

## **Metre in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*: a reanalysis**

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Middle High German (MHG), like both earlier Germanic and modern German (despite their substantial metrical differences), is considered to rely on trochaic foot structures. Scholars have consequently assumed a preference for trochaic metre in poetry of the MHG Classical Period. However, given the trend elsewhere in Europe to emulate French lyrics and compose verse in iambic metre, even in other trochaic languages, it seems inadequate simply to assume a trochaic metre for all MHG poetry without good evidence. A closer examination of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*—an adaptation of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*—suggests that the traditional analysis is not only insufficient but counter to the linguistic evidence. Based on a close analysis of a 150-line sample, it is argued here that *Parzival* was in fact composed in iambic tetrameter. A taxonomy of line structures found in the poem was identified and analysed according to Halle & Keyser's (1966) principles for iambic metre. The overwhelming dominance of the *wswsws* pattern (in addition to other permissible deviations) over a typical trochaic structure is particularly convincing. An iambic analysis is further corroborated by the consistently iambic structure of line-final feet, identified according to the weight of the final, penultimate and antepenultimate syllables of each line. The present analysis has the advantage of explaining the peculiarities of scansion in *Parzival* much more parsimoniously than the traditional literary view, which relies on the overgeneralisation of a complex system involving a large amount of additional machinery and questionable reliance on scansion which deviates from natural language. A simple iambic reading is perfectly adequate, with any apparent irregularities or deviations from an ideal iambic metre resulting from the occasional impossibility of reconciling iambic and trochaic structures; of attempting to write iambic verse in a trochaic language.