

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALLITERATIVE METRE
FROM OLD TO MIDDLE ENGLISH**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Hilary Term 2008

ABSTRACT

The Development of Alliterative Metre from Old to Middle English

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The thesis deals with the history of the alliterative long line from Old English to both early and late Middle English, and demonstrates that the differences between the metrical systems of those periods are explicable in their entirety by the historical changes in the linguistic prosody rather than a discontinuity of the alliterative tradition.

The first three chapters of the thesis examine the alliterative metre in Old English (primarily on the basis of *Beowulf*), early Middle English (primarily on the basis of Layamon's *Brut*), and late Middle English (primarily on the basis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Morte Arthure*, and the *Siege of Jerusalem*). The discussions pay particular attention to those points that are subsequently used in the historical reconstruction presented in the final chapter. At the same time, each of the period chapters aims to provide a coherent systemic formulation of the particular metre.

The chief method employed by the study is the standard procedure of matching the linguistic and metrical data, as described in the introduction. The historical reconstruction is based on the premise that in particular types of poetic environments certain changes in the linguistic prosody will automatically result in a restructuring of the metrical system. The premise leads to a new version of the history of English alliterative poetry based on the concrete evidence of the extant texts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest debt is owed to my supervisor, Ralph Hanna, for his boundless patience and expert advice on every matter I struggled with. Working with him was a great privilege, and the imperfection of my efforts was a bad tribute to his kindness and brilliance.

I am grateful for the generous support and opinion I received from Malcolm Godden, Noriko Inoue, Judith Jefferson, Anastassia Loukina, Ad Putter, and Myra Stokes. My debt to O.A. Smirnitskaya should be clear from the thesis, which was intended as an inadequate postscript to her *Verse and Language of Old Germanic Poetry*. Special thanks are due to my mother-in-law, Elena Strigina, who taught me the proper use of electronic tables and thus speeded up my data analysis by several years, and to my wife, Maria Artamonova, without whose gentle but persistent encouragement the thesis would still remain in the form of spreadsheets.

I would like to thank the Clarendon Fund of Oxford University and the Overseas Research Student Awards Scheme of the UK Government for providing the financial support for the DPhil course, and Wolfson College for its ever welcoming atmosphere.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to Yuri Kleiner. His questions started the project, and I may only hope to have answered some of them. How much I owe to him he alone knows.

ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
KEY TO SCANSION SYMBOLS	VI
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	VII
INTRODUCTION	1
LINGUISTIC CHANGE AND THE CONTINUITY OF ALLITERATIVE VERSE	1
The alliterative tradition in medieval England.....	2
Theories of continuity.....	9
The framework hypothesis	14
Prosody and alliteration	23
Outline of the thesis.....	24
METHODOLOGY OF THE METRICAL STUDY	29
CHAPTER 1. OLD ENGLISH METRE	42
THEORIES OF OLD ENGLISH METRE: THE SIEVERS TRADITION.....	42
A metrical system or rhythmical catalogue: Sievers, Pope, and Bliss.....	43
Cable's metrical theory	54
HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT ASPECTS OF THE THEORY OF SIEVERS AND CABLE	62
Interdependency of the rules.....	62
Patterns with five metrical positions.....	65
THE PROSODIC BASIS OF OLD ENGLISH VERSE	70
Secondary stress	70
A morphological metre.....	74
A SIDETRACK: OLD ENGLISH EXTENDED METRE	83
CHAPTER 2. LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH ALLITERATIVE METRE	89
THE GRAMMAR OF FINAL <i>-E</i>	93
Chronology of loss.....	93
Inflections in the final dip in SGGK.....	98
Inflections in the medial dip in SGGK	107
Inflection of disyllabic adjectives.....	109
Final <i>-e</i> in SGGK: conclusions.....	115
Inflections in the final dip in MA	116
Singular nouns in the final dip in MA	122
Inflections in the medial dip in MA.....	127
Evidence for final <i>-e</i> in SGGK and MA: a comparison.....	134
Final <i>-e</i> in MA: conclusions	138
SYLLABLES IN THE WEAK DIP	142
Suffixes in the weak dip	142
Extent of the restriction	149
THE FORM OF THE A-VERSE	155
Two-lift a-verses.....	156
Three-lift a-verses: a rhythmical catalogue and strong final dips.....	161

Three-lift a-verses: non-schwa syllables.....	167
Existence of three-lift verses	172
Three-lift b-verses.....	180
LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH ALLITERATIVE METRE: A SUMMARY	185
CHAPTER 3. THE METRE OF LAYAMON'S <i>BRUT</i>	188
THE METRE OF LAYAMON'S <i>BRUT</i> : THE LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH PERSPECTIVE	188
Language and spelling.....	190
Initial metrical statement and preliminary tests	194
The prefix licence	198
Elision.....	200
Compounds.....	201
Scansion of the basic fragment.....	203
Comparison to the Otho passage	204
Prefix licence: summary of the evidence	207
Layamon: an intermediate stage	208
THE METRE OF LAYAMON'S <i>BRUT</i> : FURTHER OBSERVATIONS	211
Length and resolution in early Middle English verse: introductory remarks.....	212
Resolution in Layamon.....	217
The form of the final dip.....	221
Suffixes: the strong dip.....	222
Suffixes: compound stress	229
Suffixes: primary linguistic stress.....	232
Suffixes: the weak dip	235
Suffixes: resolution.....	241
Rhythmical patterns of two-lift b-verses.....	243
Rhythmical patterns of three-lift b-verses.....	246
Rhythmical patterns of a-verses.....	248
Existence of three-lift verses	250
Length and resolution in early Middle English verse: concluding remarks.....	252
LAYAMON'S VERSE: SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	261
CHAPTER 4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALLITERATIVE METRE	266
From Old English to early Middle English.....	267
From early to late Middle English.....	280
Dynamism of the metrical system	282
The antiquarian question.....	285
Which Old English metre?.....	287
When did Middle English begin?	290
CONCLUSION.....	293
BIBLIOGRAPHY	295

Key to scansion symbols

Syllables in strong metrical positions

- S metrical stress; or primary metrical stress
- s secondary metrical stress
- š secondary metrical stress on a short syllable (where relevant)
- r resolved syllable; so, Sr is a resolved or resolvable sequence (e.g. *heofon*)

Syllables in weak metrical positions

- x metrically unstressed syllable
- p syllable of a prefix
- o unstressed syllable with a non-schwa vowel (in Middle English verse)
- f suffixal syllable or the second syllable of the root (where relevant)
- x...x sequence of two or more unstressed syllables
- (x) metrical position that may contain either one unstressed syllable or no syllables
- # word boundary

List of abbreviations

ASPR	<i>Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
PBB	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
DT	<i>The Destruction of Troy</i>
MA	<i>Morte Arthure</i>
O	<i>Ormulum</i>
P3A	<i>The Parliament of the Three Ages</i>
PM	<i>Poema Morale</i>
SGGK	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
SJ	<i>The Siege of Jerusalem</i>
W&W	<i>Winner and Waster</i>
WA	<i>The Wars of Alexander</i>
EME	early Middle English
LME	late Middle English
ME	Middle English
OE	Old English
OFr	Old French
ON	Old Norse

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic change and the continuity of alliterative verse

In 1923, Roman Jakobson formulated an idea that has since become commonplace: metrical prosody depends on the prosody of the language.¹ In its simplest terms, the idea is an acknowledgment of the fact that certain metrical systems cannot be implemented in some languages because the prosodic phenomena that underlie those metrical systems are not universal. So, quantitative poetry in the manner of either Greek or Latin is impossible in Modern English or Russian, since the former does not have the equivalence of a prosodically 'long' sequence to a combination of prosodically 'short' ones, while the latter does not distinguish syllabic or segmental length in any form. Similarly, the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables that forms the basis of iambic metres in English, Russian or German is very difficult to achieve in French due to the nature of phrasal stress in that language.

¹ Roman Jakobson, *O cheshskom stikhe preimuschestvenno v sopostavlenii s russkim* [on Czech verse, primarily in comparison with Russian verse] (Berlin, 1923), repr. *Über den tschechischen Vers, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des russischen Verses* (Bremen, 1974).

The match between linguistic and metrical prosody goes beyond such basic restrictions: since the only prosodic universal is the syllable, any metre developed within or adopted into a poetic tradition is necessarily shaped by the particular linguistic prosody.² It has long been established, for example, that iambic metres in various European traditions – Russian, Polish, German, English, even late Middle English and early Modern English – show markedly different characteristics that can all be related to the prosodic structure of the respective languages.³

The present thesis examines the history of alliterative metre in Old and Middle English with regard to the history of the English language. I attempt to demonstrate that many features of alliterative verse reflect the contemporary system of linguistic prosody, and that the sometimes radical contrasts between the verse of different periods can be accounted for by the linguistic changes that are known to have occurred in English between the production of *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The alliterative tradition in medieval England

The extant alliterative poetry in English comes mainly from two historical periods: Old English, starting from about the seventh century and gradually disappearing towards the Conquest, and late Middle English, starting c. 1350, gathering full force until the end of the century, and still surviving in the course of the fifteenth. In between, there is a gap that largely coincides with the period of general scarcity of

² For analyses of the linguistic foundations of the metrical prosody in various poetic traditions, cf. e.g. *Versification: Major Language Types*, ed. W.K. Wimsatt (New York, 1972) and J. Kuriłowicz, *Metrik und Sprachgeschichte* (Wrocław, 1975).

³ See, for example, V.M. Zhirmunsky, *O natsionalnykh formakh yambicheskogo stikha* [on national variants of iambic verse], in *Teoriya stikha* (Leningrad, 1968), pp. 7-23; V.Ye. Kholshchevnikov, *Russkaya i polskaya sillabika i sillabotonika* [Russian and Polish syllabic and accentual-syllabic verse], in *Teoriya stikha* (Leningrad, 1968), pp. 24-58; Marina Tarlinskaya, *Strict Stress Meter in English Poetry Compared with German and Russian* (Calgary, 1993); Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 117-129.

English writing, as far as the extant texts are concerned. Nevertheless, even within the relatively small corpus of English poetry written between 1066 and 1300, and especially within the much greater array of poetry extant from the first half of the fourteenth century, alliterative verse is rare, and for that reason the group of long narrative poems composed in a distinct style with an alliterative accentual metre in the next fifty years or so are collectively known as the 'Alliterative Revival'.

The history of alliteration in medieval English literature can shortly be presented as follows. At the start of the extant tradition there stands 'classical' Old English verse preserved mostly in manuscripts of c. 1000. Dating the composition is notoriously difficult for almost every poem.⁴ Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Robert Fulk, it is possible to construct a relative chronology for the major poems based on the evidence of their language and metre.⁵ This relative chronology accords quite well with the development of style across the poems, which show a gradual systemic transformation of heroic diction to make alliterative verse suitable for the expression of Christian themes and concepts. In absolute terms, Fulk dates the major poems to the period c. 675-850, much earlier than the extant manuscripts, and this point of view is accepted in the thesis.

Despite the internal differences in their language, style, and skill, 'classical' Old English poems form a unified group when set against a number of other compositions, in particular the psalms of the *Paris Psalter*, the *Metres of Boethius*, *Solomon and Saturn*, the *Battle of Maldon*, and the historical poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. All of the latter compositions belong to the tenth century or later and show a marked loosening of alliterative, prosodic, and syntactic patterns, poverty of poetic vocabulary, incorrect use of the surviving diction, and a generally low level of poetic skill. While it is tempting to conclude that tenth century verse reveals a deterioration of Old English

⁴ A well-known example of such difficulty is the discussion in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto, 1981).

⁵ R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992).

poetic tradition, there remains the possibility that the poems only reflect the individual ability of their authors.

At about the same time, in the course of the tenth century, there appears – as far as we can tell from the extant material – a new mode of writing usually known as 'rhythmical prose'. The style, used in sermons and homilies, is based upon two-stress phrases with a rather loose arrangement of unstressed syllables and either internal (within one phrase) or external (between two or more consecutive phrases) alliteration. First rhythmical passages are found in some Vercelli and Blickling homilies, but with the greatest consistency the style is employed by Ælfric and Wulfstan.⁶ The works of Ælfric continued to be copied after the Conquest and throughout the twelfth century, but on the evidence of the glossing efforts by the Tremulous Hand of Worcester, by c. 1225 the language of Ælfric's homilies had become largely unintelligible at least to some educated speakers of Middle English.⁷ At about exactly the same date and in the area close to Worcester, an anonymous writer, or more probably a group of writers, produced a number of works that, judging by their close attention to all matters linguistic, including spelling, vocabulary, and syntax, harked back to Old English times with their relatively high status of the native tongue. Two of those works, the Lives of St Katherine and St Margaret, employ rhythmical devices reminiscent of the Ælfrician tradition, although the early Middle English lives do not arrange their two-stress phrases in long lines by either syntactic or alliterative means.⁸

While Ælfric's homilies, including those in the rhythmical style, were still in use well after the Conquest, there is, as far as I know, no direct evidence of an early Middle English attempt to recycle Old English poetry (either in the form of an indisputable

⁶ Otto Funke, 'Studien zur alliterierenden und rhythmisierenden Prosa in der älteren altenglischen Homiletik', *Anglia* 80 (1962), 9-36.

⁷ Christine Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand of Worcester: A Study of Old English in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1991).

⁸ The historical connection between the style of Ælfric and the Katherine Group lives is suggested, for example, in Dorothy Bethurum, 'The Connection of the Katherine Group with Old English Prose,' *JEGP* 34 (1935), pp. 553-564; a different view is argued by Bella Millett, 'The Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group and the Alliterative Tradition,' *JEGP* 87 (1988), pp. 16-34.

literary borrowing or manuscript glosses). The only exception is *Durham*, a short poem written c. 1100 in an ultimately unsuccessful imitation of Old English poetic idiom. As demonstrated by Thomas Cable, the metre of the poem bears only a superficial resemblance to classical Old English verse and shows all the signs of a poet trying to resurrect a tradition he no longer belongs to.⁹ A comparable case is probably the much later, but thematically very similar *First Worcester Fragment* (*Sanctus Beda was iboren...*), dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century: the metre of the poem, if any, does not seem to fit any prosodic patterns of contemporary alliterative verse.

The last extant poem in what is largely the normal Old English metre is *Death of Edward*, entered into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 1065. However, well before that date the *Chronicle* started to include passages of what may often be described as rhythmical prose, with the first likely entry of the kind appearing as early as 959 (*on his dagum hit godode georne...*) and the last as late as 1086 (*castelas he let wyrcean*, also known as *William the Conqueror*).¹⁰ Moreover, some of the passages, most notably the *Second Death of Edgar* (*Chronicle* MSS D, E for 975) and the *Death of Alfred* (1036) bear strong resemblance to early Middle English alliterative verse not only in the employment of occasional rhyme, but also in terms of their prosodic patterns.¹¹

The use of what appears to be a loose accentual metre (bordering on rhythmical prose) with a more or less sporadic incidence of alliteration and end-rhyme re-emerges in full swing at the turn of the thirteenth century: the extant corpus ranges from the sixteen thousand verses of Layamon's *Brut* to the twenty five of the *Grave* and includes

⁹ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, pp. 52-56.

¹⁰ The passages were printed as verse in Plummer's edition, but with the exception of the *Death of Alfred* did not make it into the respective ASPR volume; see John Earle and Charles Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892); *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, ASPR vol. VI (New York, 1942).

¹¹ Cf. Luick's account of the transitional period in Paul's *Grundriß*, where he remarks on the *Death of Alfred* that "weisen die Verse bereits das Ausmass auf wie bei La3amon" (Karl Luick, 'Geschichte der heimischen Versarten,' in *Grundriß der germanischen Philologie*, 2nd edition, ed. Hermann Paul (Strassburg, 1905), vol. II, *Metrik*, p. 144).

also the *Proverbs of Alfred*, *Bestiary*, and the remaining *Worcester Fragments* known collectively as the *Soul's Address to the Body*.

The Brut is a translation, or at times a loose rendition of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, the Anglo-Norman version of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. According to the poem's preface, its author Layamon was a priest at the village of Areley Kings, ten miles up the Severn from Worcester. The dating of the poem's composition is a contentious issue, but the default opinion seems to place the *Brut* between the reigns of Henry II and Henry III, i.e. between 1189 and 1216.¹² The poem is extant in two manuscripts, BL Cotton Caligula A.ix and BL Cotton Otho C.xiii, the former dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, the latter to the first quarter of the fourteenth.¹³ The text in Otho presents a revised version of the poem. The reviser's aim was very clearly modernisation and simplification of Layamon's idiosyncratic style. Although the changes primarily concern diction and to a lesser extent syntax, the need to eradicate an obscure item of vocabulary often results in a complete rewriting of a verse.

The diction of the Caligula text is indeed unusual: it retains many words that, judging by the few contemporary texts available to us, would have sounded archaic even at the start of the thirteenth century. It also displays the device of poetic compounding which used to be so fundamental for Old English poetry. Not only is Layamon keen to use compounds, he appears ready to coin new ones, e.g. *balusiðe* 'evil fate', *horsleden* 'horsemen', *wi-ax* 'battle-axe', including those where the first component

¹² For a summary of arguments in favour of the dating see F.H.M. Le Saux, *Lagamon's Brut. The Poem and its Sources* (Cambridge, 1989). The most influential alternative theory is the proposal by Eric Stanley, who favours a dating close to the middle of the thirteenth century ('The Date of Lagamon's *Brut*,' *Notes and Queries* 213 (1968), pp. 85-88).

¹³ The dating of Caligula was first proposed by Neil Ker in the introduction to *The Owl and the Nightingale*, EETS OS 251 (London, 1963): to him a date of "probably a little after A.D. 1250" seems "on the early side." The dating is accepted in subsequent literature, e.g. Jane Roberts, 'A Preliminary Note on BL Cotton MS Caligula A.ix,' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-14 and Margaret Laing, *Catalogue of Sources for a Linguistic Atlas of Early Medieval English* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 70. For the fourteenth century dating of Otho on the basis of the script and decoration, see Jane Roberts, 'A Preliminary Note...', p. 9.

is a poetic epithet rather than a restriction on the meaning of the second compound stem (cf. OE *Gar-Dene*): *baluræs* 'evil attack', *hereburne* 'corselet', *du3eðe-king* 'king', etc.¹⁴ Nevertheless, neither in terms of the number of poetic words retained from the Anglo-Saxon times, nor in terms of the elaboration and prominence of its compounding does the *Brut* approach the classical Old English poems. Layamon's diction sounds as but an echo of the pre-Conquest style.

The same impression is produced by Layamon's metre. Of course, the *Brut* is written in the familiar long lines separated by the caesura into two half-lines that are frequently joined by alliteration. However, no prosodic regularities known from classical Old English verse have been observed in the poem. With its sporadic use of alliteration and rhyme and its *tendency* (often violated) to two phrasal stresses per half-line, the *Brut* is only close to such highly unconventional Old English poems as the *Second Death of Edgar* and the *Death of Alfred*. In fact, so confusing is the prosodic variation of Layamon's half-lines that the most popular current opinion seems to be that his poem does not employ any metre at all, being composed in a kind of rhythmical prose such as exemplified by Ælfric or the saints' lives of the Katherine Group.¹⁵

Finally, in Layamon there are no traces of the traditional themes and metaphors of Old English poetry. His syntax is nothing short of primitive, and his use of poetic variation inconspicuous.¹⁶ Overall, only a few features of his poetics are reminiscent

¹⁴ For studies of Layamon's diction, see J.P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English* (London, 1968; repr. of Manchester, 1930-1935); J.S.P. Tatlock, 'Epic Formulas, Especially in Layamon,' *PMLA* 38 (1923), pp. 494-529; Niels Bøgholm, *The Layamon Texts: a Linguistical Investigation* (Copenhagen, 1944); Mark Amodio, 'Layamon's Anglo-Saxon Lexicon and Diction,' *Poetica* (Tokyo) 28 (1988), pp. 48-59; and a series of articles by H.C. Wyld, 'Studies in the Diction of Layamon's *Brut*,' *Language* 6 (1930), pp. 1-24, 9 (1933), pp. 47-71 and 171-191, 10 (1934), pp. 149-201, 13 (1937), pp. 29-59 and 194-237.

¹⁵ Proposed by S.K. Brehe, "'Rhythmical Alliteration": Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Layamon's Metre,' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 65-87, and accepted in passing in a large number of later studies.

¹⁶ Variation as a feature of Layamon's style is dismissed, for example, in J.S.P. Tatlock, 'Layamon's Poetic Style and its Relations,' in *The Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature* (Chicago, 1923), pp. 3-11, but some relevant evidence has been assembled by James Noble, 'Variation in Layamon's *Brut*,' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 85 (1984), pp. 92-94 and 'The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Layamon's *Brut*,' *English Studies in Canada* 11 (1985), pp. 263-71. The simplicity of syntax is pointed out in E.G. Stanley, 'Layamon's un-Anglo-Saxon Syntax,' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 47-56.

(but no more than that) of pre-Conquest verse, while in most respects the *Brut* has little to do with *Beowulf*. Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that Layamon read some manuscripts of Old English poetry and constructed an 'olde' sort of verse to the best of his analytical and poetical ability.¹⁷

In the century or so up to 1350, the tradition of alliterative writing is represented by a mere handful of short poems, most of them coming from BL Harley 2253.¹⁸ However, the second half of the fourteenth century produced an array of long alliterative poems written in a very distinct style. The most striking feature of the poems is their vocabulary: many of its items are only rarely found in other Middle English texts, early or late. The metre is the familiar long line separated into two half-lines by the caesura, with two phrasal stresses per half-line – although not infrequently the third, possibly subordinated stress is allowed in the first half-line. The regular alliteration between the first and second half-lines, usually involving two staves in the a-verse, is strongly reminiscent of Old English models. It has long been acknowledged that the metre (or rhythm) of late Middle English alliterative poems is more consistent than that of Layamon. Nevertheless, the arrangement of weak syllables within the half-lines was considered to be haphazard up until the discoveries by Hoyt Duggan and Thomas Cable, who demonstrated that the second half-line (b-verse) had a metrical structure hardly paralleled in any known kind of poetry: the two-stress verse should have one and only one dip of over one syllable ("strong dip") in either initial or medial position (i.e. either before the first lift or between the two lifts), and therefore could have only two legitimate patterns: either (x)Sx...xS(x) or x...xS(x)S(x).

Thus, the four-stress alliterative long line made three appearances in the history of English poetry as we know it: during the Anglo-Saxon period, in the first half of the

¹⁷ E.G. Stanley, 'Lagamon's Antiquarian Sentiments,' *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969), pp. 23-37.

¹⁸ For the list of later Middle English short poems in the alliterative metre, see Ralph Hanna, 'Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M.T. Tavormina and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 57-61.

thirteenth century, and for about a hundred years after 1350. The gaps are wide, the compositions that could be construed as transitional are few in number, and the rather hazy similarities of metre and vocabulary are dwarfed by the differences. Nevertheless, the similarities are prominent enough to require an explanation.

Theories of continuity

Essentially, it has always been felt that the four-stress long line and the particular alliterative patterns so close to Anglo-Saxon poetry could not have been re-invented in late Middle English completely by accident: at the very least, the basic features of the two-stress half-line and alliteration should have carried on in some form of verse. Such a survival is unproblematic and easy to believe, since both features have always been deeply ingrained in the poetic and indeed everyday speech of the Englishmen. The precise mode of the continuation, as well as any further claims with regard to its extent have been much more disputable.

A century and a half of scholarship produced many theories accounting for the re-emergence of alliterative poetry, but three of them achieved by far the greatest currency. The so called "theory of popular verse" was proposed by a number of German scholars in the nineteenth century and was formulated most clearly by Karl Luick.¹⁹ As with much of Luick's work, his general account of the problem has remained virtually unchanged ever since, as long as the "theory of popular verse" has been accepted or referred to. According to the hypothesis, alliterative verse did not disappear from England after the Conquest: it only disappeared from the literate culture and thus the written records. Narrative poems in alliterative metre continued to be produced by the

¹⁹ Luick, 'Geschichte der heimischen Versarten,' in *Grundriß der germanischen Philologie*, 2nd edition, ed. Hermann Paul (Strassburg, 1905), vol. II, *Metrik*, pp. 141-181. For other accounts, differing from Luick's only in detail, see e.g. Jacob Schipper, *A History of English Versification* (Oxford, 1910).

uneducated folk throughout the intervening centuries. At certain points, such as the turn of the thirteenth century and especially the second half of the fourteenth, the style could become fashionable once again, resulting in literary 'movements' such as the Alliterative Revival. Moreover, a similar situation is sometimes posited for the Old English period itself: the extant classical Old English verse is viewed as a phenomenon of the bookish culture, and its stylistic and prosodic models as a development and elaboration of a proto-tradition, a development that survived throughout the period only within the naturally more conservative literary environment. Parallel to that, another descendant of the proto-tradition existed in the popular culture of Anglo-Saxon England. Infrequently, that popular verse was somehow reflected in the extant poems that deviate from the canon in one or another respect (claims of this kind have been made with regard to *Widsith*, *Fight at Finnsburg*, the Chronicle poems, etc.). The Middle English revivals are then said to derive from the popular rather than classical Old English verse, and are therefore cousins rather than direct descendants of the extant Anglo-Saxon poetry. The extension of the 'popular' stage (initially posited for early Middle English only) to the Old English period is convenient, since it allows to explain the striking differences between the alliterative verse surviving from before and after the Conquest: now the unattested popular Old English verse can take all the strain.

Since there is a gap between two manuscript traditions of alliterative poetry, the 'popular verse' solution suggests itself. However, so do the objections to it. Most of the dissatisfaction with the theory has been provoked by two considerations: first, by the fact that it appeals to the unknown and evidently indemonstrable, making any further scholarly discussion impossible; secondly, by the firmly held conviction that oral tradition, in the vivid phrase of Derek Pearsall, "is inevitably 'low' and inevitably makes

wretched what it touches." ²⁰ The two other theories that explain the re-emergence of alliterative poetry were devised to obviate either the second or both of those difficulties.

The "theory of manuscript transmission" reminds us that the body of surviving manuscripts forms a tiny fraction of their original number, and since most of the texts that the history of alliterative poetry is based upon are extant in a single copy, it is very probable that alliterative texts were in fact much more numerous and the chronological and stylistic gaps between them much more narrow.²¹ Since manuscript transmission provides a perfect model of discrete stages, the stark differences between alliterative poems in Old and Middle English are not surprising at all, indeed they are expected. In addition, the model accounts very well for the 'continuum of alliterative writing' that exists from late Old English onwards, with its sometimes blurred boundaries between verse and prose, alliteration and end-rhyme, 'native four-stress' and tetrameter, etc.: a literary tradition is much more prone to experimental combination of various prosodic principles than an oral one.²² The manuscript transmission hypothesis is generally unproblematic, with the significant exception that it still appeals to the unknown, in its case "a tradition of lost manuscripts".

Yet another reconstruction was proposed to obviate the latter difficulty. If there is currently a received opinion on the continuity of English alliterative tradition, it is the theory of "rhythmical alliteration" initially outlined in the well-known article by Norman Blake.²³ The prominence of his reconstruction in recent scholarly discussions

²⁰ Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977), p. 155.

²¹ See, for example, Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, p. 155.

²² A special case of the same logic of manuscript transmission is Eric Stanley's proposal with regard to Layamon's antiquarian activities. Of course, in this case no specific claims are made with regard to late Middle English developments, while the gap separating Layamon from his Anglo-Saxon models is very wide.

²³ Norman Blake, 'Rhythmical Alliteration,' *Modern Philology* 67 (1969-70), pp. 118-124. The approach found general support in many influential studies, e.g. Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge, 1977); Elizabeth Salter, 'Alliterative Modes and Affiliations in the Fourteenth Century,' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 79 (1978), pp. 25-35; Carolyn van Dyke Friedlander, 'Early Middle English Accentual Verse,' *Modern Philology* 76 (1979), pp. 219-230; A.T.E. Matonis, 'A Reexamination of the Middle English Alliterative Long-line,' *Modern Philology* 81 (1984), pp. 339-360; S.K. Brehe, "'Rhythmical Alliteration": Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Layamon's Metre,' ' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 65-87.

stems in no small part from its significant asset that *it can be discussed and argued*, while the supporters of the "popular verse" or "lost manuscripts" in most instances can do no more than state, in a rather embarrassed and apologetic tone, that their material has been lost.

According to Blake's hypothesis, Old English poetry dissipated into a kind of rhythmical narrative employing alliteration, and merged with homiletic tradition (Ælfric, Wulfstan), thus obscuring the boundaries between verse and prose. Due to the wide dissemination of Old English homilies, the tradition was carried into the Middle English period, where we find the Katherine Group and Layamon. Afterwards, the loose rhythm was gradually regularised to produce the major texts of the Alliterative Revival. Thus, there is no need to suppose the existence of any unrecorded texts or their groups.

There seem to be three main arguments in favour of the theory: 1) it provides an economical description; 2) the stylistic differences between Old English verse, Layamon, and the Alliterative Revival are too significant to make a direct continuity of the tradition of narrative verse possible; 3) oral tradition is an unworthy channel of transmission.²⁴

However, all the three arguments are not necessarily very strong. Economy is only secondary to explanatory power, and with regard to the latter Blake's theory is not optimal: it frequently does not account for the data, since many features do not demonstrate a consistent line of development, but rather are randomly present or absent in different groups of texts. Importantly, for example, both Old English and Middle English homilies lack some vocabulary common to Old English poetry and the

²⁴ The first argument is referred to, for example, in Daniel Donoghue, 'Lagamon's Ambivalence,' *Speculum* 65 (1990), p. 538; Friedlander, 'Early Middle English Accentual Verse,' p. 227; Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, p. 155. On the second, cf. Brehe, "'Rhythmical Alliteration': Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Lagamon's Metre," pp. 66-67; Elizabeth Salter, 'The Alliterative Revival,' *Modern Philology* 64 (1966), p. 146. On the third, cf. Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, p. 155.

Alliterative Revival; the long line is absent from the Katherine group,²⁵ Layamon's alliterative patterns and his use of end-rhyme set him against both Old English poetry and the Alliterative Revival.

Neither is the economy *plausible* in the first place. Bella Millett, one of the few scholars to argue at length with Blake's hypothesis, concludes her list of counter-arguments in this way:

An explanation which involves no missing links is only plausible if we have no reason to suspect the existence of missing links in the first place. Given the low status of English in the post-Conquest period, the reluctance of clerics to record secular literature, the coexistence of oral with written traditions, and the inevitable loss of manuscripts over the centuries, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the literary corpus which survives is both incomplete and unrepresentative".²⁶

Thus, while Blake's hypothesis might appear to be superior to the theories of lost traditions with their "multiplication of entities", it is in fact the latter that are made inherently more plausible by the nature of our evidence. It should be remembered that Occam's razor is in essence a tool used to select the more probable of several possible theories.

As for the significant stylistic differences between Old English verse, Layamon, and the Alliterative Revival, the argument disproves the continuity of an unrecorded tradition even as much as it disproves the line of continuity proposed by Blake himself, and therefore it is of no use. Moreover, the idea that continuity implies immobility seems to be a doubtful one. The continuity of traditional poetry implies change exactly as change is implied by the continuity of language.

²⁵ In the Lives of St Katherine and St Margaret, sentences randomly end with either odd or even-numbered two-stress verses; in addition, alliteration randomly joins verses whether they should theoretically belong to one "long line" or not.

²⁶ Millett, 'The Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group and the Alliterative Tradition,' p. 32.

A weak point in Blake's hypothesis is the development of regular verse from "rhythmical alliteration."²⁷ It is hard to agree that "it need not be thought a difficult step to transform what we have thought of as rhythmical prose into alliterative poetry."²⁸ Although "many prose works contain passages which are in verse", there has to exist a principle of selection of the metrically regular passages ("verse") and rejection of the irregular ones ("prose"). "Restoration" and "formalisation" should be based on some available models, otherwise the restoration is completely miraculous. Blake suggests that "the later poetry developed from the earlier poetry as a result of a different audience and of the poets' growing professionalism and ability to handle the alliterative meter." The last words are significant: to develop an ability, poets should have something to handle in the first place. Remove the model that the poets follow and elaborate, and the whole reconstruction immediately collapses.

The framework hypothesis

As I have already mentioned on several occasions, the main reason for the criticism of Luick's or Oakden's "theories of popular verse" was the apparent impossibility of proceeding any further than stating the existence of the lost tradition. Although the present thesis belongs to the "popular verse" camp, I believe that it is

²⁷ Salter and Brehe agree with the idea ('Alliterative Modes and Affiliations in the Fourteenth Century,' pp. 25, 28-29; "'Rhythmical Alliteration': Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Lagamon's Metre,' p. 75). Pearsall also admits the existence of an 'alliterative continuum': "In its most basic form it [alliterative tradition] may have been no more than a penchant for two-stress alliterative phrases deriving from the most fundamental rhythmic and dynamic characteristics of the language itself; but both in this and in more developed forms it existed as a continuum, a set of flexible and unformulated procedures on which literate verse-makers could draw" (*Old English and Middle English Poetry*, p. 150); but he does not go too far – hence a seemingly contradicting statement: "...but it is as difficult to believe that the alliterative poets disentangled a regular, systematic, and traditionally authentic versification from the looser rhythms of prose as to believe that they did it by stringing together accidentally regular alliterative lines from the detritus of the septenary/alexandrine tradition" (p.154). It could also be noted that *flexible* and *unformulated* in the first quotation are not the same thing.

²⁸ Blake, 'Rhythmical Alliteration,' p. 121.

possible to attempt a reconstruction of the continuity, a reconstruction that instead of being speculative would be grounded firmly in the evidence of the surviving texts and thus would offer itself to further substantiation or disproval. I propose the following general model:

- a tradition of oral narrative verse existed in England throughout the medieval period;
- the poets were not conscious of the metrical conventions of the tradition, which were therefore transmitted within the poetic texts rather than as a set of explicated rules (similarly to the common language);
- because the metre was never explicated, changes in the linguistic prosody of English inevitably resulted in changes to the metrical system, which went unnoticed by the poets and audience;
- since the traditional poetic style existed within the texts and involved other, similarly unexplicated conventions (collocations, syntactic frames, compounding, etc.), the partial breakdown of the metrical system did not lead to a collapse of the whole poetic tradition; the tradition was held together by those other, non-metrical conventions, and the continuity of the change ensured that the system of metrical prosody would never be broken down completely and as the time went on would be given the chance to become more stable and restrictive.

The only proof of the hypothesis may lie in a demonstration, attempted in this thesis, that all the differences between Old English, early Middle English and late Middle English alliterative long line are accountable for by the linguistic change in the intervening periods and at the same time are not explicable by conscious adjustments

made by poets. Conversely, if such a demonstration is successful, the dependence of the metrical changes on the linguistic change can hardly be explained by any other model than that outlined above.

This framework is largely based on the work of M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij and O.A. Smirnitskaya on the poetics of medieval texts, the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord on composition of oral narrative poems, and the ideas about the linguistic and metrical prosody initially formulated by Roman Jakobson and mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction.

In a series of his studies, and first of all in his book *The Saga Mind* published in 1971, M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij argued that within most sections of Old Icelandic "literature", and by extension within certain other types of medieval texts, there was no distinction between "fiction" and "historical truth" and no place for the author as a conscious creator of the literary work. Instead, medieval story-tellers viewed themselves purely as faithful transmitters of their tales, despite the fact that they shaped and developed the narratives in accordance with the traditional conventions of their art. In other words, the story-tellers were not conscious of their conventions – a situation which had far-reaching consequences for the poetics of medieval texts.²⁹

On the other side of the iron curtain, Milman Parry and Albert Lord produced the well-known theory of oral composition, which explained the ability of story-tellers to improvise narrative poems of considerable length rather than recite a set text from memory.³⁰ According to Parry and Lord, at the basic level of poetic production the technique of an oral singer involved a large set of verbal sequences, or "formulas", that permitted him to realise a frequently required traditional idea ("hero", "mounted his horse", etc.) within a particular available section of the poetic line.

²⁹ M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij, *The Saga Mind*, trans. Kenneth H. Ober (Odense, 1973).

³⁰ *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford, 1971). Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

The "formulas" are by no means restricted to repetitive collocations: they are variable structures that may be defined, depending on the particular formula, in terms of the lexical, syntactic and prosodic units they consist of. Due to this variability and to the presence of several linguistic factors, the nature of the formula has been a subject of much discussion and wild disagreement that there is no need to outline here.³¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the formula is understood as a frequent combination of a number of linguistic units of any level. As such, a formula can be called "syntactic" if its leading component is a syntactic frame, "lexical" if its basis is a particular word, and so on. Nevertheless, such labels are misleading, since every formula includes to a greater or lesser extent a reference to both syntactic, lexical and prosodic factors.

The basis of a formulaic technique is then the *selection* and *frequency of occurrence*, which represent two faces of one coin. The technique is viewed as the restriction of the enormous set of variants existing in the common language and as the frequent use of particular units and devices that allow the oral poet to produce metrically adequate lines quickly. The language of an oral singer is a reduced mould of the common language; the exact mode of this reduction is determined by the traditional poetics. The formula's function of the "time saver" is connected with this reduction, since fewer options to choose from means a faster composition. An important corollary of such an understanding of the formula is that in an oral narrative poem formulas are not confined to several tags, but fill the whole text.³² The "entirely formulaic composition" does not imply an exclusive use of highly frequent units. It implies a differentiation of units by frequency.

The perhaps unsurprising similarity of the formulaic technique to the common language can be observed in yet another respect. Much of *The Singer of Tales* is devoted to the subject of learning the formulaic technique. The would-be poets acquire

³¹ For a list of writings on the oral formulaic theory and the definition of the "formula", see J.M. Foley *Oral Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (New York, 1985).

³² The latter statement is often emphasised by Lord in *The Singer of Tales*.

their skill purely by listening to the songs and then, after a while, trying to reproduce the tale to the best of their ability. On many occasions Lord likens the process to the acquisition of the first language by a child.

Although the works of Steblin-Kamenskij and Parry and Lord deal with seemingly totally different matters of the history of human mind in the first case and a formal technique of composition in the second, they do have a common point: it is crucial for both of the approaches that story-tellers are not conscious of the conventions they employ. Thus, the conclusions that follow from the two theories with respect to the poetics of certain kinds of texts often coincide.

Steblin-Kamenskij's ideas were taken further by O.A. Smirnitskaya.³³ She suggested that the principle of unawareness applied not just to the larger narrative conventions and the perception of verbal art as such, but also to the traditional metre and diction. In certain historical circumstances and within certain genres, the rules of metre and diction were not explicated, but existed only within the texts. The poets and their audiences were not conscious of the rules, and had they been asked to define the traditional metre, they would have found themselves at a loss.³⁴ Nevertheless, the poets could very well produce regular verses and the audience could testify to their regularity. The situation is all but identical to that with the grammar of the common language: although speakers are neither conscious of the rules of grammar nor able to explicate them, it does not interfere with the successful production or perception of utterances.³⁵

³³ O.A. Smirnitskaya, *Stikh i yazyk drevnegermanskoi poezii* [the verse and language of Old Germanic poetry] (Moscow, 1994). Unfortunately, the work has not been translated into English. A short summary is available in Anatoly Liberman, 'Germanic and Scandinavian Poetry,' *Scandinavian Studies* 70 (1998), pp. 87-108.

³⁴ This was actually the reaction of the Yugoslavian singers asked by Lord how many words or verses there were in a particular passage composed by them ("one" was usually the answer).

³⁵ Smirnitskaya's ideas, all too briefly outlined here, are fundamental for the analysis proposed in this thesis. Nevertheless, it should be noted that I stop short of the ultimate conclusions made in *The Verse and Language of Old Germanic Poetry*. For example, the book tends to view poets' unawareness of their metrical form as an absence of the form: metre is viewed not as a coherent system, but rather as a sum of traditionally permissible patterns. While it is difficult to argue with the relevance and usefulness of the latter point of view, I believe that dispensing with the systemic aspect is neither logically necessary nor borne out by the evidence (as discussed below, Chapter 1 ff.). Once again, the analogy with the common language helps: being independent of the conscious perception of the speakers, linguistic rules still exist;

It should be noted that metrical unawareness is relative in any historical period. Obviously, at a certain level it applies even to a modern metrist engaged in a study of twentieth century prosody, as long as the need for such a study is felt at all. If we then take a lay person composing a poetic piece for a corporate newsletter or a friend's birthday, their awareness of the prosodic regularities they follow will be significantly lower. In some cases, given time, such a person will be able to give a basic definition of their metre and explain why a particular word or form "does not fit" into a particular verse. However, such cases are relatively rare, which does not prevent a very great number of people from successfully imitating the rhythms (and metres) of the poetry they have heard or read.

The same continuum should be posited for medieval times, early or late, with the difference that the immeasurably more shallow penetration of linguistic training (i.e. knowledge of such concepts as the "word", "syllable", "initial consonant", etc.) meant that most people and most poets did not have even the theoretical possibility of explicating the traditional conventions of metre and diction. At the same time, the situation need not have been universal: skaldic poetry is a primary example of the fact that metre could be explicated and therefore modified even in a predominantly (although by no means exclusively) oral environment, and that a tradition where metre was an explicated device (skaldic verse) could co-exist with a related tradition where the consciousness of metre was neither required nor prevalent (eddaic verse).

The issue of orality and literacy is relevant for the approaches of both Steblin-Kamenskij and Parry and Lord. Clearly, the root of both the formulaic technique and the unawareness of poetic conventions lies in the oral environment: despite the general pressure of the poetics of traditionality and varied repetition, the formulaic technique arises primarily from the practical need to compose metrically regular verses quickly;

at the same time, the grammar and the vocabulary constitute two opposing principles whose interaction can be presented in various ways within either the synchronic or diachronic analysis.

obviously, the need is only relevant for oral composition. Similarly, the unawareness of poetic conventions is much more characteristic of a non-literate society, since literacy by definition draws our attention to the matters of linguistic and therefore literary form.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to see either of the approaches as only applicable within the oral environment (as it was done by the more excited proponents of the formulaic theory). The poetics of traditionality, aided by the inherent ability of literacy to extend the life of texts, can preserve the formulaic mode of composition for a significant period of time after the tradition has been transferred into the soil of a literate culture. Equally, the impact of literacy and its basic concept of verbal form is not so immediate and pervasive as to result in a swift and total explication of poetic conventions. Therefore, even if we declare that a certain extant text shows the formal characteristics of formulaic composition or that the poet was not conscious of the conventions employed, it does not follow that the text is a product of an oral tradition. In fact, if viewed synchronically, the text may have very little to do with the oral popular culture of its time.

The distance between a text showing residual characteristics of oral poetics and the oral environment itself is very difficult to determine, either culturally or chronologically. Nevertheless, it can hardly be measured in hundreds of years. Moreover, while we can expect the oral characteristics to be *preserved* in a literate culture, it would be much more problematic to posit the possibility for such an originally oral traditional style to *develop*, completely within the literate culture, along the lines that such changes would have taken in the oral environment. On the contrary, any changes should be characteristic of the literate culture, and their product thus less reminiscent of the oral models. Therefore, the logic of this thesis can be presented as follows:

- all the differences, large and small, between the metre of the alliterative long line in Old English, early Middle English, and late Middle English can be shown to follow necessarily from the changes in linguistic prosody;
- the precise metrical changes are only explicable if the metre was changed not intentionally and consciously, but rather as a property of the reproducible traditional text and its units;
- for the reasons stated above, changes of this kind are only possible within an oral environment;
- as the last appearance of the alliterative long line in the mid-fourteenth century shows certain changes that could only have happened orally since its penultimate appearance, it follows that the tradition of oral narrative verse existed in England at least for some time after this penultimate appearance, namely after the last decade of the twelfth century (the traditional dating of Layamon's *Brut*, accepted and corroborated in this study);
- at the same time, no claims *whatsoever* are made with regard to the 'oral character' of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or other poems of the Alliterative Revival, or indeed with regard to Layamon's *Brut* or *Beowulf*.

It is not a task of this thesis to deal with the nature of this oral tradition or with its relationship to the contemporary literate culture. However, some comments with regard to the *theoretical possibility* of such a tradition are in order, especially in the light of the quoted popular view that "oral tradition in a literate society is inevitably 'low' and inevitably makes wretched what it touches."

Of course, the position of literacy was very strong in medieval England, and its advance in the centuries after the Norman Conquest very rapid, as shown, for example,

in the influential study by Michael Clanchy.³⁶ At the same time, there appears to be little opposition to the general outline given in *The Literacy of the Laity* by Malcolm Parkes, which suggests that certain types of literacy were restricted to certain population groups.³⁷ In particular, the composition and use of poems in writing remained for a long time largely in the domain of the clergy and (in a different mode) the nobility. Even though an allowance is made for this "largely", it leaves out the major part of the population, who are nevertheless likely to have entertained themselves with works of "fiction".

What kind of works are they likely to have been? Both on the basis of the extant vernacular poems (albeit coming from the literate environment) and typological considerations, we may safely assume that the set of genres was not restricted to songs and lyrics, but included narratives – and as we know, the default form of the narrative in that period was verse.

Therefore, it seems to me perfectly plausible that oral narrative poems were in use in England. The precise time of their disappearance is immaterial for the purposes of this thesis, as long as it happened no earlier than well into the thirteenth century.

In a society where the oral and literate traditions of verse coexist, it is indeed more likely to find the more advanced poetic skill, the more attractive and enlightened patronage, and the driving force of the general poetic development within the literate environment. However, it does not mean that there is no poetic skill to be found in oral verse, even if its surroundings are the village pub and manor hall rather than the monastic refectory. To say that oral tradition "inevitably makes wretched what it touches" is to modernise the relationship of the two modes: in the modern Western society, the oral culture is subordinate to the written one to such an extent that in the absolute majority of instances it can only be derivative, and therefore "degrading".

³⁶ Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record. England 1066-1307* (London, 1979).

³⁷ Malcolm Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity,' in *The Medieval World*, ed. David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (London, 1973), pp. 555-77.

However, the penetration of literacy was immeasurably less significant in the England of eight centuries ago, where the two modes, albeit ranked in terms of their prestige, could sometimes run parallel.

A reconstruction of the continuity of oral narrative verse based on certain formal features of *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – poems which are only indirectly linked to the oral tradition to begin with – does not require the intervening period to contain poems of a comparable poetic worth (which is not saying much, since there are few such poems in the several centuries of post-medieval English poetry as well). The only requirement is for the oral tradition to sustain its poetic form – an ability often denied to it by modern scholars of Middle English, but supported by what we know about various genres of folklore or indeed about the nineteenth and twentieth-century Yugoslavian songs, Russian *byliny*, or Finnish runes, which existed in the periphery of societies at least as literate as medieval England.

Thus, while in the absence of relevant evidence it is perfectly unnecessary to imagine scopos singing about King Arthur to entertain the builders of Caernarfon Castle, it seems there is nothing to preclude the possibility. The implications of this thesis with regard to the existence of a post-Conquest tradition of oral narrative verse are perhaps surprising, but they are hardly impossible.

Prosody and alliteration

As follows from the name, the most prominent feature of Old and Middle English alliterative verse is alliteration. However, this prominence is no more than apparent. The defining properties of any verse are those that determine the *commensurability* of poetic lines. Such properties are referred to in this thesis as

"metrical prosody"; they determine the number of metrical positions in a verse-phrase (usually corresponding to the "number of syllables") and the status of each of the positions (usually "strong" or "weak", "lift" or "dip").

In contrast to that, end-rhyme or alliteration only determine the *correlation* of poetic lines. They are ornamental, rather than structural devices. It is true for alliteration in Old English verse, even though its assignment rules are very strict. It will be shown below that it is possible to describe the structure of Old English verse in purely prosodic terms, relegating the rules of alliteration to a separate module of the metrical system. In later Middle English, as suggested by Ralph Hanna, it is essential to distinguish between poems written in the heteromorphic metre (according to the definitions of Duggan and Cable) and poems that use alliteration heavily. Although the overlap between those two sets is significant, it is by no means complete.³⁸

The present thesis is concerned with the prosodic development of the long line, and so despite its title will only rarely mention alliteration, which is thus approached as the least significant factor in the reconstruction of the history of alliterative poetry. However, the term "alliterative", although misleading, is retained, so that phrases like "alliterative poems" should be taken to mean "poems in the long line metre", while the phrase "alliterative long line" is no more than a tautology.

Outline of the thesis

As mentioned before, this thesis attempts to show that the differences between the metre of the alliterative long line in Old English, early Middle English, and late Middle English follow necessarily from changes in linguistic prosody and are not

³⁸ Ralph Hanna, 'Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M.T. Tavormina and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 43-64.

explicable by any conscious adjustments made by the poets. Before proceeding with the reconstruction, I have to present my understanding of the alliterative metre of the three periods. For the reasons that will be given below, in the second part of the Introduction, my discussion is restricted to poems which are several thousand lines long. In early Middle English, the only such poem is Layamon's *Brut*. In Old English, the analysis centres on *Beowulf*, whose versification contains the largest and in a sense the most complete array of metrical regularities. However, it must be understood that with regard to the features discussed in the chapter on *Beowulf* the metrical systems of most other "classical" Old English poems are essentially identical, and none of the minor differences affect the general line of argument in the thesis. Thus, I take the liberty of saying "in Old English" where properly I should say "in *Beowulf*". In late Middle English, the poems analysed include *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Morte Arthure*, and the *Siege of Jerusalem*, chosen as typical representatives of the Alliterative Revival. Other poems that could just as easily have served the purpose, such as the *Wars of Alexander* or the pair *Cleanness* and *Patience*, were omitted (primarily for reasons of space). Most of the remaining major alliterative texts in late Middle English are either too short (e.g. *Winner and Waster*, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *St Erkenwald*, the poems of the *Piers Plowman* tradition) or metrically deviant in various individual ways (*William of Palerne*, *The Destruction of Troy*, *Piers Plowman*).³⁹ The alliterative metres of the three periods are discussed in three largely independent chapters before the overall reconstruction is attempted in Chapter 4. Thus, unlike previous theories of continuity, this thesis does not base its argument upon the evidence of transitional texts or famous scraps of meta-statements (such as Alcuin's quip about Ingeld or the mention

³⁹ The fact that most of the poems demonstrate a virtually identical metrical system, while each of the deviations is different in its own way, suggests that it is justifiable to view the former group as "the core of the tradition" and the latter as "offshoots" from it. The same applies to Old English with its "classical" and "late", "gnomic", etc. verse. It makes sense to base a historical reconstruction on the core texts, at least in the first iteration. Since the offshoots may in most instances tell us a lot about the core of the tradition, subsequently the picture can be elaborated with this additional evidence. However, this task falls outside the scope of the thesis.

of "loyal letters that have long been used in this land" in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).

The study of Old English metre has experienced a major boom in the last twenty years or so, and the number of monographs with new theories is now growing on a yearly basis. Ideally, it would be advisable to test each of the theories within the reconstruction framework proposed above (pp. 14-23). However, the sheer volume of recent scholarship makes such an endeavour neither feasible nor in fact expedient. The historical reconstruction presented in this thesis has no claims to being the only possible one: the primary goal is to demonstrate that such a reconstruction is possible in principle. Therefore, I have chosen the theory of Old English metre that appears to be optimal with regard to the requirements listed in the section on methodology below (p. 29 ff.), namely the analysis of Eduard Sievers, vindicated by Alan Bliss, improved and elaborated by Thomas Cable, and supplemented with a wealth of new evidence by Robert Fulk.

The beginning of Chapter 1, which presents my understanding of Sievers' initial statement and its interpretation by Bliss, is in a way an extension of the methodological statements in the second part of this Introduction. A point of major importance is the demonstration that all the metrical regularities of Sievers' and Cable's system are interrelated and cannot either be observed or exist without each other. The point is crucial for the subsequent historical reconstruction, since it implies that a change in the linguistic prosody that affects one of the metrical regularities should inevitably result in a restructuring of the whole system. Thereafter I concentrate on the phenomenon of resolution (and its suspension) and propose certain adjustments to join the chorus of new theories of Old English verse. The final section of Chapter 1 deals with the so called "hypermetric" verses, which in my opinion are composed in a well-defined metre that, while different from that of the "normal" verses, is constructed on precisely the

same prosodic principles. Evidence of both the normal and the "extended" Old English metre is used in the historical reconstruction in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2 leaps straight into the late Middle English period. Our understanding of late Middle English alliterative metre was improved enormously by the discoveries of Hoyt Duggan and Thomas Cable, who demonstrated independently and in a different fashion that the arrangement of unstressed syllables in the second half-lines had a very specific and typologically unusual form. However, the two scholars disagreed on a number of other matters, first of all on the issue of final *-e*: obviously, the presence or otherwise of the large proportion of inflectional syllables has a very significant effect on the scansion and the overall metrical statement. According to Cable, the matching of the linguistic and metrical data (cf. the second part of this Introduction) testified to the sounding of final *-e*. Duggan, however, was not prepared to go against the historical grammars of Middle English: in the apparent areas of provenance of most late Middle English alliterative texts, final *-e* is thought to have disappeared well before the latter part of the fourteenth century. Therefore, a large proportion of Chapter 2 is devoted to the issue of final *-e*. I analyse *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Morte Arthure* by employing the venerable method of matching the linguistic and metrical data and arrive at conclusions which are very similar to Cable's. Having thus determined the syllabic value of a large proportion of words, I can proceed to the study of metre proper. The second part of the chapter contains a number of observations and discussions that supplement the findings by Duggan and Cable and are subsequently used in the historical reconstruction in Chapter 4.

Ralph Hanna has shown that the metre of Layamon's *Brut*, far from being a kind of half-baked rhythmical prose, generally follows the rules recently posited for late Middle English alliterative poems.⁴⁰ Since the metrical study of late Middle English

⁴⁰ Ralph Hanna, 'Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' pp. 52-53 and 61-64.

verse is currently flourishing and significant advances have been made even after the initial discoveries by Duggan and Cable, while the metre of the *Brut* has attracted, as far as I am aware, minimal attention, it was necessary to place the discussion of late Middle English out of chronological order in Chapter 2. The following chapter on Layamon draws heavily on the late Middle English material. In the beginning of Chapter 3, I establish the general framework for the metrical analysis of Layamon, following the initial proposal of Hanna. The second part of the chapter deals primarily with several metrical features that the *Brut* appears to have retained from Old English verse and with the issues of assigning metrical stress to particular classes of linguistic units. The resulting statement of Layamon's metre, as well as the accompanying observations of Chapter 3 are subsequently used in the overall historical reconstruction.

The final chapter, although by far the shortest, brings together the findings of the three period chapters and attempts to reconstruct the development of English alliterative long line within the general framework outlined in this Introduction.

Methodology of the metrical study ⁴¹

Since the main body of this thesis is a study of three individual metres, it is essential to outline the methodology of my metrical analysis.

Any study of metre faces a number of methodological problems, but the one question that surfaces most often in critical comments is the hermeneutic circle. Since any human argument, being finite, is circular in principle, "a circular argument" in practice refers to "an argument that uses a small set of data", and is a matter of degree rather than method. In this case, a criticism based upon imputing "circularity of argument" to a theory is misplaced. The worth of any theory, and of any metrical theory in particular, lies not in the impossible escape from logical circularity, but in accommodation of the largest possible set of data. While alternative interpretations will always be possible, the relative value (i.e. relative probability) of two theories is determined purely by the size of their respective "circles", including both the material and its interpretation.

This thesis is based on the assumption that for a metrical theory, the "circle size" involves:

⁴¹ In most respects the methodological approach presented in this section and adopted in the thesis corresponds closely to those set out, for example, by R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 1-66; Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1991) and 'Middle English Meter and Its Theoretical Implications,' *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 2 (1988), pp. 47-69; Stephen Barney, 'Langland's Prosody: the State of Study,' in *The Endless Knot*, ed. M.T. Tavormina and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 65-85 and 'Chaucer's Troilus: Meter and Grammar,' in *Essays on the Art of Chaucer's Verse*, ed. Alan Gaylord (London, 2001), pp. 163-191 (repr. from 'Studies in Troilus: Chaucer's Text, Meter, and Diction,' *Medieval Texts and Studies* 14 (East Lansing, 1993), pp. 77-114).

- 1) Descriptive force. It includes: what part of the material is described adequately; how many rules there are (the fewer, the better – which is part of the "economy of description"); what the general applicability of each rule is (the greater the number of rules that apply in all or most environments, the better; the greater the number of environments that each particular rule applies in, the better).
- 2) Restrictive force. It is no less important than the descriptive force and is the other side of the same coin.⁴² In any verse, there are linguistically possible patterns that do not occur. The greater the number of absent patterns ruled out by the theory, the better. So, the restrictive force could also be defined as "the descriptive force for patterns that do not occur".
- 3) Internal cohesion of the rules. Preferably, different rules within the theory should be related, e.g. by operating for and in terms of similar kinds of linguistic units, or by being applicable in a similar way in different contexts. Also, the rules should preferably be hierarchical: applicability and precise mode of operation of some rules should be determined by some others. In short, the rules should form a *system*.
- 4) External cohesion of the rules. The rules should have either synchronic or historical justification. They may be demonstrably based upon certain linguistic rules; or they may be shown to have parallels in other contemporary metres; or they could be shown to be a legacy of a historically earlier metrical system. In the latter case, the correspondence will never mean identity, since any rule is transformed in a different metrical system.

⁴² For example, a metrical theory stating that each verse in Old English should contain at least one syllable has a perfect descriptive force, unless we consider the missing parts of *Waldere* as evidence to the contrary. However, since the restrictive force of the theory is close to zero, so is its general value. An example of an unrestrictive theory is David Hoover's interpretation of Old English verse (*A New Theory of Old English Meter*, New York, 1985).

- 5) Descriptive force for linguistic phenomena. The metrical theory should be able to account for such things as syntactic inversions and metrical fillers. It should be consistent with grammar; any linguistic variation that results from the application of the theory should be within the bounds of variation known from descriptions of the language contemporary with the metrical system described.

As soon as a metrical theory has been produced and described, its precise mode of discovery becomes irrelevant. It is assumed here that the theory may and should be evaluated only within the parameters listed above.

A historical study of metre is undermined by two variables: textual imperfection and linguistic variation. It would seem that they render all or nearly all the evidence inaccessible. Unreliable evidence affects all of the parameters listed above: any analysis can hardly proceed without a clear set of rhythmical patterns. Thus, significant textual imperfection and linguistic variation may make metrical studies almost worthless.

It would appear that the aspect of textual imperfection introduces another parameter that should be used to evaluate a historical metrical study: the degree of authenticity of evidence. However, it is not actually so. As long as the changes made to the text in transmission are "errors" (mechanical errors proper or conscious alterations made without any regard to the metre), the metrical theory runs into problems only if it cannot account for a significant part of the evidence.⁴³ If it can, transmission errors become largely immaterial. So, Eduard Sievers' theory of Old English verse, developed by Alan Bliss and Thomas Cable, accounts for 99% of verses in *Beowulf*.⁴⁴ With the

⁴³ If the changes in question are not mechanical and take metre into account, it only means that the theory describes the metre of the reviser-scribe rather than the author. From the point of view of a metrical study, there is no difference.

⁴⁴ Eduard Sievers, 'Zur Rhythmik des germanischen Alliterationsverses,' *PBB* 10 (1885), 209-314, 451-545 and *Altgermanische Metrik* (Halle, 1893); A.J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1962); Thomas Cable, *The Meter and Melody of Beowulf* (Urbana, 1974) and *The English Alliterative Tradition*

exception of one parameter (historical final *-e* in singular nouns), the set of rules for late Middle English alliterative verse suggested at the end of chapter 2 accounts for over 99% of verses in SGGK. So, since textual imperfection is a matter of degree, in theory it can be debilitating – but in practice it by no means always is. Of course, the incompleteness of description leaves uncertainty with regard to certain particulars of the theory; nevertheless, it does not affect the general framework in any serious way – certainly not to the extent suggested, for example, by Hoyt Duggan.⁴⁵ A percent or two of deviating verses does not affect a theory that scores high on each of the five parameters listed above (as Sievers' and Cable's theory of Old English metre certainly does) precisely because we expect the extant text to be imperfect.

In a series of articles on Middle English alliterative verse, Hoyt Duggan proposed a method of evidence authentication that consisted in the comparison of several extant witnesses.⁴⁶ He noted that the verses that deviated from his theory almost never occurred in the same irregular form in another witness; at the same time, most of the "regular" verses re-occurred unchanged. It might seem then that evidence authentication has become one of the functions (and evaluation parameters) of the metre: the metre has acquired the ability to authenticate rather than shape evidence. Such superpowers lead to a situation radically different from that described at the start of this section.

However, the powers are imaginary. Indeed, (a) the verses that deviated from Duggan's theory almost never occurred in the same irregular form in another witness, while (b) most of the "regular" verses re-occurred unchanged. But there also were (c) rare irregular verses re-occurring in two witnesses, and (d) not so rare verses with

(Philadelphia, 1991); R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia, 1992). The theories are discussed in Chapter 1.

⁴⁵ 'The Evidential Basis for Old English Metrics.' *Studies in Philology* 85 (1988), 145-163.

⁴⁶ See especially 'The Shape of the B-Verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *Speculum* 61 (1986), 564-592 and 'Alliterative Patterning as a Basis for Emendation in Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 8 (1986), 73-105.

significantly different form in different manuscripts, but with metrically regular patterns in each case. That Duggan admitted patterns in categories (b) and (d) and rejected those in (a) and (c) is due to his formulation and use of a metrical theory. Thus, the situation is totally unchanged: metrical theory shapes the evidence rather than pre-authenticates it. As Duggan demonstrated in his groundbreaking studies, witness comparison is an extremely powerful tool of metrical *discovery*. However, it is not the only possible tool, since as suggested above, its logical procedure is not fundamentally different from any other method (e.g. analysis of metrical fillers, or indeed of any distributions at all). When we arrive at the stage of theory evaluation, re-occurrence of rhythmical patterns in different manuscripts is but one of the facts that adds to the general value of the theory (since the divergence of mechanical errors is only to be expected – which is, of course, the principle underlying the stemmatic analysis in textual criticism). At the same time, its significance is not greater than that of any of the five parameters listed at the start of this section.

The statistical method of witness comparison does not solve the problem of textual imperfection. At the very least, there will remain cases (usually rare, but theoretically not necessarily so) where both witnesses give metrically incorrect readings. What we may hope to reconstruct is the metrical archetype, which is just another imperfect copy, even if considerably more correct than the corresponding extant texts. So in principle nothing has changed – and in practice, as mentioned before, metrical theories of, say, *Beowulf* did not appear to suffer excessively from textual imperfection anyway.⁴⁷

A statistical method may suggest ideas, but shaping them into a theory (i.e. interpreting them) is impossible without the notorious "application of thought". With regard to textual imperfection, we will still have to apply the methods of textual

⁴⁷ Not because of the refusal by Old English metrists to consider the problem of evidence, but because the Sieversian theory has a very high descriptive force and scores very highly on all of the five parameters listed above.

criticism in order to determine the probable evidence for a metrical study. Within the metrical study itself, any statistical data will have no value at all unless it is interpreted – and that means construction of a theory, whatever its complexity. Despite his declared reliance on the statistical method, Duggan does indeed construct a theory that in its essentials may be and has been fully vindicated under any of the five parameters listed above.

The statistical approach is seen by its adherents as the solution to the problem of subjectivity. However, as long as the approach remains statistical, it remains completely uninformative, since to produce information we must interpret a ratio. At the same time, the statistical approach remains objective only as long as no interpretation is attempted. Thus, the only way to the desired "objectivity" is to forswear cognition as such. There are metrical studies that profitably take that route. A prominent and influential example is *The Metre of Beowulf* by Alan Bliss, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 1. There it will be argued that uninterpreted ratios are not only uninformative, but can also be misleading and harmful for future investigation. At the moment it should only be said that statistical arguments are not employed in this thesis. If I cannot suggest a synchronic or historical interpretation of a non-complementary distribution, I declare my ignorance and do not employ the ratio in any future discussion.

The second major problem of a historical metrical analysis is linguistic variation. Normally, we would expect to formulate a metrical statement, apply it to the linguistic material, and find regular correlation between metrical units (e.g. strong and weak positions) and linguistic units (e.g. morpheme and word classes). However, at the level of the language – Old or Middle English – we are aware of the existence of variant forms (usually we will be concerned with variant *syllabic* forms) for many lexical and morphological sequences. Many such variant forms will be potentially possible in the text, however precise our knowledge about the dialect and date of the poem. Worse still,

at the level of the idiolect, particularly poetic idiolect (which is more inclusive by nature), it is inevitable that at least some lexical and morphological sequences will not be represented by one and the same variant throughout the poem. With one part of the equation – metre – being undetermined, and the other – language – being variable, it is not possible to come up with anything other than a very tentative description. In this case, historical metrics cannot go any further and thus has a very restricted value.

Fortunately, just as in the case of textual imperfection, practice often turns out to be much more forgiving than theory. There are, of course, texts where the combination of linguistic variation, textual imperfection and our deficient knowledge of metre makes reconstruction unstraightforward, incomplete or perhaps ultimately impossible. A case in point is early Middle English *Poema Morale*: although the basic metrical model is the septenarius, it is possible that the author did not follow the alternating accentual-syllabic pattern strictly. Some of the words that are disyllabic in spelling always produce a good iambic rhythm if scanned as monosyllabic (e.g. *panne*, *bute*, *sollen*), but for many others strict iambics would suggest alternative scansion in different verses. The significant divergence of the six manuscripts suggests an uneasy textual history, and the texts reconstructed in the available critical editions do not come close to solving the metrical problems.⁴⁸ A similar situation can be observed in the late Middle English *Pearl*.⁴⁹ The general iambic movement of the verse is very alluring. Also, as shown by Duggan, a monosyllabic scansion of *oper*, *syben*, *wheper*, *neuer*, *euer*, *ouer* consistently produces a good iambic rhythm. However, in other respects the correlation of metre and language is not as successful. Whether we posit the grammar of final *-e* or not, there remain numerous points within each stanza where deviation from an iambic rhythm is

⁴⁸ *Das mittelenglische Poema Morale*, ed. Hermann Lewin (Halle, 1881). *Das frühmittelenglische Poema Morale*, ed. Hans Marcus (Leipzig, 1934).

⁴⁹ Cf. especially Hoyt Duggan, 'Libertine Scribes and Maidenly Editors: Meditations on Textual Criticism and Metrics,' in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. by C.B. McCully and J.J. Anderson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 219-237 and Richard Osberg, 'The Prosody of Middle English *Pearl* and the Alliterative Lyric Tradition,' pp. 150-174 in the same volume.

unavoidable. Hence the wild divergence of opinion on the metre of this important poem.⁵⁰

At the same time, in some poems application of a sufficiently rigid metrical statement produces excellent and consistent results. Not only does the statement allow one to determine the particular linguistic forms used consistently throughout the poem, but it can even reveal the lexical and morphological sequences that can be variable within the poem's idiolect. One possible example is the non-syllabic sonorants in *Beowulf*. In that poem, the match of the metrical theory and language is so good that verses with a historically non-syllabic sonorant form a considerable subset of exceptions (22 instances in Fulk's count, e.g. 1681a *wundorsmiþa geweorc*). Since the sonorant historically was non-syllabic, we are justified in scanning the verses as SSxpS, etc. to comply with the requirement of four positions (see Chapter 1). At the same time, there are five instances where the same basic requirement shows the sonorant to be syllabic, (e.g. 1587a *aldorleasne*).⁵¹ Thus, we can assume a variation between the two forms, which from the historical standpoint would be considered "old" and "new". Since the observation fits in nicely with what is known about the history of Old English, the variation does not undermine the validity of the metrical statement. On the contrary: the

⁵⁰ Regular tetrameter is either advocated or implied by J.R.R. Tolkien, ed. and trans. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and *Sir Orfeo* (London, 1975): "accentual rhythm of alternating strong ... and weak ... syllables ... in spite of the variations that are used" (pp. 146-147); C.S. Northrup, 'A Study of Metrical Structure of the Middle English Poem *The Pearl*,' PMLA 12 (1897), pp. 326-340; and O.F. Emerson, 'Imperfect Lines in *Pearl* and the Rimed Parts of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,' *Modern Philology* 19 (1921), pp. 131-141; 'Some Notes on *The Pearl*,' PMLA 37 (1922), pp. 52-93; 'More Notes on *The Pearl*,' PMLA 42 (1927), pp. 807-831. The accentual solution is preferred by A.C. Cawley and J.J. Anderson, eds. *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, (London, 1976): "the line should be read as a development of the native four-stress alliterative line, and not as a clumsy attempt to put together four iambs or anapaests" (p. 258), as well as some other editors of the poem, including Eric Gordon (*Pearl*, Oxford, 1953), Charles Moorman (*The Works of Gawain Poet*, Jackson, 1977) and William Vantuono (*The Pearl Poems: An Omnibus Edition*, Notre Dame, 1984). The "anapaests" comment in Cawley and Anderson is apparently directed at Israel Gollancz (*Pearl*, London, 1918), who insists on the "sufficient recognition" of the "trissyllabic character of the metre" (pp. xxiii-xxiv, footnote). Two other editors, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (*The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, Exeter, 1999) remark with a Delphian caution: "The governing principle of rhythm here is that of four-stressed accentual verse of an iambic pattern" (p. 50).

⁵¹ For the discussion of the phenomenon and its further metrical-linguistic implications, see R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, pp. 66-91.

statement becomes all the more probable since it can pick up such a fine linguistic point and thus increase the external cohesion of the theory (parameter 4 in the list above).

Similarly, another rigid metrical statement shows that the inflectional grammar of final *-e* was fully functional in the authorial dialects of SGGK and MA (Chapter 2). The perfect match between the two is a very strong evidence in favour of both the employed metrical theory and the resultant grammar, which corresponds in minute detail to that traditionally posited, for example, for Chaucer.⁵² The metre shows that the inflectional grammar was retained not only for major categories such as adjectival endings or verbal plurals, but categories with a relatively minor functional load, such as the distinction in the imperative singular of strong and weak verbs. At the same time, the area where the match of language and metre is least perfect is the historical *-e* in singular nouns (in SGGK only). Since the nominal *-e* was quickly becoming a lexical rather than a grammatical marker, it is precisely the area where the instability and loss of final *-e* should have been at the most advanced stage. The metrical statement is also good enough to detect – with a complete consistency – that the inflected sequence *-en-* is always syncopated when it belongs to a nominal or verbal stem (*happen, listen, herken, gomen*), but is never syncopated in strong past participles and adjectives (*comen, haypen*).⁵³ On the other hand, the inflected sequence *-er-* is syncopated in all cases. These regularities are observed in all three main poems in my corpus: SGGK, MA and SJ. However, in MA and in MA only the metrical statement shows that words like *bern* and *stern* can develop an epenthetic vowel: *beryn, steryn*. (The observation does not contradict the syncope in the inflected *-ere* sequences, since there the first vowel is unstressed.) A similar process occurs in a word like *thurgh*, which metre shows to have an occasional disyllabic form *thorowe* – again only in MA. However, not only

⁵² The most thorough description is ten Brink, *The Language and Metre of Chaucer* (London, 1901). See also E. Talbot Donaldson, 'Chaucer's Final *-e*', *PMLA* 63 (1948), 1101-1124 and M.L. Samuels, 'Chaucerian Final *-e*', *Notes and Queries* 217 (1972), 445-448.

⁵³ On the possibility of inflection in *haypen*, etc. in late Middle English, see pp. 109-115.

does this particular poem employ both variants of the word, but it consistently uses them in different metrical positions: the monosyllabic *thurgh* always stands verse-initially, the disyllabic *thorowe* verse-finally. Thus, the metrical statement allows one to build up a consistent and very detailed picture of grammatical and phonological forms used in a group of poems or in a particular text. More than that: the statement allows to construct a *consistent* picture of linguistic *variation* itself.

The same fortunate match between language and metre occurs in another poem analysed in this thesis, Layamon's *Brut*. The amount and the elaboration of linguistic data that can easily be discovered in SGGK, MA or Layamon by the application of quite rigid metres is enormous. Since the main interest of this thesis is metrical, and the space is limited, I will usually restrict myself to noting only those linguistic-metrical matches (and further linguistic regularities) that are required to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the general framework of the employed metres is correct. However, in small available samples, where the specific interpretation of each instance is crucial, I almost always mention my reasons for the particular scansion of a verse. The general conclusion is that the number of grammatical categories and lexical and morphological sequences with variable syllabic forms within one poem is relatively small in SGGK, MA and the *Brut*. It is sufficiently small not to interfere with metrical-linguistic analysis, but on the contrary to provide additional consistent evidence in support of the metrical statement.

There is hardly any need to suppose that the excellent match of language and metre in SGGK, MA and Layamon on the one hand and the nebulous results obtained for the *Poema Morale* and *Pearl* are due to the strictness of the alliterative metre as opposed to the amorphous nature of the "creole" iambic verse.⁵⁴ If we remember how

⁵⁴ In some cases it may well be true: for example, the grammar of final *-e* in *Pearl* or the wheels of SGGK does not produce results which are remotely as consistent as those for the long lines of the latter poem. Of course, it might also mean that the *Gawain*-poet did not feel the need to keep to the archaic grammar when not composing in the archaic traditional metre; more probable, though, is the conclusion that *Pearl*

regular the septenarius is in the *Ormulum*, roughly contemporary with *Poema Morale*, and how good a match to Middle English grammar the iambic metre produces in Chaucer, it appears that for certain reasons that may include textual history or iambic metres of variable strictness some poems lend themselves better to the straightforward matching of language and metre than others. The proof in each case is in studying the poem.

Thus, although in theory linguistic variation should have a debilitating effect on metrical reconstruction, in practice it can be exactly the opposite. A corollary of the above method is that it is only possible to find the consistency in linguistic variation – and thus to achieve a high probability for the proposed metrical statement – in a poem of considerable length. It is especially true of Middle English alliterative poems, where the positions that allow one-syllable precise tests are relatively few (usually one, and maximum two in the b-verse, as opposed to eight or so in a line of iambic tetrameter). Even a poem several hundred lines long would not contain enough comparable material to make confident decisions with regard to most linguistic units and categories. This is the main reason why the reconstruction of the history of the alliterative metre attempted in this thesis is based almost exclusively on the evidence of a handful of major poems: *Beowulf*, the *Brut*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Morte Arthure* and to a lesser extent the *Siege of Jerusalem*. At the next stage, the general framework constructed on the verifiable evidence of those poems can be applied to and elaborated in minor poems of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, the task falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

Another related point is the treatment of exceptions. The apparent exceptions to a metrical regularity that fall into a specific pattern and can be shown to constitute a linguistic (or sometimes metrical) feature with a good historical or synchronic

(and by extension the wheels of SGGK) is simply not composed in strict iambics, since iambic rhythm is unachievable in many verses where inflections are not an issue.

justification are treated as metrically regular verses. As suggested above, at a certain point such subsets actually start constituting evidence *in favour* of the employed metrical statement. Often the existence of such a subset is mentioned in the text or a footnote, but in other, particularly trivial instances such materials are passed over silently. However, those exceptions that do not fall into a clear subset within the particular poem are listed in full and presented as counter-evidence. It will be evident on many occasions that such verses can easily be brought into line with the metrical statement by a well-known Middle English variant. For example, I would list SGGK.141b *mynn hym to bene* as having an irregular empty final dip, simply because the inflected Middle English infinitive *to bene* < OE *to beonne* does not occur elsewhere in SGGK or the two other poems in my corpus. In many other instances, emendation is unproblematic: for example, SGGK.1982b *with ful colde sykynges* is one of only three verses in SGGK, MA and SJ that violates several regularities presented in Chapter 2. Omission of *ful* makes the line unexceptional. Nevertheless, since neither the inflected *to bene* nor the reading *with colde sykynges* are produced purely by the regular matching of language and metre, I list the verses as exceptional and go no further. I hope that the minute number of exceptions left by this pedantic procedure will in itself be a testament to the level of correspondence between grammar and metre in the *Brut*, SGGK, MA and SJ. The procedure is not a reflection of my opinion with regard to the correct readings in SGGK.141b or SGGK.1982b. However, because of the general consistency of results, I can afford for the opinion to be immaterial for the purposes of this thesis.

The final methodological point concerns the treatment of manuscript spelling. It should be clear from the above that the main external evidence in favour of the proposed metrical statements is sought in the matching of linguistic and metrical units. The initial stage of matching takes into account all linguistic variants possible in the particular period. Therefore, the precise form standing in the manuscript has to be

disregarded. At a certain point, when the correlation between language and metre has successfully been established, we obtain the knowledge of what particular linguistic forms and variants are used in the poem. Strictly speaking, that stage completes the metrical study as such. However, it is also possible to go further and compare the phonological and morphological forms revealed by the metre with those that stand in the manuscript. This stage belongs to the domain of textual history and dialectology.

Among the major poems discussed in this thesis, *Beowulf* turns out to have the most faithful spelling with regard to its metre. The most prominent exceptions are the non-syllabic sonorants mentioned above and the non-contracted verbs (e.g. 25b *man geþeon*).⁵⁵ With the exception of sporadic non-systemic errors, the spelling system in the Caligula text of Layamon's *Brut* is also a good guide to the number of syllables (pp. 190-194 and p. 264). However, that is clearly not the case in SGGK and MA.⁵⁶ Thus, although quotations from the poems follow their major editions, the implied syllabic patterns depend not on (for example) the presence or absence of graphical <e>, but on the lexical classes and grammatical categories of the constituent words.

⁵⁵ On contraction, see Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, pp. 92-121.

⁵⁶ In spite of the general inconsistency, many regularities of spelling that reflect the metre can still be uncovered in Cotton Nero A.x. See Ad Putter and Myra Stokes, 'Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the *Gawain*-Poet', in *Medieval English Measures*, ed. Ruth Kennedy, *Parergon* 18 (2000), pp. 77-95, and Ad Putter, Judith Jefferson, and Myra Stokes, *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse* (Oxford, 2007).

CHAPTER 1. Old English metre

Theories of Old English metre: the Sievers tradition

This chapter sets out to assemble the evidence on Old English metre to be used subsequently in the historical reconstruction of Chapter 4. The interpretative framework adopted here is based on the work of Eduard Sievers and his metrical followers, primarily Thomas Cable and Robert Fulk. The first part of the chapter deals with an issue of general theoretical importance: should traditional verse be viewed as a restricted set of unrelated rhythmical patterns, or is it possible and necessary to look for an overarching metrical principle? The answer is significant not only for the conclusions of Chapter 1, but for the later discussions of Middle English verse as well. Further on in this chapter, I present my understanding of the interpretations of Sievers and his followers and highlight those points that will be relevant to the ultimate historical reconstruction. I also propose some adjustments to the analyses of Cable and Fulk to improve both the synchronic description of the Old English system (properly, the

system of *Beowulf*) and its adequacy as a historical input for the Middle English alliterative long line. The synchronic arguments for the proposed adjustments form the latter part of this chapter.

A metrical system or rhythmical catalogue: Sievers, Pope, and Bliss

The study of Old English metre did not start with the work of Eduard Sievers, but it was his metrical analysis that formed the point of departure for most of the subsequent studies, and a point of reference for every single one.¹ The most well known feature of his work is the so called "Five Types", five basic rhythmical patterns available to Old English verse:

type A	SxSx	Beo.2b <i>þrym gefrunon</i>
type B	xSxS	Beo.42a <i>on flodes æht</i>
type C	xSSx	Beo.1b <i>in geardagum</i>
type D	SSsx or SSxs	Beo.31a <i>leof landfruma</i>
type E	SsxS	Beo.50a <i>murnende mod</i>

The Five Types can be perceived in two ways. Firstly, it is possible to view them as primary evidence – evidence to be elaborated, defined more accurately, and interpreted historically, typologically, or aesthetically. Secondly, they can be seen as a theory, a result of interpretation and generalisation of the basic material. In the latter case, the Five Types should depend on some initial theoretical assumptions, employed

¹ Eduard Sievers, 'Zur Rhythmik des germanischen Alliterationsverses,' *PBB* 10 (1885), 209-314, 451-545; *Altgermanische Metrik* (Halle, 1893).

to analyse and classify the basic material, and any critique of Sievers' metrical system should address not the Five Types, but their theoretical foundation.

In a frequently quoted passage, Henry Sweet remarks that Sievers' critics "seem to forget that Sievers' classification of the Old English metrical forms into types is not a theory, but a statement of facts, and that the complexity and irregularity to which they object is a fact, not a theory."²

A similar approach to the Five Types is implied in the study by John C. Pope.³ His catalogue of verses is essentially a pronunciation guide to *Beowulf*, not a metrical analysis, as his theory contains only rules for performance, not competence. The catalogue proceeds along the general lines of classification proposed by Sievers, with reference to the five basic patterns and several of their sub-types. It is easy to see though that a great number of patterns, including those not occurring in *Beowulf* and not envisaged within the Five Types framework, could be described by Pope's system of notation and included in his catalogue. Thus, Pope's theory does not need Sievers' types, and the "initial beat" hypothesis can very well be formulated without the reference to "types B and C."

The over-inclusiveness of Pope's theory is but one of its major drawbacks. Much more fundamental is his implicit claim that the commensurability of poetic verses can be determined by physical time. Theoretically, we should expect to find that the length of relevant metrical sequences (verses or their constituents) is measured in linguistic units, rather than units of absolute physical time. At least, this is the case in all modern European traditions, where the basic units of measurement are syllables, morae, and stresses. If a general statement of Old English metre could be achieved with reference to the units, rules, and models of the Old English language, there would be no need to resort to physical isochrony. A conclusion (so troubling for Pope) that Old English

² Henry Sweet, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader*, 7th ed. (Oxford, 1894), p. x.

³ John C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1966).

poetry would then appear to us as "a very queer and unintelligible thing" is then inappropriate: the poetry would appear "queer" to speakers of a different language (e.g. Modern English), who do not have the inherent command of the units, rules, and models of Old English. As it stands, Pope's study is a theory of the rhythm of *Beowulf*, not its metre; hence the title of his book. The theory is non-prescriptive, allowing for any number of radically different rhythmical interpretations of Old English poetry.

Alan Bliss's views on whether the Five Types are a "fact" or a "theory" might seem somewhat self-contradictory. In the Preface to the *Metre of Beowulf*, he writes that "[t]he result of this re-examination was a triumphant vindication of Sievers."⁴ This evidently implies a test of the assumptions underlying the Five Types, because otherwise all that Bliss had to do was to re-scan *Beowulf* and confirm that the patterns noted by Sievers indeed occur in the poem - a statement of Sievers' scholarly conscientiousness rather than Bliss's scholarly insight. In Chapter 13, "Classification", Bliss suggests that "[i]f it were not for the desirability of preserving the outline of Sievers' classification as far as possible, a more scientific and significant classification could be obtained..." (p. 84). The "desirability" results from the historical fact that Sievers' system "has become so deeply ingrained into the minds of students that no entirely new system stands any chance of success" (p. 81).

But although Bliss says explicitly that any classification involves "underlying assumptions", and therefore can never be a simple "statement of facts" (p. 3), he substantiates the "desirability of preserving the outline of Sievers' classification" with the following: "Moreover, Sievers' five types really do exist ... they really do represent the major rhythmical forms of Old English Verse" (p. 81).

The seeming contradiction in these statements comes from Bliss' understanding of the term "system". By that he evidently means *a set of parameters used for*

⁴ A.J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1962), p. v.

classification, not a set of rules used for distinguishing metrical and non-metrical patterns (or, similarly, *a set of rules used for production of metrical verses*). Thus, Sievers' system for him is no more than a classification, which he is free to elaborate by introducing new distinguishing features, coming up consequently with a greater number of catalogued sub-types. With this reservation, even major departures from Sievers (such as admitting the "light verses" with only one metrical stress) do not affect the general "system" of the Five Types. It may happen because without any attempt at interpretation (i.e. construction of a coherent metrical system, see Introduction) the parameters used for classification may be disconnected in principle, and most often *are* disconnected in Bliss's practice.

Therefore, it is difficult to agree that Bliss's re-examination produced a "vindication of Sievers"; his classification is only superficially related to Sievers' system, however one understands the term. The refusal to interpret the evidence and to construct a prescriptive metrical system brings into doubt the value as well as the validity of Bliss's choice of classifying parameters, his procedure, and possible findings.

But are there actually no theoretical assumptions and statements underlying Sievers' system of the Five Types? One need go no further than his seminal 1885 article to find them. They can be summarised as follows:

- (1) The verse (half-line) consists of two parts, which are called *feet* ("in Ermangelung eines besseren Namens"; the feet need not be equal in length). Each foot can consist of either one member (lift), two members (lift and dip), or three members (lift, dip, and secondary lift). The three kinds of feet can be combined only in such ways so as to obtain a verse containing four and only four members.

- (2) The lift can be formed by a long syllable, or by a "short + any syllable" sequence (*resolution*). If two lifts (or a lift and a secondary lift) are on the adjacent syllables (*clashing stress*), the second of them may (but does not have to) fall on one short syllable only (*suspension of resolution*).⁵

There are also succinct rules stating what kinds of words and morphemes may occur in lifts and/or dips.

The statement (1) produces the Five Types as a logical necessity. Indeed, the possible combinations of two "feet" are as follows:

I. Sx + Sx

II. Sx + xS

III. xS + xS

IV. xS + Sx

V. S + Ssx

VI. Ssx + S

The second pattern is ruled out: Sievers implies throughout his analysis that a dip may contain any number of adjacent weak syllables, unless otherwise specified. Thus, the second pattern would only have 3 positions, rather than the four required. The rest of the logically possible patterns are the familiar Five Types. (Interestingly, the possibility of the xxSS pattern – usually known as *F – does not even arise. The pattern is a result of Bliss's reading of Sievers' system, and will be discussed below.)

It cannot be overemphasised that Sievers' Five Types are *the only logically possible patterns* produced by the rules he presents in the 1885 article and summarised

⁵ Sievers, *Zur Rhythmik des germanischen Alliterationsverses*, pp. 220-221, 270.

in statement (1), and so any later claims to the arbitrary choice of metrical patterns by Sievers are no more than a misunderstanding. Sievers' "Five Types" are a "statement of facts" only in the sense that any theory purports to be so – and it is clearly not the sense implied by Sweet.

Apparently, it was simpler to state (and learn) the theory in five short graphical sequences, rather than two paragraphs of text. But what might have seemed only a difference of presentation led ultimately to the logic behind the Five Types being forgotten or neglected, and the Types starting to be perceived as raw data, "a statement of facts". But as soon as the Types turned into an arbitrary set of patterns, the task of an Old English metrist obviously was to provide a full catalogue of possible patterns, stacked arbitrarily under the headings "A", "B", etc., but actually with no need whatsoever to go beyond a continuous numerical listing. Still, any cataloguer cannot help feeling that entries should be organised under some headings and subheadings. Thus, for example, Bliss, in his catalogue, tentatively proposes to group listed patterns according to a) the frequency of their occurrence in the first or second half-line, and b) the frequency of double alliteration when the pattern occurs in the first half-line.⁶ However, a statistical, rather than structural grouping cannot be admitted as a statement of metre.

The difference between a catalogue of patterns (e.g., the list of the Five Types) and the statement (1) is that the former, taken by itself, is descriptive (i.e. analyses the material in accordance with certain parameters which are derived from previous scholarly experience and are not necessarily relevant for the analysis), while the latter has some prescriptive force (and thus can be taken as a statement of metre). The reason both for Sievers' non-insistence on the principle of four positions, and for the neglect of the statement (1) in the subsequent history of Old English metrics, was probably the

⁶ Bliss, p. 85.

insufficient prescriptive force of the principle as formulated by Sievers: it excluded a number of frequent rhythmical patterns in *Beowulf*. So, Sievers specifies in the general statement partly summarised above that five-member verses do occur in the first half-line (foot combinations 2+3 and 3+2); also, an extra dip may appear (rarely in the second half-line, quite often in the first) as an anacrusis in the patterns which we would otherwise expect to start with a lift. Not as importantly, but also somewhat confusingly, the medial dip can be "monosyllabic, disyllabic, or polysyllabic," and the initial dip "usually has 1-3 syllables" (while the verse-final dip is always monosyllabic).

The admission of the five-member verses and those with anacrusis obviously undermines the prescriptive force of (1). It becomes impossible to criticise directly the verses deviating from the four-member pattern. Instead, it is necessary to determine how many similar verses appear in the corpus; the degree of their similarity; and how problematic they all are on non-metrical grounds. Essentially, this means dealing with a catalogue of verses, rather than a metrical system.

As has already been mentioned, Bliss founded his classification purely on the combination of the "substantial differences of distribution" with the "obvious rhythmical differences" (p. 80), but without any reference to a resultant general theory. Such a method is dangerous for many reasons. The most obvious one is that the rhythmical differences may not be "obvious". As Bliss remarks, "[t]he assumptions of insignificance underlying the classifications of Sievers, Möller, Kaluza, Trautmann and others seem to be based almost entirely on subjective grounds" (p. 4). The remedy, in Bliss's opinion, would be "to establish objective criteria of what is and what is not a metrically significant difference between two types of verse. Wherever possible, I have used the following statistical criteria: 1) the proportion of a-verses to b-verses; 2) the proportion of a-verses with double alliteration".⁷ However, the lack of objectivity

⁷ Bliss, p. 4.

ascribed by Bliss to his predecessors is illusory, and comes from a contentious notion that any theory, or any fundamental knowledge, should be discovered by means of deduction. The view taken in this thesis is that any theory can only be evaluated by how completely and economically it accounts for the data (as well as by the range of data chosen), while the route of observation that led to the statement of the theory is absolutely immaterial (see Introduction). In this sense, any analytical criteria are subjective (and any theory is non-conclusive), but they must necessarily be present as relevant components in the theory. It is indeed easy to see that Bliss's "objective criteria" of classification quoted above resurface precisely at the point where he makes his only tentative attempt at a general theory.⁸

The second danger associated with Bliss's method is that even if any rhythmical difference is combined with any difference of distribution, it does not follow that the latter has been caused by metrical phenomena. Quite the contrary, most differences of distribution result from the interaction of the metrical system with a variety of external factors, which may include language, subject matter, individual and/or traditional style, etc. Without any pre-existing notion of the metrical system, it is not possible to determine the boundary between the intra- and extra-metrical phenomena. A list of distributionally interesting patterns can certainly be thought-provoking and helpful for the discovery of a metrical theory, but as the possibilities of non-theory-restricted classification are next to endless, in practice such a list of random patterns would be at best of questionable value, and at worst misleading. A rhythmical catalogue is a necessary study, but certainly one that is possible only after the basic metrical system has been established.

The third danger of the method suggested in Bliss originates from the word "substantial": what difference of distribution is substantial enough? We can assume with

⁸ Cf. Bliss, p. 4 and p. 80.

a large degree of probability, though not certainty, that if the distribution is complementary (100% vs 0%), we are dealing with a feature of metre. However, Bliss perceives metrical evidence in other ratios as well. For example, the "real metrical significance" of the "distinction between secondary and tertiary stress" is proved by several ratios.⁹ One of them demonstrates that while the distribution of the type A2k verses (e.g. 838b *guðrinc monig*) with an element carrying secondary stress is approximately equal between the first and second half-line (48% and 52% respectively), the distribution of the same type with a tertiary stress has a ratio of 20% in the first to 80% in the second half-line.¹⁰ One can object that, firstly, the number of instances in question is too small to make statistical conclusions (only 12 b-verses); secondly, there are 3 generally unproblematic a-verses which prevent us from being able to find here anything but at best a rhythmical preference;¹¹ and although rhythmical preferences can be found in astounding numbers in every poetic tradition (cf. esp. the work of Gasparov's school on modern Russian poetry¹²), they have no bearing whatsoever on metrical theory, nor its discovery.

Another ratio intended to prove the metrical significance of the distinction between secondary and tertiary stress is that for type D1 (e.g. 1083a *wig Hengeste*; 1069a *hæleð Healf-Dena*): 38 verses with tertiary stress occur in the first half-line, while there are 119 in the second half-line.¹³ The ratio can be evened out significantly, if we realise that the figure of 119 contains 58 verses with a weak preterite suffix (e.g. 81b *sele hlifade*), and 2 other forms of the suffix (1222b *weras ehtigað*; 1380 *feo leanige*). The frequent placement of the finite verb at the end of the second half-line in *Beowulf* – one of the most discussed points in Old English philology – is most probably

⁹ Cf. "the very striking differences [...] leave no doubt" (p.26).

¹⁰ Bliss, p. 26.

¹¹ 120a *wonsceaft wera*; 973a *feasceaft guma*; 1672a *sorhleas swefan*.

¹² For example, M.L. Gasparov, *Sovremennyy russkiy stikh. Metrika i ritmika* [Modern Russian verse. Metre and rhythm] (Moscow, 1974).

¹³ Bliss, p. 26.

not directly related to the issues of secondary and tertiary stress. Further, the figure of 119 contains 31 constructions like 189b *maga Healfdenes*, 529b *bearn Ecgþeowes*.¹⁴ There are only 10 instances in the first half-line.¹⁵ The reason why such constructions occur predominantly in the second half-line might well be not tertiary stress, but the patterns of alliteration: D-verses with a word boundary after the first lift usually have double alliteration which is not attainable with most proper names (except those beginning with *m-* for *maga* or *mæg*, *b-* for *bearn*, *s-* for *sunu*); therefore, the second half-line is preferable for the construction.

Thus, after recalling only two other features of rhythm and style, the ratio may be brought down, incidentally, from 38 : 119 to 28 : 28. The argument above illustrates that not only is it possible (at least theoretically, and very often in practice) to interpret a 'surprising' ratio by employing different features from the one used as the base of bisection, but also that few things can be more harmful for our analysis of a rhythmical feature than a gross uninterpreted ratio. Unfortunately, Bliss's study is permeated with ratios of this kind. To give another example, he asserts the significance of the position of the "caesura" (word boundary) in type A verses because of the following ratios: the word boundary occurs in a certain position 368 times in the first half-line, 489 times in the second half-line (43% vs 57%), while in a slightly different position it occurs 530 times in the first half-line, 446 times in the second half-line (54% vs 46%). Bliss finds the contrast "striking", and remarks that although "the numerical divergence is not great, ... in view of the large number of instances it is clearly significant" (p. 37). The point to make here is that it is precisely the "large number of instances" that makes the significance of the ratio so dubious: such a mass of verses is bound to include many

¹⁴ Also 344b, 590b, 631b, 758b, 813b, 957b, 980b, 1020b, 1040b, 1383b, 1473b, 1474b, 1530b, 1550b, 1651b, 1652b, 1817b, 1999b, 2143b, 2177b, 2367b, 2386b, 2394b, 2398b, 2425b, 2587b, 2752b, 2971b, 3120b.

¹⁵ 268a, 469a, 524a, 645a, 737a, 914a, 1699a, 1808a, 2147a, 2604a.

patterns the distribution of which can be accounted for by reasons other than the word boundary.

The difficulties arising from choosing to describe a rhythmical catalogue rather than a metrical system can also be illustrated with Bliss's theory of light verses.

According to Bliss, all one-stress verses ending in -Sx or -Ss are "found only in the a-verse, for obvious reasons" (p. 61). As Cable writes,

"[t]he reason is clear: light verses must have alliteration on the stresses that Bliss marks, or there would be no alliteration at all to bind the two half-lines together. Although verses identical in structure to "light verses" occur in the second half-line, Bliss does not call them light. If he did, the pattern of alliteration would flatly contradict his analysis: alliteration in the second half-line must occur in the first metrically stressed syllable, the one that Bliss always ignores. Without this check in the first half-line (where either or both of the stresses may alliterate), one can present an analysis denying hundreds of stresses that actually occur. Thus, in the following verse, Bliss is obliged to recognize stress on the finite verb (or else the verse would have no alliteration): [...] 90b *swutol sang scopes. / sægde se þe cube*. But in the a-verse, even with double alliteration, Bliss feels no need to stress the verb: [...] 590a *secge ic þe to soðe, / sunu Ecglafes*."¹⁶

One might add that there are quite a few a-verses which, according to Bliss's logic, should be light in terms of their lexical content, but which are scanned by him with two stresses due to alliteration. The line 197 *on þæm dæge / bysses lifes* (197a is read as C-type by Bliss) sums up the problems with the establishment of a separate one-stress pattern: the alliteration plainly shows that if the half-line has nothing better, metrical stress can even fall on "small words", and that such patterns may occur both in the a- and b-verse.

The case of light verses shows that Bliss's statements concerning the distribution of patterns should not always be relied upon, as there is a very significant interpretative layer underlying the presentation of the supposedly "raw" data.

¹⁶ Thomas Cable, *The Meter and Melody of Beowulf* (Urbana, 1974), pp. 23-24.

This interpretation would be completely acceptable within a statement of a metrical theory. Also, such a statement would naturally accommodate restrictions on the metricality of certain rhythmical patterns – while in a rhythmical catalogue these prescriptive notes (which are scattered throughout Bliss's study) can be premature. But a major fallacy of Bliss's method and argument is that he describes minor rhythmical types and then accords them with prescriptive metrical force *in isolation from other types*. In such a case, we are left with a catalogue of verses for which it is theoretically impossible to find a unifying principle (or principles).

It emerges that an approach that interprets traditional verse as a set of systemically unrelated patterns is analytically suspect and should be avoided if possible. With respect to Old English metre, such an approach is also unnecessary. The systemic aspects of Sievers' interpretation were highlighted by Thomas Cable, whose theory is outlined in the next section.

Cable's metrical theory

A possibility to improve on Sievers' metrical system lies with the principle of four positions per half-line. Thomas Cable developed the four positions theory in *The Meter and Melody of Beowulf* (1974) and *The English Alliterative Tradition* (1991). The two monographs differ in their respective presentations of Old English metre, but their main implications are similar. The basic rules in the 1974 variant are:¹⁷

¹⁷ As with Sievers' rules (1-2), rules (4-7) are not an exact quotation, but my summary of *Meter and Melody of Beowulf*, pp. 83-93.

- (4) There are three kinds of metrical positions, or three levels of metrical stress: a lift (primary metrical stress); a secondary lift ("intermediate" metrical stress); a dip (no stress).
- (5) A half-line may have four and only four metrical positions.
- (6) Any two adjacent metrical positions should have different level of metrical stress.
- (7) The second of two adjacent ("clashing") metrical stresses (primary or intermediate) cannot be heavier than the first.

The rules (4-6) produce eight possible patterns of verse:

- I. 1 \ 2 / 3 \ 4
- II. 1 / 2 \ 3 / 4
- III. 1 / 2 \ 3 \ 4
- IV. 1 \ 2 \ 3 \ 4
- V. 1 \ 2 \ 3 / 4
- VI. 1 / 2 / 3 \ 4
- VII. 1 / 2 / 3 / 4
- VIII. 1 \ 2 / 3 / 4

The last three patterns are forbidden by rule (7). As the second of two adjacent primary or intermediate stresses cannot be heavier, the sequence of the form "x / y" can only mean "dip + lift", and the sequence "x / y / z" (which occurs in patterns VI - VIII) is impossible.

The five remaining patterns are the Five Types. An important difference from a standard Sieversian classification is, however, that type D2 (pattern V above, or "SSxs")

in another notation) is classified here with type E (SsxS). It is a logical consequence of the fact that the rules (4-7) deal only with syllabic and stress patterns, leaving both word boundary and alliteration out.

Even so, the statement of metrical theory according to Cable is still incomplete.

We need a set of rules linking the metrical and linguistic stress:¹⁸

- (8) Primary metrical stress can fall on the linguistically stressed syllables of adjectives, nouns, non-finite verbal forms, derived adverbs; also on the second stem of a compound, a suffix, non-derived adverbs and finite lexical verbs.
- (9) Intermediate metrical stress can fall on the root syllable of the second stem of a compound or on a suffix; also on non-derived adverbs and finite lexical verbs.
- (10) The zero degree of metrical stress is possible on pronouns, auxiliaries, semi-auxiliaries, conjunctions, prepositions, articles; also on non-derived adverbs and finite lexical verbs.

Thus, most morphemes either receive primary metrical stress, or no metrical stress. The ambiguous morphemes are: 1) second compound stems and suffixes – they may receive either primary or secondary metrical stress; 2) non-derived adverbs and finite lexical verbs – they may receive all three kinds of stress (including no stress).

There are also rules for quantity, derived from Sievers (see rule (2) above). In the 1991 variant, Cable supplements the rules with the following:

¹⁸ Rules (8-10) are a summary of Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 21-22.

- (11) "If the antepenultimate syllable of a verse is long and stressed, the last two syllables are unresolved, regardless of their stress. All other short syllables bearing rhythmic stress must be resolved."¹⁹

It can also be formulated in this way: "suspension of resolution must occur only if the potentially resolved sequence is situated immediately between a metrically stressed long syllable and the end of the verse".

Another rule, suggested only in the 1991 study,²⁰ states that:

- (12) a dip can be strong only if it occurs within the first two positions of a verse. In other words, only the first dip in A, B, or C verses can be polysyllabic. The second dip in A, B, and C verses, as well as the only dip in D and E verses should be monosyllabic.²¹

The final set of rules concerns prefixes. In the 1974 study, Cable showed that whenever we have an anacrusis in the A-type, the syllables forming the anacrusis turn

¹⁹ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 19.

²⁰ Cf. *The English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 16.

²¹ Consider in this regard the law of Germanic sentence particles (Kuhn's First Law): "Sentence particles are grouped in the first dip of the clause. The first dip precedes either the first or the second stressed word in the clause." Particles include: finite verbs, certain adverbs, certain pronouns, conjunctions. They differ from proclitics: prepositions, certain pronouns, articles (Hans Kuhn, 'Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen,' *PBB* 57 (1933), pp. 1-109). The law was established using the material of Old English poetry. It does not function in prose. As it is easy to show, Kuhn's first law is but a special case of the monosyllabic dips rule. Sentence particles are by (Kuhn's) definition unstressed. Therefore, if one of the particles (i.e. sentence elements with relative freedom of placement, unlike prepositions and endings) occurs, for example, in the first dip of the B-type, all other particles must be placed in the dip as well, otherwise they will create a prohibited polysyllabic dip elsewhere. The only situation in which particles may occur in the second dip is when the word in the first lift is monosyllabic (or resolved) and so there is a place for a monosyllabic particle in the second dip. It might still be asked whether it is the Kuhn's first law that is a corollary of the monosyllabic dips rule, and not vice versa. To answer the question one should obviously check which rule has a wider applicability. We find that the monosyllabic dips rule works with all classes of weak syllables, not only those belonging to particles. So, there are almost no verses like **æt hilde wið gramum* (xSxxSr), where non-particles form a polysyllabic second dip. At the same time, Kuhn's law does not always work for particles: examples are listed by Kuhn himself, who therefore treats his observation as a tendency, rather than a law. Thus, it is preferable to see Kuhn's first law as a description of the most frequent (but not the only possible) pattern in the placement of relatively free sentence elements, resulting from rule (12): a polysyllabic dip can occur only within the first two metrical positions of a verse.

out to be verbal prefixes or negative particles, e.g. 505a *gehede under heofenum*, pSxxxSrx.²² Edwin Duncan extended the rule to the B-type: in the absolute majority of cases where a B-type verse contains a strong second dip (forbidden by (12)), it is the prefix that makes the dip strong, e.g. 74a *þa ic wide gefrægn*.²³ Daniel Donoghue extended the rule to the C-type: whenever a syllable occurs between the clashing stresses of the C-type (forming the forbidden fifth metrical position), the syllable belongs to a prefix, e.g. 93b *swa wæter bebugeð*.²⁴ I would suggest extending the rule to the E-type: whenever an E-type verse contains a strong dip (forbidden by rule (12)), it is

²² Cable, *The Meter and Melody of Beowulf*, pp. 32-44. I count 66 instances in a-verse: 109a, 217a, 234a, 301a, 388a, 399a, 409a, 505a, 675a, 728a, 758a, 827a, 1011a, 1108a, 1125a, 1151a, 1169a, 1304a, 1322a, 1397a, 1425a, 1474a, 1518a, 1537, 1545a, 1557a, 1612a, 1665a, 1711a, 1751a, 1758a, 1767a, 1963a, 1977a, 2252a, 2417a, 2460a, 2529a, 2538a, 2542a, 2606a, 2609a, 2629a, 2640a, 2653a, 2659a, 2681a, 2697a, 2703a, 2717a, 2855a, 2878a, 2949a, 2971a, 3079a, 3121a, 3141a, 3143a. The figure includes unstressed prefixes in adverbs and conjunctions, e.g. 43a *nalæs he hine læssan*, 503a *forþon þe he ne uþe*, and three more verses with *forþon*: 679a, 1059a, 1336a. (Another verse that almost certainly belongs here is 115a *gewat þa neosian*: it has to be emended to *neosan*, as in this position the weak verb suffix forms a secondary lift, see below. Compare also other verses with *neosan*, where the scribal variant (weak verb of the 1st class) is metrically regular: 125b *wica neosan*; 1786a *setles neosan*; 1791b *beddes neosan*; 1806b *ceoles neosan*; 2074b *user neosan*; 2366b *hames niosan*; 2388a *hames niosan*. Other verses beside 115a where the scribal variant (weak verb of the 2nd class) is incorrect are 1125b *wica neosian*; 2671b *fionda niosian*; 3045a *dennes niosian*. Thus, we may conclude that the poet's form was invariably *neosan*, with four metrically irregular instances of the 2nd class form being introduced by a scribe. It would be marginally possible to scan 115a as a C-type with primary stress on the suffix, but the pattern of 1125b, 2671b, 3045a would be unparalleled.) In b-verse, there are only two clear instances: 1877b *forberan ne mehte* and 2435b *ungedefelice*; possibly also 1504b *ðurhfon ne mihte* and 1773b *gesacan ne tealde*, although they may equally well belong to C-type if it is the negative particle that forms the prefix licence in them.

²³ Edwin Duncan, *Stress, Meter and Alliteration in Old English Poetry*, diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1985. I count 48 instances in a-verse: 74a, 79a, 80a, 229a, 294a, 362a, 464a, 694a, 760a, 779a, 800a, 808a, 860a, 882a, 903a, 1040a, 1360a, 1365a, 1420a, 1469a, 1484a, 1662a, 1673a, 1696a, 1773a, 1872a, 2033a, 2045a, 2259a, 2353a, 2397a, 2418a, 2441a, 2484a, 2505a, 2620a, 2685a, 2741a, 2752a, 2773a, 2808a, 2838a, 2997a, 3056a, 3068a, 3166a. Two interesting cases are 662a *ða him Hroþgar gewat* and 1236a *ond him Hroþgar gewat*: here, the second stem of the proper name does not form a secondary lift even though it stands between a primary stressed and a weak syllable, as the weak syllable belongs to a prefix. In b-verse, there are 89 instances: 7b, 52b, 76b, 122b, 143b, 192b, 247b, 265b, 357b, 358b, 366b, 401b, 404b, 420b, 431b, 450b, 517b, 574b, 595b, 626b, 633b, 662b, 696b, 764b, 766b, 772b, 775b, 891b, 929b, 968b, 970b, 1087b, 1198b, 1209b, 1251b, 1254b, 1291b, 1298b, 1302b, 1337b, 1460b, 1461b, 1467b, 1470b, 1497b, 1585b, 1590b, 1598b, 1613b, 1618b, 1622b, 1664b, 1672b, 1674b, 1727b, 1733b, 1739b, 1746b, 1759b, 1760b, 1770b, 1779b, 1826b, 1886b, 1975b, 1977b, 2132b, 2134b, 2138b, 2222b, 2258b, 2332b, 2347b, 2448b, 2471b, 2574b, 2614b, 2616b, 2624b, 2638b, 2682b, 2713b, 2819b, 2822b, 2834b, 2861b, 2875b, 2989b, 3090b. Perhaps 805b *scolde his aldorgedal* belongs here as well, but the sonorant of *aldor* makes scansion ambiguous.

²⁴ Daniel Donoghue, 'On the Classification of B-Verses with Anacrusis in *Beowulf* and *Andreas*,' *Notes and Queries*, 232 (1987), pp. 1-6. I count only three instances in a-verse, all of them dubious, as they can also be scanned as A-type without the prefix licence: 433a *hæbbe ic eac geahsod*; 595a *ac he hafað onfundan*; 1628a *þæs þe hi hyne gesundne*. There are 5 clear instances in b-verse: 93b, 666b, 1223b, 2247b, 2592b. Two other verses can be scanned as A-type as well: 1504b, 1773b (cf. footnote 9).

the prefix that makes the dip strong, e.g. 5b *meodosetla ofteah*.²⁵ There are no reliable examples of the prefix rule in the D-type.²⁶

The general rule for the scansion of prefixes should then be:

- (13)** unstressed prefixes and negative particles sometimes may (but sometimes may not) be excluded from the syllable and position count.

Optionality of the rule means it is usually referred to as "the prefix licence".

There are several comments to make here. First, the rule is not an extravagance of metre, nor does it serve to cover up deficiencies of the metrical theory. Rule **(13)** obviously refers to the stress position rule in the Old English language, according to which the stress always falls on the first syllable of the word, unless the first syllable is a prefix; in the latter case, the prefix is unstressed in verbs and compound adverbs, but usually stressed in nouns and adjectives (*ge-* is always, *be-* and *for-* are often unstressed even here).²⁷ Rule **(13)** deals with exactly the same prefixes that are specified in the language rule. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to refer to the prefixes as "verbal": the relevant feature is that the prefixes are *unstressed*, and the unstressed prefixes may occur either in verbs, adverbs, or nouns. At the same time, the precise reason for and mode of the reflection of the unstressed prefix rule in metre is unclear: in Cable's metrical system, there is no direct reference to word boundaries.

²⁵ I count 17 instances in a-verse: 256a, 455a, 476a, 650a, 654a, 658a, 697a, 775a, 848a, 877a, 911a, 1498a, 1681a, 1723a, 2527a, 2608a, 2774a. There are 36 instances in b-verse: 5b, 14b, 17b, 118b, 390b, 494b, 610b, 667b, 688b, 690b, 721b, 827b, 884b, 999b, 1080b, 1122b, 1132b, 1214b, 1241b, 1424b, 1483b, 1503b, 1520b, 1562b, 1569b, 1624b, 1920b, 2037b, 2396b, 2426b, 2489b, 2583b, 2600b, 2691b, 2703b, 2765b.

²⁶ There are four ambiguous verses with the adverb *ungemete*: 1792b *Geat unigmetes wel*; 2420b *wyrd ungemete neah*; 2721b *þegn ungemete till*; 2728b *deað ungemete neah*. The verses can be scanned as D-type with an uncounted double prefix between the two primary stresses (SppSrS) or as instances of E2-type (SxSS) with an uncounted single prefix (SpXsrS). However, there seems to be little evidence to support the existence of E2-type, as in all possible instances there occurs a sonorant which, if non-syllabic, precludes E2: 2436b *morbored stred* (A-type with non-syllabic sonorant and no contraction in *stred*); 1681b *wundorsmīþa geweorc* (could be scanned as E2 with the prefix rule (SxsrpS), but more probably is a standard E1 with the prefix rule (SsxpS); similarly, 667b *sundornytte beheold* and 1132b *winter yðe beleac*.

²⁷ Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, pp. 30-33.

The mention of the "negative particles" is not arbitrary either. Although the received spelling in modern editions separates the particle and the verb, there is no evidence against the possibility that negative particles were prosodically equivalent to prefixes in Old English. Rule (13) certainly refers only to the unstressed variant *ne*, not to the full form *na / no* or compound forms with initial stress like *nawiht*.

Finally, it should be stated clearly why we are ready to admit an optional rule, a licence. Although there are about 550 instances where an unstressed prefix or negative particle should be included into the position count, the licence is not used to cover up any deficiencies of the metrical theory. There does exist an unfailing regularity on which the optional rule is founded: when we encounter an extra dip (in A or C-type), or a prohibited strong dip (in B or E-type), this extra position or syllable is *always* formed by an unstressed prefix or negative particle.²⁸

The prefix licence rounds off Cable's theory of Old English metre (rules 4-13). The four basic principles are: 1) four and only four positions per half-line; 2) resolution (and suspension of resolution); 3) monosyllabic second (or the only) dip; 4) prefix licence. These are supplemented with several other rules: a) there are three levels of metrical stress; b) the second of two clashing metrical stresses (primary or secondary) cannot be heavier; c) certain morpheme classes may carry certain levels of metrical stress; d) suspension of resolution is only allowed at the end of the half-line.

²⁸ This "always" should be qualified. There actually occur several verses with three dips or a prohibited strong dip, but their number is small and they can easily be due to the textual corruption. Three dips occur in 8 cases: 25a, 107a, 157a, 1248a, 1563a, 1549a, 2651aa, 2093a. (The verse 1563 *He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga* begs for the expulsion of *he* on both metrical and stylistic grounds.) The prohibited strong dip occurs in 32 cases, all but four in B-type: 1141a (A-type); 303b, 603b, 2882b (E-type); 504a, 525a, 639a, 1088a, 1145a, 1763a, 2870a, 83b, 269b, 455b, 469b, 487b, 501b, 879b, 902b, 1093b, 1182b, 1276b, 1509b, 1616b, 1766b, 1876b, 2141b, 2277b, 2442b, 2687b, 2975b, 3085b (B-type). (Interestingly, several of the verses can be made metrically regular by reading *Eotene* with a short vowel, rather than long as Klaeber suggests. The verses where the name occurs are metrically irregular if /eo/ is long, but all of them are regular if the diphthong is short: 902b *he mid Eotenum wearð*; 1088a *wið Eotena bearn*; 1141a *þæt he Eotena bearn*; 1145a *þæs wæron mid Eotenum*. The verse 1072a *Eotena treowe* is also unusual, as two syllables in the strong dip of the A-type seem never to belong to the metrically stressed word: (?) Sxx | Sx (cf. Bliss, p. 3). So the metrical and historical evidence with regard to the vowel length in *Eotene* seem to be in conflict here.)

This metrical system describes concisely and adequately an extremely high proportion of the half-lines in *Beowulf* and other classical Old English poems, and therefore it is adopted in the present thesis. Nevertheless, I believe that certain adjustments to the theory would make it more concise while preserving its adequacy. The implications of those adjustments have some significant ramifications with regard to the history of the alliterative long line, and are therefore crucial for the historical reconstruction attempted in Chapter 4. The proposed changes to the theory of Sievers and Cable involve the prosodic basis of Old English verse, and most of the arguments to support those changes are derived from the analysis of resolution and its suspension in *Beowulf*—the analysis that fills most of the latter part of this chapter. Before that, however, it is necessary to highlight an aspect of Cable's theory that will also be of major importance for the history of English alliterative verse, namely, the *interdependency* of the rules outlined above.

Historically significant aspects of the theory of Sievers and Cable

Interdependency of the rules

Speaking about the principle of four positions, Cable remarks: "Sievers' system, though it covers the facts very well, does not place the emphasis where it belongs and is therefore less than theoretically optimal."²⁹ However, it seems that in stating his theory Cable has not placed sufficient emphasis on another important point, namely that the four basic principles (four metrical positions per half-line, resolution, monosyllabic dips, and prefix licence) are interdependent and are tenable only jointly.

It is important to see that the principle of four positions depends on the existence of resolution: only with the help of resolution can we avoid having three dips in certain verses of type C and B. For example, in 36b *þær wæs madma fela*, the metrical stress falls on the first syllable of *fela*. If we had no resolution, the second syllable of *fela* would form a third dip. But the first syllable of *fela* is short, and if we admit resolution, the stress must fall on both the first and the second syllable of the word, and then there is no third dip. The logic is similar for the C-type, e.g. in 65b *þæt him his winemagas*. If the first syllable of *wine* was not short and the metrical stress did not therefore fall on both syllables of the word, we would have had to count the second syllable of *wine* as a third dip.

But at the same time, we derive our knowledge that Old English verse featured resolution only from postulating the principle of four positions: otherwise we would have no regular pattern to support the statement that an equivalence of a short plus any

²⁹ *Meter and Melody of Beowulf*, p. 33.

syllable to a long syllable is used in versification. It seems to be a vicious circle, but the existence of both resolution and the principle of four positions is confirmed by the fact that had we tried to remove the extra dip to have a B- or C-type by means of resolution, and *failed* - i.e. there still were syllables forming the prohibited third dip (e.g. pattern *xSxSr_x, rather than a B-type xSxSr) - then we would have had no reason to speak of resolution or the principle of four positions. But although there are verses like 36b *þær wæs madma fela* on the one hand, and 41a *madma mænigo* on the other hand, verses like **þær wæs madma mænigo* do not occur.

It has to be noted that the equivalence "a short plus another short syllable = a long syllable" functions in the Old English language, and that we know about this not from metre, but from morphological alternations. As is well known, words with long root syllables have different nominal paradigms from those with short root syllables. So, for example, in neuter *-a-* stems, the N.Pl. form of *scēap* is *scēap*, but the same form of *scipu* is *scipu*. At the same time, words with the root structure "long syllable + short syllable" follow the short stem (*scipu*) type, e.g. *hēafodu*, while those with the root structure "short syllable + short syllable" follow the long stem (*scēap*) type, e.g. *wæter*.³⁰ Evidently, there is an equivalence "a short plus another short syllable = long syllable" in the language.³¹ However, it does not follow that the feature of linguistic prosody should necessarily be relevant for metre. Thus, it is still our task to find some rhythmical regularities to state that resolution is used in Old English verse, and not only in the language. The principle of four positions remains the only support for such a statement. On the other hand, the four positions principle is strongly supported by the

³⁰ Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §345: "Examples are neut. pls. of the *a*-declension (*word*, *weorod*, beside *fatu*, *hēafodu*); n.s. of the *ō*-declension (*ār*, *firen*, beside *giefu*), of the *u*-declension (*sunu* beside *feld*), of the *i*-declension (*giest* beside *wine*), and of *ua-* and *uo-* stems (*bearu*, *beadu-*, beside *gād*, *mād*); n.p. of cons. stems (*fēt*, *cælf*, beside *hnyte*); imper. of weak verbs of Class I (*dēm* beside *nere*)." The alternation is functionally prominent in the adjectival paradigm, in N.S.f. and N./A.S.n: *blind*, but *tilu* (Campbell, §639).

³¹ On the possibility of an opposite view, see Robert Stockwell and Donka Minkova, 'Old English Metrics and the Phonology of Resolution,' *North-Western European Language Evolution* 31-32 (1997), pp. 389-406, and Donka Minkova, *Alliteration and Sound Change in Early English* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 7, 40 and elsewhere.

fact that it implies, among other things, a regularity (resolution) that we would expect to find used in verse.

The important conclusion is that the principles of four positions and resolution are tenable only jointly. The same can be said about the principles of four positions and the prefix licence. On the one hand, we cannot firmly state the four positions principle without introducing the prefix licence, as otherwise there will be a significant number of A-type and C-type verses with three lifts, e.g. 399a *aras þa se rica* or 2247b *nu hæleð ne moston*. On the other hand, the discovery of the prefix licence is only possible since we have stipulated the principle of four positions.

The same kind of interdependence exists between the monosyllabic dip rule and resolution, as it is resolution that keeps the dip monosyllabic in A-type verses like 3b *ellen fremedon* (SxSr~~x~~), or B-type verses like 326b *wið þæs recedes weal* (xxSr~~x~~S).

Finally, monosyllabicity of the second dip in the B-type (e.g. 808a *on feonda geweald*) or the only dip in E-type (e.g. 877a *Wælsinges gewin*) depends on the prefix licence; but at the same time, the discovery of the licence here is only possible since the monosyllabic dip rule has been introduced.

Therefore, the basic principles of four metrical positions, resolution, monosyllabic dip, and prefix licence are all interdependent and are tenable only jointly. The conclusion is very satisfactory from the methodological point of view: the presented metrical system scores very high on the "internal cohesion" parameter (see Introduction, p. 30) in that all the observed regularities mutually support each other. In addition, the interdependency of the rules has some far-reaching consequences for the history of the metre: it is evident that a change in linguistic prosody that makes one of the rules impossible can collapse the entire metrical system, or at least result in its large-scale restructuring. In Chapter 4, I will try to show that it was indeed the case.

Patterns with five metrical positions

Cable's theory of Old English metre has a very considerable descriptive and restrictive force. It provides us with a powerful tool for interpreting the pattern of almost every line in *Beowulf* with reference to the morphological status and phonological length of every syllable. Only about 1% of verses cannot be scanned according to the rules (an exceptional figure for a historical metrical study).³² No less importantly, the theory accounts for the absence of many linguistically possible patterns.

The limitations are few. Firstly, the first dip in A, B, C-type is declared to have a random number of syllables. No regularity has been found here by any metrist, but the theoretical possibility to find one still exists. It is clear at least that no adjustments of syllable number and quantity produce any consistent results here.³³

The major deficiency of the theory, however, is its failure to account for two patterns with *five* positions. The first of these patterns will be referred to as D*, and always has the form SxSsx or SxSxs, e.g. 223a *side sænæssas*, 400a *þryðlic þegna*

³² The number does not include verses with possible linguistic variation, such as 2428b *þa mec sinca baldor* with possibly non-syllabic sonorant, or 1264b *mandream fleon* possibly without contraction. R.D. Fulk demonstrated that such phenomena have a certain regularity throughout Old English poetry, and that the regularities for all separate phenomena are very consistent between each other. Scribal error conditioned by linguistic variation is also possible in the following 9 verses: 368a *hy on wiggetawum*; 395b *in eowrum guðgeatawum*; 1946a *þæt hio leodbealewa*; 2636 *þæt we him ða guðgetawa* (read *bealwa, geatwa*, etc.); 473a *sorh is me to secganne*; 1941a *idese to efnanne*; 2562a *sæcce to seceanne* (read uninflected infinitive); 1125b *wica neosian*; 3045a *dennes niosian* (read the 1st class of weak verbs form). The verses that cannot be explained by linguistic variation are then very few: 9a *þara ymbsittendra*; 183b *wa bið þæm ðe sceal*; 186b *wel bið þæm þe mot*; 258a *ondswarode*; 340a *andswarode*; 262a *wæs min fæder*; 330a *æscholt ufan græg*; 480a *ful oft gebeotedon*; 736a *ðicgean ofer þa niht*; 747b *ræhte ongear*; 794b *þær genehost brægd*; 845a *niða ofercumen*; 954a *dædum gefremed*; 947a, 1759a *secg betsta*; 1871b *ðegn betstan*; 1728a *hwilum he on lufan*; 1828b *hwilum dydon*; 2036a *on him gladiað*; 2150 *lissa gelong*; 2173a *wrætlicne wundurmaððum*; 2297a *ealne utanweardne*; 2803b *æt brimes nosan* (Bliss suggests reading *nōsan*). Most of these 23 verses are well known suspects in Old English metrical studies. Taken together with 41 verses that have three dips or a prohibited polysyllabic dip, the total number of irregular verses is 64, i.e. 1% of the undamaged verses in the poem.

³³ Cf. for example: 64a *þa wæs Hroðgare*; 335b *ic eom Hroðgares*; 717a *þæt he Hroþgares*; 1296a *se wæs Hroþgare*; 1399a *þa wæs Hroðgare*; 1407a *þara þe mid Hroðgare*; 1580a *þonne he Hroðgares*; 1592a *þa ðe mid Hroðgare*; 1899a *ofer Hroðgares*; 1990b *ac þu Hroðgare*; 2129a *þæt wæs Hroðgare*; 2351b *syððan he Hroðgares*. "þa was" or "ofer" can hardly be equivalent to "þara þe mid" or "þonne he".

heap. The occurrence of two variants $SxSsx$ and $SxSxs$ shows that the pattern should indeed be viewed as an extension of the D-type (the extra position is a dip between two primary stresses), rather than of the A-type (a secondary stress after the second primary stress), or of the B or C-type (a primary stress at the beginning of the verse). Suspension of resolution is frequent (54 instances) at the verse end (cf. rule **11**), e.g. 1348a *micle mearcstapan*.

The pattern is in all probability authentic, and not scribal. There are several reasons for thinking so: 1) the sheer number of instances: I count 157 D* verses in *Beowulf*; 2) the precise form that D* has: it is immediately recognisable and is not related to other five-position patterns randomly occurring in the manuscript (cf. fn. 28); 3) it is clearly restricted to the first half-line.

Indeed, of the 157 instances, D* occurs in the b-verse only 6 times: 1323b *dead is Æschere*; 1525b *ðolode ær fela*; 1663b *oftost wisode*; 1869b *snude eft cuman*; 1997b *Gode ic þanc secge*; 2032b *þeodne Heaðobeardna*. An emendation to *oft* has been suggested by many editors in 1663b, while 2032b is also textually problematic.

The first component of D* is very often an alliterating verb (50 instances), e.g. 94a *gesette sigehreþig* ($pSxSrSx$), 496a *scencte scir wered* ($SxSšx$). However, when the same prosodic pattern occurs in the b-verse, alliteration always marks the nominal or adjectival form, e.g. 376b *sohte holdne wine* ($xxSxSr$, alliteration on /h/), 609b *gehyrde on Beowulfe* ($xxxxSSx$, alliteration on /b/). The only exception is the already quoted 1525b *ðolode ær fela*.

Both the proportion of 151 : 6 (or even less) and the evidence of alliteration suggest that D* is restricted to the first half-line. It might be supposed that this restriction is due to the requirement of double alliteration in such verses (all D* a-verses have double alliteration). But an equally probable hypothesis would be that both the

double alliteration and the restriction to the first half-line are conditioned by the heavy structure of D*.

The second five-position pattern is very similar in all its properties to D*. This second pattern is usually referred to as A*, and has the form of Ssxsx: 438a *geolorand to guþe*; 1017a *Hroðgar ond Hropulf*. There are 11 clear instances of the pattern in the first half-line,³⁴ but there is only one occurrence in b-verse: 1148b *Guðlaf ond Oslaf*.³⁵ All a-verses have double alliteration.

Does the occurrence of two five-position patterns mean that the metrical system built on the principle of four positions is unacceptable? Probably not, for two reasons. The first one is that the metrical system otherwise explains the occurrence of a very great number of rhythmical variations, and accounts for the absence of a very great number of other rhythmical variations. The second reason is that D* and A* are the only two morphosyllabic patterns (alliteration aside) that are restricted to one of the halves of the long line. The A* pattern has another unusual feature: it seems to be the only pattern where the position of word boundary is relevant.³⁶ It is well-known that there are verses like 61a *Heorogar ond Hroðgar*, with a word boundary after the secondary stress (Ss#xSs), but not verses like **Hroðgare Beowulf*, with both the primary stress, the secondary stress and the dip belonging to the same word (*Ssx#Ss). That is, D* and A* patterns are unusual in more than one way (not simply from the four-position point of view), and are probably marginal elements in the metrical system.

Therefore, it can only be said that two precisely defined five-position patterns are allowed in the first half-line. The reason for their existence most probably lies in the

³⁴ 18a, 61a, 308a, 438a, 608a, 1017a, 1189a, 1698a, 1815a, 2434a, 2702a. Eight other verses are ambiguous due to the (non-)syllabic sonorant, e.g. 572a *windige weallas*; also 572a, 852a, 931a, 1876a, 2447a, 2698a, 3049a.

³⁵ Four more verses contain the ambiguous sonorant: 1358b *windige næssas*; 2440b *blodigan gare*; 2049b, 2517b *hindeman siðe*.

³⁶ It is inaccurate to use the term "caesura" here, as it is usually done in Old English metrics. "Caesura" refers to a metrically invariant boundary, and as such it exists in Old English metre only between the first and second half-line. For description of rhythmical properties of certain verses the language term "word boundary" should be used (cf. the remarks in Cable 1974: 11).

history of metre, but any interpretation from within the four-position theory is impossible.³⁷

However, existence of a number of patterns that do not fall under the basic metrical rule is actually a situation we should expect. I have argued above (pp. 43-54) that it is inadvisable to analyse and represent a traditional metre as a restricted set of asystemic rhythmical patterns. On the contrary, we should adopt a systemic approach whenever our metrical theory is invested with a restrictive force of any kind and for any purpose. In the case of Old English verse, the approach produces good results in practice. Nevertheless, under the general framework of metrical change outlined in the Introduction (pp. 14-23), an oral traditional metre can hardly ever attain complete systemic regularity, just as such regularity is unattainable in the common language. Some linguistic forms, and by analogy some metrical patterns will always fail to be drawn into the sphere of application of the new linguistic or metrical rule.

As mentioned on several occasions above (p. 15), certain major changes in linguistic prosody may undermine the basic principles of a traditional metrical system. The tradition survives by virtue of many other regularities of style still fully active within the texts, but more importantly by the simple fact that the change is continuous, and therefore any collapse predicted by an abstract model of separate stages never materialises. Nevertheless, a major shift in linguistic prosody does result in the impossibility and subsequent disappearance of some rhythmical patterns, as well as in the ambiguity of others. The metrical system becomes less stable and less restrictive. As time goes on, the destabilised system reinterprets its basic principles of

³⁷ Cable attempts to tackle the D* pattern by the following argument: as the first of two clashing stresses is heavier, it must be longer, even in a normal D-type verse like 795a *eorl Beowulfes*; then, the D* verses simply fill the position of length with an unstressed syllable, e.g. in 1023a *mære maðþumsweord* (*The Meter and Melody of Beowulf*, p. 80). However, the proposal appears to confuse (albeit grudgingly) the physical and the linguistic length. The "length" mentioned in the above argument is certainly the physical one. But no sooner that we allow physical length to account for an otherwise unruly pattern in one place, we must admit the same procedure for every single verse in Old English, thus throwing away any metrical system employing linguistic entities as the units of measurement. In such a case, we automatically arrive at Pope's theory, i.e. at a catalogue of verses which is a guide to pronunciation, not a statement of metre.

commensurability and gradually moves towards a greater cohesiveness, and as a consequence – greater restrictiveness.

One of the corollaries of the model is that a traditional metre is hardly ever given opportunity to become completely cohesive. The average time span between major prosodic upheavals appears to be less than that required to eliminate any remains of the previous restructuring.³⁸ It means, *inter alia*, that the number of asystemic patterns, i.e. patterns that are not produced by general metrical rules and should therefore be specified individually, may be greater or smaller at any given point in poetic history, but it will hardly ever be zero. Given the rare opportunity to observe a cross-section in the history of a poetic tradition, we always see "a work in progress"; the picture observed will always be inherently dynamic, similarly to a proper synchronic³⁹ description of a language. Old English patterns D* and A* seem to be examples of such a historical residue. More instances of the kind will be provided in the chapters on early and late Middle English alliterative verse.

³⁸ Nor is it clear that the metrical system would necessarily weed out all such remains given an unlimited period of prosodic stability - but this is a matter of pure speculation.

³⁹ Or even more properly, "diachronic" - as opposed to "historical".

The prosodic basis of Old English verse

Secondary stress

An adjustment to the metrical theory of Sievers and Cable that I would like to propose concerns secondary stress. Secondary stress was a part of Sievers' initial system: it was an obligatory component of the "feet" containing three metrical positions (*Ictus*, *Nebenictus*, and *Senkung*).

Paradoxically, although he is eager to establish a "real *metrical* difference" (my emphasis) between the "secondary" and "tertiary" stress, Bliss denies the specific *metrical* status of secondary stress. His pre-interpretative working notion of Old English metre is that it *usually* contains four positions: two lifts and two dips. There are six possible combinations then:

- I. S x S x
- II. x S x S
- III. x S S x
- IV. S S x x
- V. S x x S
- VI. x x S S

It is important to note that the patterns are altogether different from the ones produced by Sievers' theory (cf. statement (1), p. 46). For example, the possibility of the xxSS

pattern (the famous type *F) did not arise in Sievers, and it is only in this misinterpretation of Sievers' theory that the pattern makes its appearance.

The patterns are possible because Bliss does not allow for the adjacent dips in IV - VI to merge. This assumption is very problematic even theoretically, as we are pressed to introduce an arbitrary linguistically unmotivated boundary between the adjacent unstressed syllables. As demonstrated by Cable, an analysis of the distribution of morpheme classes in Old English verse proves Bliss's assumption to be untenable in practice either.

One of the strengths of Cable's theory is that it explains the occurrence of a syllable capable of carrying some kind of linguistic or metrical stress in all contexts where it is necessary to have two metrical positions instead of a single dip. The pattern is set by compounds, with the second stem occurring in the analysed position. Words with suffixes follow the pattern, and it is possible to show that in the remainder of instances the sequence in question contains a non-derived adverb or a finite lexical verb. As non-derived adverbs and finite lexical verbs are the only two word categories that we have already known to be able (in unambiguous positions) both to carry the metrical stress and be unstressed, it is not surprising that they should appear in a newly postulated intermediate level. And as the second stems of compounds and the suffixes are traditionally said to carry "secondary stress" in Germanic philology, we are tempted to postulate a third degree of metrical stress in Old English poetry and call it a "secondary" or "intermediate" stress.

Now, on the one hand, we can explain why in some contexts several adjacent syllables should, and in other contexts should not merge into a single dip; but on the other hand, we can preserve the fixed number of metrical stresses per half-line – two (now they are known as "primary metrical stresses").

However, as soon as Cable dismisses Sievers' concept of the "foot", there emerge several problems with secondary metrical stress.

First of all, it becomes necessary to introduce the "alternating pattern" for the level of metrical stress,⁴⁰ i.e. to postulate that "any two adjacent metrical positions should have different levels of metrical stress." With three possible levels of stress (primary, secondary, none), there are eight possible combinations. To keep to the regularities observed in the text of *Beowulf*,⁴¹ three of the combinations have to be ruled out immediately by saying that "the second of two adjacent metrical stresses (primary or secondary) cannot be heavier." Unless the second rule is introduced, it is impossible to rule out absent patterns such as *F (sxSS or xsSS) or *E2 (SxsS).

But the rules have an undesirable corollary: in pattern D1 (SSsx, or 1 \ 2 \ 3 \ 4 in Cable's alternating rhythm notation) there have to be *four* levels of metrical stress (as long as the level must be different between all adjacent positions). So, by introducing the third level of *metrical* (not *rhythmical*!) stress, we seem to have no choice but to admit the fourth one too. Besides feeling generally uncomfortable about the multiplication of entities, we do not have any linguistic justification for four levels of stress in Old English (even three levels are historically doubtful). It should be emphasised that while Cable's proposal appears to describe perfectly the *rhythmical* phenomena of an Old English verse, or indeed the gradation of stress levels in English verse of any period and metre, the proposal is actually intended as a *metrical* description – and here problems arise.

The second problem with an introduction of secondary metrical stress into a theory lacking Sieversian three-member feet is the verse-final position: if the second stems of compounds should carry at least secondary metrical stress, but may be

⁴⁰ Cf. the eight schemes resulting from rules (4-6), p. 55.

⁴¹ These regularities are *not* the Five Types as "a statement of facts" or something that "really does exist" in the poem: they are discovered by the rest of Cable's rules; as discussed below (pp. 74-83), they are also determined by the alliterative patterns.

promoted to primary stress if the relevant verse contains no better candidate, we should expect verses like 1441b *gyrede hine Beowulf* and especially 1599a *þæt hine seo brimwylf* to end in two primary metrical stresses (type *F again). We might then grudgingly accept the existence of type *F, with a secondary stress in the verse-initial position (*sxSS) to prevent a three-position verse (*xSS). But the pattern would be very suspicious: it rarely has a verse-initial morpheme that is capable of carrying secondary stress in types D and E (e.g. 1599a *þæt hine seo brimwylf*), and the number of unstressed syllables is always variable, again unlike types D and E.⁴² Also, when a morpheme capable of carrying secondary metrical stress does occur in *F, it always carries alliteration, so that it seems more reasonable to scan it with primary stress. Therefore, type *F does not exist, and we have to explain why a verse like *þæt hine seo brimwylf* should have one of the two primary metrical stresses on *þæt* rather than *-wylf*.

The easiest way out of the problem is to introduce a nonce-rule, and that is exactly what Cable does: "[a] syllable can bear metrical ictus⁴³ only if it has greater linguistic prominence than at least one adjacent syllable."⁴⁴ The rule is applicable to morphemes capable of carrying secondary metrical stress in three contexts: 1) at the verse end (-SS); 2) between two primary stresses in the A-type (SSSx); 3) between two primary stresses in the B-type (xSSS). The two latter contexts are unremarkable - Cable's theory may accommodate a secondary stress in this position anyway. Thus, the rule is only relevant for the problematic verse-final context, and serves no other purpose but to remove an inconsistency caused by the previous rules (alternating level of metrical stress; relative weight of adjacent metrical stresses), and ultimately by the introduction of secondary metrical stress.

⁴² Although the latter is to be expected, as according to rule (12) polysyllabic dips are allowed within the first two positions in the verse.

⁴³ That is, either primary or secondary stress.

⁴⁴ *Meter and Melody of Beowulf*, p. 27.

Thus, the admission of secondary metrical stress into the metrical system requires three additional rules to describe its distribution, and implies the existence of the fourth level of metrical stress.

A morphological metre

I believe a simpler solution would be to keep only two levels of metrical stress ("yes or no") and to dispense with the rule of two metrical stresses per half-line.

Dispensing with the latter rule does not leave the system without a unifying principle: the chief metrical constant is the principle of four positions. At the same time, the statement of metre is greatly simplified. The basic rules would be as follows:

- (14) There are two kinds of metrical positions: a lift and a dip.⁴⁵
- (15) A verse may have four and only four metrical positions.
- (16) Two dips may not be adjacent, as in this case they merge into a single dip.

The three rules generate the following patterns:

(with 2 lifts)	I.	S x S x	8a <i>weox under wolcnum</i>
	II.	x S x S	29b <i>swa he selfa bæd</i>
	III.	x S S x	13b <i>þone God sende</i>
(with 3 lifts)	IV.	S S S x	27a <i>felahror feran</i> , 58a <i>glæde Scyldingas</i>
	V.	S S x S	18b <i>blæd wide sprang</i> , 5b <i>meodosetla ofteah</i>

⁴⁵ The better terms would be the "strong" and "weak position".

VI.	S x S S	17a <i>wuldres Wealdend</i> , 2436b <i>morþorbed stred</i>
VII.	x S S S	4a <i>oft Scyld Scefing</i> , 2201b <i>syððan Hygelac læg</i>
(with 4 lifts) VIII.	S S S S	367b <i>glædman Hroðgar</i> , 54a <i>leofleodcýning</i>

A greater number of patterns (eight instead of Sievers' or Cable's five) is immaterial: they are not a metrical system by themselves, but merely a logical consequence of metrical rules, which are succinct and few in number.

The rules used to assign metrical stress would take the following form:

- (17)** Strong metrical positions are formed by (the long syllables or resolved sequences of) roots, suffixes and stressed prefixes of open-class words, excluding finite lexical verbs;⁴⁶ strong metrical positions are also formed by (the initial – except for an unstressed prefix – long syllable or resolved sequences of) any other word displaced from its normal syntactic position and/or standing verse-finally.⁴⁷
- (18)** Weak metrical positions are formed by (the syllables of) inflections, unstressed prefixes, finite lexical verbs, and closed-class words.

It is possible for an element listed under **(18)** to be occasionally promoted and form a strong position (e.g. 1599a *þæt hine seo brimwylf*) or even alliterate (197 on *þæm dæge þysse lifes*, 251b *nu ic eower sceal*). However, demotion of an element in **(17)** is impossible.

The statement of metre is completed by introducing the rules on resolution **(2)**, **(11)**,⁴⁸ mono- and polysyllabic dips **(12)**, and the prefix licence **(13)**.

⁴⁶ Open-class words are adjectives, nouns (including compounds), lexical verbs (finite and non-finite forms), and derived adverbs. Closed-class words are pronouns, auxiliaries, semi-auxiliaries, conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and non-derived adverbs.

⁴⁷ The most prominent examples of such syntactic displacement are finite verbs occurring after the first stressed element in the sentence ("Kuhn's law") and postpositions (e.g. Beo.41a *þa him mid scoldon*).

⁴⁸ See also fn. 49.

It is possible to equate in status the primary and secondary metrical stress since the morphosyllabic segments that are usually assigned the respective stresses do not demonstrate any rhythmical difference in any rhythmical pattern in *Beowulf*. So, resolution is equally applicable in either "primary", "secondary" or "tertiary" sequences: 2239a *weard winegeomor*, 76a *folcstede frætwan*, 2622a *eorlscipe efnan*. Further, and more specifically, the contexts for the suspension of resolution are the same for all three types of sequences: 1250b *wæs seo þeod tilu*, 1b *in geardagum*, 144a *swa rixode*; 215b *guman ut scufon*, 31a *leof landfruma*, 2612a *suna Ohteres*. Further still, suspension is caused by all the types of segments indiscriminately: 31a *leof landfruma*, 90a *swutol sang scopes*, 215b *guman ut scufon* ("primary"); 838b *guðrinc monig*, 1896b *sægeap naca* ("secondary"); 1112b *æþeling manig*, 1457b *Hrunting nama*, 2457b *ridend swefað* ("tertiary").⁴⁹ The conclusion is that word boundaries and the distinction between three levels of stress are not significant for the basic prosodic structure of the Old English half-line.

It is immediately obvious that the patterns resulting from this system cut across the customary classification into the Five Types. So, pattern IV includes verses of A and D-type, e.g. 27a *felahror feran* on the one hand, and 58a *glæde Scyldingas* on the other. Pattern V includes verses of D and E-type. e.g. 129a *micel morgensweg* and 5b *meodosetla ofteah*, and also the traditionally ambiguous verses like 18b *blæd wide*

⁴⁹ Finally, Kaluza's law, if restricted to the nominal / adjectival endings (e.g. the nominative / accusative of masculine *-i-* stems) that could have a morphonological opposition within a morphological paradigm (unlike inflected trisyllabic forms like *Wedera* or most verbal endings), functions equally well for "secondary" sequences (76a *folcstede frætwan* as opposed to 31a *leof landfruma*), "tertiary" sequences (641a *freolicu folccwen*; 1470a *drihtscype dreogan*; 2069a *freondscipe fæstne*; 2133a *eorlscipe efnde*; 2535a *eorlscype efne*; 2622a *eorlscipe efnan* as opposed to 2197a *on ðam leodscipe*, again with the type of ending correctly predicted by Kaluza's Law; the only exception is 2999b *ond se feondscipe*), and most significantly, even "primary" sequences, since the first compound stems in the *weard winegeomor* type belong to those and only those words that are expected in the second metrical position under secondary stress in Bliss's version of Kaluza's law (as in *folcstede frætwan*): 487a *heall heorudreore*, 1109a *betst beadorinca*, 1847a *hild heorugrimme*, 2239a *weard winegeomor*, 2408a *hæft hygegeomor*, 1485a *geseon sunu Hrædles*, 2958b *segn Higelaces*, 1530b *mæg Hylaces*; another relevant verse, demonstrating in a similar way that SSSx and SSSx (which presuppose the relevance of word boundaries) should in fact be taken simply as SSSx, is 3041a *grimlic gryrefah*.

sprang, 1615b *sweord ær gemealt*, 897b *wyrm hat gemealt* (it has always been unclear whether they belong to type D or E).

The reason for the reshuffling is certainly the complete refusal of the proposed system to take into account word boundaries and alliteration. An inconsistency of Cable's theory is that while he constructs a metrical model without using the notion of the word boundary or the "foot", he still arrives at the Five Types in the end; but the Five Types in any interpretation would covertly include the notion of word boundary. In Cable's case, the reason for this is the employment of secondary stress, an element that is implicitly founded upon word boundary.

The notion of word boundary will certainly be required in the metrical system to describe the assignment of alliteration. The main rule here will be that alliteration may only fall on the first metrically stressed syllable of a word.⁵⁰ Additional rules will define the order of preference in which different morpheme and word classes receive alliteration.

In this way, the metrical system would be constructed in two levels: the level of verse prosody (morphosyllabic structure) and the level of alliteration. The former level is by far the most important, as the commensurability of verses (the fundamental property of the phenomenon of metre) is determined here. Although the rules for alliteration in the classical Old English metre are quite complicated⁵¹ and very strictly followed, alliteration remains but an ornament.

The divorce of the rules for verse prosody and alliteration into two separate levels within the metrical system is satisfactory not only from the theoretical and typological perspective. It is also beneficial for the economy of description: the notion of word boundary is not introduced at the level where it is not needed, plus particular

⁵⁰ The number of compounds with double alliteration (e.g. 176b *wigweorþunga*) is very small. We may safely take the alliteration as accidental and even undesirable, for had it been possible on the second stem the pattern would have been very common.

⁵¹ The rules are complicated in comparison with those for end-rhyme in later poetry, but not in comparison with the level of verse prosody in Old English.

rhythmical patterns can be shown to follow from a tabular combination of the two sets of rules.

Kaluza's law as interpreted by Fulk is the chief and probably the only evidence of the distinction between secondary and tertiary stress in Old English metre.

Considering that over sixty pages in *A History of Old English Meter* are devoted to the "ictus at the tertiary level", this is a big claim to make. However, the claim is actually far from being a flat denial of the material or conclusions presented by Fulk. The main difference of my approach is that I see the historical variation in the status of the elements that fall under the "tertiary" category to be exactly that: a variation.

Linguistically, the elements that were losing their semantic and morphological status could be interpreted either way, as strong or weak positions.⁵² In this sense, the material of Fulk's chapter holds (since it shows the historical progression of this loss in different elements across different poems).⁵³ However, as soon as the choice was made in the course of poetic production, the "tertiary" element could only be equivalent to elements with either zero metrical stress or primary – and the only – metrical stress. As outlined above, there is no difference in the prosodic behaviour of morphosyllabic sequences in the positions of "primary", "secondary", or "tertiary" stress with regard to any known prosodic phenomenon: resolution, its suspension with all the accompanying rules, or Kaluza's law. The only respect in which the distinction of the three levels of stress is significant is alliteration.

In this regard, it is instructive to consider the evidence adduced by Bliss to demonstrate the distinction between secondary and tertiary stress.

⁵² Note that there appears to be little need to pose a separate line of development for, say, vowels under secondary or tertiary stress in the history of English. The development of vowels in the relevant morphosyllabic elements can vary between that of unambiguously *betonte* or *unbetonte* ones, but phonologically there appears to have been no "third option".

⁵³ Essentially, I propose to view Fulk's material on tertiary stress as a historical rather than synchronic analysis.

That the distinction between secondary and tertiary stress is of real metrical significance will be clear from the table below. Under each of the types of verse considered the first row, marked (1), gives the number of a-verses and the number of b-verses in *Beowulf*, with percentage equivalents in brackets; the second row, marked (2), gives the number of a-verses with double alliteration and the number of a-verses with single alliteration, with percentage equivalents in brackets.

		<i>With secondary stress</i>		<i>With tertiary stress</i>	
Type A2k	(1)	23 : 25	(48 : 52)	3 : 12	(20 : 80)
	(2)	16 : 7	(70 : 30)	2 : 1	(67 : 30)
Type A2l	(1)	54 : 8	(87 : 13)	30 : 21	(59 : 41)
	(2)	54 : 0	(100 : 0)	17 : 13	(57 : 43)
Type A2b	(1)	65 : 0	(100 : 0)	47 : 27	(64 : 36)
	(2)	65 : 0	(100 : 0)	35 : 12	(74 : 26)
Type D1	(1)	20 : 2	(91 : 9)	38 : 119	(24 : 76)
	(2)	20 : 0	(100 : 0)	19 : 19	(50 : 50)
Type D2	(1)	37 : 0	(100 : 0)	20 : 111	(15 : 85)
	(2)	37 : 0	(100 : 0)	9 : 11	(45 : 55)

The very striking differences in the percentages leave no doubt that there is a real distinction between secondary and tertiary stress.⁵⁴

The most cursory glance at Bliss's table will show that the determinant feature in the distribution is actually alliteration. The patterns *with secondary stress* that occur freely in both the first and second half-line – namely, type A2k – do not show any restriction with regard to double or single alliteration (second line of data in the table). On the contrary, every pattern that is restricted to the first half-line is also restricted to double alliteration. The only logically possible explanation is that it is the requirement of the double alliteration that restricts the four latter patterns to the a-verse. As for the patterns with tertiary stress, the distributions are free enough to constitute zero evidence on their own. An example of how easy it is to show that such "suggestive" distributions have in fact nothing to do with metrical factors was given above (p. 51), specifically for the most "prominent" ratio in the second column (type D1, 38 : 119 for tertiary stress).

⁵⁴ Bliss, p. 26.

Therefore, the only thing we have learnt from the table is that full compounds always alliterate, at least in the first half-line. It is the only conclusion that really follows from the double alliteration in types A2b, D1 and D2. The reason behind this need not be purely prosodic: the poetical status of full compounds is another plausible factor. As for types A2k and A2l, they show that even if a full compound stands verse-initially, the second word in such verses should preferably alliterate too, especially if its initial syllable is long (A2l) rather than short (A2k). But since alliteration here does not directly concern a full compound, double alliteration is only a preference (54:8) rather than a rule (complementary distribution for A2b, D1 and D2).

The rules of the alliteration component should obviously make reference to word boundaries as well as the morphological structure of the sequences that are to be assigned alliteration; there is no other way. However, systemically the component is put into operation only *after* the prosodic rules have formed the verse. As follows from the discussion of Bliss's table, there is no evidence for a *direct* significance of a "secondary" or "tertiary" status of a morphosyllabic sequence at the first, prosodic level.

The proposed "morphological" theory allows us to interpret probably the most mysterious feature of Old English metre, namely the prefix licence. Cable's use of both primary and secondary stress, and his view of the verse as of a stress level contour, means that Old English had a sub-type of accentual metre that was based on the ability of particular morpheme and word classes to carry particular levels of intonational prominence. In this context, it is very hard to understand how a syllable may be completely omitted from the metrical count: the prominence of the syllable may be low, but it will still be part of the intonational contour of the verse. A suggestion that prefixes could be slurred will not do at all: first, why should prefixes have been used at all then, as in most cases they are not required by the sense; second, why not slur other syllables, not necessarily belonging to prefixes?

However, if we dispense with different levels of stress, it becomes clear that the metrical status of particular syllables is determined not by the contours of intonational prominence, but solely by the metrical status of the respective morpheme class and the position of the syllable in the verse. Thus, the morpheme classes listed in rule (17) always form the strong position in verse. The classes listed in rule (18) usually form the weak position. In these circumstances, the special status of prefixes is not at all surprising: as all morphological classes have their metrical status, the prefixes also have their own, albeit different from the rest. It is clear why prefixes may be included into or excluded from the metrical position count at will: there are two possibilities assigned by metre to this morphological class ("weak position or no position"), exactly as closed-class words are ambivalent and may occupy a weak or (in certain circumstances) strong position.

The title of this section offers the term "morphological metre". Indeed, it is hardly possible to call the proposed system "accentual" even in the limited sense that has been used in serious metrical studies of Old English verse. The half-line does not have a constant number of phrasal stresses, not even a constant number of strong metrical positions, which can instead vary from two to four with complete nonchalance. More important, because more fundamental, is the extremely frequent clash of two, or very often three, and sometimes even four strong metrical positions. Any metre where three out of the four syllables in a line can and often do form strong positions is not likely to be accentual, since the principle of stress level alternation, basic for any accentual metre, cannot exist in such an environment.

Another major feature incompatible with an accentual system is that the metrical status of almost all morphosyllabic sequences is predetermined: it is wholly dependent on their paradigmatic morphological status rather than on the phrasal, syntagmatic pattern of stress and intonation that is relevant for an accentual metre. It is especially

significant that while the sequences that are usually metrically weak may be promoted, no contextual demotion is possible for the sequences that are defined as metrically strong.

The contextual promotion of weak morphological elements is rare. Nevertheless, it does occur, and thus the accentual principle, with its attention to the general context of the phrase rather than the predetermined metrical status of a morphosyllabic unit, is present in the background of the metrical system. The growth of that seed will be described in Chapter 4.

A sidetrack: Old English extended metre

"Hypermetric verses" are lines that appear longer than normal (hence the term "hypermetric") and are scattered throughout Old English poetic corpus, usually in twos and threes, sometimes in single lines, and only rarely in longer passages. They often start in mid-sentence and make place for normal metre just as abruptly. In most cases there is no apparent poetic reason to introduce them at the point they occur. Nevertheless, the prosodic form of the verses is sufficiently consistent for them to have been accepted as genuine variations of metre (if not metrical variations) rather than textual corruptions or "prosodic fits" on the part of "oral poets turned scribes". As shown below, the verses are indeed written in a particular and very regular metre. In such a case, the term "hypermetric" is hardly applicable and only misleading. Thus, the prosodic form will be referred to as the "extended metre". The extended metre has no direct relevance for the subject of this chapter except as another illustration that the principles proposed in the previous section are functional. However, the issue of Old English extended verses will come up in Chapter 4, and it seems most appropriate to present the matter now.

Since the extended verses are rare, the material of this section goes beyond *Beowulf* and includes the relevant verses in all Old English poems, as listed by Bliss (*The Metre of 'Beowulf'*, pp.162-168), with the exception of the *Dream of the Rood*, *Guthlac A*, *Metres of Boethius*, *Psalm 50*, *Solomon and Saturn*, and *Maxims*. All of those poems with the exception of the latter show metrical deviation in the form of their extended verses just as they do in their normal verse. As for *Maxims*, their extended metre is sufficiently different to merit a separate discussion. Since the object of the

section is to present my understanding of the extended metre rather than its historical or textual variations in the Old English period, it seemed sensible to remove the poems from the corpus.⁵⁵ The final version of the list contains 496 extended half-lines.

The second half-line of the extended metre has five metrical positions. The *final four* positions can occur in any form permissible in normal verse.⁵⁶ The only difference from normal verse is that polysyllabic dips are not allowed. The reason for this restriction is that the *first* position of the extended b-verse is a polysyllabic dip. Alliteration marks only one lift – the first one. Examples of extended b-verses (the scansion column shows the pattern of the final four positions that follow after the obligatory initial polysyllabic dip):

Beo.1163b	þær þa godan twegen	-SxSx
Beo.1164b	þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere	-SpSrx
Beo.1165b	Swylce þær Unferþ þyle	-SSSr
Beo.1168b	Spræc ða ides Scyldinga	-SrSSx
Beo.1707b	ðu scealt to frofre weorþan	-SxSx
Beo.2996b	syððan hie ða mærdæ geslogon	-SxpSx
Elene.163b	ond mine leode generede	-SxpSrx
Elene.583b	ne magon ge þa wyrd bemiðan	-SpSx
Christ.1380b	ond þe ondgiæt sealde	-SSSx
Christ.1381b	geaf ic ðe lifgendne gæst	-SSxS

Although statistically the preferred form of the final four positions is -SxSx, many other patterns occur. Note that all the regularities observed in normal verse work for the extended metre: resolution (Beo.1168b *ides*, and Elene.163b *generede*, where resolution removes the polysyllabic dip); suspension (Beo.1165b *Unferþ þyle*), prefix licence (Beo.2996b *mærdæ geslogon* and Elene.163b *leode generede*, where the licence

⁵⁵ Several individual verses were removed from Bliss's list since they appear normal: Elene.163a *þe me swa leoht oðywe*, Elene.668a *ond on tweon swiðost*, Order of the World.98a *forþon scyle mon gehycgan*, Resignation.80a *gewitnad for þisse worulde*, Daniel.271b *him eac þær wæs*, Daniel.273a *him þær on ofne*, Daniel.273b *owiht ne derede*, Christ and Satan.202a *ecne in wuldre*. Also removed were Elene.580-582 because of lineation problems.

⁵⁶ With the obvious exception of the five-positional D* and A*.

removes the polysyllabic dip; as opposed to Elene.583b *wyrd bemiðan*, where the prefix takes part in position count).⁵⁷

Thus, the structure of the extended b-verse is very simple. The form of the a-verse is somewhat more complicated. Just as the second half-line, the first one ends with four metrical positions that may take any form permissible in normal verse, and just as in the second half-line, polysyllabic dips are prohibited within these final four positions. However, unlike the second half-line, the sequence before the final four positions (the "onset") is almost unregulated; the only requirements are that it should contain no more than three positions, and at least one strong position.⁵⁸ Examples of extended a-verses (the scansion column shows the pattern of the sequence that precedes the final four positions):

Beo.1163a	gan under gyldnum beage	Sxx-
Beo.1165a	æghwylc oðrum trywe	SS-
Beo.1168a	arfæst æt ecga gelacum.	SSx-
Andreas.1023a	feohtan fara monna	Sx-
Elene.583a	wrigon under womma sceatum	Srxxx-
Christ.888a	egeslic of þære ealdan moldan	SrSxxx-
Christ.1382a	arode þe ofer ealle gesceafte	SSrxxx-
Christ.1427a	eadig on þam ecan life	SSxx-
Guthlac B.1161a	onwriga worda gongum	pSr-
Riming Poem.82a	gemon morþa lisse	pS-
Lord's Prayer I.3a	noma niþþa bearnum	Sr-
Genesis.2869a	men mid siðian	S-
Exodus.573a	ealle him brimu blodige þuhton	SxxSr-
Daniel.59a	bereafodon þa receda wuldor	pSSrxx-
Judith.93a	torhtmod tires brytta	SS-

The extended a-verse should have double alliteration. One of the staves always occurs on the first lift in the sequence of final four positions. The other occurs on the

⁵⁷ However, for one reason or another the only suspended sequence in *Beowulf*, 1165b *Unferþ þyle*, does not comply to Kaluza's law.

⁵⁸ Obviously, the latter requirement is only relevant if the onset happens to contain only one metrical position: it means that the form S- is allowed, x- is not. There may seem to be two instances of the x-onset, Order of the World.102a *mid synna fyrnum* and Judith.349a *ond swegles dreamas*, but they cannot be accepted for reasons that will be made clear below.

suitable strong position within the onset. However, there is a complication: it is actually possible for the onset of the extended a-verse to contain no strong positions. In that case, the onset must take form of a polysyllabic dip, and the second alliteration occurs on the second strong metrical position within the final four. Here are some examples:

Andreas.799a	hwær se wealdend wære
Fortunes.15a	Sumne sceal hungor ahiþan
Fortunes.16a	sumne sceal gar agetan
Genesis.2170a	þenden þu mine lare læstest
Daniel.263a	Næs him se sweg to sorge
Daniel.434a	Wæron þa bende forburnene
Daniel.436a	Næs hyra wlite gewemmed
Daniel.452a	Agæf him þa his leoda lafe
Daniel.456a	Wæron hyra rædas rice
Riddle 16.1a	Oft ic sceal wiþ wæge winnan

Clearly, this subtype is related to the "light" verses of the normal metre, such as Beo.28a *hi hyne þa ætbæron* or Beo.1599a *þæt hine seo brimwylf*. The requirement of a polysyllabic dip and the specific alliteration pattern make the parallel inescapable.

Kuhn's law appears to function in the extended a-verses in a way similar to the normal metre: *swa cwæð snottor on mode (Wanderer 111a)*, *ne sindon him dæda dyrne (Christ 1049a; finite forms correctly weak)*. Particularly frequent are instances where the verb in the first stave is a variant to a preceding finite form: *þa cwom Wealhþeo forð, // gan under gyldnum beage (Beowulf 1162b-1163a, the verb correctly strong)*. However, just as in normal verse, deviations do occur, cf. *Swylce þær Unferþ þyle // æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga (Beowulf 1165b-1166a; unless the verb is weak, it is the only a-verse in the corpus with an onset exceeding three metrical positions)*. In the b-verse, interpretation of the law is somewhat different: the verb that is a variant to a preceding finite form is weak (with the possible exception of *Wanderer 111b*, see below): *Iudas hire ongen þingode, // cwæð þæt he þæt on gehðu gespræce, // ond on tweon swiðost, // wende him trage hnagre (Elene 667-668)*; *Of lame ic þe leoþo gesette, // geaf ic ðe*

lifgendne gæst, // arode þe ofer ealle gesceafta, // gedyde ic þæt þu onsyn hæfdest
(*Christ* 1381-1382).

Thus, the extended b-verse has a very clear and simple pattern that patently does not require any mergers of two permissible normal-verse patterns as suggested by Sievers or Bliss.⁵⁹ It is clearly a very regular metre built upon the same principles as the normal verse, but with a different surface form. Risking a flawed analogy, one could compare the prosodic relation of the "normal" and "extended" metres in Old English to that of a contemporary tetrameter and pentameter. The extended a-verse has the same structure of the final four positions as the extended b-verse (and thus as the normal verse). Since there was no need to posit a "merger" in the extended b-verse, such an interpretation is unattractive for the a-verse as well. The onset of the a-verse is freer than any other pattern in Old English poetry, normal or extended, in that the variation in the very number of metrical positions is allowed; however, the prosodic principles governing the extended a-verse are the same as elsewhere.

The extended metre is different from normal verse in that the first and second half-lines have their own separate structures. Generally, the distinction holds. Nevertheless, there are instances in the corpus where both half-lines follow the a-verse pattern:

Christ.1162	hloþe of ðam hatan hreþre. Hyge wearð mongum blissad
Christ.1384	welan ofer widlonda gehwylc, nysse þu wean ænigne dæl
Christ.1424	Lytel þuhte ic leoda bearnum, læg ic on heardum stane
Christ.1495	Ic wæs on worulde wædla þæt ðu wurde welig in heofonum
Christ.1514	wite to widan ealdre, wræc mid deoflum geþolian
Wanderer.111	Swa cwæð snottor on mode, gesæt him sundor æt rune

Note that (with the exception of the generally deviating *Maxims*) all the examples come from *Christ III*. It is thus more profitable to treat the alliteration in Wanderer 111 *gesæt*

⁵⁹ Eduard Sievers, 'Der angelsächsische Schwellvers,' *PBB* 12 (1887), pp. 454-482. Alan Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, pp. 88-97.

as metrically insignificant (as pointed out above, finite forms in this syntactic-metrical environment in the b-verse are normally weak).

There are only three apparently genuine examples of both half-lines following the b-verse structure:

Daniel.207	þa þis hegan ne willað, ne þysne wig wurðigean
Judith.345	to ðam ælmihtigan; huru æt þam ende ne tweode
Riddle 16.4	Ic beom strong þæs gewinnes, gif ic stille weorþe

However, by far the most interesting case is *The Fates of Apostles* 98; it is the only instance in Old English poetry where the first and second extended half-lines are actually transposed:

Her mæg findan foreþances gleaw,
 se ðe hine lysteð leoðgiddunga,
hwa þas fitte fegde. FEOH þær on ende standeþ,
 eorlas þæs on eorðan brucaþ. (*The Fates of Apostles*, ll. 96-99a).

This is of course the beginning of the passage with Cynewulf's runic signature - the only of the four where the runes are given in reverse order. For those less *gleaw* in their *foreþanc* Cynewulf gives two clues on how to arrange the runes: he says, with the characteristic straightforwardness, that *FEOH* "stands at the end", *and* reverses the regular metrical order of the two extended half-lines.

CHAPTER 2. Late Middle English alliterative metre

Late Middle English alliterative verse is currently much better described than that of Layamon. I will attempt to show that Layamon's metrical system is similar to the verse of the Alliterative Revival, and thus my analysis of the *Brut* will necessarily involve frequent reference to the late Middle English models. Therefore, it seemed expedient to present the period studies out of their chronological order, before proceeding to the overall historical reconstruction in Chapter 4.

Until relatively recently, late Middle English alliterative verse was considered to be unregulated in terms of the number and position of weak syllables. Scholars generally agreed that the b-verse had two metrical stresses, while differing in the treatment of the a-verse: in various approaches, the number of stresses there was either "always two" or "sometimes three" or "two, sometimes with a secondary stress".¹

¹ The three-stress solution is preferred, among others, by Hoyt Duggan ('The Shape of the B-verse' and 'Extended A-verses in Middle English Alliterative Poetry', in *Medieval English Measures*, ed. Ruth Kennedy, *Parergon* 18 (2000), pp. 53-76) and Thomas Cable (*The English Alliterative Tradition*). Regular two-stress metre is argued by Joan Turville-Petre ('The Metre of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *English Studies* 57 (1976), 310-28), Thorlac Turville-Petre (*The Alliterative Revival*, Cambridge, 1977) and Noriko Inoue (*The A-Verse of the Alliterative Long Line and the Metre of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Diss., University of Bristol, 2003). Another important two-stress analysis, by Marie Borroff, is cautious in its wording with regard to the complete subordination of the third stress and allows occasional three stresses in an a-verse (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study*, New Haven, 1962).

In the second half of 1980s, Hoyt Duggan and Thomas Cable independently came up with similar theories of late Middle English alliterative metre.² The major point of their theories was that the b-verse could have one and only one polysyllabic (or "strong") dip, either before the first lift ("initial strong dip") or between the two lifts ("medial strong dip").

SGGK.2b	to bronde3 and askez	xSxxSx	medial
SGGK.7b	in þe west iles	xxSSx	initial
SGGK.9b	he biges vpon fyrst	xSxxxS	medial
SGGK.30b	bot on littel quile	xxSxSx	initial

Following a term suggested by Angus McIntosh in an earlier and more theoretical discussion of the difference between the equal feet of the accentual-syllabic metres acquired from Romance traditions and the tumbling quality of much native poetry, Duggan called the metre "heteromorphic".³

Both Duggan and Cable were comfortable with the possibility of a three-lift a-verse. However, there the similarities ended and disagreements began. First, Cable maintained that the final dip of the b-verse should be invariably monosyllabic, while Duggan was prepared to permit masculine endings, although acknowledging a strong tendency to the feminine ones. The second point was related to the first: Cable suggested that the grammar of final *-e* was perfectly functional in the alliterative

² Hoyt Duggan, 'The Shape of the B-Verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *Speculum* 61 (1986), 564-592; 'Notes Toward a Theory of Langland's Meter,' *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987), 41-70; 'Final *-e* and the Rhythmic Structure of the B-Verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *Modern Philology* 85 (1988), 119-45; 'Langland's Dialect and Final *-e*,' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 12 (1990), 157-91; 'Stress Assignment in Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *JEGP* 91 (1990), 309-29. Thomas Cable, 'Middle English Meter and Its Theoretical Implications,' *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 2 (1988), 47-69; *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1991).

³ Angus McIntosh, 'Early Middle English Alliterative Verse,' in David Lawton, ed., *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background: Seven Essays* (Woodbridge, 1982), pp. 20-33. The heteromorphicity principle was first pointed out by Karl Luick in 'Die englische Stabreimzeile in XIV., XV. und XVI Jahrhundert,' *Anglia* 11 (1889), 392-443, 553-618. *Heteromorphic* is used in the thesis only in Duggan's restricted sense of "having one and only one strong dip either before the first lift or between the lifts of a two-lift verse".

poems.⁴ His metrical analysis produced a grammar very similar to what is known for the "middle" period of Middle English (c.1300 for Southern and Midland texts) and to what is familiar from Chaucer and other Southern texts from the end of the fourteenth century. Since the final dip was shown to contain routinely those and only those words and forms that historically had final *-e*, the requirement of a consistently feminine ending and the proposed grammar mutually supported each other. Duggan refused to admit the possibility of the preservation of final *-e* on the basis of the dating of its loss in historical grammars.⁵

Finally, according to Cable, the rhythmical patterns of the two half-lines were mutually exclusive: heteromorphic patterns were barred from appearing in the a-verse. Duggan suggested that verses like SGGK.3a *þe tulk þat þe trammes* were not infrequent in the first half-line. Obviously, the third point of disagreement was once again related to the first two, since while for Cable a-verse patterns without a final dip constituted evidence of mutual exclusivity, for Duggan they constituted counter-evidence.

The metrical discoveries of Duggan and Cable were used profitably by many scholars. One could point out metrical studies by Ralph Hanna, Noriko Inoue, Judith Jefferson, Ruth Kennedy, Donka Minkova, Ad Putter, and Myra Stokes and editions of alliterative texts, such as Ralph Hanna and David Lawton's *The Siege of Jerusalem*, Ruth Kennedy's *Three Alliterative Hymns*, or John Carlson's *Morte Arthure*.⁶ The

⁴ "While the immediate focus is on the final syllable in the lines of *Cleanness*, the conclusion can be generalized to the ends of lines in other poems, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Piers Plowman*, *Morte Arthure*, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *William of Palerne*, *Alexander A*, and *The Wars of Alexander*. The same principles hold, with minor modifications depending on idiolect and individual style, for nearly all of the poems of the Alliterative Revival (*The Destruction of Troy* being an exception despite, or because of, its apparent regularity, and *Piers Plowman* requiring more modifications than most)." Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 68.

⁵ 'Final *-e* and the Rhythmic Structure of the B-Verses in Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' *Modern Philology* 85 (1988), 119-120.

⁶ Ralph Hanna, 'Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M.T. Tavormina & R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 1995), 43-64. Ruth Kennedy, 'New Theories of Constraint in the Metricality of the Strong-Stress Long Line, Applied to the English Rhymed Alliterative Corpus, c.1400,' in *Métriques du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance*, ed. Dominique Billy (Paris, 1999), pp. 131-144. Noriko Inoue, *The A-Verses of the Alliterative Long Line and the Metre of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Diss., University of Bristol, 2003; 'A New Theory of Alliterative A-Verses,' *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 18 (2005), pp. 107-

studies have assembled a very considerable body of direct and circumstantial evidence in support of Duggan's and Cable's findings on heteromorphicity. I believe there is little doubt that the requirement of one and only one strong dip exists in late Middle English alliterative verse. However, in order to use late Middle English metre in the historical reconstruction proposed in this thesis it is necessary to discuss some of its features, in particular those that became the matter of controversy in the pioneering studies of Duggan and Cable. As follows from the comments above, the answer to most of these questions depends on the status of final *-e*.

132. Ad Putter, Judith Jefferson, and Myra Stokes, *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse* (Oxford, 2007); Ad Putter and Myra Stokes, 'Spelling, Grammar and Metre in the Works of the *Gawain*-Poet,' in *Medieval English Measures*, ed. Ruth Kennedy, *Parergon* 18 (2000), 77-95; Judith Jefferson and Ad Putter, 'The Distribution of Infinitives in *-e* and *-en* in Some Middle English Alliterative Poems,' *Medium Ævum* 74 (2005), pp. 221-247. Donka Minkova, 'Diagnostics of Metricality in Middle English Alliterative Verse,' in *Leeds Studies in English* (forthcoming). Editions: *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, EETS OS 320 (Oxford, 2003); *Three Alliterative Saints' Hymns: Late Middle English Stanzaic Poems*, ed. Ruth Kennedy, EETS OS 321, (Oxford, 2003). John Carlson, *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Hyper-Critical Edition*, Diss., University of Virginia, 2007.

The grammar of final *-e*

Chronology of loss

Major historical grammars of Middle English roughly agree in their dating of the loss of final *-e*. Karl Luick, Richard Jordan, Karl Brunner, and Joseph Wright place the disappearance of *-e* in Northern dialects before the end of the thirteenth century.⁷ The Midlands dialects lost final *-e* by about the middle, and the Southern dialects by about the end of the fourteenth century.

Nevertheless, preservation of final *-e* in Northern Midland dialects of the second half of the fourteenth century does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility. Despite the signs of loss appearing in the fourteenth century, the grammar of final *-e* appears in a healthy state in even later Southern poems. In Chaucer, despite certain variation (which is greater in some categories than others), the historical forms are quite regular – more regular, in fact, than some accounts allow. A similar situation transpires in the holographs of Hoccleve, writing a generation later.⁸

Dating of the composition of the Revival poems is a vexed issue. Most of the manuscripts come from the end of the fourteenth or the fifteenth century; specifically, the manuscript of SGGK is dated by Ian Doyle to the latter half of the fourteenth, with

⁷ Luick, *Historische Grammatik...*, §473; Jordan, *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology*, trans. Eugene Crook (The Hague, 1974), §138; Karl Brunner, *Die Englische Sprache* (Tübingen, 1960), vol. I, p. 348; Joseph Wright and E.M. Wright, *An Elementary Middle English Grammar* (Oxford, 1923), §141. For a detailed summary of these and other datings, see Donka Minkova, *The History of Final Vowels in English: The Sound of Muting* (Berlin, 1991).

⁸ For final *-e* in Chaucer, see especially Bernhard Ten Brink, *The Language and Metre of Chaucer* (London, 1901); E.T. Donaldson, 'Chaucer's final *-e*,' *PMLA* 63 (1948), pp. 1101-1124; and M.L. Samuels 'Chaucerian final *-e*,' *Notes and Queries* 217 (1972), pp. 445-448; for a different emphasis, see Ruth McJimsey, *Chaucer's irregular *-e*: A demonstration among monosyllabic nouns of the exceptions to grammatical and metrical harmony* (New York, 1942). On Hoccleve, see Judith Jefferson, 'The Hoccleve Holographs and Hoccleve's Metrical Practice,' in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature*, ed. D. Pearsall (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 95-109.

the last quarter somewhat more likely.⁹ Nevertheless, despite much scholarly attention no firm evidence has been uncovered to place SGGK at any particular point in the second half of the fourteenth century. The probable reference to the Order of the Garter in the closing scene of the poem (even if the following motto is discounted as a later addition) places the composition after 1348, and if the tongue-in-cheek description of the "wilderness of Wirral" is prompted by the policies of Edward the Black Prince,¹⁰ the reference is more likely to have been made before 1370s. It is universally agreed that the extant texts of SGGK, MA or SJ are removed from the originals by a considerable number of copies, so *some* time should be allowed for the process of transmission. There is every possibility, however, that at least some of the poems are *significantly* older than their manuscripts. The clearer references to historical events in other poems also point to the third rather than fourth quarter of the fourteenth century. So, *Winner and Waster* was interpreted by Gollancz as a political satire on the events of 1352-53, and although his hard-line position with regard to the poem's dating has not found universal approval, it appears that the presence of the relevant allusions in the text has not been denied.¹¹ *Morte Arthure* is sometimes seen as a poetic comment on the politics of Edward III – a comment that makes little sense if made long after the events.¹² The

⁹ "Cotton Nero A x may antedate Vernon and Simeon, for its only certain *terminus a quo* is 1348 from the Garter motto at the end of *Sir Gawain* and the volume (f.124v), the script of which, a species of Bastard Anglicana, only confirms the second half of the century, but the English couplet above the picture of the temptation of Gawayne on the next page, which is also probably by the main scribe, points rather to the last quarter of the century" (A.I. Doyle, 'The Manuscripts,' in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background* ed. David Lawton (Woodbridge, 1982), p. 92). With the exception for the manuscript of *William of Palerne* (King's College, Cambridge, MS 13), dated to c. 1360-1375 (see *William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance*, ed. G.H.V. Bunt (Groningen, 1985), and comments in Doyle, p. 90), the earliest copies of major alliterative poems (*Piers Plowman* excepted) belong to the end of the century. In addition to Cotton Nero A.x, they include the Vernon (*Pistill of Susan, Joseph of Arimathea*) and Simeon manuscripts, the Laud and Princeton copies of the *Siege of Jerusalem*, and the text of *Alexander and Dindimus* in Bodley 264.

¹⁰ Ralph Hanna, *The Wilderness of Wirral and Some Further Thoughts on "The Gawain-Country"*, paper presented at the Medieval English Research Seminar, Oxford University, Trinity Term 2006.

¹¹ *A Good Short Debate Between Winner and Waster: An Alliterative Poem on Social and Economic Problems in England in the Year 1352*, ed. Israel Gollancz (London, 1920). *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ed. Stephanie Trigg (Oxford, 1990).

¹² For the difference of opinion on the matter, see John Finlayson, 'Morte Arthure: The Date and a Source for the Contemporary References,' *Speculum* 42 (1967), pp. 624-638 and K.H. Göller, 'A Summary of Research,' in *The Alliterative 'Morte Arthure': A Reassessment of the Poem*, ed. K.H. Göller (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 11-12.

possible adjustment in dating might not be much more than a quarter of a century, but even such a figure can be crucial, as seen from some certainly Northern poetry that preserves final *-e* for metricality, such as *Speculum Vitae*, composed c.1360.¹³

The present section is concerned specifically with the grammar of final *-e* in two poems: SGGK and MA. A Southern provenance does not appear to be very plausible for the dialects of the original compositions.¹⁴ While it can hardly be denied that the case for alliterative poetry as a regional North West Midlands literary phenomenon used to be overstated,¹⁵ and although different possibilities exist for the authorial dialects of other major alliterative poems (*Piers Plowman*, *William of Palerne*, and *St Erkenwald* are particular cases in point), in the case of SGGK and MA a Southern composition is made unlikely by the patterns of alliteration and, most importantly, the use of a vocabulary (containing a significant proportion of Old Norse loans) which is at the same time specific for the alliterative style and which re-occurs, if ever, in other Northern Middle English texts.¹⁶

It follows from the preceding paragraphs that neither the most probable place, nor the most probable time of the composition of SGGK and MA fits within the time limits set for final *-e* in historical grammars. However, the gap is not impossibly large

¹³ *Speculum Vitae*, ed. Ralph Hanna, EETS OS 331 (forthcoming).

¹⁴ On the dialect of Cotton Nero A.x, see Angus McIntosh, 'A New Approach to Middle English Dialectology,' *English Studies* 44 (1963), pp. 1-11, who localises the scribe in "a very small area either in SE Cheshire or just over the border in NE Staffordshire." The poet has usually been localised close to that area, cf. Duggan, 'Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect,' in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 241-242.

¹⁵ For the discussion of the regional bias, see Elizabeth Salter, *Fourteenth Century English Poetry: Contexts and Readings* (Oxford, 1984); Ralph Hanna, 'Alliterative Poetry,' in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David A. Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 488-512.

¹⁶ On alliterative patterns in SGGK, see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed. rev. Norman Davis (Oxford, 1972), pp. 150-151 and a more recent summary in Duggan, 'Meter, Stanza, Vocabulary, Dialect,' in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 240-242. On MA, see Karl Schumacher, 'Studien über den Stabreim in der mitttelenglischen Alliterationsdichtung,' *Bonner Studien zur Englischen Philologie* 11 (1914), pp. 67-92; J.P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English* (Hamden, 1968), pp. 64-65; *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition*, ed. Valerie Krishna (New York, 1976), p. 25.

for final *-e* to have survived in certain speech registers – similarly to the model suggested by M.L. Samuels for Chaucer.¹⁷

The grammars base their conclusions with regard to the disappearance of final *-e* largely, although by no means exclusively, on the evidence of spelling.¹⁸ The inconsistency in the treatment of *-e* by Robert Thornton or the scribe of Cotton Nero A.x is well documented (many historical and grammatical *-e*'s are absent; on the other hand, there is a great number of instances where the scribal *-e* is unhistorical). In the absence of metrical evidence, this scribal inconsistency is one of the main reasons for denying the use of *-e* to the poet. Norman Davis wrote on the language of SGGK that "[i]n view of the strength of the other evidence it seems most likely that these [the rhymes *soþe* 415 : *to þe* and *wape* 2355 / *ta þe*] are conventional archaic pronunciations and that in general *-e* was no longer sounded. But it may well have been used optionally in particular places ... which we cannot determine from the written page".¹⁹ It appears that Davis did not rule out preservation of final *-e* a priori, but had little specific evidence to think otherwise. However, what cannot be determined from the written page may be recovered by metrical analysis. Since Duggan and Cable provided Middle English studies with the new powerful tool of heteromorphicity, it appears unreasonable to refuse it or reject what it can produce.

As noted before, the presence or absence of final *-e* determines the syllabic value of a very large number of words in late Middle English alliterative poems. Thus, before attempting any metrical analysis that goes beyond the general statement of heteromorphicity ("each b-verse should contain one and only one strong dip"), it is essential to establish our position with regard to final *-e*.

¹⁷ M.L. Samuels 'Chaucerian final *-e*,' *Notes and Queries* 217 (1972), pp. 445-448.

¹⁸ Minkova, *The History of Final Vowels in English*, pp. 35-80.

¹⁹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien, E.V. Gordon and Norman Davis (Oxford, 1972), p. 133.

In the discussion below, the basic statement of the heteromorphic metre is used to test the presence of final *-e* and other forms. The two available test environments are the medial strong dip and the final dip. If the grammar of final *-e* is indeed preserved in SGGK and MA, several regularities should transpire:

- the final lift should contain a number of forms that historically had final *-e*;
- the final lift should not contain either forms that historically did not have final *-e* or forms where final *-e* was the second inflectional syllable (since a disyllabic final dip seems to be impossible: with *very* few exceptions, it does not appear in any instances that do not involve the potential final *-e*);
- some strong dips should only be strong by virtue of a historically correct final *-e*;
- forms that historically contained final *-e* should not occur in the pattern $x...xSxeSx$ or $x...xSexSx$, so that the b-verse would have two strong dips.

The procedure is little different from that used by Thomas Cable, and the results are predictably similar.²⁰ Nevertheless, since Cable's analysis was centred on *Cleanness* and his results list only the more frequent grammatical categories, it seemed expedient to confirm most of his findings specifically for the poems that are used in the subsequent metrical analysis of this Chapter (SGGK and MA) and to demonstrate that final *-e* is preserved in all the contexts where we would expect to find it in accordance with the grammar of the "middle" period of Middle English. Preservation of the

²⁰ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, pp. 66-113.

inflections in grammatical categories with a small functional load is an important point, since it suggests that the grammar of final *-e* had been transmitted in the course of a natural linguistic development, rather than as a set of archaistic forms retained by the conservative style of traditional poetry.

Inflections in the final dip in SGGK

The discussion is based on my scansions of the 2025 long lines of SGGK. For certain points, a comparison is made with *Morte Arthure* and the *Siege of Jerusalem*. A statement like "an ending X is present throughout" implies that in all non-ambiguous instances the presence of a particular ending produces the correct metre, while its absence produces an irregular one.

Since the issue of the monosyllabicity of the final dip is linked directly to the problem of final *-e*, the existence of the rule has caused a great amount of controversy. Presently the received opinion seems to be that there is a *strong tendency* for the final dip to be monosyllabic (as opposed to the absence of a dip). Of course, the initial working assumption of a metrical analysis is that it *must* be monosyllabic. Any frequent occurrences or remarkable absences may then be noted, and exceptions catalogued. If the exceptions ratio is negligible, and if a large number of grammatical categories and morphosyllabic patterns demonstrate complementary distribution, the monosyllabic rule and the preserved grammar of final *-e* become a strong possibility.

This is precisely what seems to happen in SGGK. The rules stated by Cable function very soundly for the whole poem.²¹ However, several other regularities, all of them consistent with Chaucer's usage, should be added:

²¹ The rules listed in the *English Alliterative Tradition* are well-known and need hardly be restated here. They concern nouns; adjectives (plural, weak, and historically in *-e*); infinitives; weak preterites; certain

1. The plural *-e(n)* / *-e(s)* of the present, strong preterite, and syncopated weak preterite is retained throughout.²² It is frequent and usually reflected in spelling as *-en*, when its syllabic value has never been in doubt.²³ But the inflectional syllable figures in several other verses, e.g. reading *cryden* in line 1445, *mowe(n)* in line 2396, etc.:

SGGK.1004	Euen inmyddez, as þe messe metely come
SGGK.1143	And þay chastysed and charred on chasyng þat went
SGGK.1229	With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle þat lyf bere
SGGK.1343	Alle þe rymez by þe rybbez radly þay lance ²⁴
SGGK.1602	He3e halowing on hi3e with hapelez þat my3t
SGGK.1636	Bi fyn forwarde and faste, faythely 3e knowe
SGGK.1445	Þise oþer halowed hyghe! ful hy3e, and hay! hay! cryed
SGGK.2110	Forþy I say þe, as soþe as 3e in sadel sitte
SGGK.2396	For hit is grene as my goune. Sir Gawayn, 3e maye

2. The 2nd person singular ending is usually spelt *-es*, but must also have syllabic value in l.449 (this may, of course, be a subjunctive):

SGGK.449	And layte as lelly til þou me, lude, fynde
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3. The present singular subjunctive ending is *-e* throughout, as can be seen in fifteen b-verses²⁵ (excluding those with *were*):

SGGK.1038	Al þe honour is your awen – þe he3e kyng yow 3elde!
SGGK.1893	Now hym lenge in þat lee, þer luf hym bityde!

adverbs (Cable, 78-79). They parallel the description of Chaucer's grammar in Bernhard ten Brink's *The Metre and Language of Chaucer*, which remains probably the best account of Middle English grammar in general.

²² All the consonants in the discussed endings are given in brackets, as in verse-final contexts metre can only testify to the presence of a syllable, not its form.

²³ Cf. the linguistic commentary in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien, E.V. Gordon and Norman Davis (Oxford, 1972), p. 146.

²⁴ The plural forms in 1343 *þay lancen*, 1636 *3e knowe*, 2396 *3e maye* cannot be Northern due to the Northern Subject Rule: no ending is required if the pronoun is adjacent.

²⁵ Lines 1038, 1055, 1263, 1279, 1535, 1837, 1893, 1963, 2054, 2056, 2073, 2195, 2409, 2429, 2441. Most of the phrases are invocations to the divine power.

8. In adverbs final *-e* is grammatical, and is used without regard to the historical form of a particular item: *ere* (three instances, OE *ær*), *þere* (thirteen instances, OE *þær*), *-where* (seven instances, OE *-hwær*), *nexte* (once, OE *niehst*), *eke* (twice, OE *eac*), *inno3e* (once, OE *genoh*), *here* (ten instances, OE *her*).²⁷

Syncopé is regular in the unstressed sequences *-ere-*, *-ele-*, and also *-ene-* (if *-en* belongs to a nominal or verbal stem rather than to a strong participle or adjective, when syncopé does not occur). Sometimes it is reflected in spelling (e.g. 1319 *gamnez*, 1833 *fyngréz*, 1894 *gomnes*), but not in some other instances:²⁸

SGGK.1566	So felle flonez þer flete	when þe folk gedered
SGGK.1594	Hit hym vp to þe hult,	þat þe hert schyndered
SGGK.1603	Brachetes bayed þat best,	as bidden þe maysterez

In five verses, positing the regular infinitive ending might wrongly be taken to indicate a disyllabic dip at the end of the line: **herkene(n)*, **suffere(n)*, etc. But since all these infinitives contain sequences that are routinely syncopated, there is no real anomaly:

SGGK.1128	And þay busken vp bilyue	blonkkez to sadel
SGGK.1529	Oper elles 3e demen me to dille	your dalyaunce to herken
SGGK.1800	þat I may mynne on þe, mon,	my mournyng to lassen
SGGK.1967	þe gate to þe grene chapel,	as God wyl me suffer
SGGK.2012	And bede hym bryng hym his bruny	and his blonk sadel

²⁷ *ere*: SGGK.239, 527, 1632; *þere*: SGGK.344, 460, 1346, 1439, 1640, 1838, 1870, 1877, 1987, 2173, 2214, 2473, 2508; *-where*: SGGK.745, 800, 952, 959, 1521, 2181, 2164; *nexte*: SGGK.1780; *eke*: SGGK.90, 1741; *inno3e*: SGGK.888; *here*: SGGK.265, 391, 1056, 1243, 1252, 1272, 1801, 1962, 2189, 2194.

²⁸ Lines 29, 95, 156, 181, 418, 570, 775, 1131, 1170, 1194, 1201, 1414, 1494, 1516, 1529, 1566, 1594, 1603, 1739, 1967, 2505, 2346, 2350, 2505.

Several words, such as *morn*, *lorde*, *yrn*, seem to represent disyllabic forms (such as *morwen*, *louerd*, *iren*) that are usually or always obscured by the spelling.²⁹

In total, discounting nominal *-e*, grammatical inflections form the monosyllabic final dip in almost five hundred instances. The figure excludes those inflections where the weak vowel is routinely covered and which are therefore rarely brought into doubt (such as the genitive or plural of nouns, or the weak preterite, present plural and strong preterite plural of verbs).

Nouns is the only category where the rules of historical grammar do not appear to work very well. Cable suggests that "nouns from OE and ON that ended in a vowel in the nominative singular and nouns from OFr that ended in a vowel in the accusative singular have final *-e* in non-genitive singular usage ... Nouns from OE feminine declensions have a final *-e* in non-genitive singular usage."³⁰ This is largely a recapitulation of statements in the traditional grammars.³¹ However, masculine or neuter Old English nouns, or Old Norse / Old French nouns with etymologically consonantal termination quite often occur at the verse end in SGGK. In my understanding of etymology and grammar, there are 58 such instances.³² It would therefore be tempting to restate the rules, and posit an "inflected (prepositional) dative vs uninflected accusative" instead of the "feminine or vocalic vs non-feminine"

²⁹ *Morn*: ll.566, 1024, 1404, 1670, 1680, 1732, 1884; also found verse-finally in MA.1223, 2306, 3116. *Heued*: ll. 217, 286, 1721, 2217; similarly in MA.1354, 2129, 2445, 3351 and SJ.17, 247. *Lorde*: ll.753, 1271; also 42 instances in MA and five in SJ, although the disyllabic spelling occurs in the three poems only once, MA.3918 *louerde*. *Iron*: l.2267; also in MA 1105, 1182, 1186, 3621, 3683 and SJ.618, 846. *Sleight*, ll.1542, 1858, is from ON *sloegð*, and so should be monosyllabic; but it was treated as native nouns with the OE *-pu* suffix. Past participle *born*: ll.996, 2394. Adverb *ofte(n)* (fourteen instances): it is disyllabic only in SGGK, and is avoided verse-finally in MA and SJ.

³⁰ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 78.

³¹ Cf. ten Brink, pp. 141-145.

³² The nouns: *beard* (334, 2228), *bed* (1191, 1469, 2006; but here the disyllabic *bedde* is also possible), *bight* (1341), *child* (647), *Christ* (596; many times in MA), *day* (1560), *drink* (497, 1935), *dole* (<OE *dal*; 719), *faith* (2469), *fell* (723), *flet* (294, 568), *floor* (834, 1932), *gold* (4 times; also in MA), *ground* (426, 526; also in MA and SJ), *guest* (2055), *halm* (2224), *helm* (2407), *hole* (2221), *home* (1363, 1615, 1924), *horn* (1601), *king* (343; also in MA), *knight* (7 times; SJ has the singular form verse-finally once), *lace* (1851), *land* (2445; also in MA and SJ), *life* (706, 2480; also often in MA and SJ), *lote* (119), *low* (<OE *hlæw*, 2175), *middelerd* (2100; standing for *middelerþe*?), *rand* (1710), *rib* (1356), *snow* (2315), *thing* (652, 1080), *town* (1049; also twice in SJ), *vale* (2271; also in SJ, possibly disyllabic), *way* (670, 1876, 1971; also in SJ and once in MA); probably *dread* (1151 – not in Old English, nowhere else verse-finally) and *crag* (1430 – from Middle Welsh *crag*, nowhere else verse-finally).

distinction. Indeed, Cable remarks that this was his initial hypothesis: “For example, at one time I hypothesized that dative *-e* was productive in these texts, and I scanned all lines accordingly. On noticing that most of what I took to be dative *-e* occurred in feminine nouns, I changed the hypothesis to eliminate dative *-e* and posited instead a final *-e* on all nouns that were feminine in Old English.”³³

Dative endings in SGGK account for a smaller percentage of b-verse terminations than the feminine or historically vocalic endings: the “dative” hypothesis yields 104 exceptions in SGGK, as compared to 58 for the “feminine” hypothesis. Still, both figures look distinctly unimpressive, considering that in SGGK there are 377 b-verses ending in a singular noun with a monosyllabic root. However, if we posit final *-e* for both categories – feminine or historically vocalic endings *and* the dative – then there are only eleven exceptional verses.³⁴ The relevance of both those rules is not impossible, since that would be similar to the situation found in Chaucer, whose verse correctly assigns final *-e*'s to the nouns with historically feminine or vocalic endings while sometimes employing dative forms as well.

It is not just the etymological dictionaries that have been used to determine the termination of a Middle English noun. I have produced an electronic corpus of MA, SGGK and SJ that allows me to check quickly the metrical distribution of a lexical item across some 7700 lines. The corpus shows that Middle English nouns with vocalic and consonantal terminations show markedly different distributions of forms and metrical positions: nouns with vocalic termination usually occur verse-finally at least as often in the singular as in the plural, and frequently the singular usage predominates. Thus, if a noun whose syllabic status is doubtful happens to occur verse-finally only in the plural (even if no metrically unambiguous contexts are provided by the medial dip of the b-verse), it constitutes an indirect, but telling evidence that the noun does not retain final -

³³ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 82.

³⁴ Lines 334, 497, 816, 1430, 1560, 1876, 1935, 2055, 2034, 2228, 2407.

e. Furthermore, if in a large number of metrically ambiguous examples a singular noun in the first lift of the b-verse is routinely followed by weak syllables belonging to other words, this too is an indirect evidence of the consonantal termination of the noun. The direct tests, such as frequent occurrence in the singular in the final dip, are obvious. The corpus can be used in this way to determine the termination of a particular noun in SGGK, MA, and SJ and thus supplements the evidence in etymological dictionaries.

My third source of evidence for Middle English nominal terminations is Chaucer's usage, both in rhymes and line-internally. Out of the three sources, the precedence is given to the alliterative corpus. However, for almost every verse-final singular noun in SGGK all the three sources (the alliterative corpus, etymology, and Chaucer's usage) are in agreement, which testifies to a very good preservation of historical distinctions.

One should perhaps draw attention to another interesting pattern that suggests that the metrical distribution of lexical items is significant and can be used as a legitimate argument in determining the termination of a noun. A check across SGGK, MA, and SJ shows that where a singular noun that is expected from other sources to have consonantal termination occurs (almost always once only) verse-finally in one of the poems, the other two usually do not provide any support for the exception, which is thus most likely an error. However, there is a group of nouns – some of them of frequent occurrence, some rare – that should have a consonantal termination but occur verse-finally in the singular *in all three poems*. These turn out to be the very nouns that are most often cited in historical grammars as having retained the inflected dative form, and unsurprisingly the occurrences in question always follow prepositions. In SGGK, they are: *liue*, *Christe*, *golde*, the locatives *waye*, *londe*, *grunde*, *toune*, *vale* and the adverbialised phrases *on fyrste*, *on lofte*, *for sothe*.³⁵

³⁵ *Liue*: MA.802, 1066, etc.; SJ. 79, 776, 1073. *Christe*: MA.257, 296, etc.; SJ.249. *Golde*: MA.182, 1552, etc. *Lande*: MA.2798; SJ.317, 1321. *Grunde*: MA.2079; SJ.222, 311, etc. *Toune*: SJ. 689, 879. *Vale*: SJ.

Among verses that do not end in a singular noun with a monosyllabic root, there are 21 possible cases where the final dip is not monosyllabic.³⁶ In 141 *mynn hym to bene*, the infinitive can be the inflected *to bene* < OE *to beonne*.³⁷ Two verses end in *may*, which could always represent the subjunctive (OE *mæge*):

SGGK.380 Pat þou me telle truly, as I tryst may
SGGK.2298 And kepe þy kanel at þis kest, 3if hit keuer may

A further four verses with a very similar syntax appear to have an exceptional disyllabic final dip because of the first person singular or the subjunctive ending (which is confirmed as *-e* by numerous other instances, as discussed above and below):

SGGK.1278 And, soberly your seruaunt, my souerayn I holde yow
SGGK.1292 Now he þat spedez vche spech þis disport 3elde yow
SGGK.1679 For I haf fraysted þe twys, and faythful I fynde þe
SGGK.1785 And þat 3e telle me þat now trwly I pray yow

Apocope is certainly quite probable here, although it would be inconsistent with the general regularity of these endings observed elsewhere. The only clear instance of a verb violating the monosyllabic final dip rule is

SGGK.1699 Summe fel in þe fute þer þe fox bade

430, 563, 604. *Waye*: MA.473, 2091; SJ.53; *waye* is actually the only noun in the group that occurs as the direct object (again in all three poems: MA.1225 *he chesez hym the waye*, SGGK.1876 *choses he þe waye*, SJ.341 *þey chosen here wey*, SJ.1245 *takeþ his wey*), so it might not belong here. Note that many other exceptional nouns in SGGK that do not get support from the other two poems are also in context locatives: *bed, fell, flet, floor, home, low, middelerd*.

³⁶ Lines 137, 141, 380, 423, 567, 644, 654, 677, 928, 984, 1211, 1221, 1278, 1292, 1438, 1482, 1679, 1699, 1785, 2298, 2489. Line 555 *with Mador de la Port* is almost certainly obscured by spelling, and should read *Porte*. As noted by Putter, Jefferson, Putter and Stokes in their *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse* (pp. 30, 45), postpositioned *tylle* (SGGK.1979) often occurs verse-finally in other poems: *Cleanness, Alexander and Dindimus, William of Palerne* and *Awntyrs of Arthure*. Similar forms, no doubt under the influence of the adverbial inflection, are likely for 1110 *I grant þertylle* and 1438 *seggez ouerþwert* (but since the latter has no parallels, I count it as irregular to provide the maximal negative evidence.)

³⁷ Cf. ten Brink, pp. 134-5.

There are about nine hundred verses in SGGK that do not have a monosyllabic final dip without the application of the rules for final *-e*. When grammatical *-e* is inferred, there are at most 79 exceptional b-verses in SGGK; 58 of them involve nouns. These figures are maximal: they do not take into account any linguistic variants that could make the verses regular (such as well attested petrified datives, *to bene*, etc.).³⁸ Assumption of historical or grammatical final *-e* reveals many of the regularities in verbal, adjectival and adverbial inflections traditionally claimed for some contemporary Southern texts: endings for the infinitive, present plural, subjunctive, imperative and first person singular; *-e* in the weak and plural form of adjectives; preserved *-e* in historical adjectival *-ja-/-jō-* stems, etc. It is certainly significant that these and only these categories appear at the b-verse end in SGGK. On the other hand, grammatical categories where an ending, as expected from historical grammar, is either absent (preterite 3rd person singular of strong verbs, imperatives of strong verbs, strong singular monosyllabic adjectives) or disyllabic (present participles in *-ande*) do not occur in the final position of the b-verse. Discounting the b-verses that end in a singular noun, there are just five line-endings where it is at all possible to claim the use of an unhistorical or ungrammatical *-e* (ll. 567, 644, 654, 677, 1699).

This complementary distribution of various grammatical forms in final position in the b-verse, the sheer number of categories that are thereby shown to have preserved their endings, and the close correspondence of such grammar to that often claimed for Chaucer make it very difficult to claim that historical and grammatical final *-e* was not functional in the poetic language of SGGK. Whether *-e* was optional, i.e. could be suppressed at will, can be determined in the medial dip.

³⁸ Even if, in an attempt to avoid circularity, we perform a linguistic analysis with complete disregard for metrical factors, a total absence of metrically helpful linguistic variants in the resulting maximal negative evidence is statistically implausible.

Inflections in the medial dip in SGGK

Here, it is necessary to determine the verses where *-e* is required for the strong dip as opposed to the number of verses where final *-e* produces bad metre (i.e. a second strong dip). Since the length of the strong dip is variable, the number of verses that are unambiguous with regard to this test is not very great, but not negligible.

When the grammar emerging from the above analysis of the final dip is applied to the medial position, only eight b-verses emerge as irregular (i.e. have two strong dips) by reason of sounded final *-e*:

SGGK.144	Both his wombe and his wast	were worthily smale
SGGK.922	When burnez blyþe	of his burþe schal sitte
SGGK.1056	Forþy, sir, þis enquest	I require yow here
SGGK.1198	Bot 3et he sayde in hymself,	'More semly hit were
SGGK.1590	þat þe burne and þe bor	were boþe vpon hepez
SGGK.1934	I schal fylle vpon fyrst	oure forwardez nouþe
SGGK.1982	þay bikende hym to Kryst	with ful colde sykynggez
SGGK.2431	Ne þe saynt, ne þe sylk,	ne þe syde pendaundes

Line 1056 follows a pattern that we have observed before: the first person singular ending, potentially unmetrical, is once again followed by *yow*.³⁹ Line 922 has an unusually strong enjambement across the caesura; considering that *when burnez blyþe of his burþe* constitutes a good a-verse of a very frequent rhythmical pattern, it is possible that the line is incomplete and that a phrase like *in þe bur3e* was missed out by a scribe because of the close proximity to *of his burþe*.

Finally, *were* is disyllabic as a full verb or in the subjunctive (all the 24 instances at the verse end, and also medially in l.85, perhaps in 1858, see footnote 23), but monosyllabic when it is an auxiliary (ll.185, 656, 1049, 1931):

³⁹ Cf. ll.1278, 1292, 1785 and also 1679 above. Alternatively, line 1056 could be read with the caesura before *require*.

SGGK.950	Bot vnlyke on to loke þo ladyes were
SGGK.1326	Gedered þe grattest of gres þat þer were
SGGK.1858	My3t he haf slypped to be vnslayn, þe sle3t were noble
SGGK.185	þat half his armes þer-vnder were halched in þe wyse
SGGK.1049	Er þe halidayez holly were halet out of toun

Only the two verses above (144, 1590) violate the regularity.⁴⁰ Since the two verses are not only uncharacteristic for the metre and grammar of SGGK as a whole (the requirement of one and only one strong dip), but are also exceptional in terms of the treatment of a particular word (auxiliary *were* should be monosyllabic), their value as evidence for the disappearance of final *-e* in the *Gawain*-poet's dialect is questionable. Thus, the number of b-verses where a historical or grammatical final *-e* results in a metrical irregularity is eight at most, and quite possibly even less than that.

On the other hand, the metrical restriction in the medial dip reveals much grammatical and phonological regularity with regard to final *-e*.⁴¹ The list of categories is similar to that cited for the final dip, and accords with the traditional view of Chaucerian grammar. Once again, this accord extends to very minor details of the inflectional system.⁴²

⁴⁰ In 1590 *were boþe vpon hepez*, *on* could be substituted for the disyllabic variant.

⁴¹ The reliability of the metrical test is demonstrated by the following minor detail. The test is sensitive enough to confirm our historical expectations that the infinitives *go* and *see*, unlike all other infinitives in the poem, are monosyllabic: 811 '*Gode sir,*' *quop Gawan*, '*woldez þou go myn ernde*'; 2150 *For alle þe golde vpon rounde I nolde go wyth þe*; 2433 *Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte*. At the same time, *bye*, despite having a similar root structure to *go* and *see*, is shown by metre to have an *-e(n)* infinitive, again with a historical justification (< *byge* ~ *bycgan*, rather than *gan* and *seon*): 79 *Pat my3t be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye*.

⁴² For example, in Chaucer, the past participle "used predicatively remains as a rule uninflected ... but in exceptional cases the inflected form also occurs" (ten Brink, 157). In SGGK, the situation seems to be very similar: past participles used predicatively are uninflected, e.g., in the final dip, 85 *Bot Arthure wolde not ete til al were serued*, 259 *And þy bur3 and þy burnes best ar holden*. The only possible exception is 567 *Askez erly hys armez*, and *alle were þay bro3t*. However, when a past participle is used attributively, it is almost always shown to follow adjectival inflection: 659 *Ne samned neuer in no syde*, *ne sundred nouþer*, 1650 *Wakned bi wo3ez*, *waxen torches*. In only two verses is an attributive past participle required by the metre to be uninflected, both in the final dip: 579 *His thik þrawen þy3ez*, *with þwonges to tachched*, 1737 *Pat watz furred ful fyne with fellez wel pured*.

Historically and grammatically justified final *-e* is required in 145 instances to produce a strong dip and a metrically regular b-verse.⁴³ This figure suggests once again that final *-e* was fully functional in the language of SGGK. The eight unreliable instances where inflections produce bad metre are the only reason to think that *-e* was optional in the language of SGGK. That is to say, as far as metrical evidence goes, *-e* was not optional: it was required.⁴⁴

Inflection of disyllabic adjectives

My examination of final *-e* in SGGK suggests one significant difference from the traditional accounts of late Middle English grammar, namely the declension of disyllabic adjectives. According to most handbooks, only monosyllabic adjectives are inflected in the plural and weak forms: “Since, moreover, no weak *e* can stand after an unaccented syllable, all disyllabic paroxytonic adjectives and participles (unless syncope occurs) remain uninflected.”⁴⁵

⁴³ The breakdown by categories is as follows: (1) historical adjectival *-ja/-jō-* stems (527, 603, 1273, 2241, 2449, 1142); (2) plural adjectives, monosyllabic stems (disyllabic are discussed below), (213, 259, 554, 580, 620, 828, 854, 857, 867, 890, 958, 1116, 1611, 1946, 2029); (3) weak adjectives, including, in a minor contradiction to the traditional view, two instances after the indefinite article (93, 168, 206, 827, 1492, 1631, 2268, 2411); (4) simple adverbs (660, 955, 1066, 1442, 1444, 1522, 1524, 1526, 1741 uncertain, 1929, 2443); (5) adverbs in *-lyche* (135, 509, 578, 648, 832, 882, 1004, 1117, 1559, 2461); (6) nouns (22, 25, 137, 154, 267, 288, 467, 794, 917, 940, 1218, 1264, 1527, 1540, 1820, 1858, 2037, 2204, 2213, 2251, 2299, 2518); (7) numerals (44); (8) attributive past participles, plural or weak (502, 730, 912, 962, 1650, 2028, 2166); (9) infinitives (402, 411, 480, 522, 524, 560, 816, 996, 1039, 1108, 1220, 1221, 1254, 1322, 1457, 1523, 1677, 1692, 1719, 1878, 1896, 1991, 2121, 2194, 2212, 2286, 2303, 2438); (10) imperative plural (1839); (11) imperative singular of weak verbs (292, 1396, 1676); (12) preterites, often obscured by spelling (119, 468, 658, 659, 1222, 1826, 1914, 1927, 2490, 1537, 2076); (13) present 1st person singular (27, 1110, 1223); (14) subjunctive (1548, 2278); (15) present participle, singular (236, 859, 1088, 1724, 1757); for an exhaustive treatment of *-ande* in SGGK, see Inoue, *The A-Verse of the Alliterative Long Line...*, section 4.3.

⁴⁴ There are 36 b-verses that are heteromorphically irregular irrespective of the status of final *-e*. This figure excludes nine verses with three stresses (it is assumed that three-stress b-verses are metrically identical to three-stress a-verses, and so do not have to be heteromorphic), but includes four verses where alliteration contradicts stress pattern, e.g. 382 *Pat bede þe þis buffet, quat-so bifallez after* (also ll.92, 1266, 1493). The number can be wittled down further, but not significantly.

⁴⁵ Ten Brink, p. 156. The same view on disyllabic adjectives is taken by Mustanoja and Cable, among others: Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 78; Tauno Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax, Part I: Parts of Speech* (Helsinki, 1960), p. 276. This view includes paroxytonic adjectives whose second

However, lines like SGGK.1809 *And haue no men wyth no malez with menskful þingez* suggest a possibility that disyllabic adjectives could actually be inflected in the weak and/or plural form. Duggan notes the existence of such lines, but treats them as a special syntactic pattern {ADJ + N} which transcends heteromorphy.⁴⁶

Naturally, the test of the hypothesis should be in the form of the medial dip: if strong singular disyllabic adjectives are routinely followed by some other weak syllable or syllables in the medial dip (as in SJ.872 *And þis toured toun is tenful to wynne*), while weak and/or plural disyllabic adjectives regularly have no additional weak syllables following them (as in the example *with menskful þingez* above), there is a strong reason to think that disyllabic adjectives were inflected after the manner of monosyllabic ones.

To increase my evidential basis, I present the evidence of MA and SJ as well as SGGK. An obvious category to start with is adjectives in *-ful*, such as *awful, baleful, careful, doleful, dredful, sorrowful*, etc.⁴⁷ There are 28 relevant instances in the corpus.

The results are quite unequivocal: plural disyllabic adjectives are *never* followed by any

syllable is a suffix, as the suffix is deemed to be unaccented. Ten Brink states that "some trisyllabic and polysyllabic words have more than one accent" (p.3), thus excluding disyllables: "words like *wisdom, mánhood, fréendshipe, hýest* have no secondary accent" (p.198).

⁴⁶ Duggan, *Final -e...*, p. 138: "linguistic change [disappearance of *-e* in plural disyllabic adjectives] prompted a change in the conditions of metricality, though only in a very limited and specific syntactic environment ... their syntactic identity [of b-verses with the ADJ+N syntactic pattern] was more powerful than their rhythmic identity."

⁴⁷ Many of the nouns from which the adjectives in *-ful* on the list are derived (*awe, bale, care, menske, rewe, syne, sor3e/sorow, tene, wrake*) were historically disyllabic and are shown to have remained so by some instances in the alliterative corpus: SGGK.1774 *3if he schulde make synne*, SJ.1262 *scholde perische for synne*. However, those of the adjectives that are attested early were mostly disyllabic in their basic form in Old English and early Middle English, e.g. *carful, synful, sorhful, scamful* (but *bealful*). Still, there is an outside possibility of such adjectives having been rederived and therefore being trisyllabic in their basic forms: *wrakeful* rather than *wrakful*, etc. However, they are accepted as evidence for inflected disyllabic adjectives for two reasons: (1) the distribution of their singular and plural forms is identical to that of the adjectives that have an undoubtedly disyllabic basic form; (2) In Chaucer, the possible medial weak *-e-* is always absent from adjectives in *-ful*: *blisful, sinful, sorweful, careful, leueful, shameful* are always di- rather than trisyllabic (though the nouns *synne, sorwe, care, leewe, shame* are disyllabic, and *blis(se)* often so), as are *needful, thoughtful, rightful*, whose nouns should be monosyllabic historically and are confirmed as monosyllabic both in Chaucer and in my alliterative corpus. The treatment of *-ful* adjectives in Chaucer seems to be reliable supportive evidence, since the iambic rhythm would naturally accommodate trisyllabic suffixed adjectives: CT.I.1435 *And putten hym in worshipful seryyse*, CT.II.477 *God liste to shewe his wonderful myracle*, CT.IV.401 *And worshipful that folk ther she was bore* (quoted from: *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, Oxford, 1987). If Old English, early Middle English and late Middle English texts suggest that *synful*, etc. are disyllabic, and if in the alliterative poems in question such words show a distribution identical to that of undoubtedly disyllabic adjectives, then to assume their trisyllabicity in the alliterative poems is not useful logically.

additional weak syllables, and to produce the expected strong dips they must have an inflectional *-e*:

MA.3502	Ostayande in this Oryente	with awfull knyghtes
MA.791	And byttes hym boldlye	wyth balefull tuskez
MA.2054	Deuorande a dolphyn	with dolefull lates
MA.2915	All þe dreghe of þe daye,	with dredfull werkes
MA.2941	Drawes hym a dromedarie,	with dredfull knyghtez
MA.1049	Pare ware rostez full ruyd	and rewoffull bredez
MA.1840	Thow skornede vs lang ere	with thi skornefull wordez
MA.3	Schelde vs fro schamesdede	and synfull werkes
MA.2692	Thane stirttes to his sterape	sterynfull knyghttez
MA.3822	He stekys stedis in stoure	and sterenefull knyghttes
MA.3818	Wondis of thas wedirwyns	with wrakfull dynttys
SGGK.1517	Endured for her drury	dulful stoundez
SGGK.1809	And haue no men wyth no malez	with menskful þingez
SJ.1014	Kysseþ kny3tes anon	with carful wordes
SJ.1083	Rostyþ rigge and rib	with rewoffull wordes
SJ.217	Ac without tribute or trewes	by tenfulle wayes
SJ.238	In her temple bytidde	tenful þynges

Indeed, even if *some* plural disyllabic adjectives had no weak syllables following them, that would (in the absence of counter-examples) constitute quite a strong evidence in favour of the inflection. The fact that the metrical test is applicable in *every* instance is remarkable. There is but a single counter-example: MA.1840 *with thi skornefull wordez*.

On the other hand, uninflected, strong singular disyllabic adjectives are always (as would also be predictable from standard grammars) followed by some other weak syllable that is required to produce the strong dip:

MA.1777	And thane Sir Cadour of Cornewayle	es carefull in herte
MA.3897	Thane kayres he to Cornewaile,	carefull in herte
MA.760	Hym dremyd of a dragon,	dredfull to beholde
MA.815	"The dragon þat þow dremyde of,	so dredfull to schewe
MA.2053	With a dragone engowschede,	dredfull to schewe
MA.1844	The Kyng of Surry þan	es sorowfull in herte
MA.3947	Was neuer oure semliche kyng	so sorowfull in herte
SGGK.1679	For I haf fraysted þe twys,	and faythful I fynde þe
SJ.872	And þis toured toun	is tenful to wynne
SJ.390	Byggid as a belfray	bretful of wepne

The pattern seems to be rhythmically (although not metrically) violated in only one instance, when it is a plural adjective that is followed by some other weak syllables:⁴⁸

He drawes into douce Fraunce, as Duchemen tellez,
Dresside with his dragouns, dredfull to schewe (MA.1251-52)

For disyllabic adjectives in *-less*, the results are similar: the two plural instances do not have any additional weak syllables (280 *bot berdlez chylder* and 40 *and rechles merþes*), unlike all the strong singular forms (MA.1048, 3305, SGGK.438, SJ.702, 909).⁴⁹

The same distributional rule is valid for all other disyllabic adjectives: *cruell* (seven instances of the plural, one of the strong singular); *gentill* (14 plurals; 2 singulars); *reall* (12 plurals; 1 singular); *selcouth* (7 plurals; 1 singular); *certain* (18 plurals); *divers* (8 plurals); *hethen* (7 plurals); *boustous* (4 plurals); *feraunt* (4 plurals); *Irish* (three plurals); *hautain*, *pallen*, *stalworth*, *stelen* (two plurals each); *erraunt*, *Flemish*, *froward*, *heslen*, *lyard*, *reken*, *russet*, *Turkish* (one plural each). That is a total of 105 occurrences, 100 of them with a plural (or, rarely, weak) adjective and five with a singular.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Strictly speaking, the verse is metrically admissible irrespective of the status of final *-e* in *dredfull*. However, rhythmically it stands against 18 other plural instances quoted above. The simplest explanation is probably the association by the MA poet of the b-verse formula *dredful to schewe/beholde* with the word *dragon* in the a-verse (cf. MA.760, 815, 2053). Thus, the formulaic pattern which discourages (metrically possible) extra weak syllables after a plural adjective in *-ful* is overruled in this particular instance by another formulaic pattern. Alternative explanations are rather unattractive: *dredful* may refer to Lucius (strained syntax) or *dragoun* may in fact be singular (requires emendation).

⁴⁹ There are three verses that are potentially analogous to MA.1252 *dredfull to schewe* in having some unnecessary weak syllables after the plural form; however, all three contain elision: MA.2109 *haythen and other*; MA.1894 *krouell and noble*; MA.1334 *full reall and noble*.

⁵⁰ Alliteration always suggests stress on the first syllable in the adjectives. This is confirmed by syllabic patterns: stress on the second syllable would often produce a non-heteromorphic b-verse.

In the whole corpus, there are only three strictly unmetrical lines: MA.221 *with realle speche* (too short as it stands), MA.1840 *with thi skornefull wordez*, MA.115 *with his ientill knyghttes*.

Thus, the distributional pattern of additional weak syllables after strong singular disyllabic adjectives, but not after weak and/or plural disyllabic adjectives is valid in 138 instances in MA, SGGK and SJ (119 plural/weak, 19 singular). There is one "soft" (metrically unnecessary, but rhythmically acceptable weak syllables after a weak/plural adjective) and three "hard" exceptions.

But must this distributional pattern be explained by inflection? An important argument in support of such a solution is the dissimilar distribution demonstrated by other adjectives with a different stem structure. For example, the distributional pattern established above does not apply at all to adjectives like *siker* (8 instances), *biker* (1), *lither* (3), *other* (12), *nether* (1):

MA.818	That thus saillez ouer þe see	with thy sekyre knyghtez
SGGK.111	Boþe þe kynges sistersunes	and ful siker kni3tes
SGGK.403	And þat I swere þe for soþe,	and by my seker trawep
SGGK.2048	And hade ben soïourned sauerly	and in a siker wyse
SJ.950	And þus loste he þe lyf	for his luþer dedes
SJ.365	Nakened as a nedel	to þe neþer houe

In every instance, an ending would appear to result in an unmetrical second strong dip. Phonologically, however, such patterns are only to be expected, for (as I have pointed out above) the operation of syncope in the unstressed *-ere-* sequences is very regular in SGGK, MA and SJ. The difference in metrical distribution between adjectives in *-ful*, *-less*, etc., and in *-er* rules out any alternative explanations: if the main reasons for the absence of a strong dip in many {ADJ + N} b-verses were syntactic, as Duggan suggested, that would presumably apply to all kinds of adjectives, irrespective of the stem structure. The syntactic explanation starts to strain credibility when we observe

that the metrically exceptional pattern is coincidentally limited to adjectives which are (1) disyllabic, (2) weak and/or plural, and (3) would not be subject to syncope if inflected. In an uninflected state, there is no rhythmical difference between *siker*, *lither* on the one hand and *cruell*, *dredful* on the other (as can be seen from the lists above, adjectives with a suffix do not behave any differently in this particular scenario). That there *is* an apparent difference in their rhythmical distributions – and also that such difference is confined to the instances of plural and/or weak forms – can only be due to the presence of inflections, in this case final *-e*.

The different behaviour of disyllabic adjectives with and without syncope when inflected allows us to discover additional minor regularities, the consistency of which further increases the plausibility of my metrical-linguistic hypothesis. Consider, for example, a pair of adjectives, *ientill* and *nobill*, with similar, although not identical prosodic structure. In MA, SGGK and SJ *nobill* is syncopated when inflected: it often occurs in the plural in the final dip, e.g. MA.68 *and banerettes nobill*. Also, the plural form never occurs in contexts where, had it been unsyncopated, its two unstressed syllables would have had to form the strong dip (i.e. **and nobill knyghtes*). In fact, its only occurrence in the first lift of the b-verse metrically supports the syncope: SGGK.118 *with þe noble pipes*. On the other hand, another adjective, *ientill*, is never syncopated: in all its plural occurrences in the first lift of b-verse it is never followed by other unstressed words, and thus it must have two weak syllables to form the strong dip, e.g. MA.246b *and gentill knyghtes*. Because of the difference in syncopation, *ientill* and *nobill* have completely different distributions: the former occurs almost exclusively in the first, the latter in the second lift of the b-verse. The only instance of *ientill* in the second lift is, expectedly, singular: MA.987 *I am comyn fra þe Conquerour, curtaise and gentill*. Another adjective, *cruell*, has a distribution identical to that of *ientill*, which suggests that (a) its stem is disyllabic, (b) the stem remains disyllabic when inflected.

Yet another adjective, *(h)athel*, in all its unambiguous occurrences follows the *nobill* type with syncope: MA.1662 *and att his hathell bierns*, SGGK.171 *and his apel skyrtes*, SGGK.1654 *mony apel songez*.

Similarly, as I have noted above, an inflected *-en* sequence is always syncopated when it belongs to a nominal or verbal stem, something which we have to infer for many occurrences of variously inflected *happen*, *listen*, *herken*, *gomen*, etc. at the end of the line, as otherwise these words form a distinctive and highly exceptional subset of disyllabic final dips. However, plural and/or weak adjectives and attributively used strong past participles do not occur in that position; instead, they often appear in the first lift: MA.1260 *of haythen kynges*. Therefore, this set of forms belongs to the type without syncopation.

Final *-e* in SGGK: conclusions

The final dip provides metrical evidence for a full inflectional grammar in the dialect of the *Gawain*-poet. Grammatical categories from which we would expect a monosyllabic ending occur in the final dip; those that have disyllabic or zero endings do not. The correspondence with standard historical grammars of contemporary Southern texts is striking and involves even categories with a low functional load in alliterative poetry, such as the difference in the imperative singular between strong and weak verbs. It should be pointed out that in my analysis I did not start from any particular grammar, and tested all the categories independently. As I went on I found that the grammar traditionally claimed for Chaucer accounted very well for the metrical distribution of various linguistic items in SGGK, the only significant difference being the inflection of disyllabic adjectives in the plural and/or weak forms.

Metre shows beyond much doubt that the author of SGGK knew the grammar of final *-e*. The large variety of inflections attested by metre, the fact that many of the final *-e*'s are word-specific, and the absence of hypercorrective errors that would testify to an attempt to archaize poetic speech with essentially dead linguistic elements – all these considerations suggest that the *Gawain*-poet's access to inflectional grammar is unlikely to have been exclusively through the traditional style of alliterative poetry, or through poetry in general. The model of different registers, as proposed for Chaucer by M.L. Samuels, seems to offer the best available interpretation.⁵¹

Inflections in the final dip in MA

As I have tried to show in the previous sections, a scansion of SGGK that follows the rules of grammar posited for Middle English texts of c.1300 produces good and consistent results. There is no need to assume that the use of inflections, predominantly final *-e*, was optional in SGGK; metre of the b-verse shows this use to have been very regular.

Very similar results are obtained for MA. However, there are some peculiarities that will be noted in the course of the discussion. Many of them are due to the most obvious feature of MA: the poem is highly 'formulaic' in the sense that its favoured linguistic elements (words, collocations, set expressions and syntactic frames) are used with greater frequency and at a greater expense of alternative variants than in any other alliterative poem. In other words, its formulaic range is poor and therefore repetitive. One of the consequences is that the data – often quite substantial – for some grammatical categories is largely provided by a mere handful of lexical items. One may

⁵¹ M.L. Samuels, *Chaucerian Final -e*.

suspect that the particular grammatical inflection is actually dead in the language, and is only perpetuated in poetry by a handful of special archaic forms. I will return to this issue at the end of the section.

In total, over nine hundred verses in MA (i.e. every fifth line on average) have a monosyllabic final dip due to a preserved grammatical inflection. This figure includes some forty instances of the verbal plural, whose inflection was probably *-en* rather than *-e*, but excludes inflections whose existence and syllabic status have never been in doubt, such as the nominal plural and genitive.

The most frequent category is adverbs, with 191 occurrences: e.g. 4b *and gouerne vs here*.⁵² Adverbs always have final *-e*: it is a feature of Middle English grammar rather than a point of etymology of particular items.

Infinitives are also prominent, with 115 occurrences, e.g. 51b *crounes to bere*. There are 42 different lexical items – a greater variety than in other categories, but still some favourite verbs are frequently repeated.

Present plural occurs 40 times and is usually reflected in spelling as *-es*, but not always:

MA.114	Withowttyn more trouflyng the trebute we aske ⁵³
MA.1029	Thre balefull birdez his brochez þey turne
MA.2735	"Fadyre," sais Sir Florent, "full faire 3e it tell
MA.2803	Than Sir Florent and Floridas in fewtyre þey caste
MA.2869	When we are moste in destresse Marie we mene
MA.3747	Thourghe þe scheldys so schene schalkes þey towche
MA.3823	That steryn men in their sterapes stone-dede þay lygge
MA.4116	Thorowe scheldis full schene schalkes they touche

⁵² Including: 31 *faire*, 31 *ynoghe*, 21 *sone*, 14 *loude*, 11 *more*, 9 *heghe*, 8 *forsope*, 8 *sore*, 7 *at large*, 4 *belyve*, 4 *on lofte*, 3 *aboute*, 3 *a3aine(s)*, 3 *before*, 3 *eke*, 3 *faste*, 3 *3erne*, 3 *swithe*, 3 *panne*, 2 *behinde*, 2 *here*, 2 *ofte*, 2 *riche*, 2 *þerinne*, 1 *beneþe*, 1 *betwene*, 1 *longe*, 1 *nere*, 1 *stille*. This includes the postpositional uses of *a3aines*, *behinde*, *before*; the adverbialised phrases *for sothe*, *at large*, *on lofte*; and the properly adjectival uses of *ynoghe*. Note that *ofte(n)* surprisingly occurs only twice; SGGK employs the adverb as many as 14 times in the final dip. Thus it is likely that the basic form in MA poet's idiolect was the monosyllabic *oft*. SJ, similarly to MA, never has *oft(en)* verse-finally.

⁵³ Most of the verses would in fact be better served by the southern *-en*, since the Northern Subject Rule would preclude the inflection in 114 *we aske*, 1029 *þey turne*, 2803 *þey caste*, 2869 *we mene*, 3747 *þey towche*.

The figure includes at least two likely plural subjunctives, spelt *-en* in the manuscript:

MA.2947	It was no ferly, in faythe, þofe they faynt waxen
MA.3119	Diskoueres for skulkers that they no skathe lymppen

Singular subjunctives occur another 35 times (half of them in the phrase *so Crist / Gode / Lorde me helpe*). For example:

MA.121	Fore ferdnesse of hys face, as they fey were
MA.552	Be þe quartere of þis 3ere, and hym quarte stannde
MA.642	To owtraye myn enemy, 3if auenture it schewe
MA.1643	Loke 3e skyfte it so þat vs no skathe lympe
MA.2244	To owtraye þe Emperour, 3if auntire it schewe
MA.2442	I am nothyng agaste, so me Gode helpe

There are two instances of the preterite subjunctive:

MA.291	The knyghtlyeste of counsaile þat euer coron bare
MA.3962	Þou was worthy to be kyng, þofe I þe coron bare

The spelling suggests that, as expected by this stage (cf. ten Brink §195), the grade used in the subjunctive has been levelled to that of the indicative.

The preterite 3rd person singular has a *-de / -te* ending in 23 instances (almost half of them *scholde*):

MA.716	Twys in a swounyng, swelte as cho walde
MA.2479	Thane lenge they lordly, as þem leefe thoghte
MA.3157	Thaire welthes and theirre wonnynges, wandrethe he wroghte
MA.3350	And sette me softlye in the see, þe septre me rechede
MA.3352	That the krispane kroke to my crownne raughte

The 1st person singular *-e* occurs 13 times:

MA.398 And latte me neuere wantte 3ow, whylls I in werlde regne
 MA.1737 Bot I wyrke my dede, whils I in wrethe lenge
 MA.2604 And here es the kynreden that I of come
 MA.3109 "In 3one lykand londe, lorde be I thynke

Finally, there is one instance of the imperative, *-e* for weak verbs in the singular:

MA.4094 Take no tente vnto me, ne tale of me rekke

There is a large number of adjectives in the final dip of MA. Fifty seven verses feature plural forms (including 26 *alle*, 7 *bothe*, 12 *riche*, 9 *heghe*, 2 *kene*, 1 *gude*, 1 *rowme*):

MA.56 Sythyn wente into Wales with his wyes all
 MA.503 Sythyn prekes to þe pales, with portes so ryche
 MA.559 Many geaunte of Geen, justers full gude

Another 44 verses end in a singular adjective historically belonging to the *-ja/-jō-* stems. This category is almost completely dominated by one word, *riche* (41 instances out of 44):

MA.47 Fra Swynn vnto Swetherwyke, wiþ his swerde kene
 MA.439 I sall hym sekyrly ensure, vndyre my seele ryche
 MA.1017 If thowe hafe broghte þe berde he bese more blythe
 MA.1968 And byde with my balde men within þe burghe ryche
 MA.3522 I kepe no credens to crafe, I knawe the for trewe

It is assumed that an adjective is strong in the constructions {Poss. pron. + Noun + Adj} or {Article + Noun + Adj}, as the corpus provides no evidence to the contrary: all

singular adjectives in such b-verses turn out to be historical *-ja-/-jō-* stems. Thus I feel justified in classifying verses like *vndyre my seele ryche* or *within þe burghe ryche* with historical *-ja-/-jō-* stems rather than the weak adjectival declension.

Two French loans, *huge* and *large*, also end in *-e* in the strong singular form. Like *riche*, they are favoured by the poet and occur in the plural, weak, or strong singular form in 38 verses.

The weak form proper can be inferred in 24 instances. The adjective *more* dominates with 16 occurrences:

MA.141	Fore sake of thy soueraynge I suffre the þe more
MA.277	Belyn and Brene and Bawdewyne the Thyrd
MA.1018	Thane þowe gafe hym Burgoyne or Bretayne þe More
MA.3082	Ne be no burgesse wyffe, better ne werse
MA.4026	"I rede 3e warely wende and wirkes the beste

All the adjectives occurring here – *more*, *lesse*, *werse*, *werste*, *beste*, *nexte*, *thirde* – historically were only used in the weak form, and the only other one, *same*, fits the semantic category of definiteness that was usually the reason for the restriction. This clear regularity further supports the conclusion above that common adjectives in the constructions {Poss. pron. + Noun + Adj} or {Article + Noun + Adj} are declined strong in MA.

Before I proceed to discuss nouns, it might be useful to list the metrically irregular verses that do not have nominal terminations. In nouns more than elsewhere the final *-e* is a matter of vocabulary rather than grammar, and the number of apparent exceptions is therefore greater.

The list of candidates for an empty or disyllabic final dip is as follows:

MA.689	"Thowe arte my neuewe full nere, my nurree of olde
MA.759	And with þe swoghe of þe see in swefnyng he fell

- MA.817 Sothely and certayne, thy seluen it es
 MA.1103 Fro þe face to þe fote was fyfe fadom lange
 MA.1348 "Euere ware þes Bretouns braggers of olde
 MA.1612 O payne and o perell þat pendes theretoo
 MA.1946 Thane gerte he in his awen tente a table be sette
 MA.2979 Þofe Sir Gawaynne ware wo, he wayttes hym by
 MA.3016 All the tale sothely, and how they hade spede
 MA.3324 Two kynges ware clymbande and clauerande one heghe
 MA.3567 Hym sall torfere betyde þis tresone has wroghte
 MA.3654 Of theire termys they talke, how þay ware tydd
 MA.3770 Bot þan Sir Gawayne, iwysse, he waytes hym wele
 MA.3989 O rightwis, riche Gode, this rewthe Thow beholde
- MA.1342 "Now certez," sais Sir Wawayne, "myche wondyre haue I
 MA.1955 Thow arte betrayede of þi men that moste thow on traystede

Many of the sixteen lines present little difficulty. Line 689 *of olde*, 1348 *of olde*, 3324 *on heghe* are substantivised adjectives which may be inflected weak.⁵⁴ Line 759 *he fell* can more than comfortably read *he falles*, to match the present tense of the rest of the sentence:

The Kynge was in a gret cogge, with knyghtez full many,
 In a cabane enclosede, clenlyche arayed;
 Within on a ryche bedde rystys a littyll,
 And with þe swoghe of þe see in swefnyng he fell.
 Hym dremyd of a dragon ... (MA.756-760a)

Line 1103 should read *fyfe fadom large*, as is the usual idiom of the poem (601b *sexti myle large*, 801b *ten fote large*, and on fourteen more occasions). The past participles 1946 *sette*, 3016 *spede*, 3654 *tydd* could well have had disyllabic variants.⁵⁵ Line 3989

⁵⁴ Similar conclusion suggests itself for several verses in SGGK. In MA, there is a verse where a possible substantivised adjective must be inflected to produce a strong dip: 932 *It myghte salue hym of sore þat sounde was neuere* 'who had never been a healthy one'.

⁵⁵ In the Anglian dialects of Old English, *geseted* was the normal singular form (Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §753.9.b.7). Another past participle, *wroght*, seems to have been acceptable verse-finally for SJ as well as MA, cf.: SJ.466 *Keuered myd a castel was craftily ywro3t*; SJ.897 *In Rome Nero hap now mychel noye wro3t*. (*Hap* seems to be essential for the metre of a-verse - as I hope to show in the not distant future - and cannot be simply dropped to produce the metrically acceptable preterite *wro3te*, as in SGGK.3 *Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wro3t*). However, I am not sure that a disyllabic past participle **wro3te* is an acceptable variant. Chaucer, for example, seems to have the historically expected *wroght* in all metrically unambiguous instances.

Thow beholde can be the 2nd person singular just as well as the imperative (no ending for strong verbs). Line 1342 *myche wondyre haue I* is one of only two instances of the verse-final pronoun *I* in the corpus, and in the other instance, SGGK.1991 *say ne dar I*, is unproblematic (the pronoun forms the final dip due to the infinitive ending of *say*); on the other hand, various forms of *haue*, including the present 1st person singular, regularly occur verse-finally (although only twice in MA).⁵⁶ A line *myche wondyre I haue* would be unproblematic metrically and appropriate stylistically.

Line 1955 *traystede* (i.e. *traystedest*) might be an error for *trowdest*, but this would be an emendation purely on metrical grounds. Line 3770 is the only verse-final occurrence of the frequent adverb *well* in the corpus; therefore, it is almost certainly unauthentic. A possible, though not wholly attractive reading is *waytes him while*. Thus, there remain only six verses (not too many for 4346 long lines) that would require an emendation of any substance to comply with the monosyllabic final dip rule:

MA.817 Sothely and certayne, thy seluen it es
 MA.1612 O payne and o perell þat pendes theretoo
 MA.1955 Thow arte betrayede of þi men that moste thow on traystede
 MA.2979 Þofe Sir Gawayne ware wo, he wayttes hym by
 MA.3567 Hym sall torfere betyde þis tresone has wroghte
 MA.3770 Bot þan Sir Gawayne, iwysse, he waytes hym wele

Singular nouns in the final dip in MA

⁵⁶ Cf. esp. the following construction: MA.2966 "*Woo es me,*" *quod Gawayne, "that I ne weten hade";* SGGK.406 *3if I þe telle trwly, quen I þe tape haue;* SGGK.1225 *And syþen karp wyth my kny3t þat I ka3t haue;* SGGK.2390 *I halde hit hardily hole, þe harme þat I hade;* SGGK. 2507 *Þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I la3t haue;* SJ.131 *Dide myracles mo þan Y in mynde haue;* SJ.1005 *I wol tarie at þis toun til I hit taken haue.*

The grammatical categories discussed so far demonstrate a good match between language and metre: the final dip contains those and only those grammatical forms that have a monosyllabic ending. The distribution of singular nouns is less straightforward.

Generally, the appearance of singular nouns in the verse-final position seems to be governed by the standard principle given in the historical grammars and confirmed by Cable for his alliterative corpus: historical Old English feminines have *-e*; nouns of any gender and any extraction that historically ended in a vowel (nominative in Old English and Old Norse, accusative in Old French) have *-e*. In MA, such nouns occur verse-finally in the singular in as many as 330 b-verses. As usual in the poem, over half of that number is accounted for by only four nouns: *erþe* (64x), *herte* (46x), *lorde* (42x, only once spelt *louerd*, reflecting the probable pronunciation), *Rome* (29x). Still, there are over fifty other lexical items: *saule* (12x, could in theory have the parasitic vowel rather than *-e*), *time* (11x), *wille* (11x), *riche* (9x),⁵⁷ *trouthe* (8x), *ende* (7x), *strengþe* (5x), *sothe* (5x), *wreche* (4x); three instances each: *egge*, *France*, *speche*, *stede*, *Troye*; two instances each: *lance*, *lengþe*, *haunche*, *sege*, *welle*, *yerde*; one instance each: *bere*, *beste*, *chere*, *Crete*, *elde*, *folde*, *fole*, *gome*, *hande*, *helle*, *hille*, *horse*, *hoste*, *houre*, *judge*, *livinge*, *marche*, *mile*, *name*, *paine*, *rawe*, *roche*, *scathe*, *schame*, *side*, *signe*, *spere*, *stunde*, *sunne*, *veile*, *werre*, *while*, *wounde*. For several other words the most probable disyllabic pronunciation does not involve final *-e*: *day* (13x, the poetic *dawe(n)*), *hede* (4x, *heued*), *morn* (4x, *morwen*), *mede* (1x, *med(o)w(e)*, cf. MA.3238), possibly *sorowe* (6x).

There is also a group of petrified datives (*liue*, *Christe*, *golde*, *waye*, *lande*, *felde*, *grunde*; for the procedure, see the discussion of SGGK, p. 104 and fn. 32 and 35).

⁵⁷ *Riche* in *heuene riche* and *werlde riche* is taken to be the noun (although it is never spelt as in *kingrike*, which is consistent in all its four occurrences). In other combinations, like *kythe riche* or *coste riche*, it is taken to be the adjective. Highly arbitrary, but hardly important metrically. The existence of *rike* does not preclude the appearance of its genetic relative *riche* which would have been very stable all the way from Old English in the two religious idioms at least.

That leaves us with 18 verses in MA where the choice of a singular noun seems unsupported by other evidence:

MA.207	In grete goblettez ouergylte, glorious of hewe	OE <i>hiw</i> , neut
MA.913	With graynez and gobelets, glorious of hewe	OE <i>hiw</i> , neut
MA.744	Tytt saillez to þe toppe and turnez þe lufe	OFr <i>lof</i>
MA.800	Towchez hym wyth his talounez and terez hys rigg	OE <i>hrycg</i> , masc
MA.804	So they þryng þe bolde kyng bynne þe schippe-burde	OE <i>bord</i> , neut
MA.986	Thane answers Sir Arthure to þat alde wyf	OE <i>wif</i> , neut
MA.1082	Huke-nebbyde as a hawke, and a hore berde	OE <i>beard</i> , masc
MA.1118	He folowes in fersly and festenesse a dynte	OE <i>dynt</i> , masc
MA.2424	Thane they bendyde in burghe bowes of vyse	OFr <i>vis</i>
MA.2714	Barell-ferrers they brochede and broghte them the wyne	OE <i>win</i> , neut
MA.3283	The toþer was 3alowerre then the 3olke of a naye	OE <i>æg</i> , neut
MA.3857	Thorowe þe helme and þe hede, one heyghe one þe brayne	OE <i>brægen</i> , neut
MA.4002	Ne neuer fowle see fellide þat flieghe with wenge	ON <i>vængr</i>
MA.4037	I sall even amange his mene malle hym to dede	OE <i>deap</i> , masc
MA.1908	The Senatour Carous es kaughte with a knyghtte	
MA.3865	Fraynes at the false mane of owre ferse knyghte	
MA.841	Comez a templere tyte and towchide to þe Kyng	
MA.1309	Sir Arthure herytage, þat honourable kyng	
MA.2731	He was chosen and chargegide in chambire of þe Kyng	
MA.4169	Siche honoure neuer aughte none erthely kyng	

Several are candidates for petrified datives: 986 *to þat alde wyf*, 3283 *the 3olke of a naye*, 1908 *es kaughte with a knyghtte*, 3865 *of owre ferse knyghte*, 841 *and towchide to þe Kyng*, 2731 *in chambire of þe Kyng*. *Kny3te* and *kyng* are indeed supported by the other poems: SJ.437 *with a pryuande kny3t*, SGGK.343 *quop Wawan to þe kyng*; the dative singular of *kny3t* is frequent verse-finally in SGGK. However, there is always a danger that such occurrences of *kny3t* and *kyng* are no more than scribal substitutions for other poetic synonyms. This is almost certainly the case in MA.4169 *none erthely kyng*, which is quite unique in its use of the nominative (of a monosyllabic word in this metrical position), and arouses a strong suspicion that *louerd* might be a better reading; and in fact, line 1664 has *his erthely lorde*.

Line 1309 should read *Arthures*: the extant text frequently drops the genitive ending in personal names, which might be fine linguistically, but very often is unacceptable metrically:

MA.496	Till Akyn in Almayn, in Arthur landes
MA.988	As one of þe hatelest of Arthur knyghtez
MA.1170	Thane bourdez þe bolde kyng at Bedvere wordez
MA.2838	"Me angers earnestly at Arthure knyghtez
MA.4216	þat was Sir Arthure awen and Vtere his fadirs
MA.4259	Mourtherys in the mowntaygnes Sir Mordrede knyghtes
MA.4320	And sythen merke manly to Mordrede children ⁵⁸

Reading *Arthures* in line 1309 leads to reading *kynges* verse-finally. Another instance where an ending has probably been lost in transmission is 804 *bynne þe schippe-burde*: cf. MA.1699 *within chippe-burdez*, SGGK.115 *at þe sidbordez*. Three other verse-final occurrences of the word are all plural. An identical emendation suggests itself for 4002 *þat flieghe with wenge*.

Although *dede* is a Northern form for 'death', in l.4037 we might be dealing with the substantivised adjective, rather than the noun. *Brayne* in l.3857 may either be a dative or rather retain the disyllabic variant *brayen*.

There are two nouns in the list for which there is some reason to suspect a historical change of gender. *Berd* is masculine in Old English and monosyllabic in Chaucer. However, MA.1082 has the support of SGGK.334 *Wyth sturne schere þer he stod he stroked his berde* and SGGK.2228 *Boþe þe lyre and þe leggez, lokkez and berde*. Similarly, MA.1118 *dint* recurs verse-finally in the singular in SJ.1202 *þe seueþ hitteþ on hym an vnhende dynte*. Still, the strong prevalence of plural verse-final forms of *berd* and *dint* make the change of gender not very likely.

⁵⁸ Similarly in 1826 *and Lewlyns brothire*, which should be an uncontracted *Lewlynes*.

The list of nouns that clearly violate the rules of historical grammar and alliterative metre is thus quite short: 207, 913 *hewe*; 744 *lufe*; 800 *rigg*; 1082 *berde*; 1118 *dynte*; 2424 *vyse*; 2714 *wyne*.

Positing the requirement of the monosyllabic final dip reveals a complete preservation of historical (i.e. dependent on the etymological form, e.g. in nouns and adjectival *-ja-/-jō-* stems) and grammatical (i.e. extended by analogy over the whole grammatical category, e.g. in adverbs) final *-e*'s and other endings. The inflections bring down the number of non-monosyllabic final dips in MA from over nine hundred to two dozen at most (and over half even of that number can be discounted easily). The whole set of monosyllabic inflections traditionally posited for the contemporary southern texts is present:

- nouns in *-e*: native feminine, ON and OFr vocalic;
- adjectives: plural, weak, native *-ja-/-jō-* stems, OFr in *-e*;
- adverbs;
- numerals;
- verbs: infinitives, present (1Sg, 2Sg, plural), preterite (strong plural, 3Sg in *-de/-te*), subjunctive (present and preterite, singular and plural), imperative (of weak verbs).

Categories with disyllabic or zero endings (e.g. the present participle formation, preterite of weak verbs in *-ede*, preterite 3Sg of strong verbs or imperatives of strong verbs) do not occur in the final dip.

As I have noted above, occurrences of many grammatical categories are dominated by a couple of words, and it might be suspected that the respective inflection is actually dead in the language, and is only perpetuated in poetry by several archaic

forms. The most striking example is *ryche* with 41 out of the 44 occurrences of the adjectival *-ja-/jō-* stems. *Faire*, *ynoghe*, *sonne*, *loude* account for half of the adverbial instances; *erþe*, *herte*, *lorde* and *Rome* for half of the nominal; *helpe* (in invocations of the divine power) for half of the subjunctival; *huge* and *large* – for all the French adjectives in *-e*; *more* – for the majority of weak adjectival forms. However, these preferences seem better explained by the repetitive style of the poem. Although the forms listed above are very frequent verse-finally, there are still over 150 occurrences of 50 other nouns that comply with the rules of metre and historical grammar; over a 100 occurrences of 25 other adverbs; 20 occurrences of other subjunctives; and so on. The degree of regularity in the final dip that MA demonstrates would definitely have been impossible if the poet had been clinging on to a handful of the archaic forms with a limited poetic currency.

Inflections in the medial dip in MA

The next stage of the analysis of final *-e* in MA is to determine the verses where final *-e* and other inflections are required for a correct metre in the medial dip (i.e. to form the strong dip) as opposed to the number of verses where final *-e* produces bad metre (i.e. a second strong dip, since the initial dip is already strong). There are about three hundred b-verses in MA that provide unambiguous results in the medial dip and support the preservation of the full inflectional grammar of Middle English in the authorial dialect.

The categories revealed by metre in the medial dip are similar to the final dip set, but their relative frequency is different, and some new categories (with disyllabic endings that were impossible in the final dip) appear.

Adverbial *-e*, of such frequent occurrence in the final dip, is attested only once:

1548 *Whethire 3e suffyre them saughte or sone delyuerde*. However, there are six verses to confirm that the adverbial *-ly(che)* was disyllabic (and no direct evidence to the contrary):

MA.589	Iche prynce with his powere appertlyche graythede
MA.2674	Of larkes, of lynkwhyttez, þat lufflyche songen ⁵⁹

Another category that we could not observe in the final dip is the numeral (13 instances). This is hardly attested in SGGK (only in 44 *ful fiften dayes*), but the MA poet is very fond of specifying numbers:

MA.105	He sall the seke ouer þe see wyth sexten kynges
MA.837	The floure and þe faire folke of fyftene rewmez
MA.1912	Bot fay of ours in þe felde a fourtene knyghttez
MA.2216	Threpede thorowe þe thykkys thryttene sythis

Infinitives provide the strong dip in 16 instances, e.g. 3977 *It es no wirchipe, iwysse, to wryng thyn hondes*.⁶⁰ Plural verbs are confirmed in 25 medial dups:

MA.742	Frekes on þe forestavne faken þeire coblez
MA.748	Holly withowttyn harme þay hale in bottes
MA.4114	And in they schokke their scheldes, schontes no lengare ⁶¹

Other verbal endings are still rarer. There are only two potential instances of the subjunctive, in modified invocation formulas:

⁵⁹ Also ll.1286, 2123, 3316, 3849.

⁶⁰ The manuscript spelling is usually *-en*, and so it should be in six of the instances to avoid elision, e.g. 613 *With weches and warlaws to wacchen his tentys*.

⁶¹ On five occasions elision requires the ending to be *-en*. The lexically suspect line 2114 *Craschede doun crestez and craschede braynez* is the only evidence for an unsyncopated plural weak preterite.

MA.2724 As sais vs Sir Priamous, so helpe Seynt Peter
 MA.3796 I syghe noghte for my selfe, sa helpe oure Lorde

However, in both instances alliteration points to the first stress on *so*, which in the case of MA.3796 would also solve the problem of elision (*sa help' our Louerd*).

Imperatives occur only three times, two weak singular and one plural:

MA.547 Wage many wyghtemen and wache thy marches
 MA.3799 For dere Dryghttyn this daye, dredys no wapyn
 MA.4137 Redy the for rescows, arraye thee sone

Additional evidence on the preservation of the imperative endings is provided by the initial dip. The monosyllabic strong imperative *take* stands in the weak initial dip six times (in the set expression *take hede / tente / kepe*), e.g. 1682 *And claymez of knyghthode, take kepe to 3our selfen*.⁶²

The preterite 3rd person singular is required by metre in only four verses:

MA.3271 Ilke a segge by hym selfe, and saide theis wordez
 MA.3290 Ofte he syghede vnsownde and said theis wordes
 MA.3310 Bot 3it he sprange and sprete and spradden his armes
 MA.4313 And sone to his sekire men he said theis wordes

Note that in the extant copy the unhistorical *-n* correctly protects the syllable from elision in 3310 *spradden his armes*. Nunnation also appears in the text in the only instance of the metrically demonstrable 1st person singular *-e* in the medial dip: 2445 *They sall wante or I weende, I wagen myn hevede*. I will return to the two lines later.

⁶² Also the weak initial dip contains on several occasions plural auxiliaries: 2117 *Was neuer stele ne stede mighte stande them a3aynez*; 2490 *Sir Forawnt and Sir Florydas sall folowe thi brydyll*; 2691 *Sais þat he has saluez sall soften vs bothen*; 4193 *Today Clarente and Caliburne sall kythe them togedirs*. Thus in the poet's dialect, as elsewhere in Middle English, the singular forms of such verbs could be extended to the plural.

The most frequent category to provide the metrically required inflection in the medial dip is the adjectival plural, e.g. 372 *with gentill knyghtes*.⁶³ All the adjectives are disyllabic in their basic forms.⁶⁴ There are 95 such verses, featuring the following adjectives: *awful, baleful, bustous, certayn, cruell, divers, doleful, dredful, feraunt, Flemesch, froward, hawtayn, haythen, heslyn, ientill, Irisch, lyard, reall, rewfyl, rosset, selcouth, synful, stelen, uncouth* (first syllable alliterating), *unreken* (second syllable alliterating), *wrakful*.⁶⁵ There is also a single weak form: 2895 *Thus es þe geante forjuste, that errawnte Iewe*.

Adjectives in *-ly(che)* are also inflected in the plural (35 instances). Again, those which could potentially reintroduce medial *-e-* behave identically to those whose root is unproblematically monosyllabic: *erthelyche* (EME *erþlic*), *hertelyche* (in Chaucer *hertly* is disyllabic), *lordlyche, semlyche, wynlyche* (OE *wynlic*) behave just as *burlyche, comelyche* (OE *cymlic*), *ferlyche, frelyche, freschlyche, griselyche, kyndlyche, knyghtlyche, lothelyche* (OE *laðlic*), *manlyche*.

Plural past participles are inflected in the medial dip in MA when used attributively. There is no evidence to the contrary:

MA.555 To hostaye in Almayne with armede knyghtez

⁶³ On the selection of adjectives for this test (*baleful, synful*, etc.) see fn. 47.

⁶⁴ That monosyllabic adjectives never occur in such position is understandable: for the plural ending of a monosyllabic adjective to form the strong dip it normally would have to be followed by a noun stressed on the second syllable. However, such nouns turn out to be extremely rare verse-finally. In the whole of MA there are only 12 examples (and only four of them contain an adjective at all): 185 *in silueryn chargeours*, 3468 *he sees there commande*, 725 *schiftys the comouns*, 746 *prouen there depnesse*, 2423 *to sett withe engeynes*, 2481 *certayne engynes*, 3036 *and bendes engynes*, 83 *and mad his enclines*, 5 *thorowe vertous lywynge*, 691 *foresake noghte þis offyce*, 386 *and to þe holy vernacle*, 4021 *encroche any wirchipe*. SGGK actually makes use of precisely such syntactic-syllabic pattern: 213 *as scharp rasores*. Relatively often, SGGK employs another construction where the ending of a plural monosyllabic adjective can be attested metrically – verses with three lexical words: SGGK.554 *big men boþe*, 580 *And syþen þe brawdren bryné of bry3t stel rynges*, etc.

⁶⁵ Some other adjectives are discounted as evidence since their basic forms could well be trisyllabic, despite the fact that their distribution is identical to the ones listed above, i.e. that when they occur in the first lift of b-verse in the plural (and they tend to be almost exclusively plural in this position) they are never followed by weak syllables belonging to other words. These are: *precious* (10x), *valiant* (8x), *galliard* (7x), *speciall* (1x), *clergiiall* (1x). That caution is in order is clearly demonstrated by *precious*: in Chaucer, it is disyllabic when stressed on the last syllable, but trisyllabic when stressed on the first. In MA it always alliterates on /p/.

MA.731	Trussez in tristly trappyde stedes
MA.1461	Thare ware gomes thurghegirde with grundyn wapyns
MA.2149	Facez fetteled vnfaire in filterede lakes
MA.2274	They hewede doun haythen men with hiltede swerdez

There are 34 instances, including some with syncope (required in the unstressed *-ere-* sequences): 189 *baterde*, 1051 *crysmed*, 2115 *couerde*, 2149 *filterede*, 2880 *roselde*, 3042 *playsterede*, 3185 *krysomede*.⁶⁶ Predicative plural past participles do not form the medial dip, and are therefore most likely uninflected (as in Chaucer). However, verse-finally neither predicative nor attributive past participles are inflected in the plural:

MA.50	Mad of his cosyns kyngys ennoyntede	<i>attributive</i>
MA.1549	3e may haue fore þe Senatour sextie horse chargede	<i>attributive</i>
MA.1605	Sir Boyce and Sir Berell, with baners displayede	<i>attributive</i>
MA.1877	To rype vpe the Romaynez ruydlyche wondyde	<i>attributive</i>
MA.3801	Ayere to endelesse joye with angells vnwemyde	<i>attributive</i>
MA.131	We come at his commaundment; haue vs excusede	<i>predicative</i>
MA.166	Now er they herberde in hey and in oste holden	<i>predicative</i>
MA.654	Luke my kydde castells be clenlyche arrayede	<i>predicative</i>
MA.899	In Seynt Mighell Mount, there myraclez are schewede	<i>predicative</i>
MA.1420	And saide "Sir, sekerly, 3our seggez are supprysside"	<i>predicative</i>

The probable reason for this is the postposition of attributive participles in the final lift.

As I have suggested above, adjectives in postposition cannot decline weak (although they certainly can form plural). A similar rationale might exist for participles.

Present participles in *-ande* are have *-e* in the plural, e.g. MA.953: *He salu3ede þat sorowfull with sittande wordez*, and on 31 other occasions in the corpus (MA, SGGK, SJ).⁶⁷ The reason why *-e* here might be called inflectional rather than historical (i.e. rather than an unremarkable preservation of the historical ON *-andi*, supported by

⁶⁶ There is no evidence in the corpus that *-en* of strong past participles like *grounden* or adjectives like *heslyn*, *hethen*, *stelen* could be syncopated when inflected. On the other hand, syncope is almost always present in inflected forms when *-en* is part of a verbal or nominal root (*britten*, *happen*, *listen*, *gomen*, etc.).

⁶⁷ Including one possible weak form (vocative): MA.2778: "Fy," sais Sir Floridas, "thow fleryande wryche!"

OE *-ende*) – is some evidence that *-ande* might have lost its *-e* in the singular (i.e. joined the declension of common adjectives). So, plural participles in *-ande* are only rarely followed by other weak syllables in the medial dip, as in MA.4338 *Ladys languessande and lowrande to schewe*. On the other hand, singular present participles are almost always followed by some other weak syllables (in 31 instances): MA.498 *And so into Lumberddye, lykande to schewe*. There are only three exceptions:

MA.1353 Graythes towarde þe gome with grucchande herte
 SGGK.1088 Þenne he carped to þe kny3t, criande loude
 SGGK.1757 Þe lady luflych com la3ande swete⁶⁸

As I will try to show in the next section (pp. 142-153), suffixes cannot form a weak dip. Therefore, a direct metrical test of the monosyllabicity of the singular *-and(e)* is impossible.⁶⁹ Thus the only available evidence for the inflection *-and* in the singular / *-ande* in the plural is indirect and inconclusive.

The medial dip in MA shows up nominal *-e* on only eight occasions:

MA.37 Gyan and Gothelande and Grace the ryche
 MA.3933 Erles of Awfrike and Estriche berynes
 MA.2327 Fore pape, ne for potestate, ne prynce so noble
 MA.2339 Euen appon an olyfaunte, hys egle owtt ouere
 MA.2999 Thas þat chasede that daye, their chauce was bettire
 MA.2546 Bothe schere thorowe schoulders a schaftmonde large
 MA.3843 He schare hym one þe schorte rybbys a schaftmonde large
 MA.4232 Into þe schuldyre of þe schalke a schaftmonde large

⁶⁸ Another possible exception of the kind is MA.198 *Fesauntez enflureschit on flammande siluer*. However, *silver* seems to attract exceptional occurrences of its attributes. For example, the adjective *chalk-whit* often occurs in the first lift of b-verse, always in the plural or (once) weak form: MA.1363 *Till a cheefe forest, on scalke-whitte horses*, and in five more verses. This is what we would expect. Three verses, though, seem exceptional in that they do not appear to have a strong medial dip. All three contain the word *silver*: MA.1026 *Choppid in a chargour of chalke-whytt syluer*; MA.2522 *With chapes and cheynes of chalke-whyte slyuer*; MA.3266 *Thereone was a chayere of chalke-whyte siluer*. Possibly, *silver* as material may require or allow the plural. [Neuter in Old English, cf. the uninflected plural of *winter* (OE neuter plural *wintru*), as in *seven winter*, etc., frequent in MA?]

⁶⁹ The b-verse in SJ.437 *And sixtene þousand in þe þridde with a þryuande kny3t* is metrically inadmissible on multiple grounds.

Even of those, two are in personal nouns; three in a set phrase *a schaftmonde large*; and *egle* could equally be *egel*.⁷⁰

Finally, a mention must be made of the verses that become irregular due to positing full inflectional grammar for MA. There are but four of them:

MA.115	That Iulius Cesar wan with his ientill knyghttes
MA.1840	Thow skornede vs lang ere with thi skornefull wordez
MA.339	"Sir, and we wyste 3our wyll, we walde wirke þeraftyre
MA.2032	And thane Sir Lucius on lowde said lordlyche wordez

Lines 115 and 1840 have been discussed and dismissed above. The two others can hardly stand alone against four thousand verses.

The verses that remain are metrically irregular in any case, without regard to the grammar posited above:

MA.1160	Pay ware fayne þat þey fandē no flesche entamed
MA.1291	And than the Romayns so ryche had arayedē their tentez
MA.1659	If here be any hathell man, erle or oþer
MA.1805	"Thowe hase wyrchipe wonne and wondyde knyghttez
MA.1870	The Kyng of Surry the kene to Sir Cadore es 3elden
MA.2057	For thare es noghte bot dede thare the dragone es raissede
MA.2124	Graythes hym to Golapas, þat greuyde moste
MA.2139	Bot they fitt them fayre, thes frekk byernez
MA.2180	One this reall his dede to reuenge
MA.2840	They will be owtrayedē anon, are vndron ryng
MA.2986	Thorowowte þe rerewarde he holdes wayes
MA.3021	Oure wirchipfull wardayne es wele escheuyde
MA.3078	In iche leuere on lowde the Kyngē did crye
MA.3220	Of he slynges with sleghte and slakes gyrdill
MA.3293	And nowē my lordchippes are loste and laide for euer
MA.3661	Brethly bessomes with byrre in beryns sailles
MA.3766	Metis with medilwarde, that Modrede ledys

⁷⁰ The two remaining verses are not free from doubt either. Line 2327 *ne prynce so noble* may read *ne prince[s] so noble*. The formula of 2999 *theire chaunce was bettire* appears only with *no bettir* elsewhere in MA: 1937 *my hape es no bettyre*, 3851 *his grace was no bettyre*, 3576 *the chaunce es no bettire*. The relevant passage is: "Þane oure cheualrous men changen theire horsez, // Chases and choppes down cheftaynes noble ... Thas þat chasede that daye, theire chaunce was bettire, // Swiche a cheke at a chace escheuede theym neuer" (MA.2989-3000). Krishna translates: "Those who ran (away) that day, their fate was better / (For) in their flight they never had to suffer such a setback". If we accept that 2999 *chased* refers to the pursued rather than pursuers, it might make more sense to read "those who ran away did *no* better, since they could not escape an attack during the pursuit".

Explanations of greater or lesser obviousness and plausibility may be suggested for most, e.g. 1659 *erel* with the epenthetic vowel; 2139 *frekk[este]* to match all the four other occurrences of the adjective; 2986 [*his / him*] *wayes*, to match other uses of the phrase; 3078 *lorde* or *lige-lord*; 3766 [*of / wyth*] *Mordrede[s] ledys* (cf. above on the genitive of personal nouns); 3220 *slakes [his] gyrdill*; etc.⁷¹

Thus final *-e* and other inflections bring down the number of non-heteromorphic b-verses from about 350 to less than twenty (even at the maximal negative evidence).

Evidence for final *-e* in SGGK and MA: a comparison

The two metrical tests show beyond much doubt that the authorial dialect of MA, just as that of SGGK, retained the inflectional grammar and the rules for final *-e* traditionally posited (with the exception of disyllabic adjectives) for contemporary southern texts. However, there is a difference in what particular inflections are revealed by metre in the final and medial dip of the two poems. The data is summarised in the following table:

⁷¹ The following verses are obscured in spelling: 1730 *and alkyn gamnes*, 2350 *be nakyn tytlye*. A comparison with 2363 *be nonkyns tytlye* and 3244 *and alkyns trees* demonstrates that the poet's standard form was *-kines*, inflected and unsyncopated.

Table 1.

	SGGK medial	MA medial	SGGK final	MA final
Adjectives: plural	23	95	27	57
Adjectives: weak	8	1	13	24
Adjectives: <i>-ly(che)</i> , Pl.	3	35	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Pres. part.: <i>-ande</i> , Pl.	4	32	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Past part.: attributive, Pl.	7	34	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Adjectives: <i>ja/jō</i> stems	7	-	32	44
Adjectives: French in <i>e</i>	-	-	9	38
Adverbs	12	1	220	191
Adverbs in <i>-ly</i>	10	6	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Nouns	24	8	311	330
Numerals	1	13	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Infinitives	28	16	118	115
Verbs: plural ⁷²	17	25	31	40
Verbs: pres. 1Sg	3	1	20	13
Verbs: subjunctive	2	2	21	35
Verbs: imperative	4	3 (+6 initial)	1	1

MA : SGGK length ratio = 2.14

Certainly, metrical attestation of a category in the medial dip is a matter of chance, but it is likely that any differences would level out at least partly over the course of several thousand verses.

With respect to the final dip the two poems are quite similar: adjectival endings are used for metrical purposes with the same frequency (although SGGK is a bit freer with *-ja/-jō-* stems), MA has a formulaic preference to *large / huge*, verbal endings are only slightly more frequent in SGGK, and although SGGK uses proportionally a lot more adverbs, nouns and infinitives, they are still very frequent in MA.

In the medial dip, however, there is a clear shift in preferences. Inflections of nominal attributes (adjectives, past and present participles) are used for metrical purposes in MA at least twice as often as in SGGK. This is at least partly due to the greater repetitiveness of MA's traditional style. Noticeably, this higher frequency does not apply to the weak forms (only once in MA, in contrast to 24 such forms in its final

⁷² Note that in MA almost all the *-es / -en* plural endings in question are present tense; for SGGK, the figure includes predominantly the *-en* ending of the strong preterite.

dip) and the historical *-ja-/jō-* stems, which do not occur in the medial dip at all. Such total absence confirms what was already suspected from the evidence of *-ja-/jō-* stems verse-finally in MA: besides the 41 instances of *riche*, only *kene*, *blithe* and *trewē* appear once each. Compare that to SGGK which has a complete set of the major *-ja-/jō-* stems in the strong singular in the final dip: *blithe*, *clene*, *dere*, *grene*, *hende*, *riche*, *sturne*, *swete*, *thicke*, *trewē*, *wilde*.

The drop in the metrically relevant use of the three main categories (adverbs, nouns, infinitives) between the final and the medial dip is much greater for MA than SGGK, and is particularly sharp for adverbs (just once in the medial dip, in contrast to 220 times verse-finally) and nouns (just 8 instances, most of them suspect, rather than the 330 verse-finally).

Verbal endings are also almost non-existent: only one 1st person singular ending and two subjunctives. This does not apply to the plural *-es / -en* ending (where *-e* is covered), which occurs just as often in the medial dip of MA as it does in either the medial dip of SGGK or the final dip of MA.

Of course, such rarity of employment for metrical purposes might be accidental. Consider though the case of the 1st person singular. It is indeed not generally frequent in the first lift of the b-verse in MA (about 40 instances), but there is quite a number of verses where the ending could have been used metrically:

MA.378b	I rekke bott a lyttill
MA.2631b	I hette the forsothe
MA.3030b	I hete the forsothe
MA.3396b	I hette the forsothe
MA.3369b	I hette 3ow forsothe
MA.3422b	I knawe it forsothe
MA.1330b	I send hym thes wordez
MA.1571b	I sende hym þes wordez

None of the highlighted words is required for sense. Considering the general aversion of alliterative poets, authors of MA and SGGK included, to trisyllabic (or longer) strong medial dips, one might wonder why the opportunity of a disyllabic dip formed with a 1st person singular ending has not been taken here.⁷³

The rare, almost nonexistent use of several grammatical categories in the medial dip of MA suggests, I believe, one possible explanation. The rare categories are those that would have been the first to disappear from dialects where the inflectional system went into a relatively fast decline: the weak adjective, the historic *-ja-/-jō-* stems, minor verbal endings of the subjunctive and the 1st person singular, the historic distinctions between nouns. The rare use of such categories in the medial dip could not have been due to such a decline in the author's dialect, since he demonstrates a complete command of the whole grammatical and lexical arsenal in the final dip (except for the dominance of *riche* to the point of exclusion of all the *-ja-/-jō-* stems). Imagine though what would happen if the text passed through the hands of a scribe mindful of metre but whose grammar and metrical system corresponded to those of the author of the *Destruction of Troy*. As that poem shows, after the loss of most *-e*'s the requirement of the monosyllabic final dip was relaxed, but the basic rule of one and only one strong dip remained. For such a reviser the presence or absence of *-e*'s in the final dip would have been of no consequence whatsoever, and so he would have no reason to meddle with the grammatical forms used verse-finally; thus they have been preserved quite well in transmission. However, he would have been unhappy with verses which in his opinion lacked a strong dip; he padded them out with extra weak syllables – at least, in the less acceptable cases. Since the verses he was padding out were syntactically targeted at the medial rather than initial strong dip, and to a lesser extent because medial strong dips are statistically prevalent anyway, such addition of new syllabic material did not result

⁷³ In SGGK, for example, over 85% of medial strong dips are disyllabic.

in many verses where our reading of the original *-e* would produce a second strong dip. Some of the troublesome verses in MA may have such origin, but even then they are very few.

We might also remember that in the only instance where the 1st person singular ending does form a strong medial dip in MA, it is spelt with *-en* in the manuscript: 2445 *I wagen myn hevede*. This is probably a trace of a copyist who was prone to nunnation (cf. its other instance, this time with metrical justification, in 3310 *Bot 3it he sprange and sprete and spradden his armes*). Then the form would have been overlooked by the subsequent reviser and its metrical significance not weeded out as in other putative instances of the 1st person singular.

Among other things, the findings show that Duggan's procedure of metrical discovery by manuscript comparison may be dangerous: if a reviser-scribe within the textual tradition of one extant witness consistently emended the verses to conform with his more advanced grammar (as seems to be the case with MA), while the textual history of the second witness does not contain such a metrical-grammatical revision, the method of manuscript comparison will show divergences precisely at the points where final *-e* was relevant for the author. Discounting the verses, as Duggan's method requires, will then deprive us of the evidence that final *-e* was relevant in the medial dip in the original poem.

Final *-e* in MA: conclusions

According to the material presented above, the rules of the alliterative b-verse, with 1) two lifts, 2) the monosyllabic final dip, and 3) one and only one strong dip in either medial or initial position, are confirmed in well over 99% of lines in MA. By this

stage the metrical statement has ceased to be a continually reviewed working hypothesis, and should more profitably be posited as a final theoretical claim (see p. 185, "B-verse"). The claim may and should be evaluated by the regularity in the syllabic value of variable forms it is required to produce to be true. It turns out that this latter regularity is also overwhelming: for the great majority of questionable linguistic points that may potentially show variation across Middle English, only one syllabic variant is used in all occurrences of such a linguistic element or category in MA. It does not mean that the regularities are not complex. As we have seen, in some inflected adjectives in *-ele* the medial vowel is always syncopated, in others it never is – depending on the structure of the first root syllable. So, adjectives like *nobill* and *(h)apell* are always syncopated when inflected (*noble*, *hable*); on the other hand, adjectives like *gentill* and *cruell* are never syncopated. It is perhaps important to note that the knowledge in the case of each particular word is acquired purely from metrical patterns: spelling offers no help at all (for the logic of the metrical analysis, see 109-115). The pattern is repeated in other words: the metre demonstrates that the inflected sequence *-ele* is syncopated when preceded by the *-VC-* structure, but not *-V-* or *-VCC-*. Another sonorant follows a different version of the syncopation rule: the inflected *-ene* is syncopated when part of a nominal or verbal root, but never in strong past participles and adjectives. Further still, the syncope in the inflected *-ere* sequence is regular and does not depend on any other factors. However, when the first vowel in a sonorant sequence is stressed (e.g. */-er-/* rather than */-ər-/*), some words can develop epenthetic vowels (the opposite of syncopation): *bern*, *sterne*. Unlike the syncopation rules for *-ere*, *-ele*, *-ene* – which are both regular and identical in MA, SGGK and SJ – epenthetic vowels appear only in MA, only in certain words, and only sporadically (i.e. the variants with epenthesis are relatively rare). However, in some instances the metre shows that the poem consistently employs two different variants in two different metrical positions. So, the

adverb/preposition *thurgh* in MA is always disyllabic verse-finally: 1379b *he berez hym thurghe*; 2087b *and jaggede hym thorowe*. Verse-initially, it is always monosyllabic: 24b *thorowe craftys of armes*; 2446b *thorowe helpe of my Lorde*. The dominant manuscript spelling is *thorowe* without any regard to the metrical position. A monosyllabic reading of *thorowe* verse-finally is out of the question: MA contains hardly a dozen clear non-monosyllabic final dips, and the nine instances of verse-final *thorowe* would almost double that number, standing out very clearly. On the other hand, it is remarkable that *thorowe* never forms a strong dip (although having the disyllabic variant, it could have done). It occurs either in the weak initial dip or – always with other weak syllables – in the strong medial dip. Of course, verse-final *thorowe* is always an adverb, while verse-initially or medially it is usually a preposition, but the (in)significance of the fact is a secondary matter. What is important is that the two linguistic variants of *thorowe* show a consistent, complementary distribution. The regularity is supported by similar possibilities existing for phonologically similar words within the poem.

Finally, all the regularities of the possible syllabic variation are further supported by the full inflectional grammar that is revealed by the same metrical rules and corresponds closely (with the exception of plural disyllabic adjectives) to the grammar traditionally posited for such contemporary southern texts as Chaucer. Thus, significant bodies of data on metre, grammar and linguistic variation link to produce a consistent and plausible description. The grammar of final *-e* that has been shown to exist in the authorial dialects of SGGK and MA is at the same time yet another proof of the requirement of one and only one strong dip in the b-verse ("heteromorphicity") and the requirement of the monosyllabic final dip.

Now that the syllabic value of various linguistic forms in SGGK and MA has been established, and two basic rules of the heteromorphicity and the monosyllabic final

dip have been confirmed, it is possible to proceed with the analysis of other metrical features of late Middle English verse. In particular, I will focus on the form of the weak dip, the form of the a-verse, and the form of the b-verses with three open-class words. The features observed in the course of the discussions will lead to a summary statement of late Middle English metre to be used in the subsequent historical reconstruction.

Syllables in the weak dip

Suffixes in the weak dip

One of the points where Duggan and Cable disagreed in their interpretation of the evidence was the metrical value of the suffix *-ly* (*-liche*). Cable noted that while the suffix was unexceptional at the end of the a-verse, it never appeared in the same position in the second half-line. Cable concluded that the reason for the restriction was preservation of the historical final *-e* in *-liche*:

The present study diverges from traditional readings in proposing that the *-ly* adverbial ending is disyllabic in the fourteenth century. The explanation lies in the phonological and metrical arguments that run throughout this chapter. A survey of the distribution of metrical patterns shows that *-ly* adverbs show up often at the end of the first half-line but almost never at the end of the second half-line. Indeed, in the whole corpus that I have scanned, not a single line ends with a *-ly* adverb. ... All adverbs ending in *-ly* retain the disyllabic structure of the two sources of that ending (OE *-lice* and ON *-liga*). Where the fricative is lost, the ending is assumed to be [liə].⁷⁴

On the other hand, Duggan pointed out that *-ly* adverbs never occurred in the first lift of b-verse so that the suffix would form the strong dip on its own – as it should have been able to had it been disyllabic. In practice, *-ly* adverbs in the medial strong dip were always followed by other weak syllables. Duggan concluded that the reason for the distribution was loss of the historical final *-e* in *-liche*:

One finds not one instance of an *-ly* adverb in the archetypes of *Parlement*, *Siege*, and *Wars* in which the b-verse rhythm is anything other than (x)/xx(x)/x. Instead, the poets always follow the *-ly* with an unstressed syllable

⁷⁴ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, pp. 75-76 and 78-79. The only examples I can find in the eighteen major poems of the Revival are *Mum and the Sothsegger* 935b *ne so hevenely*; *The Destruction of Troy* 11760b & *cumbricit hym seluensely*; and six lines in *Golagros and Gawain* (ll. 507, 922, 951, 1223, 1227, 1302).

– another adverb, a preposition, an auxiliary, a pronoun, or an unstressed initial syllable of the final word. Thus, though there may well have been a time when such adverbs, like formerly trisyllabic adjectives, could alone have filled the medial dip, they clearly did not do so by the time the surviving poems were composed. ... It is important here to stress that verses of that form occur in the different manuscripts of P3A, SJ and WA, but they do not occur in the archetypes. It is easy enough to turn to the works of, say, the *Gawain*-poet and find verses like C 310 *clanlych planed* or SGGK 1183 *and dernly vpon*, but there is every reason to think such verses simple error.⁷⁵

The metrical tests in first part of this Chapter have provided a large amount of very consistent evidence in favour of the preservation of the full inflectional grammar of Middle English in the language of SGGK and MA. At the same time, the discussion of adjectives with disyllabic stems (pp. 109-115) confirms the significance of a regular occurrence of other weak syllables in the strong dip; distributions in this position turn out to be even more significant than what could be expected in theory.⁷⁶ Thus, the observations of both Cable and Duggan seem highly pertinent, and their respective conclusions unavoidable. And still they contradict.

A possible solution to this logical and methodological impasse is that the remarkable distribution of *-ly* is not due to the presence of final *-e*. I would like to propose that *-ly* cannot appear in the final dip not because it is disyllabic, but because it is a suffix.

My corpus in this section includes three poems: SGGK, MA and SJ. I checked all appearances of the following suffixes: *-dom*, *-ship*, *-hood*, *-ness*, *-ing*, *-and*, *-ling*, *-ly*, *-ful*, *-less*, *-some*, *-ish*, *-y*, *-ous*, *-est*, *-ess*, *-ant*. The array is sufficiently large to test the hypothesis. Some of the suffixes are adjectival and have historically uninflected forms in the strong singular. Some are nominal, frequently occurring in the uninflected

⁷⁵ Duggan, *Final -e and the Rhythmic Structure of the B-verse*, pp. 138-139. In the three poems analysed in this section (SGGK, MA and SJ), *-ly* adverbs are followed by some weak material in a great majority of cases – 174 instances out of 195 (e.g. SGGK.2302b *so felly þou spekez*). As it will become evident from the discussion below, I am not prepared to see the remaining 21 lines as scribal errors (cf. the final comments on the metrical distribution of final *-e* in MA and SGGK, p. 138).

⁷⁶ This greater-than-expected significance can be explained by the fact although strong dips are not restricted to two syllables, they are actually disyllabic in about 85% of all b-verses in SGGK, MA or SJ.

singular. The evidence of native nominal suffixes *-ship*, *-and/-ing* and *-ness* is strictly speaking immaterial, since historically they had *-e* in all their forms, and so we would not expect their appearance in the final dip of the b-verse anyway.⁷⁷ They are included for the sake of completeness. Some other suffixes, e.g. *-ance* or *-(t)ion*, do not occur after monosyllabic stems, and/or are disyllabic themselves; they are not suitable for the test at all.

My findings can be summarised in the following table:

Table 2.

Suffix	Total instances	Medial dip, with other weak material	Medial strong dip, forms by itself	Medial weak dip, forms by itself	Final dip
<i>-dom</i>	8				
<i>-ship</i>	22	11			
<i>worship</i>	48	9		1	1
<i>-hood</i>	15	2			
<i>-ness</i>	20	8	1		2
<i>-ing</i>	143	41	1		2
<i>-ling</i>	7	1			
<i>-ess</i>	14	2			
<i>-y</i>	131	24		9	5
<i>-est</i>	85	18			17

The columns contain the following data:

1. the total number of occurrences in the corpus;
2. instances where the suffix occurs in the medial dip of the b-verse and is followed by weak syllables of other words, e.g. MA.150b *no wyrchip it were*, SGGK.1800b *my mournyng to lassen*;

⁷⁷ In Old English, certain nouns in *-ing* were masculine, and others in *-ung/-ing* feminine. By the late Middle English stage, however, all *-ing* nouns appear to have been declined feminine, and therefore had the grammatical final *-e*. The levelling was probably at least partly due to the variation between *-ing-* and *-and-*, the latter with a historical *-e*.

3. instances where the suffix occurs in the medial dip of the b-verse, and the medial dip should be strong, e.g. SGGK.917b *of talkyng noble*;
4. instances where the suffix occurs in the medial dip of the b-verse, and the medial dip should be weak, e.g. MA.4019b *ne no wirchipe ells*;
5. instances where the suffix occurs in the final dip.

All the suffixes in the table, except the last two (which will be discussed later), are nominal. Column (3) contains potential exceptions to the heteromorphicity principle in general, since a monosyllabic suffix in an uninflected form cannot form a strong dip on its own. Both apparent exceptions belong to suffixes that historically have final *-e*, so actually there are no violations of the principle here:

MA.3552	And has wroghte hire with childe, as witt nesse tellis
SGGK.917	And þe teccheles termes of talk yng noble

Exceptions to the rule proposed above (that suffixes cannot occur in a weak dip) are given in columns (4) and (5). There are only six such verses in the three poems:

MA.4021	3iff þou kepe thi couent encroche any wir chipe
MA.746	The pryce schippeþ of the porte prouen theire dep nesse
SGGK.2523	þe Brutus bokez þerof beres wyt nesse
MA.5	In this wrechyd werld, thorowe vertous lyw yng e
SGGK.1982	þay bikende hym to Kryst with ful colde syk yng eþ
MA.4019	Loke it wante no waxe, ne no wir chipe ells (<i>elision</i>)

It is noticeable that all five occurrences in the final dip belong to the suffixes that historically have final *-e*. Thus, what we have here in all likelihood is the shift of the primary linguistic and metrical stress onto the suffix: a phenomenon well attested in Middle English poetry of all periods (see discussion of the stress shift in Layamon, pp.

229-243). In fact, without such a shift SGGK.2523b *beres wyttensse* and MA.5 *thorowe vertous lywynges* do not have a strong dip.⁷⁸ The only verse where the shift produces the undesired second strong dip is SGGK.1982b *with ful colde sykynges*. Thus, the number of "genuine" (before any textual considerations are employed) exceptions to the principle is only two: SGGK.1982b and MA.4019b.

As for adjectival suffixes after monosyllabic stems (*-ful*, *-less*, *-ish*, *-ous*, *-ant*, and the rare *-some*), their distribution is seriously affected by the weak/plural inflection (see pp. 109-115). They very often occur in a medial dip that must be strong, but as the adjectives always need to be inflected, the suffix does not form the strong dip on its own. Strong singular forms are always followed by some other weak material in the medial dip. The fact most relevant for the present purposes is that these suffixes never occur in the final dip, or in a medial dip that must be weak, even when they belong to strong singular adjectives. Thus, no new exceptions transpire for adjectival suffixes.

In SGGK, MA and SJ the adverbial *-ly* is followed by some other material in the weak dip in 174 instances (cf. fn. 75). In another 21 it forms the strong dip on its own. An analogy with the very persistent avoidance of the metrically unnecessary (though rhythmically admissible) extra weak syllables after plural adjectival forms suggests that the 174 : 21 ratio for the adverbial *-ly* is significant and that the suffix was usually monosyllabic.⁷⁹ However, there is no need to assume that the remaining 21 instances are corruptions: since historically the adverbial suffix was disyllabic, and since (as shown in the first part of this Chapter) final *-e* is very well preserved in the alliterative poems, it is not surprising to find variation between the historically correct, but disappearing *-liche* and the new and dominant monosyllabic form.

⁷⁸ Verse-initial *thorowe* is monosyllabic in MA, see above. First-syllable stress is preferable in *vertous* because of the alliteration.

⁷⁹ Duggan proposes (*Final -e*, p. 139) that the difference between adjectives and adverbs in *-ly* is due to syntactic factors. However, appeals to historical syntactic preferences overruling synchronic metrical rules are always suspect. The argument presented in the section on disyllabic adjectives (pp. 109-115) suggests that Duggan's syntactic explanation is untenable for adjectives, so there is no need to invoke similar arguments for adverbs.

At the same time, the adjectival *-ly* behaves like other adjectival suffixes. There are 154 occurrences (with monosyllabic stems). It occurs in the medial dip on its own in 46 instances, all of them weak and/or plural (e.g. MA.586b *the burlyche knyghtes*).⁸⁰ When strong singular, it is followed by other weak material (three instances, e.g. MA.1086b *and vgly to schewe*); a plural form is followed by other weak material only twice. Thus, unlike the adverbial *-ly*, the adjectival *-ly* does not seem to have a variant disyllabic form. It behaves consistently as a monosyllabic adjectival suffix and is inflected in strict accordance with grammar.

Another suffix with a potential variation, participial *-ing/-and*, seems to be inflected just as other polysyllabic adjectives. So, in weak and/or plural contexts, it is not followed by any other weak material in 50 instances out of 60 (e.g. MA.3749b *with daggande sperys*).⁸¹ In strong singular contexts, on the contrary, it is followed by some weak syllables: 33 instances (e.g. SGGK.450b *herande þise kny3tes*). However, there are unusually many exceptions – cases where the suffix has a strong singular form and still forms the strong dip without any additional weak material:

SGGK.1088	Þenne he carped to þe kny3t, criande loude
SGGK.236	Þen grene aumayl on golde glowande bry3ter
SGGK.859	And vnder fete, on þe flet, of fol3ande sute
SGGK.1757	Þe lady luflych com la3ande swete
SGGK.1724	Loude he watz 3ayned with 3arande speche
MA.198	Fesauntez enflureschit on flammande siluer
MA.1353	Graythes towarde þe gome with grucchande herte

⁸⁰ The number includes two instances of the vocative, which has the weak form as well: SJ.985 *Þan seiþ Sire Sabyn anon, 'semelich lord'*; MA.3371 *Fonde of þe fyneste, thow frelich byerne*.

⁸¹ Including one vocative: MA.2778 *"Fy," sais Sir Floridas, "thow fleryande wryche!"*.

The situation is similar to that with adverbial *-ly*, and here too I would assume the existence of an unpopular variant disyllabic form.⁸² The only verse with participial *-ing/-and* that directly contradicts my proposed rule of suffix distribution is

SJ.437 And sixtene þousand in þe þridde with a þryuande kny3t

where the suffix stands in a weak medial dip. In the final dip the participial *-ing/-and* does not occur.

With the exception of SGGK.1982b and MA.4019b, the violations of the proposed rule involve only two suffixes. The first is *-y* (see Table 2):

SGGK.1086 þe lorde let for luf lotez so myry
 SGGK.1623 þe lorde ful lowde with lote and la3ter myry
 SGGK.1970 Al þat euer I yow hy3t halde schal I rede
 SGGK.1848 Lo! so hit is littel, and lasse hit is worþy
 SGGK.1728 And ofte reled in a3ayn, so Reniarde watz wyle
 MA.260 Bot þou arte a meruailous man with thi mery wordez
 MA.1082 Huke-nebbyde as a hawke, and a hore berde
 MA.2005 That no powere sulde passe be no preue wayes
 MA.386 I make myn avowe to Gode and to þe holy vernacle
 SJ.107 Without hosebondes helpe saue þe Holy Goste
 SJ.115 þe þridde in heuen myd hem is þe Holy Goste
 SJ.162 Alle þei hatte in herte for his holy werkes
 SJ.1220 þat schal ben satled soure on 3oure sory kynde
 SJ.1232 Ierusalem þe Iewen toun and þe ioly temple⁸³

The second offending suffix is the superlative *-est*. There are 18 verses where *-est* is unexceptionally followed by some weak material in the dip. However, on 17 occasions it stands in the final dip:

SGGK.354 I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest

⁸² For a detailed account of the distribution of *-ande* in SGGK, see Noriko Inoue, *The A-Verse of the Alliterative Long Line...*, section 4.3. My corpus confirms her conclusions.

⁸³ Possibly also SJ.1125 *Hacchen vpon hard steel with an herty wylle*, as the text stands in Laud and as printed by Kölbing and Day. Hanna and Lawton emend to *hetter wylle*.

SGGK.1441 For he watz bre^me, bor alþer-gratt^est
 SGGK.1381 '3e iwysse,' quop þat oþer wy3e, 'here is wayth fayrest

The formulaic expression *at þe gaynest* always occurs at the end of the b-verse, in

SGGK.1973 For to ferk þur3 þe fryth and fare at þe gaynest

and in 13 lines in MA. There might have been a metrical distinction between grammatical and lexical suffixes, but it is hard to tell due to the paucity of the former in Middle English.

Therefore, the evidence of SGGK, MA and SJ supports the proposed rule: "suffixes are not allowed to occur in the monosyllabic dip, final or medial." For the almost three hundred of nominal and about six hundred of adjectival suffixes in the b-verse, there are only three exceptions: SGGK.1982b *with ful colde sykynges*, MA.4019b *ne no wirchipe ells*, SJ.437b *with a pryuande kny3t*. Two suffixes, *-y* and *-est*, are the only ones to violate the regularity – and they do it quite often.

Extent of the restriction

The next question to ask should concern the extent of the rule that suffixes are not allowed to occur in the monosyllabic dip. What is the relevant feature of the restriction: morphological class (similarly to Old English verse), word boundary, or something else?

The restriction holds for the second stem of compounds. In my corpus, there are no instances of the first stem of a compound occupying the second lift of a b-verse, so that the second stem would have to form the final dip. Instead, there are over fifty b-

verses where the second stem occupies the second lift; in every case, the first stem then occupies the first lift: SGGK.37b *vpon Krystmasse*.

Similarly, "heavy" disyllabic personal names do not occur at the end of the b-verse: *Baldwin, Bed(i)wer, Bedwin, Britain, Cornwall, Clement, Cler(e)mond, Flanders, Friesland, Sandwich*, etc. The only potential counter-example that I find is SGGK.552b *þe duk of Clarence*, but here the lift should be on *-en-* for the verse to have a strong dip: /kla'rense/. At the same time, *Brutus, Peter, James, Lowes, Tremble, France, Logres, Wales, Rome* appear to be acceptable verse-finally.

The latter group of personal names suggests that it is hardly the word boundary that is relevant for the rule. Indeed, word boundary on its own could never be the explanation here since almost every single final dip (and many of the medial weak dips) is formed by a syllable belonging to the same word as the syllable in the second lift (...*kni3tes*, etc.). So, for the word boundary to be relevant, it should work in conjunction with some other feature. Looking at the types of syllables that so far have been shown not to occur in a weak dip (suffixes; second stems of compounds; second syllables of certain names), we might have to infer that personal names like *Baldwin, Britain, Cornwall, Clement* were morphologically equivalent to compounds or suffixed nouns. However, there is a much more attractive solution.

Consider the following list. It contains *all* nouns (both native and borrowed) *with a disyllabic stem stressed on the first syllable, except those ending in final -e* that occur at the end of b-verse *in the singular* in SGGK, MA or SJ (words with only one suitable instance are listed in brackets):

*(altar), (apple), (anger), (armour), brother, chamber, chapel, (courser),
(dainty), (engine), (erber), eve, father, fewter, (giant), girdle, haven, heaven,
hunger, iron, lady, (lenten), (maiden), (mantle), (marble), master, meiny,*

(*member*), *middle*, *mother*, (*mulne*), (*navel*), *number*, *people*, *powder*, *sable*,
saddle, *shoulder*, *silver*, (*story*), (*swefn*), *table*, *tackle*, *temple*, *title*, (*token*),
(*trencher*), (*trifle*), (*trister*), (*unty3tel*), (*valley*), (*vessel*), *water*, *weapon*,
winter, *wonder*.⁸⁴

With the exception of *dainty*, *engine*, *giant*, *lady*, *meiny*, *story* and *valley*, all the words end in "/e/ + sonorant".⁸⁵ *Engine*, *giant* occur only once under the relevant conditions:

MA.1222	Qwen Sir Arthur the Kyng had kylled þe gyaunt
SJ.1209	Than Tytus on þe same side setteþ an engyne ⁸⁶

The same applies to *valley*:

SGGK.2145 Til þou be bro3t to þe boþem of þe brom valay

Elsewhere the poems always have the variant *vale* at the end of the b-verse :

SGGK.2271	þat neuer ar3ed for no here by hylle ne be vale,
SJ.430	Weren di3t forþ by day and drowen to þe vale
SJ.563	Baches woxen ablode aboute in þe vale
SJ.604	With ded bodies aboute alle þe brod vale

⁸⁴ Possibly also *errand*, *lord*, *head* (*erend* / *ernde*, *louerd* / *lorde*, *heued* / *hefde*).

⁸⁵ *Armour*, *coursour*, *lentoun* seem to have been assimilated to *armer*, *courser*, *lenten*. Cf. also spelling *courser* in MA.1388, 2115, 2166, 4010.

⁸⁶ The other five occurrences at the end of the b-verse are plural: MA.2423 *To seke them a sekyre place to sett wiþe engeynes*; MA.2481 *Settes vp sodaynly certayne engynes*; MA.3036 *Thane boldly þay buske and bendes engynes*; SJ.678 *Oper busked were boun, benden engynes*; SJ.1191 *On ech side for þe assaute setteþ engynes*. An emendation to *setteþ engynes* in SJ.1209b would fit the usage elsewhere in alliterative verse. However, the sense of the passage and the agreement between manuscripts make the emendation highly unlikely.

Thus, it seems likely that SGGK.2145 should also read *vale*, and so *valley* should be taken off the above list.

The rest of the exceptional words – *dainty*, *lady*, *meiny*, *story* – end in *-y*.

The list of nouns makes it obvious that the rule proposed in the previous section (p. 143), "suffixes are not allowed to occur in the monosyllabic dip, final or medial" should in fact be formulated as follows: "a monosyllabic dip cannot be formed by a syllable with a non-schwa vowel".

Indeed, the rule applies to the distribution of suffixes, compound stems, personal names or simplexes. All the suffixes examined in the previous section (pp. 142-149) contain a non-schwa vowel. All personal names that do not occur at the end of the b-verse have a non-schwa vowel in their second dip: *Baldwin*, *Bed(i)wer*, *Bedwin*, *Britain*, *Cornwall*, *Clement*, *Cler(e)mond*, *Flanders*, *Friesland*, *Sandwich*, etc. At the same time, all personal names that do occur there have a weak vowel in their second dip: *Peter*, *James*, *Lowes*, *Tremble*, *France*, *Logres*, *Wales*, *Rome*.⁸⁷ The only exception is *Brutus* in the famously obscure SGGK.13b *Felix Brutus* (no strong dip either).⁸⁸

As for *engin*, *giant* and *valay*, they are unlikely to be examples of a non-schwa vowel in the final dip. They are usually stressed on the second syllable, and in the case of *valay* it is the place of stress that determines the variation with *vale*. Therefore, the three lines with these words (as they stand in the manuscript), together with SGGK.13b *Brutus*, are exceptions to the requirement of an obligatory final dip rather than to the proposed restriction on non-schwa vowels. The combined 7,700 lines of SGGK, MA

⁸⁷ In fact, almost all the personal names of the relevant prosodic structure that come up in the poems do occur at the end of the b-verse, except for some very rare ones (*Basle*, *Chester*, etc.). It is thus very unlikely that the distribution of personal names ("only in the first lift" or "in the first or the second lift of the b-verse indiscriminately") is due to syntactic reasons or to their "alliterative rank". The prosodic structure gives a simple and encompassing answer.

⁸⁸ Among other things, the rule explains the persistent absence of *Arthur* at the end of the b-verse. SGGK and MA have a combined total of 78 instances of the name, evenly distributed between the first and second lift of the a-verse and the first lift of the b-verse. The absence at the end of the long line is due to the non-schwa vowel in the second syllable of *Arthur*. Three-lift lines do not have a similar restriction, cf. the rare SGGK.2275b *in kyngez hous Arthor*.

and SJ produce only three exceptions to the proposed rule: SGGK.1982b *with ful colde sykynggez*, MA.4019b *ne no wirchipe ells*, SJ.437b *with a þryuande kny3t*.⁸⁹

As with suffixes, a consistent deviation from the rule is word-final *-y*. Just as the adjectival suffix *-y* (*holy, hory, joly, miry, privy, redy, sorry, wily, worpy*) provided as many as 14 exceptional verses (see p. 148), nouns listed in this section contain *-y* in the relevant metrical position on 9 occasions (*dainty, lady, meiny, story*). It should be emphasised that the exceptional status applies only to the word-final *-y*. It is all the more interesting since the word-final *-y* is in fact bracketed with schwa in another Middle English rule: that of elision. The recurrence of the pairing is another argument in favour of the proposed rule (if the clear-cut distribution was not enough).

As for the second regular exception, the suffix *-est*, its appearance might be due to the fact that alone among the discussed suffixes it belongs to inflectional morphology rather than word-formation.⁹⁰ Its status might have contributed to the sporadic weakening of the vowel to schwa. The weakening remained sporadic, since although *-est* does violate the proposed rule regularly, the offending cases are still in a small proportion to the total number of verses with *-est*.

The final formulation of the rule is thus purely phonological and does not make any reference to the morphological status of the syllable:

A monosyllabic dip cannot be formed by a syllable with a non-schwa vowel.

The only admissible exception is the root-final /i/ or the suffix /i/.

It is fairly obvious that the prosodic rationale for the restriction is a non-zero degree of linguistic stress on the syllables with vowels other than schwa. Indeed, it can

⁸⁹ Trivial emendations to *with colde sykynggez* and *no wirchipe ells* are available. SJ.437b *with a þryuande kny3t* probably has no final dip either (although the prepositional case of *kny3t* is not wholly unattested at the end of the b-verse, see pp. 98-107), and manuscripts show a considerable variation in this line.

⁹⁰ Another such suffix is the comparative *-er*. The participial *-ing* / *-and* is often lexicalised.

be viewed as a defining property of such syllables in Middle English. In this sense, a monosyllabic dip formed by such a syllable is not properly "weak" prosodically. At the same time, it is not "strong" in the same sense as polysyllabic dips are, since it is never equivalent to a strong dip for the purposes of heteromorphy (see also pp. 167-172). Also, non-schwa syllables lose their special status when placed in a polysyllabic dip with other syllables: there is no difference in distribution of -S₀xS- and -S_xxS- in the b-verse. The precise reasons for the alliterative metre to have employed the linguistic phenomenon in the particular way it did can only be established when we know more about the role of linguistic stress and the nature of metrical stress in late Middle English verse.

The form of the a-verse

Probably the first feature that strikes a metrically-minded reader of late Middle English alliterative poetry is the frequent occurrence of a-verses with three open-class words. Since almost all b-verses, and the majority of a-verses feature only two such words, the "three-lift verses" (as they will be called below, without prejudicing their metrical status) appear to interfere with the only metrical principle that was observable prior to the discoveries by Duggan and Cable. Understandably, while some scholars were prepared to admit three metrical stresses in about one fifth to one third of late Middle English a-verses, others – notably Marie Borroff – argued that one of the open-class words should be subordinated prosodically so that the metrical unity of the verse could be preserved. The appeal to metrical unity is an important argument; at the same time, the proposals to subordinate one of the linguistic stresses have always been hampered by the fact that even though relatively few "three-lift" a-verses contain triple alliteration *and* quite a lot of them have syntactic constructions where prosodic subordination is very likely (adjective + noun, etc.), the two sets do not seem to be correlated: alliteration does not regularly mark those two words that syntactically would be expected to retain their phrasal stress. Instead, the syntactic positions of the two staves often seem haphazard.⁹¹

Whatever the precise metrical interpretation of three-lift verses, there is a widespread agreement that *rhythmically* they constitute a distinctive subset. Therefore, I

⁹¹ See especially Marie Borroff, *'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight': A Stylistic and Metrical Study* (New Haven, 1962) and Joan Turville-Petre, 'The Metre of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,' *English Studies* 57 (1976), 310-28.

feel justified in provisionally separating the discussions of a-verses with two and three open-class words.

The first part of this Chapter, on the grammar of final *-e*, was mainly based on the evidence of SGGK and MA. The second part, on the vocalic restriction in the weak dips, presented the data for SGGK, MA and SJ. The present section is restricted to the discussion of the 2025 a-verses of SGGK. In my understanding, 1401 of them have two lexical stresses; 624 have three or more.⁹²

Two-lift a-verses

Thomas Cable proposed that the metrical identity of the a-verse should be defined in terms of its difference from the heteromorphic rhythm in the second half-line: rhythmical patterns of the a- and b-verse should be mutually exclusive.⁹³ With regard to two-lift verses, Cable suggested that they should contain "at least two strong dips", although acknowledging that this rule, and some others, "overstate the regularity of the meter, because there are exceptions that must be explained, but this first approximation moves us toward understanding the general principles by which most of the extant fourteenth-century alliterative poetry was composed."⁹⁴ The suggestion that the patterns of the first and second half-line should be mutually exclusive was rejected by Duggan, who pointed out that verses like SGGK.3a *þe tulk þat þe trammes* were not infrequent in

⁹² The three-lift category includes primarily verses with three open-class words; also, verses with phrasal verbs where the adverb is separated from the verb root by at least one syllable. Other minor rules and their substantiation are mentioned throughout the following discussion.

⁹³ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, pp. 85-113.

⁹⁴ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, pp. 91-92.

the first half-line. In Duggan's opinion, a-verses did not have a well-defined metrical form, but only showed certain rhythmical preferences.⁹⁵

The material of SGGK convinces me that Duggan's view is essentially correct, although the patterns of the two half-lines diverge more than he would allow. Here is a very general list of rhythmical subtypes of two-lift a-verses in SGGK:

1. Patterns suitable for b-verse, according to Duggan's system: 472 instances.

SGGK.62a	Fro þe kyng watz cummen	xxSxSx
SGGK.366a	þen comaunded þe kyng	xSxxxS ⁹⁶
SGGK.409a	þen may þou frayst my fare	xxxS(x)xS(x)

2. Strong initial and medial dips, no final dip: 398 instances.

SGGK.30a	And he þat wan watz not wrothe	xxxSxxxS
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3. Strong initial and medial dips, final dip weak: 315 instances.

SGGK.20a	Ande quen þis Bretayn watz bigged	xxxSxxxSx
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4. Strong final dip, any configuration of the initial and medial dips: 207 instances.

- (a) one and only one other dip is strong: 181 instances.

SGGK.12a	Langaberde in Lumbarde	SxxxSxxx
SGGK.310a	þat al þe rous rennes of	xxxSSxx ⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Cf. in 'The Shape of the B-verse': "A-verse rhythms are far more flexible. There are rarely more than eight unstressed syllables, and the most common rhythmical patterns involve three or fewer syllables in each dip. None to five unstressed syllables may occur before the first lift and from none to seven immediately follow it. None to three syllables may fall after the final stressed syllable. Though any two dips may have three syllables, the third dip in such lines tends to be light, and when any one dip contains four or more syllables, the other two dips tend to have two, one, or no syllables" (p. 570). See also 'Extended a-verses in Middle English alliterative poetry,' in *Medieval English Measures*, ed. Ruth Kennedy, *Parergon* 18 (2000), pp. 53-54.

⁹⁶ For the relevance of alliteration in indicating the position of stress, see Duggan, *Stress Assignment*.

⁹⁷ For present purposes, I scan postpositions as unstressed if they are no more than one unstressed syllable away from the final lift, as in this example. If the distance is greater, postpositions are assigned metrical stress. The decision is arbitrary (although cf. Inoue, *The A-Verse of the Alliterative Long Line...*, sections 2.5 - 2.6); the issue is discussed further in the next section, pp. 161-167.

SGGK.186a Of a kyngez capados xxSxSxx

(b) both initial and medial daps are also strong: 23 instances.

SGGK.240a Forþi for fantoum and fayry3e xxxSxxSxx
 SGGK.1707a And he trantes and tornayeez xxSxxSxx

(c) neither the initial nor the medial dip is strong: 3 instances.

SGGK.2053a Þe mon hem maynteines xSxSxx
 SGGK.2262 Munt as ma3tyly SxSxx
 SGGK.2275 Ne kest no kaelacion xSxSxxx

5. The verse does not contain a strong dip: 9 instances.

SGGK.1297a So god as Gawayn xSxSx

Category (4c) appears suspect: it is represented by only three instances, and in all of them there is a possibility of a compound stress on the final word: *'mayn'teines*, etc. However, the same possibility exists in a large number of the 207 verses with a strong final dip (cf. 12a *Lumbardie*, etc.). All such verses can easily be classified as three-lift, and I return to the issue in the discussion of three-lift verses (pp. 161-167).

Doubts arise with regard to category (5) as well. Not only does it include only nine verses, but many of them look incomplete. As suggested on p. 107, in 922 *When burnez blyþe of his burþe schal sitte* a phrase like *in þe bur3e* could be missed out by a scribe before the caesura because of the close proximity to *of his burþe*. SGGK.2212a *Thenne þe kny3t* does not even have a second open-class word.⁹⁸ SGGK.46a and 1652a involve the vexed problem of *glaum ande gle*. The participial *glaumande* spelling in 46a (but not in 1652a) produces an unexceptional verse (*-ande* can be disyllabic in participial adjectives, even in strong singular, see pp. 127-134 and especially pp. 142-149). The traditional reasons for emending 46a are very sound (occurrence in Pat.269b

⁹⁸ Other possible scansions of the verse, including moving *con* to the a-verse, are no less problematic for various reasons.

and in ON *glaumr ok gleði*; no attestations of ME *glaymen*, v.),⁹⁹ but the *Gawain*-poet often adjusted and transformed set constructions of the alliterative tradition in a way similar to his treatment of the larger conventions of contemporary narrative poetry. There is no reason why he could not transform that familiar phrase.¹⁰⁰ Incidentally, Pat.269b *pur3 glaym ande glette*, often used to support the emendation, is itself an irregular b-verse unless we read *glaymande*.

The twelve instances in categories (4c) and (5) are the only a-verses not to contain a strong dip either initially or medially. A rule "two-lift a-verses must contain at least one strong dip either initially or medially" seems quite likely. However, Cable's requirement of *at least two* strong dips does not hold even as a tendency: category (1) "verses, heteromorphic according to Duggan's system" has 472 examples – or exactly a third of all two-lift verses in SGGK. As I attempt to show below, many of those 472 verses are actually unsuitable for the b-verse; nevertheless, my arguments will affect the number of strong dips in only 26 of those verses.

The joint conclusions of the first part of this Chapter (pp. 93-142) have been that the grammar of final *-e* was fully functional in the authorial dialects of SGGK and MA and that the final dip of the b-verse was monosyllabic with a negligible number of exceptions (most of them in singular nouns). In the second part of the Chapter (pp. 142-155) I showed that non-schwa vowels could not occur in weak dips. In my opinion, the two rules (and the grammar of final *-e*) are essential parts of the metre of the b-verse. With this in mind, the 472 examples in category (1) can be further classified as follows:

A. Verses that satisfy all the b-verse requirements,

except that their ending is masculine: 102 instances.

⁹⁹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien, E.V. Gordon and Norman Davis (Oxford, 1972), p. 73. The emendation is adopted in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. also MA.59 *In Glamorgan with glee, thare gladchipe was euere*.

SGGK.357a	No bounte bot your blod	xSxxxS
SGGK.366a	þen comaunded þe kyng	xSxxxS

B. Verses that have two strong dips when final *-e* is taken into account: 26

instances.

SGGK.71a	Alle þis mirþe þay maden	xxSexSx
SGGK.409a	þen may þou frayst my fare	xxxSexSe
SGGK.584a	And alle þe godlych gere	xxxSxeSe
SGGK.2444a	þat schal I telle þe trwly	xxxSexSx

C. Verses that satisfy all the b-verse requirements,

except that a non-schwa vowel occurs in a weak dip: 158 instances.

SGGK.11a	Tirus to Tuskan	SxxxSo
SGGK.158a	þat spenet on his sparlyr	xSxxxSo
SGGK.287a	þat dar stifly strike	xxSoSx
SGGK.491a	This hanselle hatz Arthur	xSxxxSo
SGGK.876a	Watz grayped for Sir Gawan	xSxxxSo
SGGK.976a	To be her seruaunt sothly	xxxSoSo
SGGK.1941a	As is pertly payed	xxSoSx

D. Verses that satisfy all the b-verse requirements, without exception: 186

instances.

SGGK.3a	þe tulk þat þe trammes	xSxxxSx
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First of all, here is another confirmation of the restriction on the weak dips proposed in 2.2: the patterns that occur in only three b-verses as the text stands in the (main) manuscripts of SGGK, MA and SJ are perfectly fine in the a-verse. SGGK alone has 158 examples. Thus, their avoidance in the b-verse is clearly not accidental.

Secondly, the frequency of two-lift a-verses that are rhythmically suitable for the second half-line is not as great as would follow from Duggan's system: with categories

(A), (B) and (C) taken out, we are left with only 186 examples instead of 472, or 13% of "b-verse patterns in the a-verse" instead of 33%.

The general conclusions of the section confirm Duggan's view: the a-verse hardly features any clear metrical regularities. Preferences are to be found, but they are no more than that – preferences. So, 67% of a-verses have two strong dips (initially, medially, or finally); 87% of two-lift a-verses have rhythmical patterns that are impossible in the b-verse. There is only one rhythmical regularity that seems to be true for all fourteen hundred verses (with only twelve exceptions, most of them suspect): a two-lift a-verse must contain a strong dip in either initial or medial position. In a way, the statement parallels the metrical definition of the heteromorphic b-verse: the initial restriction is the same. However, it neither mentions that the strong dip should be "one and only one" nor specifies the form of the final dip.

Three-lift a-verses: a rhythmical catalogue and strong final dips

I can add little to the rhythmical classification of three-lift verses given by Duggan in one of his later articles.¹⁰¹ His classification is based upon a corpus of 1,235 three-lift a-verses occurring in a total of 5,952 lines from various late Middle English poems. My discussion is based upon the 624 three-lift a-verses I can find in SGGK. The corpus is further reduced by 42 verses that permit variable scansion, giving a selection of 582 verses.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Duggan, 'Extended A-verses in Middle English Alliterative Poetry', in *Medieval English Measures*, ed. Ruth Kennedy, *Parergon* 18 (2000), 53-76.

¹⁰² The 42 verses include those with four open-class words, or two open-class words and a compound. In order to have three lifts, one of the words / stems should be subordinated prosodically (67a *3e3ed 3eres-3iftes on hi3* and also 159, 773, 830, 1159, 1445, 1675, 1680, 1968, 2223, 2296). Also, in certain forms, like the adverbial *-ly* or participial *-ande*, final *-e* could be variable (pp. 146 and 148); similarly, as suggested at various points throughout the section on final *-e*, there is a possibility of the weak declension in singular adjectives after the indefinite article. Such ambiguous contexts of final *-e* make it impossible to be certain with regard to the number of strong dips in some three-lift a-verses. A well-defined metrical

The percentages below are, unsurprisingly, very similar to Duggan's, except that the posited grammar of final *-e* means that patterns without any strong dips are considerably rarer than in his version:

1. The most frequent pattern is (x)S(x)Sx...xS(x), with the only strong dip in the second medial position: 334 instances.

SGGK.2a þe bor3 brittened and brent xSxSxxS

2. The only strong dip occurs in the first medial position, (x)Sx...xS(x)S(x): 135 instances.

SGGK.13a And fer ouer þe French flod xSxxxSxS

3. Two strong dips occur in both medial positions, (x)Sx...xSx...xS(x): 67 instances.

SGGK.309a What, is þis Arthures hous SxxSxxS

4. The initial dip is strong, x...xS-. There are 60 instances, including:
 - (a) the second medial dip is also strong, 26 instances

SGGK.135a And þe fyrst cource in þe court xxSxSxxS

- (b) the first medial dip is also strong, 17 instances

SGGK.426a þat þe bit of þe broun stel xxSxxSxS

- (c) both medial dips are also strong, 1 instance

SGGK.1540a Bot to take þe toruayle to myself xxSxxSxxxS

pattern, such as that observed in the b-verse, would have made the decision in most instances easy. However, since there is no well-defined metrical statement available for three-lift a-verses (as it will be suggested below, in confirmation of Duggan's view), any decision as to the precise rhythmical form of the 42 excluded verses would be arbitrary to some extent. Since no possible scansion of those verses contradicts any strong tendency discussed below, it seemed expedient to leave them out and present rhythmical ratios by using the evidence of those three-lift a-verses whose syllabic composition does not cause any doubt (except possibly textual).

(d) both medial dips are weak or absent, 16 instances

SGGK.727a When þe colde cler water xxSxS(x)Sx

5. The final dip is strong, -Sx...x: 3 instances.

SGGK.37a Þis kyng lay at Camylot xSSxSxx

SGGK.1135a Ete a sop hastly SxSSxx

SGGK.2123a As help me God and þe halydam xSxxSxxSxx

6. No strong dips in any position, (x)S(x)S(x)S(x): 28 instances.

SGGK.22a In mony turned tyme xSxSxSx

SGGK.98a Ledede, lif for lyf SSxS

The suspiciously rare patterns here are (4c) "three strong dips – in the initial, first medial and second medial position", and (5) "strong final dip". Since (4c) has only one example in SGGK, it may be posited with some confidence that *a three-lift a-verse cannot contain more than two strong dips*.

The three verses with a strong final dip (37a, 1135a, 2123a, above) are reminiscent of category (4) in the list of two-lift a-verses in the previous section, p. 157:

SGGK.12a Langaberde in Lumbarde SxxxSxxx

SGGK.310a Þat al þe rous rennes of xxxSSxx

SGGK.186a Of a kynges capados xxSxSxx

SGGK.240a Forþi for fantom and fayry3e xxxSxxSxx

SGGK.1707a And he trantes and tornayeez xxSxxSxx

SGGK.2053a Þe mon hem maynteines xSxSxx

SGGK.2262a Munt as ma3tyly SxSxx

SGGK.2275a Ne kest no kauelacion xSxSxxx

Together, the two patterns (207 two-lift and 3 three-lift a-verses) constitute the whole evidence for polysyllabic final dips in SGGK. It is noteworthy that in almost every single instance the strong final dip is formed by a word that could carry secondary stress

in Middle English. The verse-final position contains Romance words with more than one non-schwa vowel (e.g. *abataylment*, *capados*, *chamberlayn*, *charyte*, *comaundement*, *coprounes*, *cortaysye*, *gargulun*, *Gryngolet*, *Hautdesert*), historical or transparent compounds (e.g. *stel-gere*, *gryndelston*, *Krystmasse*, *hendelayk*), or words with native suffixes (e.g. *broþerhede*, *comlokest*, *departyng*, *endelez*, *worþyly*, *busyly*). In another nine instances, the strong final dip is formed by a phrasal verb, where the postposition is also available for stress: 173 *ferkkes on*, 262 *play[e] wyth*, 310 *rennes of*, 431 *start[e] forth*, 1158 *halden in*, 1727 *runnen at*, 2009 *dressed vp*, 2069 *brayde down*, 2097 *prece to*. It leaves only ten verses where the strong final dip contains words and syllables of the lowest accentual rank: 99 *fulsun hom*, 394 *siker me*, 728 *falle my3t*, 1054 *negh[e] my3t*, 1127 *go wolde*, 1291 *stonyed hym*, 1436 *breued watz*, 1454 *schote at hym*, 1873 *riches hym*, 2362 *asay[e] þe*. Thus, all but the ten verses give us the opportunity to do away with strong final dups completely, so that the first half-line parallels the second in that regard.

There are two evident ways to eliminate the strong dip. First, the words can carry *the only* stress on a non-initial syllable: *capa'dos*, *gargu'lun*, *runnen 'at*, etc. However, despite the well-known relative laxity of alliterative patterns in SGGK, all the relevant verse-final words take part in alliteration with a remarkable regularity, and all of them alliterate on the first syllable.¹⁰³

Duggan has argued persuasively that in the b-verse alliteration marks the metrically stressed syllable.¹⁰⁴ The evidence is provided by the heteromorphicity test: for example, if *comandis* in WA.4983b *and comandis him to bryn* is stressed on the second rather than the first syllable, the b-verse is non-heteromorphic. The number of b-

¹⁰³ One exception: 552 *Savage* does not alliterate. Strictly speaking, 311 *sourquydrye* (qu), 790 *abataylment* (b), 975 *aquoyntaunce* (qu), 1273 *debonerte* (b) do not alliterate on the initial syllable, but alliteration does not point to the *last* of the syllables available for stress either.

¹⁰⁴ Duggan, 'Stress Assignment in Middle English Alliterative Poetry.' *JEGP* 91 (1990), 309-29.

verses where heteromorphicity and alliteration point to different syllables is minute.¹⁰⁵

In order to argue her theory that all verses contain only two lifts, Noriko Inoue (similarly to Marie Borroff and Joan Turville-Petre in pre-Duggan studies) had to assume that alliteration is not a guide to stress placement in the a-verse. To accommodate Duggan's findings, she suggested that alliteration played that role in the second, but not in the first half-line. I find the proposal unlikely. It would be exceptional for a feature of the language-metre interaction to behave differently in different metrical positions. In essence, Inoue's proposal would mean that the very prosodic principles (never mind particular metrical rules or rhythmical patterns) of the first and second half-line are different. One option should be chosen: either alliteration (when it occurs) is a guide, or it is not. Since the form of the a-verse, especially the three-lift verse, is a matter of debate, while the heteromorphic principle in the b-verse is by now a matter of fact, the evidence of the latter with regard to the (non-)correlation of alliteration and stress is far superior, and thus alliteration should be taken as an indication of metrical stress in the first half-line as well.

Therefore, since words like *capados* or *departyng* at the end of the a-verse always alliterate on the initial syllable, the shift of the only stress to *capa'dos* etc. is unacceptable. There is a second possibility though: such words may carry two metrical stresses in that position, *'Langaberde in 'Lumbar'die*. It would certainly be economical if we could do away with strong final dips in late Middle English alliterative verse: the description of the a-verse would be much simplified and the newly found similarity between the patterns of the first and second half-line would tie up nicely with the rule proposed at the end of the section on two-lift a-verses (p. 161): "a two-lift a-verse must

¹⁰⁵ The role of alliteration as a guide can be defined in the following way: *if an open-class word features what can potentially be taken as alliteration on one of the syllables that can potentially receive stress in Middle English (i.e. 'comandis / co'mandis), the word should in this case be stressed on this syllable, and alliteration should be taken as metrically significant*. Of course, alliteration can be completely absent from a lift-bearing word in the (three-lift) a-verse, or indeed (as appears from SGGK and other poems, *pace* Duggan) from the first lift in the two-lift b-verse. Alliteration is a guide only as far as it occurs at all.

contain a strong dip in either initial or medial position". Just as that rule is an underspecified version of the heteromorphic principle in the b-verse, prohibition of the strong final dip in the a-verse would appear as a similarly underspecified version of the monosyllabic final dip requirement in the b-verse (since the a-verse would still allow zero final dipoles as well as monosyllabic ones). Nevertheless, considerations of economy cannot be taken as decisive arguments. Also, there are ten verses in SGGK that do not provide a syllable available for the third metrical stress (*99 fulsun hom*, etc. above). The fact that there are only ten may be due to a prohibition of the strong final dip that would result in avoidance of such morphosyllabic sequences; or it may be due to a purely linguistic rarity of such clause endings. There appears to be no way to answer the question.

However, I believe the possible parallelism with the b-verse is not the only argument in favour of the three-lift interpretation of *Langaberde in Lumbardie* and the like. Strong final dipoles occur in 207 a-verses with two open-class words, but only in 3 a-verses with three open-class words. The likeliest explanation for this would be that a syllable in the strong final dip carries another metrical stress (2+1 is fine, but 3+1 is too much). As follows from the list of patterns at the start of this section, the distribution of dipoles in three-lift a-verses appears to be quite free (except that three strong dipoles are prohibited), and there is no obvious reason to disallow the strong final dip. Therefore, the fact that the strong final dipoles are avoided in three-lift verses while being very frequent in the two-lift ones, coupled with a regular (197 out of 207 instances) occurrence of linguistic material suitable for stress within those strong final dipoles, makes it quite probable that verse-finally 12 *Lumbardie*, 186 *capados*, 907 *Krystmasse*, 2053 *maynteines*, 2275 *kauelacion* and others carry two metrical stresses rather than one, and

that the 207 a-verses should be reclassified as three-lift. In that case, strong final dips do not appear in late Middle English alliterative poetry.¹⁰⁶

Three-lift a-verses: non-schwa syllables

Returning to the 582 three-lift a-verses declared as the basic corpus at the start of the previous section (p. 161), there are a couple of rhythmical observations to make. SGGK contains 46 three-lift verses without a strong dip in either the first or second medial position: 785a *Þe burne bode on blonk*, xSSxS. In 16 out of the 46 there is a strong initial dip: 1670a *Bot þe kny3t craued leue*, xxSSxSx. This incidence of the strong initial dip is much higher than average for the poem (35% rather than 10%), so it might appear to compensate for the absence of a strong medial dip. In another 20 of the 46 verses, a weak dip is formed by a non-schwa syllable (as defined above, p. 153):

SGGK.370a	And gef hym Goddez blessing	xSxSxSo
SGGK.792a	Wyth mony luflych loupe	xSxSoS

Thus, only 10 verses without any strong dip remain uncompensated by either the strong initial dip or a non-schwa syllable in a weak dip:

SGGK.22a	In mony turned tyme
SGGK.98a	Lede, lif for lyf
SGGK.226a	Se þat segg in sy3t
SGGK.745a	With ro3e raged mosse
SGGK.785a	Þe burne bode on blonk
SGGK.789a	Of harde hewen ston
SGGK.1119a	With mony leude ful ly3t
SGGK.1195a	Þe lede lay lurked

¹⁰⁶ As for the 3 a-verses with three open-class words (37a, 1135a, 2123a), they join the verses with four open-class words in having four potential metrical stresses. On their interpretation, see Chapter 4.

SGGK.1610a With bred blent þerwith
 SGGK.1741a Hir brest bare bifore

The most interesting thing about the distribution though – and the point that suggests that we can indeed speak of "rhythmical compensation" here – is that the set with strong initial dips and the set with non-schwa syllables do not overlap: although there are 16 verses with strong initial dips and 20 verses with non-schwa syllables, there is no verse where both of them occur together. Therefore, the distribution is hardly accidental. Nevertheless, the ten uncompensated verses suggest that the following definition is probably only a strong tendency: "a three-lift a-verse should contain at least one strong dip or monosyllabic dip formed by a non-schwa syllable".

The avoidance of uncompensated three-lift verses without a strong dip is also suggested by metrical fillers. Consider the following list, where *ful* creates the preferred – or required – strong dip:

SGGK.14a On mony bonkkes ful brode
 SGGK.69a Ladies la3ed ful loude
 SGGK.74a Whene Guenore, ful gay
 SGGK.117a Wyth mony baner ful bry3t
 SGGK.120a Þat mony hert ful hi3e
 SGGK.132a An oþer noyse ful newe
 SGGK.152a A strayte cote ful stre3t
 SGGK.155a With blyþe blaunner ful bry3t
 SGGK.195a Þer mony bellez ful bry3t
 SGGK.498a A 3ere 3ernes ful 3erne
 SGGK.743a Of hore okez ful hoge
 SGGK.788a Ande eft a ful huge he3t
 SGGK.2003a Þe snawe snitered ful snart
 SGGK.2006a Þe leude lystened ful wel ¹⁰⁷

It is particularly impressive that the list includes 14 out of the total of 21 appearances of the intensifier *ful* in the a-verse.

¹⁰⁷ 74a *Guenore* or *Guenor*; 120a *herte*; 788a *eft* carries the first lift; 2003a *snitered* and 2006a *lystened* feature syncope (see at various points in the section on final *-e*, e.g. pp. 101, 101, 113, 131).

The significance of the distribution of non-schwa syllables in a-verses without any strong dips can be confirmed from another angle. Going outside three-lift a-verses without any strong dips, we may notice that non-schwa syllables appear in the monosyllabic final dip of all three-lift a-verses in SGGK on 20 occasions, e.g. 370a *And gef hym Goddez blessyng*, xSxSxSo. Only two of those 20 verses feature a strong dip:

SGGK.640a	Fyrst he watz funden fautlez	SxxSxSo
SGGK.1073a	And cum to þat merk at mydmorn	xSxxSxSo

Once again we see that an appearance of a non-schwa syllable in a monosyllabic dip in three-lift a-verses is correlated with the absence of any strong dips.

Even more curious is another feature of non-schwa syllable distribution. Non-schwa syllables appear in a monosyllabic medial dip of three-lift a-verses on 25 occasions: 792a *Wyth mony luflych loupe*, xSxSoS; 375a *Gawan gotz to þe gome*, SoSxxSx. Eight of the 25 verses have no strong dips (cf. above). All of the remaining 17 verses have the non-schwa syllable in the monosyllabic dip in the first medial position, with the initial dip always weak or absent, and the second medial dip always strong: (x)SoSx...xS(x). It means that the patterns (x)Sx...xSoS(x) or x...xSoS(x)S(x) or x...xSoSx...xS(x) do not occur, although all of them are perfectly possible in theory.

I have shown above (pp. 156-161) that non-schwa syllables could appear in both the final and medial monosyllabic dips in two-lift a-verses. Indeed, their appearance contributed significantly to the mutual exclusivity of the rhythmical patterns of the first and second half-line. However, the distribution of non-schwa syllables in three-lift a-verses turns out to be much more limited, and can be summarised as follows:

1. Non-schwa syllables can occur in monosyllabic dips of the three-lift a-verse that has no strong dip: 792a *Wyth mony luflych loupe*, xSxSoS, 370a *And gef hym Goddez blesyng*, xSxSxSo. Indeed, 20 out of 30 three-lift a-verses without a strong dip feature a non-schwa syllable in a monosyllabic dip.
2. Otherwise, the only three-lift pattern where a non-schwa syllable can form a monosyllabic dip is (x)SoSx...xS(x): 375a *Gawan gotz to þe gome*. Unlike point (1), this option is relatively rare: most verses of the form (x)SxSx...xS(x) have no non-schwa syllable in the second medial position.

There are only two exceptions to the distribution: 640a *Fyrst he watz funden fautlez*, SxxSxSo, and 1073a *And cum to þat merk at mydmorn*, xSxxSxSo.

The first point of the distribution suggests the following provisional explanation: as I have noted above (p. 153), non-schwa syllables have a non-zero degree of linguistic stress, and therefore the monosyllabic dips formed by them are not properly "weak". Then it is possible to view the appearance of such syllables in three-lift verses without a strong dip as some kind of rhythmical compensation. However, in b-verses and two-lift a-verses a monosyllabic dip formed by a non-schwa syllable is most emphatically *not* equivalent to a polysyllabic dip. Therefore, the precise "kind" of the rhythmical compensation remains unclear, as does the issue of whether it was obligatory or not. I will return to the problem below (pp. 180-185).

The restriction to the (x)SoSx...xS(x) pattern is even more difficult to explain: there appears to be no reason why (x)Sx...xSoS(x) or others should be ruled out at its expense. At the present stage, I will have to treat the restriction as a special pattern, similarly to D* or A* in Old English verse.

One thing is clear about the distribution of non-schwa syllables though: it provides another piece of evidence in favour of the metrical distinction between three-lift and two-lift verses. First, consider the regularity with which a non-schwa syllable appears in the monosyllabic final dip of three-lift verses that lack a strong dip: (x)S(x)S(x)S_o. It is true that non-schwa syllables often occur in a similar position in two-lift a-verses, (x)Sx...xS_o or x...xS(x)S_o, and so if we remove the metrical stress from either the first or the second lift in (x)S(x)S(x)S_o, we would arrive at quite an unexceptional two-lift a-verse. However, there are only 148 two-lift a-verses ending in -S_o, which is 10% of the total number of two-lift a-verses, or 30% of those with only one strong dip. In the relevant verses with three open-class words, the -S_o ending appears in 20 instances out of 30. Why would non-schwa syllables be twice more frequent in verses that are already rhythmically heavier than the unambiguously two-lift ones?

Low as is the value of any statistical argument, in this case it has cumulative force, since the following two observations are rather more problematic for a "no three lifts" theory. First, a two-lift theory is not able to account for the persistent appearance of non-schwa syllables in a medial, rather than final dip of a three-lift verse without any strong dips: 792a *Wyth mony luflych loupe*, xSxS_oS, etc. In fact, a two-lift theory would not even register the distribution, since with the first or second open-class word demoted the verses would be no different from those where non-schwa syllables do not occur. Similarly, a two-lift theory would not register the existence of the special pattern (x)S_oSx...xS(x) and the glaring absence of the corresponding (x)Sx...xS_oS(x) and others: demote the first or the second lift, and the (non-)occurrence of the non-schwa syllable is immaterial. However, the patterns clearly show that it was not the case.

Existence of three-lift verses

Metrical interpretation of verses containing three open-class words has always been one of the major issues in the study of late Middle English alliterative poetry. On the one side, there are metrists who are prepared to admit the variable number of metrical stresses in the a-verse. So, Cable and Duggan do not see any need to subordinate prosodically one of the three open-class words (or compound stems). For Cable, the incidence of three-lift verses is a corollary of the mutually exclusive patterns of the first and second half-line. For Duggan, the full metrical status of all three lifts is essential for his rule that all authentic lines should have at least two staves in the a-verse. As mentioned above (p. 155), it is eminently obvious that alliteration cannot be used as a guide to determine the choice of two metrical stresses in three open-class words, cf. SGGK.1446 *Haden hornes to mouþe, heterly rechated*. Not only would the "alliteration stress" produce an unnatural and hardly possible in practice rhythmical pattern $SxSxxx(x)$, but the resultant syntactic bracketing of *hornes to mouþe* (instead of *haden ... to mouþe*) would be nonsensical. Lines of this type abound, and so alliteration must be disregarded; but that would severely affect Duggan's rule. Faced with verses containing four open-class words, Duggan (while doubting their authenticity in the first place) is prepared to permit subordination of a linguistic stress, pointing out that while in an accentual metre it is perfectly plausible to expect *some* subordination of linguistic stress, it is also more plausible to find it, say, in a dozen "four-lift" verses of SGGK than in over six hundred of the "three-lift" ones.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ "In some ways, moreover, though this small sample suggests the possibility of four metrical stresses in a-verses, such 'heavy' verses provide a less severe challenge to the current orthodoxy than the hundreds of lines in which long strings of unstressed syllables appear to separate ictuses" (*Extended A-Verses*, p. 55). For the remarks on the authenticity of the potentially four-lift verses, see p. 74 in the same article.

On the other side of the argument are the studies of Marie Borroff, Joan Turville-Petre, and Noriko Inoue.¹⁰⁹ Borroff and Turville-Petre showed that in a vast majority of verses with three open-class words, the syntactic structure gives the opportunity to subordinate one of the linguistic stresses. In order to achieve some kind of metrical regularity and ultimately a better aesthetic quality of the verse, they accept the opportunity and pose the requirement of two and only two metrical stresses in each half-line.¹¹⁰ Alliteration has to be disregarded. Inoue follows the argument, but unlike Borroff posits specific rhythmical rules that determine the choice of two stressed words: if the second medial dip is strong, the stresses fall on the second and third open-class words; otherwise, on the first and third words.

The comments at the end of the previous section should make it quite obvious which side in the argument I prefer to take. It seems to me that the argument should finish before it is started. The fact that verses with three open-class words are concentrated in the first half-line can conceivably mean only one thing: they are metrically different from verses with two open-class words.¹¹¹ What could this difference be? A complete suppression of one of the linguistic stresses could very often produce regular heteromorphic patterns, so that such verses would be totally unexceptional with regard to anything we know about the b-verse. Therefore, the only conceivable difference is the third linguistic stress. A linguistic stress that has metrical significance is called 'metrical stress'.

This metrical stress can be of a different kind to primary metrical stresses: it can be "secondary", "subordinated" (as are some stresses in Sievers' theory of Old English verse, for example). But here lies another problem with the "two-lift" approach: the

¹⁰⁹ Marie Borroff, *'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight': A Stylistic and Metrical Study*; Joan Turville-Petre, *The Metre of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*; Noriko Inoue, *The A-Verse of the Alliterative Long Line and the Metre of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'*.

¹¹⁰ Although Borroff allows the possibility of three stresses in verses with strong syntactic breaks like SGGK.256 *'Nay, as help me, quop þe habel. (Sir Gawain..., pp. 202-203)*.

¹¹¹ I find 624 verses with three open-class words in the first half-line of SGGK, 58 in the second. On three-lift b-verses, see below. "Metrically" here means "in terms of metrical rules" rather than "in a different metre".

studies heavily use the term "subordinated stress". In general linguistic parlance, however, "subordinated stress" means a lower degree of stress, but certainly not its absence. This connotation lurks in much of Borroff's discussion. At the same time, the final metrical statement rigidly demands two and only two metrical stresses per half-line.

The goal of the restriction to two lifts is metrical uniformity. However, metrical uniformity is itself violated in the disregard of alliteration. It is true that Duggan's claim that all verses should have at least two staves in the a-verse and a staff on the first lift in the b-verse is problematic: it would entail considerable and unstraightforward rewriting of large portions of, for example, MA and SGGK, which would seem particularly unfortunate in the case of the latter.¹¹² However, it is much more difficult to argue with another of his rules, namely, that alliteration is a guide to metrical stress in the b-verse. Counter-evidence to that is negligible. Therefore, in order to achieve metrical uniformity in one respect (the number of stresses), we must sacrifice another metrical principle: alliteration then should be a guide to metrical stress in the second half-line, but not in the first. As mentioned above (p. 165), such a distinction is also very unlikely on theoretical grounds.

At the same time, the possibility of a variable number of metrical stresses per half-line is much less problematic: it does not affect the prosodic principles of verse organisation, but only concerns the size of the verse unit produced by those principles. If there is a metrical uniformity in late Middle English alliterative verse, it is precisely that the rhythms are not uniform. So, the dips in the b-verse are unequal (hence the term "heteromorphic"); in the a-verse, there is the variation between the two-lift and three-lift patterns; the same "tumbling" quality is present on the level of the first and second half-

¹¹² By "straightforward" changes I mean primarily a syntactic swap of the first and second lift, e.g. in MA.2982 *That he swyftly swelte and on þe erthe swounes* (emendable to *and swounes on þe erthe*), or replacement of a synonym, e.g. in SJ.16 *Whiche berne hereabout bobbed þe laste* (Laud reads *man*). However, emendations of this kind are hardly possible in e.g. SGGK.2197 *With he3e helme on his hede, his launce in his honde*.

line with their almost completely divergent patterns. On a yet higher level, the natural conclusion to the tendency is the introduction of the bob-and-wheel in a totally different metre. The introduction appears to be implemented most appropriately in SGGK, with its variable stanza length, since we are not aware of the point at which the bob would come just as we cannot predict whether the next b-verse is going to have a strong initial or a strong medial dip, or whether the next a-verse is going to have two or three stresses. As I will attempt to show in Chapter 4, the reasons for the "tumbling" quality that permeates late Middle English alliterative verse are historical; nevertheless, the combination of similar factors at the different levels of metrical structure happens to provide a very powerful poetic tool, turning the verse into a rhythmical rollercoaster ride – while blindfolded. However, the regulations and guidelines of the amusement park are very strict.

In any case, the variable number of metrical stresses per half-line is the only problem of a three-lift theory.¹¹³ For a two-lift theory, in addition to the fundamentally puzzling concentration of patterns with three open-class words in the a-verse and the theoretically unlikely difference in the correlation of alliteration and stress between the first and second half-lines, there is the problem of super-long dips. In the b-verse of SGGK, the strong dip is usually two syllables long. Three-syllable dips occur in about 10-15% of b-verses. Four-syllable dips are rare and probably inauthentic.¹¹⁴ In the two-lift a-verses, three-syllable dips are as frequent as two-syllable ones, but dips of four syllables or more are still very rare. Similar percentages are true for most other alliterative poems. Moreover, similar percentages are true for three-lift a-verses – that is, if we allow three lifts for them.

¹¹³ Verses with four open-class words are unproblematic. I agree with Duggan that in an accentual metre an occasional suppression of a linguistic stress is perfectly admissible, and should be expected. Indeed, some of the "three-lift" verses could and undoubtedly were occasionally pronounced with two metrical stresses. However, a regular suppression of linguistic stress in all, or even the majority of "three-lift" verses seems highly unlikely for reasons presented throughout this section. In addition, there is a possibility that four metrical stresses were a metrically permissible variation, see Chapter 4.

¹¹⁴ Noriko Inoue, *The Avoidance of a Four-Syllable Dip in the B-Verse*, paper presented at the 41st International Congress on Medieval Studies at Leeds, 2006.

As I have noted above (pp. 162-163), the absolute majority (92%) of three-lift a-verses have at least one strong dip in the first or the second medial position. Most strong dips here are disyllabic, but trisyllabic ones occur not infrequently – certainly more often than the 10-15% in b-verses, for example, but slightly less often than the 50% or so in two-lift a-verses. Now if one of the three open-class words (or compound stems) is demoted, it would result in a substantial number of dips that would be five to nine syllables long. Inoue partly addresses the problem in her rule that if the second medial dip is strong, the stresses fall on the second and third open-class words; otherwise, on the first and third words. Since the rhythmically dominant pattern is (x)S(x)Sx...xS(x) (57% of verses with three open-class words), the rule means that in most cases the dips will not exceed the preferred length of two to three syllables: (x)x(x)Sx...xS(x) (the first "lift" is replaced with a weak position). However, in the pattern with two strong medial dips, (x)Sx...xSx...xS(x) (12% of verses), the resultant initial strong dip turns out to be almost always four syllables long: (x)xxxSx...xS(x) (the first "lift" is replaced with a weak position). Finally, in the pattern with the strong dip in the first medial position, (x)Sx...xS(x)S(x) (23% of verses), where according to the rule it is the second lift that should be demoted, the resultant medial strong dip is at least four syllables long in theory, and as often as not five syllables long in practice: (x)Sxxxx(x)S(x) (the second "lift" is replaced with a weak position). Therefore, although Inoue's rule saves the embarrassment of eight-syllable long dips implicitly tolerated by earlier theories, the resultant dips still often exceed the threshold of three syllables preferred by the metre elsewhere, and indeed fulfilled unproblematically in a-verses with three open-class words if all the three are allowed to carry metrical stress.

Yet another problem of the two-lift approach is the particular rhythmical patterns that are restricted to the a-verses with either two or three open-class words. One of the examples is related to the problem of alliteration and was presented in detail

above (pp. 161-167): verse-final words like *capados* and *Lumbardie*, capable of carrying two metrical stresses, always alliterate, and invariably alliterate on their first stressable syllable. This is a particularly bad case for denying the significance of alliteration as a stress guide in the first half-line: while – if we forget about the b-verse – the proposal to disregard alliteration generally provokes sympathy because of the inconsistent placement of alliteration in the a-verse, in the case of verse-final *capados* and *Lumbardie* there is nothing inconsistent. On the contrary, the regularity of their alliteration is unflinching throughout the two hundred relevant verses. Nevertheless, a two-lift theory has little option but to posit the stress on a non-initial syllable: *capa'dos*, *Lumbar'die*. Otherwise, the 207 a-verses with two open-class words would have a polysyllabic final dip, and since such a dip occurs in only 3 a-verses that contain three open-class words, the distribution would constitute a clear evidence of the metrical difference between two- and three-lift verses.

Neither is the two-lift approach able to account for the twice greater incidence of a non-schwa syllable in the $(x)S(x)S(x)S\circ$ pattern as compared to $(x)Sx\dots xS\circ$; nor to explain the significance or even register the distribution of non-schwa syllables in a pattern like $(x)S\circ S(x)S(x)$ or $(x)S(x)S\circ S(x)$, or in the special pattern $(x)S\circ Sx\dots xS(x)$ (see pp. 167-172).

As suggested at the beginning, all of the above discussion is superfluous if a two-lift theory cannot explain why the contested verses are concentrated in the first half-line – and this explanation appears to be theoretically impossible. Any kind of answer would implicitly involve the presence of the third open-class word. For example, Borroff's treatment of the metre of SGGK was necessarily rhythm-oriented. Thus, while positing that (almost) every single a-verse contains only two metrical stresses, she suggests that the rhythmical movement produced by the subordination of the third open-class word is more suitable to the longer and more amorphous first half-

line. However, it means that the subordination is not complete in the sense that the presence of the third word is still relevant to the metre.

Similarly, Inoue says: "The subordinated alliterating words would be pronounced with linguistic stress in real performance, but such stress is metrically irrelevant; alliteration, however, functions to signal their semantic weight and to fulfill the alliterative expectations of the listener. In this sense, the term "extended", which gives a wrong impression that such verses are metrically longer than the *standard* verses (i.e., verses with only two possible ictus positions) misrepresents the structure of the alliterative long line."¹¹⁵ In this case, the implicitly incomplete subordination of the third word is manifested in the separation of the *metrical* and *linguistic* stress. In theory, this is a sound procedure: metrical and linguistic stresses are prosodic entities of a different level, and they need not coincide. In the accentual-syllabic verse, linguistically unstressed elements may occur in the position of metrical stress, as for example *with* in *Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote*, while linguistically stressed elements may occupy metrically weak positions, as *sweet* in *When to the sessions of sweet silent thought*. In an accentual verse, linguistic stress is also not projected straightforwardly to metrical stress as long as "linguistic stress" means "word stress", i.e. the position and potential prominence of stress (properly: the prosodic structure) prescribed for a particular word in the lexicon. The material relevant for metrical stress is phrasal stresses, so when we are talking about one of the words being "subordinated" prosodically, we mean that some word stress may fail to be projected to the phrasal stress. At this point, we have not yet left the level of linguistic prosody. But as we arrive at the next stage, the correlation between phrasal and metrical stresses appears to be the very definition of an accentual metre. Therefore, Inoue's proposal amounts to a denial of the accentual nature of late Middle English alliterative verse – certainly not an

¹¹⁵ *A New Theory of Alliterative A-Verses*, p. 116.

impossible proposition, but one it is very difficult to substantiate at the present stage of our knowledge. In fact, she pursues the possibility by suggesting that the presence or absence of the strong dip after the second open-class word determines subordination of either the first or the second linguistic stress. In a way, this is parallel to the influence exerted on the linguistic material by the ordinal number of a metrical "slot" in the accentual-syllabic template. However, in the accentual-syllabic verse the "slots" and their properties are assigned beforehand, and the rhythmical pattern results from the interaction of the pre-determined metrical pattern and the linguistic material. In late Middle English alliterative verse, on the contrary, we learn about the presence of a strong dip from the particular form of the employed linguistic material, not vice versa. Nowhere is the accentual nature of the alliterative verse more clear than in the b-verse: it is the linguistic material that determines whether the verse has the form (x)Sx...xSx or x...xS(x)Sx. Since the metre appears to be accentual, a divorce of the metrical and linguistic (phrasal) stress is impossible: no element can be stressed linguistically while remaining unstressed metrically. Therefore, Inoue's proposal is another case of an implicitly incomplete subordination of "the third word".

The precise metrical status of "the third word" is another matter. I have argued in this section that an admission of the third full metrical stress would fit perfectly with many aspects of rhythm and metre. Even the apparently chaotic variation between three and two metrical stresses in the a-verse can be viewed as a manifestation rather than a violation of the general metrical principles of late Middle English alliterative poetry. However, other answers are possible as well: the third word might carry a secondary rather than primary stress (if we stay within the linguistic approach to metre); it might increase the physical duration or change the intonational pattern of the verse-phrase (if we adopt the performance viewpoint); and so on. What all of the explanations will always have in common is the metrical significance of the third word: had the

subordination been complete, verses with three open-class words would not have been restricted to the a-verse.

Therefore, verses with three open-class words are treated as a separate metrical category throughout this thesis.

Three-lift b-verses

A section on the form of the a-verse may not seem the most appropriate place to discuss b-verses with three open-class words. However, any such discussion is necessarily part of the issue of three-lift a-verses.

According to the exposition above (pp. 161-172), there are at least 624 three-lift a-verses in SGGK. If, as suggested on p. 166, a-verses with a strong final dip are also interpreted as three-lift, the total is actually 831, or 41% of all a-verses in the poem. As opposed to that, the second half-line contains only 58 instances of three open class words or compound stems (2.9%). Similar ratios occur in MA and SJ: 83 three-lift b-verses in MA (1.9%) and 33 in SJ (2.6%). The 174 verses together constitute the corpus for this section.

Because of their rarity, b-verses with three open-class words are usually only mentioned in passing as possibly unreliable instances of an a-verse pattern in the second half-line. The approach is not wholly satisfactory for the simple reason that the form of three-lift b-verses is demonstrably different from that of their relatives in the first half of the alliterative long line.

In SGGK, only 30 of 624 three-lift a-verses have no strong dips. If the three-lift status is extended to the 207 verses with a strong final dip (*'Langaberde in 'Lumbar'die*), we find that strong dips routinely occur in such verses as well. There is

only one exception: 2053a *Be mon hem maynteines*, xSxSSx.¹¹⁶ In fact, the regular occurrence of a strong dip (initial, first medial or second medial) in the 207 verses is another evidence in favour of their three-lift interpretation, since the rhythmical patterns produced by a double stress on *'Lumbar'die*, etc. correspond exactly to those of the verses with three open-class words. Thus, on the whole only 31 of 831 three-lift a-verses do not have a strong dip. As shown above (p. 167 ff.), in 20 of those 31 a monosyllabic dip is formed by a non-schwa syllable.

If we turn to three-lift b-verses in SGGK, MA and SJ, we find that the patterns without a strong dip occur in 161 of the 174 of them, for example:

SGGK.731b	þe colde borne rennez ¹¹⁷
SGGK.1141b	þre bare mote
SGGK.1338b	to haue hole sydes
SJ.199b	grete God þanked
MA.801b	ten fote large

Three-lift b-verses with a strong dip mostly occur in MA, with only two exceptions in SGGK and none in SJ. Here is a complete list:

MA.424b	halde my R ounde Table	(infinitive)
MA.930b	thre hundreth at ones	
MA.1622b	two h onourable kyngesz	
MA.2160b	fyfe hundrethe at ones	
MA.2521b	thre g rayhondes of sable	
MA.2933b	ten thosande or euen	
MA.3214b	and holde my R ownde Table	(infinitive)
MA.3705b	seuen hundrethe at ones	
MA.3756b	thre hundrethe at ones	
MA.3768b	to halde þe grene hill	
MA.4005b	ne halde my R ownde Table	(infinitive)
SGGK.1037b	in god fayth hit is yowrez	
SGGK.1208b	sayde þat gay lady ¹¹⁸	

¹¹⁶ In two other verses the final *-e* is not elided, which is unusual, but not exceptional: 1952a *With merþe and mynstralsye*, xSxxSxSx; 2262a *Munt as ma3tyly*, SxxSxS. It is also possible to scan the verses as xSxSoSx and SxSoS respectively, with elision and a non-schwa syllable in a strong dip (cf. pp. 167-172).

¹¹⁷ Alliterative stave is shown in bold.

Therefore, patterns of the first and second half-line turn out to be as mutually exclusive with respect to three-lift verses as they are with respect to the two-lift ones. Three-lift a-verses should contain at least one strong dip in the initial, first medial or second medial position (10 exceptions in 831 instances in SGGK). Three-lift b-verses should not contain a strong dip (2 exceptions in 58 instances in SGGK and 13 exceptions in 174 instances in SGGK, MA and SJ combined).

The observation explains the persistent appearance of non-schwa syllables in those three-lift a-verses that lack a strong dip (20 instances out of 30 in SGGK): SGGK.370a *And gef hym Goddez blessyng*, xSxSxSo; SGGK.792a *Wyth mony luflych loupe*, xSxSoS. On p. 170 it was provisionally suggested that non-schwa syllables in monosyllabic dips may serve as a "rhythmical compensation" for the absence of a strong dip. It was also noted, however, that such rhythmical equivalence would be unusual, since it is abundantly clear that in two-lift a- and b-verses a monosyllabic dip formed by a non-schwa syllable is *not* equivalent to a polysyllabic dip. With the knowledge of the metrical form of three-lift b-verses, the explanation of the persistent appearance of non-schwa syllables in those three-lift a-verses that lack a strong dip is obvious: the non-schwa syllable plays here the same role it does in two-lift a-verses like SGGK.191a *Pe tayl and his toppyng* (xSxxSo), making them unacceptable for the b-verse and contributing to the rhythmical divergence of the first and second half-lines.

The next conclusion that follows from the observations is that three-lift verses without a strong dip do not have to be prohibited in the a-verse, even though there are but 10 of them in 831 instances in SGGK. As shown above (p. 160), non-schwa

¹¹⁸ Kölbing and Day follow the Laud text in printing SJ.397b *pe beste was on sette*, which is then another example. Hanna and Lawton prefer the reading *assised*, in three other manuscripts. In that case, the b-verse is totally unexceptional: *pe beste was assised*. In some other verses the strong dip is eliminated by elision: SGGK.988b *pe lorde hit tayt makez*, SJ.11b *by-wente his white sides*, SJ.40b *to gayne her grym sores*, SJ.139b *holy churche to encresche*, MA.1261b *that heghe in Heuen sittez*, MA.3980b *for Cristes lufe of Heuen*, MA.1120b *halfe a fote large*, etc.

syllables make 158 two-lift a-verses in SGGK unacceptable for the b-verse. At the same time, there remain 186 two-lift a-verses that are perfectly suitable for the second half-line. Therefore, since non-schwa syllables (in a monosyllabic dip) play the same role in three-lift verses, there is no immediate need to declare the remainder metrically irregular, even though the ratio 10 : 831 is much more suspect than 186 : 1401. The authenticity of three-lift b-verses with a strong dip is rather more questionable, since most of the exceptions belong to only one poem, MA, with only two instances in SGGK and none in SJ. Further checks in other late Middle English poems are needed.

With regard to the "two or three lifts" controversy, the metrical form of b-verses with three open class words does not change much. A complete prosodic demotion of "the third word" in the b-verse will almost invariably produce a correct heteromorphic pattern, especially since the requirement of the monosyllabic final dip is applicable in three-lift b-verses as well as two-lift ones: (x)S(x)S(x)Sx gives (x)x(x)S(x)Sx or (x)S(x)x(x)Sx. The demotion would produce non-heteromorphic results only in the very rare, if attested, SSSx pattern. However, the evidence of alliteration and syntax with regard to which of the three words should be demoted is again not correlated, just as it is not in three-lift a-verses.¹¹⁹ The position of the two-lift theories is becoming more and more untenable: not only are we to suppose (against all theoretical probability) that alliteration serves as a guide to the place of metrical stress in b-verses but not in a-verses, but now it turns out that alliteration can serve as the guide only in b-verses with two open-class words, but not in b-verses with three open-class words. Considering that the two-lift theory set out to show that verses with three open-class words are no different from the rest, it has arrived at a straightforward contradiction.

Of course, any metrical form found in three-lift b-verses does not affect the fundamental issue to be explained by a two-lift theory: why verses with three open-class

¹¹⁹ For example, SJ.1229 *A wye on þe wal cried wondere heye*. The correct syntactic bracketing of *wonder heye* produces a non-heteromorphic SxSxxx. The bracketing *cried wonder* (with stress on *wonder*), suggested by alliteration, is nonsensical.

words or compound stems constitute 41% of a-verses and only 3% of b-verses in SGGK, if such verses are wholly equivalent to those with two open-class words.

Late Middle English alliterative metre: a summary

One of the main conclusions of the chapter is that the inflectional grammar well attested in Midlands texts of c. 1300 and in Southern poetic texts of c. 1400 was fully functional in the authorial dialects of SGGK and MA. Spot checks in other poems show that the same is very probably true for the *Siege of Jerusalem*, the *Wars of Alexander*, *Alexander and Dindimus*, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *Winner and Waster*, *St Erkenwald*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*. Of the poems examined, the grammar of final *-e* is irrelevant for the metre only in the *Destruction of Troy*, apparently composed much later.¹²⁰ In this regard, my evidence for SGGK and MA is in full accord with Cable's findings in *Cleanness* and with the studies by Judith Jefferson, Ad Putter and Myra Stokes who examine all of the poems listed above.¹²¹

When the inflectional grammar is taken into account, the rules and preferences that transpire in SGGK (for most parameters also MA and SJ) can be summarised as follows:

B-verse

1. The absolute majority of b-verses have two lifts (97%).
2. The b-verse should contain a strong dip in the initial or medial position.
3. The b-verse can contain only one strong dip.
4. The final dip cannot be strong.

¹²⁰ See Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Author of *The Destruction of Troy*,' *Medium Ævum* 57 (1988), pp. 264-269.

¹²¹ Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1991). Ad Putter, Judith Jefferson, and Myra Stokes, *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse* (Oxford, 2007).

5. The final dip should be monosyllabic, rather than absent. (Exceptions: SGGK under 3%, most involving nouns; MA under 0.5%.) (Pp. 98-107 and 116-127.)
6. Non-schwa syllables are prohibited in the monosyllabic dip, final or medial. (Exceptions: 3 instances in 7,705 verses of SGGK, MA and SJ.) (Pp. 142-153.)
7. Three-lift b-verses cannot contain strong dips. (Exceptions: none in SJ; 3% in SGGK; 13% in MA.) (Pp. 180-184.)

A-verse

1. The a-verse may have either two or three lifts.
2. The two-lift a-verse should contain a strong dip in the initial or medial position. (Exceptions: under 1% in SGGK). (Pp. 156-161.)
3. Preference: three-lift a-verses should contain a strong dip in the initial, first medial or second medial position. (Alternative patterns: under 4% in SGGK.) (Pp. 161-172.)
4. The final dip cannot be strong. (Exceptions: potentially 10, or 0.5% in SGGK; probably none). (Pp. 161-167.)
5. Preference: rhythmical patterns of both two-lift and three-lift a-verses should be unsuitable for the b-verse as defined above. (Alternative patterns: 13% for two-lift verses; 1% for three-lift verses in SGGK.) (Pp. 156-161 and 180-184.)
6. Non-schwa syllables are allowed in the monosyllabic dip and are often employed in both two-lift and three-lift a-verses to fulfill preference (5). (Pp. 156-161, 167-172 and 180-184.)

7. If a three-lift a-verse contains a strong dip, a non-schwa syllable cannot occur in a monosyllabic dip except in the following special pattern:

(x)S₀Sx...xS(x). (Exceptions: 5% in SGGK, or 2 out of 45). (Pp. 167-172.)

Note that the rules (2) and the rules (4) are the same for both half-lines; it is also partly true for the rules (1). B-verse rules (3) and (5) are further specifications for b-verse rules (2) and (4) respectively; the a-verse lacks those specifications. The rules (6) directly oppose each other, as well as b-verse rule (7) and a-verse preference (3). The opposition is generalised in a-verse preference (5). A-verse rule (7), establishing a special pattern, is the only rule that has no bearing on the other half-line.

CHAPTER 3. The metre of Layamon's *Brut*

The metre of Layamon's *Brut*: the late Middle English perspective

Before proceeding to the overall historical reconstruction, it remains to discuss the features of early Middle English alliterative verse. It is usually said that Layamon's *Brut* is written in half-lines with a two-stress accentual metre, with frequent but not obligatory alliteration and end-rhyme.¹ Even though it is very basic rhythmically, the requirement of two-stress phrases is often broken in Layamon. Combined with the inconsistency of alliteration and rhyme,² this led some scholars to classify the *Brut* as rhythmical prose, together with the Lives of the Katherine Group, Ælfric, and some early Middle English poems, such as the *Worcester Fragments*.³ However, Ralph

¹ For example: J.P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English*; Dorothy Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 23-45; Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977).

² A cursory check turns out the figures of about 80% for alliteration and 20% for end-rhyme.

³ Proposed by S.K. Brehe ('Reassembling the *First Worcester Fragment*,' *Speculum* 65 (1990), pp. 521-36 and "'Rhythmical Alliteration": Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Layamon's Metre,' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 65-87), following the general

Hanna has shown that Layamon fits well the heteromorphicity framework proposed by Hoyt Duggan and Thomas Cable for the poems of the Alliterative Revival.⁴

Layamon's metre has attracted minimal attention in comparison to Old English or even late Middle English alliterative verse, which means that in contrast to the two previous chapters it is impossible to base the present analysis on a metrical account that would be both very adequate descriptively, elaborated in many studies, and accepted by a significant part of the scholarly community. Of the few studies that deal with the prosodic organisation of Layamon's verse (rather than concentrating on the matters of alliteration and rhyme), Hanna's proposal is the only one that offers a systemic metrical interpretation of the *Brut*.⁵ However, as far as I am aware, his application of the heteromorphicity principle to Layamon has not been taken up by a major metrical study of the poem. In this situation, I have to start with establishing the basic framework of Layamon's metre by considering briefly how well and in what particular respects it conforms to the rules set out by Duggan and Cable for late Middle English. After the general frame of reference has been established, I proceed to a discussion of more specific aspects of Layamon's verse in the second part of this Chapter.

Layamon's *Brut* is extant in two witnesses: BL Cotton Caligula A.ix and BL Cotton Otho C.xiii, the latter containing a revised version of the poem. The present Chapter is based almost entirely on the evidence of the Caligula text, although in certain instances a reference will be made to the revision in Otho.

theory of Norman Blake ('Rhythmical Alliteration,' *Modern Philology* 67 (1969), pp. 118-24) and Carolyn van Dyke Friedlander ('Early Middle English Accentual Verse,' *Modern Philology* 76 (1979), pp. 219-30), and accepted in passing in Donka Minkova, 'The Credibility of Pseudo-Alfred: Prosodic Insights in Post-Conquest Mongrel Meter,' *Modern Philology* 94 (1997), pp. 427-454.

⁴ Ralph Hanna, 'Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,' in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M.T. Tavormina & R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 43-64.

⁵ Cf. also Ewald Standop, 'Der Rhythmus des Layamon-Verses,' *Anglia* 79 (1962), pp. 267-286; A.W. Glowka, 'Prosodic Decorum in Layamon's *Brut*,' *Poetica* 18 (1984), pp. 40-53; James Noble, 'The Four-Stress Hemistich in Layamon's *Brut*,' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 87 (1986), pp. 545-549; Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 58-63; S.K. Brehe, "'Rhythmical Alliteration": Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Layamon's Metre,' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 65-87.

Language and spelling

As I pointed out in the Introduction (pp. 34-39), manuscripts may reflect the syllabic count of the original poems with a varying degree of faithfulness. So, the spelling of the *Beowulf*-manuscript is in general a good reflection of the poem's metre. The situation is confirmed by many studies of Old English verse and has few exceptions (such as the syllabic spelling of many non-syllabic sonorants). As I argued in Chapter 2, the extant witnesses of SGGK and MA are, on the contrary, highly unreliable as metrical evidence: on many occasions, their spelling does not reflect the actual number and arrangement of syllables which is produced by the matching of the grammar and the metrical hypothesis.

Ideally, any statement on the reliability of a particular scribal practice should only be made at a sufficiently advanced stage of metrical-linguistic analysis. However, since the spelling of Caligula has often been characterised as "inconsistent" and "irregular", it is absolutely necessary to start a metrical study of Layamon with defining a basic approach to the metrical interpretation of the textual evidence. This section presents some general observations on the consistency of the Caligula scribe, as well as some conclusions on the match of metre and spelling based on the heteromorphicity test. I believe the observations allow one to establish the working procedure for a metrical analysis of the *Brut*. Additional evidence on the matching of language, metre and spelling will be accumulated throughout this Chapter and will then be summarised in its conclusions.

A certain degree of undeniable inconsistency on the part of the scribe makes it very probable at the outset that the Caligula text does not reproduce Layamon's spelling

entirely faithfully. In turn, the poet's spelling would not necessarily have reflected his pronunciation.⁶ Otho contains a heavily revised version of the poem and cannot be used with full confidence to support an alternative reading prompted by metrical considerations, even though metrical considerations and the testimony of Otho may sometimes happen to agree. Nevertheless, metrical tests, historical grammar and the internal consistency of scribal practice in the sixteen thousand line poem offer ample opportunities for identifying suspect points within the Caligula text. On many occasions, historical grammar, metrical findings, and the standard spelling practice in Caligula agree in their evidence to justify the removal or disregard of a textual aberration.

An example may be given to illustrate the point. On historical grounds we would expect *fusde* as the preterite of *fusen* (OE *fȳsan*), and the form *fusede* in ll. 757 and 2486 is suspect. A look through the text shows that on 62 other occasions the manuscript spelling is the expected *fusde*. The trisyllabic *fusede* in ll. 757 and 2486 is also unacceptable metrically. Thus, all the three sources of evidence are in agreement here, and so the *fusede* spelling may be disregarded in the metrical-linguistic analysis. Such points, when particularly significant in a small selection of available examples, will sometimes be mentioned in footnotes below; usually though they will be passed over silently. It should therefore be noted at the outset that in most respects Caligula produces the impression of a metrically reliable witness.

It has been pointed out on more than one occasion that certain features of spelling in Caligula evolve over the course of the poem. For example, Eric Stanley's argument about the antiquarian nature of Layamon's poetry was largely based on one such feature, treatment of <a> / <æ>.⁷ At the same time, in many areas relevant for

⁶ On the differences between the Caligula practice and the putative authorial spelling see especially G.L.Brook, 'A Piece of Evidence for the Study of Middle English Spelling,' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 73 (1972), pp. 25-28.

⁷ Cf. Eric Stanley, 'Lagamon's Antiquarian Sentiments,' *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969), pp. 23-37.

metre, such as pronominal forms, inflections or potentially syncopated sequences (-*el(e)-*, -*er(e)-*, etc.) the manuscript is consistent throughout, and deviations are easy to identify.

The statement about inflections may seem strange in view of the findings of Hoffmann and Bøgholm, the only two scholars to have described Layamon's language at any length.⁸ However, since they aim to cite as many irregular forms as possible, the impression is somewhat distorted: if one analyses a continuous passage of Caligula in terms of etymology and grammar, the percentage of correct endings is very large. Even then, most deviations are due to a small number of factors: 1) no place / direction rule in the government of prepositions, which can take either the accusative or dative; 2) nunnation (addition of an unetymological final *-n*, plus the reverse process of *n*-dropping, e.g. 10579b *Drihten us fulsten*, instead of *fulste*; 10613b *swa hit a liun weoren*, instead of *weore*); 3) unstable A.S.m. ending (*-e* rather than the historical *-ne*).

The most interesting case is that of adjectives. In Bøgholm's view, "adjectives are most irregular in their inflection". Hoffmann's lists of forms for different cases seem to support the thesis.⁹ However, it is easy to see that the irregularity is mostly historical, rather than grammatical: 1) A.S.m. in *-ne*, G.S.m./n. in *-es* are rare; 2) *-n* in the weak declension is optional, and usually absent even in D.Pl.m./n. – but nunnation is not restricted to the inflections of adjectives and nouns. At the same time, *-re* in G./D.S.f. is quite stable. Equally, the rule "*-e* in the plural and in the weak declension" is applicable in a very high percentage of cases. For example, in several hundred instances of adjectives in *-lic*, there is not a single violation of the rule. Declension is variable in superlatives, similarly to Old English, where the weak forms could sometimes occur without the normally required demonstrative or possessive pronoun due to the inherently definite meaning of the superlative itself. The historical adjectives in *ja/jō*

⁸ Paul Hoffmann, *Das grammatische Genus in La3amons 'Brut'* (Halle, 1909); Niels Bøgholm, *The Layamon Texts: a Linguistical Investigation* (Copenhagen, 1944).

⁹ Bøgholm, p. 51. Hoffmann, pp. 39-49.

retain *-e* in the singular (N.S.m./f./n., A.S.n.): so *wilde, kene, riche, clane*, (but sometimes *aðel*, irregular in other respects as well).

Thus, the Caligula text does show a system of adjectival endings, at least in terms of their syllabic value, if not always a precise form. Its consistency should prevent one from randomly adjusting the inflectional syllables to fit a metrical theory, since while it is possible that the author's system was different from that of a later scribe, it is unlikely to have been less stable. It may well be the case that for Layamon *-ne, -es, -en* endings were the rule (and their sporadic occurrence in Caligula is then a case of a scribal *Mischsprache*), but that would not affect the syllable count.

The consistency can be illustrated by a continuous sample of 200 lines (10534-10733). Historically suspect spellings are few: 10600b *þat formest is wel idon*, 10660 *and uppen Colgrime smiten* (*uppen* usually governs personal names in the accusative), 10666a *War beo 3e Bruttes* (in this phrase *war* is indeclinable, 20 instances in Caligula), 10726b *he com þere forð-rihtes* (OE *þer*; but as demonstrated by rhymes, Layamon vacillates between the historical *e*-less form and the regular adverbial formation in *-e* which came to dominate in later Middle English, cf. Chapter 2). In two other cases, unexpected forms stand in rhyme:

10671 & he smat enne **oðer**; þat wes þas cnihtes broðer;
10667 Her stondeð us biuoren; vre ifan alle **icoren**.

(*oðer(n)e* A.S.m., *icorene* Pl. elsewhere in the text). A check of further 800 lines suggests that the linguistic consistency of the fragment is, if anything, lower than average. Therefore, the Caligula spelling seems to be a good guide to the syllable count. Historical grammar and metre help in identifying the aberrations.¹⁰

¹⁰ Heteromorphy also helps to determine the usual pronunciation of some inflections. For example, *halst* occurring for *haldest* (Bøgholm, p. 34) means that the 2nd person singular ending could be contracted. A heteromorphy check shows that it is not only a scribal feature, as the ending seems to be

Initial metrical statement and preliminary tests

The following metrical rules have been assumed as a starting point of the analysis:

1. the long line is divided into two half-lines (verses) with a caesura;
2. all words and word classes are arranged within the poetic usage into a scale of relative accentual ranks;
3. the half-line has two lifts, which fall on the words having the highest accentual rank within the half-line;
4. heteromorphic lines are those having one and only one strong dip (two or more syllables);
5. in contrast to late Middle English verse, the final dip can be absent; however, as in late Middle English, it can not exceed one syllable;
6. some verses can have three stresses instead of two; the heteromorphicity criterion does not apply then.

The rules assumed are an abridged and relaxed version of the metrical statement provided for late Middle English verse in Chapter 2 (p. 185-187). The abridgement serves to provide a convenient and (as far as possible) uncontroversial starting point of the metrical analysis.

The basic material is 200 long lines (10534-10733) of the Caligula text.

monosyllabic when it matters for the metre, e.g. 1902a *þat þu dalest þis lond* (7 instances against 1). The rule is functioning in *The Owl and the Nightingale* as well, although dialects are certainly different.

However, before scanning the basic fragment of 200 lines, it was necessary to determine the status and probable scansion of a particular word or word part (morpheme or sequence of sounds). Examples were then taken from the whole Caligula text or its randomly chosen section, so that the number of instances would normally be between 50 and 100.

First, it was necessary to check the relative accentual rank of certain words. Nouns, non-finite verb forms, lexical verbs, lexical adjectives, derived adverbs, and numerals are strongly stressed words; they were taken to be non-demotable. Prepositions, articles, and auxiliaries almost never receive stress. Small adjectives and adverbs have an intermediate and often ambiguous status; they were analysed in two steps:

- If the tested word often occurs in a verse which already contains three non-demotable words, it follows that the tested word itself is demotable. Otherwise, such verses would contain four lifts, which is not plausible, since verses with four unambiguously non-demotable (open-class) words are relatively rare.
- If the tested word does *not* often occur in a verse which already contains three non-demotable words, then verses with the tested word and two non-demotables are scanned in two ways: 1) with the lifts on the tested word and any of the non-demotables, or 2) on both non-demotables. If the 2nd type returns all or nearly all regular (heteromorphic) verses, then the word is demotable; otherwise, the word belongs to the non-demotable category (and the analysed verses are declared to have three lifts). Also, very frequent occurrence in

verses with two non-demotables suggests by itself that the word in question is demotable.

The tests showed that *al*, *moni*, *oðer*, *muchel* are demotable, but very often carry metrical stress; *bihalues*, *biuoren*, *(n)æuere* have a lower degree of prosodic prominence; *wel*, *swiðe*, *al-swa*, *nu*, *bute*, *æfne*, *æer*, *neh* can be stressed, but only occasionally are.

Secondly, it was necessary to check the syllabic value of some morphemes and sound combinations – whether it was preferable to scan them as di- or monosyllabic. Once again, the chief test was the compliance to the heteromorphicity rules. Verses containing the morpheme or sound combination in question were classified into the following categories, familiar from the discussion of final *-e* in Chapter 2:

- A. the combination occurs in the "weak dip" or rather what would be the weak dip if it were monosyllabic (e.g. 1888b *al þis driht-liche lond*);
- B. it occurs in the final dip, which must be weak (e.g. 2344a & *bad hine quic-liche*);
- C. it forms the strong dip (e.g. 5872b & *wunliche londes*);
- D. it occurs in the strong dip with some other unstressed syllables (e.g. 3206b *and freo-liche on folke*);
- E. it occurs in a 3-lift verse;
- F. the verse is irregular anyway - whether the morpheme is mono- or disyllabic (e.g. 7505b *buten hi3end-liche ich beo dæd*).

Categories A and B support monosyllabic; category C, disyllabic scansion.

Other categories are irrelevant, although D might be viewed as indirect evidence for monosyllabicity, as it can be said that the morpheme or sound combination alone is not enough to constitute a strong dip. Here are some of the findings that will be used silently in future scansions:

- **-ie-** is monosyllabic in all relevant instances (either in verbs, adjectives, or proper nouns), similarly to other familiar Middle English texts such as *The Owl and the Nightingale* or the Harley lyrics. Examples: 455b *to faren þe to wonien*, 1600b *þat wes þa bisie king*.¹¹
- **-el-**: on the whole, the evidence suggests that we should follow the manuscript spelling in scanning the words with the root final *-el*, e.g. in 1653b *of idele manne*. There are only 3 instances out of 71 that can be made to comply to the heteromorphicity rules by deviating from the manuscript spelling. So, while variation in pronunciation is probable, the scribe appears to follow metre quite well.
- **intrusive vowels between a consonant and /r/** are very frequent in the Caligula spelling, and usually metre shows that they were indeed pronounced: 10561 *selere* (OE *selran*), 10604 *næuere* (OE *næfre*), 10563 *ludere* (OE *hludre*), 10565 *alderen* (OE *ieldran*; here metre requires a disyllabic *aldren*), 10565 *luðere* (OE *lyðrum*), 10588 *3arewe* (OE *gearwe*), 10601 *luðere* (OE *lyðre*), 10602 *bitere* (OE *bitre*; variation already in Old English), 10658 *whitere* (ON *vigt* < *vigr*), etc.¹²

¹¹ The only verse where *-ie-* forms strong dip on its own is 10855a *þer næstieð arnes*, which is quite clearly an error for *næstleð*, < OE *nestlian* rather than *nist(i)an*. Otho has *nestleþ*.

¹² The history of unstressed vowels in this environment is outlined in Karl Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache* (Oxford, 1964), §§446-450.

Other sequences will be discussed later in conjunction with relevant features of Layamon's metre.

The prefix licence

A description of rhythmical patterns in Layamon's *Brut*, and therefore any analysis that seeks to determine how well the poem conforms to the heteromorphicity principle, is affected significantly by a number of factors. Some of them, such as the ability of certain words to carry metrical stress, or the syllabic value of particular phonomorphological sequences, have been discussed in the previous section. It remains to present the initial evidence with regard to three other features of Layamon's verse, namely the prefix licence, elision, and stress patterns in compounds.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, unstressed prefixes and negative particles could be excluded from the syllable count in Old English verse. For example, they could form the otherwise irregular "anacrusis" in A-verses, e.g. *Beowulf* 109a *ne gefeah he þære fæhðe* : ppSxxxSx, occur between the stresses in C-verses, e.g. *Beowulf* 1223b *swa sæ bebugeð*, xSpSx, or extend the dip in D- and E-verses to over one syllable, e.g. *Beowulf* 17b *worold-are forgeaf* (SrSxps or SrSxps). At the same time, there are verses where verbal prefixes should be included into the syllable count for the lines to be regular, e.g. *Beowulf* 2b *þrym gefrunon* (SpSx).

Within the heteromorphicity hypothesis, in order to check whether a similar licence existed in Layamon, one should determine the percentage of lines where the suppression of the prefix eliminates the second strong dip, e.g. 10062b *þenne his flocc is awemmed* (xxxSxps). Such a test was carried out for three selections:

- 1) all prefixes in ll. 10001-10250;
- 2) a very frequent prefix in the entire Caligula text; I chose the double prefix *un-i-*, since its disyllabicity is convenient for a test based on heteromorphicity;
- 3) due to its highly formulaic use in the poem, the word *un-i-lic* was analysed separately from other instances of the *un-i-* prefix.

All prefixes in 10001-10250. The number of verses emended by the introduction of the prefix licence is not significant (9 out of 68). They may simply be irregular.

UN-I- It is necessary to suppress the prefix 11 times out of 173 to produce a regular verse. Also, 88 of the instances, regular if the prefix is scanned in the usual way, are formulaic phrases like 15580b *mid unimete folke*, 5195b *folc unimete*. Considering the importance of the evidence of formulaic systems, we may conclude that the prefix licence does not work here.

However, what we should also be looking at is the percentage of *irregular* verses that can be emended by the prefix licence. These 20 lines where the prefix licence could be applied emend *all but three* of the irregular verses in the analysed selection. So, at least in the lines that contain a prefix, the licence is a powerful means of cutting down the number of irregular verses. It will be remembered from Chapter 1 (p. 60) that it was that particular argument that allowed us to establish the existence of the prefix licence in Old English verse.

UNILICHE. The word has almost purely formulaic function: it does not carry any important meaning, but provides a rhyme to words on /-it/ (*Childric*, *Rodric*, *dic*, *riche*, etc.); it rhymes in 10 instances out of 12, and all instances but one are in the b-verse.

The part of the verse up to *(un)iliche* is formulaic enough: cf. 8623a *elches weorkes...* and 4947b *elches londes...* (xxSx-); 3512b *alle þon oðere...* and 6456b *al his iferen...* (xxxSx-); 7954b *ælche deore...*, 4946b *elche oðer...*, 5163b *ælche oðere...*, and 10552b *ælchen oðere...*. We might reasonably expect a high degree of metrical regularity from such a plainly formulaic word, especially in the b-verse. However, 10 verses out of 12 are irregular if the prefix licence is not applied, e.g. 8623 *elches weorkes unniliche* (xxSxppSx). Thus, verses with *uniliche* support the prefix licence: 10 verses out of 12 are irregular, and all 10 can be emended by the licence.

Further evidence in support of the licence will be provided at relevant points in further discussions.

Elision

Elision is well attested in Middle English poetry. Thus, in lines 1-200 of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, there are 56 instances where its application produces a regular iambic line (including headless lines), against 7 instances where it spoils the metre. The rule in *The Owl and the Nightingale* seems therefore to be "the final vowel of a polysyllabic word should be elided before the initial vowel of the following word within the same verse." For Chaucer, the generally accepted rule is different: elision may occur in monosyllabics too, and also before Romance words, pronouns, and auxiliaries beginning with *h-*.¹³ There is then a possibility that elision is operational in Layamon.

In 200 lines of the basic fragment, *The Owl and the Nightingale*-type elision makes three verses regular, four irregular, and has no effect in 26 instances. If

¹³ Bernhard ten Brink, *The Language and Metre of Chaucer* (London, 1901); E. Talbot Donaldson, 'Chaucer's Final -e', *PMLA* 63 (1948), pp. 1101-1124; Donka Minkova and Robert Stockwell, 'Chaucerian phonemics: evidence and interpretation,' in *Language History and Linguistic Modelling*, ed. Raymond Hickey and Stanislaw Puppel (Berlin, 1997), pp. 47-49.

monosyllabics and/or functional words in *h-* are added into the equation, the results are even less impressive. In the corresponding passage in Otho, *The Owl and the Nightingale*-type elision makes one verse regular, while interfering with the metre of another eight.

Therefore, elision may be present in Layamon on purely theoretical grounds, but there is very little evidence to support it. At best, it is rare and optional. I will not be returning to the issue below; however, while analysing verses in every selection made for every point to be discussed I checked whether elision might produce a sub-pattern or affect conclusions in any significant way. It was never the case. Considering how easy it is to observe elision in other Middle English poems, be it *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *Poema Morale*, *The Canterbury Tales* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, there appears to be little chance that elision occurs in Layamon's verse with any degree of frequency.¹⁴

Compounds

In most cases, compounds occur in the verse-final position. If a compound is stressed on the first component, the line is almost always irregular because of a strong final dip: 2281b *to quene of Dene-marke*; in addition, the lines are then often irregular because they lack a strong dip: 10762b *winden heore-mærken*. Therefore, we should consider other options of stressing compounds: either on both components or on the second component only. If a compound occurs in a verse containing only small words, or small adjectives like *alle* or *ælc*, the stress should be on both components of the compound: 10819b *mid heore hux-warden*.

¹⁴ Of course, elision is not used uniformly in all Middle English poems, even the late Middle English ones.

Verses that contain a compound and a non-demotable word are always regular if stressed on the non-demotable and on the second component of the following compound: 10759a *halden ut of wude-sca3e*; or on the non-demotable and the first component of the preceding compound: 10072a *burh-men mid þa beztse*, 10450b & *wilgomen wurchen*. Compounds do not seem to occur in verses with two non-demotables, which suggests that they bear two obligatory stresses and verses like *halden ut of wude-sca3e* have three lifts.

Words with heavy suffixes and adverbial compounds (e.g. *wisdom*, *wuniende*, *(n)æueremare*) behave in the same way: they often occur in the verse-final position in verses otherwise containing only small words, and produce regular scansion when stressed on the root syllable and the suffix. A general definition of the category appears to be "words with more than one syllable that contains a non-schwa vowel".

Verse-final compounds and words with suffixes often rhyme. It is another evidence in favour of the metrical stress on the second component of compounds (or properly on the "non-initial non-schwa syllable"), unless we are prepared to admit rhyme between sequences with different degrees of metrical stress:

10184 Colgrim wes in Eouerwic; & þær abad him Childric
 10297 and wreken wruð-liche; ure cun & heore riche
 10454 þat heo comen ful iwis; to Derte-muðe at Totteneis
 10474 to fihten wið Childrichen; þan strongen & þan richen

A related rhythmical feature of Layamon's verse is the stress on a small word or a small adverb in the verse-final position, e.g. 10241 *þene balde kæisere mid muchele harme þere*. If the small adverb is left unstressed, we are left with a strong final dip and an irregular line. Small words rarely occur in the verse-final position, but if they do, they are usually supported by rhyme, cf. also 10889 & *funde þene king Gillomar / þe*

icumen wes to londe þar. Thus, any word placed in the verse-final position, regardless of its accentual rank, receives metrical stress.

Scansion of the basic fragment

When the provisions of the previous four sections (pp. 194-203) are taken into account, the scansion of the basic fragment of 200 lines in *Caligula* (ll. 10534-10733) produces the following breakdown into major verse types:¹⁵

Table 3.

	a-verse		b-verse	
Heteromorphic	115	57.5%	157	78.5%
Three-lift	44	22%	25	12.5%
Non-heteromorphic	41	20.5%	18	9%
<i>Total</i>	<i>200</i>		<i>200</i>	

Thus, the *Caligula* text is not written in a truly heteromorphic metre (even allowing for the masculine-feminine ending variation), and there are significant discrepancies with the figures for the poems of the Alliterative Revival:

1. 9% of b-verses are irregular.
2. 12.5% of b-verses have three lifts. The corresponding figure for the Alliterative Revival is below 2%.¹⁶
3. 57.5% of a-verses are heteromorphic. The corresponding figure for the Alliterative Revival is just over 10% (13% in SGGK, see pp. 156-161).

¹⁵ The prefix *licence* is not taken into the account (relevant verses are initially counted as irregular).

¹⁶ Ralph Hanna, 'Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry', p. 45. I find 174 three-lift b-verses in 7705 lines of SGGK, MA and SJ (just over 2%; see pp. 180-184).

The 9% given in the table is the maximum possible figure for non-heteromorphic two-lift b-verses. But even it demonstrates that it would not be sensible to treat Layamon as rhythmical prose, as the level of heteromorphicity in the text is very high and cannot be easily dismissed.

Nine of the eighteen irregular b-verses can be emended by the prefix licence. Another three belong to the special pattern that will be discussed below, pp. 222-229. That leaves but six non-heteromorphic b-verses, or 3% of the sample.¹⁷ The number is sufficiently small to assert the essentially heteromorphic character of the Caligula text.

Comparison to the Otho passage

The text preserved in Otho has been heavily revised: in comparison with Caligula, some verses are omitted, some altered, some new ones are created to render the general meaning of the original text. It is interesting to compare the metrical practices of the two witnesses: the heavy revision means we actually have two texts for metrical analysis. Obviously, a straightforward comparison of Caligula and Otho is not equivalent to a comparison of the reviser's original and the updated version produced by him: in addition to that change, there are two textual traditions to consider. However, since at the present stage of our knowledge about the *Brut* it is impossible to separate the sporadic changes accreted in the course of transmission from the activity of the reviser, a straightforward comparison of the Caligula and Otho texts remains the only available procedure.

¹⁷ The six irregular verses are: 10540b *beornes sturne*, SxSx; 10549b *hæh of stele*, SxSx; 10568b *ure cun & ure riche*, xxSxxxSx; 10645b *swulche fisces in wælle* xxSxxxSx; 10667b *vre ifan alle icoren*, xxpSxxpSx; 10727b *of his cume nane custe*, xxSxxxSx. (10727 *nane custe* is Dat.; 10568, 10667 *ure* could already be variable by c.1200, although in Old English it is declined like adjectives in *ja/jō* and is always spelt with *-e* in Caligula.) The three remaining examples to be discussed later: 10697b & *al mi drihtlice uolc*, 10552b *ælchen oðere vnlic*, and 10601b *swa me scal a ludere don*.

The metrical correlations between the Caligula and Otho are classified in the following categories:

- a heteromorphic verse in Caligula is identical (spelling not taken into account) to Otho;
- a non-heteromorphic verse in Caligula is identical in Otho;
- a completely new verse in Otho is heteromorphic;
- a completely new verse in Otho is non-heteromorphic;
- a heteromorphic verse in Caligula is revised in Otho; result – a non-heteromorphic verse;
- a non-heteromorphic verse in Caligula is revised in Otho; result – a heteromorphic verse;
- a heteromorphic verse in Caligula is revised in Otho; result – a heteromorphic verse;
- a non-heteromorphic verse in Caligula is revised in Otho; result – a non-heteromorphic verse;

The results are given below (three-lift verses are counted as regular):¹⁸

Table 4.

	A-verses	B-verses
Identical heteromorphic verses	63	58
Identical non-heteromorphic verses	14	3
New heteromorphic verse in Otho	13	17
New non-heteromorphic verse in Otho	1	1
Heteromorphic verse in Caligula > non-heteromorphic verse in Otho	9	6
Non-heteromorphic verse in Caligula >	9	3

¹⁸ Due to the omission of many verses, the total length of the Otho fragment is 158 full lines, rather than the two hundred in Caligula.

heteromorphic verse in Otho		
Heteromorphic verse in Caligula > heteromorphic verse in Otho	39	62
Non-heteromorphic verse in Caligula > non-heteromorphic verse in Otho	10	8

The general results (with all ambiguous verses counted as irregular at this stage) correspond to the Caligula text quite well: there are 21.5% of irregular a-verses (20.5% in Caligula) and 11% of irregular b-verses (9% in Caligula). The ratio of the three-lift verses is also very similar. Thus, it is possible to say that the two texts represent a similar stage of development of the heteromorphic metre.

The reviser was obviously familiar with the metre, as nearly all new verses in Otho are heteromorphic: of the 18 new b-verses, only one (O.10543b *one brunie of stele*) is possibly irregular, but it may be set right by elision. Of the 14 new a-verses, only one (O.10579a *nou we helpe to-dai*) might be irregular, but it can be emended by the prefix licence.

Otho is less consistent when revising the existing lines: in this category there are 19 non-heteromorphic a-verses and 14 non-heteromorphic b-verses. Sometimes, Otho faithfully reproduces a verse which is irregular in Caligula. Significantly, the revised version is much more willing to repeat a non-heteromorphic a-verse (14 instances) than a non-heteromorphic b-verse (3 instances): it shows that for the Otho reviser the requirement of heteromorphicity was predominantly a feature of the second rather than the first half-line – perhaps more so than for the creator of the Caligula text.

The comparison of two texts provides another argument in support of the existence of the prefix licence. In the basic passage from Caligula, there are 17 irregular verses (eight in the first half-line, nine in the second) that can be emended by the prefix licence. Five of them are dropped in Otho. Of the remaining twelve, 8 are unchanged. Two are slightly revised, but are still irregular and can still be emended by the prefix licence. Only two verses (10670b, 10729a) are revised in such a way that they cannot be

emended by the licence. Therefore, 10 out of the possible 12 verses can be emended by the prefix licence in Otho as well as in Caligula. In the cases without a prefix Otho is not so willing to leave an irregular verse as it is (cf. the table above). For example, there are no irregular b-verses left identical in Otho – with the exception of the three emendable by the prefix licence. Clearly, the verses emendable by the prefix licence were perfectly regular to the Otho reviser (and/or did not appear as random errors in the course of the textual transmission of both extant versions).

With the prefix licence and elision applied, the ratio of heteromorphic b-verses in Otho is 94% (10 irregular verses out of 158).

Prefix licence: summary of the evidence

The following arguments have been adduced so far in support of the prefix licence in the metrical systems of both Caligula and Otho scribes:

- 1) The licence emends 20 out of 23 non-heteromorphic verses in two selections: all prefixes in ll. 10001-10250 and the prefix *uni-* in the whole text (250 verses total).
- 2) The licence emends all 10 irregular verses with *(un)iliche*. There are only 12 verses with *(un)iliche* altogether; the word is but a metrical filler and is only used in formulaic phrases. It would be very surprising to find a metrically irregular metrical filler – no less so than a metrically irregular formulaic phrase.
- 3) The licence emends 9 out of 18 irregular b-verses in the basic passage from Caligula (50%). The percentage is almost twice as high as the estimated value (50 total instances of a prefix in 200 b-verses, 25%).

- 4) There are 17 verses emendable by the licence in *Caligula*. Twelve of them also occur in *Otho*. Eight of the twelve are unchanged, two are only slightly changed (and are still emendable by the licence). It means that the verses emendable by the prefix licence were perfectly regular to the *Otho* scribe, since in other cases *Otho* is not so willing to leave an irregular verse as it is. For example, there are no irregular b-verses left identical in *Otho* – with the exception of the three emendable by the prefix licence.

Layamon: an intermediate stage

Layamon fits well the intermediate position between the metres of Old English poetry and the Alliterative Revival. The account in Chapter 1 makes it clear that Layamon (or any other Middle English poem) cannot be approached with Sievers' types: any such attempt is a gross misapprehension of the Old English system. At the same time, percentages given in Table 3 (p. 203) show that Layamon does not completely fit the late Middle English system either:

- 12% of b-verses in *Caligula* have three lifts, as compared to less than 2% for the Alliterative Revival.
- Three-lift verses are twice as frequent in first half-line (22%), but not as frequent as in some late Middle English poems (there the figure is variable across the corpus: it can be slightly under 20%, e.g. for MA, but almost reaches 40% for SJ and the poems of the *Gawain*-group).
- Non-heteromorphic lines are more frequent in the first than in the second half-line in Layamon: if all remotely ambiguous verses are counted as

irregular, the figure is 20% (or 26% for two-lift verses only), as compared to 9% for b-verses. It is still not as many as in the poems of the Alliterative Revival (over 90% for two-lift verses).

All the ratios point in the same direction: although the Caligula text is essentially heteromorphic, the distribution of heteromorphic, non-heteromorphic, and three-lift patterns between the first and second half-line is more even than in the poems of the Alliterative Revival. The specialisation of the first and second half-line is present in Layamon, but to a lesser degree.

The results would fit the continuation hypothesis well: in Old English poetry the first and second half-lines were largely identical in structure, but subsequently they diverged. The divergence is not complete even in the late Middle English poems (a-verse can still be heteromorphic; three-lift b-verses occur, albeit rarely), while Layamon demonstrates yet an earlier stage.

The early stage of divergence in Layamon can also be gleaned from the scribes' practice. The Caligula scribe sometimes introduces excessive punctuation after the second lift of a three-lift verse, if the first resulting fragment is heteromorphic.¹⁹ It betrays his familiarity with the heteromorphic metre. Frequent confusion of *punctus* and *punctus elevatus* in Caligula (which generally mark the end of b-verse and a-verse respectively) lead to the following conclusions: 1) the Caligula scribe did not slavishly copy the punctuation of his exemplar, but almost always relied on his own usage; 2) the scribe could not distinguish a- and b-verses by their rhythmical patterns, but had to rely exclusively on syntax and rhyme.²⁰ Otho shows signs of the same inability, which is a

¹⁹ E.g. in 10880 "and his smale uolc; he setten alle bi weste. siden", also 5223, 5471, 5624, 10332, 10484, 10588, 10880, 12222, 12241, 12267, 12657, 12845. This use is most probably metrical, as other punctuation in mid-verse occurs only in the lists of names (e.g. 12, 12155) or to mark off a syntactically complete short phrase, usually exclamation (e.g. 601, 12109).

²⁰ Syntax: sentences must end with the b-verse. Rhyme: the scribe often reverts to his usual punctuation when he has encountered a rhyme.

natural consequence of the fact that the specialisation of the first and second half-line is at a relatively early stage of development in Layamon.

The metre of Layamon's *Brut*: further observations

It is sufficiently clear from the previous section that Layamon's metre is a good candidate for an intermediate stage between Old English and late Middle English: the rhythmical patterns are essentially those of late Middle English poems, but their specialisation between the first and second half-lines is less pronounced. On the other hand, the prefixes seem to have the same metrical status they used to have in Old English verse. However, much of the evidence on the latter point is circumstantial: since by its very nature the prefix 'licence' involves variability, it can be shown to exist with any degree of certainty only when we are equipped with a thorough knowledge of the metrical system and the admissible rhythmical patterns.

Exposition in the first part of this Chapter was largely confined to the metrical similarities between the *Brut* and the poems of the Alliterative Revival. It established the basic framework of Layamon's verse. The following discussion addresses a number of more specific metrical features: resolution, the form of the final dip and the weak medial dip, the accentual status of suffixes and similar linguistic material (e.g. compound stress or the possibility of stress shift in compounds), special patterns in the b-verse (i.e. the non-heteromorphic patterns that appear to be admissible), and finally, the form and rhythmical preferences of three-lift verses. All these topics will be familiar from the previous two chapters and will be relevant for the historical reconstruction attempted in Chapter 4. For example, resolution establishes a link with Old English poetry (a link that requires interpretation); special patterns in the b-verse are typologically similar to the non-systemic, but clearly genuine D* and A* patterns in Old English, or to the rare masculine endings in late Middle English verse; the presence of

such accentual features as the stress shift or compound stress is crucial for determining the prosodic basis of Layamon's metre; finally, the discussion of the precise form of the final dip, weak medial dip, and three-lift b-verses allows one to see the differences as well as similarities between the early and late Middle English incarnations of the alliterative long line.

As in most cases of metrical analysis, it is impossible to argue the existence of any single regularity without making reference to a number of others: the interdependence of the rules of Old English verse (pp. 62-65) may serve as a good example. The only context where metrical rules can be presented separately is the final statement of a metre. Therefore, the topics listed above resurface throughout the following discussion. For instance, although the chief arguments for the use of resolution or the prefix licence in the *Brut* are provided in the relevant sections, additional pieces of evidence appear and are noted subsequently as one learns more about other metrical features and patterns of Layamon's verse. To simplify matters, the discussion has been cross-referenced and final lists of arguments for the most important features have been provided at the end of the chapter.

Length and resolution in early Middle English verse: introductory remarks

It will be practical to start with a matter that could be passed over silently in the discussion of heteromorphicity, since its effect upon the relevant patterns was minimal. However, as one goes into the minutiae of Layamon's metre, it is difficult to proceed without the realisation that resolution is still functional in the *Brut*.

The relevance of the length of the metrically stressed syllable in some early Middle English texts is documented by Luick:

Daß die Kürzen in offener Silbe im 12. Jahrhundert im ganzen unversehrt waren, zeigt die metrische Verwendung derartiger Formen: sie erscheinen nicht an Versstellen, wo die Folge $\text{—}X$ üblich war, dagegen als Ersatz von — ('Auflösung'): ersteres z.B. am Schluß, letzteres in der Zäsur des Septennars (namentlich in *P[oema] M[orale]*, ersteres auch bei O[rm]). Die letzten Denkmäler dieser Art sind O[rm] und wie es scheint - mit gewissen Einschränkungen – *K[ing] H[orn]*. Allerdings ist zum Teil mit der Möglichkeit zu rechnen, daß ein älterer Brauch mechanisch weitergeführt wurde.²¹

While it seems advisable to share Luick's caution with regard to *King Horn*, the relevance of syllable length in Orm can hardly be disputed. According to the rule, confirmed in all recent studies of the language and metre of the *Ormulum*,²² the syllable in the final lift of the line must be long, e.g.:

Nu broþerr Wallterr, broþerr min
 Affterr þe flæshess **kinde**,
 7 broþerr min i Crisstenndom.
 Þurh fulluhht, 7 þurh **trowwþe**. (ll. 1-4).

Exceptions are very few. Disputing Donka Minkova's view that Middle English open syllable lengthening was not a feature of Orm's language, Betty Phillips lists two words with a historically short stressed syllable that occupy the final lift in Orm: 9210 *græfess*, 3717 *afell*.²³ Robert Fulk, John Anderson and Derek Britton – in their two respective articles that share a similar approach to Orm and re-affirm the interpretation of his

²¹ Luick, *Historische Grammatik*, §391, Anm. 1.

²² R.D. Fulk, 'Consonant doubling and open syllable lengthening in the *Ormulum*,' *Anglia* 114 (1996), pp. 481-513; John Anderson and Derek Britton, 'Double Trouble: Geminata versus Simplex Graphs in the *Ormulum*,' in *Studies in Middle English Linguistics*, ed. Jacek Fisiak (Berlin, 1997), pp. 23-58; Donka Minkova, 'Nonprimary Stress in Early Middle English Accentual-Syllabic Verse,' in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. C.B. McCully and J.J. Anderson (Cambridge 1996), pp. 95-119; Elizabeth Solopova, 'The metre of the *Ormulum*,' In *Studies in English Language and Literature. 'Doubt wisely': Papers in honour of E.G. Stanley*, ed. by M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (London, 1996), pp. 423-439.

²³ Donka Minkova, 'The Environment of Open Syllable Lengthening in Middle English,' *Folia Linguistica Historica* 3 (1982), pp. 29-58. Betty Phillips "Open syllable lengthening and the *Ormulum*", *Word* 43 (1992), 375-382.

system proposed in 1888 by Henry Sweet – refute the first example as erroneous, while admitting *afell* as the only possible, albeit not very probable candidate.²⁴

Similar regularity, as noted by Luick, holds for syllables in the lifts immediately before the end of the line and before the caesura in *Poema Morale*, a poem dated to c.1150-1180.²⁵ Recently, however, this observation has been taken one step further by Robert Fulk,²⁶ who has shown that in all instances where the requirement of a strong caesura is violated, the stressed syllable turns out to be short, e.g.:

PM.2 Ic welde more þanne ic **dede**; mi wit oh to bi more
 PM.31 Ne hopie wif to hire **were**, ne were to his wiue
 PM.44 Þer ne mai hit him **binimen** se loþe ne se lieue
 PM.46 þider we sendeð and selue **bered** to litel and to selde

The logical conclusion is that in the position before the caesura the sequence "short+any" is equivalent to a long syllable.

Fulk does not find resolution in any other verse position of *Poema Morale*. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out, since all his examples for syncope in trisyllabic words (*makede*, *fu3eles*, *betere*) and syneresis (*comen*, *muchel*, *litel*) may potentially be explained by resolution. Even if all such instances of potentially resolved sequences in mid-verse are shown to fall into other categories like syncope or syneresis, and if syncope and syneresis are shown to apply to words with long root syllables – in short, even if the explanatory power of syncope and syneresis appears to cover fully and extend beyond that of resolution, there will remain a possibility that resolution constituted a potential alternative interpretation for the poet and his audience.

²⁴ Henry Sweet, *A History of English Sounds* (Oxford, 1888), §616 ff. Fulk, *Consonant doubling...*, pp. 487-489. Anderson and Britton, *Double Trouble...*, pp. 30-31. The two articles also dispute the validity of the three words with a historically short vowel marked as long in Orm's manuscript (*si3e*, *sáete*, *fére*) adduced by Phillips as evidence for the incipient open syllable lengthening.

²⁵ The dating is discussed in Olof Arngart, ed. *The Proverbs of Alfred* (Lund, 1955), vol. 2, p. 57.

²⁶ R.D. Fulk, 'Early Middle English Evidence for Old English Meter: Resolution in *Poema Morale*,' *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 14 (2002), 331-355.

At the same time, it is quite clear that unlike Old English (with the exception of certain patterns discussed in Chapter 1), the equivalence of "short+any" to a long syllable was not an automatic phenomenon in those early Middle English poems where the length of a metrically stressed syllable appears to be relevant. Orm is happy to admit short stressed syllables in a non-final lift. His reluctance to depart from the one-to-one matching of metrical positions and syllables (rather than "length segments", as in Old English) leads to the regularity with which the final lift is occupied by a long syllable: resolution never occurs there. The fact that Orm was unwilling to extend the admissibility of a short syllable to the verse-final lift that had to be followed by a feminine ending suggests that he was unable to do so, whether because of some linguistic restriction on the prosody of "nuclear" stress in early Middle English phrase, because of the deep structure of Orm's verse (as suggested by Donka Minkova), or because the final foot was doubled in performance (as suggested by Robert Fulk).²⁷ Moreover, Fulk does not speak of any resolved sequences at the verse end in *Poema Morale*, as opposed to the position before caesura.

Since, according to Fulk, the use of resolution in *Poema Morale* did not have "any correlate in French and Latin models",²⁸ and since, according to Minkova, claims for resolution in other early Middle English verse cannot be substantiated,²⁹ Fulk suggests that the origin of the feature in *Poema Morale* most probably lies in some historical connection with Old English poetry.³⁰

However, it is important to remember that Minkova's statement is not intended as a final conclusion based upon an examination of all the available data. Her concerns

²⁷ Minkova, *Nonprimary Stress...*; Fulk, *Consonant Doubling...*, p. 506. On the emergence of nuclear stress in early Middle English, see Donka Minkova and Robert Stockwell, 'Against the Emergence of the Nuclear Stress Rule in Middle English,' in *Studies in Middle English Linguistics*, ed. J. Fisiak (Berlin, 1997), pp. 301-334 and C.B. McCully, 'Stress, Survival and Change: Old to Middle English,' pp. 283-300 in the same volume.

²⁸ Fulk, *Early Middle English Evidence...*, p. 351.

²⁹ Minkova, *The credibility of Pseudo-Alfred...*, pp. 443-444.

³⁰ Since *Poema Morale* is composed in a metre which is decidedly not a direct descendant of the alliterative long line, consideration of the hypothesis falls outside the scope of this thesis.

here are methodological. Minkova's scepticism and warning are a reaction to the fact that too many scholars have been looking for and finding resolution without having constructed a tight system of metrical rules that would restrict the possible set of patterns as well as describe those registered in the extant text – just as the same scholars would (often on the same page) look for and find Sievers' Five Types in a Middle English text.³¹ As it was emphasised in Chapter 1, such chronological and typological extension of Old English metre is gravely misplaced, and is no more than a consequence of the failure to understand the systemic aspect of Old English metre, of which the Five Types are but an epiphenomenon (or "surface structures", depending on the theoretical framework).

Such unjustified applications of Old English rhythmical types to Middle English poems include two early treatments of Layamon's verse that in fact state that resolution was alive and well in the *Brut*. In his influential (but not nearly enough) contribution to Paul's *Grundriß*, Karl Luick outlines his view of the metre, which in his opinion is based essentially upon the "extended" and "non-extended" Five Types of Old English poetry, but with a requirement of two secondary as well as two primary metrical stresses in each half-line.³² Luick notes in shorthand that "[f]ür die Haupthebung ist wie im Stabreimverse eine lange Silbe oder ihr Gleichwertiges, úx".³³ Jacob Schipper, arguing with the essence and the apparatus of Luick's theory of the two secondary accents, sees in Layamon's verse an even truer reflection of Old English rhythmical types, and therefore has nothing to say against resolution, which he illustrates by two examples:

7048a & þus þine du3eðe; stille þe fordemeð and 6947 Woden hehde þa hæhste la3e; an

³¹ Some of the prominent examples are Luick (see below), Schipper (see below), Arngart (*The Proverbs of Alfred*), Malone ('Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*: A Metrical Study,' in *Chaucer und seine Zeit. Symposium für W.F. Schirmer*, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen, 1968), pp. 71-95), Oakden (*Alliterative Poetry in Middle English*). There is a host of others.

³² Karl Luick, 'Geschichte der heimischen Versarten,' in *Grundriß der germanischen Philologie*, 2nd edition, ed. Hermann Paul (Strassburg, 1905), vol. II, *Metrik*, pp. 141-181.

³³ Luick, 'Geschichte der heimischen Versarten,' p. 148.

ure ælderne dæ3en.³⁴ However, since the metrical proposals of both Luick and Schipper were not restrictive enough (if at all), their suggestions with regard to resolution could not be substantiated and thus were ignored or forgotten.

However, Fulk's findings in *Poema Morale* show that the "eclectic" character of early Middle English verse does not completely preclude the possibility of establishing "minimal pairs" required (all other variables suspended) to prove the existence of a particular prosodic feature. Admittedly, our understanding of *Poema*'s metre – albeit severely hampered by textual uncertainty – is somewhat superior to that of the traditional group of "native" texts (Layamon, *Bestiary*, *Proverbs of Alfred*, Worcester Fragments, etc.) – that is, unless we approach the *Brut* equipped with the knowledge of heteromorphic verse. In any case, it is not difficult to show that resolution is indeed used in Layamon.

Resolution in Layamon

In the first part of this Chapter (p. 201) I have subscribed to the popular, although not universally accepted view that in Layamon compounds and polysyllabic words with more than one non-inflectional syllable with a vowel which is not schwa (such as *Toteneis*, *Childriche*, *afterward*) could carry metrical stress on the last non-schwa syllable of the stem (usually heavy; so, *'-neis*, *'-riche*, *'-ward*). This is demonstrated both by the rhyme and the heteromorphicity test.³⁵ For the same reasons it was suggested that any functional word put in the verse-final position so that a strong

³⁴ Jacob Schipper, *A History of English Versification* (Oxford, 1910), p. 77-78. It is noteworthy than although Schipper was the person to point out the sporadic occurrence of a "superfluous syllable at the close of the first hemistich" in *Poema Morale* (p.193), his failed to identify resolution here on linguistic grounds. This makes it all the more probable that him posing resolution for Layamon was driven primarily by considerations of literary history.

³⁵ The view is also suggested by the analogy with many other Middle English poems. More evidence will be presented below, pp. 232-243.

dip results (as in 10026b *mid arhðe weore afallæd þere*) should carry metrical stress.

With these two provisions, Layamon appears to have no strong final dips: the majority of line endings are feminine, although masculine ones are also not infrequent. Still, there is a small but significant number of exceptions to the regularity: in the test corpus of 1,800 lines,³⁶ seventy two have a strong final dip, e.g.:

- 59 moni lond umbe-rowen; redes him **trokeden**
 72 Þare quene hit of-þouhte; nopeles heo hit **poledede**

The other verse-final words in question are: *apelest* (l. 10104), *aþene* (OE *āgen*, l. 10080), *balewe(n)* (ll. 157, 10516), *biburiede* (OE *byrgan*, l. 422), *bihofede* (OE *behōfian*, l. 330), *biscopes* (l. 10173), *biwitene* (l. 10231), *iborenne* (l. 10434), *broþere* (OE *brōþor*, ll. 10089, 10129), *cleopede* (ll. 413, 782), *comele* (l. 10116), *(i)comene* (ll. 227, 10860), *dunede* (ll. 10317, 10593), *duþeðe(n)* (ll. 10087, 10092, 10917), *fæþerest* (l. 10701), *ferede(n)* (ll. 120, 639), *forfarene* (ll. 10883, 10886), *forlorene* (l. 10571), *fulede* (l. 745), *uoþeles* (l. 10855), *hauede* (l. 556), *hauene* (ll. 554, 749, 10884, 10898), *hidere* (l. 10753), *ladene* (l. 555), *laþere* (OE *lāþ*, l. 438), *louede(n)* (ll. 94, 131, 152), *Lundene* (l. 10190), *makede(n)* (ll. 154, 290, 315, 10677, 10814), *ofslæþene* (l. 10385), *oðere* (OE *ōþer*, l. 10983), *smeoðede* (l. 783), *sumeres* (ll. 10472, 10703), *stefene* (ll. 10356, 10391, 10406), *itemede* (l. 558), *togædere* (ll. 313, 511, 10004), *iþowene* (l. 172), *watere(n)* (ll. 10013, 10029, 10456, 10723, 10864), *weorede* (OE *werod*, l. 10807), *wonede(n)* (ll. 744, 10842, 10912), *þifeðe* (l. 10058), *wudere* (OE *hwider*, l. 10768).

³⁶ The lines are taken from the beginning and from the second half of the Brut (ll. 36-835 and 10000-10999). As usual in my discussions of Layamon, the spelling of the Caligula manuscript is initially taken to be a good guide to the metre.

Since in 63 of the 72 instances the words have a historically short root syllable, it seems reasonable to conclude that while strong final dups were prohibited in Layamon, resolution was functional in the final lift of the verse.

It is true that some of the words do not in all probability constitute evidence. Such a view applies especially to *hauede*, for which *hafde* is by far the more frequent spelling, and *stefene*, since *stefn-* spellings predominate (although *steuen-* occurs as well). It is also true that many of the words are straightforward candidates for syncope: *sumeres*, *watere*, *comele*, etc.; possibly also *cleopede*, *dunede* and similar preterites, even at such an early date. However, such alternative explanations would make reference to several distinct historical processes, rather than a single all-encompassing statement; they would not, or would only problematically apply to some of the words on the list (*apelest*, *weorede*, the participles); and most importantly, they would not account for the fact that there are very few words where the potentially syncopated syllable would follow a *long* root syllable – words such as *broþere(n)*, *seoluere(n)*, *luþere(n)*, *wintere(n)* or many other standard items of Layamon's vocabulary. The list contains only four such examples: *broþere* (ll. 10089, 10129, both datives), *oðere* (l. 10983, dative) and *lapere* (l. 438, N.S.comp.). Note also that the inflected forms of the *broþere(n)* type are very frequent in mid-verse in the *Brut*, while the uninflected *broþer* forms occur equally frequently in mid-verse and verse-finally. This almost total avoidance of trisyllabic, potentially syncopated words with a *long* root vowel at the verse end seems to suggest that while syncope was, inevitably, always a possibility, syncopated forms did not dominate, and that the leading factor in the distribution was the length of the first non-prefixal syllable rather than the structure of the second one.³⁷

³⁷ For the history of unstressed vowels in this environment see Luick, *Historische Grammatik...*, §§446-450, esp. §449 on the *brōþere* / *ōþere* forms. When Luick's narrative is applied to Layamon, the distribution of the words with a short and a long root vowel presented above leads to two conclusions: in Layamon's language, the epenthetic vowel in this environment (*brōþere*) had already developed (formerly OE *brōþrum*, *ōþre*, etc.) and the forms with it had become at least strongly dominant. However, it did not (yet?) lead to a regular shortening of the root vowel in the resultant trisyllabic form. There is another

The remaining five instances are thus the only "irregular" (i.e. not falling into a particular category) exceptions to the prohibition of a strong final dip in Layamon:³⁸

330	I þon castle weoren monie men; & muchel mete þer bihofede
422	þat heo nomen þat wæl; & wel hit biburiede
10080	inne Alemaine; þat aþel wes his aþene
10173	beornes and eorles; & þa hali biscopes ³⁹
10190	him-seolf he nom from Humbre; þat lond into Lundene

For most, if not all of the five, possible solutions will offer themselves, but they should not concern us here. The ratio of 63 from 72 and the apparent avoidance of the *broþere*-type words seem to be sufficient evidence for resolution in the final lift of Layamon's verse.

There is less clarity with regard to the use of resolution in other positions of Layamon's verse, since the search for "metrical minimal pairs" is much less straightforward. However, in the discussion of rhythmical patterns below I hope to show that there is some circumstantial evidence for mid-verse resolution. Therefore, I

question to ask as well: are the sporadic occurrences of verse-final *broþere*, etc. due to the starting development of syncope or of shortening in trisyllabics? It will be shown below (pp. 229-232) that sporadic trisyllabic shortening seems to appear in other contexts, where syncope is not always an option; therefore, trisyllabic shortening is a preferable general solution, which in turn reduces the probability of syncope as an explanation for *sumeres*, *watere*, *comele* forms with the short vowel.

³⁸ There is also a number of verses that may seem to contain counter-evidence, but actually do not. So, in 210 *þat þat Troynisce folc; mid his fulle fultume* the final word should be stressed on the second syllable (and so it is equivalent to *Childric*, etc. – just as we would expect from a word with a non-schwa vowel in the second syllable of the root): on all the other occasions it is used, *fultume* rhymes with *son* (7296, 8196, 9919, 9928, 10306) and *luue* (11059). Similarly, in 16 out of 18 instances *ridere(n)* rhymes with *ifere(n)*, just as it does in 10326 *Heo hafden to i-feren; seouen þusend rideren* and 796 *Suard hefde to i-feren; þreo hundred ridearen* (also note the spelling here). Spelling is at fault in 339b *þa helpeð his freondene* (A.Pl. is always correctly spelt *frenden* or *frendes* elsewhere, with *frendene* otherwise occurring just once, for the expected G.Pl.), in 757b *& hem to scipe fusede* (OE *fjsan*; the spelling *fusede* occurs three times, as against 62 instances of the expected *fusde*) and in 831b *þene castel kennede* (spelt *kende* on the other seven occasions). Finally, as many as five lines (10135, 10141, 10256, 10750, 10900) contain a verse-final *hirede* < OE *hired*. However, the very frequency of this particular word (in the list above only *watere(n)* occurs as many times) in a position that should be prohibited for it suggests strongly that either the vowel was short in Layamon's language (cf. also Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §372, unless it is a slip of the pen?), or we are dealing with a derivative of ON *hirð*. For the attestations of *hired* / *hird* in South West Midland texts in early Middle English, see Richard Dance, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English: Studies in the Vocabulary of the South-West Midland Texts* (Tempe, 2003), p. 396, who generally rejects, but leaves the possibility of Old Norse derivation.

³⁹ The first syllable of *biscop* was long in Old English, cf. e.g. *Elene* 1051b *Rome bisceop*, 1072a *to þam bisceope*; *Genesis* 2103a *leoda bisceop*; etc.

postpone the comparison of the relevance of prosodic length in the *Ormulum*, *Poema Morale*, and the *Brut* until that evidence is presented.

The form of the final dip

Thus, the final dip in Layamon cannot be strong (5 exceptions in 1,800 verses). Unlike late Middle English, however, that seems to be the only restriction. The final dip is predominantly feminine, but in a corpus of 600 lines⁴⁰ I find 146 b-verses with masculine endings. The breakdown into rhythmical types is as follows:

- 28 verses definitely have three lifts
- 42 possibly have three lifts
- 76 definitely have two lifts
 - 29 of the two-lift verses are definitely heteromorphic
 - 9 are probably heteromorphic
 - 2 have no strong dips
 - 21 have two strong dips
 - 15 have two strong dips, but the second one contains a prefix (therefore, the verses are heteromorphic with the prefix licence)

It appears that not only are masculine endings perfectly admissible in the final dip, they do not show any preference to particular rhythmical patterns either, with one exception. There is a correlation between the absence of the final dip and the "two

⁴⁰ The lines come from three passages: ll. 36-235, 6000-6199 and 10534-10733.

strong dips" pattern. It is noteworthy that even when the prefix licence is applied, 21 out of 76 two-lift b-verses without a final dip contain two strong dips: this is a much higher than average ratio of non-heteromorphic b-verses in the *Brut* (cf. Table 3, p. 203).

The point can be illustrated in another way. In a random corpus of 1,000 lines,⁴¹ I find 89 b-verses that can potentially (by taking into account no additional factors) be taken as violations of the heteromorphicity requirement.⁴² As many as 73 of them are potentially irregular by virtue of having two strong dips. Of those, 42 do not have a final dip. Obviously, the ratio of 42 / 73 is much higher than the expected average incidence of b-verses without a final dip (147 / 600, above).

On its own, this statistical observation has little value. The correlation is very far from either a near-100% rule or at least a "strong tendency", and must be due to certain external factors. I will return to the matter later. It should also be remembered that the total of 146 masculine endings includes 27 verses that end in a sequence "short+any", e.g. 10555b *mid rede golde stauen* or 204 & *wiðer-heppes feola*, since resolution has been shown to function in the final lift of the line. Additional supporting evidence will be presented in due course, including the next section.

Suffixes: the strong dip

As we have seen, the status of suffixes was a significant feature of both Old English and late Middle English alliterative metre, which makes their behaviour in Layamon a matter of considerable interest. The present analysis is based on the evidence of six suffixes – *-lich* (352 instances), *-dom* (93 instances), *-scipe* (93

⁴¹ Lines 36-835 and 10534-10733.

⁴² It would seem to be too high a ratio of non-heteromorphic b-verses as compared with the results in Table 3 (p. 203). However, 15 of the gross number of 89 are made regular by the prefix licence, 23 are subject to the suffix regularity to be discussed later, about ten may qualify for three lifts, etc.

instances), *-ful* (73 instances), *-ling* (30 instances) and *-nesse* (26 instances) – in b-verses in the complete text of the *Brut*.

As usually, it is convenient to start with *-lich*. It occurs as many times as the other five together, and thus will provide a good basis for comparison. First of all, the occurrences of *-lich* can be classified grammatically: it can occur in adverbs, plural adjectives, weak adjectives or singular strong adjectives. In all of those cases, the suffix is always spelt as inflected, *-liche*.⁴³ Unlike later Middle English, this applies to the oblique cases of strong singular adjectives, e.g. 3142b *of wordliche dome*. The suffix is uninflected only in the N.S.m./f./n. and A.S.n. of strong adjectives, and so it is always spelt in Caligula, e.g.:

6141 *Hider-ward lauerd king. we þe wulleð cuðen a wunderlic þing*
12771 *nis in nare leode; nan swa lad-lic beore*

Secondly, the occurrences of *-lich* can be classified by the type of the dip, similarly to the procedure in Chapter 2. The inflected suffix can occur in three-lift verses, e.g. 10567b & *stærcliche heom leggen on*; such verses are beyond the scope of the present discussion. It can occur with other syllables within the strong dip, e.g. 92b *leofliche to wife*. In a large proportion of such verses (43 out of 120), the only other syllables in the strong dip are prefixes, e.g. 10495b *oht-liche agunnen*. In 98 instances, *-liche* forms strong dip on its own, e.g. 4878b *grundliche feire*, 2080b *wes feondliche kene*. All these patterns are quite unexceptional.

More interestingly, in 44 cases *-liche* stands in what should be a weak dip, since the verse already has a strong one, e.g. 8218b *þe wes feond-liche stærce*. In 9 other cases the dip that should be weak contains a prefix in addition to *-liche*, e.g. 3678b *and he hit*

⁴³ There are but two deviations, both in adverbs: 1133b & *laðelich him lokede on*, 13232b *kenlich swiðe*. They are evidently slips of the pen. In 10779 *þa isah Childric; þat heom ilomp liðerlic* the relevant word is an adjective. The construction is popular in Layamon (cf. also 5179, 6006, 10069, 10074, etc., with *sellic*).

wraðliche biheold. In fact, such verses with a suffix in the second strong dip constitute a very considerable proportion (up to 45%, if prefix licence is taken into account) of all non-heteromorphic b-verses in Layamon, and thus merit particular attention.

It turns out that in almost every instance concerned the verses have a masculine ending. In other words, when the second strong dip is formed by *-liche*, the pattern $x...xSxxS$ is allowed, while the pattern $x...xSxxxSx$ is not. There are but six exceptions among the 44 verses: 180b & *mid stilliche runen*, 298b *wes in armliche benden*, 8831 *ane lad-liche here* (OE *hære* "sackcloth of hair"), 11639b & *of godliche pallen*, 14734b *of þan heoueneliche kinge*, 16075b *to þan heouen-liche kinge*. At the same time, there are six verses where the ending may appear to be feminine, but which have a short syllable in the final lift:

986	heo clepeden hit Cornwaile; þurh heora sotliche cure
1007	bi-heold he þa leswa; & þene leofliche wode
1792	fainen mines lauerdes & is fæirliche cume
7998	& whæt tacneð heore fiht; & heore feond-liche gripen
9638	mid muchele richedome; þene þus reouliche here
12771	nis in nare leode; nan swa lad-lic beore ⁴⁴

Since verses ending with a sequence "short+any" follow the regularity observed for verses with unambiguously masculine endings, this is another piece of evidence in favour of resolution in Layamon.

Similar verses with the prefix in the second strong dip ($x...xSxxxpS$) show the same distribution: of the nine, six have masculine endings, one has a masculine ending due to resolution, one is ambiguous, and one violates the regularity:

244	þe king nom þat writ on hond; & he hit wrodliche bi-heold	<i>masc</i>
614	þat his lauedi Diana; hine leofliche biheolde	<i>masc</i>
1116	Locrin iseh þer Æstrild; & he heo leofliche bi-heold	<i>masc</i>

⁴⁴ OE *cyre*, *wudu*, *cyme*, *gripe*, *here*, *bera*, all with a short vowel.

3678	Cezar iseh þis writ; and he hit wraðliche biheold	<i>masc</i>
4264	Alle heo beoð i Doure; þine dæd-liche iuan	<i>masc</i>
15544	Penda to Lundene com; he wes aht-liche under-uon	<i>masc</i>
9575	and buten he of sæhnesse speken; ich wulle me wurðliche awrake	<i>resolved</i>
8012	þu lettest þine Peohtes; hine ladliche biswiken	<i>possibly resolved</i>
9357	& luuien hire mid liste; & mid leofliche bihæste ⁴⁵	<i>fem</i>

Since verses with the prefix behave identically to those without it, and since there are no similar verses where the syllable after *-liche* in the second strong dip belongs to anything other than a prefix, this is another evidence in favour of the prefix licence in Layamon.

The restriction of strong dips with *-liche* to the $x...xSxxS$ pattern is all the more peculiar since the rule cannot be generalised: in the test corpus of 1,000 lines (see fn. 41) there are but six examples of the pattern $x...xSxxS$ without a suffix in the second strong dip, as in 134b *þe on þan londe was duc* or 10667 *vre ifan alle icoren* (with resolution).

All the regularities suggest that $x...xSxxS$ with *-liche* in the second strong dip is a genuine pattern of Layamon's verse that unusually combines a syllabic constraint with a morphological one. In turn, the particular syllabic constraint is also uncharacteristic for Layamon, since as we have seen in the section on the final dip (p. 221 ff.) the feminine and masculine endings generally interchange without any limitation.

For other suffixes, the regularity is much less pronounced: the $x...xSxxS$ pattern is preferred, but $x...xSxxSx$ is too frequent to be ignored. For *-ful*, the split is four verses like 1445b *þe wes þe tir-fulle Feond* against three verses like 3015b *to þan blisfulle kinge*. The two instances with *-nesse* have a masculine ending with resolution, 574b *an are hæitnesse nome* (and similarly 1425b). For *-dom*, the $x...xSxxS$ pattern

⁴⁵ 614 *biheolde* is a scribal error, cf. the other examples and elsewhere in *Caligula*. The vowel is long in OE *swīcan* (and *beswiken* is a strong verb in the *Brut* - the preterite is always *beswac*), but influence of *swice*, *swica* n., *swicol* adj., *swician* wk.verb is very much a possibility. The line is taken as ambiguous.

occurs once, 1662b *nauest þu rich[e]-dom inoh*,⁴⁶ and the x...xSxxSx pattern twice, 2979b *for þan riche-dom of Rome*, 8811b *þesne swike-dom to dihten*. Finally, -scipe in the second strong dip is accompanied by the masculine ending on nine occasions, e.g. 177b *þat is monscipe steor*, 6949b *and heom wurð-scipe duden* (with resolution), 61b & *he hine mid monscipe biwon* (with the prefix licence) or 11813b *and his cniht-scipe forsaken* (with both resolution and the prefix licence), while six verses have a syllable in the final dip, e.g. 426b *he mid monscipe grette*. So, the total ratio for the four suffixes is but 16:11, as opposed to a much more significant 45:7 for -liche.

The fact that the x...xSxxS regularity does not work for the other four suffixes is surprising, even though the absolute number of relevant verses is small. The previous sections of this Chapter should have made it progressively more clear that the popular perception of Layamon's verse as "highly irregular" or being nothing more than "rhythmical prose" is very far from the truth. At the same time, the perception is partially correct in the sense that few rhythmical regularities in the *Brut* have no exceptions: 90% is the usual figure. The reasons such figures are used to posit "rules" to be employed in subsequent discussions are twofold: first, a 90% regularity is difficult to brush aside, and is generally impossible to account for by a combination of external factors (cases of scholarly blindness excepted); secondly, the "rules" serve as a foundation for future observations and refinement of our knowledge of the metre. Without such conditional "rules" the progress is impossible. The hope is that as time goes on and the metrical puzzle is built up, the exceptional verses will receive explanation: the history of Old English metrics is a good example.

There is evidence to show that the x...xSxxS pattern is not an artefact of the distribution of one particular suffix. In the test corpus of 1,000 lines (see fn. 41), seven verses with a suffixal syllable (excluding the five suffixes analysed in detail above) or

⁴⁶ The manuscript spelling is *rich-dom*, but this is one of only three times the historically correct *riche* is spelt *rich* in Caligula, including in compounds. Clearly an error. Rhymes also testify against the other two instances.

the second syllable of the root in the second strong dip have the masculine ending, and so conform to the pattern:

52b	3eon þare wint re de sæ	
79b	þat wes of Tus k anne duc	
378	for he wes his leod e ne swike	(<i>resolution</i>)
448	& beon þere leod e ne king	
461b	þat us is sele s t to don	
586b	þe weren his wis e ste men	
621b	þar is wild e rne muchel	(<i>resolution</i>)

The only exception is 630b & *hou þe læfdi him sæide*.

In sum, we can speak at least of the *tendency* for the pattern $x...xSfXS-$ (where "f" is a suffixal syllable or the second syllable of the root) to have the masculine ending. The pattern can hardly be dismissed for two reasons: 1) as pointed out before, verses of the $x...xSfXS(x)$ pattern constitute up to 50% of all non-heteromorphic b-verses in the test passages of the *Brut*; 2) the overall incidence of masculine ending in the pattern ($x...xSfXS$ rather than $x...xSfXSx$) is 68 out of 87 – at least five times more than the average frequency of masculine endings in the poem.

The pattern explains the correlation observed above (p. 221 ff.) between the absence of the final dip and the "two strong dips" pattern. It was the only rhythmical preference observed for verses with masculine endings, and since it has now been accounted for, we may confidently say that there are no cases where the form of the final dip is the driving factor behind the rhythm of Layamon's verse.

What is the best way to describe the pattern, though? What is its relevant feature – the presence of a suffix, or perhaps the position of a word boundary? It looks like the second answer is preferable. In all the verses, with the single exception of 461b *þat us is selest to don*, both syllables in the second strong dip belong to the same word as the first lift, so that the word boundary falls only before the second lift ($x...xSxx\#S$, with the

placement of word boundaries before the first lift irrelevant), e.g. 586b *þe weren his wiseste men*. Since the pattern $x...xSx\#x\#S$ (*þat us is selest to don*) – which is perfectly possible linguistically – is avoided, the relevant feature seems to be the position of the word boundary: $x...xSxx\#S$.

The conclusion is indirectly supported by another set of verses with *-liche* which has not been mentioned yet. In a number of instances, *-liche* in the second strong dip is preceded by a disyllabic root, so that the dip contains three syllables rather than two, all belonging to the same word:

325b	þe wes wnderliche deop
1650b	heo hit bluðeliche vnder-foð
4390b	him wes wunder-liche læð
5161b	þe wæs wunderliche deop
5983b	& þisne wunderliche ræm
7505b	buten hi3end-liche ich beo dæd
7990b	& þat wunderliche fæht
8093b	þat hit wunderliche. born
8764b	for þis is witerliche soð
9699b	þæt nulle hi3enliche cume ⁴⁷ (<i>resolution</i>)

Note that all the verses have a masculine ending, and so conform to the regularity. The dip still contains a suffix, but its position is different, and so the word boundary-based interpretation is once again preferable.

⁴⁷ In the second lift: OE *cyme*. In the first lift: OE *blīðelice*, EME *hīgendlice* ~ OE *hīgian*. 8764b *witer-* (< ON *vittr*) is ambiguous: the vowel may well be short, and *witer-* is the usual spelling in Caligula. In this case, the line should belong with the standard $x...xSxxS$ type (with resolution and a disyllabic second dip). However, on two occasions the manuscript has *witter-*, and so the word follows the prosodic variation of native words of the same structure (*bit(e)r-* / *bitt(e)r-*) (see R.D. Fulk, 'Ambisyllabicity in Old English: A Contrary View,' in *Insights in Germanic Linguistics II: Classic and Contemporary*, ed. Irmengard Rauch and Gerald. F. Carr (Berlin, 1997), 29-45).

Suffixes: compound stress

The regularity observed in the previous section can hardly be interpreted simply by a reference to a certain degree of linguistic and therefore metrical stress that suffixes may have (so that the heavy second strong dip is "compensated" by the absence of the final dip). In the absence of rhythmical patterns with similar types of constraints, that would mean explaining unknown with the unknown – and logically trivial. Forestalling the conclusions of the chapter, I can say that there seem to be no rhythmical regularities that would require a specific mention of suffixes in their definitions. On the other hand, we will come across another regularity that depends upon word boundaries.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that suffixes as such present no interest in Layamon: on the contrary, there are several important points to be made. First of all, suffixes can carry metrical stress, so long as they satisfy the requirement of "a non-inflectional syllable with a vowel which is not schwa". Most of them do, and thus words like *sarinesse* or *wihtful* are prosodically equivalent to *Toteneis* or *Childric*. Often this happens under the "compound stress", that is when the first lift of the half-line is occupied by the root of the same word, cf. for *-nesse*:

4684 ah sone þer-æfter. him com særinesse
 4732 For nare 3itsunge; for nare 3iuernesse
 11339 inne griðe & inne friðe; in alle uæ3ernesse
 12902 & sæt & bi-heold æuere; ænne burinæsse

Although in all of these cases the pre-suffixal stem is polysyllabic, clashing metrical stresses within the same word are by no means unacceptable. For example, 6 of the 22 verses with compound stress on a suffix have clashing stress:

4599 he hætte al þa ræi3e; and alle þa rad-fulle

223 þat he an wriht makede; al mid wisdome
 11089 he sette grið he sette frið; and alle freodomes
 11646 Wel wurðe þan monne; þe mid wisdome
 14550 and þer wuneden þeouwe; inne þral-dome
 937 þer wes muchel folc; at þere wrastlinge⁴⁸

The pre-suffixal sequences with a short vowel occur another 13 times: in addition to 11339 *uæ3ernesse*, 12902 *burinæsse*, there are 12445 *balufulle*, 2058 *swikedome* (5 times total), 4912 *kinedome* (5 times total). Thus, if resolution is functional in this position too, there remain only three verses where compound stress occurs in a *x...xSxSx* rather than *x...xSSx* pattern:

4684 ah sone þer-æfter. him com særinesse
 4732 For nare 3itsunge; for nare 3iuernesse
 9958 mid ræh3ere strengðe; & mid riche-dome

On the other hand, if resolution is not functional here, most of the verses have the form *x...xSxSx*.

Evidently, a larger corpus is required to choose the correct interpretation. In the first 1,000 lines of the *Brut*, there are 30 b-verses with compound stress.⁴⁹ In 20 of them, the pre-suffixal sequence or the first stem of a compound is unambiguously monosyllabic:

57 & heuede Eneas þe duc; mid his **driht**-folcke
 165 & he iwende sorhful; ouer **sea**-streames⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Note that 223b, 4599b and 11089b may not belong here: the first stress on *al(le)* produces normal patterns.

⁴⁹ Lines 57, 138, 165, 222, 223, 235, 256, 263, 271, 284, 285, 291, 365, 391, 421, 452, 487, 540, 542, 555, 584, 669, 686, 694, 741, 799, 851, 866, 937, 969.

⁵⁰ The pattern without a clashing stress may appear to occur once, in 421b *al his leode-ferde*. A wider search turns out that the latter compound is also spelt this way in 2479b *mid his leode-ferde*. However, on the other 52 occasions *leod* in compounds is spelt as monosyllabic, whatever metrical position it is in: 10339 *leod-ferde*, 1025 *leod-folke*, etc. Therefore, *leode-ferde* is exceptional on several counts, and should be treated as scribal error. Emended, 421b *al his leode-ferde* joins all the other verses in the first 1,000 lines of the *Brut* in demonstrating that compound stress is not permitted in the *x...xSxSx* pattern.

In the other 10, the corresponding sequence has a short vowel:

138	witen he wolde; þurh þa wiþer -craftes
235	Leouere heom his to libben; bi þan wode -roten

Also, 256 *wored-strencðe*, 285 *bale-siðe*, 365 *quale-huse*, 391 *wiðer-winnan*, 452 *kine-londe*, 487 *wiðere-craftes*, 741 *kine-londe*, 851 *wode-londe*.⁵¹

The problem can also be approached from another direction. In the basic passage of 200 lines (ll. 10534-10733) discussed in first part of this Chapter, there are 19 (or rather 12, if resolution is taken into account) b-verses and 21 a-verses of the form x...xSxSx, e.g. 10645a *swulche deor an hulle*, 10539b *& his cnihtes alle*, 10732 *into þan scipen grunde*. None of them feature compound stress. At the same time, in the x...xSSx pattern within the same passage word boundaries occur in every possible configuration.⁵²

It should therefore be concluded that it is the three verses with the x...xSxSx pattern that are exceptional: 4684b *him com særinesse*, 4732 *for nare 3iuernesse*, 9958 *& mid riche-dome*. In Layamon, compound stress is not permitted without clashing stress.

An important corollary is that for the first time resolution has been shown to function outside of the final position. Just as with the disyllabic final dips (pp. 217-221), the evidence of the "minimal metrical pairs" is very clear-cut. Also, just as with disyllabic final dips, there are a few exceptions. It would be tempting to say that both in

⁵¹ The final <e> in 487 *wiðere*- is unacceptable both historically and in terms of the Caligula spelling (only *wiþer*- elsewhere). Read *wiðer-craftes*.

⁵² It should perhaps be pointed out that there *are* words that make the x...xSxSx pattern with compound stress linguistically possible. Besides *særinesse*, *3ifer nesse* and *richedome*, Layamon's vocabulary includes *hæðen esse*, *hersum nesse*, *idel nesse*, *rihtwis nesse*, *wilderness e*, *Cristindom*, *halidom*, *martirdom*, *unwisdom*. But for the three exceptional instances given above (ll. 4684, 4732, 9958), these words never occur with compound stress. Also, there are dozens of compounds of the required prosodic structure - but none of them occur with compound stress in the test passage.

the case of *broþere*, *oðere* and *lapere* verse-finally and that of *særinesse*, *3iuernesse* and *riche-dome* in the compound stress environment we are dealing with Middle English shortening in trisyllabic words (cf. fn. 37). That may well be so, and it is certainly noteworthy that none of the exceptions contain a consonant cluster. However, it should be emphasised that such shortening must have been a very occasional phenomenon in the language of Layamon – otherwise it becomes very hard to explain why potential candidates for the Middle English shortening in trisyllables were so strenuously avoided in the relevant metrical positions.

Finally, compound stress with a syllable between the lifts (-SxS-) is still prohibited when the final dip is absent (x...xSxS). The only example of the pattern is 66b & *he wes redesful*.⁵³ Given the frequency of forms like *Cristindom* verse-finally (e.g. 7325b *þe luuede þene Cristindom*), the absence of the pattern is clearly significant. At the same time, the pattern x...xSxS without compound stress is not infrequent (e.g. 10729b *al þas londes folc*).

Suffixes: primary linguistic stress

The second environment where suffixes (or any non-initial non-schwa syllables in a word that contains several such syllables) may carry metrical stress is the end of a verse in which the first lift falls on a different word, e.g. 14666 *and for-saken Godes mæsse*; *and luuien hæðenese*. The difference from the pattern discussed in the previous section is that the suffix here attracts the primary *linguistic* stress as well metrical stress. As in the example just given, the stress shift is often supported by rhyme. The shift is

⁵³ The corpus: all b-verses in *Caligula* (for the six suffixes listed on p. 222); ll. 10534-10733 (for compounds).

also necessary for many such verses to have the required strong medial dip as well as to prevent the disallowed strong final dip.

The stress shifts whether or not the final dip is present:

6094 ah he wunede inne Rome; mid muchele riche-dome
 14665 buten he libben wolden; his lif in þral-dome
 6354 & 3et heo þencheð ufele don; to fallen þæne Cristindom
 8424 þu scalt swiðe wel don; vnder-uoh Cristindom
 14047 Ich æm þin a3en mon; & iseh þisne swike-dom⁵⁴

The metrical stress on the suffix here is beyond reasonable doubt. However, is it not possible for the root to retain its primary linguistic, and thus metrical stress, so that the verses would simply have three lifts? Such interpretation is undesirable on two counts.

First, it would produce a significant number of verses ending in -SS – cf. 14047b & *iseh þisne swike-dom* above (with resolution). The category would include, for example, almost all occurrences of the suffix *-ling* (*Bruttene deorling*, rhyming with *king*, etc.). However, such termination is extremely rare, if genuinely attested at all, in three-lift verses.

In order to solve the latter difficulty, it may be suggested that in those verses where the suffix is uninflected (or more generally, where the post-radical sequence is monosyllabic), it does not receive metrical stress at all, so that there is no shift of the linguistic stress. Indeed, the strong dip in verses like & *iseh þisne swike-dom* or *Bruttene deorling* almost never depends on the syllable in the position of *swike-* or *deor-*, so that they are free to carry metrical stress: the situation is thus markedly different from that of verses with a final dip, such as *his lif in þral-dome*, where the

⁵⁴ When inflected, *-dome* rhymes only with words like *Rome*, *sone* (adv), *idon*, *come* (past plural or subjunctive), all reflexes of OE /ō/. However, the vowel seems to be shortened in the closed syllable of the uninflected form: *-dom* rhymes with *mon*, *on* < OE *mon*, *on*; *don*, *com* < OE *dōn*, *cwōm*; *gon* < OE *gān*. It is not a feature of suffixal development, since the same difference in rhyming is true for *com* (past singular grade) as opposed to *come* (past plural grade).

stress shift is often essential for heteromorphicity. However, this suggestion would still not account for verses like *his lif in þral-dome*: since the post-radical sequence is polysyllabic, the suffix or second stem should be stressed, and the resultant pattern is $xSxSSx$; but the $-SSx$ termination is also rare in three-lift verses, although not to the same degree as than $-SS$. Problematically as well, the suggestion to leave *-ling* in *Bruttene deorling* unstressed would entail operation of the rhyme between metrically stressed and unstressed sequences (*deorling* here rhyming with *king*, and hundreds of similar verses in the *Brut*). This solution is not inconceivable, especially considering the non-structural role that rhyme plays in Layamon's metre. Nevertheless, the fact that the "immobility of primary stress" hypothesis does not account for the *his lif in þral-dome* type makes it difficult to claim three metrical stresses for verses like *to fallen þæne Cristindom* ($-SxS$) either – purely because such claim would go against Occam's razor. As for the ambiguous *Bruttene deorling* pattern, the possibility of rhyme between metrically stressed and unstressed sequences will be discussed below.

The second general objection against having two metrical stresses on the same word in this rhythmical pattern is the practice of contemporary iambic verse, most importantly of Orm, who feels no compunction about metrically subordinating the first syllable capable of linguistic stress to the second one: 19002 *o þiss Goddspelless lare*, 19014 *7 wiþþ mannshipe wurrþedd*, 19053 *forr þatt itt dra3heþþ a33 dunnwarrd*, 19125 *7 he comm inntill all mannkinn*.

In sum, it appears fairly certain that verses like *and luuien hæðenese* have only two metrical stresses, the second of them on the suffix. In an accentual verse, the situation where the suffix is metrically stressed while the root is not can only be achieved by shifting the primary linguistic stress.

Suffixes: the weak dip

As shown in Chapter 2 (pp. 142-153), in late Middle English alliterative verse non-schwa syllables, including suffixes, are disallowed in a monosyllabic dip. A similar, although not identical situation obtains in Layamon.

Suffixes occur only rarely in the weak medial dip. Of the six suffixes used for much of the previous discussion, four – *-ful*, *-lic*, *-dom* and *-ling* – are monosyllabic and so can potentially form the weak dip.⁵⁵ There are but seven verses where they do:

8503b	þat is a god-ful king
5223	þes wes a sellich gume
8999	a swiðe seol-lic þing
12771	nan swa lad-lic beore
1400b	& þene kinedom æke
6787b	& þene kine-dom nome
9905b	& þisne kinedom walden ⁵⁶

Considering that the four suffixes occur over 550 times in the b-verses of the *Brut*, the pattern is definitely rare, and therefore might have been avoided.

The impression is confirmed by a continuous examination of the first 4,000 lines of the poem, which contain only three genuine examples of the pattern:

595b	a swiðe wunsum fur
1072b	þat wes an leodisc king
2010b	þe mihte þis kine-lond walden ⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The corpus for the suffixes is the same as stated in the beginning of discussion (p. 222), i.e. all b-verses of the Caligula text: *-lic* (352 instances), *-dom* (93 instances), *-ful* (73 instances), *-ling* (30 instances).

⁵⁶ Another verse, 602b *þurh þine wihtful craft*, is not a genuine example, since it is the only time in the Caligula text the adjective in the construction {*þurh* + POSS. / DEM.PRON. + ADJ + *craft(e)*} is uninflected (cf. ll. 1453, 3797, 4536 (*þurh his wit-fulne cræfte*), and similarly 5096 (*þurh niðfulne craft*)).

⁵⁷ Lines 679b *þer heo leof folc funden* and 2323b *& mine leoue-mon leden* should probably be interpreted as having three lifts; three-lift verses quite often contain non-schwa syllables in a weak dip. Line 1326b *wes al þis leodisc folc* is a scribal error, both historically and with regard to the Caligula spelling; read *leodisce* (cf. e.g. ll. 2759b, 2886b, 3950b, 13248b, and indeed 6481b *al þis leodisce folc*). Line 3482b *and blæð-fest king* lacks a strong dip.

There is one instance of the suffix *-sum*, the suffix *-isc*, and the second compound stem of *kine-lond*. Checking *-sum* and *-isc* in the whole text of *Caligula*, we find that 595b is the only genuine example of *-sum* in this position (which otherwise occurs 25 times in the b-verse), while there are two other examples of *-isc* (which occurs 96 times):

12552b þat wes a Brittisc king
14887b þat wæs a Bruttisc eorl

2010b *kine-lond* is the only compound to occur in this position in the first 4,000 lines. The *Brut* has over 350 instances of *lond*-compounds (including *Irlond*, etc.), about half of them in the b-verse, but none are rhythmically parallel to 2010b.

Thus, whatever angle is used to examine the evidence, it appears that non-schwa syllables are very rare in the medial weak dip. It is also noteworthy that all the twelve exceptional verses fall into one of two categories. Eight contain the indefinite article:

8503b þat is a god-ful king
5223 þes wes a sellich gume
8999 a swiðe seol-lic þing
12771 nan swa lad-lic beore
595b a swiðe wunsum fur
1072b þat wes an leodisc king
12552b þat wes a Brittisc king
14887b þat wæs a Bruttisc eorl

It is not for the first time that we come across the possibility of a weak adjectival inflection after the indefinite article (cf. Chapter 2, fn. 43), even though the *Caligula* spelling contains no examples to support the hypothesis.⁵⁸ Note also that if the

⁵⁸ I do not find any examples. Two are quoted by Hoffmann (*Das grammatische Genus in La3amons 'Brut'* (Halle, 1909), p. 41): 8813 *he wes an hæðene gume; ut of Sax-londe i-cume*, which can also be G.Pl., and 7631a *Pa wes þer an aþele eorl* - but *aþele* often retains the ending of *-ja-/jō-* adjectives in the

adjectives are indeed inflected, the eight verses fall into the $x...xSfXS$ pattern: all of them have the required masculine ending (*gume*, *beore* resolved; see pp. 222-229 on the pattern).

The other four verses have a particular pattern, $x...xSr fSx$, with resolution in the first lift and a monosyllabic final dip:

1400b	& þene kinedom æke
6787b	& þene kine-dom nome
9905b	& þisne kinedom walden
2010b	þe mihte þis kine-lond walden

Since there is no comparable evidence for different lexical items of an identical prosodic and/or morphological structure, the repetition of the pattern might be accidental.⁵⁹ In any case, the lines stand alone, and it seems quite clear that non-schwa syllables were all but prohibited in the weak medial dip of Layamon's verse.

Just as in late Middle English alliterative poetry, there is only one suffix, *-est*, that occasionally does not comply to the rule, even though 8 exceptions out of 295 instances in the b-verse is not too great a number either:

283	swa heom læðest wes
3949	swa him alre laðest beo
10201	þe wes him leofest monnen
13231	alre swiðest ærne
13738	þer heo þihkest weoren
14972	of alre laðest monne
15619	& him leofuest monne
15823	swa þe arle leofest bið

The crucial difference from late Middle English verse with respect to non-schwa syllables in the weak dip is that in Layamon such syllables seem to be allowed in the

strong singular. For the evidence in late Middle English alliterative verse, see at various points in the section on final *-e* in Chapter 2, in particular fn. 43.

⁵⁹ See, however, below, fn. 66.

final dip. Suffixes often occur here: there are 16 instances of *-ling* (*Bruttene deorling*, etc.), 10 instances of *-lic*, 16 instances of *-dom*:

12170 and Gonwæis Orcaneie king; ut-la3en deor-ling
 14203 Ða quene læi inne Eouwerwic; næs heo næuere swa sarlic
 5123 Seuerius wende anan; to hæbbene þisne kinedom

Besides verses with these suffixes, in the whole text of the *Brut* there are at least 280 b-verses that end in a non-schwa syllable immediately preceded by the (first) syllable of the root, or by the resolved sequence (*dunward*, *naping*, *kinelond*, *hondsæx*, *unfrið*, *cheping*, *stiward*, *Oswald*, *Merlin*, *Cezar*, etc.).⁶⁰ Native words constitute about half of the instances, e.g.:

689 he wes swa kene he wes swa strong; swilc hit weore an eotand
 1262 Seoððen heo 3ef Madan an hond; al his fader kine-lond
 2826 Ðat faht bi-gon at mid-niht; & [laste] þat hit wes dæiliht
 3610 and Cezar rad 3eond Flaundre lond. an scewede þære sæ-strond
 6568 & ne wrað þu noht; Sæint Benediht. ne do þu him nan vn-riht
 7468 & þus hailede him on; þe swic-fulle wimman
 7497 & Vortigerne þe swikele king; ilæfde þare læsing
 8290 to-wardes Gode he was god; he wes an hali biscop

It is noticeable that the words in question almost invariably rhyme.⁶¹ In fact, only 12 out of 280 verses do not feature a rhyme or at least an assonance. Coupled with the observation that non-schwa syllables do not occur in the weak medial dip, the rhyming may lead to the conclusion that in 280 verses like 7497b *ilæfde þare læsing* or 13020b *Bruttene deorling* there is actually no final dip at all: rather, the final syllable carries metrical stress. In this case, *Bruttene deorling*, declared ambiguous in the previous section, joins the rhythmical types *his lif in þral-dome* and *to fallen þæne*

⁶⁰ More often than not, such verses have three lifts. Both three-lift and two-lift verses are discussed indiscriminately in the section.

⁶¹ On average, rhyme occurs in about 20% of Layamon's lines.

Cristindom in suggesting that the primary linguistic stress does shift in certain metrical positions. Consequently, there remain no restrictions on the stress shift rule proposed in the previous section.

It should be remembered that rhyme is not a structural element of Layamon's metre, and its evidence is thus no more than collaborative. However, the fact that regular rhyme is found precisely at the points where there are independent reasons to suspect metrical stress suggests that the poet employed rhyme as a guide to highlight the stress shift required by his prosody. That is particularly evident in Layamon's treatment of foreign words. There are but three in the relevant position:

6313 þat is on Latin ful iwis; þat me sæið Pax vobis
 12227 of Rome he wes legat; and of þan hirede prelat
 14840 he was icleopped legat; of þissen londe he wæs primat

For all of them he manages to find rhyme, difficult as it is in the case of *primat*. Similar problems must have arisen with foreign names, especially the large group of those in *-us*. In almost every single instance (90 out of 95) Layamon procures the rhyme; the only way to do that in most cases is to put a similar foreign name at the end of the a-verse:

17 An-oþer he nom on Latin; þe makede Seinte Albin
 858 þer hefde Brutus; enne mæi haihte Turnus
 989 Gurmund draf out þe Brutuns; & his folc wes ihaten Sexuns
 1347 Brutus Uært Escut. Margadud; Sisilius. Regin; Bladud
 2695 uppen ure godd wel idon. þe is icliped Dagon
 3698 þider com tiðende þat him wæs sær; þat icumen wes Iulius Cezar
 4247 Androgeus forð-riht anan; sende his sune Cenan
 5324 þe oðer wes icleoped þus; Liuius Gallus
 5705 & dæd his þe riche Leonin. & his broðer Marin
 6058 Heo grætten Maximian; and talden him of Melgan
 6291 þus ferde ful iwis; Melga & Wanis
 9382 Sone þe armite com in; þa ifunde he Mærlin
 12662 of Babilone Mæptisas; of Spaine þe kaisere Meodras
 13614 þe eorl of Chastre Curselein; and eorl of Baðe þe hehte Urgein

Yet another evidence in support of the stress shift is provided by the suffix *-est*. As mentioned above, it is the only suffix to appear with any consistency in the weak medial dip either in late Middle English alliterative verse or in Layamon. A possible reason for that is that the suffix vowel could sometimes be weakened to schwa (to replace the short /e/). The suffix often occurs at the end of b-verse in disyllabic words (e.g. 7030 *Pa sæide Hængest; cnihten alre fæirest*, 92 instances total), but in contrast to other non-schwa syllables, it rhymes in only a quarter of such verses (instead of almost 100%), and even so almost all such rhymes are in the formulaic phrases with *Hengest*, as in the just-mentioned 7030. Since *-est*, which from its appearance in the medial dip we do not expect to behave as a normal non-schwa syllable, does not usually rhyme in the relevant position at the line end, the consistent rhyming of all the unambiguous non-schwa syllables appears even more significant, and the linguistic stress shift in verses like *Bruttene deorling* even more likely.

Overall, it seems quite certain that non-schwa syllables were prohibited in the weak dip in Layamon just as they were in late Middle English alliterative verse. There is as good as no evidence in the medial dip, and the potential examples in the final dips turn out to be lifts in reality. The chief difference between Layamon and late Middle English poems is that in the latter the monosyllabic final dip became obligatory and therefore there remained no place for verses like Layamon's *Bruttene deorling* with its stress shift and the resultant masculine ending.⁶²

⁶² The requirement does not apply in late Revival poems such as *Golagros and Gawain*, where the restriction on non-schwa syllables in weak dips was relaxed again, cf. Chapter 2, fn. 74.

Suffixes: resolution

The final question to consider is the possibility of resolution in suffixes and, more generally, in positions other than the (primary?) metrical stress. The obvious candidate for the examination is *-scipe*: in all probability the only candidate. Two other potentially suitable suffixes, *-liche* and *-dome*, appear to have a long vowel for the following reasons:

1. *-lic* was shortened in early Old English (hence *-licu*, etc. in the relevant forms).⁶³ However, in later texts the vowel became consistently long due to analogy.⁶⁴
2. *-li3* and *-dom* are long in Orm (e.g. 10269 *baldeli3*, 8974 *wissdom*).
3. In Layamon, *-liche* rhymes with *riche* (4518, etc.), *dich[e]* (7967, OE *dīc*), and *Eoferwic* (9136, OE *wīc*); *-dome* rhymes with *Rome* (2612, etc.), *come* (4636, etc., past plural stem), and *sone* (4939, etc., OE *sōna*); all the words have a historically long vowel.

The most significant feature of the rhythmical distribution of *-scipe* is that it can form the strong dip without any additional syllables (22 out of 92 instances in b-verse):

4151 & æfter muchel weorld-scome; wurð-scipe wurhten
10175 mid his mon-weorede; his monscipe halden

If the suffix is resolved here, the resulting pattern, xSfSx, is hardly paralleled: 3482b *and blæð-fest king* is the only aberration of that kind. Therefore, *-scipe* is either long (in contrast to Old English or Orm) or resolution does not apply in a dip.

⁶³ Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §356 and §642 fn.3.

⁶⁴ R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, pp. 234-5 and elsewhere.

There are four instances of a verse-final *-scipe*:

6791	& hat heom wel bi-witen; al ure wurð-scipen
6737	ich eow wulle wel biwiten; mid muchelere wurðscipe
6904	Ah of eou ich wulle iwiten; þurh soðen eouwer wurð-scipen
6950	þene feorðe dæi i þere wike; heo 3ifuen him to wurð-scipe

The lines suggest that in Layamon, just as in Old English or Orm, the vowel of *-scipe* is short, since in all four it rhymes with a historically short vowel: OE *bewitan*, *wicu*.

Thus, the only possible conclusion for verses like *his monscipe halden* is that resolution is not applicable in dips. However, resolution must be applicable in the four instances where *-scipe* is verse-final – otherwise the rhyme with *bewiten* and *wicu*, which should be resolved under metrical stress, would have been impossible. Therefore, the verse-final *-scipe* is metrically stressed, which is another piece of evidence to support the stress shift advocated above, pp. 232-241. On the other hand, the consistently rhyming verse-final *-scipe* adds more evidence (this time in a purely numerical sense) to the consistently rhyming verses with non-schwa syllables in the "final dip" (actually, the final lift) discussed on pp. 238-240. Once again, we see that different types of regularities – resolution, rhyme, occurrence or non-occurrence in certain metrical positions, etc. – mutually reinforce each other and form a tight, coherent and non-contradictory picture of Layamon's verse.

There is another regularity to support the conclusion that resolution functions only under metrical stress. In the four examples above, the primary linguistic and therefore metrical stress is shifted onto the verse-final *-scipe*, while the radical syllable belongs to the dip. However, unlike *-dome*, *-nesse*, *-fulle*, the potentially resolved *-scipe* never occurs with compound stress: there are no verses with *-scipe* to parallel 11646b *þe mid wisdom*. The reason should be clear by now: since *-scipe* must be resolved under metrical stress, a verse **þe mid monscipe* would have the xxSS pattern,

inadmissible in the *Brut*;⁶⁵ at the same time, *mid muchelere wurðscipe* is fine:

xSxxxS.⁶⁶

Rhythmical patterns of two-lift b-verses

The first part of this Chapter presented b-verse types of the *Brut* from the late Middle English perspective (pp. 188-211). It turned out that the absolute majority of two-lift b-verses were heteromorphic and so corresponded to the models proposed by Duggan and Cable for the poems of the Revival. The time has come to look more closely at particular rhythmical sub-types of the b-verse.

The following rhythmical types of two-lift b-verses occur in the 200-line passage (Caligula ll. 10534-10733) analysed in the first part of the Chapter:

Table 5.

Pattern	Instances	Example
Sx...xSx	66	10541b <i>dælde his ferde</i> 10543b <i>ibroide of stele</i> (prefix licence, 6 instances)
xSx...xSx	50	10546b <i>mid hosen of stele</i>

⁶⁵ There are examples of x...xSS b-verses in Layamon, but they are very rare and few of them sustain scrutiny. See below, pp. 243-246.

⁶⁶ As discussed on pp. 222-229, verses with *-scipe* provide a considerable share (6 out of 19) of exceptions to the rule that "b-verses with two strong dips and no word boundaries before or within the second strong dip should have a masculine ending": x...xSxx#S. Instead, verses with *-scipe* often have a feminine ending: x...xSxx#Sx. However, if *-scipe* is resolved (and therefore, presumably, stressed) here, the six verses have the form x...xSfSx (426b *he mid monscipe grette*; 1897b & *is cnihtscipe tælden*; 3858b & *mine freond-scipe habben*; 4958b *þa his monscipe uðe*; 6888b & *of his freond-scipe rohten*; 11761b *and his mon-scipe bruken*). At the same time, the only genuine exceptions to the rule "no non-schwa syllables in the medial weak dip" listed in the section on the weak dip (p. 235 ff.: 1400b & *þene kinedom æke*; 6787b & *þene kine-dom nome*; 9905b & *þisne kinedom walden*; 2010b *þe mihte þis kine-lond walden*) have precisely the same form. However, on the one hand, the suffixes must be stressed, otherwise this narrowly defined pattern would contradict both the "no non-schwa in a weak dip" and "no resolution in a weak dip" rules, which have been shown to be incorporated in many observable regularities of Layamon's verse; on the other hand, if the suffixes are stressed, the verses have three lifts - and a pattern hardly paralleled in genuinely three-lift verses (x...xSSSx). Another problem is that the examples occur only for two suffixes, *-dom* and *-scipe*. Thus, even if the rare pattern is genuine, its relation to the system of Layamon's verse is unclear. A possible solution is a mid-verse stress shift (& *þisne kinedom walden*: xxxxxSSx), but there is hardly any way to test such a hypothesis.

x...xSxSx	16	10671b <i>þat wes þas cnihtes broðer</i> 10641b <i>heore sund is awemmed</i> (prefix licence, 2 instances)
x...xSSx	19	10553b <i>ænne sceld deore</i> 10732b <i>into þan scipen grunde</i> (resolution, 6 instances)
x...xSxS	10	10609b <i>swa bið þe wilde bar</i> 10688b <i>þat he a-midde to-clæf</i> (prefix licence, 5 instances)
Other	14	(see below)
Total	175	

The 14 verses in the "other" category include:

Table 6.

Pattern	Instances	List of verses
x...xSxx#S (see pp. 222-229)	3	10697b & <i>al mi drihtliche uolc</i> 10552b <i>ælchen oðere vnlic</i> (prefix licence; the verse can also be taken as three-lift; another option is shortening in trisyllabics, then the verse belongs to the x...xSxS type) 10601b <i>swa me scal a luðere don</i> (shortening in trisyllabics possible, then x...xSxS)
No strong dips	3	10540b <i>beornes sturne</i> 10549b <i>hæh of stele</i> 10692 <i>þe aðele king</i>
x...xSx...xSx	4	10667b <i>vre ifan alle icoren</i> (possibly three-lift) 10645b <i>swulche fisces in wælle</i> (possibly three-lift) 10568b <i>ure cun & ure riche</i> 10727 <i>of his cume nane custe</i> (possibly three-lift)
xSx...xS	3	10718b <i>þas word hafede isæid</i> (possibly three-lift) 10733b <i>þat Childric of heom neore war</i> (possibly three-lift) 10592b <i>stiðimoden king</i> (possibly three-lift)
x...xSS	1	10629 <i>nu him is al swa þere gat; þer he þene hul wat.</i>
Total	14	

The pattern x...xSS is very rare (as well as another possible interpretation of the line, SxxxSS). This particular verse might have the feminine variant of *hul* (cf. *Otho þar he þane hulle wot*);⁶⁷ however, in *Caligula hul* is always masculine and so uninflected in

⁶⁷ For gender variation in this word in late Old English and early Middle English, see Peter Kitson, 'On Old English Nouns of More Than One Gender,' *English Studies* 71 (1990), 185-221.

the accusative. More in keeping with the Caligula practice would be to propose *bi-wat* (cf. 6502b *þe þat munster biwat*).

Thus, with the exception of several rare and often unreliably attested patterns, two-lift b-verses in the *Brut* belong to one of five rhythmical types:

(1) xSx...xSx

(2) x...xSxSx

(3) Sx...xSx

(4) x...xSxS

(5) x...xSSx

Types (1) and (2) are similar to the basic b-verse types in late Middle English poems (monosyllabic final dip, one strong dip either initially or medially), while the three others are reminiscent of types A, B, and C in Old English verse. Patterns (3) and (5) are also admissible in late Middle English, but not (4), since the zero final dip is all but prohibited.

Probably the most notable thing about the list is the absence of patterns xSx...xS or Sx...xS: it would seem that the medial strong dip cannot combine with the masculine ending. The types are not totally unattested. Table 6 above contains only three examples, both unreliable because likely to contain three rather than two lifts. However, a check into two further passages of 200 lines (ll. 36-235 and 6000-6199) turns up thirteen instances of the pattern (x)Sx...xS:

45	Eneas þe duc; mid ermðen at-wond
204	þar aros wale & win; & wiðer-heppes feola
212	& he heora monredne; mid monscipe on-feng
229	inne þeowe-dome; þrel-werkes doð
6025	þe strengeste þe weoren a þan dæ3en; & fulfilled mid ut-la3en
6050	swa wes þis kinelond; of folke swiðe vnstrong

6097 heo to-breken Rome wal; & eoden in ouer-al
 6103 & Gratien forð-riht anan; ahnede þisne kine-dom
 6146 þer-fore wes þe king glad; & þiderwærd wes swiðe ræd
 6150 Þus Gratien þe king; for ut an slæting
 6158 & funden þer ful iwis; Melga & Wanis
 6162 Þa weoren glade ful iwis; Melga & Wanis
 6191 & ferdan forð ful iwis. to Melga & Wanis

The pattern is still less frequent than $x...xSxS$ (25 occurrences in the same passages).

Note also that in 8 of the 13 cases (ll. 6025, 6050, 6097, 6103, 6150, 6158, 6162, 6191) there is stress shift at the end of the verse (see pp. 232-241).

Note also that in the selection of 600 lines (ll. 36-235, 6000-6199 and 10534-10733) there are 15 verses of the pattern $x...xSxpS$ and no verses of the pattern $xpSx...xS$. The distribution simultaneously suggests that the $x...xSxS$ pattern exists while $xSx...xS$ is avoided, and offers additional evidence in favour of the prefix licence in Layamon.

At this stage then it could be said that the pattern $(x)Sx...xS$ is attested, mostly in verses with stress shift, but is much less frequent than the five other rhythmical types of the b-verse.

Rhythmical patterns of three-lift b-verses

Since the passage discussed in the previous section (ll. 10534-10733) has too few three-lift verses (26) to be representative, I have added a selection of clearly three-lift verses from two other passages of 200 lines each (ll. 2001 - 2199 and 8000 - 8199). Verses from the two latter passages where the number of lifts is ambiguous are discarded, since they do not provide any clear evidence of the possible or preferred rhythmical patterns. The three passages together turn out only 58 three-lift b-verses – a

statistically insignificant number, but sufficient for the purposes of the discussion below. It may be noted that despite the small number of instances the relative frequency of rhythmical patterns in the three passages is very similar.

Rhythmical patterns of three-lift b-verses can be subdivided into three major groups:

1. Three-lift b-verses without a strong dip.

18 verses out of 58, e.g. 10657b *fif and twenti þusend*.

The initial dip is irrelevant (appears in half of the instances).

Medial dipo: the 1st and 2nd lifts often clash (6 instances); the 2nd and 3rd do not.

The final dip is always present, except for two verses with resolution: 2042

*Suððen he turnde his fare; & ferd feorh-riht to Wales and 10555 þer wes innen igrauen; mid rede golde stauen.*⁶⁸

Thus, the common pattern suggested by the verses is (x)S(x)SxSx.

2. Three-lift b-verses with one strong dip.

28 verses out of 58, e.g. 10567b & *stærcliche heom leggen on*.

The initial dip is irrelevant (appears in two thirds of the instances).

The final dip is irrelevant (appears in one third of the instances).

The 1st and 2nd lifts clash twice; there are also three verses with a clashing stress

on the 2nd and 3rd lifts: 10561b *selere cniht nenne*, 10673b & *enne cniht atwa clæf*, 10687b and *hærdliche adun sloh*.

⁶⁸ This is the first, and so far as I am aware, the only evidence against resolution in the Brut. Note that in the same set of verses, 2019b *þe haueden ferdan muchele* and 8019b *mid seouen hundred scipene* require resolution to have the same monosyllabic final dip that is dominant in the rest of the selection and seems to be violated by 2042b *Wales* and 10555 *stauen*.

Strong dips occur 4 times before the 1st lift; 19 times between the 1st and 2nd lifts; 5 times between the 2nd and 3rd lifts (as in 10567b above); never verse-finally.

Thus, in three-lift b-verses the only strong dip prefers the position between the 1st and 2nd lifts. This is different from late Middle English poems, where the only strong dip is almost thrice more frequent between the 2nd and 3rd lifts than between the 1st and 2nd lifts.

3. Three-lift b-verses with two strong dips.

12 verses out of 58, e.g. 2135b *a blisse hit stod on his hand*.

Initial dip is usually present, the final dip is usually absent. Clashing stress is rare. Strong dips are distributed freely between the three available positions (the initial, first medial, and second medial dip; the final dip is never strong), with a couple of verses having as many as three, e.g. 10669b & *he smat ænne Sexise cniht*.

Rhythmical patterns of a-verses

The following rhythmical types of two-lift a-verses occur in the basic passage analysed in the first part of the Chapter (ll. 10534-10733):

Table 7.

Pattern	Instances	Example
Sx...xSx	36	10659a <i>hælden to hulle</i> 10585a <i>igripen heore wepnen</i> (prefix licence, 1 instance)
xSx...xSx	40	10553a <i>He heng an his sweore</i>
x...xSxSx	21	10639a <i>nu he stant on hulle</i>

		10555a <i>þer wes innen igræuen</i> (prefix licence, 4 instances)
x...xSSx	7	10541a & <i>he a fif dæle</i> 10586a <i>þis isæh Arður</i> (non-schwa in final dip, 5 instances)
x...xSxS	10	10689a <i>and þere burne hod</i> 10596a <i>þat þæ heorte to-chan</i> (prefix licence, 4 instances)
Non-heteromorphic	42	
Total	156	

The biggest change from Table 5 is the greater incidence of verses outside of the five basic patterns observed for the two-lift b-verse. In particular, the pattern (x)Sx...xS is now as frequent as x...xSxS (7 and 10 instances respectively). Also, there are as many as 25 verses with two strong dips, x...xSx...xS(x), making it the third most frequent pattern in the first half-line. Only four of the 25 verses have the special form x...xSxx#S, e.g. 10560a *þene uæireste cniht*.

A similar relaxation of the tendencies and regularities observed in the b-verse is characteristic of three-lift a-verses. So, while the only strong dip still prefers the position between the 1st and 2nd lifts to that between the 2nd and 3rd (38 to 28 instances respectively), the difference is much less sharp than in the b-verse. Verses with two strong dips are not more frequent than in the b-verse (14 instances in 99 verses), but clashing stress is: the 1st and 2nd lifts clash in 14 instances out of 99, the 2nd and 3rd in another 14 instances. In the second half-line, three-lift verses without a strong dip always had a feminine ending, but there are three exceptions in the a-verse (out of 19): 2183a & *gret þu londes king*; 8093a *þe wind wæht þat fur*; 8182a & *wræken mi deore cun*.⁶⁹

Polysyllabic final dips do not occur in either two- or three-lift a-verses.

⁶⁹ Line 8182a belongs here if *wræken* is resolved, otherwise the verse has an unexceptional xSx...xSxS pattern.

Existence of three-lift verses

Do three-lift verses really exist? In an accentual metre (and Layamon's looks to be accentual), it should be possible to suppress the stress on one of the full words. At its most relaxed, the rule would allow for any two of the full words to be stressed, irrespective of their prosodic weight and the syntactic structure of the phrase. Clearly, the first necessary condition then is that the rhythmical patterns of what appear to be three-lift verses should be reducible to those of the unambiguously two-lift ones by a simple suppression of one of the "lifts", e.g.:

10621b	mid seoue þusend cnihtes	xSrxxSx
10567b	& stærcliche heom leggen on	xSxxxxxS

In the selection of 157 three-lift verses discussed on pp. 246-250 (99 a-verses, 58 b-verses), there are only 13 (4 a-verses, 9 b-verses) that do not turn into a heteromorphic two-lift verse if the medial lift is suppressed, and three of them can be brought into line by suppression of the initial lift instead, e.g.:

10669	& he smat ænne Sexise cniht	xxSxxxxxS
8061	þene ældre broðer a-nan	xxxxSxpS

In practice, since the polysyllabic final dip is disallowed in three-lift verses just as it is in the two-lift ones, the only three-lift lines that are not automatically reduced to a heteromorphic pattern by the removal of the medial lift are those with a strong initial lift: but the latter is quite rare (see pp. 246-250). Nine irregular b-verses out of 58 (i.e. 15%) is a greater ratio than we would expect (only 3% of two-lift verses in *Caligula* are

non-heteromorphic, see p. 203), but the figure is still very far from being a conclusive proof that the three-lift verses should not actually be treated as two-lift ones.

Other problems look rather more serious. For once, suppression of the medial lift produces medial dips of up to eight, and rarely less than four weak syllables. Clearly, such sequences must have put much strain on the stress-timing abilities of Middle English speakers; they also raise the dreaded question of why such potentially three-stress sequences should have been used at all, and so often at that.

Related to the same problem is the relative frequency of three-lift verses within the long line: if the presence of the third full word is metrically insignificant, why would such verses appear twice as often in the first half-line as in the second? The question is all the more important since if we are prepared to admit *some* degree of metrical significance for the third full word, we arrive at the point we started from, i.e. that "two-stress" is not an adequate uniform description of the metre and that there exist two kinds of verses: those with two "word-stresses" and those with three.

Secondly, while the patterns produced by the suppression of the medial lift are almost invariably heteromorphic, their relative frequency is markedly different from the rhythmical subtypes of the unambiguously two-lift lines. For example, when taken as a homogeneous group, three-lift verses do not show any preference with regard to the form of the final dip: just over half of them have masculine endings, and thus the (x)Sx...xS pattern. At the same time, I have shown above (p. 243 ff.) that this pattern is very rare among the unambiguously two-lift verses, almost to the point of total exclusion in the second half-line.

Finally, within the three-lift verses itself, there seems to be a correlation between the absence of a strong dip and the strictly feminine ending (exceptions are very few; see pp. 246-250): 10615b *fif & twenti hundred*, SxSxSx. It is easy to see that the "absence of a strong dip" requirement has any substance only if the medial lift is indeed

a lift. If the medial lift is suppressed (SxxxSx) and the verse is thus equivalent to, for example, 10567b & *stærcliche heom leggen on* (xSxxxxxS in the two-lift interpretation), the regularity in the form of verses like *fif & twenti hundred* cannot even be formulated and thus cannot be accounted for.

All the considerations, many of which will be familiar from the corresponding section of Chapter 2 (pp. 172-184), lead me to believe that the three-lift pattern is a genuine phenomenon of Middle English alliterative long line.

Length and resolution in early Middle English verse: concluding remarks

The evidence for resolution in Layamon is provided by several patterns described above:

1. The final dip cannot be polysyllabic: 10807b *mid muclē mon-weorede* (pp. 217-221).
2. In the pattern x...xSxx#S-, the verse-ending has a strong tendency to be masculine. Words with a short root vowel are frequent in the second lift (while words with a long root vowel are exceptionally rare): 1007b & *pene leofliche wode* (pp. 222-229).
3. The distribution of *-scipe* together with the arguments adduced for the verse-final stress shift suggest that the suffix is resolved when stressed verse-finally: 6950b *heo 3ifuen him to wurð-scipe* (pp. 241-243).
4. Compound stress only occurs in conjunction with clashing stress: 11646b *þe mid wisdomē*. The only – and frequent – exceptions to that

rule are first stems with a short vowel: 235b *bi þan wode-roten* (pp. 229-232).

Alternative explanations like syncope or syneresis do not hold:

- verse-finally, some forms (e.g. *mon-weorede*) do not have the normal syncope environment; Layamon is too early for the consistent syncope or apocope in *-ede* forms of short stem verbs; I am not aware of any certain evidence, metrical or textual, that syncope was possible in the participial *-ene*;
- also verse-finally, the $x\dots xSxx\#S$ pattern contains forms where syncope is not an option: *awrake*, *beore*, *cume*, *cure*, *here*, *wode*;
- syncope does not apply in *-scipe*;
- verse-medially, in the $x\dots xSSx$ pattern with compound stress, it could be proposed that the medial *-e* in *kinelond*, *swikedom*, etc. is syncope, similarly to the widespread pattern of Old English and Middle English *sinful* < *synne* (cf. Chapter 2, pp. 109-115 and fn. 47), while the syncope before a sonorant operates in forms like *wiþercraftes*. However, the proposal is insufficient to explain the absence of equivalent examples with a long first syllable.

The only negative evidence uncovered so far are two b-verses, 2042 *Suððen he turnde his fare; & ferd feorh-riht to Wales* and 10555 *þer wes innen igrauen; mid rede golde stauen* (p. 247), and similarly 8182a & *wræken mi deore cun* (see p. 249 and fn. 69), since the absolute majority of three-lift verses without a strong dip have a feminine ending. It should be noted, however, that a-verses contain two other exceptions to the

regularity – 2183a & *gret þu londes king* and 8093a *Þe wind wæht þat fur* – which do not involve resolution. Since words with short vowels are rare in the relevant positions and do not form any frequent sub-pattern (unlike those cited in points 1-4), the three verses hardly constitute strong counter-evidence.

All but the last of points 1-4 above provide evidence for resolution *in the final lift* of the b-verse. This is at least partly due to the fact that the verse-final position gives more opportunities to test the status of the potentially resolved syllable. In fact, with the exception of the special pattern $x...xSSx$ with compound stress (point 4 above), there is only one mid-verse environment where resolution is testable directly: $x...xSxSx$. Unfortunately, the pattern is not frequent (less than 10% of b-verses, see Table 5), and considering the relative infrequency of words with short vowel, suitable verses are quite rare.

There are some words that occur in the first lift of two-lift b-verses often enough: *dugeðe*, *scipen* (pl), *sumer*, *swike*, *water*, *wude*, *fare* the noun and the relevant forms of *faren* the verb. In most cases, however, they are either followed by a strong dip (5232b *faren in-to Rome*), or are immediately adjacent to the second lift (10767b & *in-to scipen fusen*). We are left with a selection of under forty suitable verses: no wonder the matter of mid-verse resolution has come up so occasionally in this chapter.

In eight instances, the words in question should be resolved for the verse to have only one strong dip:

9479	we habbeoð ifaren al niht
6970	& to scipen gon liðe
6805	þe wes swike ful deorne
10853	beoð i þan watere longe
10873	þa i þan watere weoren
10961	þe 3eond þas watere stondeoð
10963	bi þan watere flode

12075 and þat **water** wes liðe ⁷⁰

In another six, the verses should feature both resolution and prefix licence to be heteromorphic:

2113 heore **du3eðe** to-dealde
 3158 and his **du3eðe** bi-leæfde
 9779 and mi **du3eðe** aswunden
 9464 & we scullen **fa**ren nu to-niht
 10336 þene **wude** al bileien
 13577 þene **wude** to bi-witte3en

The fourteen verses would have constituted significant evidence but for another nine that have two strong dips irrespective of resolution, e.g. 1274b *he wes swike mid þan meste*. A possible interpretation therefore would be that verses like 6805b *þe wes swike ful deorne* belong to the same class as 1274b *he wes swike mid þan meste*, and resolution is irrelevant. Thus, the direct test in the x...xSxSx pattern proves inconclusive.

There are, however, some less straightforward considerations that support the existence of resolution in mid-verse. As I have noted above, the selected words very often occur before the medial strong dip, e.g. 5232b *fa*ren *in-to Rome*. Notably, in 79 instances the potentially resolved sequence is followed by at least two (and usually

⁷⁰ There are four other interesting verses that are in fact a continuation of the x...xSSx pattern with compound stress: 7019b *imong his du3eðe monnen*, 10394b *al his du3eðe cnihtes*, 12744b *þa þa du3eðe sturedede*, 12954b *to his du3eðe-kinge*. For the verses to be heteromorphic, *dugeðe* should be resolved. However, even in this case the pattern is x...xSxSx, which is prohibited with compound stress (pp. 229-232). Thus, *dugeðe* compounds are exceptional with regard to the rule - but then *dugeðe* itself has an exceptional prosodic structure, with its trisyllabic basic form and short root vowel. On the basis of *dugeðe* alone, we might posit a sub-rule that while the x...xSxSx is prohibited with compound stress when the first lift is long, it is acceptable if the first lift is resolved. Typologically, it would look similar to the Old English rule that the suspension of resolution is itself suspended after a resolved sequence (*to brimes farode* as opposed to *in geardagum*). The Old English rule is clearly existent, but its prosodic basis is hardly understood. Due to the paucity of equivalent examples, whether the *dugeðe* compounds form a genuine or a "ghost" sub-pattern must remain unclear until there is a good understanding of the reasons for Layamon's metre to avoid the x...xSxSx pattern with compound stress.

exactly two) weak syllables – enough to form the strong dip on their own. Only on four occasions resolution would deprive a verse of the required strong dip:

475	þa scipen to driuen
6009	þa scipen wandrien
11134	to scipen forð-rihtes
7417	þurh swike his craftes

The situation is unusual: although Layamon is much more tolerant of trisyllabic dips than the late Middle English poems, half of his medial strong dips are in fact disyllabic. However, such an average is only attained for verses with potentially resolved sequences if resolution is accepted; otherwise, medial strong dips in such verses are one syllable longer than elsewhere in the *Brut*. The heavy preponderance of *possibly* trisyllabic (and longer) dips in verses with potentially resolved sequences is a significant, if indirect argument in favour of the use of resolution in mid-verse.

Some support for that view is provided by the behaviour of metrical fillers. In 6 out of the 57 instances where the intensifier *ful* occurs in a two-lift b-verse, the metrical filler is required for the strong dip only if resolution is functional:

4313	bi-uoren wes ful stille
6789	þe swike wes ful derne
6799	þe swike wes ful deorne
6839	þe swike wes ful deorne
10216	raðe & ful sone
11045	ful raðe & ful sone

However, since the intensifier *ful* appears to be metrically relevant only in about 50% of its occurrences, the six examples are almost as inconclusive as the test in the x...xSxSx pattern above. Nevertheless, it is notable that *ful* never appears in verses like **þe swike*

ful derne, where it would be called upon to produce a strong dip in conjunction with a potentially resolved syllable.

Thus, with the exception of the *x...xSSx* pattern, it is quite difficult to find clear-cut evidence for mid-verse resolution in Layamon. At the same time, the difficulty is procedural, and is not due to internal contradictions within the data or to an avoidance of short stem words in the first lift. There are three main arguments in favour of mid-verse resolution: 1) compound stress in the *x...xSSx* pattern; 2) consistently di- or trisyllabic dips *after* the potentially resolved sequence in the first lift; 3) lack of counter-evidence (in the selections for the words listed above, only 475b, 6009b, 7417b, 11134b). Overall, unless serious objections are forthcoming, there is no reason to doubt that resolution functioned consistently in any metrically stressed position in the *Brut*.

The situation with mid-verse resolution is much more uncertain in *Poema Morale*. On the one hand, in the first hundred lines of Marcus' text (based upon MS Digby 4) there are 29 instances where resolution would improve the iambic metre:⁷¹

42 Se deð his e3hte on **sikere** stede þet sent hi to **heueriche**
47 **þider** we solde **dra3en** and don wel ofte and ilome ⁷²

Also 12 *litel* (if short), 12 *muchel*, 14 *muchel*, 26 *comen*, 26 *euele*, 27 *heuene*, 28 *seuene*, 33 *hine*, 34 *hine*, 40 *haueth*, 46 *thider*, 49 *dra3en*, 49 *thider*, 51 *thider*, 52 *mu3en*, 57 *iwoned*, 63 *biuore*, 64 *3ieuen*, 66 *haueth*, 66 *mu3en*, 81 *biloken*, 83 *fo3eles*, 83 *makede*, 87 *buuen*, 95 *beren*.

Words with a short vowel constitute the majority of those that interfere with disyllabic rhythm. The other examples include 10 *deden*, 16 *elde*, 17 *elde*, 19 *ar3e*, 25

⁷¹ *Das frühmittelenglische 'Poema Morale'*, ed. Hans Marcus (Leipzig, 1934).

⁷² The final *-e* in 42 *e3hte* is elided. Elision is very consistent, and 47 *ofte* (possibly *often*) is one of the few exceptions.

selue, 27 *sende*, 28 *elmesse*, 30 *otheres*, 33 *selue*, 33 *bithencheth*, 41 *riche*, 46 *sendeth*, 51 *habbeth*, 55 *e3hte*, 55 *hwile*, 66 *lesse*, 68 *wonderlicheste*, 85 *orde*, 90 *ithanc*, e.g.:

16 Nu ic wolde, ac ic ne mai, vor **elde** ne vor unhelðe
 55 Se þet **e3hte** wile hialde wel þe **hwile** þe hi mot wealde ⁷³

The list includes only four instances where the syllable length is due to a long vowel (and which are therefore directly comparable to the 29 verses with short stems): 10 *deden*, 30 *otheres*, 41 *riche*, 55 *hwile*.

However, in 23 other instances words with a short vowel should remain unresolved for the metre to be regular, e.g.:

73 **Litel** loc is **gode** lief þet cumð of gode iwille

Also 17 *bistolen*, 25 *hine*, 39 *godes*, 39 *siker*, 39 *wile*, 45 *3ieue*, 53 *godes*, 58 *godes*, 59 *euel*, 60 *euel*, 63 *heueneking*e (read *heuenkinge*), 65 *heueriche*, 70 *uele*, 73 *gode*, 73 *litel* (if short), 76 *heuenfer*, 87 *biuoren*, 88 *godes*, 91 *godes*, 93 *luueden*, 95 *biuoren*, 96 *heuenliche*, 99 *misdeden* (from *don*). A comparison with the text in Jesus 29 and Trinity B.14.52, as printed by Morris, and Lambeth 487, as printed by Hall, shows that the three witnesses diverge in a metrically significant way in almost half the verses that testify against resolution, but usually agree in the verses where resolution improves the metre.⁷⁴

Unlike many of the potentially resolved forms that appear before the caesura – *dede* "did", *were* "man", *stede* "place", *loue* "love", *ware* "goods, protection", *uele*

⁷³ Omitted from the list are *bute*, *þanne* and *sulle(n)*, consistently monosyllabic for metrical purposes (cf. OE *þon*, *sculon*?).

⁷⁴ *An Old English Miscellany*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 49 (London, 1872), pp. 58-71; *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 53 (London, 1868), pp. 220-232; *Selections from Early Middle English*, ed. Joseph Hall, (Oxford, 1920), pp. 30-46.

"many"⁷⁵ – all the words where resolution would improve the metre in the mid-verse of *Poema Morale* are indeed subject to the alternative explanations of syncope and syneresis (see p. 214). Thus, despite the absence of long vowels in equivalent metrical positions and despite the better agreement of manuscripts in verses that testify for rather than against resolution, there is little need to suppose that in the mid-verse of *Poema Morale* the metrical equivalence of "short+any" to a long syllable was more than a sporadically employed option, if functional at all.

The treatment of prosodic length in the three early Middle English poems where it appears to be relevant can be summed up as follows:

1. *Ormulum*: short syllables are disallowed in the final lift of the line; resolution is never employed.
2. *Poema Morale*: short syllables are disallowed in the final lift of the line; resolution functions in the pre-caesural lift; resolution is optional at best in other positions.
3. *Brut*: resolution appears to function in all lifts (but not in dips); due to the metrical system of the poem, most of the evidence for resolution comes from the final lift.

Two main conclusions follow. First, as shown by the *Ormulum* and *Poema Morale*, the use of resolution in verse was linguistically optional in early Middle English. Therefore, its regular employment in Layamon requires some kind of explanation. Secondly, the regular resolution in the *Brut* makes a late dating of its composition – a dating that would place the composition close to the production of the Caligula manuscript c.1275 – highly unlikely: in most contexts resolution could not

⁷⁵ See Fulke, *Early Middle English evidence...*, p. 347 ff.

survive the open syllable lengthening that started in the thirteenth century. This prosodic feature appears to confirm the most popular dating of the poem between 1189 and 1216, most probably in the last decade of the twelfth century.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Cotton Caligula A ix is dated to c.1275 by N.P. Ker (introduction to *The Owl and the Nightingale*, EETS OS 251, London, 1963), Jane Roberts ('A Preliminary Note on BL Cotton MS Caligula A.ix,' in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's Brut*, ed. F.H.M. Le Saux, pp. 1-14) and in Margaret Laing (*Catalogue of Sources for a Linguistic Atlas of Early Medieval English*, Cambridge, 1993). Composition of the *Brut* is put close to the dating of Cotton Caligula by Eric Stanley ('The Date of Lagamon's *Brut*,' *Notes and Queries* 213 (1968), pp. 85-88). For arguments against the proposal, see Françoise Le Saux, *Lagamon's 'Brut'. The Poem and its Sources* (Cambridge, 1989). On the datings of the open-syllable lengthening, see especially Robert Fulk, *Consonant doubling and open syllable lengthening in the 'Ormulum'*.

Layamon's verse: summary of the findings

1. The long line consists of two verses separated with a caesura.
2. Verses can have either two or three lifts.
3. Lifts are usually formed by the linguistically stressed syllable of a full word; metrical stress on a full word can only rarely be suppressed (if verses with four full words are genuine at all). Optionally, lifts may be formed by small adjectives and adverbs. Any verse-final word must carry metrical stress.
4. Monosyllabic dips cannot be formed by a non-schwa syllable of a word that carries metrical stress on another such syllable; the restriction is relaxed in the a-verse (see also #8), and does not apply for three-lift verses.
5. In words with more than one non-schwa syllable (which are normally stressed on the first such syllable, since Layamon uses a negligible number of Romance words) the stress may shift onto the last of such syllables; if such a word is the only stressable one in the verse (according to #3), it carries both metrical stresses ("compound stress").
6. The metre is heteromorphic: two-lift b-verses may have one and only one strong dip.
7. The final dip is either absent or monosyllabic in both two- and three-lift verses.
8. Among *two-lift verses only*, non-heteromorphic patterns amount to 24% in the a-verse, under 4% in the b-verse.
9. Three-lift verses amount to 22% in the a-verse, 12% in the b-verse.
10. Use of elision was not identified.

11. The prefix licence functions in a way similar to Old English poetry: prefixes may optionally be excluded from the syllable count.
12. Metrical equivalence of the "short+any" sequence to the long syllable is present, and appears to function consistently in any lift; in dips, it does not.
13. Two-lift b-verses have five most frequent rhythmical subtypes ($xSx...xSx$, $x...xSxSx$, $Sx...xSx$, $x...xSxS$, $x...xSSx$); pattern $xSx...xS$ is avoided, but sometimes present in the verses with stress shift (see #5); there is no such restriction in the a-verse (where the pattern is still relatively rare), possibly because of a significant proportion of non-heteromorphic verses.
14. There are a couple of special patterns of two-lift verses: 1) compound stress is only possible in the $x...xSSx$ pattern (feminine ending, no weak syllables between the stressed sequences); 2) the second strong dip is allowed if its syllables belong to the same word as the first lift and there is no final dip.
15. Three-lift b-verses with only one strong dip prefer it between the 1st and 2nd, rather than the 2nd and 3rd lifts; there is no such restriction in the a-verse.
16. Clashing stress is rare in three-lift verses, especially on the 2nd and 3rd lifts, especially if there is no final dip.
17. Special patterns of three-lift verses: verses without a strong dip almost always have the feminine ending (while if there *is* at least one strong dip, the feminine and masculine endings occur with equal frequency).

The present study does not confirm a popular view of the *Brut*, namely, that Layamon's metre (or rhythm, depending on the position of a scholar) undergoes change and possibly even conscious development in the course of sixteen thousand poetic lines. I do not intend to argue with the increased incidence of rhyme: that much seems to be clear. However, I failed to detect any significant difference with regard to the

occurrence or relative frequency of any rhythmical pattern in any part of the *Brut*.

Although I have not scanned the complete text of the poem (neither, I believe, have any of the proponents of the contested view), many of the tests *were* carried out for the complete text; for others, several short passages were selected from various parts of the poem: the beginning, the allegedly more assured middle section, the allegedly most traditional and regular Arthurian part, etc. The only section of the poem that appears to differ metrically or rhythmically is the thirty five lines of the 'general prologue'.

If the above rules are correct, they leave no place for another popular notion that Layamon was writing in a transitional amorphous style, perhaps similar to the rhythmical prose of Ælfric, Wulfstan, the Katherine Group and other homiletic texts of late Old English and early Middle English period. The material presented throughout the present chapter demonstrates that Layamon's verse can be described with quite a restrictive system of metrical rules which in many cases determines the permissible patterns with one-syllable precision, sometimes even making reference to additional factors such as word boundary, vocalism, or morphological class.

Nevertheless, the impression of rhythmical laxness and irregularity produced by the *Brut* is perfectly understandable. First and foremost, it is due to the considerable proportion of three-lift verses (about one quarter of the first and one eighth of the second half-lines). As suggested above, three-lift verses do not have any significant or easily noticeable regularities (rule 17 hardly changes the situation). Four-lift verses, though rare, occur as well, and may be particularly frustrating to a reader in search of a clear and unified measure. Due to their infrequency, it is hazardous to make any pronouncements with regard to their status: have the four-lift verses descended from the SSSS pattern of Old English poetry (*Hroðgar Beowulf*, etc.)? Or are they textual corruptions? Or should one of the full words be demoted accentually? Their very infrequency makes the answer not particularly important.

Another factor contributing to the impression of laxness is that almost any regularity observable in the poem is not complete: in every case, there will be a number of exceptions. However, all the rules stated above are true in at least 90% of instances, many in over 95%, and some are close to 100%.⁷⁷

One of the possible responses is to blame the scribes. While perfectly prepared to do this, I must note that another general conclusion of the chapter is the surprising reliability of the Caligula text. Standard scribal errors are of course present: in some instances, an unusual syntactic inversion is effaced, with unwelcome consequences for the metre; in some, words intrude from neighbouring lines and verses; in others, an unhistorical inflection may appear, opposed both by the metre *and* the usage elsewhere in the manuscript. Such errors are not difficult to identify; there are undoubtedly others that are less evident. However, generally the spelling system of Caligula seems to reflect the metre very well: for example, there is the regular epenthesis in forms like *broþere* and *luðere*, confirmed metrically; disyllabic pronouns (e.g. *hine*) and articles (*þone*, *ænne*) occur in the metrical positions that require them to be disyllabic. As far as I can tell, there is no need to adjust systematically any feature of the Caligula spelling in order to arrive at the regularities presented above. There is also no regular pattern among the metrically exceptional verses that would suggest a *systematic* linguistic interference by a scribe. On the contrary, the occasional premature punctuation in three-lifts verses (when the first two lifts form a syntactic unit and produce a heteromorphic pattern, see p. 209) suggests that the Caligula scribe, whose punctuation is almost certainly original rather than copied (p. 209), paid at least sporadic attention to the metre of the text he was copying. Whether or not the Caligula text is a witness of a drastic revision of Layamon's poem (like Otho is),⁷⁸ the *mutual* consistency of metre and

⁷⁷ Naturally, there is an exception to this "all" as well: the pattern *x...xSxx#S-* has the masculine ending in 80% of instances.

⁷⁸ Cf. J.R.R. Tolkien's view that "in any case some person or persons unknown have obviously badly damaged *Layamon*, so that its present form falters in its literary and linguistic evidence" ('Philology:

spelling is impressive, even if their respective *internal* consistencies do not go much beyond the 95% mark.

With this in mind, it appears to me far more plausible to ascribe the persistent, if infrequent incidence of metrically exceptional verses in Layamon to the dynamic (rather than amorphous) state of his metrical system. In fact, it is precisely the situation we should expect to find on the basis of the theoretical framework proposed in the first part of the Introduction. The matter is discussed further in the general outline of the development of alliterative metre from Old English to Middle English, to which it is now time to proceed.

CHAPTER 4. The development of alliterative metre

Chapters 1 to 3 presented synchronic descriptions for the three periods of alliterative verse in England. It will be obvious that each of the chapters dealt with but a selection of metrical problems relevant for a particular period and raised in the scholarly discussion. The choice of the particular problems was determined first of all by their importance for the general statement of the respective metre and by the role they play in the process of argument and substantiation of other regularities within the metrical system. At the same time, most of these observations are used below in the historical reconstruction of the development of the alliterative long line.

The reconstruction follows the general framework proposed in the Introduction (pp. 14-23). It is assumed that when metrical conventions are not explicated for the poets or audience, but only exist within the traditional text, metre can and does change over time without any conscious interference of the poets. The changes are conditioned primarily by the changes of linguistic prosody. A major shift in the prosodic component of the language may affect a basic feature of the traditional metre; in this case, the metrical system undergoes restructuring on the basis of the surface rhythmical patterns that are still supported by other devices of traditional poetry (with "formulas" being the most convenient term). Nevertheless, while a metrical system can lose its stability, it

does not lose its identity: this is ensured by the continuous, non-discrete character of the historical change.

A transformation of the alliterative long line that follows this theoretical framework is outlined in the first part of this Chapter. The second part deals with several implications and assumptions of the proposed historical reconstruction.

From Old English to early Middle English

In Chapter 1, Old English metre emerged as a closely knit system of interdependent rules. The basic rule of four metrical positions per half-line, the use of resolution, the prefix licence and the restriction on polysyllabic dips can only be discovered in conjunction with each other. An analytical procedure that does not take into account one of the rules will produce flawed results for the other three, or will fail to detect their existence altogether.¹ To the extent that the transmission of a language or a language-based entity such as metre involves re-analysis, the interdependence of the rules was relevant for Old English poets as well as for modern-day metrists. Potentially, a change in linguistic prosody that would have made one of the rules impossible (for example, a move to syllabic isochrony) could collapse the entire metrical system.

However, in Old English metre there was a principle even more basic than that of the four positions per half-line – namely, the principle of correlating metrical positions and linguistic units. As suggested in Chapter 1, the Old English principle was morphological: it was the morphological status of a syllable (properly "morphosyllabic

¹ An example of a partially flawed analysis is the initial statement by Sievers, which did not include the prefix licence and therefore (among other things) admitted an infrequent "anacrusis", affecting the regularity of four positions (a drawback which still exists in the present version because of the D* and A* types). An example of a complete failure is Bliss's study, where the four position principle is misunderstood entirely, and any "detection" of other regularities such as resolution is a sign of the scholar's indebtedness to Sievers.

sequence") that determined its metrical status, i.e. determined whether it formed a strong or a weak metrical position. Only with regard to the morphologically "weak" sequences certain contextual variation was possible: rarely, they could be promoted to occupy strong metrical positions.

The situation we encounter in Layamon is very different. All the signs point to an accentual type of versification:

- there is a considerable number of frequent words that may attract metrical stress optionally, depending on the overall structure of the phrase (*al, moni, oðer, muchel, bihalues, biuoren, (n)æuere* and to a lesser extent *wel, swiðe, al-swa, nu, bute, æfne, ær, neh*, etc.; see pp. 194-198 and examples throughout Chapter 3). The "overall structure" here refers only to the rhythm of the phrase, and does not concern specific syntactic patterns, as it does in Old English. Moreover, the accentual prominence of such words seems to be correlated with their prosodic weight rather than their lexical status;²
- the prohibition of particular types of syllables in the monosyllabic dip is defined in purely phonological terms ("non-schwa vowels") rather than morphological ones ("suffixes", or "second syllables of the root"; see below);
- the "stress shift" phenomenon (pp. 232-243) as opposed to "compound stress" (p. 229 ff.) suggests that the choice of the morphosyllabic sequences to carry metrical stress depends on the overall rhythm of the verse-phrase.³ In other words, the metrical status of morphosyllabic

² For example, trisyllabic prepositions *bihalues* and *biuoren* (even allowing for resolution in the latter) have a higher accentual rank than monosyllabic adverbs *nu* or *wel*.

³ Since, for example, a compound may be stressed in three ways: 1) on the first stem, if the compound occurs at the beginning of the half-line and is followed by an open-class word; 2) on the second stem

sequences in Layamon is not set pre-contextually, as opposed to the situation in Old English.

Therefore, the biggest change that occurred between the composition of the extant Old English and early Middle English alliterative poems was the transition from the morphological to the accentual principle of correlating linguistic units and metrical positions. It must have been a consequence of a corresponding change in the accentual sub-system of the English language. The details of the accentual change are a subject of great dispute.⁴ The situation is further complicated by the fact that most of the evidence for Old English stress is derived specifically from metre, in whatever interpretation. Nevertheless, it can be stated with sufficient assurance that in Old English at least one lexical stress marks the first long syllable (or resolved sequence, if resolution is accepted as a language phenomenon) of the root or strong prefix. In this formulation, the Old English principle of stress assignment is purely morphological, although at a subsequent stage it takes into account the phonological factor of syllabic length. As opposed to that, Middle English stress assignment seems to operate with phonological elements, namely the position and length of the syllable.⁵ In addition, for one reason or another there appears the possibility of variation in the placement of stress within the same word (applicable to both Romance and native words of suitable structure).⁶ This possibility of variation means that the phrasal context can, and often does become crucial for the choice of a variant. Thus, a stress assignment that operated with morphological units within a word has been replaced by a stress assignment that

("stress shift"), if the compound occurs verse-finally and is preceded by an open-class word; 3) on both stems ("compound stress"), if the compound occurs verse-finally and the half-line does not contain any open-class words (or other words attracting metrical stress).

⁴ See the summary of major approaches in C.B. McCully, 'Stress, Survival and Change: Old to Middle English,' in *Studies in Middle English Linguistics*, ed. J. Fisiak (Berlin, 1997), pp. 283-300.

⁵ See Roger Lass, 'Phonology and Morphology,' in *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume II, 1066-1476*, ed. Norman Blake (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 23-155.

⁶ Lass explains the variation by the interaction between the old Germanic Stress Rule and the new Romance Stress Rule. A different view is offered in McCully (above).

operated with phonological units within a word *and* within a phrase. Not surprisingly, the metrical systems of Old English and early Middle English demonstrate precisely the same difference, as suggested in the comments above.⁷

How would the shift to the accentual principle affect the metrical patterns of Old English? Primarily, it should have been relevant for three-, and the rare four-lift verses:

IV.	S S S x	27a <i>felahror feran</i> , 58a <i>glæde Scyldingas</i>
V.	S S x S	18b <i>blæd wide sprang</i> , 5b <i>meodosetla ofteah</i>
VI.	S x S S	17a <i>wuldres Wealdend</i> , 2436b <i>morþorbed stred</i>
VII.	x S S S	4a <i>oft Scyld Scefing</i> , 2201b <i>syððan Hygelac læg</i>
VIII.	S S S S	367b <i>glædman Hroðgar</i> , 54a <i>leof leodcýning</i> ⁸

After a change to the accentual system, the patterns would result in very frequent clashing stress, often of three straight stresses. Thus the patterns had to be "diluted", which resulted in the loss of the four-position rule in three-lift verses.

Some of the Old English verses with three strong positions had a polysyllabic dip. Those are the verses that are usually classified as types A and B but actually have the third strong position: SxSS and xSSS, or with a polysyllabic dip Sx...xSS and x...xSSS. Therefore, in the new metre we should expect polysyllabic dips in three-lift verses to appear as either initial or first medial, but with the first medial position dominating statistically, just as type A dominated over type B in Old English poetry. In addition to that, since the chief purpose of diluting the three-lift verses was to reduce the frequency of clashing stress and the crowding of lifts in general, the first medial

⁷ Another change that falls into the same pattern is the change in the type of morphology: stem-based inflection and derivation made way for word-based ones (see Dieter Kastovsky, 'Typological Changes in the History of English Morphology,' in *Meaning and Beyond. Ernst Leisi zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Udo Fries and Martin Heusser (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 159-178 or 'The Typological Status of Old English Word-Formation,' in *Papers from the Fifth International Conference on English Historical Linguistics*, ed. Sylvia Adamson et al. (Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 205-223).

⁸ The examples are from *Beowulf*. For the full list of rhythmical types, see p. 74.

position should have been preferable (since the initial position does not separate any lifts), and thus even more dominant statistically.

This is exactly the situation we find in Layamon (pp. 246-248): in the b-verse, two-thirds of strong dips occur in the first medial position, with the initial and second medial positions sharing the remaining third equally. Since the essence of the initial change was relaxation of the structure of three-lift verses, it would have been surprising to find a hard rule governing all or nearly all three-lift verses in the *Brut*. Instead, the number and placement of strong dips in Layamon's three-lift verses is variable, but the clear statistical preference (position of the strong dip) that stands out from the general freedom appears to have a very good historical reason.

The fall of the four-position principle spread to two-lift verses, and new rhythmical possibilities appeared. In the list below, new patterns are shown in bold:

xSxSx	xSx...xSx
SxSx	Sx...xSx
xSxS	x...xSxS
xSSx	x...xSSx
	x...xSxSx

The other factor that contributed to the emergence of new patterns was possibly the prefix licence. It is at least noticeable that the "extra positions" in the three new patterns appear precisely where a prefix could stand: $pSxSx$ or $xSpSx$, $pSx...xSx$, $x...xSpSx$. The evidence adduced throughout Chapter 3 suggests that the prefix licence was alive and well in Layamon; nevertheless, by the very nature of the licence prefixes may count both ways – that is, they can either register or not in the count of metrical positions, and thus verses with prefixes, being ambiguous, could add to the flux in the transitional

system and facilitate the emergence of new rhythmical patterns. For example, in Old English poetry the prefix counted as a metrical position in a pattern like S_pS_x . In a pattern like S_xpS_x the status of the prefix was, generally speaking, ambiguous: it could count as a syllable in a polysyllabic dip, or it could be left out from the metrical scheme for the verse to be equivalent to S_xS_x . On the other hand, in the pattern pS_xS_x the prefix had to be deemed superfluous to the position count, as verses should have four metrical positions. Now with the four-position principle under systemic pressure from three-lift verses, the patterns like pS_xS_x may also become ambiguous with regard to the operation of the licence and thus contribute to the emergence of new five-position patterns. At the same time, this need not lead to the disappearance of the prefix licence itself, for two related reasons: 1) it can be supported by other, unambiguous patterns; 2) in the transitional period, the new patterns are "ambiguous", rather than necessarily five-positional, and thus operation of the licence is not ruled out; by the end of the transitional period, when the metrical system has relatively stabilised, there is an increase in the number of patterns that clearly support the existence of the licence.

After the disappearance of the four-position principle in two-lift verses, the poetic tradition requires a new unifying metrical principle, new criterion of commensurability. If all the patterns listed above were accepted as regular, two-lift verses would hardly be distinguishable from prose, or rhythmical prose. Certainly, it was not an impossible option, but the tradition followed a different course. As it happened, the new unifying principle was provided by the polysyllabic dip.

In Old English poetry, two-lift verses allowed only one polysyllabic dip, either initially (in types B and C) or medially (in type A). The distribution was preserved in Middle English, but all patterns without a strong dip (the left column above) had to disappear. There was actually a precedent for an obligatory polysyllabic dip in Old English poetry too: as outlined in the final part of Chapter 1 (pp. 83-88), the second

half-line of Old English hypermetric verse had to start with a polysyllabic dip. In a time of flux when various options were available to the tradition, the analogy with hypermetric verses could have been significant, contributing at the same time to the metrical divergence of the first and second half-line.

The final dip was left virtually untouched by the transition, and the state of affairs we find in the *Brut* reflects Old English distributions faithfully. So, in Old English two-lift verses, masculine ending was infrequent: the "type A" SxSx was statistically dominant, and only the relatively rare "type B" xSxS had a zero final dip. Thus, it is not surprising to find masculine endings in only 10-15% of Layamon's two-lift b-verses. On the other hand, Old English verses with three strong metrical positions more often than not ended in a lift; so in Layamon, a masculine ending occurred in 50% of three-lift verses.

It is perhaps easier to see why the metrical change took the direction it did if we depart from an abstract model of discontinuous stages and remember that the change was not instant. If it had been, many of Old English three-lift verses simply would not have had three lifts when reinterpreted accentually. But precisely because the change was continuous, the realisation that the three strong morphosyllabic sequences formed three lifts was always present: it was only difficult to implement the three lifts within the new accentual framework because of the resultant preponderance of clashing stress. So the three lifts had to be separated and the basic principle of four positions was gone from three-lift verses. As for the two-lift ones, it is difficult to see what other choices existed before them beyond the following four:

1. return to the four position rule
2. generalise patterns without a polysyllabic dip
3. generalise patterns with a polysyllabic dip

4. accept all patterns as regular

As I have noted above, the fourth option was pretty much equivalent to the loss of metre as a set of restrictions on natural speech patterns. Since three-lift verses increased in size, it was not very attractive to reduce the size of two-lift verses by generalising patterns without a polysyllabic dip. Therefore, the main race appears to have been between "four positions" or "one and only one polysyllabic dip". The latter might have won due to a variety of factors:

- a general tendency to increase verse length, as seen in three-lift verses;
- patterns with "one polysyllabic dip" were rhythmically much more closely related to the patterns of three-lift verses, especially in an accentual verse where one of the three lifts could potentially be suppressed (with greater or lesser probability, itself dependant on a host of factors, linguistic and otherwise);
- ambiguous patterns produced by the prefix licence (see above);
- the precedent of an obligatory polysyllabic dip in the second half-line of Old English hypermetric verse.

However, the victory was not complete. The old system was still reflected in early Middle English verse in terms of the position of the polysyllabic dip with regard to the presence or absence of the final dip. In the continuation of the $xSSx$ pattern, a polysyllabic dip could only ever be in one position – initially: $x...xSSx$. However, its position in the continuations of $SxSx$ and $xSxS$ ($Sx...xSx$ or $xSx...xSx$ and $x...xSxS$ respectively) depended upon the final dip: medial polysyllabic dip with a feminine ending, initial with masculine. In Old English verse, a polysyllabic dip in "type B",

$xSx...xS$ or $x...xSx...xS$, was very rare, but not ruled out completely (I find 28 instances in *Beowulf*, see Chapter 1, fn. 28). Therefore, it is not surprising to find the $xSx...xS$ pattern as the marginal one in the b-verses of Layamon (p. 243 ff.). The other possible patterns also have the same relative frequency as their predecessors in Old English: $xSx...xSx$ and $Sx...xSx$ are very frequent and form the rhythmical background of the b-verse (cf. the identical role of $Sx(...x)Sx$ in Old English); $x...xSSx$, $x...xSxSx$ (from Old English ($x...$) $xSSx$) and $x...xSxS$ (from Old English ($x...$) $xSxS$) are considerably less frequent, but still occur in a noticeable proportion of b-verses (cf. similar frequency of their counterparts in Old English poetry). The marginal position of the $xSx...xS$ pattern in Old English (where the marginality is due to metrical requirements) *and* in Layamon (where the marginality does not follow from non-specific metrical rules) is a very important point, since it demonstrates that the requirement of one and only one polysyllabic dip was not employed blindly to produce all linguistically possible verse-phrases, but rather modified the set of patterns provided by the previous metrical system.

One environment which began to stimulate the growth of the now systemically acceptable $xSx...xS$ in early Middle English was b-verses with stress shift (cf. in the *Brut*: 6025 *þe strengeste þe weoren a þan dæ3en; & fulled mid ut-la3en*; 6103 & *Gratien forð-riht anan; ahnede þisne kine-dom*; 6158 & *funden þer ful iwis; Melga & Wanis*; see pp. 243-246 and 229-241). The majority of its instances belong here. However, as it will be shown later, this growth was short-lived.

A related issue is probably that of the special early Middle English pattern $x...xSxx\#S$ (see pp. 222-229). Its affiliation to the former "type B" is likely, since the early Middle English pattern shows a strong preference to the masculine ending (pp. 222-229, 235-241 and elsewhere in Chapter 3); but unlike $xSx...xS$, the pattern cannot be accommodated within the general rules of Layamon's metre, and yet there can be few

doubts that it is genuine (pp. 221-229). The apparent metrical irregularity of the pattern associates it with Old English (x...x)xSx...xS, which similarly violates one of the general metrical rules in the Old English system. It is thus at least possible that early Middle English x...xSxx#S is a direct descendant of Old English (x...x)xSx...xS, which incidentally sometimes had the particular form (x...x)xSxx#S, cf. in *Beowulf*: 269b *wes þu us larena god*, 1766b *oððe eagena bearhtm*, 902b *he mid Eotenum wearð*, 1088a *wið Eotena bearn*, 1141a *þæt he Eotena bearn*.

The patterns x...xSxx#S and x(#)x#SSx (compound stress with obligatory clashing stress, see pp. 229-232) unusually make reference to word boundary. I am unable to think of a reason, historical or systemic, for the restriction in x(#)x#SSx. However, use of word boundary is not totally surprising in an accentual metre, where the basic unit for the assignment of the strong metrical position is a (phonetic) word. It is possible that Middle English alliterative verse takes notice of word boundaries in another, much more significant area – namely, with regard to the prohibition of non-schwa syllables in the weak dip.

It is easy to see that the prohibition of non-schwa syllables in the weak dip is formulated in purely phonological terms. Morphology is relevant only indirectly, inasmuch as most suffixes and some second root syllables contain non-schwa vowels. I have noted above (pp. 142-149 and 235-241) that the only suffixes that do appear in weak dipo, albeit very occasionally, are the adjectival *-er* and *-est*. It could be proposed that the two are exceptional because they belong to inflectional morphology rather than word-formation. However, the difference in the distribution between, for example, *wonder* and *fultum* (the second syllable of the former occurs in the weak dip, the second syllable of the latter does not) suggests that the relevant feature is indeed vocalism, and not the morphological status of the syllable. Then, the rare occurrences of *-er* and *-est* in the weak dip may more profitably be explained by the possibility of a very sporadic

weakening of their /e/ to schwa (which in turn may have been aided by the fact that the two suffixes belong to inflectional morphology – but that would have no *direct* bearing on the metrical rule).

At the same time, the weak dip is allowed to contain non-schwa vowels if they belong to monosyllabic functional words – *in, al, is*, etc.: 10641b *heore sund is awemmed*, 10645a *swulche deor an hulle*. Such verses are rare, but they appear to be genuine. In any case, they are nowhere near as rare as those with the weak dip formed by a non-schwa syllable of a word that contains several of them (possibly no examples at all, see pp.235-241 on the sub-patterns *pat is a god-ful king* and *& þisne kinedom walden*). Thus, word boundary may appear to be a relevant feature in this metrical environment too.

However, the most concise and attractive formulation of the rule should probably be different. It is clear that the syllables prohibited in a monosyllabic weak dip are those that may *potentially* carry the primary linguistic stress. The property must have been particularly relevant in Middle English, a language with significant accentual fluctuation within words of the relevant structure. Also, a non-schwa vocalism probably involved a non-zero degree of linguistic stress, which must have been the deciding factor in barring such syllables from the weak dip. In this case, the metrical rule reflected a feature of linguistic prosody.

The prohibition of certain syllables in the weak dip is thus a purely phonological rule that has very little to do with morphology. As noted at the start of the chapter, the possibility of variable metrical status for particular words (small adjectives and adverbs) and word parts ("stress shift" and "compound stress") are other clear indications of the accentual nature of Middle English alliterative metre. How could then early Middle English verse have retained the prefix licence, a feature dependent on the use of the morphological principle in projecting linguistic units onto metrical positions? The

reason seems to be quite simple. Since the prefixes we are talking about are actually *unstressed* prefixes (verbal or nominal), they can be defined in two ways: either by reference to their morphological class, or by their position before the first *stressable* (not necessarily stressed) syllable within a word. Apparently, the former option was relevant for Old English, the latter for early Middle English verse.

One of the most remarkable changes between the Old English and early Middle English systems was the rhythmical divergence of the two half-lines. It is remarkable because in Old English the patterns of the a- and b-verse were, generally speaking, the same. Nevertheless, the preconditions for the divergence did exist.

Since the first half-line could have double alliteration, and since alliteration was only possible on the first strong syllable within a word (rather than on the second compound stem or a suffix),⁹ it meant that the number of independent open-class words was greater on average in the first half-line. While the metre was morphological, the difference was immaterial for the verse structure; but when the accentual principle came to the fore, the greater average word content resulted in a greater average rhythmical weight of the a-verse.

Similarly, full compounds almost always had to alliterate. Therefore, it was preferable for them to occur in a verse with another open-class word (that by definition had to include a strong metrical position) in the first rather than the second half-line, since there compounds were not restricted to the initial position: e.g. 2191a *heaðorof cyning* or 2196a *bold ond bregostol* (both verse-initial and verse-final positions are possible for the compound), rather than 2224b *heteswengeas fleah* (due to the obligatory alliteration, only the verse-initial position is possible). Since the stress in full compounds was quite often relevant metrically in early Middle English, the statistical

⁹ The extreme rarity of compounds like *wigweorþunga* shows unmistakably that they were avoided, if not prohibited altogether.

preference meant that the average incidence of three-lift verses was greater in the first rather than the second half-line.

Double alliteration and the greater rhythmical weight of the a-verse appear to have been a chicken and an egg throughout the known and unknown history of the alliterative metre. It is suggested, for example, by the frequent pattern in the lists of names both in Old Norse and Old English poetry, which could reflect the stage before the formation of the classical Old English or Old Norse metre:

Harðverkr, Hrökkvir
ok Hastigi,
Hræsvelgr, Herkir
ok Hrimgrinnir

Hymir ok Hrimþurs,
Hvalr, Þrigeitir,
Þrymr, Þryðgelmir,
Þistilbarði

(*Snorra Edda, The First List of Giants*, ll.9-16)

Heðcan sohte ic ond Beadecan ond Herelingas,
Emercan sohte ic ond Fridlan ond Eastgotan
(*Widsith*, ll.112-113)

In *Widsith* – which, as well-known, is not an example of regular Old English verse – the heavier rhythm of the first half-line takes precedence over double alliteration: it is the leading factor. In classical Old English verse the relationship appears to have been reversed, and the transition to early Middle English brought about yet another reversal. Nevertheless, classical Old English verse had two relic patterns to reflect the historically greater weight of the first half-line: they are D* and A* (pp. 65-70 and elsewhere). Similarly, the transition to a heavier a-verse is by no means complete in the *Brut*, where only a quarter of two-lift a-verses have non-heteromorphic patterns with two strong dips. On the whole, the rhythmical divergence of the half-lines has become noticeable in Layamon, but not much more than that.

From early to late Middle English

The transformation of the alliterative metre between the extant early Middle English and late Middle English texts was much less drastic than in late Old English, as demonstrated by the fact that the heteromorphic metre of late Middle English is immediately recognisable in Layamon for anyone who would want to have a close look at his poem. Nevertheless, the later Middle English period saw many significant changes to the metre.

First of all, the divergence of a- and b-verse patterns continues. In the Revival texts, the patterns have become almost totally mutually exclusive (see pp. 156-161 and 185). Three-lift verses occur in hardly more than 2% of second half-lines (compare that to over 12% in Layamon, pp. 203-204 and 246-248). Non-heteromorphic two-lift a-verses, which constituted only about 25% in Layamon (see pp. 203-204 and 248-250) are completely dominant in late Middle English (87% in SGGK, see 156-161 and 185).

Resolution was finished off by the open syllable lengthening, apparently completed in the beginning of the fourteenth century,¹⁰ and other quantitative changes that brought Middle English close to the isochrony of the Scandinavian type.¹¹ The environment where resolution of the short syllable was possible, -VCV- was exactly the environment of the open syllable lengthening. Even though the open syllable lengthening was an optional change that occurred more frequently in the words of the *name* type (with *-e* in the second syllable) rather than of the *catel* type (with a closed

¹⁰ Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, §§391; Donka Minkova, 'The Environment of Open Syllable Lengthening in Middle English,' *Folia Linguistica Historica* 3 (1982), pp. 29-58; Robert Fulk, 'Consonant doubling and open syllable lengthening in the *Ormulum*,' *Anglia* 114 (1996), pp. 481-513.

¹¹ Karl Luick, 'Beiträge zur englischen Grammatik III: Die Quantitätsveränderungen im Laufe der englischen Sprachentwicklung,' *Anglia* 20 (1898), 335-362. Yu.K. Kuzmenko, *Phonologicheskaya evolutsiya germanskikh yazykov* [the phonological evolution of Germanic languages] (Leningrad, 1991). Roger Lass, 'Phonology and Morphology,' in *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume II, 1066-1476*, ed. Norman Blake (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 23-155. Nikolaus Ritt, *Quantity Adjustment: Vowel Lengthening and Shortening in Early Middle English* (Cambridge, 1994).

second syllable), resolution environments were sufficiently marginalised to become unsustainable and irrelevant metrically. In addition, the new (and often regular) syncope in the *-er(e)-*, *-el(e)-*, and certain *-en(e)-* sequences also helped reduce the number of environments where the short vowel could be relevant for the metre.¹² Not surprisingly, at no point in the discussion of late Middle English alliterative metre was it necessary to posit the existence of resolution.

The prefix licence was finished off by the influx of Romance words: the number of sequences before the first stressed or stressable syllable multiplied greatly, and the ambiguity provided by the licence became too much for a metre to handle. It should be noted that Layamon's *Brut*, a poem translated from Anglo-Norman, contains a minimal number of French loans. Most of those that do occur have a prosodic structure that makes them quite unexceptional among the native vocabulary: *ariued*, *cacchen*, *false*, *ginne*, *male*, etc.¹³

Non-schwa syllables are still disallowed in the final dip, just as they were in Layamon (pp. 235-241). However, the feminine ending has now been generalised.

Masculine endings were relatively rare in Layamon, especially in the b-verse with its avoidance of the $xSx...xS$ pattern (see pp. 243-246). The b-verse could thus end in a lift only in three cases: the relatively rare $x...xSxS$, very rare $xSx...xS$ (usually with stress shift), and the not too infrequent, but systemically exceptional $x...xSxx\#S$. Being systemically exceptional, the latter pattern dies a timely and peaceful death. Three-lift b-verses with their 50% of masculine endings disappear in the general move towards the mutually exclusive rhythms of the first and second half-line. The remaining masculine endings (in one-and-a-half pattern: $x...xSxS$ and $xSx...xS$), having become even more outnumbered than they were during the transition from Old English to early

¹² Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, §§469-470. See also throughout the section on final *-e*, Chapter 2, e.g. pp. 101, 101, 113, 131.

¹³ See Niels Bøgholm, *The Layamon Texts: a Linguistical Investigation*, pp. 17-18 and the overall counts in J.P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English* (Hamden, 1968), vol. 2, p.172.

Middle English, are also weeded out in the general move towards a more restrictive metre. The movement might not be complete in late Middle English, since the poems possibly still show a (suspiciously minute) number of masculine endings.

Finally, the natural phrase rhythm has switched the preferred placement of the only strong dip in three-lift verses to the second medial position. The fact that the preference was different in Layamon is a testament to his relative proximity to the Old English system.

Thus, it is possible to present the development of the alliterative long line between the Old English, early Middle English and late Middle English periods as a direct consequence of language change. The shift in the nature of the linguistic stress, quantitative changes such as the open syllable lengthening, and the influx of Romance vocabulary provide the impacts that result in a gradual restructuring of the metrical system. It is hardly conceivable that the type of transformation suggested here could be carried through by conscious efforts on the part of the poets. Indeed, the picture would have been entirely different, had some changes been implemented in a literate environment with the intention of resuscitating the failing poetic metre after a major prosodic upheaval. Various aspects of the problem are considered in the two following sections.

Dynamism of the metrical system

Underlying this thesis is the assumption that the metre of traditional, first of all oral poetry exists only within the poetic texts and does not have an abstract definition for the practitioners of the tradition to externalise and later adhere to. Certain major changes in linguistic prosody may undermine the basic principles of a traditional

metrical system. The tradition survives by virtue of many other regularities of style still fully active within the texts, but more importantly by the simple fact that the change is continuous, and therefore any collapse predicted by an abstract model of separate stages never materialises. Nevertheless, a major shift in linguistic prosody does result in impossibility and subsequent disappearance of some rhythmical patterns, as well as in ambiguity of others. The metrical system becomes less stable, less restrictive, and therefore less appealing poetically. As time goes on, the destabilised system reinterprets its basic principles of commensurability and gradually moves towards a greater cohesiveness, and as a consequence – greater restrictiveness.

One of the corollaries of the model is that a traditional metre is hardly ever given opportunity to become completely cohesive. The average time span between major prosodic upheavals appears to be less than that required to weed out any remains of the previous restructuring. It means, *inter alia*, that the number of asystemic patterns, i.e. patterns that are not produced by general metrical rules and should therefore be specified individually, may be greater or smaller at any given point in poetic history, but it will hardly ever be zero. Given the rare opportunity to observe a cross-section in the history of a poetic tradition, we always see "a work in progress". The picture observed will always be inherently dynamic – similarly to a proper synchronic description of a language. If the above paragraphs remind of a simplified account of language change, it is because the poetic tradition exists within the language, is wholly built upon it and shares with it the important characteristic that speakers do not have to be aware of the system to produce correct and successful utterances.

Without any additional information on the previous or subsequent historical stages it is often difficult to say whether the "dynamic", peripheral elements within a poetic tradition and specifically within a traditional metre are going to disappear under the systemic pressure or, on the contrary, take part in a restructuring of the system. For

example, in Old English metre as presented in Chapter 1, patterns D* and A* (Sx#SSx and SSx#Sx and their available variations) exist outside of the general rule of four metrical positions per half-line. The same possibly applies to the patterns with suspension of resolution and the so called "light verses". If the four-position rule persisted, all or any of the special patterns could gradually disappear. If the rule came under threat – as it did – the patterns could add their weight to the instability of the system and the collapse of the rule.

Obviously, the asystemic status of a rhythmical pattern is a relative matter. The pattern may be a product of the ever imperfect textual evidence, and since systemic arguments by definition cannot be brought to bear on an asystemic pattern, the only solution lies in external methods (such as direct textual criticism or a statistical comparison of manuscript witnesses). More importantly, the pattern can be asystemic within one, but perfectly systemic within another metrical reconstruction (as, for example, the D* pattern is in some theories of Old English verse – those that use ad hoc rules excepted). However, the precise classification of a rhythmical pattern within a metrical theory is irrelevant: the common feature of all theories is the presence of "special cases", patterns that are peripheral in one or another respect.

In a study of a traditional style, the special cases need not be imperfections of a particular reconstruction (even though often they must be). As suggested above, they can be a testament to the ongoing historical development of the metrical system. Just as in Old English verse D* and the suspension pattern require special treatment, Layamon has the asystemic pattern x...xSxx#S, the restriction of compound stress to the clashing stress environment, and the requirement of the feminine ending in three-lift verses without a strong dip. Also, while the divergence of the first and second half-line is minimal in Old English and is probably reflected only in the double alliteration and the restricted distribution of D* and A*, the seed produces a very different picture in

Layamon. The picture may appear somewhat chaotic, and from a strictly synchronic view that is what it is; but when viewed historically, a certain degree of irregularity in the distribution of rhythmical patterns between the first and second half-line in Layamon emerges as only one point in a directed development that reaches a much more stable and transparent state in late Middle English poems. It is a kind of continuous development that can hardly be expected from a discontinuous manuscript tradition, where metrical rules are periodically analysed, reformulated, and adjusted; at the same time, the development would be quite natural in an environment where poetic conventions remain unexplicated.

The antiquarian question

Could the development of alliterative verse happen in a manuscript tradition, rather than in a living popular one? The most probable scenario in this case would feature the initial antiquarian activity by Layamon (as outlined by Eric Stanley), its subsequent dissemination and further adaptation in longer and shorter Middle English poems and finally use in the major productions of the Alliterative Revival.

The second part of the scenario is slightly problematic as it implies a significant degree of influence exerted by Layamon on Middle English poetry. As far as I am aware, in every other conceivable respect his influence on subsequent writings was exactly nil. Alternatively, it can be proposed that both Layamon and later alliterative verse draw upon a lost work of an antiquarian nature. It appears more probable, even though the only otherwise known and undoubted literary debt that Layamon owes is to the *Roman de Brut* that he is translating.¹⁴

¹⁴ F.H.M. Le Saux, *Lagamon's 'Brut'. The Poem and its Sources* (Cambridge, 1989).

However, the antiquarian scenario runs into greater problems when trying to deal with the precise nature and history of the several extant incarnations of the alliterative metre. First of all, the antiquarian theory does not explain the gradual specialisation of the half-lines. Had a manuscript containing Old English verse been analysed by someone with the intention of resurrecting the old ways and traditions of the country, it is difficult to imagine that the person would have come up with the idea of half-line specialisation in the first place, all the less so with the idea of a partial specialisation that did not resemble the little partial specialisation that could be observed or perceived in Old English verse. The move towards the mutual exclusivity of the a- and b-verse patterns between early Middle English and late Middle English is easier to imagine as a conscious or semi-conscious adjustment; but as soon as we recollect that the tendency between early Middle English and late Middle English was an exact continuation of that between Old English and early Middle English, the argument becomes even more difficult to believe.

The evidence of the *Ormulum* and *Poema Morale* shows that resolution was not a linguistically inevitable feature of early Middle English verse. The fact that the *Brut* is the only poem among the three to use resolution in every strong metrical position, and also the preservation of the prefix licence make the manuscript hypothesis highly improbable: had anyone been able to pick up the features while studying Old English poetry, he would surely have been able to produce a verse immeasurably closer to the Old English models than what we find in Layamon and in Middle English generally. For resolution and the prefix licence there at least remains a possibility that they were transmitted through popular songs and rhymes and then were used by an antiquarian in combination with other material (lexical, for example) he picked up from manuscripts. However, when we add the gradual specialisation of the half-lines, these songs and

rhymes start looking remarkably similar to direct descendants of Old English classical verse, with regard to their metre at least.

Manuscript transmission of the metre appears to be also ruled out by the apparent illogicality of certain features in Layamon's system. If the metre was a conscious production, the avoidance of the $xSx...xS$ pattern in the b-verse would be quite strange, considering that $x...xSxS$ is not infrequent and that both $xSx...xS$ and $x...xSxS$ interchange freely in the first half-line; less problematic, because potentially explicable by peculiarities of Middle English accentuation, would be the prohibition of compound stress in the $x...xSxSx$ pattern, unexceptional otherwise; the prohibition of non-schwa syllables in the weak dip explicitly refers to a feature of Middle English linguistic prosody and has little to do with the rhythmical patterns observable in Old English. In any case, for the latter two regularities to appear with such consistency as they do in the *Brut*, the antiquarian metre should have existed for a period of time before falling into Layamon's hands.

As shown above, the changes in the alliterative metre between Old English and late Middle English can be explained by specific references to events in the history of English and do not need a recourse to creative efforts of an individual antiquarian. It means that any alternative hypothesis will have to account for this accidental correspondence.

Which Old English metre?

The historical reconstruction attempted in this Chapter (pp. 267-280) silently accepts that the traditional metre to have developed into the system of early Middle

English *Brut* is the same metre as attested in the corpus of "classical" Old English poetry. However, two other possibilities have to be considered.

As suggested in Chapter 1 (pp. 83-88), Old English "hypermetric" verses can be described by a concise metrical statement which is different from that of the "normal" verses but operates on the same basic principles. Is it possible that Middle English alliterative verse descended from the less well attested, but as clearly traditional extended metre of Old English?

It might be tempting to suggest the historical connection because of the two major features that bring the extended metre and Middle English verse together and set them apart from Old English "normal" metre: the obligatory polysyllabic dip in the b-verse and the complete rhythmical divergence of the half-lines. The two features have actually been mentioned above (p. 273) as contributing factors in the choice of the direction for the development of post-Old English verse. Paradoxically though, it is precisely these two features that make any direct historical connection between Old English extended metre and Layamon highly unlikely: both the position of the polysyllabic dip before the first lift of the b-verse and the divergence of rhythmical patterns are set in stone, and make the variation in early Middle English simply unfathomable. Moreover, it is hard to see what linguistic events could upset the rhythmical forms of the extended metre.¹⁵ Left alone, the latter could continue essentially unchanged well into the Middle English period. Therefore, the extended metre looks an extremely unlikely candidate for the predecessor of Middle English verse. Its influence on the "new" metre, if any, was nothing more than analogical.

The second possibility to consider is rather more vague, and so of necessity are any counter-arguments against it. It was suggested, most notably by Luick, that early

¹⁵ "Rhythmical" is essential here: although, as I have suggested in the section on extended Old English verse (pp. 83-88), the metrical organisation of the last four metrical positions of both the first and second half-lines of Old English extended verse corresponds exactly to that of a normal half-line, the statistical rhythmical preferences of the extended metre are quite different, and clashing stress is rare.

Middle English verse might have descended from an unknown popular metre.¹⁶

According to his theory, the metre of classical Old English poetry was a bookish regularisation of popular verse which, being popular, did not find its way into any extant text.

Luick's suggestion is not as speculative as it may seem. It is true that while the "metre X" remains completely unknown, no sensible discussion is possible.

Nevertheless, if it can be shown that the metrical antecedent of early Middle English verse should have a particular form, and this particular form would appear at the same time to be a good basis for Old English classical verse, such "metrical archetype" becomes fully vindicated. Moreover, relevant evidence could be uncovered in other Germanic traditions typologically earlier than late Old English. However, I am not aware of any detailed reconstructions along these lines.¹⁷

In the absence of competing reconstructions, the explanatory power of the theory proposed in this thesis remains the only measure of its probability. If Old English classical metre is sufficient to account for the emergence of early Middle English alliterative verse – and as suggested above, Old English and early Middle English metres *are* linkable by linguistic change with some subsequent settling of the relatively amorphous set of resultant patterns – then introduction of an unknown popular metre becomes a straightforward case of multiplication of entities. It should not surprise us if the new system does not resemble the old one particularly closely. Changes happen, and some of them produce more serious consequences than others.

¹⁶ Luick, *Geschichte der heimischen Versarten*, pp. 149-153.

¹⁷ I discount the numerous proposals that list the similarities between Old English and Middle English alliterative verse and then ascribe the differences to "another popular metre" without much further ado.

When did Middle English begin?

In the D and E manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in the entry for AD 975, there stands a nine-line poem which in this thesis has been referred to as *The Second Death of Edgar*. Generally, it can be scanned as normal Old English verse, with the exception of three half-lines (2b, 4a and 9a). However, its alliteration is sporadic, and end-rhyme appears: *wide / swiðe*, *cyninge / gecynde*, *rang / strang*. At the same time, only two of the eighteen half-lines would not be possible in Layamon: 1b *Angla reccend* and 3b *geond feola þeoda*. All the rest comply with the heteromorphicity requirement.¹⁸

Thus, as early as 975, almost a century before the usual cut-off point of the Conquest, we have a perfectly good example, albeit a very short one, of what looks like early Middle English alliterative metre. Another such instance appears in the Chronicle under AD 1036. It is the much better known, because of its surprising inclusion into the ASPR, *Death of Alfred*. Here, the incidence of verses violating the rules of normal Old English metre is much greater than in the *Second Death of Edgar*: 18 out of 40 (2b, 3b, 5b, 10b, 11b, 14b, 16b, 19b, 20b; 1a, 2a, 3a, 5a, 6a, 10a, 11a, 13a, 20a); alliteration, although frequent, does not follow the classical patterns; rhyme and assonance (mostly achieved by grammatical parallelism) occur in over half the lines (twelve). At the same time, only two b-verses and five a-verses would have been problematic or unacceptable in Layamon: 3b *sume hreowlice acwealde* (because of the feminine ending in the specific x...xSfXS- pattern, cf. p. 222 ff.), 5b *sume hættode* (no strong dip), 2a *and his geferan he todraf* (two strong dips), 5a *sume hamelode* (no strong dip), 13a *to Eligbyrig*

¹⁸ 2b & *Myrcna mundbora* and 4a *þæt afaren Eadmundes* should be scanned with a stress shift onto *-bor-* and *-mund-* (as in Layamon), 7b *ne se here swa strang* with resolution (xxSrxS, hence one strong dip), and 9a *þa hwile þe se æþela cyning* with three lifts (and a polysyllabic dip between the first and second lifts, again corresponding to the rhythmical preference in Layamon).

(no strong dip), 18a *ful wurðlice* (no strong dip), 20a *on þam suðportice* (strong final dip).

Of course, the two poems are very short, but their correspondence to the metrical models of the *Brut* is remarkable, and thus cannot be discounted lightly.

Viewed under the framework proposed in this thesis, the appearance of quite a well-formed early Middle English alliterative metre in the second half of the tenth century means that the prosodic change that resulted in the metrical restructuring of the long line had started a long time before 975. I would not venture to suggest the dating here, but as mentioned in fn. 7, the change of the accentual principle might have been concurrent with the complete obfuscation of thematic vowels and the transition from the stem-based to word-based morphology.

In this situation, the infelicities of Old English verse produced in the tenth century (cf. Introduction, p. 3) can be ascribed with considerable confidence to the deterioration of the poetic tradition rather than an unhappy chance by which the Chronicle poets were quite poor practitioners of their art. Indeed, if the prosodic and metrical changes had started with full force before the tenth century, the "normal" Old English metre attested in most Chronicle poems and other contemporary productions could be no more than an imitation of bookish models, an imitation that for reasons of both language and prestige had little chance to sustain its poetic excellence for a long time.

The linguistic pressure on the Chronicle poets can be illustrated with their use of resolution. In the *First Death of Edgar* (AD 975, MSS A, B, C) resolution follows the classical rules: it removes the prohibited fifth position, e.g. in 11a *to cynerice*, 20b *byrnende lufan* or 22a *to swiðe forsewen*, and is correctly suspended, e.g. in 24b *deormod hæleð*, 26b *gamolfeax hæleð*. However, it turns out that the suspension only occurs after the "secondary metrical stress" in full compounds, while after the "tertiary

metrical stress" resolution is required: 12b *þam wæs Eadweard nama*, 15b *ðam wæs Cyneweard nama*, 19b *þæt wæs gnornung micel*. This distinction directly contradicts the situation presented for the classical Old English metre in Chapter 1: there, suspension of resolution did not depend on whether the preceding metrical position was formed by what is usually termed "primary", "secondary", or "tertiary" stress (p. 76). It is noteworthy that the only *regular* deviation of a Chronicle poem from the classical rules should concern the area of linguistic and metrical prosody that has been claimed as the leading factor in the transformation of the alliterative long line.¹⁹

¹⁹ Another tenth-century development that can be related to the "prosodic unrest" that started some time before is rhythmical prose. The instability of the new prosodic system, and possibly its clear distinction from the classical models still preserved in the bookish culture, might have contributed to the emergence of rhythmical modes unconstrained by anything save the requirement (or merely preference) of two stresses per phrase. Presently, I do not see any specific rhythmical connection between the patterns of Ælfric, Wulfstan, or the Katherine Group and those of Layamon (or the two Chronicle poems described above). Random checks suggest that in the rhythmical works heteromorphic and non-heteromorphic patterns alternate freely, just as Ælfric randomly uses phrases that are or are not acceptable as half-lines of classical Old English poetry. However, a more thorough study is certainly in order.

CONCLUSION

The contention of this thesis is that it is possible to present the development of the alliterative long line between the Old English, early Middle English and late Middle English periods as a direct consequence of language change. The shift in the nature of linguistic stress, quantitative changes such as open syllable lengthening, and the influx of Romance vocabulary provide the impacts that result in a gradual restructuring of the metrical system.

It is hardly conceivable that the type of transformation suggested here could be carried through by conscious efforts on the part of the poets. Indeed, the picture would have been entirely different, had certain adjustments been implemented in a literate environment with the intention of resuscitating the failing poetic metre after a major prosodic upheaval. Moreover, the metrical systems described in the three period chapters do not produce the impression of intentional creations coming from within the bookish culture: the basic prosodic principles are entirely different from the Latin or Romance models, and the presence of rhythmical patterns that cannot be described by general metrical rules is most likely to be a testament to long historical development, similarly to "irregular forms" in the language.

Such a development is only possible outside of a codified literate culture, and only for as long as there is a tradition of texts that can preserve the metre as their non-explicated feature. Since the present thesis, for reasons of space, is restricted to the

metrical analysis, no particular claims can be made with regard to the exact kind of such traditional texts. However, it is notable that statistical arguments play an important role in some changes outlined in Chapter 4, e.g. in the progressive specialisation of the half-lines, rhythmical preferences in the position of the strong dip in three-lift verses in both early and late Middle English, relative prominence of particular b-verse patterns in early Middle English (explicable by reference to the relative prominence of Old English rhythmical patterns within the framework of the proposed reconstruction), reasons of the almost complete disappearance of b-verses with masculine endings in late Middle English, and so on. The relevance of such statistical considerations suggests that the texts to have preserved the long line were poems of considerable length. Moreover, they must have been poems that retained the traditional language ("formulas"), otherwise the statistical correspondences between the historically related patterns of different periods would not have been preserved or transformed in the way they were.

The differences of poetic style and vocabulary have often been cited as a proof of the break in the continuity of alliterative verse between Old and Middle English. However, this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that in a traditional poetics where conventions are not explicated a major change in one area may have far-reaching consequences – far-reaching both chronologically and systemically. If we remember, for example, how closely does the device of Old English poetic variation depend on such linguistic features as compounding or a well-developed inflectional morphology, and if we remember how closely is compounding connected with the prosodic phenomena of language and verse, we can see that a purely linguistic change (in this example, mode of accentuation) may have an impact on what is seemingly a completely independent feature of the traditional style (in this example, variation). However, discussion of these matters lies outside the scope of this thesis.

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