CHAPTER THREE: THE ORMULUM

A synchronic study requires a consistent corpus: the language of one place at one time. As previously explained, I concentrate on the period of early ME as being crucial in the development of group-verbs, and accordingly the place ought to be in the East or Central Midlands, as it is those dialects which are most nearly the lineal ancestors of standard ModE, spoken and written. The style and register of the material should be as close as possible to ordinary, everyday usage. The best approximation will be found in prose that is intended for a popular audience and which is not too rhetorically organised or mannered. Poetry, though often suitably informal in tone, is mostly disqualified by its peculiarities of word-order—a major concern in this study—if not by a characteristic vocabulary as well.

There are few enough works to choose from in early ME and none ideally suitable. The Final Continuation of the Peterborough Chronicle meets many of the requirements but is ruled out by a length of only c.2,600 words. The Ancrene Riwle is longer, and its material can be supplemented by the inclusion of other texts of the 'Katherine Group', but it is a 'literary' work, albeit with passages of great apparent naturalness, and more important, its dialect is outside that grouping of dialects which takes in substantial Scandinavian influence and goes on to

1See M. I. Samuels, Linguistic Evolution: With Special Reference to English (Cambridge, 1972), pp.165-70, and the standard histories of the language.

2This would add problems of differing dates of composition, of close translation from Latin, of the use of alliterative prose, and so on.
form the basis of London English. These texts are useful witnesses to
different varieties of early MS and I shall make extensive reference to
them and to others, but none provides a homogeneous corpus that suits my
purposes.

A more promising choice is the Ormulum, a collection of Gospel para-
phrases and homilies some 110,000 words long. It is the work of one man,
Orm or Ormin, who composed it and—to a large extent—wrote it out.

There are few textual problems. There is no explicit indication of date
or provenance, but scholars are agreed on a date of c.1200 and a proven-
ance in the northern part of the East Midlands dialect area; more recently
it has been located at or near Stamford, which lies between East Anglia
and the Central Midlands area. It has the disadvantage of being in
metrical form.

Content and style

'The text consists of a dedication to Orm's brother Walter, a table

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3I use the following edition, referred to here as 'WH': The Ormulum:
With the Notes and Glossary of Dr. R. H. White, edited by Robert Holt, 2
vols (Oxford, 1873). In cases of doubt I have looked at the manuscript,
Bodleian MS. Junius 1. All departures from the WH text are noted and jus-
tified, if only by the self-explanatory sign 'MS'. Some corrections have
been taken from S. Holm, Corrections and Additions in the Ormulum Manuscript
(Uppsala, 1922) and R. W. Burchfield, 'The Language and Orthography of the
Ormulum MS', TPhS (1956), 56-87. I ignore two subtleties of Orm's orth-
ography not noticed in WH, concerning forms of the letter 'g' and the di-
agram 'gh'; for these see A. S. Napier, 'Notes on the Orthography of the
Ormulum', TPhS (1891-94), Appendix II, pp.1*-4*, and Burchfield, op. cit.
The letters 'D' and 'F' before a line number signify 'Dedication' and
'Preface' respectively, so named in WH and separately numbered.

4He calls himself Ormin at D324, D325 and Orm, P2. On author and
scribe(s) see H. Ch. Matthes, Die Einheitlichkeit des Orrmulums: Studien
zur Textkritik, zu den Quellen und zur sprachlichen Form von Ormins
Evangelienbuch (Heidelberg, 1953) and J. E. Turville-Petre, 'Studies on
the Ormulum MS.', JEGP, 46 (1947), 1-27.

5For Stamford see Angus McIntosh, 'A New Approach to Middle English
Dialectology', BS, 44 (1963), 1-11 (p.11). See also the references given
in H. M. Flasdieck, 'Die sprachliche Einheitlichkeit des Orrmulums', Anglia,
47 (1923), 289-331 (p.289 note 3), and WBD, 'Plan and Bibliography', p.11.
of the Latin texts used (cited in Latin), a preface, an introduction to
the first paraphrase, and the paraphrases and homilies that make up the
body of the work.'\textsuperscript{6} That is to say, Gospel texts from the Missal are
paraphrased in English and then interpreted for their 'doctrinal and
practical bearings' (WH, i, p.1x, and see also Orm D29-40). The doctrinal
and homiletic commentaries are largely derived from the works of Beide and
others.\textsuperscript{7} The surviving material is 'about an eighth of the work envis-
aged . . . by the author'.\textsuperscript{8}

The style is simple and repetitive, in keeping with Orm's avowed
desire that his English version of the Gospels should be listened to by
'all Englishe lede' (D132, D308), and in particular by '1newed folke'
(D55). The vocabulary is neither archaic nor 'literary'. There is a
large number of Scandinavian loanwords, fewer than twenty words from
French, a trace of Low German, and much of the vocabulary is not recorded
elsewhere before Orm by ORD or MHD.\textsuperscript{9} The language is unpoetic as much by
design as because of a lack of literary talent: Orm seems above all to
have been concerned with clarity and orthodoxy, and he hardly attempts to
enrich his words with anything beyond their plain meaning. There is no

\textsuperscript{6} Quoted from Robert A. Palmatier, \textit{A Descriptive Syntax of the 'Ormulum'}

\textsuperscript{7} See WH, Preface, p.1x, and Notes, passim; Matthees, Einheitlichkeit;
H. H. Glunz, \textit{Die Literarästhetik des europäischen Mittelalters}
(Bochum-Langendreer, 1937), pp.576-93.

\textsuperscript{8} Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson, editors, \textit{Early Middle English Texts}

\textsuperscript{9} Useful references are E. Brate, 'Nordische Lehnhörter im Ormulum' (di-
sertation Uppsala, 1884), also in \textit{PBR}, 10 (1885), 1-80 and 580-86 [latter
seen]; P. Kluge, 'Das fränkische Element im Ormulum', \textit{BStm}, 22 (1896),
179-92; Mary S. Serjeantson, \textit{A History of Foreign Words in English}
(London, 1935), pp.81-94, 120, 172; Burchfield, 'Language', p.63; Alan S. C. Ross,
'The Rare Words of the Ormulum', \textit{BPhS}, 12 (1970), 42-47. First occurrences
in Orm missed by MHD include about(e)n adv. 8 (350), apoven prep.
(V309), avyn adv. 7. (b) (12813), avyn prep. 8. (a) (12533), somev v. 3a.
(a) (17455), gangen v. + till (15170); there are more omissions, of
course, from ORD.
poetic resonance, no especial felicity of expression, no avoidance of meaningless words, much unvaried repetition, little feeling for the sound. 10 Not belonging to a 'school' of English versification, Orm did not have a tradition of vocabulary or phrasing to conform to. His use of rhythmical verse is generally thought to have been an aid to reading aloud by a preacher. 11 All in all it seems probable that the differences between the Ormulum and any prose Orm might have written are due solely to the demands of the metre. It is necessary, therefore, to give a brief account of the metre, as the description in WH (i, pp.lxv-lxvii) is not wholly accurate and does not make clear how far it might have distorted the word-order.

Metre

The metre is an adaptation of the Latin iambic septenarius. 12 The evidence for the lineation of the verse is the insistent rhythm, the pointing in the manuscript, and the failure to assimilate initial ʰ- at the beginning of a half-line to a preceding -d or -t. (What I call a half-line is printed on a separate line in WH.) Almost every line has precisely fifteen syllables if measured in a conventional way, namely with elision of final, lightly stressed -ʔ before an initial vowel or ʰ-

10 There is very occasional, non-structural rhyme, e.g. lede (p70):dede, wære (10337):wære, wrohht ...; shaffte (19109):nhohht ...; shhete, butenn hire & butenn (2034). Non-functional alliteration is more common, as in Onn enig wise wurbbenn wis To witten whatt he were (11599, sim. 11611) and 11.306-308; see also E. S. Cieszewski, 'The Alliterative Phrases in the Ormulum', LSE, 5 (1936), 50-67.


in the same half-line.\textsuperscript{13} The penultimate beat is never carried by an open syllable with a short vowel, as for example in the word name 'name', just as in the Latin form the position is barred to 'light' ('short') syllables.\textsuperscript{14} No other position in the line is reserved for syllables of a particular quantity, however. The siting of word-division is also hap-hazard, apart from a regular break after the eighth syllable,\textsuperscript{15} corresponding to diaeresis after the fourth foot in the Latin metre (Raven, \textit{Metre}, p.71), and an absence of breaks between fourteenth and fifteenth syllables. The latter has no correspondence in the Latin and is probably due to the rarity in English of unstressed monosyllables at the end of a tone-unit.

The effective governing principle of \textit{Orm}'s metre is accentual: alternate beats in the line are metrical lifts. If the lines are read as prose, syllables in odd-numbered positions are most often lightly stressed—always so in the last position—whilst even-numbered syllables take full or secondary stress more often than not. An alternation of lifts and dips is the basis of much non-alliterative English poetry, though rarely with such monotonous 'ti-tum-ti' rhythm as that of \textit{Orm}. A proportion of nearly one stress in two would be higher than in speech, so that

\textsuperscript{13}Syllables in \textit{Orm}'s metre are not to be 'resolved' as in Latin metrics. Apparent exceptions to the syllable count at 3725, 8657, 16839, 17362 as printed in WH are in fact metrical in the manuscript. To maintain the metre we must not slide \textit{batre hu} (D49), we must apparently slide \textit{myrre an} (7433), and we must read \textit{Propitiatorium} (1036) with six syllables, \textit{Propitiari} (1039) with five.


\textsuperscript{15}The only exceptions are \textit{Aroneess} (487) and \textit{Eleazzar} (583). Both are on inserted leaves in the manuscript, as are the only instances (454, 466, 476, 480, 502, 522, 576, 554, 616, 1039, 1043) of syllables in line-final position whose vowel is not spelled with \textit{e}; cf. Glanz, \textit{Literarahæstetik}, p.326. Perhaps \textit{Orm} lowered his standards towards the end of his task.
it is common for a lift to be occupied by a syllable of secondary or zero stress. The converse licence, less common, is for Orm to displace a lift, especially that normally falling on the sixth or tenth syllable of the line. Precisely what happens in such cases is open to argument. J. Hall writes that Orm 'does violence to the natural accent', whilst Schipper argues that 'there can only be a question of level stress, not of inversion of accent'. The relevant point is that in a minority of lines—I have noticed about two hundred—Orm sacrifices the regular pattern of his metre to maintain word—order.

There are numerous expedients for accommodating ordinary word—order to the demands of the metre. Orm can add or subtract syllables by cavalier treatment of inflexional -e, by the use of forms with or without syncope (e.g. widdwe/widwe), by the avoidance or not of elision (e.g. forrvedde/offredde), by selection amongst other variants (e.g. bikschedd/bikshht, by/on/on/on/on, stillely/stillelike/stillig), and by manipulation of foreign names (e.g. Kalldewe/Kalldewische/Kalldisseke/Kalldelandesse, Caym as mono— or disyllable, Aaron as di— or trisyllable). He has no qualms about the wholesale use of metrical fillers like all, richt, wel, nor about clise batt in conjunctions (e.g. hurrh batt or hurrh batt tatt as required). Perhaps the most extreme example of padding takes place in the often—used 'as' conjunction, which varies from alle (e.g. P51) through all richt all swa se (e.g. 17030) to all bweorr ut all swa sume (e.g. 5064), through every intermediate syllabic length.


18 Compare, say, Chaucer's treatment of the name Creswede, and note that 'biblical names were handled quite arbitrarily' with respect to syllabification and quantity in medieval Latin (Strecker, Intro. Med. Latin, p.58).
Orm's lack of aesthetic scruple makes it relatively easy for him 'to maintain the position of a word in a phrase or a word or phrase in a clause'.

There is some evidence, though, of language being affected more seriously by the metre. In order to avoid infringement of the 'name rule' for the penultimate syllable, Orm writes *fullhtmung*... to *sangenn* (10798), where his normal verb is *takenn*. Numeral follows its noun for the same reason in *stafass fowre* (16405), and participle precedes finite verb in *forrhodenn haffde* (12), *takenn haffde* (19558), perhaps for the same reason; Palmatier finds only 49 cases out of 293 in his corpus where past participle precedes finite verb.

Hiatus within the half-line is normally avoided: there are fewer than thirty instances altogether. Sometimes a different form can be substituted to avoid hiatus, e.g. *towynss* (9632) for *onn wynns*, *began* for *henn*; but in some cases it appears that word-order has been changed, e.g. *All swa birsth him* (2751) for the more common *him birsth*, and *hinn fra* (19601) beside *fra ne*, *fra began*.

Syntactic units frequently correspond to half-lines, despite the large number of sentences and clauses which run on across a mid-line break or across the end of a line. Both metrical pauses have some effect on the syntax. The mid-line break is enough of a pause to make hiatus acceptable and to preclude assimilation of initial -h to a preceding -d or -e. Single words rarely straddle the break—cf. note 15 above—so that we find *cnaepechild Hiss* (4220) for *cnaepechild-ess*. Almost any

20 *Descr. Syntax*, p.83; the corpus is about 15% of the WH text. 
21 Orm's dialect has only partially assimilated the Scandinavian third person plural pronouns: *hegg* is normal, *beegre* and *he(o)re* appear to be in free variation, but *henn* is the unmarked oblique form, *began* only being used where its absence would result in hiatus (sole exception 10399). 
22 See WH, i, p.lxviii; Burchfield, 'Language', p.70.
syntactic grouping above the word may be interrupted by the break: nouns in apposition (e.g. 17106, 19445), determiner and numeral (3275), deter-
minder and noun (11999), preposition and object (517, 529, 13542), ele-
ments of a complex conjunction (11807), verb phrases like uss Birrh (7416)
and toc Nib (14456). That the mid-line break does not separate ne and
finite verb or to and infinitive is because unstressed proclitics cannot
fall on the eighth syllable.

The end of the line is much more of a syntactic obstacle. It too
permits hiatus and precludes assimilation of _b_. Strings isolated by
enjambement tend to be major constituents like a whole clause, a phrase
conjoined by _a_, the subject, direct object or verb. It is rare for the
end of a line to fall within a constituent; some examples are
Zakarigesse macche / Elysabeb (290), a habe / Pezz sanndenn (18542),
shillde / Shwenn (19350), ne mihte / Rohht forbeenn (19896), Patt hird
wase i bitt time / Nemmedi Elesageress hus (592), stamndenn / Onqrness
him (11470). A tightly bound group like a prepositional phrase is never
interrupted. The following passage illustrates the relative importance
of mid-line break and line end:

sandenn, whanne itt comm berto Patt ure Laferred wolde
O rode bolen dmb, forr uus To lesenn ut off helle,
Pisse labe follo, unfrerl follo Off pisse Parisessewes
Wass att tatt labe rap Patt Crist Wess naguessed upp o rode,
Forr patt teg3 haffdenn mikell n1p øm himm & øm hiss lare
(18039)

In conclusion, although the demands of the metre—especially the
accentual rhythm, the pause at the end of the line, and the avoidance of
hiatus—may have modified the statistics of word-order, the overall
effect is not serious: Orm may be taken as a representative corpus of
early OE.

The corpus

Unless otherwise stated, statistics concerning Orm are based on the
whole WH text of Dedication (D1-342), Preface (P1-106), and Homilies
(1-19992; 19993-20059 are hopelessly corrupt), the numbering in WH being by half-lines. Reference is occasionally made to fragments not in the WH text, that is to say, to passages deleted by Orm and given in the WH notes, and to passages and words now missing from the autograph manuscript but available in a seventeenth-century transcript.\(^\text{23}\) Line numbers of citations from Vliet's transcript are preceded by the letter 'V'.

Previous work

The only syntactic studies of Orm of any note have been the following: Weyel's dissertation on the infinitive, Laeseke's dissertation on S/V/O order in various types of clause,\(^\text{24}\) Lehre's *Sprachform* on nominal morphology, and Palmatier's *Descr. Syntax*. The latter is a methodical, structuralist description of a corpus consisting of 3,012 half-lines (out of some 20,000 all told); it provides useful statistics on the word-order relations of most sentence elements. There is negligible overlap with the present study of verbs and particles.


\(^{24}\) Friedrich Weyel, *Der syntaktische Gebrauch des Infinitiva im Ormulum*, Beilage zum Bericht der Städtischen Realschule in Heiderich, 1895-96; Bernhard Laeseke, "Ein Beitrag zur Stellung des Verbums im *Ormulum*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Berlin, 1917). Weyel's dissertation is not reliable. There are errors both of transcription, e.g. *wel* for *god* (3252) on p. 22, and of interpretation, e.g. of *didem* (16338) as periphrastic aux. instead of causative, and *att* (13282) as infinitive marker, both on p. 23.