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IMPERFECT LINES IN *PEARL* AND THE RIMED PARTS OF *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

There are some thirty lines of *Pearl* which are internally imperfect in the MS, as compared with the usually regular character of the poet's verse. Most of these, too, may be made to correspond with the poet's normal lines by very simple means, while some, if not all, may be attributed to a careless scribe.

For example, in line 72 *adubmente* may be assumed to be *adubement* because of the form which appears in four similar lines of the refrain (84, 96, 108, 120). Similarly *John* must be supplied in 997 and *gret* in 1104 from the refrain in the stanzas of their respective groups. In 363 and 977 an *I*, absolutely necessary to the sense, has been dropped after a final vowel which a careless scribe might have supposed sufficient for the meter. Line 1117 has been assumed to be imperfect, but may be read with the stress on the first syllable of *delyt*, since the word sometimes so alliterates in other poems. Compare *Wars of Alex.*, 265, 3743; *Piers Plow.*, A, II, 68; *deliteable* (*delitable*, *dilitable*) in the former at 4303, and in the latter at A, I, 32, B, I, 34; also *delited* in *Piers Plow.*, A, B, I, 29. See also *Pearl*, 1153 in which *delyt* may alliterate with *drof* in an *aabb* line, of which Northup ("Metrical Structure of *Pearl*," *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, XII, 326) admits twenty-five examples. Osgood emends 1201 by inserting *hym* between *sete* and *saʒte*, but the expression *sete saʒte* seems to me complete in itself and needs no pronoun of reference. Line 690 is metrically perfect enough, but the sense requires some emendation, as that of Gollancz or Bradley.

There remain twenty-three lines requiring emendation in order to be as regular metrically as most lines of the poet, less than 2 per cent of those in the poem. They are 17, 51, 68, 122, 225, 286, 381, 486, 564, 586, 635, 678, 683, 709, 825, 990, 995, 999, 1000, 1004, 1036, 1046, 1076. These differ from the lines so far discussed in that they may be made metrically perfect by the addition of a final unstressed *e* to some one monosyllable of each line. Of them Gollancz emended in the manner suggested all but five, that is, 68,

683, 709, 825, 990, 995, but without adequately discussing the reason for the change. Indeed, he says in his note to *hert* (17):

There are some 60 or 70 instances of the sounding of the final *e* throughout the poem; most of these I have noted, in many cases restoring the metre of the line. A consideration of these instances leads me to the conclusion that, as far as this point is concerned, the dialect of the poem is an artificial one. Northup, in his excellent and painstaking study of metrical structure mentioned above, briefly suggested adding *e* finally to a monosyllable in each of the lines above, except 825 and 990, while he would also so emend additional lines 497, 616, 771, 776, which will be discussed later.¹

Osgood, in his edition of *Pearl* (*Introd.*, p. xliii), noted eighteen lines in which an unstressed syllable is lacking, that is, 17, 51, 72, 122, 134, 188, 225, 286, 381, 486, 564, 586, 678, 709, 825, 990, 999, 1036, but emended only 72, *adub[be]mente*. He justifies retaining the MS readings by this statement:

At first sight this restoration [that is of final *e* in some words] is justified by Chaucer's practice, who never omits the unstressed syllable in this metre (Ten Brink, *Chaucers Sprache und Verskunst*, 2te Aufl., sec. 299), and that of his contemporaries (Schipper, *Eng. Metrik*, I, 278-79). But the verse of the North is freer, and the irregularity here considered is perfectly natural in a poet whose usual medium is the alliterative long line; furthermore, the omission occurring regularly in fourteen cases at the opening of the fourth foot, and in the four other cases after the caesura, indicates that it was intentional. I have therefore retained the MS readings.

Leaving this somewhat extraordinary view of the poet's language for the present, lines 134, 188 seem to me to need no emendation, since not lacking in an unstressed syllable. They were not emended by Gollancz or noted by Northup as belonging with the others in requiring an additional final *e* in any word. No word of either line requires an additional final *e* for inflectional or other linguistic reasons.

¹ It would be less necessary to consider these lines if Northup's study had been more fully accepted, as by Osgood in his edition of *Pearl*. The latter, however, has disregarded Northup's recommendations entirely, and thus is at variance with Gollancz's emendations also. Osgood also rarely recognizes the final *e* as an inflectional or syntactical element in monosyllables, as in the dative of nouns, the dative, weak form, and plural of adjectives, the inflectional or other endings of verbs. For example, in his glossary he gives the form *ask* for the verb, when *aske* is the form in all cases but 564, and that must be so emended for the meter. The adjectives *blake*, *blayke* are plurals in the examples occurring in the poem, *blak* the singular of the first being found in *Clannesse*, 1017. Many other examples might be cited to prove the point.

The assumption by Gollancz of an "artificial dialect," because of the syllabic quality of certain final *e*'s, and that of Osgood regarding the influence of the alliterative long line are at variance with what we should naturally expect of any writer. We should first try to explain apparent peculiarities of any writer's language on a natural basis, and resort to other explanations only when the natural one fails. When a writer is clearly imitating a language not his own, as in late ballad imitations, or in the Spenser imitations of the eighteenth century, the imitation is usually clear enough in itself. I wish to show, therefore, that emendation of all the twenty-three lines mentioned in the third paragraph is merely a regularizing on the basis of what may reasonably be inferred from the language itself, at the time of the poet's writing. The final *e* which is needed to make each line regular may be fully accounted for on the basis of earlier forms of the words, which were still sometimes, if not always, preserved. In other words, the writer was using his native tongue in a natural, rather than exceptional, manner.

The language of the fourteenth century, as is well known, was in a state of transition regarding the pronunciation of the final unstressed *e*. The result was a double pronunciation, especially of many monosyllabic words, as shown by the language of Chaucer, who has been most carefully studied in this respect, and of other writers. Monosyllables with final unstressed *e* historically or analogically in early Middle English had sometimes lost that vowel as a separate syllable, so that the same word might be used in either of two forms at the pleasure of the speaker or writer. Perhaps it would be better to say that, while the shorter form of the word was the more common, the dissyllabic form was still sometimes used in certain idioms.

Far from being an unusual condition, the same thing was true of the language of the sixteenth century. Consider in this respect final *-ion* of nouns, which might be either dissyllabic or monosyllabic, final *-ed* of past tenses and past participles, which might be syllabic, less commonly final *-es* of genitive singulars, as in *moones*, *whales* of Shakespeare. Later modern English has its analogies in many double forms like *I'll*, *don't* beside *I will*, *do not*, many clipped words in slang or colloquial speech, and such occasional doublets as *incog*,

pro tem, for *incognito*, *pro tempore*. The main difference between English of today and that of the fourteenth century is that fewer of these double forms are of inflectional character, for the very good reason that we have fewer inflections. Yet the genitive singular of monosyllabic nouns ending in *s*, as *Jones's house*, *Sims's tailoring*, may still be monosyllabic or dissyllabic at pleasure, while the doublets *my-mine*, *your-yours* depend for their use on syntactical considerations.

As compared with Chaucer, in whose language we have come to recognize such double forms as common, the language of the *Pearl* poet had fewer such doublets because he belonged to a region in which the final unstressed *e* had been more commonly lost. But this does not mean that no such double forms should be recognized as used by him. Absence from the MS may be easily accounted for because the scribe of the MS belonged to a still later time than that of the poet, while he was notably careless in other particulars.

A final unstressed *e*, not appearing in the MS but needed for the meter of the line, may therefore be reasonably inferred to have belonged to the poet's language, if it represents (1) one historically or analogically belonging to the word in early Middle English; or (2) one belonging to it inflectionally or syntactically, as in the dative of a noun or adjective, the plural or weak form of an adjective, the inflectional ending of a verb. In such cases, either of two forms—one with or one without unstressed final *e*—is possible, if required by the meter. On this basis let us examine the needed emendations in the *Pearl* lines mentioned above, as well as those metrically deficient in the rimed lines of *Sir Gawain*.

In six of the lines enumerated as now imperfect the nouns *hert* (17, 51), *tong* (225), *blys* (286), *step* (683), *glas* (990), if emended to forms with final *e*, would make the lines entirely regular. Of these, *hert*, *tong*, *step* had a historical final *e* in early Middle English, and *herte* appears and is clearly dissyllabic in 128, 176, *tonge* in 100, while *stepe* is the form of that word in *Clannesse*, 905, the only other time in which it seems to be found in the poems of this author. *Blys* is an Old English feminine which in early Middle English had regularly assumed an unstressed final *e* by analogy, and *blysse* not only occurs sixteen times (not fourteen times as Osgood enumerates) to *blys* five

times in *Pearl*, but is clearly dissyllabic in 397 and 611. Besides, like *hert* (51) it is a dative in 286, the line under discussion, and on this account alone might have retained an earlier syllabic final *e*. Again, in all other instances of the word within the line it appears before a vowel, weak *h*, or an unstressed syllable, and would be monosyllabic on those accounts whether written *blys* or *blysse*.¹ At the end of lines 372, 384, 396 it may have been a dissyllable. *Glas* is an Old English neuter which, like other such neuters, sometimes assumed final unstressed *e* by analogy of oblique cases and plurals. It appears as *glasse* twice in the poem, once (1025) before an unstressed syllable and therefore monosyllabic, once (1106) at the end of the line and then possibly a dissyllable; see also examples of the dissyllabic form in Mätzner. On all accounts it seems to me better to read *glasse* in 990 rather than to supply a new word before *burnist* as does Gollancz. To sum up, there is ample reason to emend the nouns *hert*, *tong*, *blys*, *step* to *herte*, *tonge*, *blysse*, *stepe* in the lines suggested, and probably *glas* to *glasse*.

In thirteen lines monosyllabic adjectives without final unstressed *e* in the MS, if emended for one linguistic reason or another, would render those lines entirely regular. These are the adjectives *fyrst* (486, 635, 999, 1000), *hyȝ* (678), *ilk* (995), *long* (586), *rych* (68, 1036), *self* (1046, 1076), *þryd* (1004), *wlonk* (122). Of these all but *ryche* and possibly *hyȝ* are monosyllabic adjectives which may be emended on inflectional or syntactical grounds. Thus *wlonk*, monosyllabic in the singular in 903 and 1171 and regularly in the poems, is a plural in 122 and should be *wlonke* for that reason. Four of the remaining monosyllabic adjectives require the weak form with final syllabic *e* in eight instances. *Fyrst* and *þryd* are ordinal numerals and regularly weak, so that on that account should be *fyrste*, *þryde* (or *þrydde*) in the lines in which they occur. These are the only examples of the former as an adjective, but *þryde* (*þrydde*) is dissyllabic in 833, and probably in 299. In all these examples of *fyrst* and *þryd* they are in dative phrases, and this is an added reason for emending with final *e*. *Ilk* appears in the weak form *ilke* and dissyllabic in 704, and there is no reason why it should not be of the same form in 995.

¹ This implies that *bredful* is stressed on the second syllable in 126, but *blys* may there be explained as a monosyllable before the caesural pause.

Self is usually an intensive pronoun in the poems, but in three instances is an adjective and in two of them weak (1046, 1076), so that it should be emended to *selfe* (*selve*). Compare the weak *selve* in Chaucer, *Troil.*, IV, 1240; *H.F.*, 1157; *C.T.*, A, 2584, among other examples. In the remaining example of the word as an adjective (203), it occurs in a dative phrase in which case *self* or *selve* may be read, but it is there probably unstressed and doubtless for that reason a monosyllable in the MS.

One monosyllabic adjective, *long* in the dative phrase *for long zore* (586), should read *longe* in keeping with its form in many similar expressions; compare my *Mid. Eng. Read.*, sec. 139, *Clannesse*, 769, and Chaucer's *B. of D.*, 20, 380. For other monosyllabic adjectives with inflectional syllabic *e* in dative phrases, see *brode* (650), *same* (1099), *tenþe* (136), and in *Gawain*, *fyne* (1239), *brinne* (1868).

Ryche had final *e* historically and in the examples 68, 1036 is a plural, so that for both reasons it should become *ryche*. In all other instances in the poem the word occurs before a vowel, weak *h*, or an unstressed syllable, and thus might have been written either *rych* or *ryche*. In *Gawain*, 586, however, *ryche* is dissyllabic in a dative phrase. *Hyȝ* (678), originally monosyllabic as was OE *hēah*, also has the dissyllabic form *hyȝe* by analogy of oblique case and plural forms, as in 401 and Chaucer's *Troil.*, III, 1207.¹ The MS *hyȝ*, therefore, may stand for a plural of the monosyllable or for the dissyllabic form, but in either case should be *hyȝe*. So its dissyllabic weak form in 395, 1051 may be accounted for in the same way. The weak *hyȝe* of 596, 1054 may be dissyllabic, but, on the other hand, these examples of *hyȝe Kyng*, *hyȝe God* may be retentions of the Old English compounds *hēah-cyning*, *hēah-god*, with final *e* not syllabic before the second element of the compound. Compare for similar possible compounds *hyȝe masse* (*Pat.*, 9), OE *hēah-mæsse*; *hyȝe tyde* (*Gaw.*, 932), OE *hēah-tīd*, and with the last *hyȝ seysoun* of *Pearl*, 39. In all these examples the first element alliterates, while the second element is less fully stressed, as usually in compounds.

¹ Skeat accounts for a dissyllabic *heighe* in the *Troilus* passage (see glossary under *heigh*) as a "def. form, therefore read the heighe." In this I think he is mistaken in failing to note that OE *hēah* became both ME *hy* (*heigh*, *hyȝ*) and *hye* (*heighe*, *hyȝe*) with final *e* by analogy. Besides, the *Troilus heighe god* is exactly equivalent to OE *hēah-god* as used in the OE Psalm 56:2 (Grein-Wülker, Vol. III, Part ii, p. 91) *ic cleopige to heah-gode (deum altissimum)*, and need not be regarded as an example of *heighe* in a weak form.

In three and perhaps four lines an inflectional final *e*, if added to verbal forms, would make those lines metrically regular. Two of these verbal forms are *carp* (391) and *ask* (564), the first appearing as *carpe* and dissyllabic at 949, the second as *aske* and similarly a dissyllable at 316 and 580. In the only other case in which either word could have syllabic *e*, *carpe* of 753, a past tense form with omitted or absorbed final *d*, the *e* is a separate syllable. *Aske* (910) precedes a vowel and is necessarily monosyllabic. Besides, as Northup points out, three other infinitives within the lines of the poem have syllabic final *e*, *hyre* (507), *take* (552), *sete* (101), and I may add from *Gawain*, *holde* (1043). The past tense *wroȝt* (825) should be *wroȝte*, a final *e* being syllabic in the pasts *oȝte* (341), *herde* (873), *glente* (1000). In *Gawain* the past *made* is dissyllabic in 687, and perhaps *herde* in 690. In all other examples of the past tense *wroȝt*, it occurs before an unstressed syllable or syllables and would have been monosyllabic whether written *wroȝte* or *wroȝt*.

Line 709 has been regarded as unmetrical, though not altered by Gollancz or Osgood. Kölbing, on the other hand, thought it required emendation, and proposed *arede* for *rede*, while Holthausen (*Archiv für neueren Sprachen*, CXXIII, 242) suggested inserting *so* before *con*. It may be pointed out that *con* might be assumed to be a subjunctive *cone* (*conne*) instead of the usual indicative, and thus be in accord with the subjunctive *loke* in the next line. The subjunctive *cone* (*conne*) would then be dissyllabic and supply an extra unstressed syllable before *rede*, as the subjunctive *dele* is dissyllabic in *Pearl* 606. Compare also *stod* in *Gawain*, 1768, which is subjunctive and should be *stode* in rime with the plural adjective *gode* of line 1766.

The additional lines which Northup proposed to alter by adding an unstressed *e* to *your* (496), *gret* (616), *kyn* (771), *much* (776), can be read as they stand, and thus do not require emendation in the sense of the lines already discussed. If emended to *youre*, *grete*, *muche*, these adjectives would take the stress from the comparatively unimportant words *in* (497, 776) *so* (616), thus making the lines somewhat smoother in their metrical flow. Yet this alone does not seem to me a reason for the change. It is more to the point that *your* and *much*, if emended, would be explained as not

impossible datives in dative phrases. We have no further data in the poem on which to determine the emendations, since in all other cases of the words within the lines, nine for *your* and eight for *much*, they are either themselves unstressed, or appear before a vowel, weak *h*, or an unstressed syllable. They could not be dissyllabic in such situations.

Gret, on the other hand, has no final *e* historically or as a rule if ever for analogical reasons, although *grete* at the end of line 637 may be an instance. In the twenty-three examples of the word in the poem, not counting 1104 in which it must be restored, *gret* (*grete*) occurs before a vowel, weak *h*, or an unstressed syllable, so that we have in them no data for the assumption of *grete* in this case. At the end of a line *grete* is a plural in 90 and a dative in 560, but whether the final *e* is syllabic in these cases depends upon the question of the syllabic character of final *e* in other places. In *Clannesse* the singular is regularly *gret*. All things considered it seems doubtful whether *gret* in 616 should be emended.

Kyn (771) is an Old English neuter which sometimes becomes ME *kinne* by analogy of oblique case and plural forms, so that it may be emended here. In the two other examples in which it appears in the singular, 755 and 794, it occurs before a vowel or weak *h* and could therefore not be dissyllabic. In both these instances, however, *quat kyn*, the same expression as in 771, is stressed on the second element. If such stress belongs in the line Northup proposed to emend, as I think it does, the emendation to *kynne* is inevitable. To Northup's example of *kynne* in *Piers Plow.*, B, V, 639, may be added B, XI, 290, but that in Orm 1051 does not seem to me a case in point.

While considering the lines which may possibly be emended by addition of a final unstressed *e* to a monosyllable for inflectional reasons, we may note that 87 may belong here. In this line, if *flavoreȝ* is to be stressed on the first syllable, as seems likely from the alliteration, then the plural adjective *frech* before it must become *freche* (*fresche*), as in *Gawain*, 122. The line may be read, however, with stress on the second syllable of *flavoreȝ*, in which case *frech* would remain monosyllabic before an unstressed syllable. It is impossible, therefore, to express more than one's general choice of

two possibilities. My own would be, because of the probable alliteration of the line, to emend the adjective in accordance with principles laid down for the plurals of other monosyllabic adjectives in similar instances.

To turn to our second poem, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* there are 404 rimed lines, not counting the 101 tail rimes which close the irregular, unrimed stanzas, and are separately numbered by Morris. A very few of these rimed lines are metrically deficient, as 84, 249, 736, and perhaps 1016, which seem to require an added word. Thus in 84, *soth* should probably be *sothly*, no adverbial *sothe* appearing in the poems, the scribe perhaps mistaking *soth* for the noun or adjective. Some such addition as *word* or *speche* would appear to be needed after *cast* in line 249, and some such word as *ryȝt* before *wel* in 736. Perhaps a *þe* should be supplied before *trumpeȝ* in 1016. But I am now especially interested in lines which are metrically deficient by the probable omission of an inflectional or syntactical final *e*, as in the lines of *Pearl* already discussed.

Taking these in the order of nouns, adjectives, and verbs involved, the noun *Meȝel-mas* in 532 should be *Meȝel-masse*. The last part of the compound, OE *mæsse*, has final *e* historically, and usually in these poems; compare *masse* in *Cl.*, 51, and *Pat.*, 9; *Kryst-masse* in *Gawain*, 37, 734; *crysten-masse* in *Gawain*, 502, but *crysten-mas*, 985; and even *mas* in rime (*Pearl*, 1115), in which *masse* is possible. The parallel form *messe* in rime (*Pl.*, 497) is also in point as more likely the Old English variant *messe* than the OF *messe*; cf. *messe-quyle* in *Gawain*, 1097.

In line 35 the adjective *lel* is plural and should be *lele* on this account, as well as for the meter. Similarly, in line 1177 the adjective *derk* is weak and for this reason should have the form *derke*, thus completing the line metrically. In verbs there are no examples within the lines which require change for metrical reasons, but in three instances changes of verbs in final position should probably be made. Thus in 1146 the past plural *ȝod* should probably be *ȝode* to rime with the plural adjective *ȝode* in 1148. As already indicated above the subjunctive *stod* of 1768 should be *stode* for inflectional reasons, and the rime word of 1766 is the plural adjective *ȝode* as in 1148. In 1975 the infinitive *þonk* should probably be *þonke*, as the

rime word *wlonk*, a plural of the adjective, should probably be *wlonke*. For the latter compare the suggested emendation of *Pearl*, 122.

In conclusion let me return to the reasons Osgood suggested for retaining the MS readings in most of the *Pearl* lines he was discussing. His first suggestion, that the poet was perhaps influenced by the long alliterative line, rests, it seems to me, on a wrong assumption. It implies that the poet, when working in the medium of the long alliterative line, would use a language somewhat different from that naturally spoken by him and others in his age and district. Now I know of no reason to believe that the language of the long alliterative line ever differed essentially from the language of ordinary life. That it was not as regular syllabically as the line of four stresses used in *Pearl* rests upon its previous history and later development, but that does not indicate that the language used in the two forms was different in any important particular. Only if the poet were consciously imitating a form not naturally his own, could this be true, and of this no proof has been offered or I think can be presented.

Again, Osgood argued that, in the lines he cited, the omission of *e* in the unstressed syllable "was intentional," because in fourteen of the instances it occurred "at the opening of the fourth foot, and in the four other cases after the caesura." Yet in contravention of his own point he amended *adubmente* (72) to *adubbement*, because the longer word is shown to be correct by its use in similar position at the end of the four succeeding stanzas. Omission of the *e* in this case, far from being intentional, must have been merely a scribal error.

The argument from the frequency of omission before the fourth stress rests on no more certain basis. Osgood failed to note how frequently the final *e* which might have syllabic value is preserved before the various stresses. An examination of the first 200 lines of the poem shows some thirteen instances in which a final *e* is still preserved before the fourth stress, as compared with four instances before the second, and at most only one (*roude* 112) before the third. If the proportion holds good for the remaining lines of the poem, as we may reasonably believe it will, then there are at least seventy-eight instances of final *e* before the fourth stress, compared with some

twenty-four before the second stress. In any case the reason for more omissions of syllabic final *e* before the fourth stress than before the second or third is simply that there was more opportunity for a careless scribe to make such omission. Moreover, the proportion of omissions in the two places is essentially the same, as we should expect it to be if it were a matter of careless copying. The argument from intention on the part of the poet falls to the ground completely. Again we may reason with confidence that the emendations, justified as they have been from the point of view of inflection and syntax, are not barred by any intention on the part of the poet, whether in imitation of another literary form or not.

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the relation of linguistic facts to the metrical irregularities of Middle English poetry, through application to two poems belonging to the same time and district, and generally believed to be by the same author. Such examination would seem to be unnecessary but for the frequent disregard of such essential facts of language in the Middle English period. Many glossaries of Middle English works are prepared with slight regard for them, notwithstanding such care in this particular as Skeat exercised in the glossaries to *Piers Plowman* and *Chaucer*. Questions of metrical regularity or irregularity are often discussed with little consideration of their importance, as in the otherwise valuable editions of *Pearl* by Gollancz and Osgood. It is hoped the paper may also call attention to the importance of further investigation of linguistic problems in this important period.

OLIVER FARRAR EMERSON

WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY