

Rhythm

Concepts

Contraction When a word loses a medial consonant, causing the two syllables on either side of it to merge: **sehan* > *sēon*. Contracted sequences could count as one or two metrical syllables in early verse as required, but are generally counted as one in later verse.

Dip A metrical position carrying no metrical stress

Drop *See dip*

Half-lift A metrical position carrying reduced metrical stress

Lift A metrical position carrying full metrical stress

Long syllable Any syllable which, after syllabification, does not end in a short vowel

Parasiting When a word gains a syllable because a vowel is added to make it easier to pronounce (*epenthesis*). Such extra syllables could be counted or ignored in early verse, but are generally counted in late verse.

Particle A word type which in Old English verse normally occurs near the beginning of a clause, comprising finite verbs, personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, demonstrative adverbs, and some conjunctions. These normally do not receive stress unless displaced to later in the clause.

Primary stress The most prominent type of word stress. Depending on the Old English word class in which it is found, it corresponds to a full metrical lift (e.g. with nouns) or to a dip (usually with finite verbs).

Proclitic A word type that normally occurs just before a stress word, comprising prepositions, demonstratives, possessives, coordinating conjunctions, and prefixes. These only receive stress if they are displaced to *after* the stress word on which they depend.

Resolution When a short syllable of at least some stress is metrically combined with the following syllable as a single metrical syllable. This is especially common if the second syllable is also short and no lift immediately precedes the resolvable sequence.

Secondary stress A category of reduced word stress, as found in the second element of an Old English compound. It normally corresponds to a metrical half-lift, but it may be bumped up to a full lift as required.

Short syllable Any syllable which, after syllabification, ends in a short vowel

Stress word A word type that always serves as a lift in Old English verse, comprising all nouns, adjectives, participles, and infinitives, as well as the heavier adverbs and pronouns

Syncope The loss of an unstressed medial vowel, as when dissyllabic *mihtig* (“mighty”) gains a weak nominative singular masculine ending *-a*, yielding *mihtga* after dropping medial *i*. Scribes sometimes wrote or reintroduced these vowels; some editors then print a dot below to indicate they are to be ignored in scansion.

Tertiary stress A category of word stress reduced even below the level of secondary stress, as found in heavy Old English inflectional suffixes. It normally corresponds to a metrical half-lift, but it may

be demoted to dip as required.

***u*-apocope** The loss of the inflectional ending *u* after a long stem, as in nsf *lār* (contrast *gyfu*) or napn *word* (contrast *scipu*). The relevance to metrics is that the forms that lose *-u* are also resolvable sequences, suggesting a linguistic basis for the metrical phenomenon of resolution.