

Metrical Revisions in the *Ormulum* Manuscript

Andrew Cooper 
Stockholm University
andrew.cooper@english.su.se

(Received 5 December 2025; revised 12 May 2026)

The *Ormulum* is a long and complex early Middle English text extant in a single medieval manuscript. The majority of the text comprises verse homilies, making for a total of around twenty thousand regular lines. In addition, the manuscript is the author's working draft and includes intervention showing development of the text over what may have been several decades. The thousands of revisions, some individual, some systematic, have never been fully catalogued. The present article highlights systematic changes in the manuscript which have an influence on metrical features and proposes typological categories into which they may be divided according to scope, exemplified by reference to the most salient revisions. It is concluded that changes below the level of a morpheme (type 1) rarely have a metrical effect, although there are some minor examples. Grammatical revisions which remove or replace affixes (type 2), typically the result of language change, are compensated for with various rewriting strategies to keep the meter regular. Similarly, it is unusual for revisions of individual lexical items with synonyms (type 3) to cause metrical changes, but that changes to whole verses (type 4) can have metrical causes, including as strategies for reducing the repetition of formulae.

Keywords: early Middle English; *Ormulum*; Orm; Junius; syllabic meter; septenarius

1. Introduction

The *Ormulum* is one of the earliest Middle English (ME) texts.¹ It is unique for its length, the precision of its spelling system, the steady metrical pattern which typifies the entirety of its English text, and because it represents a working draft, written mostly in the author, Orm's, own hand.² The meter is based strictly on long lines of fifteen syllables, divided at a significant syntactic break, into eight-syllable on-verses and seven-syllable off-verses, and is so regular that it has been

¹ In this, as in all things *Ormulum*, I am indebted to Nils-Lennart Johannesson for his work on the manuscript, especially during sabbaticals in Oxford in 1997 and 2002, in which he consulted the manuscript intensively, and for the images of the manuscript he commissioned (available at the time of writing from the Digital Bodleian). His detailed annotated transcriptions of the manuscript continue to form the basis of the *Ormulum* Project. Johannesson was also a frequent participant at *SELIM* conferences and presented at *SELIM* on the *Ormulum* at least six times.

² There have been several ways of rendering the names of both the text and the author. The present article uses the conventions established by the *Ormulum* Project at Stockholm University, using *Ormulum* for the text and *Orm* for the author.

© Ediuno. Ediciones de la Universidad de Oviedo. 

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

described as soporific (Bennett and Gray 1990, 31). The present article investigates manuscript evidence for the editing process which led to the text adhering so rigidly to this remarkably regular meter, as well as exemplifying some salient revisions affecting other metrical features, and placing the revisions into principal categories based on the scope of the evident changes. The categories are based on the scope of revisions, at the level of (1) single or multiple graphs smaller than a morpheme, (2) morphemes smaller than an orthographic word, (3) lexical items as orthographic words and (4) elements longer than an orthographic word. The present article uses examples from MS Junius 1 to identify the metrical effects that revisions have had in the manuscript.

The *Ormulum* manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 1) comprises 119 folios containing over 20,000 lines of English verse as well as 243 entries of Latin prose, serving as a table of contents for the original, much larger, text (Faulkner 2010).³ The first volume apparently originally ran to 50 homilies, suggesting the existence of four further unattested volumes of comparable size (Johannesson and Cooper 2023, 19). The partially surviving volume is a working interim manuscript, into which more-or-less complete passages have been carefully copied and subsequently edited. Some folios are whole and complete, while others are heavily damaged or are inserts (Kwakkel 2012). This makes the manuscript itself complicated to work with, before even considering the nature of the text.

With reference to the text, perhaps the most striking feature of MS Junius 1 is its extremely precise orthography, which Sweet called “more or less absolutely uniform” (1888, 70). This orthography represents many more distinctions than are usual in Middle English writing, giving a great deal of precise phonological information. The orthographic system is made even more informative by its interaction with the text’s verse design (in the terms of Jakobson 1960). The metrical structure of the English text of the *Ormulum* is an iambic *septenarius*, comprising long lines of fifteen syllables divided into two unequal verses, which in the *Ormulum* are remarkably regular (Zonneveld 2000, 36). The on-verse for each verse pair comprises four iambic feet (eight syllables) and is identified in the manuscript by a bold capital at the beginning of the line.⁴ The off-verse comprises three iambic feet and an unstressed final syllable (for a total of seven syllables), and it is identified by a non-bold capital. Rhyme, alliteration and other decorative poetic devices are rare in most of the text. Metrical operations such as resolution

³ Johannesson and Cooper’s edition text (2023) includes 448 introductory lines, the *Prolegomenon*, combining White’s (1852) *Preface* and *Dedication*; these lines are prefixed with P. Some material in the homilies has been recovered from Jan van Vliet’s copy (London, Lambeth Palace, MS 783); these lines are prefixed with V. Recovered material from folio 48r is included as an appendix after the main text; these lines are prefixed with A.

⁴ See Johannesson (forthcoming) for a description of Orm’s alphabet and use of capitals.

(see below for examples) occur within verses but not across the caesura between verses, or across line breaks. The *Ormulum* is also legendarily repetitive, using regularity of form, formulaic expressions and emphasis for liturgical effect (Morrison 1980, 133). The orthography and metrical structure in combination therefore reveal a great deal about early Middle English language and its pronunciation, including how it accommodated the borrowing of lexical items and derivational affixes from Old Norse (ON) and French (see, respectively, Pons-Sanz, forthcoming; Skaffari, forthcoming). These regular features allow for more complicating features to be considered in context.

A further remarkable feature of MS Junius 1 is the evidence of extensive editorial practice found throughout the entire extant manuscript, comprising thousands of changes, ranging from single strokes of the pen to the replacement of multiple lines. No complete review of revisions in this manuscript has been published, primarily due to the magnitude of the work required to detect them all. The present article therefore does not claim to be comprehensive in the details of its findings but focuses on providing a typology which can inform a more complete future analysis of the manuscript. Most of the few previous studies on revisions in the *Ormulum* have focused on minor but frequent revisions which indicate language change having taken place during the text's development, including the systematic substitution of derivational endings descended from Old English (OE) for ON equivalents (Holm 1922; see also section 5 below). Since at least White (1852), revisions in the manuscript have often been attributed to a Hand B, correcting the original Hand A.⁵ Hand B has variously been associated with an additional unnamed scribe (White 1852; Burchfield 1952, 1953; Holm 1922), or to Orm himself, at a later stage of life (Turville-Petre 1947; Matthes 1951; Morrison 1983). A further Ormish Hand (or type) P has also been adduced, for the English text before the homilies, by Matthes (1933).⁶ This part of the manuscript includes White's Preface and Dedication, which Johannesson and Cooper (2023) group together as the Prolegomenon, following the discovery of the connection between the two sections, also by Matthes (1933). The exact

⁵ Hands A and B are more similar than can be explained by their simply being contemporaries. However, if there ever was a detailed understanding of the paleography of Hand B as distinct from Hand A, the knowledge has been lost, except for a few details. Certainly, parts identified as B can have larger and clumsier letters than parts identified as A, but this could also be attributed to Orm himself having worsening vision and weaker hands as he aged, as well as the difficulty of writing over rougher erased parchment (see also Morrison 1980). One clear feature associated with Hand B is in the form of the <n>, in which the minims lack upward exit strokes, and may be described as flat-footed. This type of <n> is frequent in revisions, for example in line 452, folio 12v, but not in <n> in unrevised words, which are sharp-footed. The revision is one of many attributed to B by White, although he does not specify the form of the <n> (White and Holt 1878, ii, 350; see also Cooper and Dekker, forthcoming).

⁶ On folios 3r, part of 3v, *signe de renvoi* to 9r, part of 9v, returning to 3v, all of folio 4 and the first few rows of 5r, column a.

details of the interaction between Hands A and B are therefore unresolved. There are also minor additions by a medieval Hand C, who is certainly a different contributor, and does not follow the orthographic principles of the rest of the text. The present paper addresses revisions but does not claim that they are the result of collaboration between several contributors. The assumption, taken from Johannesson and Cooper (2023), is that Hands A, B and P belong to Orm himself in different roles during different stages of composition and editing.

With reference to the revisions in the manuscript, the most comprehensive description available to scholarship as a whole is by Holm (1922).⁷ Holm makes an attempt to categorize the changes in the manuscript, with points of inquiry based on White's notes (as presented in White and Holt 1878) complemented by a single inspection of the manuscript of unknown duration. He also freely admits that his procedure is, to an extent, impressionistic. However, Holm (1922) is a slim monograph volume with a much larger scope than the present article can claim. The purpose of the present article is to use examples of metrical change to begin an annotated typology of revisions in MS Junius 1, without the fundamental assumption that changes have any particular purpose or goal. By contrast, Holm's implied thesis is always that the changes evident in the manuscript are improvements—corrections and additions—which implies that they address mistakes or absences in copying. This assumption suggests that the text at the time of copying was in a more advanced stage of composition than the present article claims. His book is also largely formulated as a catalogue, listing instances for reference, and is furthermore incomplete.⁸ Holm's categorization therefore represents no better a starting point for modern studies than White's (1852) notes. Nevertheless, both White (1852) and Holm (1922) remain helpful reference works and note at least some of the instances of the changes addressed below, albeit without usually considering the metrical effects of the changes. Matthes (1933) discusses some revisions in his discussion of Hand (or Type) B, which are critiqued by Turville-Petre (1947), who had unlimited access to the

⁷ Line numbers cited by Holm are from White and Holt (1878). These line numbers are included in the marginal apparatus in Johannesson and Cooper (2023). The present article uses line numbers from Johannesson and Cooper, which sometimes differ from White and Holt.

⁸ Indeed, it can be argued that any attempt to catalogue the changes in MS Junius 1 is *necessarily* incomplete, as there are an enormous number of changes, many of them are very minor, and others may be unnoticeable. For example, two common features of Orm's writing are the stacking of double letters, and the use of strokes above the letter as a scribal abbreviation to indicate a nasal consonant letter <m> or <n>. The combination of these two features creates a range of allographs for certain words. This means that a word like *himm* "him" as rendered in editions may actually be spelled <himm>, <hi^mm> or <hī> in the manuscript. Adding such a graph or part of a graph can affect the metrical status of many words and the relevant strokes may have been added at any time. Sometimes a change in ink color or the shape of a letter may indicate a change in hand or time of addition, but there is no obvious pattern to the distribution of the various forms within the manuscript: any may occur at any point.

manuscript. Turville-Petre argues that types A and P are Orm himself, while B is another person “intimately versed in Orm’s thought and methods” (27). Later, Matthes (1951), in a direct response to Turville-Petre, discusses revisions which affect formulaic expressions (addressed in section 7 below), and argues against her specific points that there is no evidence that B has a worse understanding of the verse structure than A. They also address some of the specific changes listed below, but with very little reference to metrical aspects of the text. The sources mentioned in this paragraph nevertheless represent a minimal background to frame the discussion of the examples presented below.

Theoretical approaches to textual revisions rarely address medieval manuscripts, as there are so few which feature apparent authorial intervention, and even fewer which address verse texts. Furthermore, the implication of *correction* opposed to *revision* is that in order for correction to take place, an ideal form must exist at some point, perhaps represented in an exemplar, perhaps only in the mind of the author. As noted above, the present article does not make this assumption and leaves the possibility open that cancelled parts of the *Ormulum* may have been correct or acceptable at some point. As with Holm (1922), the prevailing assumption is that scribes correct their own or others’ errors, rather than change their minds (e.g., Hamel 1983). With reference to Orm’s apparent procedure of changing his text over time, Taylor (2015) does address the interaction of the roles of author, scribe and editor when they intersect in one medieval person, providing a philosophical background to considering an author who interacts with the text at several stages of production. Bryan (1999) addresses collaborative work between several contributors, as well as highlighting that certain revisions “defy the category of ‘error,’” allowing for multiple, equally valid final forms (15). For the purposes of the present article, however, a theory of how manuscripts become complex in the first place is wanting. Nevertheless, there are good sources for later materials, which survive in greater volume and diversity. Wakelin (2014) notes that corrections in handwritten documents are ubiquitous but understudied compared to printed texts. He also summarizes current views on scribal intervention, especially in copying, the results of which are often small in scope. Other scribes in the medieval period were able to focus on minutiae, including individual graphs or syllables (Wakelin 2014, 24). These inform type 1 and 2 revisions below, which address changes smaller than a word. He also notes the addition of “tiny words,” emphasizing that “frequent ubiquitous close reading constitutes the big picture” (16). However, as with other sources mentioned above, Wakelin also characterizes manuscript revisions as corrections of errors by default, including in the case of the *Ormulum* (12). The categorization method below relies largely on generalizations derived from Wakelin (2014), in that he addresses changes at the level of a graph, part of word or whole word, reflecting types 1, 2 and 3

respectively. The present paper adds a further category 4 for revisions greater in scope than an orthographic word.

The data for the categorization below is based on a list of manuscript revisions identified while editing the manuscript for Johannesson and Cooper (2023). The following sections do not attempt to list all changes in the manuscript, or even provide a representative sample, as there are uncounted thousands.⁹ Furthermore, many identified changes are clearly attempts to address space concerns or to adhere more closely to orthographic features and therefore do not affect meter. The larger-scale features which are addressed include lexical root and derivational ending substitution and their effect on suprasegmental phonological phenomena such as vowel hiatus (and its avoidance), the addition and removal of lexical items, and the addition or removal of multiple verses. Many revisions include text being cancelled.¹⁰ Nevertheless, White was able to recover much cancelled text already in his 1852 edition, and Johannesson and Cooper (2023) had the advantage of high-quality digital photographs, including ultraviolet images, allowing closer analysis of specific deletions than before. Furthermore, new text may be added interlineally, over erasures, in the margins with guiding lines showing the point of insertion, in balloons, in spaces intended for capitals or entries from the table of contents or on additional slips of parchment inserted into the binding, sometimes with paired sets of *signes de renvoi* showing where they should be inserted into the text.

The remainder of the present article exemplifies types of changes which are evident in the manuscript and establishes the step of placing them within a set of categories as part of the development of a typology. This typology will allow the great undifferentiated mass of complex and interacting changes in the manuscript to be organized for reference.

2. Method

The examples for this article were extracted from the copious notes produced by Nils-Lennart Johannesson during his early work in processing the text for the

⁹ For any attempt to produce a complete catalogue, an electronic edition, cross-referenced to manuscript images and accompanied by a hierarchical database will be a minimal requirement. Producing such a tool is one of the goals of the *Ormulum* Project at Stockholm University but at time of writing is still in the planning stage.

¹⁰ Cancellation may be by erasure, the process of scraping off the uppermost layer of parchment. Erasure leaves a darker, rougher writing surface which clearly stands out from the surrounding area. Sometimes, it can be seen that a correction is immediate, as the text continues uninterrupted from an erased area onto fresh parchment. Sometimes it is evident that the correction is made later, as text around the erasure remains, and new text is fitted into the erasure. Cancelled text may instead be deleted. Deletion is the inking over of text, covering all space between the baseline and waistline. This obscures the majority of the text under most light conditions, leaving only ascenders and descenders visible.

2023 edition. These materials remain largely unpublished but are an essential reference archive for the *Ormulum* Project. The selection first involved a principle of exclusion, starting with the entire text of MS Junius 1, and removing changes which could not have a metrical impact within Orrm's system. Since there are so many revisions in the manuscript, a set of principles was established to remove or limit features which are irrelevant to verse design (in the terms of Jakobson 1960). These principles of exclusion are mostly listed below as part of the framing of the principal categories. However, there are some general principles which can also be applied. Excluded examples include those irregular lines which are caused by parts of the manuscript being cut away after writing (e.g., on folios 15 and 119), and uncorrected errors, which show no evidence of revision so are outside the remit of the present article. In addition, minor changes are considered to be non-metrical if replacements are like-for-like (e.g., if a consonantal onset is replaced by another consonantal onset). However, replacements larger than a word but smaller than a verse may have metrical consequences, so they are not excluded. Furthermore, examples are excluded if the same word or small group of words has been written twice in succession, for example on both sides of a line break, and one has later been cancelled or is noted by Johannesson and Cooper (2023) to have been removed from the edition text. In addition, instances of the removal or addition of entire groups of pairs of verses are excluded from the present study, as are entire added pairs of verses without cancelled text, for example indicated by *signes de renvoi* and inserted folios. The remaining revisions may have a bearing on metrical issues, including rhythmic features, poetic devices and lexical choices, such as the use of anaphora and formulae. The remaining notes were sorted into categories based on the scope of the changes evident in them. Within these principal categories, similar revisions were grouped together, and salient examples extracted for discussion.

One limitation of the present article is the technical ability to render the huge range of orthographic details used by Orrm, especially his stacked letters, diacritics and rare graphemes (some of which are evidently unsystematic) as well as his obsolete punctuation. Scribal abbreviations are also used frequently in words of Latin origin. These variants are expanded in the present article with the forms given in the edition by Johannesson and Cooper (2023), with the exception of the *paraphi* and some punctuation marks, which are left out for technical reasons.

3. Types of Revisions

The revisions discussed in the present article are divided by scope, on a scale of 1–4, with a proviso that the smallest changes (type 0) are not included in the present article.

1. Additions or erasures of single or multiple graphs smaller than a morpheme.
2. Addition, cancellation or alteration of morphemes smaller than an orthographic word.
3. Addition, replacement or cancellation of lexical items as orthographic words.
4. Addition, replacement or cancellation of elements longer than an orthographic word.

These categories do not quite run the gamut of potential changes. There are some revisions (which could be called type 0) which are smaller than a graph and therefore too small to affect phonological features. There are however multiple changes of each larger type, some of which occur only once, and others which are the result of apparent systematic revision throughout the manuscript. The remainder of the present article exemplifies some of the more prominent changes which have an effect on Orrm's metrical choices.

3.1 Type 1 changes: Additions or erasures of single or multiple graphs smaller than a morpheme

Type 1 changes are extremely common and rarely affect the meter. There are however very few instances in which additions or cancellations of single letters may be seen to cause metrical changes. This is due to a small number of factors. The first is that the addition of single letters to create double consonants is often untraceable because of the use of stacked letters and nasal strokes, which may have been added at any time. The second is that many inflectional endings inherited from OE have been reduced to a simple <e> which may be subject to resolution if followed by a word beginning with a vowel or <h>, as a form of hiatus avoidance.¹¹ One controversial point connected to resolution is the distinction between initial <ǧh> (perhaps /ç/) and medial <ǧ^h> (certainly /ɣ/) which, despite a similar appearance and some phonetic similarities, have different origins and have been demonstrated not to represent allophones of a single morpheme.¹² Furthermore, initial <ǧh> occurs only in *ǧho* "she," derived from OE *hēo* "she." If

¹¹ A note on transcription conventions. In order to discuss metrical features, it is necessary to refer to phonological features. However, the phonology of the *Ormulum* is typically discussed with reference to its strict orthography (see especially Anderson and Britton 1999). A complete phonological analysis of the *Ormulum* dialect, adducing all of its evident phonemes and allophones, has not been published. Cooper and Åberg (forthcoming) summarize the essential points. Phonological annotation is therefore used sparingly in the present paper, and graphological annotation substitutes for it when addressing manuscript features.

¹² See Anderson and Britton (1999) and Cooper and Åberg (forthcoming) for discussions.

this <ǧh> does represent a phoneme, it is remarkable in not being recurrent.¹³ It also represents a precocious spelling variant, since other texts with <ǧh> for ME *she* are much later and use the same sequence in other words (Anderson and Britton 1999, 305). However, one instance may indicate the emergence of <ǧh> from earlier <h>. In line 452, the original text *Patt naffde ho næfrær tæmedd* “that she had never before conceived” features an otherwise unattested form of the subject *ho* “she” in a metrically licit off-verse.¹⁴ This text is found on folio 12v, part of the oldest quire in the manuscript, and is the first instance in the homilies in which the feminine subject is found in a position where resolution of two adjacent vowels could take place.¹⁵ Correcting to *ǧho* prevents this resolution and thereby adds a syllable to the line. This extra syllable is removed when an apparently later hand replaces the disyllabic compound *næfrær* “never before” with the rather feeble *nohht* “not.” The revision of this line may indicate that *ho* was considered an acceptable feminine singular subject pronoun in the young Orrm’s variety, perhaps even up until the point where he began copying notes into the extant manuscript.

There are also two borderline cases. One instance, at line 5693, starts life as grammatically sound but metrically illicit structure, *Swa summ þe spell kibeþþ*, “as the preaching says,” which would have made a six-syllable line. Later, *ǧodd* was added above *spell*, creating a further example of a formula described further in section 7 below. While Present-Day English *gospel* is lexicalized into one morpheme, its compound structure is still transparent in ME, so this may be considered the addition of a morpheme rather than part of one. In a similar case dealing with inflectional morphology, 7 *cunnenn swa to cwemenn ǧodd* “and know so to please God” (line 10163) was first written 7 *cunnenn swa to cwemenn ǧode*, with the final word showing an unexpected form in this position, as the *-e* suffix indicates a dative object. However, this leads to a nine-syllable line ending on an unstress, making an unacceptable on-verse.¹⁶ While the etymon for this

¹³ All translations are mine.

¹⁴ White and Holt (1878) record this change without comment, ascribing the change to B (350). No other instances of *ho* are evident in the manuscript either as a variant of *ǧho* or in any other circumstance. Other early ME texts with *ho* as the female pronoun include the Lambeth Homilies, MS 487 (Morris 1988).

¹⁵ See also final unstressed <e> before <ǧh> in, for instance, lines 1937, 2037, 2045, etc. A complete list would be otiose as *ǧho* is among the commonest of words, especially in passages about the Virgin Mary.

¹⁶ A note on the use of the Tironian *et* for *and* “and,” written <7>. Orrm uses this very frequently, and when writing in English, he has four forms, as with all letters: a large capital for marking text sections, a bold capital used at the beginning of on-verses, a non-bold capital at the beginning of off-verses, and a miniscule elsewhere. Capital Tironian *et* is indistinguishable from numeral seven in most modern fonts. Orrm did not use Arabic numerals, so there is no danger of confusion in his writing. Arabic numerals in the manuscript, such as the column numbers, are added by modern contributors.

verb, OE *cwēman* “to please,” usually has a dative object, *cwemenn* elsewhere in the *Ormulum* has an unmarked object, so this appears to be a metrical and spelling correction rather than a grammatical one.¹⁷ The paucity of type 1 examples show that it is unusual for such minor changes to affect the meter, or if they do, it is difficult to detect them.

3.2 Type 2 changes: Addition, removal or alteration of morphemes smaller than an orthographic word

These type 2 changes, in which affixes are removed or added, have the greatest influence on metrical revisions. Systematic changes in this category are sometimes consequences of changes in the grammatical system, which Orm apparently noticed during the editorial process. One frequent change which affects the meter is the standardization of the singular forms of *self* “self” as part of reflexive pronominal expressions. Holm (1922) catalogues these as “B.-corrections bearing upon accident” (1). In OE, *self* “self” has a range of inflections typical of a pronoun, but by Orm’s time, the inflectional system has virtually collapsed, leaving for this lexeme only the unmarked *self*, a weak form *selfe* and an apparently dative *selfenn* found as a prepositional complement. However, the pre-edited text also allows *selfenn* in anaphora to nominative noun phrases, later revised to *self*.¹⁸ This is sometimes compensated for by the addition of monomorphemic adverbs, especially *aȝȝ* “always, ever” (e.g., line 1252), *wel* “well” (e.g., line 3192) and sometimes by the replacement of the entire phrase, showing that type 2 cancellations can lead to type 3 and 4 additions (see sections below). For example, line 1252 starts life as *7 arrt te selfenn milde. 7 meoc*. “and [thou] art thyself mild and meek.” Later, the suffix is removed from *selfenn*, and *aȝȝ* “always” is added, leaving *7 arrt te self aȝȝ milde. 7 meȝc*.¹⁹ There are also some instances of *-enn* being added.²⁰ For example, line 3562, *Forr MARȝe. 7 forr himm selfenn ec*.²¹ “For Mary and for himself also” started as *Forr sannte MARȝe. 7 forr himm self*. Since this instance of the pronoun is a prepositional complement, the suffix is expected, and its addition meant that *sante* had to be removed, further necessitating that a sentence adverbial *ec* “also”

¹⁷ A dative noun *ȝōde* “to God” (with a breve to distinguish it from the otherwise homographic adjective *ȝōde* “good.PL”) is however found as an adjective complement with a derived adjective in line 1952, *Þatt ta wass ȝōde cweme* “that then was pleasing to God.”

¹⁸ Reformulated with *self* at lines 1090, 5757, 9133, 9353, 9390, 9421, 11252, 16877 and 17168. *Selfen* is replaced entirely at 3545, 4227 and 5979. Nominative singular *selfenn* apparently remains uncorrected in lines 3882, 9912, 12881 and 14944. There is also a reformulation with *aȝenn* “own” in line 11414, and entire lines replaced in lines 19027 and 19311.

¹⁹ With regular <eo> to <e_> updating in *meȝc* (Johannesson and Cooper 2023, xxvi).

²⁰ At lines 3562, 3614 and 11989.

²¹ In Johannesson and Cooper (2023, 150), with erroneous extra spacing as *himm selfenn* [sic].

be added to make up the numbers. A sort of reverse of this also occurs three times. In these cases, a preposition is added before the reflexive NP, allowing the pronoun to retain the oblique suffix in the newly-formed prepositional complement.²² Line 3041 started life as *7 soþfast ȝodd himm sellfenn*, “and truly God himself,” but in its final condition reads, *7 soþ ȝodd inn himm sellfenn*. “and true God in himself.” The addition of the preposition makes this instance of *sellfenn* grammatically correct, with a change from a two-syllable adjective to a one-syllable synonym correcting the meter. This change represents the continuing process of inflection loss in early Middle English in action, and revisions by which the meter might be kept regular, happening apparently whenever Orrm noticed change during his lifetime.

Derivational suffixes are also subject to some revision. One commonplace revision was identified by White (1852), who observed (but did not catalogue) the frequent cancellation of the OE nominal suffix *-niss* and its disyllabic variant *-nesse*, and their being replaced by the ON equivalent *-leȝȝc*. He characterizes this change as a typical intervention of the “ruder but apparently contemporary” Hand B (White 1852, 350). Nouns and adjectives with distinctive weak forms in the *Ormulum* invariably come from OE etymons, meaning that nominal suffixes from ON etymons do not have variants both with and without final <e>. Throughout the manuscript, most instances of the *-niss* suffix have been replaced by *-leȝȝc*.²³ However, both *-ness* and *-nesse* remain. Burchfield (1956) commented that the original monosyllabic form was always *-niss*, although it appears that in two cases, *-ness* was the original, while *-nesse* is never corrected.²⁴ In line 5056, *-niss* is replaced by *-nesse*, which adds a potential syllable. However, this is countered by a syntactic reorganization which leads to resolution of the adjacent vowels into a single position. The original text is *7 godess aȝenn onnlicniss* “and God’s own likeness.” Later, this is changed to *7 godess onnlicnesse*. *7 all* “and God’s likeness and all,” which allows the final *-e* in *onnlicnesse* to be resolved into the following vowel of *annd*. Similarly, at line 5094, the *-niss* in *lufeniss* is replaced by *7 ec*, also leading to resolution. It is not clear why *-leȝȝc* would have been unsuitable in these two cases. Instances of *-niss* to *-leȝȝc* replacement are found only between Homilies 1 and 10, suggesting that the change was relatively early. Usages of *-leȝȝc* without correction continue throughout the text. Furthermore, the Prolegomenon, which represents the latest

²² At line 3041 with *inn*, line 16428 with *burrh*.

²³ *-niss* > *-leȝȝc* replacement at lines 73, 85, 1142, 1170, 1380, 1476, 1544, 1546, 1768, 1883, 2165, 2521, 2523, 2531, 2535, 2539, 2551, 2605, 2637, 2663, 2964, 4622, 4628, 4648, 4706, 4746, 5706, 5724, 6276 and 7522.

²⁴ Pace Burchfield (1953), *-ness* > *-leȝȝc* replacement occurs at lines 1388 and 2637. However, this would be very difficult to determine from visual inspection of the manuscript or the reverse-color facsimile used by Burchfield to create his transcript.

extant text, does not include any *-leȝȝc* replacement, but *ȝodleȝȝc* “goodness” is found twice in uncorrected text.²⁵ There does seem to be free variation between disyllabic *-nesse* and monosyllabic *-leȝȝc* evident in the three- or four-syllable *modiȝnesse* “pride, arrogance” (which also has a four-syllable genitive form *modiȝnesses*)²⁶ and the much less frequent apparent exact synonym *modiȝleȝȝc*, with three syllables.²⁷ The availability of synonymous OE and ON derivational suffixes in Orrm’s dialect allows abstract nouns to have a variable metrical status.

The selected type 2 revisions show that grammatical change in the language can have metrical implications, and also that, along with other revisions, considerable grammatical changes took place during Orrm’s lifetime, which he tried to keep track of by updating his text to accommodate for new inflectional patterns. It also shows that parts of words and whole words were considered metrically equivalent to each other and that type 2 and 3 changes frequently occur together when single syllables are revised.

3.3 Type 3 changes: Replacement or removal of lexical items as orthographic words

Where whole words are added to lines without removing or adjusting other textual elements, it is usually apparent that the words have been left out by mistake. For example, at line 5349, *Forr mikell þing to tacnenn* “For to signify great things,” the *to* is inserted above the line, confirming that the verb is infinitive, and the revision corrects both a metrical and grammatical oversight. Because of the flexibility in lexical choice provided by a large number of metrically similar synonyms, this type of change usually has no effect on metrical structures. However, changes can be used to confirm the metrical equivalence of specific words or groups of words and reveal phonological choices.

There are numerous instances of changes in which lexical items are cancelled and replaced by near-synonyms found elsewhere in the text, or in some cases exact synonyms. Replacement of metrically equivalent lexical items can be incorporated to show the order in which changes took place. For example, in its final condition, the lexical root *ȝiferr* (OE *ȝifer* “glutton”) is found in the derivational noun *ȝiferrnesse* “avarice, greed,” only at line 9318. However, there is a systematic replacement of *ȝiferr-* with the apparent exact synonym

²⁵ At lines P373 and P407.

²⁶ At lines P78, P156, 1397, 3835, 3991, 4565 (gen.), 4979 (gen.), 6267, 6269, 6277, 7367, 8164 (where the <e> has been added later in the margin), 8322, 9610, 9620, 9788, 9835, 10787, 10791, 11590, 11790, 11796, 11850, 11968, 12040, 12056, 12062, 12067, 12078, 12219, 12301, 12356, 12367, 12375 (gen.), 12509 (gen.), 12971, 12975, 13673, 13683, 14923, 14941, 16830, 16845, 17677, 17730, 18260, 18267, 18412, 18440 (gen.) and 18466.

²⁷ At lines 73, V339, 1544, 2637, 3994, 8011, 12380, 19116 and 19708.

ġrediġ- (OE Anglian *grēdiġ* “greedy”) at least 45 times, leading to a type 2 change.²⁸ *Ġrediġ* also appears twice in uncorrected text, suggesting that *ġiferr-* > *ġrediġ-* is a late change. However, the apparent order of interventions from original *ġiferrniss* to final *ġredileġġc* in line 4648 suggests that the removal of the *-niss* suffix occurred later than the replacement of the root.²⁹ This combination of two type 2 changes, each addressing one morpheme, leads to a type 3 change. However, *ġiferr* and *ġrediġ* are both trochaic with a closed final syllable, so this replacement alone has no effect on the meter and apparently represents only lexical change. It may also be argued that, since this process only takes place in compounds, these elements should be considered combining forms rather than free morphemes. Nevertheless, replacements between metrically equivalent synonyms are fairly frequent and in some cases systematic.

Another regular change which appears to be liturgical in origin rather than lexical, grammatical or metrical is the removal of the casual use of *laferrd* “lord” as an honorific (see also Holm 1922, 49; Matthes 1951, 191). In the final condition of the text, *laferrd* as a honorific is reserved for God and Christ.³⁰ However, originally, John the Baptist and Job were given the same title, all instances of which were removed and the lines in which they were found formulated with a variety of solutions.³¹ The relationship between John and Jesus is emphasized by the revision in which *7 tatt te laferrd sannt iohan* “and which the lord Saint John” is reformulated to *7 tatt tatt cristes þeww iohan* “and which that servant of Christ, John.”³² These changes show that systematic replacement of particular terms and phrases does occur, but Orm also allowed himself some liberty in replacing them, allowing the text to undergo a reduction in repetitiveness during revision. These replacements are however like-for-like in terms of metrical status and show primarily that the decision to remove a single word can cause other words to be removed or added or force reformulation of whole phrases.

There are a few examples where grammatically sound sentences are revised to make the meter more regular. Line 9521 started life as *To ġreġġþenn hemm 7 to ġarrkenn hemm* “to prepare and to ready them” with synonymous coordinated

²⁸ Replacement found at lines 2967, 2975, 4522, 4560, 4648, 4697, 5713, 7511, 8014, 10152, 10177, 10184, 10186, 10202, 10210, 10213, 10216, 10234, 10238, 10240, 11780, 11798, 12074, 12076, 12225, 12231, 12265, 12277, 12291, 12297, 12305, 12332, 12339, 12355, 12379, 12497, 14129, 14139, 14241, 16017, 16028, 16031, 16059, 16831 and 16839.

²⁹ At line 3994 as *ġrediġleġġc*; at line 10217 as a free morpheme; at line 12280 as a root in *ġrediġliġ* “greedily”; at line 15789 as *ġrediġnesse*.

³⁰ The emperor is described as *oferrlaferrd* “overlord” (line 8272), and *laferrd* is used as a term of address to John the Baptist at line 9312.

³¹ For John, at lines 707, 9129, 9161, 9189, 9219, 9599*, 9651*, 9791*, 9849*, 9933*, 10115, 10366*, 10384*, 10442* and 10478*. For Job, at lines 4756, 4764 and 4832. See also the following note. These two characters have very different characteristics, and why they should be picked out for this title (compared to, e.g., Abraham) is not immediately obvious.

³² Instances of this specific revision are marked with * the preceding note.

verb phrases including one object per verb.³³ This made an illicit 9-syllable line, so the first *hemm* was erased after the next line was begun, and two horizontal lines drawn over the space. The addition or removal of a pronominal object was apparently a common trick for adjusting the meter (e.g., Wakelin 2014, 296). In the *Ormulum*, this technique can be seen, for example, in line 387, originally *Patt mann hallt forr góde menn*, “that one holds for good men.” This makes for an unacceptable seven syllables for an on-verse, and has an object added to make it identical to line 9705, *Patt mann hemm hallt forr góde menn* “that one holds them for good men.” This particular expression also recurs in line 9997 with a disyllabic variant of the third person singular indicative (with epenthesis rather than assimilation), and as a main clause: *Mann haldeþþ hemm forr góde menn*. While many replacements of whole words are like-for-like exchanges, it can also be shown that greater metrical rigor can be afforded by some grammatical flexibility in the revision of single lexical items. However, it is also the case that lexical replacements affecting whole words often have no effect on the meter. This is because synonyms, including borrowings from ON, are plentiful, and the Germanic stress patterns still dominant in the Middle English of the *Ormulum* vary little, meaning that like-for-like replacements are usually available if a single word is to be replaced.

3.4 Type 4 changes: Replacement of elements longer than an orthographic word

There are many points in the manuscript in which whole verses are replaced. Such replacements are arguably not relevant in terms of adhering to the metrical structure, as they operate above the level of the verse pair and are usually like-for-like exchanges of complete verses. However, some replacements of whole or partial verses allow us to see developments in the use of poetic devices. The frequent replacement of formulae by other formulae allows us to know which of his commonplace expressions Orrm considered to be interchangeable, and which he (perhaps) thought were being used too often or not often enough.

In the final condition of the *Ormulum*, the off-verse *Swa summ þe góddspell kipeþþ* “just as the gospel tells” (e.g., line 660) recurs throughout the text, with a less common on-verse variant *Swa summ þe góddspellwrihhte seððþ* “just as the evangelist says” (e.g., line 5642). In the original, the off-verse variant *Swa summ þe boc uss kipeþþ* “just as the book tells us” also occurs.³⁴ However in line 2246, this off-verse is deleted and replaced with *Affterr gástlike lare* “according to

³³ Comparable phrases combining this pair of verbs in an off-verse without an object in the same line occur in lines 97 and 9158.

³⁴ At lines 1137, 2246, 3277 and 5001.

spiritual doctrine,” which does not recur elsewhere in the extant text. Similar replacements of this expression with contextually relevant verses indicate that Orm consciously reduced the amount of formulaic material during the editorial process.³⁵ In an apparent attempt to diversify the commonplace formulae, *Swa summ þe ġoddspell kipeþþ* is replaced by *Þatt witt tu wel to soþe* “be well aware that this is true” at least thirty-two times.³⁶ This demonstrates that Orm was conscious of the repetitive nature of his text and modified it to distribute the formulae in a way that seemed suitable to him.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the verse design of the *Ormulum* is both very strict and flexible enough to accommodate linguistic and conceptual revisions, which occur frequently throughout the entire manuscript. While some revisions may be considered corrections, others affect features which may not have been errors to begin with. Similarly, textual material is not only added but sometimes removed and not replaced. Revisions can be metrical in nature or in effect, and metrical changes may be forced by changes in inflection or derivational morphology, lexical choice or by alteration of liturgical content or poetic devices.

Type 1 changes smaller than a morpheme rarely have a metrical impact, but metrical features can reveal the revision of language features, such as the apparent variant feminine singular pronoun *ho*. Type 2 are by far the most important for metrical issues, in which affixes, especially inflectional suffixes, are removed due to language change noted during the editorial phase of composition. The revision of affixes is often accompanied by Type 3 revisions in which orthographic words are added or removed, often with minimal lexical content. There are also instances in which components of derived words are replaced one at a time, to the point that it can be observed in what order changes have been made. When larger Type 4 replacements are made, it is apparent that the purpose is to revise content rather than grammar or meter. In several cases, such replacements have an effect on poetic content, to reduce the repetitive nature of the text by replacing commonplace formulae with other, less common formulae or new expressions. This typology provides a means of organizing the large number of complex revisions in MS Junius 1 and can provide scholars with a means of addressing the metrical aspects of the *Ormulum* in this most complex of manuscripts.

³⁵ This formula is replaced by non-repeating expressions with narrative content at lines 150 and 2660, and as part of a larger replacement covering lines 7464–69.

³⁶ At lines 234, 1275, 2002, 4051, 4147, 6605, 6699, 6725, 7321, 8516, 8592, 8720, 9550, 9678, 9872, 10585, 10961, 13241, 13353, 13621, 13629, 14179, 14661, 14683, 15207, 15901, 15945, 16421, 16893, 16935, 17349 (partially reconstructed by Johannesson and Cooper 2023) and 19743.

References

- Anderson, John, and Derek Britton. 1999. "The Orthography and Phonology of the *Ormulum*." *English Language and Linguistics* 3 (2): 299–334. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674399000258>.
- Bennett, J. A. W., and Douglas Gray. 1990. *Middle English Literature 1100–1400*. Oxford History of English Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryan, Elizabeth J. 1999. *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture: The Otho Lazamon*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Burchfield, R. W. 1952. "Two Misreadings of the *Ormulum* Manuscript." *Medium Ævum* 21: 37–39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/43626436>.
- Burchfield, R. W. 1953. "A Source of Scribal Error in Early Middle English Manuscripts." *Medium Ævum* 22 (1): 10–17.
- Burchfield, R. W. 1956. "The Language and Orthography of the *Ormulum* Ms.1." *Transactions of the Philological Society* 55 (1): 56–87.
- Cooper, Andrew, and Johanna Åberg. Forthcoming. "Phonology and Orthography in the *Ormulum*." In *The Language of the Ormulum*, edited by Sara M. Pons-Sanz, Andrew Cooper, Marcelle Cole, and Belén Méndez-Naya. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Cooper, Andrew, and Kees Dekker. Forthcoming. "Manuscripts and Editions: A Biography of the *Ormulum*." In *The Language of the Ormulum*, edited by Sara M. Pons-Sanz, Andrew Cooper, Marcelle Cole, and Belén Méndez-Naya. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Faulkner, Mark. 2010. *The Production and Use of English Manuscripts*. <https://www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/mss/EM.Ox.Juni.1.htm>.
- Hamel, Mary. 1983. "Scribal Self-Corrections in the Thornton *Morte Arthure*." *Studies in Bibliography* 36: 119–37.
- Holm, Sigurd. 1922. *Corrections and Additions in the Ormulum Manuscript*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri A.-B.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1960. "Linguistics and Poetics." In *Style in Language*, edited by Thomas Albert Sebeok, 350–77. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Johannesson, Nils-Lennart. Forthcoming. "Punctuation and Capitalisation in the *Ormulum*." In *The Language of the Ormulum*, edited by Sara M. Pons-Sanz, Andrew Cooper, Marcelle Cole, and Belén Méndez-Naya. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Johannesson, Nils-Lennart, and Andrew Cooper, eds. 2023. *The Ormulum*. 2 vols. EETS o.s. 360, 361. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kwakkel, Erik. 2012. "Discarded Parchment as Writing Support in English Manuscript Culture." In *English Manuscripts Before 1400: English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* vol. 17, edited by A. S. G. Edwards and Orietta Da Rold, 238–61. London: British Library.

- Matthes, Heinrich Christoph. 1933. *Die Einheitlichkeit des Ormmulum: Studien zur Textkritik, zu den Quellen und zur Sprachlichen form von Orrmins Evangelienbuch*. Heidelberg: C. Winter.
- Matthes, Heinrich Christoph. 1951. "Die Ormmulum-Korrekturen." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 50 (2): 183–99.
- Morris, Richard, ed. and trans. 1868. *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises (Sawles Warde, and þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd: Ureisuns of Ure Louerd and of Ure Lefdi, &c.) of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries / Edited from Mss. in the British Museum, Lambeth, and Bodleian Libraries*. EETS 29, 34, 53. London: N. Trübner & Co.
- Morrison, Stephen. 1980. "Continuity and Innovation in Early English Homilies: Studies on the Vocabulary of Spiritual Warfare in Old English Writings and in the Ormmulum." PhD diss. University of York. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/14007/>.
- Morrison, Stephen. 1983. "Sources for the *Ormulum*: A Re-Examination." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (4): 419–36.
- Pons-Sanz, Sara M. Forthcoming. "Ormm's Norse-Derived Vocabulary." In *The Language of the Ormmulum*, edited by Sara M. Pons-Sanz, Andrew Cooper, Marcelle Cole, and Belén Méndez-Naya. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Skaffari, Janne. Forthcoming. "French-Derived Words in the *Ormulum*." In *The Language of the Ormmulum*, edited by Sara M. Pons-Sanz, Andrew Cooper, Marcelle Cole, and Belén Méndez-Naya. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Sweet, Henry. 1888. *A History of English Sounds from the Earliest Period, with Full Word-Lists*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Taylor, Andrew. 2015. "Vernacular Authorship and the Control of Manuscript Production." In *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, edited by Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen, 199–214. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turville-Petre, J. E. 1947. "Studies on the *Ormulum* MS." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 46 (1): 1–27.
- Wakelin, Daniel. 2014. *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, Robert Meadows, ed. 1852. *The Ormmulum*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- White, Robert Meadows, and Robert Holt, eds. 1878. *The Ormmulum, with the Notes and Glossary of R. M. White*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Zonneveld, Wim. 2000. "The *Ormulum* and the *Lutgart*: Early Germanic Iambs in Context." *Parergon* 18 (1): 27–52.