

Ling 103: Language Structure and Verbal Art
Short Written Assignment #3

Examine the lines below from Chaucer's General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, lines 677-689. Then answer questions 1-3.

This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex
But smoothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex
By ounces heenge his lokkes that he hadde
And therwith he his shuldres overspradde
But thinne it lay, by colpouns, oon by oon;
But hood for jolitee wered he noon,
For it was trussed up in his walet:
Him thoughte he rood al of the newe jet.
Dischevelee save his cappe he rood al bare.
Swiche glaring y  n hadde he as an hare.
A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe,
His walet biforn him in his lappe,
Bret ful of pardon, comen from Rome al hoot.

y  n: eyes (two syllables)
vernycle: souvenir reproduction of
a religious relic
bifor: before
bret ful: entirely full
hoot: hot

heeng: hung *wex*: wax
strike: hank
flex: flax
ounces: i.e., in thin strands
overspradde: overspread
colpouns: strands
oon: one
jolitee: nonchalance
wered: wore
walet: pack
him thoughte: he thought
of the newe jet: in the latest fashion
dischevelee: with hair down
swiche: such

1. Examine the polysyllabic words below. On the left is the Middle English form as it appears in the above passage. On the right is the modern English counterpart with the stressed syllable marked.

<i>Pardoner</i>	<i>Párdoner</i>
<i>yelow</i>	<i>yéllow</i>
<i>overspradde</i>	<i>overspréad</i>
<i>colpouns</i>	<i>cúlppons</i> (obsolete)
<i>jolitee</i>	<i>jóllity</i>
<i>walet</i>	<i>wállet</i>
<i>dischevellee</i>	<i>dishévelled</i>
<i>vernycle</i>	<i>vérnicle</i>
<i>pardon</i>	<i>párdon</i>

According to the rules for Middle English stress given in class, where should these Middle English words have stress? (You may wish to look the words up in the Middle English dictionary to determine which vowels are long and which are short, and if any of these words have alternate spellings) Which words, if any, could be optionally subject to stress retraction? Which word (on the evidence of the rhyme scheme) must have had a different stress than in modern English, even though the stress rules do not predict this?

2. Supply metrical grids for the lines shown, noting stress maxima, obligatory elisions or syncopes, and schwas that are not counted for the meter. Discuss briefly any unusual properties in the lines.
3. For the line

His walet biforn him in his lappe,

some editors insert *lay* so that the line reads:

His walet lay biforn him in his lappe,

Briefly discuss the pros and cons of this emendation based on evidence from meter.