poems.\(^\text{20}\) The half-line division rarely comes between the verb and an immediately following direct object, though it may do so: an example is “And how þis coueitise overcome · clerkes and prestes” (13.11).\(^\text{21}\) Syntactic constructions that place a phrasal verb in final position in the a-verse are common: an example is “Pe fruit þat þei brynge forth · aren foule wordes” (9.179).\(^\text{22}\) As often in this poem, alliterative pattern is not dispositive: when divided after *forth*, the alliterative pattern of (9) is *aab/bbx* (with stressing of *forth* in verse-final position) or *aa/bbx* (assigning *forth* to the verse-final dip). Burrow and Turville-Petre do not recognize either pattern, but they report 43 instances of the simpler pattern *aa/bb*.\(^\text{23}\)

My final correction is a truly difficult case:

(10) Come knelyinge · to þe corps & songen (19.153)

In a note on this line, the editors make the following points (quotations are of the editors’ note):

(a) “[T]he caesura follows *knelinge*, though all B scribes take it to follow *corps*”.

(b) The F-redactor repaired the meter of the line transmitted in his exemplar: F reads “Comen knelynge to þat corps / & konyngly surge,” with an alliterating adverb supplied at the head of the b-verse.

(c) Copies of the beta family append the Latin phrase *Christus resurgens* to the end of 19.153. L reads “Come knelynge to þe corps · & songen *christus resurgens*”.

(d) In F and in the cognate line in C-version manuscripts, the Latin quotation follows on the next line, where it joins a “detached b-verse” transmitted by no beta copy. Line 19.154 in F reads “*Christus resurgens a mortuis / & a-noon he roos after.*” (Comparison with C-version copies shows that *a mortuis* and *a-noon* are metrical padding, added by the F-redactor.)

These points lead the editors to the following summary reconstruction: “both F and beta reacted to the short line with its uncertain placement of caesura: F added the adverb *konyngly* to provide b-verse alliteration, and beta took the Latin from the next line, dropping the detached b-verse of l. 154 as a consequence”. This is possible, yet point (a) seems to me mistaken: an a-verse of the

\(^\text{19}\) A note on prosodic terminology: “a-verse” and “b-verse” name the first and second half-lines, respectively. “Lift” and “metrical stress” are equivalent terms; the contrasting prosodic element is a “dip”. A “short dip” is a single unstressed syllable delimited by lifts or by a lift and the right or left edge of a verse. A “long dip” is a sequence of two or more unstressed or lightly stressed syllables. The b-verse in (9), as punctuated, has a long initial dip and no medial dip. For a summary description of the meter of Middle English alliterative b-verses, see Cornelius, 2023a, 268-271, with further references.


\(^\text{21}\) Some other examples are 13.7, 15.499, 15.500, and 15.537.

\(^\text{22}\) See also 1.125, 1.128, 2.70, 2.146, 2.234, etc.

\(^\text{23}\) Burrow, Turville-Petre 2018, 24.
form *Come knelynge* might derive support from short a-verses such as those in (1)-(4), but syntax ought to place the half-line boundary after the prepositional phrase *to þe corps*, where all B-version manuscripts have it, not after *knelynge*. The problem is then a deficient b-verse. Reconstruction is seriously impaired by the absence of R in this part of the poem, as Burrow and Turville-Petre observe in their introduction. Moreover, Burrow and Turville-Petre judge that F shows contamination from a C-version copy throughout passus 19. If the F-reading at 19.153 derives from a C-version copy, beta-family copies supply the only evidence for the B-version archetypal. The situation is not hopeless, however. The reading of L (quoted above at point (c)) is very likely to represent the beta hyparchetype (other beta-family copies provide no challenge) and it deserves respect. In fact, the line structure given by beta has close parallels:

(11) And saracenes for þat siȝte · shulle synge *gloria in excelsis &c* (3.335)  
(12) He sette a soure lof to-for vs · and seyde *agite penitenciam* (13.50)

In these two lines and beta’s form of 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 half-line boundary. The precedent set by (11) and (12) supports beta’s claim to transmit the authorial (and hence also archetypal) form of 19.153. The more difficult question regards the “detached b-verse” transmitted by F and C-version copies (see above, point (d)). In another venue I argue that Burrow and Turville-Petre’s critical terminology is, in this particular case, better than their editorial presentation, and that *and he ros after* should be printed as a singleton, unpaired, or “detached” half-line. My present argument calls for a narrower suggestion: whatever one thinks of punctuation after *corps*, it should be accepted in an edition of the archetype.

**Corrections to the metrical punctuation of the archetypal manuscript**

Burrow and Turville-Petre aim “to restore the readings of Bx, not of the poem that Langland wrote”, and the editors make themselves responsible for commenting on archetypal errors only where the reading is “manifestly wrong” and bears on “interpretation of the text” or else where archetypal error provoked further variation that must be taken into account in editorial reconstruction. Readers may wish to know where the archetype is unlikely to represent the poet. That desire can only be met by re-editing the text, but it is possible to collect preliminary observations on the topic of this article, notation of verse structure. Some lines are structurally defective or deficient, on account of archetypal error. Like other scribes, the archetypal scribe probably punctuated some lines too early, then entered a second mark at the correct location without razing out the first. Setting these aside – and always assuming that stemmatic reconstructions can be trusted – the archetypal scribe’s notation of verse structure seems to have been very accurate. The scribe’s evident misdivisions are few in number. For each line, I record the word after which the scribe should have punctuated:

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24 Ibid., 31-32.  
25 Ibid., 31.  
26 Cornelius 2023b.  
27 Burrow, Turville-Petre 2018, 3, 33.  
28 Examples, some less certain than others, are 1.204, 1.210, 5.200, 9.214, 11.389-390, 11.408, 12.28, 13.56, 13.476, and 15.121.  
29 An example is 17.69, in which the second punctus divides correctly (and see also the punctuation of L and R at 16.31). Elsewhere multiple punctuation sometimes supplies syntactic guidance. See Burrow, 2014, 11-12. In 18.326 the second punctus divides the completed metrical line from an extra-metrical Latin quotation.
These misdivisions are unexceptional, paralleled by misdivisions in individual manuscripts elsewhere in the tradition. Most are remarked by Burrow and Turville-Petre, who are prompted to comment because scribes later in the tradition objected to the punctuation apparently transmitted in the archetype. (Burrow and Turville-Petre do not remark on the scribal punctuation of Prol.70, 7.100, or 19.363 and they are more willing than I am to allow multiple points of division.)

Langland’s metrical grammar deserves more study. To conclude this report, I comment briefly on constructions that place an auxiliary verb at mid-line. Unlike the Gawain-poet, Langland willingly placed the mid-line division between an auxiliary and an immediately following infinitive, yet this division seems to occur only where the auxiliary supplies the final lift in the a-verse. An example is “In signe þat I shulde · biseche hir of grace” (10.152). When a mid-line auxiliary is not alliterated, it belongs in the b-verse:

(13) For riȝtful reson · shulde rewle ȝow alle (1.56)

Item (13) shows the usual construction: the auxiliary verb forms the initial dip of the second half-line and the root syllable of the infinitive supplies the first metrical stress of this half-line. The scribes sometimes equivocate, placing the auxiliary in final position in the a-verse:

(14) Suche lessounes lordes shulde · louie to here (10.98)

I class (14) as an archetypal misdivision.

Cleanness, Patience, and Gawain

Prior art and editorial policy

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors of Cleanness, Patience, and Gawain punctuated for syntax, not meter, in agreement with modern conventions of punctuation. Half-line divisions were treated as an element of scansion, therefore left unmarked in the reading text. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron supply sample scansion in an introduction to their edition of the poems, with notation of half-line divisions, and examples of enjambments between half-lines. The half-line division also receives useful comment in an essay by Hoyt N. Duggan. Putter and Stokes are the first editors of Cleanness, Patience, and Gawain to mark half-line divisions within the reading text. The editors usually divide half-lines with several ems of whitespace. Less often, they divide with a medium dash. These markings

31 Other instances of this construction are Prol.89, 3.185, 5.21, 9.76, 12.179, 15.95, 17.229, 17.243.
32 This placement probably does not create a long verse-initial dip, though the result would not be unmetrical in Piers Plowman. See the discussion at item (19), below.
33 Andrew, Waldron, 2007, 45–47. The enjambments are between subject and verb, or within a string of attributive adjectives, but the editors’ first example, Cleanness 170, illustrates appositional variation, not enjambment. Putter and Stokes represent the syntax accurately by entering a comma between half-lines: “That schal shewe hem so schene, / schrowde of the beste?” The b-verse varies “wedes” in the previous line (antecedent of “That”).
improve the visual clarity of the text and they form a basis for discussions, in explanatory notes, that improve and correct earlier understandings of the poet’s meter and grammar.\textsuperscript{35} Emendations repair several lines that remained irregular in earlier editions.\textsuperscript{36} Criticisms should not be taken to diminish Putter and Stokes’s achievement and contribution, for which they richly deserve praise and thanks.

I find no misdivisions in Putter and Stokes’s text of Cleanness or Patience.\textsuperscript{37} In Gawain I find a small number of irregularities, difficult cases, and errors. Line references are to Gawain unless otherwise indicated. Quotations are from the edition by Putter and Stokes, but I divide half-lines with a virgule, for the sake of clarity.

**Misdivisions of the transmitted text**

I begin with four lines in which Putter and Stokes print the reading of the manuscript but misdivide. One line is printed without division: divide Gawain 729 after slete. In two other lines, the editors separate a conjunction or conjunctive adverb from the clause that it opens:

(15) Wayves up a wyndow and / on the wye calles (1743)
(16) Welawylle was the way there / thay by wode schulden (2084)

The correct metrical divisions are before and and there, respectively. The printed division of (15) is only explicable as a production error. The printed division of (16) could be defended by reading there as a demonstrative adverb, but it is surely relative, with the sense ‘where’, serving to open a subordinate locative clause.\textsuperscript{38}

Very similar to (16) is

(17) Now rides this renk thurgh / the ryalme of Logres (691)

Divide after renk: thurgh, a preposition, should not be separated from its object. Duggan’s illustrations of strong enjambments include a single line that could be adduced as precedent for Putter and Stokes’s division of (17):

(18) Then was there no tom there bitwene / his tale and her dede (Patience 135)

The structure of (18) is acceptable because a verse-by-verse parsing of this line may initially construe there bitwene as a compound adverb with demonstrative force (MED s.v. “thē̆r–bitwē̆ne adv.”), stressed and alliterating on the medial syllable of bitwene, yielding a syntactically self-contained half-line with normative metrical shape. The noun phrase in the b-verse forces a retrospective reinterpretation of syntax, duly recognizing bitwene as a preposition.\textsuperscript{39} Two interpretations of syntax succeed one another in time, yet the first interpretation may not be abandoned for it alone provides a viable division of half-lines. Like bitwene, thurgh can be an adverb, yet the analogy between lines is imperfect, for (17) lacks the metrical and syntactic factors that induce an adverbial interpretation in (18). *Now rides this renk* is a satisfactory a-verse, from the perspectives of both syntax and meter. (It passes the metrical

\textsuperscript{35}See, for instance, Putter and Stokes’s notes to Gawain 44 and 836.

\textsuperscript{36}For instance, Gawain 815, 1187 and 1255. Gawain 1293 probably deserves more attention.

\textsuperscript{37}The construction of Cleanness 385 and Patience 429 is peculiar. See Cornelius, 2018, 417.

\textsuperscript{38}See Mustanoja, 1960, 337–338; and OED s.v. “there, adv. (adj. and n.),” sense II.9.a.

\textsuperscript{39}My phrasing is indebted to Weiskott 2015b, an account of “syntactical reversal” and “retrospective syntactical reanalysis” in Old English poems.
test of dissimilation because renk, a stressed monosyllable, would be unmetrical in final position in the b-verse.) A reader next encounters the sequence thurgh the ryalme, an unambiguous prepositional phrase. Since the preposition and determiner thurgh the form a long dip, one expects any medial dip to be a stem-syllable or monosyllabic bound morpheme nucleated by schwa.40 The etymological final -e of ryalme is the correct kind of linguistic material for a short medial dip. The free morpheme of is metrically irregular in this context, but should not provoke a reinterpretation of line-structure. This type of metrical irregularity occurs in about 0.5 per cent of lines in Gawain.41

I turn next to a line in which Putter and Stokes emend without affecting the location of the half-line division:

(19) That so worthy as ye wolde / wynne yow hider (1537)

The reflexive pronoun yow is supplied by Putter and Stokes; previous editors have accepted the line as it stands in the manuscript, without this word. Intransitive and reflexive constructions are both acceptable. (Compare 402 and 2215.) Putter and Stokes adopt the reflexive construction here because yow supplies a syllable metrically necessary to the b-verse. The line, however, should divide before wolde. Assigning the auxiliary wolde to the a-verse preserves aalax alliteration, but the line-structure is not credible, for, in Cleanness, Patience, and Gawain, the half-line boundary never splits an auxiliary verb from an immediately following infinitive or past participle. (This is a difference from Piers Plowman.) In the edition by Putter and Stokes, there are just two exceptions in 4363 lines.42 Moreover, in (19) division before wolde is probably supported by considerations of rhetoric and expressivity. The line is spoken by Gawain, who assures the lady of the castle that he appreciates her company. The pronoun ye should have emphatic stress and the best way to code emphatic stress is within a line structure that also assigns metrical stress to this word. The poet, it seems, has done just that: as the last word in the a-verse, ye bears the second and final lift of the half-line. Putter and Stokes’s reflexive pronoun yow remains a good emendation, for the syllable that it contributes is probably still metrically necessary, even after assigning wolde to the b-verse. When lightly stressed, the modal auxiliaries wolde and schulde reduce to monosyllables, without inflectional -e, so a b-verse reading “wolde wynne hider” should probably be construed as unmetrical, lacking a long dip. For the emended half-line “wolde wynne [yow] hider” compare “schulde helden him after” (1692b) and “schuld wende on that ernde” (559b).43

Lines defective or deficient as printed

In 1281 and 1884, defective line structures probably indicate an underlying textual problem, left unresolved by Putter and Stokes. For the first of these, the manuscript reading is “& ay þe lady let lyk

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40Yakovlev 2009.
42The second instance is item (21), below. Duggan (1997, 230) classes 2212 as a third instance of this pattern, but Putter and Stokes rightly divide that line before the auxiliary. Note that enjambment of auxiliary and infinitive is permitted at line-end: for instance, “Compast in his concience / to what that case myghte | Mene other amount” (1196–1197a). The line-boundary is more permissive than the half-line boundary, as Weiskott (2020, 230) observes of Piers Plowman.
43In 559b the spelling schuld (without -e) is an editorial normalization, pointing readers towards a monosyllabic pronunciation. Putter and Stokes retain the -e in 1692b, perhaps because they expect this syllable to elide with b-. Elision is probably not the relevant consideration in this case: the spellings schulde and wolde are realized as monosyllables in contexts of light stress. For the editors’ policy on spellings see Putter, Stokes, 2014, xxvii–xxxii.
a hym loued mych” (f. 108r). The line evidently suffers multiple defects but it figures in the present discussion because the syntax goes out of focus at mid-line, precisely where one expects the half-line division. Putter and Stokes emend as follows:

(20) And aye the lady let as ho liked him / and loved him swythe (1281)

This editorial composition has a b-verse with impeccable rhythm, but the line is diffuse and prosaic. Nor is it clear how the line posited by Putter and Stokes would prompt a scribe to write something like the line transmitted in manuscript. Previous editors have only emended the manuscript reading a to as. In defense of more extensive surgery, Putter and Stokes write:

[M]ore seems to have gone wrong. The idiom is in fact let as (cf. 1190, 1201, 2257): there is no example in MED of let as being varied to let lik(e) as. Whatever lyk represents probably belonged with the a-verse, which is overlight if the caesura is taken as falling after let. mycb is usually assumed to be an authorial variant of much, but the spelling occurs nowhere else in the MS, and the poet noticeably avoids using much at line end, where an unstressed syllable is required, and where swythe provides the equivalent sense (see e.g. C[leaness] 987). The line is evidently corrupt, though the alliterative collocations themselves look authentic: for let-lady/lord-love, see 1086, 1206, 1733; C[leaness] 1434.44

Putter and Stokes’s point about the idiom let as is well taken, but we should inquire what might have prompted a scribe to write let lyk. If we suppose that let stood in the scribe’s exemplar, and suppose the scribe understood this word in the sense ‘pretend’ (MED “lēten, n.”, sense 16), then lyk might have been intruded by semantic attraction, perhaps displacing another /l/-alliterating word. The sense ‘pretend’ is certainly appropriate to the first bedroom scene, where the lady’s intention is an engrossing theme (what game is she playing?). The poet, however, might have employed let in another sense, perhaps ‘utter, permit (to escape)’ (MED sense 9(d)), exemplified in the lord’s eager verbal entertainment of Gawain on the previous evening: “The lord let for luf / lotes so mery” (The lord uttered very merry sounds on account of his pleasure) (1086). Taking that line as a model, I suggest that line 1281 might originally have read “And aye the lady let lotes / as him loved swythe” (And the lady continuously chirped as if she loved him greatly). The emendation lotes is supported by the poet’s persistent evocation of the sounds of merry conversation whenever Gawain and the lady are together. The transmitted form of the line would have been generated by a scribe’s attunement to the theme of courteous role-play – an attunement that steered the scribe first towards an incorrect sense of let, then towards lyk by semantic association. The scribe’s a is explicable as routine mechanical error. Putter and Stokes’s emendation of mycb to swythe remains good, in light of the distributional evidence they cite.

In 1884, the problem is a contiguous verb phrase, editorially split across half-lines (compare (19), above):

(21) As domesday schulde have ben / dight on the morne (1884)

Considerations of verse syntax would place the half-line boundary before schulde or after dight, yet these divisions yield half-lines that are unbalanced and defective in rhythm and meter. The verb phrase

44Ibid., 714.
schulde have ben dight is suspect not only for its mid-line position, but also as verbose, inconsistent with the *modus scribendi* of this poet. I suspect the line has suffered scribal rewriting.

The context is Gawain’s confession on his final day at Hautdesert. *As* pertains to a comparison of equivalence (*so clene | As*). In the paraphrase of Putter and Stokes, the priest “rendered him [Gawain] as free from sin as (he would need to be) if Judgement Day had been appointed for the morrow”.45 The counterfactual past perfect *schulde have ben dight* is clumsy. A hypothetical future-in-the-past, *schulde be dight*, is grammatically and contextually appropriate and more vivid.46 It expresses Gawain’s perspective and mirrors the modal construction of his request to be taught “How his saule schulde be saved”, a few lines above (1879a). The transmitted text is explicable as the response of a scribe who wished to emphasize his own perspective and the perspective of readers, who know the world did not end the next morning. One needs also to assume that a /d/-alliterating word was lost somewhere in transmission, perhaps within the same episode of rewriting. I propose “As domesday schulde derfly / be dight on the morne” (As if judgment day should promptly be ordained tomorrow). (The half-line boundary may separate an auxiliary verb from the remainder of the verb phrase when another element intervenes, as the adverb *derfly* does here.) For the alliterative collocation *derfly-dome-dight*, compare “And he derfly at his dome / dight hit bylive” (*Cleanness* 632), a line that reports how Abraham’s servant responded to his master’s order to cook a meal.

Finally, I note several lines in which the half-line division is not in question, but the manuscript text, retained by Putter and Stokes, is deficient. Geoffrey Russom offers plausible emendations to 206, 627, and 2212, three lines with deficient a-verses.47 For 922, a line with a deficient b-verse, I favor the emendation suggested by Eric Weiskott, for it permits us to explain the genesis of the transmitted text.48 Putter and Stokes have no relevant notes on these lines. In *Cleanness*, lines 422 and 1483 are deficient and deserve editorial attention. (See the editors’ note on the second of these lines.)

**Conclusion**

The PPEA edition of the archetype of *Piers Plowman* B and the Penguin edition of *Cleanness, Patience, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are aimed at different readers and guided by different principles, yet they are alike in supplying typographic notation of verse structure. Although a skeptical mindset is appropriate facing the presentations of scribes and editors alike, these two editions are distinguished contributions to modern understanding of alliterative verse and the particular usages of Langland and the *Gawain*-poet. Future editors of Middle English alliterative verse should follow the precedent set by these two editions, Hanna and Lawton’s *Siege of Jerusalem*, Lawton’s *Joseph of Arimathea*, Skeat’s editions, and modern editions of older Germanic alliterative verse. Editors and readers should pay as much attention to half-line divisions as to line-divisions.49

46 For *schulde* in this tense formation see Mustanoja 1960, 496.
47 Russom 2017, 221-222, 295n19.
48 Weiskott 2015a, 162; compare Russom 2017, 140-141, 182.
49 This article has benefited from the criticisms of Eric Weiskott and peer reviewers. They bear no responsibility for the views expressed.
Bibliography


