

THE CAMBRIDGE

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

THIRD EDITION DAVID CRYSTAL



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lunch (brunch) n. Informal combination of breakfast

WILLIE
f

5

G

emo

KEEP CALM AND READ DAVID CRYSTAL

Thanks

Only about the other meetings comments I suppose and how they would propose to take the ideas forward.

you... but I guess that is partly up to you to say what is constructive etc.

Amazing! What about Fri lunchtime?

is anything on Fri any need for a meeting?

nope

what I can't say lunchtime?

am here all this week!!



CONTENTS

1 Modelling English	2	6 Modern English	80	Unusual Structures	140	Knowing vs Knowing	
PART I The History of English	4	Transition	80	Lexical Creation	142	About	203
2 The Origins of English	6	Grammatical Trends	81	Literary Neologism	144	Traditional Grammar	204
3 Old English	8	Prescriptivism	82	10 Etymology	146	Prescriptive Grammar	206
Early Borrowings	8	American English	84	Lexical History	146	The 21st-Century Legacy	208
Runes	9	Breaking the Rules	88	Semantic Change	148	The Main Branches of	
The Old English Corpus	10	Variety Awareness	90	Folk Etymology	149	Grammar	209
Literary Texts	12	Scientific Language	91	Place Names	150	14 The Structure of Words	210
The Anglo-Saxon		Literary Voices	92	Surnames	158	Morphology	210
Chronicle	14	Dickens	93	First Names	160	Suffixation	210
Spelling	16	Recent Trends	94	Nicknames	162	Adjectives	211
Sounds	18	Current Trends	96	Object Names	164	Nouns	212
Grammar	20	Linguistic Memes	97	Eponyms	165	The Apostrophe	215
Vocabulary	22	7 World English	98	11 The Structure of the		Pronouns	215
Late Borrowings	24	The New World	98	Lexicon	166	Verbs	216
Dialects	28	American Dialects	99	Semantic Structure	166	15 Word Classes	218
4 Middle English	30	Canada	101	Semantic Fields	167	Parts of Speech	218
French and English	30	Black English Vernacular	102	Dictionary and Thesaurus	168	Traditional Definitions	218
The Transition From Old		Australia	104	Collocations	172	New Classes	219
English	32	New Zealand	105	Lexical Predictability	174	Nouns	220
The Middle English		South Africa	106	Idioms	175	Pronouns	222
Corpus	34	South Asia	107	Synonyms	176	Adjectives	223
Literary Texts	36	West Africa	108	Antonyms	177	Adverbs	223
Chaucer	38	East Africa	108	Hyponyms	178	Verbs	224
Spelling	40	South-East Asia and the		Incompatibility	179	Prepositions	225
Sounds	42	South Pacific	110	Other Sense Relations	180	Conjunctions	225
Grammar	44	A World Language	112	12 Lexical Dimensions	182	Interjections	225
Vocabulary	46	Numbers of Speakers	114	Loaded Vocabulary	182	16 The Structure of	
Latin borrowings	48	Standard English	118	Taboo	184	Sentences	226
Dialects	50	The Future of English	120	Swearing	185	Spoken and Written	
Middle Scots	52	English Threatened and		Jargon	186	Syntax	226
The Origins of Standard		as Threat	122	Doublepeak	188	Types of Sentence	228
English	54	Euro-Englishes	124	Political Correctness	189	Sentence Structure	229
5 Early Modern English	56	PART II English Vocabulary	126	Catch Phrases	190	Sentence Functions	230
Caxton	56	8 The Nature of the		Vogue Words	191	Clause Elements	232
Transitional Texts	58	Lexicon	128	Slogans	192	Clause Types	233
Renaissance English	60	Lexemes	128	Graffiti	193	Phrases	234
The Inkhorn Controversy	61	The Size of the English		Slang	194	Noun Phrases	234
Shakespeare	62	Lexicon	129	Quotations	196	Verb Phrases	236
The King James Bible	66	Abbreviations	130	Proverbs	196	Multiple Sentences	238
Spelling and Regularization	68	Proper Names	132	Archaisms	197	Multiple Structures	239
Punctuation	70	The Size of a Person's		Clichés	198	Abbreviation	240
Sounds	71	Lexicon	133	Last Words	199	Disjuncts and Comment	
Original Pronunciation	72	9 The Sources of the		PART III English Grammar	200	Clauses	241
Grammar	74	Lexicon	134	13 Grammatical		Reporting Speech	242
Vocabulary	76	Native Vocabulary	134	Mythology	202	Sentence Information	243
The Academy Issue	77	Foreign Borrowings	136	The Nature of Grammar	202	Beyond the Sentence	244
Johnson	78	Lexical Structure	138				

PART IV Spoken and Written English 246**17 The Sound system 248**

Phonetics and	
Phonology	248
Vocal organs	248
Vowels	249
Consonants	254
Syllables	258
Connected Speech	259
Prosody	260
Sound Symbolism	262
Pronunciation in Practice	266

18 The Writing System 268

Graphetics and Graphology	269
Typography	269
The Alphabet	270
Properties of Letters	277
Letter Frequency	277
Letter Distribution	278
Letter Symbolism	280
Analysing Handwriting	281
Graphetic Variety	282
Spelling	284
Sources of Irregularity	286
Spelling Reform	288
Punctuation	290
The Development	
of the Writing System	292
Punctuation Marks	294
The Punctuation Problem	296

PART V Using English 298**19 Varieties of Discourse 300**

Structure vs Use	300
Pragmatic Issues	300
Constructing a Discourse	301

Microlinguistic Studies	302
Pragmatics	304
Cognitive Approaches	306
Texts and Varieties	308
Speech and Writing	309
Mixed Medium	310
Monologue and Dialogue	312
Panchronicity	317

20 Regional Variation 318

Accent and Dialect	318
International and	
Intranational	319
A Day in the Life of the	
Language	320
American and British	
English	326
American Dialects	332
British Dialects	338
Scotland	348
Wales	354
Ireland	356
Canada	360
Caribbean	364
Pidgins and Creoles	366
Australia	370
New Zealand	374
South Africa	376
New Englishes	378
Culture Talking	383

21 Social Variation 386

Sociolinguistic	
Perspective	386
Received Pronunciation	387
Prescriptive Attitudes	388
Gender	390
Occupation	394
Religion	395
Science	396
Law	398

Plain English	401
Politics	402
News Media	406
Journalism	408
Broadcasting	410
Weather Forecasting	411
Sports Commentary	412
Advertising	414
Restricted Varieties	416
New Fashions	418
New Technologies	419

22 Personal Variation 420

Individual Differences	420
Deviance	421
Word Games	422
Rule-Breaking Varieties	426
The Edges of Language	429
Jokes and Puns	430
Comic Alphabets	433
Variety Humour	436
Literary Freedom	438
Phonetics and Phonology	440
Graphetics and	
Graphology	442
Grammar and Lexicon	444
Discourse and Variety	446
Stylometry	449
Forensic Linguistics	450

23 Electronic Variation 452

Netspeak and its	
Properties	452
Lexical Distinctiveness	461
Graphetic Distinctiveness	462
Graphological	
Distinctiveness	463
Grammatical	
Distinctiveness	466
Discourse Distinctiveness	468

PART VI Learning About English 476**24 Learning English as a Mother Tongue 478**

Child Language	
Acquisition	478
Literacy	479
Grammatical Development	480
Early Words and Sounds	482
Reading and Writing	484
Insufficient Language	486
Language Disability	486

25 New Ways of Studying English 488

Technological Revolution	488
Corpus Studies	490
National and	
International Corpora	492
Dictionaries	498
Innovations	502
Sources and Resources	506

APPENDICES 507

I Glossary	508
II Special Symbols and Abbreviations	526
III References	528
IV New Addresses	534
V Further Reading	535
VI Index of Linguistic Items	540
VII Index of Authors and Personalities	544
VIII Index of Topics	549
Acknowledgements	569

PREFACE

A book about the English language – or about any individual language – is a daring enterprise, for it has as many perceptive critics as there are fluent readers. The language as a whole belongs to no one, yet everyone owns a part of it, has an interest in it, and has an opinion about it. Moreover, whenever people begin to talk about their own language, they all have something to offer – favourite words or sayings, dialect anecdotes and observations, usage likes and dislikes. Individual linguistic memories, experiences, and abilities enable everyone to make a personal contribution to language chat. In a sense, we are all truly equal when we participate – even though this democratic vision is disturbed by the widely-shared perception that some (notably, those who have learned the terminology of language study) are more equal than others.

The Stories of English

That is why the metaphor of ‘the story’ (as in ‘the story of English’) is somewhat misleading. There is no one ‘story’ of English. There are innumerable individual stories. And even if we look for broad narrative themes, there are several dimensions competing for our attention. For example, there is the structural story – the way the sounds, grammar, and vocabulary of the language have evolved. There is the social story – the way the language has come to serve a multiplicity of functions in society. There is the literary story – the way writers have evoked the power, range, and beauty of the language to express new orders of meaning. And there is the chronological story – apparently the most straightforward, though even here it is not possible to give a simple account, in terms of a beginning, middle, and end. There is no single beginning to the story of English, but several, with waves of Anglo-Saxon invaders arriving in various locations, and laying the foundations of later dialect difference. There is no single middle, but several, with the language diverging early on in England and Scotland, then much later taking different paths in Britain, North America, and elsewhere. And, as we observe the increasingly diverse directions in which English is currently moving around the world, there is certainly no single end.

A Traveller’s Guide

The biggest problem in compiling this book, accordingly, was what order to impose upon the mass of material which presents itself for inclusion. I have started with history, moved on to structure, and concluded with use. But it might have been otherwise, and I have written the six parts so that it is possible for readers to begin with any one of them and move in any direction. The same principle was applied to the structure of each part. While there is a certain logic of exposition in some topics (such as Part I, the history of English), there is none in others (such as Part V, the account of major regional or social varieties). In all cases, therefore, chapters, and sections within chapters, have been planned as self-contained entities, with relevant conceptual underpinning provided by the frequent use of cross-references.

The basic unit of organization in the book is the double-page spread. Sentences never cross turn-over pages, and the vast majority of topics are treated within the constraints of a single spread. I have tried to ensure that it will be possible for readers to dip into this book at any point, and find a coherent treatment of a topic in a single opening. There is too much in any language for the information to be assimilated in a continuous reading, and this is especially so in the case of English, with its lengthy history and vast range of use; and while some may wish to read this book ‘from left to right’, I suspect most will prefer to make more leisurely excursions over a period of time – more a casual stroll than a guided tour. The double-page spread approach is designed for that kind of traveller. Indeed, the metaphor of travelling is far more suitable for this book than the metaphor of story-telling.

Treatment and Coverage

I have kept several criteria in mind while writing *CEEL* (pronounced ‘seal’, as we have come to call it). I have tried to find a balance between talking about the language and letting the language speak for itself. Most spreads distinguish between an expository overview and detailed examples (largely through the typographic convention of main text vs panels). Then within each spread, I have tried to provide examples of the wonder which can be found when we begin to look carefully at the language. All languages are fascinating, beautiful, full of surprises, moving, awesome, fun. I hope I have succeeded in provoking at least one of these responses on every page. I would be disappointed if, after any opening, a reader did not feel to some extent entertained, as well as informed.

Obviously it has all been a personal selection. The hardest part, in fact, was the choosing. Once I had decided on a topic for a spread, I would collect material relating to it from as many sources as I could find. I would write the opening perspective, and then look at all the material to find textual and pictorial illustrations. Invariably I had enough material to fill several spreads, and choosing what to put in and what to leave out was always painful. The moral is plain. There are several other possible encyclopedic worlds.

Wider Horizons

In particular, there has not been space to go into the many applications of English language studies in proper detail. I touch upon some of these areas in Part VI, but the aim of that part is not to be comprehensive, but simply to illustrate the various directions that applied language studies can take. There are many other horizons which can only be approached by using systematic information about the language, but this book does not try to reach them. However, in view of its special place in the history of language study, I do try to reach out in the direction of literature as often as possible, and it is perhaps worth drawing attention to the way that literary examples are

dispersed throughout the book. I have always been strongly opposed to the great divide which traditionally separates ‘lang’ and ‘lit’. It seemed to me that it would only reinforce that divide if I were to include a separate chapter called something like ‘literary language’, so I have not done so – a position which is discussed towards the end of §22. Many pages, accordingly, display a literary presence – sometimes by way of stylistic comment, often through extensive quotation.

Acknowledgements

If an enterprise of this kind has succeeded, it is because its author has managed to balance on the shoulders of many others, without too often falling off. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Whitney Bolton, of Rutgers University, who read the whole text of the book and offered innumerable valuable comments and suggestions. I must thank Dr Andy Orchard and Professor David Burnley for their advice on several points in the Old and Middle English chapters. And a number of other scholars or organizations have helped me find the best illustration of a particular topic: these points of contact are acknowledged formally at the end of the book, but I would want to record personal thanks to Henry G. Burger, Lou Burnard, Kenneth Cameron, Jack Chambers, Vinod Dubey, Leslie Dunkling, Charles Jones, Kevin Kiernan, Edwin D. Lawson, Geoffrey Leech, Valerie Luckins, Angus McIntosh, Chrissie Maher, Chris Upward, Maggie Vance, and Lyn Wendon. Anne Rowlands helped me compile the indexes. It is perhaps unusual to thank a journal, but I have to acknowledge an enormous debt to *English Today*, and thus to its editor, Tom McArthur, for bringing together such a valuable collection of English-language material. For anyone who wishes to maintain a healthy English-language lifestyle, I prescribe the reading of *ET* three times a day after meals.

The book has been a real collaboration with in-house staff at Cambridge University Press, and involved many planning meetings both in Cambridge and Holyhead, over a period of some three years. It is therefore a real pleasure to acknowledge the roles of Geoff Staff and Clare Orchard, who managed and coordinated the project at Cambridge, Paula Granados and Anne Priestley, who carried out the picture research, and Carol-June Cassidy, who read the text from the point of view of American English. I have much enjoyed collaborating once again with Roger Walker, whose design experience will be evident on every page. I am especially grateful to Adrian du Plessis, director of Cambridge Reference, for his personal interest and encouragement from the earliest days of this project. And, in a different sense of in-house, I thank my wife, Hilary, whose editorial comments have greatly improved the clarity of the text, and whose role in relation to the book’s planning and production has been so great that it defies any attempt at conventional expression.

David Crystal
Holyhead, October 1994

Preface to the Paperback Edition

I have been delighted by the enthusiastic reception given to the appearance of *CEEL*, which has permitted the early production of a

paperback edition. For this edition I have taken the opportunity of correcting a number of typographical errors which slipped through in the first printing, and have made a number of small textual modifications in response to points made by readers and reviewers. The only major authorial change affects §7, where I have brought the table of World English statistics up to date, using 1995 population estimates; this has also involved a rewriting of the associated commentary.

Several other changes have affected later sections of that chapter, largely as a consequence of the rapidly growing position of English throughout the world. Indeed, since the text of *CEEL* was completed, in 1994, this topic has attracted greatly increased media attention, with the millennium providing the excuse for fresh discussion of ‘the future of English’. A related publication, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1997, 2nd edn 2003), has enabled me to deal with this issue in proper depth, supplementing the historical story outlined in the first part of §7 with a fuller account of contemporary developments (such as the role of English on the Internet) than it has been possible to describe in the present book.

This preface gives me an opportunity to thank the many readers of the first edition who have sent in facts, comments, and anecdotes about the way English is used in various parts of the world. These are far too numerous and extensive to be easily included in a book like *CEEL*, but they have all been carefully filed, and it is my hope that before too long there will be an opportunity to use this information as part of an archive about the English language, whose absence (referred to at the end of the book) I continue to lament.

David Crystal
Holyhead, February 1997

Preface to the Second Edition

The amount of revision for the new edition has been considerable, but can be easily summarized. Time-related tables, such as the table of statistics on World English usage and country population figures, have been updated to 2001. The rapid evolution of the Internet during the 1990s has required the addition of a separate 10-page section (§23), with consequent revision of later chapter numbers. Political events of the decade, such as in Hong Kong, have been addressed, and a number of dated illustrations have been replaced. The section giving details of further reading has been updated, and websites have been added to institutional addresses. Last but not least, with the turning of the millennium all references to ‘this century’, and the like, have been faithfully revised.

David Crystal
Holyhead, September 2002

Preface to the Third Edition

A lot has happened in the 15 years since the second edition, though not all of the developments have been predictable. For instance, I was expecting to update the statistics on global English use – now including all countries, not just those where English is a first or second language – and I wasn't surprised to find it necessary to add extra pages on the growing cultural identities of 'new Englishes'. But who would ever have predicted that I would need new spreads on English in a post-Brexit Europe, or on changes in the oratorical style of American presidents?

I introduced the language of the Internet in my second edition, but the digital developments that sparked linguistic interest pre-2003 have been hugely overtaken by those that have taken place since, not least in relation to social media and online language play. Facebook, Twitter, Wikis, Second Life, WhatsApp, LOLcats, and Doggolino name just some of the popular innovations that today need to be represented in any book that dares to call itself a language encyclopedia. They illustrate the emergence of new varieties of online discourse, often more radical than the first manifestations of electronically mediated communication, and making us rethink some of our traditional categories of linguistic description, especially in relation to text analysis. At the same time, the arrival of 'big data' has introduced a new climate into corpus linguistics, which has vastly grown since 2003, and motivated one of the largest revisions in this edition.

Other fields have grown too. This third edition has additional spreads on gender, with its new paradigms of enquiry, Internet graphology, and forensic linguistics. The first decade of the new millennium also saw the publication of the historical thesaurus of the *OED*, fresh interest in original pronunciation (especially in relation to Shakespeare), and the emergence of new forms of digital art. The field of linguistics broadened its scope, notably in cognitive linguistics and the various domains of online enquiry that provided the motivation for searchlinguistics. The ongoing revision of the *OED* necessitated a complete review of all the statistics relating to Shakespeare's vocabulary, and the new character of the *OED* and other dictionaries

Frontispiece Caption

The British Library printed a series of postcards reflecting the history of the language and its varieties, in association with its exhibition *Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices* (12 November 2010–3 April 2011) (see p. 504). In their breadth of coverage they provide an appropriate frontispiece for the encyclopedia.

Introduction to the exhibition

Summer is icumen in (c. 1225–50); BL Harley MS.978 (see p. 36)

Merchant, from the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1483) G.11586 (see p. 38)

Of Matrimonie, from the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) BL C.25.1.14.(1.) (see p. 67)

Opening page of *A Table Alphabetical*, Robert Cawdrey (1604) Bodleian Library (see p. 76)

has caused a significant expansion to Part VI. That section also acknowledges the various ways in which popular interest in the language has been fostered in recent years by such organizations as the British Library.

All of this has added over fifty pages to the present edition. Most of the other pages have also been revised, some very much so, to take account of the various changes that have affected the language since 2003. Updating the visual context has been essential too: a new typeface has been used throughout, and about one-third of the illustrations in the book have been replaced. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly some illustrations can go out-of-date – most obviously, perhaps, in relation to technology. The mobile phones and computers of only fifteen years ago now look extremely clunky. This edition is also the first to be made available online, which has allowed me to make an audio recording of the historical illustrations and the examples of modern pronunciation, as well as adding links to additional material. Every spread has a link, either to an extra piece of writing by me or to a website.

I am grateful to Cambridge University Press for initiating a survey of second-edition users, whose feedback gave me several clear pointers about the topics most in need of revision. My thanks also to the team of people who worked on this new edition, especially my commissioning editor Rebecca Taylor, picture researcher Claire Eudall, page designer Zoe Naylor, and the other members of the in-house team: content managers Charlie Howell and Rosemary Crawley, content team lead Rachel Cox, design manager Stephanie Thelwell, Noel Robson from Creative Technical Support, and freelance copy-editor Chris Jackson. Geetha Williams and the typesetters at MPS Limited in Chennai did a grand job of turning my new-page briefs into elegant layouts. At home, Hilary Crystal managed the process of inputting revisions and, as ever, provided invaluable comments on my initial drafts. The result, I hope, is a book that will meet the needs and interests of a new generation of 21st-century English-language enthusiasts.

David Crystal
Holyhead, April 2018

Title-page of the *King James Bible* (1611) BL C.35.1.13.(1.) (see p. 66)

Hornbook, wooden 'paddle' with printed alphabet and text, 14.5 x 8.5 cm (c. 1650) BL C.45.a.14 (see p. 270)

Letters W and X from *The Paragon of Alphabets* (1815) BL Ch.800/111.(7.) (see p. 276)

The Pronouns, from *The Infant's Grammar* (1824) BL 012806.ee.33.(9.) (see p. 230)

Frontispiece of the *Modern Flash Dictionary* by George Kent (1835) 1490.d.52 (see p. 194)

H-dropping, from *Punch* (27 October 1855) C.194.b.199 (see p. 90)

The Mouse's Tale or Tail, from *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, Lewis Carroll (c. 1852–4) BL Add.MS.46700 (see p. 283)

Poster for Naylor's Travelling Show (1879) BL Evan.462 (see p. 414)

How to Write Love Letters and Romance with Your Girl Friend, Nathan O. Njoku (1965) BL X.0909/588.(161.) (see p. 108)

Remaining items all British Library design

The British Library presents

An entertaining EXHIBITION WITH ONE SERIOUS FLOOR

Handwritten musical notation with Latin lyrics, likely from a medieval manuscript.

OF PATRIMONIE. Fol. cccc. lxxvii.

who greeth this woman to be maried to this man.

I. A. take thee. A. do my lordes will, to have a lyeum this day forward, for better, for worse, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love, and to obey, til death by depart: according to gods holy ord. And thereto I plight thee my trouth.

When shall they loose their bondes, or when shall they be free? The answer is, when they have paid the money, or when they have given the bond.

A Table Alphabetical, contayning and teaching the true writing, and vnderstanding of hard vsual English words. &c.

(k) standeth for a kind of. (g. or gr.) standeth for Greeke. The French words haue this (f) before them.

A

- A Bandon, cast away, or pátte by, to leave, or foysake.
- Abash, bluth.
- abba, father.
- abbelle, abbateffe, spiritis of a summe-rie, comforters of others.
- abbators, counsellors.
- aberration, a going a stray, or wandring ring.
- abbreviat, to shorten, or make
- abridge, to short.
- abbur, to lie into, or border upon, as one lands end meets with another.
- abecedarie, the order of the Letters, as hee that oseth them.
- aberration, a going astray, or wandring.

B. § abdi-

THE HOLY BIBLE.
Containing the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Handwritten text, possibly a prayer or a letter, with a decorative border.

W w
Wandering Willy

That wandring far from home is silly, is often provid... and now in Willy.

X x
Xenophon

We come now to the Letter X, Which does not small our mind perplex. But yet we think that every Son Should read the works of Xenophon.

THE PRONOUNS.

At this moment a bustle was heard at the door From a party of PRONOUNS, who came by the score. And what do you think? Why I vow and declare They would pass for the Nouns who already were there. And their boldness was such, as I live it is true, One declar'd he was I, and one call'd himself YOU.

IN THE

Handwritten text on a yellow background, possibly a poem or a letter.

Prize Dogs of various Breeds

BLACK and TAN TOY TERRIERS, ITALIAN GREYHOUNDS, BLUE and HAIRLESS TERRIERS, PUG DOGS, DALMATIANS, &c.

GREAT ENGLISH & IRISH BULL DOGS,

GREAT DOG SHOW

1.—"KING," Belfast. 2.—"YOUNG DUKER," Sheffield.

HOW TO WRITE LOVE LETTERS
AND ROMANCE WITH YOUR GIRL FRIENDS
BY N. O. NOKU

Two lovers in the game of love. This is the best way to romance with your lovers if you don't know.

3/6d Net Price.

Copy right reserved.

1965 Edition 12th April.

A MAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE.
PAD. DIG. SHACK.
ROOST. GAFF.
SOCK. CRIB.
HAME. PLACE...

AT THE END OF THE DAY, THEY'RE MOVING THE GOALPOSTS

BRUV, MATES, COCKERS

LEND ME YER BRITNEYS

2b or not 2b. That is the Q.

PART I

The History of English

The history of English is a fascinating field of study in its own right, but it also provides a valuable perspective for the contemporary study of the language, and thus makes an appropriate opening section for this book. The historical account promotes a sense of identity and continuity, and enables us to find coherence in many of the fluctuations and conflicts of present-day English language use. Above all, it satisfies the deep-rooted sense of curiosity we have about our linguistic heritage. People like to be aware of their linguistic roots.

We begin as close to the beginning as we can get, using the summary accounts of early chronicles to determine the language's continental origins (§2). The Anglo-Saxon corpus of poetry and prose, dating from around the 7th century, provides the first opportunity to examine the linguistic evidence. §3 outlines the characteristics of Old English texts, and gives a brief account of the sounds, spellings, grammar, and vocabulary which they display. A similar account is given of the Middle English period (§4), beginning with the effects on the language of the French invasion and concluding with a discussion of the origins of Standard English. At all points, special attention is paid to the historical and cultural setting to which texts relate, and to the character of the leading literary works, such as *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Early Modern English period (§5) begins with the English of Caxton and the Renaissance, continues with that of Shakespeare and the

King James Bible, and ends with the landmark publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*. A recurring theme is the extent and variety of language change during this period. The next section, on Modern English (§6), follows the course of further language change, examines the nature of early grammars, traces the development of new varieties and attitudes in America, and finds in literature, especially in the novel, an invaluable linguistic mirror. Several present-day usage controversies turn out to have their origins during this period. By the end of §6, we are within living memory.

The final section (§7) looks at what has happened to the English language in the 20th and 21st centuries, and in particular at its increasing presence worldwide. The approach is again historical, tracing the way English has travelled to the United States, Canada, Africa, Australia, South and South-East Asia, and several other parts of the globe. The section reviews the concept of World English, examines the statistics of usage, and discusses the problems of intelligibility and identity which arise when a language achieves such widespread use. The notion of Standard English, seen from both national and international perspectives, turns out to be of special importance. Part I then concludes with some thoughts about the future of the language, especially in Europe in a post-Brexit world, and about the relationships which have grown up (sometimes amicable, sometimes antagonistic) between English and other languages.

A map of Anglo-Saxon England taken from Edmund Gibson's 1692 edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Latin caption (top left) explains that the map shows the places mentioned in the Chronicle and in Old English literature.

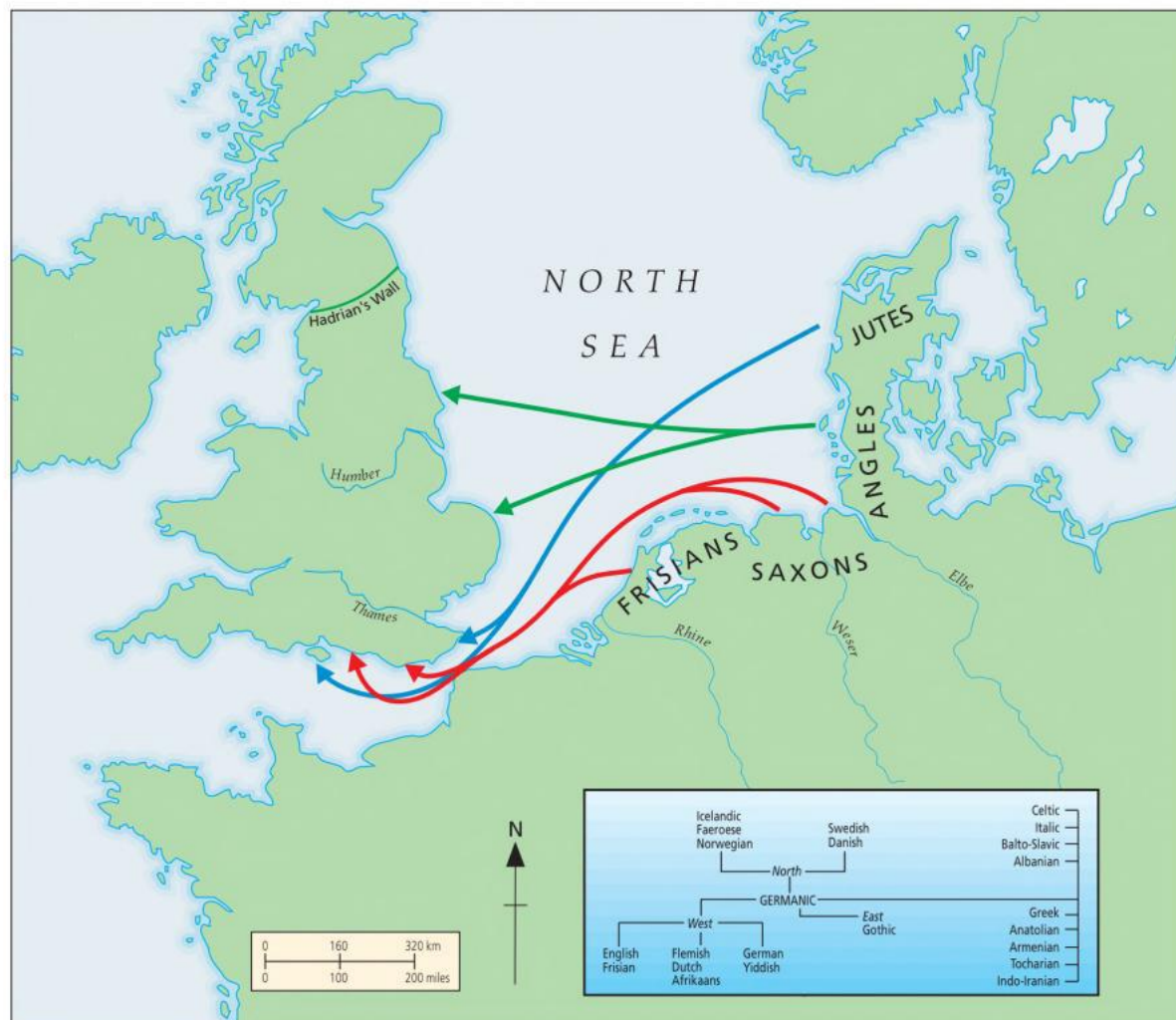
'To Aëtius, thrice consul, the groans of the Britons.' Thus, according to the Anglo-Saxon historian, the Venerable Bede, began the letter written to the Roman consul by some of the Celtic people who had survived the ferocious invasions of the Scots and Picts in the early decades of the 5th century. 'The barbarians drive us to the sea. The sea drives us back towards the barbarians. Between them we are exposed to two sorts of death: we are either slain or drowned.'

The plea fell on deaf ears. Although the Romans had sent assistance in the past, they were now fully occupied by their own wars with Bledla and Attila, kings of the Huns. The attacks from the north continued, and the British were forced to look elsewhere for help. Bede gives a succinct and sober account of what then took place.

They consulted what was to be done, and where they should seek assistance to prevent or repel the cruel and frequent incursions of the northern nations; and they all agreed with their King Vortigern to call over to their aid, from parts beyond the sea, the Saxon nation...

In the year of our Lord 449 ... the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and obtained the victory; which, being known at home in their own country, as also the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a still greater number of men, which, being added to the former, made up an invincible army.

Bede describes the invaders as belonging to the three most powerful nations of Germany – the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes. The first group to arrive came from Jutland, in the northern part of modern Denmark, and were led, according to the chroniclers, by two Jutish brothers,



The homelands of the Germanic invaders, according to Bede, and the direction of their invasions. Little is known about the exact locations of the tribes. The Jutes may have had settlements further south, and links with the Frisians to the west. The Angles may have lived further into Germany. The linguistic differences between these groups, likewise, are matters for speculation. The various dialects of Old English (p. 28) plainly relate to the areas in which the invaders settled, but there are too few texts to make serious comparison possible.

English is a member of the western branch of the Germanic family of languages. It is closest in structure to Frisian – though hardly anything is known about the ancient Frisians and their role in the invasions of Britain. Germanic is a branch of the Indo-European language family.

Hengist and Horsa. They landed at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet, and settled in the areas now known as Kent, the Isle of Wight, and parts of Hampshire. The Angles came from the south of the Danish peninsula, and entered Britain much later, along the eastern coast, settling in parts of Mercia, Northumbria (the land to the north of the Humber, where in 547 they established a kingdom), and what is now East Anglia. The Saxons came from an area further south and west, along the coast of the North Sea, and from 477 settled in various parts of southern and south-eastern Britain. The chroniclers talk about groups of East, West, and South Saxons – distinctions which are reflected in the later names of Essex, Wessex, and Sussex. The name Middlesex suggests that there were Middle Saxons too. Bede’s account takes up the story:

In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over the island, and they began to increase so much that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time expelled by the force of their arms, they began to turn their weapons against their confederates.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (see p. 14), compiled over a century later than Bede under Alfred the Great, gives a grim catalogue of disasters for the Britons.

457 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford,



Kent] and there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.

465 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of the thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.

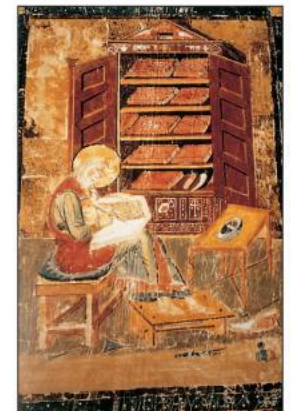
473 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English as one flies from fire.

The fighting went on for several decades, but the imposition of Anglo-Saxon power was never in doubt. Over a period of about a hundred years, further bands of immigrants continued to arrive, and Anglo-Saxon settlements spread to all areas apart from the highlands of the west and north. By the end of the 5th century, the foundation was established for the emergence of the English language.

THE NAME OF THE LANGUAGE

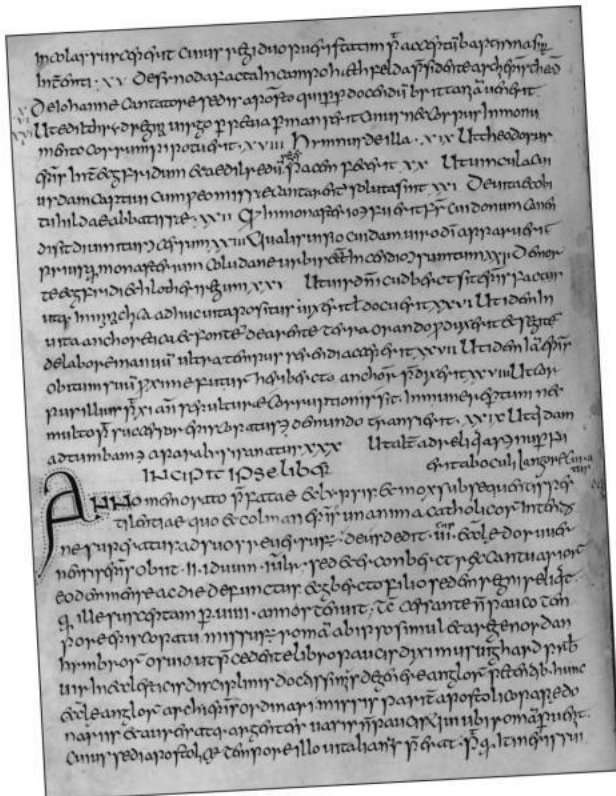
With scant respect for priorities, the Germanic invaders called the native Celts *wealas* (‘foreigners’), from which the name Welsh is derived. The Celts called the invaders ‘Saxons’, regardless of their tribe, and this practice was followed by the early Latin writers. By the end of the 6th century, however, the term *Angli* (‘Angles’) was in use – as early as 601, a king of Kent, Æthelbert, is called *rex Anglorum* (‘King of the Angles’) – and during the 7th century *Angli* or *Anglia* (for the country) became the usual Latin names. Old English *Engle* derives from this usage, and the name of the language found in Old English texts is from the outset referred to as *Englisc* (the *sc* spelling representing the sound *sh*, /ʃ/). References to the name of the country as *Englaland* (‘land of the Angles’), from which came *England*, do not appear until c. 1000.

The remarkably preserved body of a man, found in a peat bog in Denmark. Over 500 such remains have been found throughout northern Europe, many in the area formerly occupied by the Germanic tribes. The person has been murdered, possibly as a sacrificial victim to the Earth goddess. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of the tribes in his *Germania*, and at one point mentions a group of tribes including the Eudoses and the Anglii: ‘These tribes are protected by forests and rivers, nor is there anything noteworthy about them individually, except that they worship in common Nerthus, or Mother Earth, and conceive her as intervening in human affairs, and riding in procession through the cities of men.’ (Trans. M. Hutton, 1914.)



The Northumbrian monk, Bede, or Bæda, known as the Venerable Bede. Born at Monkton on Tyne in c. 673, he was taken at the age of 7 to the new monastery at Wearmouth, moving in 682 to the sister monastery at Jarrow, where he worked as a writer and teacher. He died in 735, and was buried at Jarrow. His masterpiece, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (‘Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation’), was begun in his later years, and finished in 731. Its focus is the growth of Christianity in England, but its scope is much wider, and it is recognized as the most valuable source we have for early English history. Written in Latin, an Old English translation was made in the reign of Alfred the Great.

A page from one of the manuscripts of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. The language is Latin.



THE EARLY PERIOD

Before the Anglo-Saxon invasions (§2), the language (or languages) spoken by the native inhabitants of the British Isles belonged to the Celtic family, introduced by a people who had come to the islands around the middle of the first millennium BC. Many of these settlers were, in turn, eventually subjugated by the Romans, who arrived in 43 AD. But by 410 the Roman armies had gone, withdrawn to help defend their Empire in Europe. After a millennium of settlement by Celtic speakers, and half a millennium by speakers of Latin, what effect did this have on the language spoken by the arriving Anglo-Saxons?

Celtic Borrowings

There is, surprisingly, very little Celtic influence – or perhaps it is not so surprising, given the savage way in which the Celtic communities were destroyed or pushed back into the areas we now know as Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria, and the Scottish borders. Many Celts (or Romano-Celts) doubtless remained in the east and south, perhaps as slaves, perhaps intermarrying, but their identity would after a few generations have been lost within Anglo-Saxon society. Whatever we might expect from such a period of cultural contact, the Celtic language of Roman Britain influenced Old English hardly at all.

Only a handful of Celtic words were borrowed at the time, and a few have survived into modern English, sometimes in regional dialect use: *crag*, *cumb* ‘deep valley’, *binn* ‘bin’, *carr* ‘rock’, *dunn* ‘grey, dun’, *brock* ‘badger’, and *torr* ‘peak’. Others include *bannoc* ‘piece’, *rice* ‘rule’, *gafeluc* ‘small spear’, *bratt* ‘cloak’, *luh* ‘lake’, *dry* ‘sorcerer’, and *clucge* ‘bell’. A few Celtic words of this period ultimately come from Latin, brought in by the Irish missionaries: these include *assen* ‘ass’, *ancor* ‘hermit’, *star* ‘history’, and possibly *cross*. But there cannot be more than two dozen loan words in all. And there are even very few Celtic-based place names (p. 151) in what is now southern/eastern England. They include such river names as *Thames*, *Avon* ‘river’, *Don*, *Exe*, *Usk*, and *Wye*. Town names include *Dover* ‘water’, *Eccles* ‘church’, *Bray* ‘hill’, *London* (possibly a tribal name), *Kent* (‘border land’), and the use of *caer* ‘fortified place’ (as in *Carlisle*) and *pen* ‘head, top, hill’ (as in *Pendle*).

Latin Loans

Latin has been a major influence on English throughout its history (pp. 24, 48, 60, §9), and there is evidence of its role from the earliest moments of contact. The Roman army and merchants gave new names to many local objects

and experiences, and introduced several fresh concepts. About half of the new words were to do with plants, animals, food and drink, and household items: Old English *pise* ‘pea’, *plante* ‘plant’, *win* ‘wine’, *cyse* ‘cheese’, *catte* ‘cat’, *cetel* ‘kettle’, *disc* ‘dish’, *candel* ‘candle’. Other important clusters of words related to clothing (*belt* ‘belt’, *cemes* ‘shirt’, *sutere* ‘shoemaker’), buildings and settlements (*tigle* ‘tile’, *weall* ‘wall’, *ceaster* ‘city’, *stræt* ‘road’), military and legal institutions (*wic* ‘camp’, *diht* ‘saying’, *scrifan* ‘decree’), commerce (*mangian* ‘trade’, *ceapian* ‘buy’, *pund* ‘pound’), and religion (*mæsse* ‘Mass’, *munuc* ‘monk’, *mynster* ‘minster’).

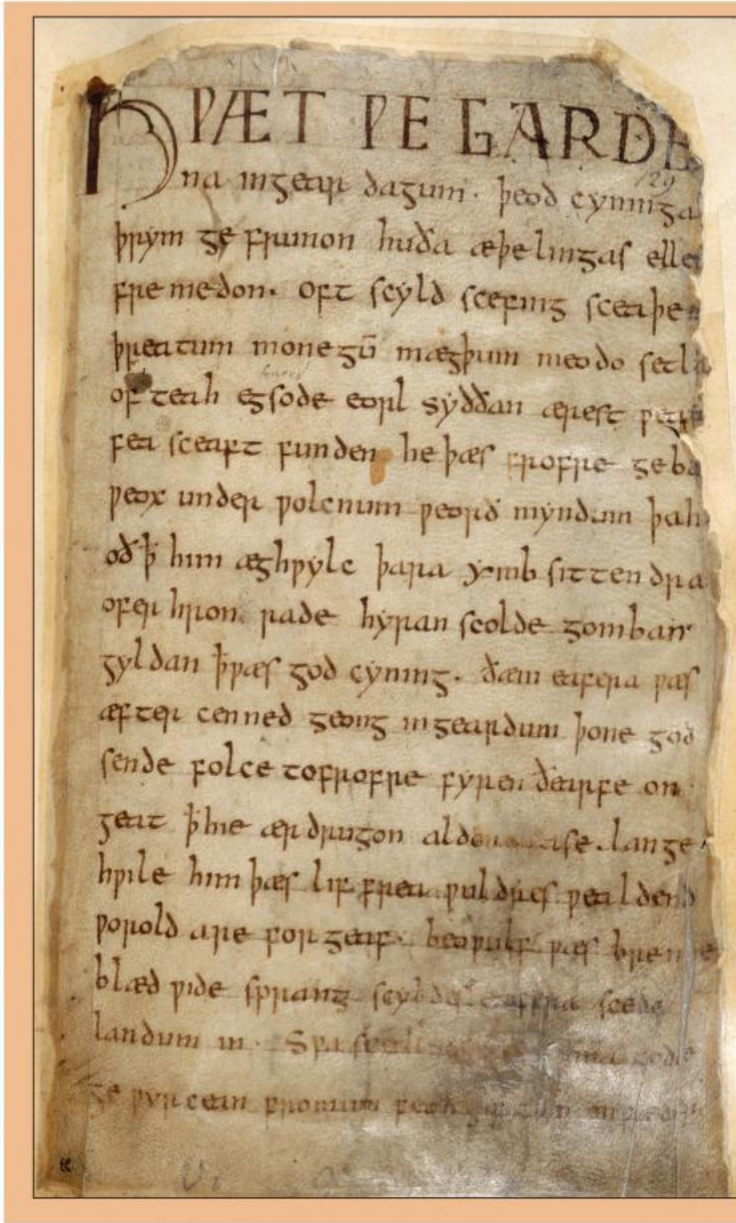
Whether the Latin words were already used by the Anglo-Saxon tribes on the continent of Europe, or were introduced from within Britain, is not always clear (though a detailed analysis of the sound changes they display can help, p. 19), but the total number of Latin words present in English at the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period is not large – less than 200. Although Vulgar Latin (the variety of spoken Latin used throughout the Empire) must have continued in use – at least, as an official language – for some years after the Roman army left, for some reason it did not take root in Britain as it had so readily done in Continental Europe. Some commentators see in this the first sign of an Anglo-Saxon monolingual mentality.

ANGLO-SAXON OR OLD ENGLISH?

The name *Anglo-Saxon* came to refer in the 16th century to all aspects of the early period – people, culture, and language. It is still the usual way of talking about the people and the cultural history; but since the 19th century, when the history of languages came to be studied in detail, *Old English* has been the preferred name for the language. This name emphasizes the continuing development of English, from Anglo-Saxon times through ‘Middle English’ to the present day, and it is the usage of the present book (abbreviated *OE*). Some authors, nonetheless, still use the term *Anglo-Saxon* for the language, the choice of this name reflecting their view that the nature of the language in this early period is very different from what is later to be found under the heading of English.

A reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon huts at West Stow, Suffolk. Each hut is some 15–20 feet (5–6 m) in length.





HWÆT WE GARDE-
What We Spear-Danes'

na. in gear-dagum. þeod-cyninga
in yore-days, tribe-kings'

þrym ge-frunon huða æþelingas ellen
glory heard, how the leaders courage

fremedon. Oft scyld scefing sceapena
accomplished. Often Scyld, Scef's son, from enemies'

þreatum monegum mægþum meodo-setla
bands, from many tribes mead-benches

of-teah egsode eorl syððan ærest weard
seized, terrorised earl(s), since first he was

fea-scaeft funden he þæs frofre gebad
destitute found; he its relief knew,

weox under wolcnum weorð-myndum þah.
grew under skies, in honours thrive,

oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymb-sittendra
until to him each of the neighbours

ofer hron-rade hyran scolde gomban
over whale-road submit must, tribute

gyldan þæt was god cyning. ðæm eafera was
yield; that was good king! To him heir was

æfter cenned geong in geardum þone god
after born young in dwellings, him God

sende folce to frofre fyren-ðearfe on-
sent to folk for solace; intense misery

geat þ hie ær drugon aldor-[le]ase. lange
saw when they before felt leaderless a long

hwile him þæs lif-frea wuldres wealdend
while; to them for it Life-Lord, glory's Ruler

worold-are for-geaf. beowulf wæs breme
world honour gave, Beowulf was famed,

blæd wide sprang scyldes eafera scede-
renown widely sprang of Scyld's heir Danish

landum in. Swa sceal [geong g]uma gode
lands in. So shall young man by good [deeds]

ge-wyrcean fromum feoh-giftum. on fæder
ensure, by fine fee-gifts in father's...

(After
J. Zupitza,
1882. Trans.
J. Porter, 1991.)

THE SCOP'S TALE

This opening page of the *Beowulf* text is taken from the text now lodged in the British Library, London (manuscript reference, Cotton Vitellius A. xv). The manuscript is a copy made in c.1000, but it was damaged by a fire at the Cottonian Library in 1731, hence the odd shape to the page. The name of the poet, or scop, whose version is found here is not known, nor is it clear when the work was first composed: one scholarly tradition assigns it to the 8th century; another to a somewhat later date.

This is the first great narrative poem in English. It is a heroic tale about a 6th-century Scandinavian hero, Beowulf, who comes to the aid of the Danish king Hrothgar. Hrothgar's retinue is under daily attack from a monstrous troll, Grendel, at the hall of Heorot ('Hart') in Denmark (located possibly on the site of modern Leire, near Copenhagen). Beowulf travels from Geatland, in southern Sweden, and after a

great fight kills the monster, and in a second fight the monster's vengeful mother. Beowulf returns home, recounts his story, and is later made king of the Geats, ruling for 50 years. There, as an old man, he kills a dragon in a fight that leads to his own death.

This plot summary does no justice to the depth of meaning and stylistic impact of the work. Apart from its lauding of courage, heroic defiance, loyalty to one's lord, and other Germanic values, *Beowulf* introduces elements of a thoroughly Christian perspective, and there are many dramatic undercurrents and ironies. The monster is a classical figure in Germanic tradition, but it is also said to be a descendant of Cain, and a product of hell and the devil. The contrast between earthly success and mortality is a recurrent theme. While *Beowulf* is being feted in Hrothgar's court, the poet alludes to disastrous events which will one day affect the Geats, providing a note of doom that coun-

terpoints the triumphal events of the narrative. The poem is full of dramatic contrasts of this kind.

Whether the poem is a product of oral improvisation or is a more consciously contrived literary work has been a bone of scholarly contention. Many of its striking features, in particular its alliterative rhythmical formulae (p. 23), are those we would associate with oral composition, for they would be a valuable aid to memorization; on the other hand, modern scholars have drawn attention to the patterned complexity of its narrative structure, its metrical control, and its lexical richness, suggesting a literary process of composition (p. 23). The critic W. P. Ker expressed one view, in *The Dark Ages* (1904), that *Beowulf* is a 'book to be read' – but if so it is one which makes maximum use of a style which must originally have evolved for use in oral poetry. (For an account of some modern investigative techniques, see p. 489.)

THE RUNE POEM

Each stanza of this poem (the first six are shown below) begins with the name of the rune printed alongside (p. 9). The poem would have been passed on orally, the rhythm and alliteration making it easy to remember, in much the same way as children today learn 'Thirty days hath September'.

Feoh byþ frofur fira gehwylcum—

F sceal ðeah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dælan
gif he wile for Drihtne domes hleohtan.

Ur byþ anmod 7 oferhryned,

U felafrecne deor, feohteþ mid hornum,
mære morstapa: þ is modig wuht!

Þorn byþ ðearle scearp, ðegna gehwylcum

Þ anfeng ys yfyl, ungemetun reþe
manna gehwylcun ðe him mid restedð.

Os byþ ordfruma ælcra spræce,

O wisdomes wraþu and witenra frofur
and eorla gehwam eadnys and tohiht.

Rad byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum

R sefte, and swiþhwæt ðam ðe sitteþ onufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpaþas.

Cen byþ cwicera gehwam cuþ on fyre,

C blac and beorhtlic, byrneþ ofstut
ðær hi æþelingas inne restap.

Wealth is a joy to every man—

but every man must share it well
if he wishes to gain glory in the sight of the Lord.

Aurochs is fierce, with gigantic horns,

a very savage animal, it fights with horns,
a well-known moor-stepper: it is a creature of
courage!

Thorn is very sharp, harmful to every man

who seizes it, unsuitably severe
to every man who rests on it.

Mouth is the creator of all speech,

a supporter of wisdom and comfort of wise men,
and a blessing and hope to every man.

Journey is to every warrior in the hall

pleasant, and biting tough to him who sits
on a mighty steed over the mile-paths.

Torch is to every living thing known by its fire;

bright and brilliant, it burns most often
where the princes take their rest within.

Old English poetic manuscripts contained no titles. Titles such as *Beowulf* or *The Seafarer* have been added by editors, usually in the 19th century. Most of the poetry is also anonymous, the chief exceptions being the few lines known to be by Cædmon (p. 20) and four poems containing the name of Cynewulf woven in runes into the texts as an acrostic (p. 424), so that readers could pray for him. We know more of the prose authors, who included King Alfred, Archbishop Wulfstan, and Abbot Ælfric, but even here most of the surviving material, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (p. 14), is anonymous.



From Alfred with love

Ælfred kyning hateð gretan
Wærferþ biscep his wordum
luflice ond freondlice...

King Alfred sends his greetings
to Bishop Werferth in his own
words, in love and friendship...

In the preface to his translation of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* ('Pastoral Care'), made c. 893, Alfred contrasts the early days of English Christianity with his own time, for which the destruction caused by the Vikings would have been largely to blame (p. 25). This book was part of a great programme of learning which Alfred inaugurated in an effort to repair the damage, organizing the translation of major texts which previously had been available only in Latin. Most of the surviving manuscripts of Old English are 10th-century in origin, and must owe their existence to the success of this programme.

The preface continues:

I want to let you know that it has often occurred to me to think what wise men there once were throughout England ... and how people once used to come here from abroad in search of wisdom and learning – and how nowadays we would have to get it abroad (if we were to have it at all). Learning had so declined in England that there were very few people this side of the Humber who could understand their service-books in English, let alone translate a letter out of Latin into English – and I don't imagine there were many north of the Humber, either. There were so few of them that I cannot think of even a single one south of the Thames at the time when I came to the throne. Thanks be to almighty God that we now have any supply of teachers. (Trans. A. G. Rigg.)

THE OPENING LINES OF THE SEAFARER

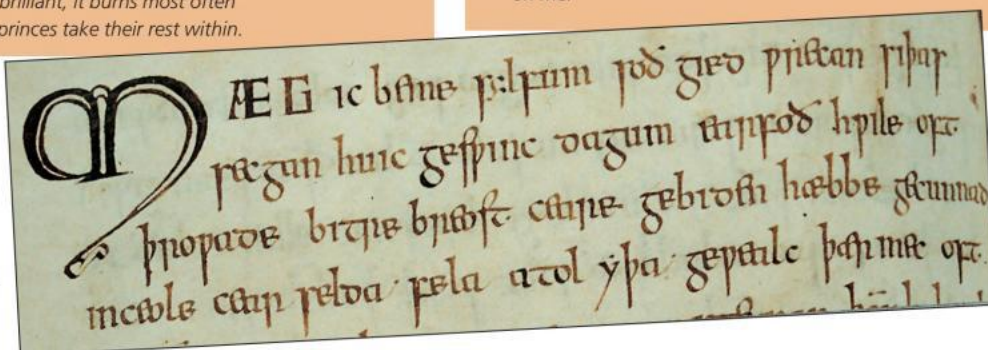
Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,
atol yta gewealc.

*Can I about myself true-poem utter,
of journeys tell, how I in toilsome-days
hardship-times often suffered
bitter heart-sorrow have endured,
come to know on ship many sorrow-halls
cruel rolling of waves.*

FROM THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

Pæt wæs geara iu— ic þæt gyta geman—
þæt ic wæs aheawen holtes on ende
astyred of stefne minum. Genaman me ðær
strange feondas,
geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me
heora wergas hebban;
bæron me þær beornas on eaxlum, oð ðæt hie me
on beorg asetton;
gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge. Geseah ic
þa Frean mancynnes
efstan elne micle, þæt he me wolde on gestigan.

*That was very long ago— I remember it still—
that I was cut down at the forest's edge
stirred from my root. Strong enemies took me there,
made me into a spectacle there for themselves, ordered me
to lift up their criminals;
men carried me there on shoulders, until they set me on
a hill;
many enemies fastened me there. I saw then the Lord of
mankind
hastening with great courage, that he intended to climb
on me.*



The opening lines of *The Seafarer*, from the Exeter Book.

455 Her Hengest 7 Horsa fuhton wiþ Wyr̥t georne þam cyninge, in þære stowe þe is gecueden Agæles þrep, 7 his broþur Horsa man ofslog. 7 æfter þam Hengest feng [to] rice 7 Æsc his sunu.

455 *In this year Hengest and Horsa fought against King Vortigern at a place which is called Agælesþrep [Aylesford], and his brother Horsa was slain. And after that Hengest succeeded to the kingdom and Æsc, his son.*

457 Her Hengest 7 Æsc fuhton wiþ Brettas in þære stowe þe is ge cueden Crecgan ford, 7 þær ofslogon .IIII. wera, 7 þa Brettas þa forleton Cent lond, 7 mid micle ege flugon to Lunden byrg.

457 *In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford], and there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.*

465 Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wið Walas neah Wippedes fleote, 7 þær .XII. Wilisce aldor menn ofslogon, 7 hiera þegn an þær wearþ ofslægen, þam wæs noma Wipped.

465 *In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of their thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.*

473 Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wiþ Walas, 7 genamon un arimedlico here reaf, 7 þa Walas flugon þa Englan swa fyr.

473 *In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English like fire.*

477 Her cuom Ælle on Breten lond, 7 his .III. suna. Cymen, 7 Wlencing, 7 Cissa. mid .III. scipum, on þa stowe þe is nemned Cymenes ora, 7 þær ofslogon monige Wealas, 7 sume on fleame bedrifon on þone wudu þe is genemned Andredeas leage.

477 *In this year Ælle came to Britain and his three sons Cymen, Wlencing, and Cissa with three ships at the place which is called Cymenesora [The Owers to the south of Selsey Bill], and there they slew many Welsh and drove some to flight into the wood which is called Andredeasleag [Sussex Weald].*

485 Her Ælle gefeahrt wiþ Walas neah Mearc rædes burnan stæðe.

485 *In this year Ælle fought against the Welsh near the bank of [the stream] Mearcraedesburna.*

488 Her Æsc feng to rice, 7 was .XXIII. wintra Cantwara cyning.

488 *In this year Æsc succeeded to the kingdom, and was king of the people of Kent twenty-four years.*

(After C. Plummer, 1892. Trans. G. N. Garmonsway, 1972.)

SOURCES OF THE CHRONICLE

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is not a single text, but a compilation from several sources which differ in date and place of origin. It takes the form of a year-by-year diary, with some years warranting extensive comment, some a bare line or two, and many nothing at all. Most ancient European chronicles were kept in Latin, but the present work is distinctive for its use of Old English – and also for the vast time-span it covers, from year 1 (the birth of Christ) to various dates in the 11th or 12th century.

There are seven surviving chronicle manuscripts, six of which are completely in Old English, the seventh partly in Latin. Scholars have given each text a distinguishing letter name, but they are more commonly known by the name of their source location or that of an early owner.

- Text A¹: the *Parker Chronicle*. This is the oldest manuscript, written in a single hand from the beginning to 891, then kept up to date in 13 or 14 other hands up to 1070. Its name derives from a former owner, Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury (1504–75). It is sometimes called the *Winchester Chronicle*, because its 9th-century subject-matter was compiled at Winchester, being later transferred to Canterbury. This is the version from which the facing extract is taken.
- Text A²: Fragments of an 11th-century copy of the *Parker Chronicle*, almost completely destroyed in the same Cottonian Library fire that damaged *Beowulf* (p. 11).
- Texts B and C: the *Abingdon Chronicles*. Two West Saxon versions: the first (B), extending to year 977, was copied c. 1000, and kept at Canterbury without additions; the second (C), extending to 1066, is a mid-11th-century copy which was kept up to date.
- Text D: the *Worcester Chronicle*. A text, with northern material added, which was sent to the diocese of Worcester. It was written in the mid-11th century, and kept up to date until 1079.
- Text E: the *Peterborough Chronicle*; also called the *Laud Chronicle*, after Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645). This version, copied at Peterborough in a single hand until 1121, extends as far as 1154.
- Text F: the bilingual *Canterbury Epitome*. This is a version of E in Latin and English, written in Canterbury c. 1100.

The Easter Tables

The text opposite shows the years 455 to 490 from Text E, and deals with the events soon after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons (p. 7). In this part of the Chronicle, the scribe has written a series of years on separate lines, assuming that a single line would suffice for each year. (He missed out year 468, and had to insert it afterwards – an interesting example of how scribal errors can be made.)

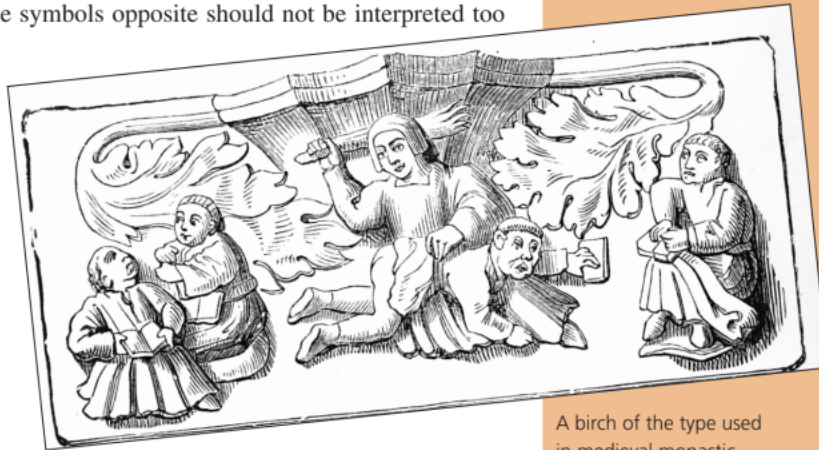
The Chronicles are not all like this. They change in style as they develop, and lose their list-like appearance. Many of the later entries, especially those written by contemporaries, contain a great deal of narrative, and take on the character of literary essays under their year headings.

The listing technique shown in the illustration is one which originated with the *Easter Tables*, drawn up to help the clergy determine the date of the feast in any year. A page consisted of a sequence of long horizontal lines. Each line began with a year number, which was followed by several columns of astronomical data (e.g. movements of the Sun and Moon), and the results of the calculation. Of particular relevance was the space left at the end of each line, which was used to write short notes about events to help distinguish the years from each other (such as 'In this year Cnut became king'). The Chronicles grew out of this tradition, but as the intention changed, and they became more like historical records, these end-of-line notes took up more space than was expected, and the scribe had to make room where he could find it. This is why some of the entries in the illustration appear opposite several year numbers.

OLD ENGLISH SOUNDS

How do we know what Old English sounded like? The unhelpful answer is that we do not. In later periods, we can rely on accounts by contemporary writers (p. 71) – but there is none of this in Old English. The best we can do is make a series of informed guesses, based on a set of separate criteria (see below), and hope that the results are sufficiently similar to warrant some general conclusions. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to this issue, and we now have a fair degree of certainty about how most of the sounds were pronounced. If an Anglo-Saxon were available, using the information on these pages we could probably communicate intelligibly.

We would have to get used to each other's accent, of course, in much the same way as modern speakers (unused, say, to Geordie or Cockney speech) need to do. There is no reason to suppose that there was any less phonetic variation in Anglo-Saxon times than there is today, and the symbols opposite should not be interpreted too



A birch of the type used in medieval monastic schools.

narrowly. To say that Old English *æ* was pronounced as an open front vowel (p. 250) is sufficient to distinguish it from *e* and other vowels, but it does not tell us the exact vowel quality which would have been used.

The Evidence

There are four main types of evidence used in deducing the sound values of Old English letters.

- **Alphabetical logic** We know a great deal about how the letters of the Roman alphabet were pronounced, and it seems reasonable to assume that, when the missionaries adapted this alphabet to Old English, they tried to do so in a consistent and logical way. The letter representing the sound of *m* in Latin would have been used to represent the same sound in English. Likewise, if they found it necessary to find a new letter, this must have been because they felt no Latin letters were suitable (as in the case of the new symbol *æ*).

Similarly, a great deal of information comes from the way variations of regional accent and changes over time are shown in the spelling of Old English texts. The scribes generally tried to write words down to show the way they

GETTING IT RIGHT

Generations of Old English students have pored over tables such as this one, in an effort to work out the 'sound' of the language. Many must have identified during their university days with the students of Ælfric (p. 16), caring not so much about what they said, as long as they said it right. But the analogy is only a partial one: 21st-century university tutors of Old English would not, on the whole, beat their charges.

Letter	Example and its meaning	IPA symbol	Modern example
æ	sæt 'sat'	[æ]	Southern BrE sat
ǣ	dǣd 'deed'	[ɛ:]	French bête
a	{ mann 'man' dagas 'days'	[ɒ] ¹ [ɑ]	AmE hot German Land
ā	hām 'home'	[ɑ:]	father
c	{ cyrice 'church' cēne 'bold'	[tʃ] ² [k]	church keen
cg	ecg 'edge'	[dʒ]	edge
e	settan 'set'	[ɛ]	set
ē	he 'he'	[e:]	German Leben
ea	earm 'arm'	[æə]	} as for [æ], [ɛ:], [e], [e:], followed by the first syllable of about
ēa	eare 'ear'	[ɛ:ə]	
eo	eorl 'nobleman'	[e:ə]	
ēo	beor 'beer'	[e:ə]	
f	{ æfre 'ever' fif 'five'	[v] ³ [f]	ever fife
	gyt 'get'	[j] ²	yet
g	fugol 'bird'	[ɣ] ⁴	colloq. German sagen
	gān 'go'	[g]	go
h	{ heofon 'heaven' niht 'night' brōhte 'brought'	[h] ⁵ [ç] ⁶ [x] ⁷	heaven German ich German brachte
i	sittan 'sit'	[i]	sit
ī	wīd 'wide'	[i:]	weed
o	{ monn 'man' God 'God'	[ɒ] ¹ [ɔ]	AmE hot BrE hot
ō	gōd 'good'	[o:]	German Sohn
s	{ rīsan 'rise' hūs 'house'	[z] ⁸ [s]	rise house
sc	scip 'ship'	[ʃ]	ship
þ, ð	{ oþer, oðer 'other' þurh, ðurh 'through'	[ð] ⁸ [θ]	other through
u	ful 'full'	[u]	full
ū	hūs 'house'	[u:]	goose
y	wynn 'joy'	[y]	German Würde
ȳ	rȳman 'make way'	[y:]	German Güte

Notes
Some of the sounds are restricted to certain contexts.

- 1 before m, n, n(g)
- 2 before/after i, and often æ, e, y
- 3 between voiced sounds
- 4 between back vowels
- 5 initially
- 6 after æ, e, i, y
- 7 after a, o, u
- 8 between vowels

The following riddle (No. 86 in the *Exeter Book* (p. 12)) illustrates the use of this transcription in a continuous piece of writing.

(After R. Quirk, V. Adams, & D. Davy, 1975.)

Wiht cwōm gangan	þær weras sæton
[wiçt kwō:m gɑŋgɑn	θɛ:r wɛrɑs sɛ:tɔn]
monige on mæðle,	mōde snottre;
[mɔniʒə ɔn mæðlə	mo:də snɔtrə]
hæfde ān ēage	ond ēaran twā
[hævdə a:n e:ʒə	ɔnd e:ərɑn twɑ:]
ond twēgen fēt,	twelf hund hēafda,
[ɔnd twe:ʒɔn fe:t	twelf hund hɛ:əvdɑ]
hrycg ond wombe	ond honda twa
[hryçʒ ɔnd wɔmbɑ	ɔnd hɔndə twɑ:]
earmas ond eaxle,	āne swēoran
[ɛ:ərmɑs ɔnd æəkslə	a:nə swe:ərɑn]
ond sīdan twā.	Saga hwæt ic hātte!
[ɔnd si:dɑn twɑ:	sɑgɑ hwæt ic hɑ:tɛ:]

were spoken. They were not in a culture where there were arbitrary rules for standardized spelling (though rigorous conventions were maintained in certain abbeys), so we are not faced with such problems as silent letters: the *w* of *writan*, the ancestor of *write*, was pronounced. Old English is, accordingly, much more ‘phonetic’ than Modern English (p. 284).

- **Comparative reconstruction** We can work backwards from later states of the language to make deductions about how Old English must have sounded. Several of the sounds of Modern English (especially dialect forms) are likely to have close similarities with those of Old English. It is unlikely that there is any real difference in the way most of the consonants were pronounced then and now. The chief problems are the vowels, whose values are always more difficult to pinpoint (p. 249).
- **Sound changes** We know a great deal about the kinds of sound change which take place as language progresses. It is therefore possible to propose a particular sound value for an Old English letter different from the one in existence today, as long as we are able to give a plausible explanation for the change. For example, the Old English equivalent to *it* was *hit*. If we claim that the *h* was pronounced, we have to assume that people stopped pronouncing it at a later stage in the language. Is this a likely sound change? Given that the dropping of *h* in unstressed pronouns is something that happens regularly today (*I saw ‘im*), it would seem so.

- **Poetic evidence** The way in which poets make words rhyme or alliterate can provide important clues about the way the sound system works. So can the rhythmic patterns of lines of verse, which can show the way a word was stressed, and thus indicate what value to give to a vowel appearing in an unstressed syllable – a critical matter in the late Old English period (p. 32).

Complications

There are many pitfalls to trap the unwary philologist. Scribes could be very inconsistent. They were also prone to error. But of course we do not know in advance whether an idiosyncratic form in a manuscript is in fact an error or a deliberate attempt to represent an ongoing sound change or a regionalism. A great deal of detailed comparative work may be required before we can be sure.

The absence of universal spelling rules can also pose a problem, as there was no necessity for scribes to be consistent, and many were not (p. 10). Manuscripts can vary in their use of *þ* and *ð* (p. 16), single or double consonants (*s* or *ss*, *d* or *dd*), and several groups of vowels (notably, *i*, *y*, and *ie*). At one point we might find *hit*, and at another, *hyt*; *gyldan* ‘pay’ might be spelled *gielðan*; *þær* might be *þar*. Such difficulties, it must be appreciated, contribute only to the fortitude and motivation of the true Old English phonologist. *Hiȝe sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre* (p. 12).

ANCIENT MUTATIONS

Some English word pairs showing the effects of a phonological change which took place over 1,200 years ago.

goose – geese
tooth – teeth
man – men
mouse – mice
hale – health
doom – deem
full – fill
whole – heal
fall – fell (vb.)
blood – bleed
foul – filth
long – length
broad – breadth
old – elder

THE FIRST VOWEL SHIFT

We can say one thing with certainty about the accent of the Anglo-Saxon invaders after they arrived in Britain: it changed. We know this because the words which emerged in Old English out of the Germanic spoken on the Continent (p. 6) looked (and therefore sounded) very different from their later counterparts in the early days of German. What happened to cause such a difference?

A related observation arises out of the way some Latin words were borrowed into Old English without a change in their vowel, whereas others did change. Latin *caseus* became *cyse* ‘cheese’ in Old English, but *castellum* became *castel* ‘village’. In the first case, the *a* vowel changed; in the second case, it did not. There are many similar examples. What happened to cause such a difference?

i-mutation

The explanation is now a well-established part of Germanic philology. It asserts that the Old English vowels changed in quality between the time the Anglo-Saxons left the Continent and the time Old English was first written down. By examining hundreds of cases, it is possible to establish a pattern in the way this change took place.

In Germanic there were many words where a vowel in a stressed syllable was immediately followed by a high front vowel ([i]) or vowel-like sound ([j]) in the next syllable. The plural of **fōt* is thought to have

been **fōtiz*, with the stress on *fō*. For some reason (see below), the quality of this high front sound caused the preceding vowel to change (mutate). In the case of **fōt*, the *ō* became *ē*, which ultimately came to be pronounced [i:], as in modern *feet*. The *-iz* ending dropped away, for once the plural was being shown by the *e* vowel, it was unnecessary to have an ending as well. *Fēt* therefore emerged as an irregular noun in English – though the process which gave rise to it was perfectly regular, affecting hundreds of cases.

This process has come to be called *i*-mutation, or *i*-umlaut (a German term meaning ‘sound alteration’). It is thought to have taken place during the 7th century. There is no sign of the vowels continuing to change in this way in later periods. The process also explains the Latin example above: *caseus* must have been borrowed very early into English, before the time that *i*-mutation was operating, as its vowel has been affected (in this case, the *a* has become *y*); *castellum*, however, must have been borrowed after the time when *i*-mutation stopped taking place, as its *a* vowel has remained in *castel*.

i-mutation is a kind of ‘vowel harmony’ – a very natural process which affects many modern languages. People, it seems, readily fall into the habit of making one vowel in a word sound more like another in the same word, and this is what happened in 7th-century Old English. All back vowels in the context described above were changed into front vowels –

and all short front vowels and diphthongs were affected, too, being articulated even further forward and higher (with the exception of [i], of course, which is already as far forward and as high in the mouth as any vowel can be).

There are a few exceptions and complications, which analysts still puzzle over, but the general effect on the language was immense, as this sound change applied to the most frequently occurring word classes, all of which had *i* sounds in their inflectional endings. This is why we have in Modern English such pairs as *food* / *feed* (from the addition of an **-ian* verb-forming suffix in Germanic), as well as *strong* / *strength* and several others (from the addition of an **-ip* adjective-forming suffix). Not all the forms affected by *i*-mutation have survived into Modern English, though. In Old English, the plural of *book* was *bec*, but this has not come through into Modern English as *beek*: the forces of analogy (p. 212) have taken over, and caused a change to the regular *books*.

We do not know why *i*-mutation operated when it did. What was it that made 7th-century Anglo-Saxons start pronouncing their vowels in this way? And why did the process not affect all cases of *i* in a following suffix (words ending in *-ing*, for example, were not affected)? This phonological detective story is by no means over.

The asterisk marks a hypothetical form.

SOME FEATURES OF OLD ENGLISH GRAMMAR

THE CÆDMON STORY

Old English prose provides the clearest way in to analysing the grammar of the language (the poetry, as can be seen from the extracts on pp. 12–13, is much more compressed and intricate). This extract is from an Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 4, Ch. 24). It tells the story of Cædmon, the unlettered cowherd who became England's first Christian poet, sometime in the late 7th century. The translation dates from the late 9th century. (The actual text of Cædmon's hymn is given on p. 29.)

To modern eyes and ears, Old English grammar (for grammatical terminology, see Part III) provides a fascinating mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The word order is much more varied than it would be in Modern English, but there are several places where it is strikingly similar. Adjectives usually go before their nouns, as do prepositions, articles, and other grammatical words, just as they do today. Sometimes, whole sentences are identical in the order of words, or nearly so, as can be seen from the word-for-word translation in the Cædmon text below. The main syntactic differences affect the placing of the verb, which quite often appears before the subject, and also at the very end of the clause – a noticeable feature of this particular story.

In Modern English, word order is relatively fixed. The reason Old English order could vary so much is

that the relationships between the parts of the sentence were signalled by other means. Like other Germanic languages, Old English was *inflected*: the job a word did in the sentence was signalled by the kind of ending it had. Today, most of these inflections have died away, leaving the modern reader with the major task of getting used to the word endings, in order to understand the Old English texts. It is necessary to learn the different forms taken by the verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and the definite article. The irregular verbs, which change their form from present to past tense, are a particular problem (as they continue to be, for foreign learners), because there are so many more of them. Nonetheless, it should be plain from reading the glosses to the Cædmon extract that present-day English speakers already have a 'feel' for Old English grammar. (Long vowel marks (p. 16) are added in the notes below, as an aid to pronunciation.)

wæs he se mon in weoruldhade geseted oð þa tide þe he
Was he the man in secular life settled until the time that he
wæs gelyfdre ylde; ond he næfre nænig leoð geleornode, ond he
was of-advanced age; and he never any poem learned, and he
for þon oft in gebeorscipe, þonne þær wæs blisse intinga
therefore often at banquet, when there was of-joy occasion
gedemed, þæt heo ealle sceolden þurh endebyrdnesse be hearpan
decided, that they all should by arrangement with harp
5 singan, þonne he geseah þa hearpan him nealecan, þonne aras he
to sing, when he saw the harp him approach, then arose he
for some from þam symble, ond ham eode to his huse. þa he
for shame from the feast, and home went to his house. When he
þæt þa sumre tide dyde, þæt he forlet þæt hus þæs
that a certain time did, that he left the house of the
gebeorscipes, ond ut wæs gongende to neata scipene,
banquet, and out was going to of-cattle stall
þara heord him wæs þære neahte beboden; þa he ða þær
of which keeping him was that night entrusted; when he there
10 in gelimplice tide his leomu on reste gesette ond onslepte,
at suitable time his limbs at rest set and fell asleep,

þa stod him sum mon æt þurh swefn, ond hine halette
then stood him a certain man beside in dream, and him hailed
ond grette, ond hine be his noman nemnde, 'Cædmon, sing me
and greeted, and him by his name called. 'Cædmon, sing me
hwæthwugu.' þa ondswarede he, ond cwæð, 'Ne con ic noht
something.' Then answered he, and said, 'Not can I nothing
singan; ond ic for þon of þeossam gebeorscipe ut eode ond hider
sing; and I for that from this banquet out went and hither
15 gewat, for þon ic naht singan ne cuðe.' Eft he cwæð,
came, because I nothing to sing not knew how.' Again he spoke,
se ðe wið hine sprecende wæs, 'Hwæðre þu meah me
he that with him speaking was, 'However you can for-me
singan.' þa cwæð he, 'Hwæt sceal ic singan?' Cwæð he, 'Sing
sing.' Then said he, 'What shall I sing?' Said he, 'Sing
me frumsceaft.' þa he ða þas andsware onfeng, þa ongon he
me creation.' When he this answer received, then began he
sona singan in herenesse Godes Scyppendes, þa fers
immediately to sing in praise of God Creator, those verses
20 ond þa word þe he næfre gehyrde...
and those words that he never had heard...

WORD ORDER

The varying forms of nouns, adjectives, and articles tell us how the parts of the clause relate to each other. In Modern English, the difference between (i) and (ii) is a matter of word order:

- (i) *the woman saw the man*
- (ii) *the man saw the woman*

In Old English, the two sentences would be:

- (i) *sēō cwēn geseah þone guman*
- (ii) *se guma geseah þā cwēn.*

The nominative feminine form *sēō* in (i) has changed to an accusative form, *þā*, in (ii). Similarly, the accusative masculine form *þone* in (i) has become a nominative *se* in (ii).

It is thus always clear who is doing what to whom, regardless of the order in which the noun phrases appear: *þone guman geseah sēō cwēn* has the same meaning as (i).

WÆS HE SE MON...

wæs

The past tense of the verb 'be' has changed little since Old English times, apart from the loss of the plural ending.

- wæs 'was' 1st/3rd sg.
wære 'were' 2nd sg.
wæron 'were' 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

The present tense forms, however, show several differences. To begin with, Old English had two sets of words expressing the notion of 'be', one parallel to Latin *esse* and the other to Latin *fui*.

- wesan
eom 1st sg.
eart 2nd sg.
is 3rd sg.

sind(on) 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

- bēon
bēo 1st sg.
bist 2nd sg.
bið 3rd sg.
bēoð 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

There were also subjunctive, imperative, and participial forms of both verbs.

There seem to have been several differences in the

way the two sets of verbs were used, though there is insufficient evidence to draw up hard-and-fast rules. The *bēon* forms were preferred in habitual and repetitive contexts, and especially when there was a future implication. Ælfric's *Latin Grammar* actually equates *eom*, *eart*, *is* to Latin *sum*, *es*, *est*, and *bēo*, *bist*,

bið to *erō*, *eris*, *erit*. There is a clear example of this difference in one of the Homilies, where the speaker addresses the Holy Trinity:

ðu ðe æfre wære, and æfre bist, and nu eart, an ælmihtig God... *you who always were, and ever will be, and now are, one almighty God...*

hē

The personal pronoun system had more members than we find in Modern English, and several of them are well illustrated in this extract (the numbers below refer to lines). Modern equivalent forms are given below, but these do not capture the way in which the pronouns were used in Old English, where gender is grammatical (p. 221): for example, *bōc* 'book' is feminine, and would be referred to as

heo 'she', whereas *mægden* 'girl' is neuter, and would be referred to as *hit*. (This list gives the standard forms found in late West Saxon (p. 28), and ignores spelling variations.)

- ic (13) 'I' nom.
mē (16) 'me' acc./dat.
mīn 'my, mine' gen.
- wē 'we' nom.
ūs 'us' acc./dat.
ūre 'our(s)' gen.
- þū (16) 'thou' (sg.) nom.
þē 'thee' acc./dat.
þīn 'thy, thine' gen.
- gē 'ye' (pl.) nom.

eōw 'you' acc./dat.

- eōwer 'your(s)' gen.
- hē (1) 'he' nom.
hine (11) 'him' acc.
his (6) 'his' gen.
him (5) '(to) him' dat.
- hēo 'she' nom.
hī 'her' acc.
hire 'her(s)' gen.
hire '(to) her' dat.
- hit 'it' nom./acc.
his 'its' gen.
him '(to) it' dat.
- hīlhēo 'they/them' nom./acc.
hīra 'their(s)' gen.
him '(to) them' dat.

In addition, the language showed the remains of a 'dual' personal pronoun system, but only in the 1st and 2nd persons. The 1st person form meant 'we two' (nom. *wit*, acc./dat. *unc*, gen. *uncer*); the 2nd person form 'you two' (nom. *git*, acc./dat. *inc*, gen. *incer*). This disappeared by the 13th century.

There are obvious correspondences with the modern pronouns in most cases, but not between the old and modern sets of 3rd person plural

forms. The West Saxon forms were supplanted by Scandinavian forms some time after the Norman Conquest, perhaps because people felt they needed to make a clear difference in pronunciation between the 3rd person singular and plural forms – *him*, in particular, must have been a source of confusion. Whatever the reason, Viking influence prevailed, and the modern English forms now begin with *th-*. (For the special problem of *she*, see p. 43.)

se

Old English nouns may be masculine, feminine, or neuter, regardless of the biological sex of their referents. They also appear in nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative forms (p. 214), depending on their

function in the clause. The nominative masculine form of the definite article, *se*, is seen here with *mon* (a common spelling for *man*); the equivalent feminine form, *sēo*, would be found with *hearpe* 'harp'; and the equivalent neuter form, *þæt*, would be found with *hūs*.

Other forms of the article can be seen in the extract – though it should be noted that articles are not used as much as they would be in Modern English, as can be seen from 'in dream' (11) and other such cases:

- þā The acc. sg. form of *sēo*,

following the preposition *oð* 'until' (1), or as object of the verb (5, 7). It also appears as the acc. pl. of *þæt* (19, 20).

- þæm (6) The dat. sg. of *þæt*, following the preposition *from*.
- þæs (7) The gen. sg. of *þæt*.

ABBREVIATIONS

acc.	accusative case
dat.	dative case
gen.	genitive case
nom.	nominative case
pl.	plural
sg.	singular
1st	1st person
2nd	2nd person
3rd	3rd person

...geseted

There are three main kinds of Modern English verbs (p. 216), and all three can be traced back to Old English.

- 1 Those forming their past tense by adding *-ed* to the root form of the present tense: *jump/jumped*. Then as now, the majority of verbs are of this type.
- 2 Those forming their past tense by changing a vowel in the root form of the present tense: *see/saw*. These are called *vocalic* or 'strong' verbs in Old English grammars, and the patterned changes in vowel quality which they display are described as *vowel gradation* or *ablaut*.
- 3 Wholly irregular forms, such

as *can*, *will*, and *be* (see above).

Verb inflections

The modern verb has very few inflectional endings. Past tense for regular verbs is marked by the *-ed* suffix in all persons; and in the present tense only the 3rd person singular is distinctive (*-s*). Old English made far more distinctions, as can be seen from the following paradigm (variation between different classes of verbs is not shown):

Present tense

ic lufie 'I love'
þū lufast 'you (sg.) love'
hē/hēo/hit lufað 'he/she/it loves'
wē, gē, hī lufiað 'we/you (pl.) they love'

Past tense

ic lufode 'I loved'
þū lufodest 'you (sg.) loved'
hē/hēo/hit lufode 'he/she/it loved'
wē/gē/hī lufodon 'we/you (pl.) they loved'

Some of the present tense endings weakened and disappeared soon after the Old English period. But the 2nd and 3rd person singular forms stayed on, developing into the familiar *-est* and *-eth* forms of Middle English (*lovest*, *loveth*). Their later development is described on p. 44.

There were several other distinctive inflectional features of the Old English verb:

- The infinitive (p. 216): *-an* or *-ian* was added to the root. Examples in the *Cædmon* text include *singan* 'to sing'

and *nealecan* '(to) approach' (5). The infinitive of 'love' was *lufian*. The use of a suffix to mark the infinitive was lost during the Middle English period, and the particle *to* came to be used as an alternative marker.

- The *-ing* form (p. 216): the equivalent form was *-end(e)*. Examples in the text are *gongende* (8) 'going' and *spreccende* (16) 'speaking'. This form hardly survives the beginning of the Middle English period, being replaced by the *-ing(e)* ending which in Old English had been restricted to nouns.
- The *-ed* form (p. 216): this shows the same kind of vowel changes and endings we see today, but it also had a special prefix, *ge-* (as

in all other West Germanic languages): the form is well represented in the *Cædmon* text, being a past narrative – see *geseted* 'settled' (1), *geleornode* 'learned' (2), etc. It stays well into Middle English, but is lost by c. 1500, apart from in archaisms (such as *yclept* 'called').

- The subjunctive (p. 228): unlike in Modern English, this mood was systematically used, but it had far fewer endings than the indicative. It can be seen especially in subordinate clauses expressing a subjective attitude. Plural forms in both present and past tenses have a distinctive *-en* ending. An example in the text is *sceolden* 'should' (4).

OLD ENGLISH VOCABULARY

The vocabulary of Old English presents a mixed picture to those encountering it for the first time. The majority of the words in the Cædmon extract (p. 20) are very close to Modern English – once we allow for the unfamiliar spelling (p. 16) and the unexpected inflections (p. 21) – whereas those in the poetic texts (p. 12) are not. In the Cædmon text we would have little difficulty recognizing *singan* as *sing* or *stōd* as *stood*; and *ondswarede* is quite close to *answered*, *onslepte* to *asleep*, and *geleornode* to *learned*. Omitting the *ge-* prefix helps enormously, making *-seted* more like *seated*, *-seah* like *saw*, and *-hyrde* like *heard*. Most of the prepositions and pronouns are identical in form (though not always in meaning): *for*, *from*, *in*, *æt* ('at'), *he*, *him*, *his*.

On the other hand, some of the words look very strange, because they have since disappeared from the language. In the Cædmon extract these include *gelimplice* 'suitable', *neata* 'cattle', *swefn* 'dream', *beboden* 'entrusted', and *frumsceaft* 'creation', as well as some of the grammatical words, such as *se* 'the' (p. 21). These examples also illustrate the chief characteristic of the Old English lexicon, the readiness to build up words from a number of parts – a feature which has stayed with English ever since (p. 138). Frequent use is made of prefixes and suffixes, and compound words are everywhere in evidence. The meaning of these words often emerges quite quickly, once their parts are identified. Thus, *endebyrdnesse* is a combination of *ende* 'end' + *byrd* 'birth, rank' + *-nesse*, which conveys the meaning of 'arrangement', or (in the present context) of people 'taking their turn'. *Gebeorscipe* seems to have nothing to do with 'banquet' until we see that it is basically 'beer' + 'ship'.

Particular care must be taken with words which look familiar, but whose meaning is different in Modern English. An Anglo-Saxon *wīf* was any woman, married or not. A *fugol* 'fowl' was any bird, not just a farmyard one. *Sōna* (*soon*) meant 'immediately', not 'in a little while'; *won* (*wan*) meant 'dark', not 'pale'; and *fæst* (*fast*) meant 'firm, fixed', not 'rapidly'. These are 'false friends', when translating out of Old English.

WORD-BUILDING

The way Old English vocabulary builds up through the processes of affixation and compounding can be seen by tracing the way a basic form is used throughout the lexicon.

(Only a selection of forms is given, and only one possible meaning of each form.)

gān/gangan 'go'
gang journey

Compounding

æftergengness succession
ciricgang churchgoing
forliggang adultery
gangewifre spider
('go' + 'weaver')

gangpytt privy
hindergenga crab
sægenga sea-goer

Prefixation

beganga inhabitant
begangan visit
bigengere worker
foregān go before
forġān pass over
forþgān go forth
ingān go in
ingang entrance
nīþergān descend
ofergān pass over
ofergenga traveller
ofgān demand
ongān approach
oþgān go away

tōgān go into
þurhgān go through
undergān undergo
upgān go up
upgang rising
ūtgān go out
ūtgang exit
wīþgān go against
ymbgān go round
(After D. Kastovsky, 1992.)

Not all Old English prefixes have come down into Modern English. Among those which have been lost are *ge-* (p. 21), *oþ-* ('away'), *nīþe-* ('down'), and *ymb-* ('around'). There is a memorial to *tō-* in *today*, *towards*, and *together*.

SELF-EXPLAINING COMPOUNDS

gōdspel < *gōd* 'good' + *spel* 'tidings': gospel
sunnandæg < *sunnan* 'sun's' + *dæg* 'day': Sunday
stæfcraeft < *stæf* 'letters' + *cræft* 'craft': grammar
mynstermann < *mynster* 'monastery' + *mann* 'man': monk
frumweorc < *frum* 'beginning' + *weorc* 'work': creation
eorþcræft < *eorþ* 'earth' + *cræft* 'craft': geometry
rōdfæstnian < *rōd* 'cross' + *fæstnian* 'fasten': crucifix
dægred < *dæg* 'day' + *red* 'red': dawn
lēōhtfæt < *lēōht* 'light' + *fæt* 'vessel': lamp
tīdymbwlätend < *tīd* 'time' + *ymb* 'about' + *wlätend* 'gaze': astronomer

THE WHOLE STORY

The root form *hāl* is used in Old English as the basis of six words; and the process continues into Modern English, where a further nine words are in evidence (plus many more compounds, such as *whole-food* and *health-farm*).

The diagram also shows a related set of etymologies. Old Norse *heill* and Old English *hāl* both come from the same Germanic root. Much later, the Scandinavian development also affected English. (After W. F. Bolton, 1982.)



The Effect of Norse

The second big linguistic invasion came as a result of the Viking raids on Britain, which began in AD 787 and continued at intervals for some 200 years. Regular settlement began in the mid-9th century, and within a few years the Danes controlled most of eastern England. They were prevented from further gains by their defeat in 878 at Ethandun (p. 26). By the Treaty of Wedmore (886) the Danes agreed to settle only in the north-east third of the country – east of a line running roughly from Chester to London – an area that was subject to Danish law, and which thus became known as the *Danelaw*. In 991, a further invasion brought a series of victories for the Danish army (including the Battle of Maldon, p. 12), and resulted in the English king, Æthelred, being forced into exile, and the Danes seizing the throne. England then stayed under Danish rule for 25 years.

The linguistic result of this prolonged period of contact was threefold. A large number of settlements with Danish names appeared in England. There was a marked increase in personal names of Scandinavian origin (p. 26). And many general words entered the language, nearly 1,000 eventually becoming part of Standard English. Only c. 150 of these words appear in Old English manuscripts, the earliest in the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum, and in the northern manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (D and E, p. 15). They include *landing*, *score*, *beck*, *fellow*, *take*, *husting*, and *steersman*, as well as many words which did not survive in later English (mostly terms to do with Danish law and culture, which died away after the Norman Conquest). The vast majority of loans do not begin to appear until the early 12th century (p. 48). These include many of our modern words which use [sk-] sounds (an Old Norse feature), such as *skirt*, *sky*, and *skin*, as well as most of the words listed below.

The closeness of the contact between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danish settlers is clearly shown by the extensive borrowings. Some of the commonest words in Modern English came into the language at that time, such as *both*, *same*, *get*, and *give*. Even the personal pronoun system was affected (p. 21), with *they*, *them*, and *their* replacing the earlier forms. And – the most remarkable invasion of all – Old Norse influenced the verb *to be*. The replacement of *sindon* (p. 21) by *are* is almost certainly the result of Scandinavian influence, as is the spread of the 3rd person singular -s ending in the present tense in other verbs (p. 44).



◀ A signpost in North Yorkshire acts as a Danish memorial.

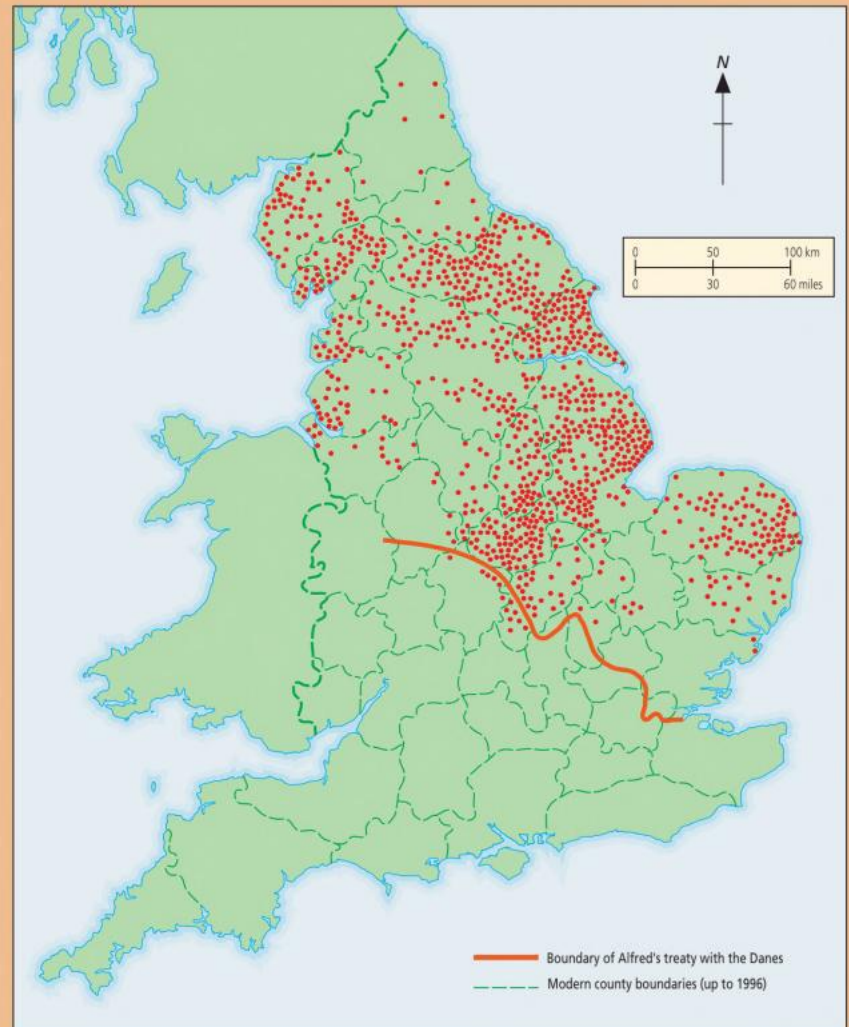
SCANDINAVIAN PLACE NAMES

Scandinavian parish names in England, related to the boundary line of the Danelaw.

There are over 1,500 such place names (p. 151) in England, especially in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Over 600 end in *-by*, the Scandinavian word for 'farm' or 'town' – *Derby*, *Grimsby*, *Rugby*, *Naseby*, etc. Many of the remainder end in *-thorp* ('village'), as in *Althorp*, *Astonthorpe*, and *Linthorpe*; *-thwaite*

('clearing'), as in *Braithwaite*, *Applethwaite*, and *Storthwaite*; and *-toft* ('homestead'), as in *Lowestoft*, *Eastoft*, and *Sandtoft*. The *-by* ending is almost entirely confined to the area of the Danelaw, supporting a theory of Scandinavian origin, despite the existence of the word by 'dwelling' in Old English.

(After P. H. Sawyer, 1962.)



AND A FEW MORE NORSE LOANS...

again, anger, awkward, bag, band, bank, birth, brink, bull, cake, call, clip, crawl, crook, die, dirt, dregs, egg, flat, fog, freckle, gap, gasp, get, guess, happy, husband, ill, keel, kid, knife, law, leg, loan, low, muggy, neck, odd, outlaw, race, raise, ransack, reindeer, rid, root, rugged, scant, scare, scowl, scrap, seat, seem, silver, sister, skill, skirt, sly, smile, snub, sprint, steak, take, thrift, Thursday, tight, trust, want, weak, window

THE OTHER WHITE HORSE

This figure was carved to commemorate the victory of King Alfred over the Danes at the Battle of Ethandun (878), modern Edington, Wiltshire. It was a decisive battle. As the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle puts it:

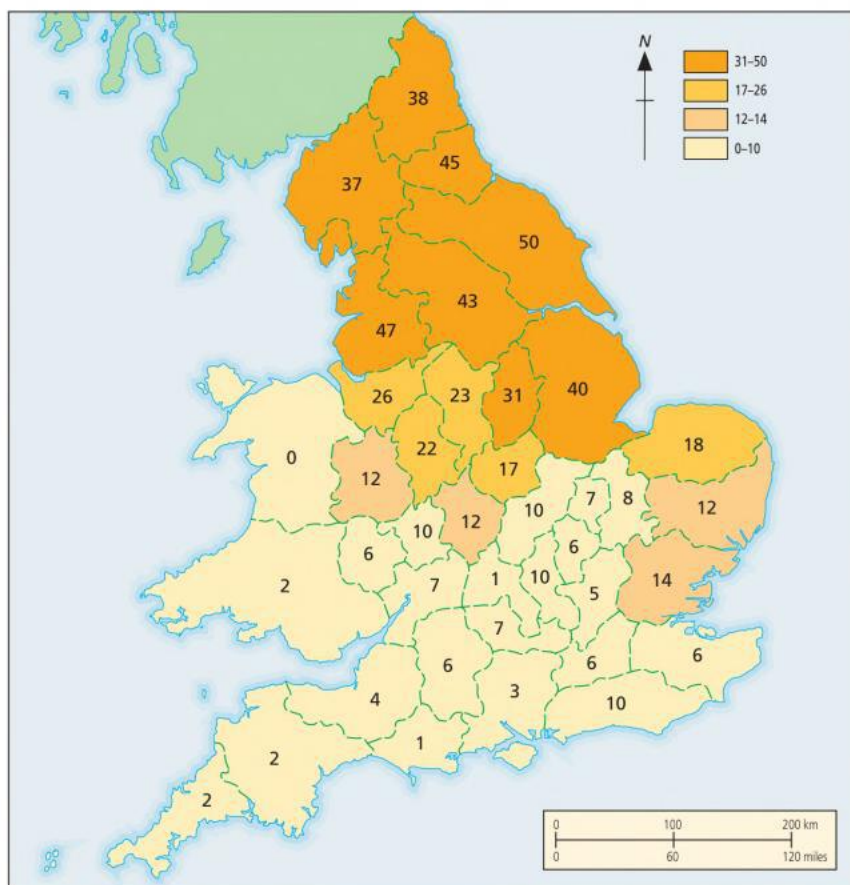
King Alfred ... went from these camps to Iley Oak, and one day later to Edington; and there he fought against the entire host, and put it to flight, and pursued it up to the fortification [probably Chippenham], and laid siege there for a fortnight; and then the host gave him preliminary hostages and solemn oaths that they would leave his kingdom, and promised him in addition that their king would receive baptism; and they fulfilled this promise...

The Edington horse (known locally as the Bratton or Westbury horse) may be less well known to modern tourists than its pre-historic counterpart at Uffington in Berkshire, but it is far more important to English history.



SCANDINAVIAN PERSONAL NAMES

The distribution of English family names (p. 159) ending in *-son*, such as *Davidson*, *Jackson*, and *Henderson*. The figures give the number of different surnames which are thought to have come from each county. The Scandinavian influence in the north and east is very clear, especially in Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire, where over 60 per cent of personal names in early Middle English records show Scandinavian influence.



SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST?

With two cultures in such close contact for so long, a large number of duplicate words must have arisen, both Old Norse (ON) and Old English (OE) providing ways of describing the same objects or situations. It is hardly ever possible in such cases to explain why one word proves to be fitter than another to survive. All we know is that there is evidence of three subsequent developments.

ON 1 OE 0

Sometimes the Scandinavian word was kept. This is what happened with *egg* vs *ey* (OE), *sister* vs *sweostor* (OE), *silver* vs *seolfor* (OE), and many more.

ON 0 OE 1

In other cases, the Old English word stayed, as in *path* vs *reike* (ON), *sorrow* vs *site* (ON), *swell* vs *bolnen* (ON), and also many more.

The linguistic situation must have been quite confusing at times, especially when people travelled about the country, and were uncertain about which form to use (as shown by William Caxton's famous story about the words for 'egg', p. 58).

ON 1 OE 1

In several cases, both words have been retained. For this to happen, of course, the two words would need to develop a useful difference in meaning.

These cases include:

ON	OE
dike	ditch
hale	whole (p. 22)
raise	rise
scrub	shrub
ill	sick
skill	craft
skin	hide
skirt	shirt

In many cases, one form has become standard, and the other kept in a regional dialect:

garth	yard
kirk	church
laup	leap
nay	no
trigg	true

Vocabulary Then and Now

It should be plain from pp. 22–3 that there are many differences between the way vocabulary was used in Old English and the way it is used today. The Anglo-Saxons' preference for expressions which are synonymous, or nearly so, far exceeds that found in Modern English, as does their ingenuity in the use of compounds. The absence of a wide-ranging vocabulary of loan words also forced them to rely on a process of lexical construction using native elements, which produced much larger 'families' of morphologically related words than are typical of English now.

A great deal of the more sophisticated lexicon, we must also conclude, was consciously created, as can be seen from the many *loan translations* (or *calques*) which were introduced in the later period. Calques are lexical items which are translated part-by-part into another language. The process is unusual in Modern English – an example is *superman*, which is a translation of German *Übermensch*. In late Old English, by contrast, calques are very common, as can be seen from the following examples.

praepositio 'preposition' > *foresetnys*
coniunctio 'joining' > *geðeodnys*
episcopatus 'episcopate' > *biscopphad*
significatio 'signification' > *getacnung*
unicornis 'unicorn' > *anhorn*
aspergere 'sprinkle' > *onstregdan*
inebriare 'make drunk' > *indrencan*
trinitas 'trinity' > *þriness*
contradictio 'contradiction' > *wiðcwedennis*
comparativus 'comparative' > *wiðmetendlic*

Ælfric is one who used them widely in his writing, especially when developing the terminology of his *Grammar* (p. 16).

Wiðmetennis

A final comparison. There are, it is thought, around 24,000 different lexical items (§8) in the Old English corpus. This lexicon, however, is fundamentally different from the one we find in Modern English. About 85 per cent of Old English words are no longer in use. Moreover, only 3 per cent of the words in Old English are loan words, compared with over 70 per cent today. Old English vocabulary was thus profoundly Germanic, in a way that is no longer the case. Nearly half of Modern English general vocabulary comes from Latin or French, as a result of the huge influx of words in the Middle English period (p. 46). And the readiness to absorb foreign elements has given the modern language a remarkable etymological variety which was totally lacking in Old English. It is this situation, indeed, which latter-day Anglo-Saxonist language reformers find intolerable (p. 125).

FRENCH BEFORE 1066

French vocabulary influenced Middle English so markedly after the Norman Conquest (p. 30) that it is easy to ignore the fact that French loan words can be found in Old English too. Indeed, it would be surprising if there had been no such influence, given the close contacts which had grown up in the 10th and 11th centuries. The monastic revival (p. 24), in particular, had started in France, and many English monks must have studied there.

Above all, there was close contact between the two cultures following the exile to Normandy of Edward the Confessor, the son of Æthelred II (the *unræd*, or 'ill-advised') and Emma, daughter of the Duke of Normandy. Edward lived there for 25 years, returning to England in 1041 with many French courtiers. When he succeeded to the throne, several of the French nobles were given high positions – a source of considerable grievance among their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

Whatever the political consequences of these events, the linguistic consequences were a handful of French loan words, among them *capun* 'capon', *servian* 'serve', *bacun* 'bacon', *arblast* 'weapon', *prisun* 'prison', *castel* 'castle', and *cancelere* 'chancellor'. Some words gave rise to related forms, notably *prud* 'proud', whose derivatives included *prutness* 'pride' and *oferprut* 'haughty' (compare earlier *ofermod*, p. 22).

Old Saxon

One other language provided a small number of loan words – that spoken by the Saxons who had remained on the continent of Europe. It is known that copies of Old Saxon texts were being made in southern England during the 10th century. A personage known as John the Old Saxon helped Alfred in his educational reforms. There also exists a passage translated in the 9th century from Old Saxon and embedded

within the Old English poem *Genesis* (and known as *Genesis B*). In it we find such forms as *hearra* 'lord', *sima* 'chain', *landscipe* 'region', *heodæg* 'today', and a few others, all of which are thought to be Old Saxon. These words had no real effect on later English, but they do illustrate the readiness of the Anglo-Saxons to take lexical material from all available sources – a feature which has characterized the language ever since.



THE LORD'S PRAYER

The predominantly Germanic character of Old English vocabulary is well illustrated by the standard version of the 'Our Father'. (Long vowels are shown, as an aid to pronunciation: see p. 18.)

Fæder ùre,
 þū þe eart on heofonum,
 sī þīn nama gehālgod.
 Tō becume þīn rīce.
 Gewurþe ðīn willa on eorðan swā swā on heofonum.
 Ūrne gedæghwāmlican hlāf syle ūs tō dæg.
 And forgyf ūs ùre gyltas, swā swā wē forgyfað
 ūrum gyltendum. And ne gelæd þū ūs on costnunge,
 ac alȳs ūs of yfele. Amen

[Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
 come. Thy will be done, on earth as it
 is in heaven. Give us this day our
 daily bread. And forgive us our
 trespasses, as we forgive those who
 trespass against us. And lead us not
 into temptation, but deliver us from
 evil. Amen.]

OLD ENGLISH DIALECTS

The Old English texts which have survived come from several parts of the country, and from the way they are written they provide evidence of dialects. As there was no standardized system of spelling (p. 16), scribes tended to spell words as they sounded; but because everyone used the same Latin-based alphabetic system, there was an underlying consistency, and it is possible to use the spellings to work out dialect differences. For example, in the south-east, the word for ‘evil’ was written *efel*, whereas in other places it was *yfel*, suggesting that the former vowel was unrounded and more open (p. 250). Hundreds of such spelling differences exist.

Most of the Old English corpus is written in the West Saxon dialect (see map), reflecting the political and cultural importance of this area in the 10th century. Dialects from other areas are very sparsely represented, with only about a dozen texts of any substance – inscriptions, charters, glosses, and verse fragments – spread over a 300-year period. Nonetheless, Old English scholars have found a few diagnostic features which enable us to identify dialect areas.

The Historical Setting

The major areas are traditionally thought to relate to the settlements of the invading tribes, with their different linguistic backgrounds; but what happened in the 300 years after the invasions is obscure. There is evidence of at least 12 kingdoms in England by the year 600. Seven are traditionally called the *Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy* (Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex), but it is difficult to know what realities underlie such a grouping. From a linguistic point of view, only three kingdoms emerged with enough power for there to be clear dialectal consequences: Northumbria, in the 7th century, then Mercia, and by the 9th century Wessex, the latter emerging under King Egbert (ruled 802–39). These three areas, along with Kent (whose early importance is suggested by the Augustine story, p. 10) have led to the recognition of four major dialects in Old English.

To talk about regional dialects at all is somewhat daring, given that the areas are so approximate, and the texts are so few. Indeed, regional definition may not be the best approach, given the political and religious situation of the time. Social and literary factors may have been paramount. Because the writing of manuscripts was in the hands of monastic copyists, and copies (as well as the copyists) travelled between centres, dialect features would appear outside a particular geographical region. The use of a ‘koiné’ of poetic conventions may have been widespread. Manuscripts with ‘mixed’ dialect features are thus common.



The chief dialect areas of Old English. The map also shows some of the more important Anglo-Saxon kingdoms known from the early period, and their approximate locations.

DIALECT SIGNPOSTS

Old English dialectology is a complex subject, full of meticulous description, cautious generalization, tabulated exception, and (given the limited evidence) controlled frustration. There are no single indicators which will definitively locate a text. Rather, dialect work involves comparing a large number of possible diagnostic signposts, and drawing a conclusion on the basis of the direction to which most of them seem to be pointing. Given the realities of scribal error and dialect

mixture, it is not uncommon to find a text pointing in several directions at once.

Some examples of signposts:

- If you see a manuscript form with the spelling *ie*, this is likely to be a West Saxon text, with the symbol representing a diphthong. In other dialects there would be a pure vowel. Example: ‘yet’ would be *giet* in West Saxon, but *get* elsewhere.
- If you see an *o* before a nasal consonant (*m, n, ng*), it

is probably a Northumbrian or Mercian text. (Compare the Scots pronunciation of *mon* for *man* today.)

Example: ‘land’ would be *land* in West Saxon and Kentish, but *lond* further north.

- If you see the personal pronouns *mec, usic, bec*, and *eowic* instead of *me, us, be*, and *eow* (p. 20), the text is likely to be Northumbrian or Mercian. Example: see the *Lord’s Prayer* on p. 27.

The Chief Dialect Divisions

The area originally occupied by the Angles gave rise to two main dialects:

- *Northumbrian* was spoken north of a line running approximately between the Humber and Mersey rivers. It extended into the eastern lowlands of present-day Scotland, where it confronted the Celtic language of the Strathclyde Britons. A period of Northumbrian political power in the late 7th century made the north a cultural centre, with several monasteries (notably, Wearmouth and Jarrow) and the work of Bede pre-eminent. Most of the earliest Old English texts (7th–8th century) are Northumbrian, as a result. They include Cædmon's Hymn (see opposite), Bede's Death Song, the Ruthwell Cross and the Franks Casket inscriptions (p. 9), a short poem known as the *Leiden Riddle*, a few glosses, and the 6,000 or so names of people and places in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 7).
- *Mercian* was spoken in the Midlands, roughly between the River Thames and the River Humber, and as far west as the boundary with present-day Wales. Very few linguistic remains exist, presumably because of the destructive influence of the Vikings. The chief texts are various charters, a famous gloss to the Vespasian Psalter, and a few other Latin glossaries. The chief period of Mercian power was the early 8th century, but many later West Saxon texts show the influence of Mercian, partly because several scholars from this area (e.g. Werferth) were enlisted by King Alfred to help the literary renaissance he inspired.
- *Kentish*, spoken in the area of Jutish settlement, was used mainly in present-day Kent and the Isle of Wight. There is very little extant material – a few charters of the 8th–9th centuries, a psalm, a hymn, and sporadic glosses. Scholars have also made some further deductions about this dialect from the way it developed in Middle English (p. 50), where there is more material.
- The rest of England, south of the Thames and west as far as Cornwall (where Celtic was also spoken) was settled by (West) Saxons, and became known as Wessex. Most of the Old English corpus is written in the Wessex dialect, *West Saxon*, because it was this kingdom, under King Alfred, which became the leading political and cultural force at the end of the 9th century. However, it is one of the ironies of English linguistic history that modern Standard English is descended not from West Saxon, but from Mercian, which was the dialect spoken in the area around London when that city became powerful in the Middle Ages (pp. 41, 50).

CÆDMON'S HYMN

The version of Cædmon's hymn (p. 20) usually printed is in literary late West Saxon, and the text here is from an 11th-century manuscript. However, a Northumbrian version has also survived in an 8th-century manuscript, which is thus very close to the language Bede himself must have used. The differences are very evident, though in only one case (l. 3) does an important variant reading occur.

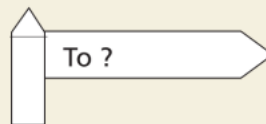
West Saxon

Nu we sceolan herigean heofonrices weard,
 metodes mihte 7 his modgeþanc,
 werc wuldorfæder, swa he wuldres gehwæs,
 ece drihten, ord onstealde.
 He æres[t] gescop eorðan bearnum,
 heofon to rofe, halig scyppend;
 þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
 ece drihten, æfter teode,
 firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.

Northumbrian

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard,
 metudæs maecti end his modgicand,
 uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,
 eci dryctin, or astelidæ.
 He aerist scop aelda barnum
 heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;
 tha middungeard moncynnes uard,
 eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ,
 firum foldu, frea allmectig.

*Now we shall praise the keeper of the heavenly kingdom,
 the power of the lord of destiny and his imagination,
 the glorious father of men,
 the deeds of the glorious father, } when of every glorious thing
 he, the eternal lord, ordained the beginning.
 He first shaped for the children of earth
 the heaven as a roof, the holy creator;
 then the guardian of mankind, the eternal lord,
 afterwards made middle-earth;
 the almighty lord (made) land for living beings.*



WS fæder ure þu þe art on heofonum
 No. fader urer ðu art in heofnu(m)
 Me. feder ure þu art in heofenum
 'father our thou (which) art in heaven'

The opening line from a West Saxon (WS, late 11th century), Northumbrian (No., late 10th century), and Mercian (Me., early 10th century) version of the Lord's Prayer illustrates two of the important dialect features of Old English. (After T. E. Toon, 1992.)

- 'father' The original Germanic vowel has come forward in WS, and even further forward in Me., but has stayed back in No.
- 'art' WS and Me. have developed a diphthong before [r] and a following consonant. This has not happened in No., where the vowel has stayed low, and also moved further back.

This extract also shows how not all the variations found in a comparison of manuscripts should be interpreted as dialectal.

- The use of letter 'eth' rather than 'thorn' in the words for 'thou' is not a dialect matter, as these symbols were often interchangeable (p. 16).
- It is not possible to read much into the different spellings of the unstressed syllable of 'heaven', as the sound quality would have been indeterminate (just as it is in Modern English) and the spelling unsystematic.
- There is insufficient dialect evidence in the Old English corpus to draw any firm conclusions from the grammatical variations.

Of course, when we first examine a manuscript, we have to work such things out for ourselves. We are not given the information in advance. Every variant form is a possible signpost. Finding out which lead somewhere and which do not is what makes Old English dialectology so engrossing. And the story is by no means over, for there are many dialect questions which remain to be answered.

THE TRANSITION FROM OLD ENGLISH

A fundamental change in the structure of English took place during the 11th and 12th centuries – one without precedent in the history of the language, and without parallel thereafter. Grammatical relationships in Old English had been expressed chiefly by the use of inflectional endings (p. 20). In Middle English, they came to be expressed (as they are today) chiefly by word order. Why did this change take place? Few subjects in the history of English have attracted so much speculation.

The Decay of Inflections

About one fact there is no doubt. There are clear signs during the Old English period of the decay of the inflectional system. The surviving texts suggest that the change started in the north of the country, and slowly spread south. Several of the old endings are still present in the 12th-century text of the *Peterborough Chronicle* opposite, but they are not used with much consistency, and they no longer seem to play an important role in conveying meaning.

But why did the Old English inflectional endings decay? The most obvious explanation is that it became increasingly difficult to hear them, because of the way words had come to be stressed during the evolution of the Germanic languages (p. 6). The ancestor language of Germanic, Indo-European, had a ‘free’ system of accentuation, in which the stress within a word moved according to intricate rules (p. 260). In Germanic, this system changed, and most words came to carry the main stress on their first syllable. This is the system found throughout Old English. As always, there were exceptions – the *ge-* prefix, for example (p. 21), is never stressed.

Having the main stress at the beginning of a word can readily give rise to an auditory problem at the end. This is especially so when there are several endings which are phonetically very similar, such as *-en*, *-on*, and *-an*. In rapid conversational speech it would have been difficult to distinguish them. The situation is not too far removed from that which still obtains in Modern English, where people often make such forms as *-ible* and *-able* (*visible*, *washable*) or *Belgian* and *Belgium* sound the same. This ‘neutralization’ of vowel qualities undoubtedly affected the Old English system.

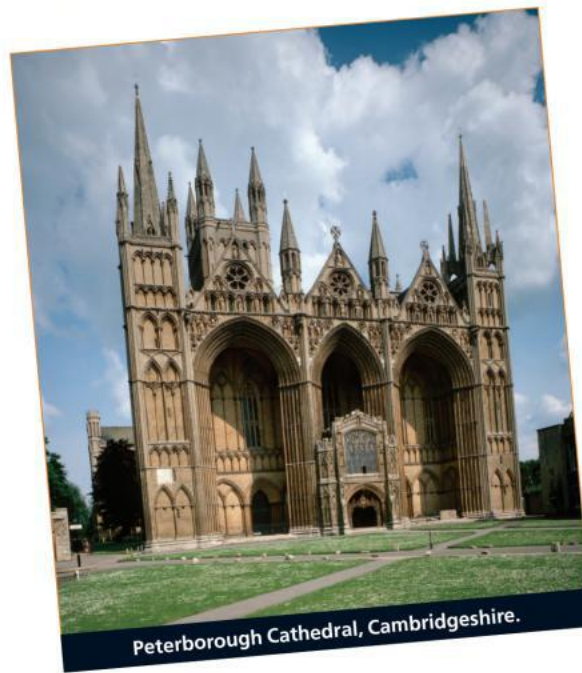
The Contact Situation

However, auditory confusion cannot be the sole reason. Other Germanic languages had a strong initial stress, too, yet they retained their inflectional system (as is still seen in modern German). Why was the change so much greater in English? Some scholars cite the Viking settlement as the decisive factor (p. 25). During the period of the Danelaw, they argue, the contact between English and Scandinavian would have led to the emergence of a pidgin-like variety of speech between the two cultures, and perhaps even eventually to a kind of creole which

was used as a lingua franca (p. 344). As with pidgins everywhere, there would have been a loss of word endings, and greater reliance on word order. Gradually, this pattern would have spread until it affected the whole of the East Midlands area – from which Standard English was eventually to emerge (p. 50). At the very least, they conclude, this situation would have accelerated the process of inflectional decay – and may even have started it.

Whether such arguments are valid depends on how far we believe that the speakers of Old English and Old Norse were unable to understand each other at the time, and this is largely a matter of speculation. Perhaps there existed a considerable degree of mutual intelligibility, given that the two languages had diverged only a few hundred years before. The roots of many words were the same, and in the Icelandic sagas it is said that the Vikings and the English could understand each other. Whatever the case, we can tell from the surviving Middle English texts that the Danelaw was a much more progressive area, linguistically speaking, than the rest of the country. Change which began here affected southern areas later. Some form of Viking influence cannot easily be dismissed.

As inflections decayed, so the reliance on word order became critical, resulting in a grammatical system which is very similar to that found today. There is no sign in the *Peterborough Chronicle* extract of the Old English tendency to put the object before the verb, for example (p. 44). The Subject–Verb–Object order, already a noticeable feature of Old English, has become firmly established by the beginning of the Middle English period.



Peterborough Cathedral, Cambridgeshire.

INFLECTIONAL CARRYING POWER

This is a list of the most important endings in Old English regular nouns and verbs (p. 20), along with one lexical example of each. All endings which consisted of just a vowel, or a vowel plus nasal, disappeared from the language during the Middle English period. The only endings to survive were the ones with greater carrying power – the high-pitched *-s* forms (*kings*, *king's*, *lovest*), the *-th* forms (*loveth*, later replaced by *-s*, p. 44), and the distinctive *-ende* of the participle (later replaced by *-ing*, p. 45) and past tense.

Nouns

(*cyning* ‘king’, *scip* ‘ship’, *glof* ‘glove’, *guman* ‘man’)

-e, *-n* (acc. sg.) *glofe*, *guman*

-es, *-e*, *-n* (gen. sg.) *cyninges*, *glofe*, *guman*

-e, *-n* (dat. sg.) *cyninge*, *guman*

-as, *-u*, *-a* (nom. pl.) *cyningas*, *scipu*, *glofa*

-n, *-as*, *-u*, *-a* (acc. pl.) *guman*, *cyningas*, *scipu*, *glofa*

-a, *-ena*, (gen. pl.) *cyninga*, *glofa*, *gumena*

-um (dat. pl.) *cyningum*, *glofum*, *gumum*

Verbs

(*fremman* ‘perform’, *lufian* ‘love’, *deman* ‘judge’)

-e (1 sg. pres. ind.)

fremme, *lufie*, *deme*

-est, *-ast*, *-st* (2 sg. pres. ind.)

fremest, *lufast*, *demst*

-eð, *-að*, *-ð* (3 sg. pres. ind.)

fremeð, *lufað*, *demð*

-að (1–3 pl. pres. ind.)

fremmað, *lufiað*, *demað*

-e (1–3 sg. pres. subj.)

fremme, *lufie*, *deme*

-en (1–3 pl. pres. subj.)

fremmen, *lufien*, *demen*

-de (1 & 3 sg. past ind.)

fremede, *lufode*, *demde*

-dest (2 sg. past ind.)

fremedest, *lufodest*, *demdest*

-don (1–3 pl. past ind.)

fremedon, *lufodon*, *demdon*

-de (1–3 sg. past subj.)

fremede, *lufode*, *demde*

-den (1–3 pl. past subj.)

fremeden, *lufoden*, *demden*

-ende (pres. part.)

fremmende, *lufiende*, *demende*

Abbreviations (see Part III)

acc. accusative; dat. dative; gen. genitive; ind. indicative; nom. nominative; part. participle; pl. plural; pres. present tense; sg. singular; subj. subjunctive; 1, 2, 3 1st, 2nd, 3rd person.

THE PETERBOROUGH CHRONICLE

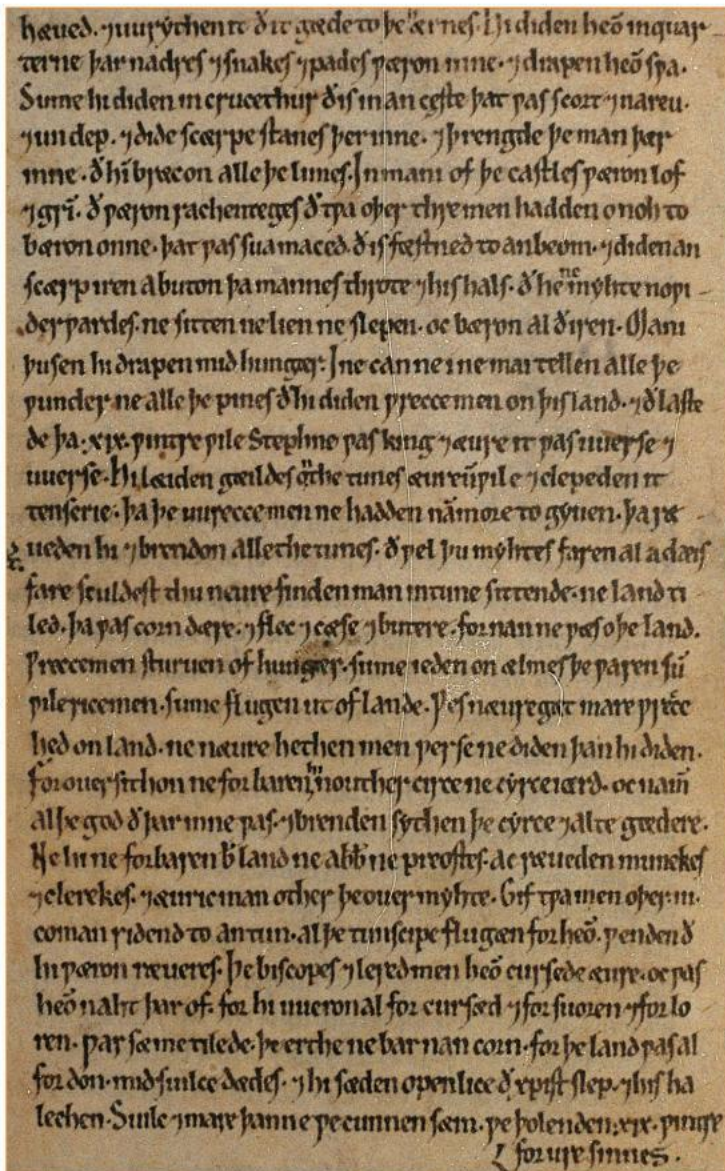
We are fortunate to have the later years of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (p. 14), which continues to the middle of the 12th century, to illustrate this period of change. In 1116, most of the monastery at Peterborough was destroyed by fire, along with many manuscripts. The monks immediately began to replace the writings which had been lost. They borrowed the text of the Chronicle from another monastery, copied it out, and then carried on writing the history themselves. They continued until 1131, but then the writing stopped – doubtless because of the chaotic conditions of civil war which existed in the reign of King Stephen, some of which are described in the extract below.

This extract is from the Chronicle when it begins again in 1154, after the death of Stephen, adding

several events from the intervening years. The language is now quite different. Despite points of similarity with the previous work, the overall impression is that the writer is starting again, using vocabulary and grammatical patterns which reflect the language of his time and locality, and inventing fresh spelling conventions to cope with new sounds. The extract has been set out in a word-for-word translation, but (unlike the Old English extract about Cædmon on p. 20), it is no longer necessary to add a free translation as well. Apart from a few phrases, the language now seems much closer to Modern English.

The later material from the *Peterborough Chronicle* looks back towards Old English and ahead towards Middle English. Scholars have indeed argued at length

about whether it is best to call it 'late Old English' or 'early Middle English'. Some stress the archaic features of the text, pointing to similarities with the West Saxon dialect of Old English (p. 29); others stress the differences, and consider it to be the earliest surviving Middle English text. The Chronicle illustrates very clearly the difficulty of drawing a sharp boundary between different stages in the development of a language. But it does not take much longer before the uncertainty is resolved. Other texts from the 12th century confirm the new direction in which the language was moving; and within a century of the close of the Chronicle, there is no doubt that a major change has taken place in the structure of English. (The first twelve lines of the illustration are transcribed and translated below.)



Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 636, fol. 89 v.

- [Me dide cnotted strenges abuton here] hæued and
 [One placed knotted cords about their] head and
 uurythen it ðat it gæde to þe hærnas. Hi diden
 twisted it that it entered to the brains. They put
 heom in quarterne þar nadres and snakes and pades
 them in cell where adders and snakes and toads
 wæron inne, and drapen heom swa. Sume hi diden in
 were in, and killed them so. Some they put in
 5 crucethur[s], ðat is in an ceste þat was scort, and nareu,
 torture-box, that is in a chest that was short, and narrow,
 and undep, and dide scærpe stanes þerinne, and
 and shallow, and put sharp stones therein, and
 þrengde þe man þær-inne, ðat him bræcon alle þe limes.
 pressed the man therein, that they broke all the limbs.
 In mani of þe castles wæron lof and grin, ðat
 In many of the castles were headband and halter, that
 wæron rachteges ðat twa oþer thre men hadden onoh
 were fetters that two or three men had enough
 10 to bæron onne; þat was sua maced, ðat is fæstned to an
 to bear one; that was so made, that is fastened to a
 beom, and diden an scærp iren abuton þa mannes throte
 beam, and put a sharp iron about the man's throat
 and his hals, ðat he ne myhte nowiderwardes, ne sitten
 and his neck, that he not might in no direction, neither sit
 ne lien ne slepen, oc bæron al ðat iren. Mani
 nor lie nor sleep, but bear all that iron. Many
 þusen hi drapen mid hungær.
 thousand they killed by means of hunger.
 15 I ne can ne I ne mai tellen alle þe wunder ne alle þe
 I not know nor I not can tell all the atrocities nor all the
 pines ðat hi diden wreccemen on þis land, and ðat
 cruelties that they did to wretched people in this land, and that
 lastede þa xix wintre wile Stephne was king, and æure it was
 lasted the 19 winters while Stephen was king, and always it was
 uuerse and uuerse.
 worse and worse.

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH CORPUS

The Middle English period has a much richer documentation than is found in Old English (p. 10). This is partly the result of the post-Conquest political situation. The newly centralized monarchy commissioned national and local surveys, beginning with the Domesday Book (p. 30), and there is a marked increase in the number of public and private documents – mandates, charters, contracts, tax-rolls, and other administrative or judicial papers. However, the early material is of limited value to those interested in the linguistic history of English because it is largely written in Latin or French, and the only relevant data which can be extracted relate to English place and personal names (§10). Most religious publication falls into the same category, with Latin maintaining its presence throughout the period as the official language of the Church. A major difference from Old English is the absence of a continuing tradition of historical writing in the native language, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – a function which Latin supplanted, and which was not revived until the 15th century.

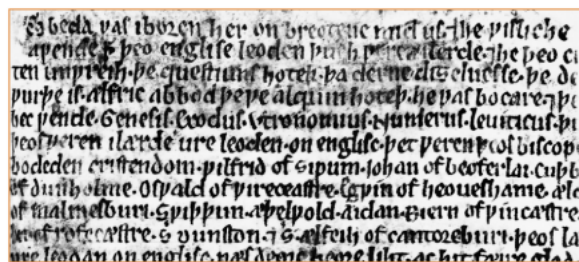
Material in English appears as a trickle in the 13th century, but within 150 years it has become a flood. In the early period, we see a great deal of religious prose writing, in the form of homilies, tracts, lives of the saints, and other aids to devotion and meditation. Sometimes a text was written with a specific readership in mind; the *Ancrene Riwe* ('Anchorites' Guide'), for example, was compiled by a spiritual director for three noblewomen who had abandoned the world to live as anchoresses. During the 14th century, there is a marked increase in the number of translated writings from French and Latin, and of texts for teaching these languages (p. 31). Guild records, proclamations, proverbs, dialogues, allegories, and letters illustrate the diverse range of new styles and genres. Towards the end of the century, the translations of the Bible inspired by John Wycliff appear amid considerable controversy, and the associated movement produces many manuscripts (p. 54). Finally, in the 1430s, there is a vast output in English from the office of the London Chancery scribes, which strongly influenced the development of a standard written language (p. 41).

The Poetic Puzzle

Poetry presents a puzzle. The Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition apparently dies out in the 11th century, to reappear patchily in the 13th. A lengthy poetic history of Britain known as *Lazamon's Brut* (p. 36) is one of the earliest works to survive from Middle English, and in the 14th century come the important texts of *Piers Plowman* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (p. 37). What is surprising is that the alliterative Old English style (p. 23) is still present in all these works, despite an apparent

break in poetic continuity of at least a hundred years. The conundrum has generated much discussion. Perhaps the alliterative technique was retained through prose: several Middle English prose texts are strongly alliterative, and it is sometimes difficult to tell from a manuscript which genre (poetry or prose) a piece belongs to, because the line divisions are not shown. Perhaps the Old English style survived through the medium of oral transmission. Or perhaps it is simply that most poetic manuscripts have been lost.

Middle English poetry was inevitably much influenced by French literary traditions, both in content and style. One of the earliest examples is the 13th-century verse-contest known as *The Owl and the Nightingale* (p. 36). Later works include romances in the French style, secular lyrics, bestiaries, ballads, biblical poetry, Christian legends, hymns, prayers, and elegies. The mystical dream-vision, popular in Europe, especially in Italy and



Ælfric abbot, þe we Alquin hoteþ, he was bocare, and þe fif bec wende, Genesis, Exodus, Vtronomius, Numerus, Leuiticus. þurh þeos weren ilærde ure leoden on Englisc. þet weren þeos biscofes þe bodeden Cristendom: Wilfrid of Ripum, Iohan of Beoferlai, Cupbert of Dunholme, Oswald of Wireceastre, Egwin of Heoueshame, Ældelm of Malmesburi, Swithun, Æpelwold, Aidan, Biern of Wincæstre, Paulin of Rofecæstre, S. Dunston, and S. Ælfeih of Cantoreburi. þeos lærden ure leodan on Englisc. Næs deorc heore liht, ac hit fære glod. Nu is þeo leore forleten, and þet folc is forloren.

France, is well illustrated by the poem modern editors have called *Pearl*, in which the writer recalls the death of his two-year-old daughter, who then acts as his spiritual comforter. Drama also begins to make its presence felt, in the form of dialogues, pageants, and the famous cycles of mystery plays (p. 58).

Much of Middle English literature is of unknown authorship, but by the end of the period this situation has changed. Among the prominent names which emerge in the latter part of the 14th century are John Gower, William Langland, John Wycliff, and Geoffrey Chaucer, and some time later John Lydgate, Thomas Malory, William Caxton, and the poets who are collectively known as the Scottish Chaucerians (p. 53). Rather than a somewhat random collection of interesting texts, there is now a major body of 'literature', in the modern sense. It is this which provides the final part of the bridge between Middle and Early Modern English (§5).

POETRY OR PROSE?

The *Worcester Fragments* are the remains of a manuscript which was used to make the cover of a book in the Chapter Library at Worcester. The result of piecing together the fragments was a piece of continuous text, probably copied c. 1200 from a much earlier text. The manuscript contains Ælfric's *Grammar* (p. 16), a passage on the *Debate of the Soul and the Body*, and an item on the disuse of English.

Part of this last item is given here. Modern editions usually print the text in lines, as if it were a poem, but the rhythm and alliteration are extremely free and unpredictable, and it is difficult to identify lines of a conventional kind. In other words, it would be just as plausible to print the material as prose. The editor has filled out the text in a few places where there were holes in the manuscript. An interesting linguistic feature is the preservation of the irregular form of the noun for 'books', *bec*. (After B. Dickens & R. M. Wilson, 1951.)

Abbot Ælfric, whom we call Alquin, he was a writer, and translated five books, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus. Through these our people were taught in English. These were the bishops who preached Christianity: Wilfrid of Ripum, Iohan of Beoferlai, Cuthbert of Dunholme, Oswald of Wireceastre, Egwin of Heoueshame, Ældelm of Malmesburi, Swithun, Æthelwold, Aidan, Biern of Wincæstre, Paulin of Rofecæstre, S. Dunston, and S. Ælfeih of Cantoreburi. These taught our people in English. Their light was not dark, and it shone brightly. Now is this knowledge abandoned, and the people damned...

JOHN OF TREVISA

The Cornishman John of Trevisa (d. 1402), who became an Oxford scholar and clergyman, made in 1387 a translation of Ranulf Higden's Latin *Polychronicon* – so called because it was the chronicle of many ages, from the Creation to 1352. At one point, Higden reviews the language teaching situation in England, and gives two reasons for the decline of the mother tongue.

On ys for chyldern in scole,
 aʒenes þe vsage and manere of
 al oþer nacions, buþ compelled
 for to leue here oune longage,
 and for to construe here lessons
 and here þinges a Freynsch, and
 habbeþ suþthe þe Normans
 come furst into Engelond. Also
 gentil men children buþ ytauzt
 for to speke Freynsch fram tyme
 þat a buþ yrokked in here cradel,
 and conneþ speke and playe wiþ
 a child hys brouch; and oplon-
 dysch men wol lykne hamsylf to
 gentil men, and fondeþ wiþ gret
 bysynes for to speke Freynsch,
 for to be more ytold of.

One [reason] is that children in school, contrary to the usage and custom of all other nations, are compelled to abandon their own language, and to carry on their lessons and their affairs in French, and have done since the Normans first came to England. Also the children of gentlemen are taught to speak French from the time that they are rocked in their cradle, and learn to speak and play with a child's trinket; and rustic men will make themselves like gentlemen, and seek with great industry to speak French, to be more highly thought of.

At this point, John of Trevisa adds the following:

Pys manere was moche y-vsed tofore þe furste moreyn, and ys seþthe somdel ychaunged. For Iohan Cornwall, a mayster of gramere, chayngede þe lore in gramerscole and construccion of Freynsch into Englysch; and Richard Pencrych lurnede þat manere techyng of hym, and oþer men of Pencrych, so þat now, þe ʒer of oure Lord a þousond þre hundred foure score and fyue, of þe secunde kyng Richard after þe Conquest nyne, in al þe gramerscoles of Engelond childern leueþ Freynsch, and construeþ and lurneþ an Englysch, and habbeþ þerby avantage in on syde, and desavantaue yn anoþer. Here avantaue ys þat a lurneþ here gramer yn lasse tyme þan childern wer ywoned to do. Desavantaue ys þat now childern of gramerscole conneþ no more Freynsch þan can here lift heele, and þat ys harm for ham and a scholle passe þe se and trauallye in strange londes, and in meny caas also. Also gentil men habbeþ now moche yleft for to teche here childern Freynsch.

This practice was much used before the first plague, and has since been somewhat changed. For John Cornwall, a teacher of grammar, changed the teaching in grammar school and the construing of French into English; and Richard Penkrige learned that method of teaching from him, and other men from Penkrige, so that now, AD 1385, the ninth year of the reign of the second King Richard after the Conquest, in all the grammar schools of England children abandon French, and compose and learn in English, and have thereby an advantage on the one hand, and a disadvantage on the other. The advantage is that they learn their grammar in less time than children used to do. The disadvantage is that nowadays children at grammar school know no more French than their left heel, and that is a misfortune for them if they should cross the sea and travel in foreign countries, and in other such circumstances. Also, gentlemen have now largely abandoned teaching their children French.

Plus ça change...

A PASTON LETTER

This is an extract from one of the collection of letters written by members of the Norfolk family of Paston during the 15th century. There are over a thousand items in the collection, dealing with everything from legal matters to domestic gossip, and written throughout in a natural and often vivid style. Most of the collection is now in the British Museum. The present example comes from a letter written 'in hast[e]' by Margaret Paston to her husband John on 19 May 1448, Trinity Sunday evening.



Ryght worshipfull husbond, I recomaund me to yow, and prey yow to wete þat on Friday last passed be-fore noon, þe parson of Oxened beyng at messe in our parossh chirche, euyn atte leuacion of þe sakeryng, Jamys Gloys hadde ben in þe towne and come homward by Wymondams gate. And Wymondam stod in his gate and John Norwode his man stod by hym, and Thomas Hawys his othir man stod in þe strete by þe canell side. And Jamys Gloys come wyth his hatte on his hede between bothe his men, as he was wont of custome to do. And whanne Gloys was a-yenst Wymondham he seid thus, 'covere þy heed!' And Gloys seid ageyn, 'so i shall for the.' And whanne Gloys was forther passed by þe space of iii or iiij strede, Wymondham drew owt his dagger and seid, 'Shalt þow so, knave?' And þerwith Gloys turned hym and drewe owt his dagger and defendet hym, fle yng in-to my moderis place; and Wymondham and his man Hawys kest stonys and dreve Gloys into my moderis place. And Hawys folwyd into my moderis place and kest a ston as meche as a forthyng lof into þe halle after Gloys; and þan ran owt of þe place ageyn. And Gloys folwyd owt and stod wyth-owt þe gate, and þanne Wymondham called Gloys thef and seid he shuld dye, and Gloys seid he lyed and called hym charl, and bad hym come hym-self or ell þe best man he hadde, and Gloys wold answere hym on for on. And þanne Hawes ran into Wymondhams place and feched a spere and a swerd, and toke his maister his swerd. And wyth þe noise of þis a-saut and affray my modir and I come owt of þe chirche from þe sakeryng, and I bad Gloys go in-to my moderis place ageyn, and so he dede. And thanne Wymondham called my moder and me strong hores, and seid þe Pastons and alle her kyn were [hole in paper] ... seid he lyed, knave and charl as he was. And he had meche large langage, as ye shall knowe her-after by mowthe.

My dear husband, I commend myself to you, and want you to know that, last Friday before noon, the parson of Oxnead was saying Mass in our parish church, and at the very moment of elevating the host, James Gloys, who had been in town, was coming home past Wyndham's gate. And Wyndham was standing in his gateway with his man John Norwood by his side, and his other man, Thomas Hawes, was standing in the street by the gutter. And James Gloys came with his hat on his head between both his men, as he usually did. And when Gloys was opposite Wyndham, Wyndham said 'Cover your head!' And Gloys retorted, 'So I shall for you!' And when Gloys had gone on three or four strides, Wyndham drew out his dagger and said, 'Will you, indeed, knave?' And with that Gloys turned on him, and drew out his dagger and defended himself, fleeing into my mother's place; and Wyndham and his man Hawes threw stones and drove Gloys into my mother's house, and Hawes followed into my mother's and threw a stone as big as a farthing-loaf into the hall at Gloys, and then ran out of the place again. And Gloys followed him out and stood outside the gate, and then Wyndham called Gloys a thief and said he had to die, and Gloys said he lied and called him a peasant, and told him to come himself or else the best man he had, and Gloys would answer him, one against one. And then Hawes ran into Wyndham's place and fetched a spear and a sword, and gave his master his sword. And at the noise of this attack and uproar my mother and I came out of the church from the sacrament, and I told Gloys to go into my mother's again, and he did so. And then Wyndham called my mother and me wicked whores, and said the Pastons and all her kin were (...) said he lied, knave and peasant that he was. And he had a great deal of broad language, as you shall hear later by word of mouth.

Such a story could have appeared in any modern tabloid. (The hole in the paper is fortuitous, and is unlikely to be an 'expletive deleted'.) The experience shocked Margaret, who 'wolde not for xl li. have suyche another trouble' ('wouldn't have another such disturbance happen for £40').

THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE

This is the first example to appear in English of the debate verse form which was so popular in Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries. In the poem, the two speakers argue their views in the manner of a lawsuit. The work has become famous for its humour and irony, and for the lively way in which the characters of the two birds are portrayed. It displays a French-inspired scheme of four-beat lines in rhyming couplets. Its authorship has not been established, though the dialect represented is southern, and it was probably composed c. 1200. From a reference in the poem to a Master Nicholas of Guildford (who the birds agree should judge the debate), that area of Surrey has been suggested as a possible source. The following extracts are of the opening lines, and part of one of the nightingale's diatribes.

Ich was in one sumere dale,
In one suþe diþeale hale,
Iherde ich holde grete tale
An hule and one niþtingale.
Þat plait was stif & starc & strong,
Sumwile softe & lud among;
An aiþer aþen oþer sval,
& let þat vole mod ut al.
& eiþer seide of oþeres custe
Þat alreworste þat hi wuste...

*I was in a summer valley,
In a very hidden corner,
I heard holding a great argument
An owl and a nightingale.
The dispute was fierce and violent and strong,
Sometimes soft and loud at intervals;
And each swelled in anger against the other,
And let out their bad temper.
And each said of the other's qualities
The worst things that they knew...*

& þu tukest wrope & vuele,
Whar þu miþt, oversmale fuþele...
Þu art lodlich to biholde,
& þu art loþ in monie volde;
Þi bodi is short, þi swore is smal,
Grettere is þin heued þan þu al;
Þin eþene boþ col blake & brode,
Riþt swo ho weren ipeint mid wode...

*And you ill-treat cruelly and badly,
Wherever you can, very small birds...
You are hateful to behold,
And you are hateful in many ways;
Your body is short, your neck is small,
Your head is bigger than the rest of you;
Your eyes both charcoal-black and wide,
Just like they were painted with woad...*

THE CUCKOO SONG

This well-known song is one of several secular lyrics dating from c. 1225. It is one of a very few such lyrics which have musical notation in the manuscript (as well as an alternative religious text in Latin).

Svmer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med
And springþ þe wde nu.
Sing cuccu!

*Summer has come in,
Loudly sing, cuckoo!
The seed grows and the
meadow bursts into flower
And the wood springs up now.
Sing, cuckoo!*

Awe bleteþ after lomb,
Lhouþ after calue cu,
Bulluc stertep, bucke uertep.
Murie sing cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu,
Wel singes þu cuccu.
Ne swik þu nauer nu!

*The ewe bleats after the lamb,
The cow lows after the calf.
The bullock leaps, the buck farts.
Merry sing, cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo,
You sing well, cuckoo.
Never cease you now!*



LAZAMON'S BRUT

This is a poem of c. 16,000 lines telling the history of Britain from the landing of Brutus (the *Brut* of the title, the reputed founder of the Britons) to the last Saxon victory over the Britons in 689. It uses an alliterative line, showing the influence of Old English (p. 11), and many of its themes reflect those of earlier Germanic times; but the approach was also much influenced by French chivalric romances. The text actually uses as a source a French verse chronicle, *Roman de Brut*, made by the 12th-century Anglo-Norman author, Wace.

Little is known of Lazamon (modern spelling, Layamon), other than what he tells us in the opening lines of the work – that he was a parish priest of Ernleþe (modern Areley Kings, Worcestershire). There are two extant manuscripts, both dating from the first half of the 13th century, and separated in time by about a generation. This has given scholars a rare chance to make a comparison, to see if the two versions throw some light on the way the language could have changed during that time.

The poem is written in long lines, divided into half-line groups, and a great deal of use is made of alliteration, rhyme, and other phonological features which give the units their structure (p. 441). A surprising feature of the text is that, despite being written 150 years after the Conquest, it has very few French loan words. It is likely that the poem's subject-matter, much concerned with battles within the epic tradition, motivated Lazamon to use an older vocabulary, associated more with the Old English period. However, there are no kennings in the text (p. 23). The later version also contains rather more French loans, suggesting that the scribe was to some extent trying to modernize the language. (Extracts and translation from N. Blake, 1992.)

Earlier version (lines 8949 ff.)

Nu haueð Vortigernes cun Aurilien aquald.
nu þu ært al ane of aþele þine cunne.
Ah ne hope þu to ræde of heom þat liggeð dede.
ah þenc of þe seoluen seolðen þe beoð ʒiueþe.
for selde he aswint þe to him-seolue þencheð.
þv scalt wurðen god king & geunene lauerd.
& þu to þere mid-niht weþne þine cnihtes.
þat we i þan morþen-liht mæþen come forð-riht.

Later version (lines 8219 ff.)

Nou haueþ Vortigerne his cun Aurelie acwelled.
nou hart þou al one of alle þine kunne.
Ac ne hope þou to reade of ham þat liggeþ deade.
ac þench ou þou miht þi-seolf þine kinedom werie.
for sealde he aswint þat to him-seolue trestep.
þou salt worþe god king and steorne þorh alle þing.
And þou at þare midniht weþne þine cnihtes.
þat þou at þan moreliht maþe be a-redi to þe fiht.

*Now that Vortigern's family has killed Aurilie,
you are the sole survivor of your family.
But do not expect any support from him who lies dead.
Put your trust in yourself that help is granted you,
for seldom is he disappointed who puts his trust in
himself.
You will become a worthy king and ruler of people.
And arm your followers at midnight
so that we may advance in the morning.*

POETRY FOR THE EAR

'Delightful', 'enchanted', and 'beguiling' are just some of the terms critics have used to express their feelings about the opening lines of the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The lines unquestionably demonstrate Chaucer's great skill in poetic description, for, when we look carefully at their grammatical structure, they ought not to generate such responses at all. On the face of it, it is improbable that a term like 'enchanted' would ever be used of a sentence which begins with a four-line subordinate clause with a coordinate clause inside it, and which is immediately followed by a six-line subordinate clause with two more coordinate clauses inside it, and which also includes a relative clause and a parenthetical clause, before it reaches the main clause. Sentences with multiple embeddings (p. 239), such as the one you have just read, are not usually described as 'enchanted'. The

fact that we not only cope with Chaucer's sentence but have the aural impression that it flows along so smoothly and simply is a tribute to his poetic genius.

The lines work partly because of the rhyme, which organizes the meaning into units that our auditory memory can easily assimilate, and partly because of the metre, which adds pace and control to the reading. The long sequence of clauses, identifying first one aspect of the time of year, then another, also promotes a leisurely, storytelling atmosphere which anticipates the vast scale of the work to follow. It is as if the poet were asking us, through the syntax and prosody, whether we are sitting comfortably, before he begins. As some critics have put it, it is poetry for the ear rather than for the eye.

The artifice of the grammar of these opening lines can also be seen in several points of detail. The normal order of clause elements is reversed

in l. 11 and l. 12 (verb before subject), and in l. 2 (object before verb). The normal order of phrase elements is reversed in l. 1 (adjective after noun) and l. 6 (auxiliary verb after main verb). As a further aid to the metre, we see an extra particle brought into the opening line (*Whan that Aprile...*) and a prefix added to a past participle in l. 8 (*yronne*). These were some of the stylistic options available to Chaucer at the time: it would have been perfectly possible for him to have written *Whan Aprile and ronne*. The existence of variant forms in a language is of considerable poetic value, providing the writer with options to suit different metrical contexts – if *also* or *better* will not fit a line, then *als* and *bet* might – to ensure the verse 'does not fail' (see below). A modern poet might similarly enjoy the freedom of choice between *happier* and *more happy*, or between *all work*, *the work*, and *all of the work*.

The way in which Chaucer can capture the natural features of colloquial speech is not well illustrated by the *Prologue* – at least, not until towards the end, when the Host starts to speak. The following extract, from *The Summoner's Tale* (ll. 2202–6) provides a better example:

'Ey, Goddes mooder', quod she, 'Blisful mayde!
Is ther oght elles? telle me feithfully.'
'Madame,' quod he, 'how thynke ye herby?'
'How that me thynketh?' quod she, 'so God me speede,
I seye, a cherl hath doon a cherles deede.'

('Ee, God's mother', said she, 'Blissful maiden! Is there anything else? Tell me faithfully.'
'Madame', said he, 'What do you think about that?'
'What do I think about it?' said she, 'so God help me, I say a churl has done a churl's

deed.') Here we see the way in which Chaucer keeps a dialogue going, with quickfire questions and answers within the verse structure. The words are uncomplicated, mostly just one syllable long. The passage also shows one of his favourite stylistic tricks, the use of a rhyming tag with a natural conversational rhythm to it: so *God me speede* – like his use elsewhere of *as I gesse* ('as I guess') and many other such 'comment clauses' (p.241). Other important characteristics of conversation are seen in the example, such as the 'I said/he said' pattern still found in narrative today, as well as an exclamation, an oath, and the use of direct address (*Madame*). Along with a goodly store of vulgarisms and name-calling – for *Goddes bones*, by *Seinte Loy*, *olde fool*, by *my feith* – these features demonstrate why Chaucer's conversational poetry is so distinctive and so real.

SOME LESSER-KNOWN EXTRACTS

These two extracts further illustrate the variety of Chaucer's writing. The first is the opening of the scientific discourse he wrote in c.1391 for 'little Lewis, my son', *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* (an early instrument for observing the position and altitudes of celestial bodies). The second is the opening of his 'ABC', an early poem in which the first letter of each verse follows the order of the letters of the alphabet. It was possibly written in the mid-1360s for devotional use by Blanche, the first wife of John of Gaunt.

Lyte Lowys my sone, I aperceyve wel by certeyne evidences thyn abilite to lerne sciences touching nombres and proporciouns; and as wel considre I thy besy praier [*anxious prayer*] in special to lerne the tretys of the Astrelabie. Than [*then*] for as moche [*much*] as a filosofre saith, 'he wrappeth him in his frend, that condescendith to the rightfule praiers of his frend,' therefore have I yeven the [*given thee*] a suffisant Astrelabie as for oure orizonte [*horizon*], compowned [*constructed*] after the latitude of Oxenforde [*Oxford*]; upon which, by mediacioun [*mediation*] of this litel tretys, I purpose to teche the [*thee*] a certain nombre of conclusions aperteyning to the same instrument. I sieie a certain of conclusions, for thre [*three*] causes. The first cause is this: truste wel that alle the conclusions that han [*have*] be founde, or ellys possibly might be founde in so noble an instrument as is an Astrelabie ben [*are*] unknowe parfitty [*perfectly*] to eny mortal man in

this region, as I suppose. Another cause is this, that sothly [*truly*] in any tretis of the Astrelabie that I have seyn, there be somme conclusions that wol [*will*] not in alle thinges parformen her bihestes [*fulfil their promise*]; and somme of hem ben to [*them are too*] harde to thy tendir age to conceyve.

Almighty and al merciable queene, To whom that al this world fleeth for socour [*help*],
To have relees of sinne, of sorwe, and teene [*hurt*],
Glorious virgine, of alle floures flour [*flower of all flowers*]
To thee I flee, confounded in error.
Help and releeve, thou mighti debonayre [*gracious one*],
Have mercy on my perilous langour [*affliction*]!
Venquissed me hath my cruel adversaire.

Bountee so fix hath in thin [*thy*] herte his tente,
That wel I wot [*know*] thou wolt [*will*] my socour bee;
Thou canst not warne [*refuse*] him that with good entente
Axeth [*asks for*] thin helpe, thin herte is ay [*always*] so free [*generous*].
Thou art largesse of pleyn felicitee [*absolute bliss*],
Haven of refut [*refuge*], of quiete, and of reste.
Loo [*Lo*], how that theeves sevene [*the seven deadly sins*] chasen mee!
Help, lady bright, er that [*before*] my ship tobreste [*is wrecked*]!

THE -e QUESTION

The chief difficulty in trying to read Chaucer's verse aloud in its original pronunciation is knowing when to sound the -e which appears at the end of so many words (p. 32). The opening lines of the *Tales* provide several examples: do we add a 'weak' ending to *soote*, *droghte*, *roote*, *sweete*, *melodye*, and others? The transcription given suggests that we do, in most cases, but is this transcription the only one?

Final -e was certainly on its way out of the language at this time, and a generation or so later it would be completely gone. But in Chaucer's time, there would have been considerable variation. Older speakers might keep it; younger ones drop it. Or perhaps the -e would be kept in careful recitation style. It would almost certainly be elided (p. 259) before a vowel, as in *droghte* (l. 2). And when it represented an earlier inflectional ending (and not a later spelling idiosyncrasy), it would probably have been pronounced. But many cases cannot be resolved so easily.

Scholars are divided on the issue, some recommending the pronunciation in doubtful instances, others rejecting it. That Chaucer himself was aware of the importance of metrical regularity is suggested by his request to Apollo (in *The House of Fame*, l. 1098) to guide him in making his poetry pleasing, 'Though som vers fayle in a syllable' ('Though some lines fail in a syllable'). But no one has yet found a foolproof way of determining Chaucer's prosodic intentions, and different readings continue to be heard.

MIDDLE ENGLISH SPELLING

What is immediately noticeable from the range of texts illustrated in the preceding pages is the extraordinary diversity of Middle English spelling – far greater than that found in Old English (p. 16). Students who are new to the period quickly learn the skill of glossary delving – encountering a variant spelling in an edited text (e.g. *naure*, *næure*, *ner*, *neure*), then trawling through the back of the book to track down what it is a variant of (in this case, of *neuer* ‘never’). A good editor makes the job easy, by providing copious cross-references. Some words have a dozen or more variants.

This situation results from a combination of historical, linguistic, and social factors. The sociolinguistic impact of the French invasion, the continuation of the processes of sound change which began in Anglo-Saxon times, and the considerable growth and movement in population during the medieval period, especially in the south-east of the country, all helped to influence the shape of the writing system. The change is quite dramatic. There is a marked contrast between the diverse and idiosyncratic forms used at the beginning of the period and the highly regularized system of spelling which begins to appear in the 15th century, in the work of the Chancery scribes and William Caxton (p. 56).

Some Textual Features

The text of the *Peterborough Chronicle* (p. 33), dating from the very beginning of the period, shows some of the important features of Middle English spelling. The Old English runic symbols are still in use, but there is some inconsistency. The *-th* spelling makes a sporadic appearance for *þ*. The symbol *p* is used in the manuscript, but this has been represented on p. 33 by *w* (as is usual in modern editions of these texts). *uu* is also a common spelling for this sound; the word for ‘wretched people’, for example, is spelled both ways in the illustration (ll. 11, 14). The letter *g* is used for a sound which most other texts of the time spell with *ȝ*. There is some alternation between *æ* and *a*. In addition, *u* is used where we would now find *v*, in such words as *gyuen* ‘give’ and *æure* ‘ever’.

Because of the spelling, several words look stranger than they really are. An example is *wreccemen*, which would have been pronounced like *wretch-man* (but with the *w* sounded), and is thus very close to modern *wretched*. *Cyrceiærd* likewise would have been close to the modern pronunciation of *churchyard*, because the two *c* spellings each represented a *ch* sound, and *i* stood for the same sound as modern *y*. And *altegædere* is not far from *altogether*, nor *laiden* from *laid*.

MIGHT IS RIGHT

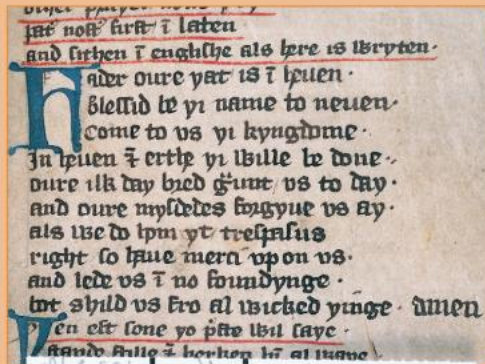
The various spellings of *might* clearly illustrate the way grammatical, dialectal, and scribal variants complicate the study of Middle English texts. All the following are listed in one standard collection of early extracts (B. Dickins & R. M. Wilson, 1951).

maht	miztte
mahte	mihhte
mayht	mihte

micht	mist
michtis	mithe
micthe	mouth
mizt	myht
mizte	myhte
mizten	myhtes
miztest	myhtestu

Some of the variation can be explained by grammatical context (e.g. the *-est* endings for the 2nd person singular). Some is probably due to

scribal error (e.g. *mayht*). A good example of a dialectal variant is *micht*, which suggests an origin in the north-east (compare modern Scots *nicht* ‘not’). However, by the time of William Caxton (p. 56), many of the variations had died out, and Caxton’s own use of the *myght* spelling proved to be a major influence on the emergence of the modern form.



Fader oure þat is i heuen.
blesid be þi name to neuen.
Come to us þi kyngdome.
In heuen 7 erth þi wille be done.
oure ilk day bred ȝunt vs to day.
and oure mysdedes forgyue vs ay.
als we do hom þt trespasus
right so haue merci vpon us.
and lede vs i no foundynge.
bot shild vs fro al wiked tinge.
amen.

(After C. Jones, 1972.)

SOME MANUSCRIPT FEATURES

This is an extract from a 14th-century manuscript – a translation of the Lord’s Prayer used in *The Lay Folk’s Mass Book*. It is written in *book hand*, a script which was widely used during the Middle English period.

- Old English thorn (*þ*) is used, but written identically to *y* (see further, p. 41): compare the first symbol of *þi* (l. 2) with the last symbol of *day* (l. 5) in the manuscript. *þ* is beginning to be replaced by *th*, as in *erthe* (l. 4).
- The yogh (*ȝ*) and ash (*æ*) symbols have been replaced by *g* (as in *forgyue*, l. 6) and *a* (as in *fader*, l. 1), respectively. There is an unusual replacement for Old English *þ*, seen in *wille* (l. 4). The new symbols show the influence of the Carolingian script widely used in Continental Europe (p. 270).
- The long *s* symbols, also found in Carolingian script, are used in such words as *blesid* (l. 2). There is a later example in the extract from Shakespeare (p. 63). The shape continued to be used in print until the 18th century.
- Some of the symbols are beginning to take on a modern appearance, compared with their earlier use in insular script (p. 16). A long downward stroke is no longer used in *r* (*erth*, l. 4). The top of *f* now ascends above the general level of the line (*forgyue*, l. 6), and the ascender in *t* now goes through the crossbar (*right*, l. 8).

As a result, these symbols are much easier to distinguish than they were in Old English.

- Several abbreviations are used, including a line suspended above a symbol to show a missing *n* (l. 1), a superscript standing for *ra* (l. 5), and a shorthand form of *and* (l. 4).
- There is no real punctuation. A mark resembling a period is used after most lines, but its function is unclear.

Minim confusion

Texts of this period show a problem known as *minim confusion* (p. 273). A *minim* is a short vertical stroke of the pen, as in the *i* of *is* (l. 1) or *þi* (l. 2). Several letters were formed by a sequence of such strokes – *u*, *n*, *m*, *v*, and sometimes *w* (*uu*). Because scribes did not usually leave space between different letters, any word which contained these letters in adjacent positions would be difficult to read. A sequence of six minims could be read as *mni*, *imu*, *inni*, and several other possibilities. Compare the *m* of *merci* (l. 8) with the *un* of *foundynge* (l. 9). Because there were so many possible ambiguities, Norman scribes introduced the Carolingian convention of writing the minims representing *u* as an *o*, whenever a sequence of two or three other minims followed (as in *come*, l. 3). No new pronunciation is implied by this change. As with the later dotting of *i*, and the reshaping of the tops of *m* and *n*, there was a purely graphic reason for it – to help keep different letters apart.

NORMAN INFLUENCE

As the period progressed, so the spelling changed. The Norman scribes listened to the English they heard around them, and began to spell it according to the conventions they had previously used for French, such as *qu* for *cw* (*queen* for *cwen*). They brought in *gh* (instead of *h*) in such words as *night* and *enough*, and *ch* (instead of *c*) in such words as *church*. They used *ou* for *u* (as in *house*). They began to use *c* before *e* (instead of *s*) in such words as *cercle* ('circle') and *cell*. And because the letter *u* was written in a very similar way to *v*, *n*, and *m* (see opposite), words containing a sequence of these letters were difficult to read; they therefore often replaced the *u* with an *o*, in such cases as *come*, *love*, *one*, and *son*. *k* and *z* came to be increasingly used, as did *j* (a visually more distinct form of *i*). And one pair of letters came to be used in complementary ways: *v* at the beginning of a word (*vnder*), and *u* in the middle (whether consonant or vowel, as in *haue*). By the beginning of the 15th century, English spelling was a mixture of two systems, Old English and French. The consequences plague English learners still (p. 286).

YE OLDE LETTERS



How did *the* become *ye* in *Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe* and other such institutions?

Of the four Old English letters, only thorn (*þ*) continued to be much used throughout the Middle English period, eventually being replaced by *th*. However, scribal practice altered during that time, and the symbol took on a new shape (see illustration opposite), becoming so like a *y* that some writers actually added a dot above the symbol to help distinguish it. This new shape was used in such grammatical

words as *the*, *thou*, and *that*, and was often abbreviated (e.g. as *ye*, *yt*).

The writing of *þe* 'the' as *ye* continued in some manuscript styles until the 19th century, by which time people had long forgotten the original letter shape and the 'th' sound it once represented. They saw the letter as a *y*, gave it the expected modern value, and pronounced the word as 'ye' – a usage still found today in such mock-archaic contexts as pub names (*Ye Olde Fighting Cocks*), shoppe names, and comic dialogue (see further, p. 197).



THE CHANCERY LINE

Some of the royal Chancery records, kept on skins of parchment which were then sewn together and rolled up. Systematic record-keeping was an essential part of the monarchy's attempt in the 12th century to develop more effective government. At first the Chancery consisted of a small number of scribes who travelled with the king and prepared his documents; but during the 13th century they came to be permanently located in Westminster.

The importance of the Chancery is its role in fostering the standardization of English, in handwriting, spelling, and grammatical forms. The 'Chancery hand' developed in Italy in the 13th century, and spread to London via France. From c. 1430 a vast number of documents emerged. Careful analysis of the manuscripts in the Early Chancery Proceedings has shown that the clerks imposed a great deal of order on the wide range of spellings

which existed at the time, and that the choices they made are very largely the ones which have since become standard. The genealogy of modern Standard English goes back to Chancery, not Chaucer.

Although other varieties of English had achieved some degree of standardization, they were soon overtaken by the quantity of material which emerged from the Chancery office. When Caxton established his press, also in Westminster (1476), 'Chancery Standard' already carried enormous prestige. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that it is this set of practices which, associated with the authority of the court and fostered by the power of the press, eventually exercised such influence around the country – though not all Chancery features were retained by the printing-houses.

An example of Chancery influence is its choice of *such*, as opposed to *sich*, *sych*, *seche*, *swiche*, and other variants. *Can*, *could*, *shall*, *should*, and other grammatical words were also

given their modern form here. Moreover, there are clear differences between Chancery Standard (CS) and Chaucer's spelling preferences (p. 38) – for example, *not* (CS) for *nat*, *but* (CS) for *bot*, *gaf* (CS) for *yaf* ('gave'), *thes(e)* (CS) for *thise*, and *thorough* (CS) for *thurch* ('through').

Chancery Standard does not derive from the language and style found in the works of Chaucer and Gower, and other major literary figures, therefore; and it took a while before Chancery features emerged in literary texts. Rather, it is a quite distinct variety, showing the influence of the Central and East Midland dialects (p. 50), as well as features associated with London. This mixture is not surprising, given that we know large numbers of people were attracted to the London area from the Midlands in the 15th century. But it does give the Midland dialect area a somewhat larger role in the shaping of modern Standard English than was traditionally thought to be the case (p. 54).

MIDDLE ENGLISH SOUNDS

At the same time as new letter shapes and preferences were emerging (pp. 40–1), there was a continual process of change affecting the way English was pronounced. The result is a degree of complex interaction between the writing and sound systems which has no parallel in the history of English. It is not possible for these pages to provide a systematic description, but they can at least indicate the general character of the pronunciation developments throughout the period. For those interested in the history of spelling (p. 286), especially, it is a particularly important time, as this is when many rules and idiosyncrasies of the modern system were introduced.

New Spelling Conventions

Several consonant sounds came to be spelled differently, especially because of French influence. For example, Old English *sc* /ʃ/ is gradually replaced by *sh* or *sch* (*scip* becomes *ship*), though some dialects use *s*, *ss* or *x*. Old English *c* /tʃ/ is replaced by *ch* or *cch* (as in *church*), and the voiced equivalent /dʒ/, previously spelled as *cg* or *gg*, becomes *dg* (as in *bridge*).

New conventions for showing long and short vowels also developed. Increasingly, long vowel sounds came to be marked with an extra vowel letter, as in *see* (earlier *sē*) and *booc* (earlier *bōc*). Short vowels were identified by consonant doubling, in cases where there might otherwise be confusion, as in *sitting* vs *siting*. This convention became available once it was no longer needed to mark the lengthened consonants which had been present in Old English, but lost in early Middle English.

A similar redeployment of graphic resources followed the loss of the unstressed vowels that originally distinguished inflectional endings, as in *stane* ‘stone’ (p. 39). Although the final /ə/ sound disappeared, the *-e* spelling remained, and it gradually came to be used to show that the preceding vowel was long. This is the origin of the modern spelling ‘rule’ about ‘silent e’ in such words as *name* and *nose* (p. 284). The availability of such a useful and frequent letter also motivated its use in other parts of the system: for example, it marked the consonantal use of *u* (*haue*) and the affricate use of *g* (*rage* vs *rag*), and it helped distinguish such modern pairs as *teaselteas* and *toltoe*.

New Pronunciations

Several sounds altered during the early Middle English period. Some took on a different value; some disappeared altogether. In particular, there was a restructuring of the Old English vowel system (p. 18). The original diphthongs became pure vowels, and new diphthongs emerged. Some of the new units arose when certain consonants at the end of a syllable came to be pronounced

in a vowel-like manner – an example is *wei* ‘way’, from Old English *weg*. French loan words also introduced new diphthongs, in the form of /oi/ and /oi/ – unusual sounds for English, and the ancestors of modern /ɔɪ/ in *joy*, *point*, etc.

Several of the pure vowels also changed their values. For example, in most parts of the country (except the north), Old English /ɑ:/ came to be articulated higher at the back of the mouth, as is shown by such spelling changes as *ban* becoming *bon* ‘bone’ or *swa* becoming *so*. Northern speech followed its own course in several other areas too (p. 50); for example, several of the new diphthongs were far more evident in the south, being replaced by pure vowels in the north (*light* vs *licht*).

An interesting change happened to [h]. This sound appeared before a consonant at the beginning of many Old English words, such as *hring* ‘ring’ and *hnecca* ‘neck’. It was lost early on in the Middle English period – the first sign of the process of ‘aitch-dropping’ which is still with us today. The loss of *h* before a vowel began some time later, producing variations in usage which continued into the 16th century. Middle English manuscripts show many examples of an *h* absent where it should be present (*adde* for *had*, *eld* for *held*) or present where it should be absent (*ham* for *am*, *his* for *is*). The influence of spelling (and doubtless the prescriptive tradition in schools) led to the *h*-forms being later

SOUND SYSTEM 1350–1400

By 1400 the sound system emerging in the south-east of the country (as used by the Chancery and Chaucer) would have had the following inventory. (There is continuing controversy over the number and phonetic quality of the diphthongs.)

The spelling shown in the examples is in many cases just one of several possibilities. The asterisk identifies emerging phonemes (see above).

Consonants

p, b *pin*, *bit*
t, d *tente*, *dart*
k, g *kin*, *good*
tʃ *chirche* ‘church’
dʒ *brigge* ‘bridge’
m, n, ŋ* *make*, *name*, *song*
l, r *lay*, *rage*
w, j *weep*, *yelwe* ‘yellow’
f, v* *fool*, *vertu* ‘virtue’
s, z* *sore*, *Zephirus*
θ, ð *thank*, *the*
ʃ, ç, x *shour*, *nyght*, *droghte*
h *happen*

Long vowels

i: *ryden*
e: *sweete*
ɛ: *heeth*
ɑ: *name*
u: *houre*
o: *good*
ɔ: *holy*

Short vowels

ɪ *this*
ɛ *men*
a *can*
ə *aboute* (*in unstressed syllables*)
ʊ *but*
ɔ *oft*

Diphthongs

æɪ *day*
oɪ* *joye*
ɔɪ* *joinen* ‘join’
ɪʊ *newe*
ɛʊ *fewe* ‘few’
aʊ *lawe*
ɔʊ *growe*

THE ORMULUM

ʒiss boc iss nemmedd
Ormulum, forþi þatt
Orm itt wrohhte.

*This book is called Ormulum,
because Orm wrote it.*

Little else is known about the author. The opening lines of the Dedication (see below) tell us that he has a brother, Walter, who is also an Augustinian canon. The text is c. 1180, and the dialect is probably north Midland. It is a series of homilies, intended to be read aloud. Over 10,000 full lines survive, and this (according to the contents) may be only about an eighth of the projected work.

Orm’s work is of interest not for its poetic style (a series of 15-syllable lines, meticulously kept, but with little ornament) nor especially for its content, which has attracted such epithets as ‘intolerably diffuse’ and ‘tedious’. Its significance is the idiosyncratic orthography, and in particular his system of consonant doubling. He has tried to devise a foolproof way of helping his intended readers, so that they make no mistakes when reading aloud.

Orm’s basic rule is to double a consonant after a short vowel in a closed syllable – a principle he implements scrupulously. His concern has been of great value to linguists, providing a major source of evidence about the length of vowels in early Middle English. He is very aware of what he is doing, and evidently quite proud of his system: indeed, at one point in his Dedication he warns future copyists to make sure they get his double lettering system right. No wonder that some have called him the first English spelling reformer.

Nu broþerr Wallterr,
broþerr min, affterr þe
flæshess kinde,
Annd broþerr min i
Crisstenndom þurrrh
fulluht annd þurrrh
trowwþe...

*Now brother Walter, my
brother, after the manner of
the flesh and my brother in
Christianity through baptism
and through faith...*

restored in many words in Received Pronunciation (though not in such Romance loans as *honour*), and thus to the present-day situation where the use of /h-/ is socially diagnostic (p. 339).

New Contrasts

In a few cases, new contrastive units (phonemes, p. 248) emerged. The /v/ sound became much more important, because of its use in French loan words, and began to distinguish pairs of words, as it does today (*feel* vs *veal*). Although both [f] and [v] sounds are found in Old English, the language did not use them to differentiate words. Similarly, French influence caused /s/ and /z/ to become contrastive (*zeal* vs *seal*). And the *ng* sound /ŋ/ at the end of a word also began to distinguish meanings at this time (*thing* vs *thin*). In Old English, this sound had always been followed by a /g/ – *cyning* ‘king’, for example, was /kyniŋg/. However the /g/ died away at the end of the Old English period, leaving /ŋ/ as the sole distinguishing unit.

The study of Middle English phonology is made increasingly difficult (and fascinating) by the intricate dialect situation (p. 50). On the one hand, a letter might be given different pronunciations depending on the dialect area in which it appears; an example is the letter *y*, which for a while represented an unrounded sound quality in the south and a rounded sound quality in the north. On the other hand, a sound might be given different spellings depending on the dialect area in which it appears; an example here is Old English /x/, spelled in the middle of words as *gh* in the south, and as *ch* in the north (*night* vs *nicht*). Finally, we should note the continuing need for analytical caution because spelling was not standardized. Problems of authorial idiosyncrasy and copyist error abound, contributing to both the complex character of the period and the moral fibre of its students.

THE SHE PUZZLE

Plotting the way sounds and words changed between Old and Middle English can be an intriguing business, and one which cannot always be resolved, as the story of *she* illustrates. There is a fairly obvious relationship between most of the Old English pronouns (p. 20) and their Modern English equivalents. But what is the link between *hēō* and *she*? The question has attracted several answers, and remains controversial.

- The simplest solution is to argue that there was a series of sound changes by which *hēō* gradually changed into *she*.
- 1 Sometime between Old and Middle English, the diphthong altered, the first element becoming shorter and losing its stress. [he:ə] thus became [hjo:].
- 2 The [h] element then came to be articulated closer to the palate, as [ç], in much the same way as happens to modern English *huge*.
- 3 [ç] then became [ʃ], to give the modern consonant.

There are certain facts in favour of this theory (the preferred explanation). Spellings such as *scho* are found in very early Middle English in the north. Also, a similar development took place in a few place names, such as Old Norse *Hjaltland* becoming modern *Shetland*. The main argument against the theory is that there is no clear evidence for Step 3 elsewhere in English at any time – apart from in these few foreign place names. Is it plausible to propose a sound change which affected only one word? Also, we are still left with the problem of getting from [o:] to [e:], which is required in order to produce the modern sound of *she*. For this, we have to assume a process such as analogy – perhaps the vowel of *she* being influenced by that of *he*. But there is no clear evidence for this.

- Alternative theories argue that *hēō* comes from *sēō*, the feminine form of the definite article. The simplest version postulates similar sound changes to the above, giving [sjo:] as a result. This is a short, plausible step away

from [jo:]. However, we are still left with the question of why the [o:] vowel became [e:].

- A third argument also begins with *sēō*, but takes a different phonological route. Sometime after the Conquest, we have a lot of evidence to show that the sound of *ēō* [e:ə] changed to become close to *ē* [e:]. This would have had the effect of making the words *heo* and *hē* sound the same; and as this process began to operate, it must have been quite disconcerting. People would have been unclear whether someone was saying *he* or *she*. In these circumstances, there would be a need to find a way of keeping the two words apart; and the suggestion is that *sēō* filled this need. Why *sēō*? There is a close semantic link between personal and demonstrative pronouns in many languages, and it can be seen in Old English too, where *sēō* meant ‘that’ as well as ‘the’. We can see the closeness in the text on p. 20 (l. 16), where the masculine form *se* ‘the’ is used as ‘the one’, and is glossed as ‘he’. The same could apply to *sēō* in its relation to *hēō*. It would be very natural to use the phonetic distinctiveness of the former to help sort out the ambiguity of the latter. All that would then be needed was a further consonant change from [s] to [ʃ], as the vowel is already on course for its modern sound.

The problem here is in this last step. How can [s] become [ʃ] in front of an [e:] vowel? It would be the equivalent of a change from *same* to *shame*. To get from [s] to [ʃ], there needs to be some intervening sound which ‘pulls’ the s in the direction of the more palatal sound [ʃ]. The obvious candidate is [j], itself a palatal sound, but the whole point of this third argument is that there is no [j] left in *hēō*. The possibility of a [j] developing disappeared when we argued that *ēō* became [e:].

The origins of *she* thus remain one of the unsolved puzzles in the history of English.

MEDIEVAL LINGUISTIC CURIOS

The name *Stanley*, along with its abbreviated form *Stan*, is quite unusual from a phonological point of view. It is an ancient aristocratic name, found throughout the Middle English period, and the family name of the earls of Derby. It means ‘stony field’ – presumably an earlier place name. What makes the name interesting is that it did not follow the normal pattern of sound change which affected the long *ā* vowel in Old English: *stān* became *stōn* in early Middle English, which became modern *stone* – just like *bān* ‘bone’, *hām* ‘home’, and many others. But the Old English spelling was preserved in the proper name (presumably because of the influence of northern dialects, p.50), so that we have *Stanley* rather than *Stonely Holloway*.



Interesting things happened in Middle English to the velar fricative /x/, spelled *h* and then *gh*, at the end of a word. It came to be pronounced /f/ in some words (e.g. *enough*, *tough*), but it was lost in others (*through*, *plough*). In one word, both changes took place, giving the modern doublet of *dough*, where the /x/ was lost, and *duff*, where it became /f/. The latter is found now only in such forms as *plum-duff*, a type of pudding, and (possibly) *duffer* (‘man of dough’?).



MIDDLE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

The vocabulary of the *Peterborough Chronicle* (p. 32) is not typical of the Middle English period as a whole. Despite the fact that it was written almost a century after the Conquest, there is little sign of the French vocabulary which was to be the distinctive characteristic of the era. The *Chronicle* vocabulary is still typical of what would have appeared in literary West Saxon – predominantly Germanic, with an admixture of Latin and Scandinavian (p. 24). Several of its words have since dropped from the language – for example, we no longer use *pinas* ‘cruelties’, or *namen* ‘took’. And of the words which are still found today, several have altered meanings: *wonder* could mean ‘atrocities’ as well as ‘marvels’, and *flesh* had the general sense of ‘meat’. Such ‘false friends’ are always a problem in reading a Middle English text because of their misleading similarity to the modern words.

The French Factor

French influence became increasingly evident in English manuscripts of the 13th century (p. 31). It has been estimated that some 10,000 French words came into English at that time – many previously borrowed from more distant sources (such as *alkali* from Arabic). These words were largely to do with the mechanisms of law and administration, but they also included words from such fields as medicine, art, and fashion. Many of the new words were quite ordinary, everyday terms. Over 70 per cent were nouns. A large number were abstract terms, constructed using such new French affixes as *con-*, *trans-*, *pre-*, *-ance*, *-tion*, and *-ment*. About three-quarters of all these French loans are still in the language today.

As new words arrived, there were many cases where they duplicated words that had already existed in English from Anglo-Saxon times. In such cases, there were two outcomes. Either one word would supplant the other; or both would co-exist, but develop slightly different meanings. The first outcome was very common, in most cases the French word replacing an Old English equivalent; for example, *leod* gave way to *people*, *wlitig* to *beautiful*, and *stow* (n.) to *place*. Hundreds of Old English words were lost in this way. But at the same time, Old English and French words often both survived with different senses or connotations, such as *doom* (OE) and *judgment* (F), *hearty* (OE) and *cordial* (F), and *house* (OE) and *mansion* (F) (p. 134). Sometimes pairs of words were used, one glossing the other: *for routhe and for pitie* is a Chaucerian example, and legal terminology often developed coordinations of this kind (p. 398). Bilingual word lists were compiled as early as the mid-13th century to aid intelligibility between English and French.

COURTLY FRENCH LOANS



A miniature of c. 1400, showing Chaucer reading his works aloud to a group of nobles and their ladies. The words from French which would have been entering the language during Chaucer's lifetime were rather different in character from those which arrived in the early Middle English period. The French of the Norman conquerors was a northern dialect of the language, and this dominated the English scene for 200 years (p. 30). By the 12th century, however, Paris had come to be established as the centre of influence in France, and new loan words began to arrive from the dialect of that area.

As the Parisian court grew in prestige, so Parisian French became the prestige dialect. It is this variety of French which in due course would have been taught in quality schools in England, with the earlier English-influenced varieties of French considered uneducated and perhaps a bit of a joke (if this is the correct interpretation of Chaucer's remark about the Prioress, who learned her French at the Benedictine nunnery in Stratford, Middlesex):

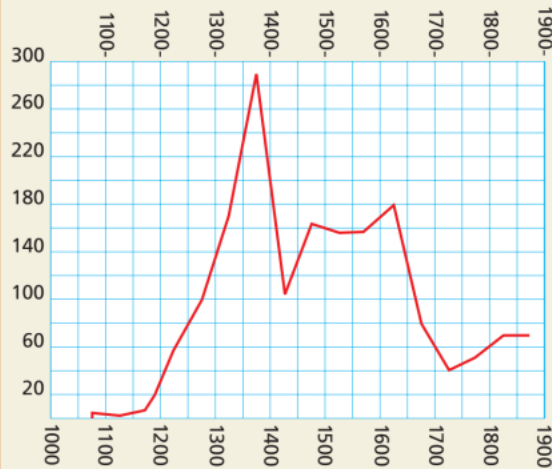
And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly
[gracefully],
After the scole [school] of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe [her
unknown].

From a lexical point of view, it is important to note these dialect differences, as otherwise it is not possible to explain certain spelling variants. There are several pairs of loan words affected (though not all have survived in Modern English):

<i>Norman French</i>	<i>Parisian French</i>
calange (1225)	challenge (1300)
canchelers (1066)	chanceleres (1300)
wile (1154)	guile (1225)
warrant (1225)	guarantee (1624)
warden (1225)	guardian (1466)
reward (1315)	regard (1430)
conveie (1375)	convoy (1425)
lealte (1300)	loialte (1400)
prisun (1121)	prison (1225)
gaol (1163)	jail (1209)

The central French spellings post-date the Norman ones. The situation is not always clear, partly because of the uncertainties of English spelling practices at the time (p. 40); but there is enough evidence to show that there were two distinct stages of borrowing from French in early Middle English.
(After D. Burnley, 1992.)

FRENCH INFLUENCE ON THE ENGLISH LEXICON



This diagram shows the varying rate at which French words have come into English since late Anglo-Saxon times, based on the entries in a historical dictionary showing the date at which an item is first used in an English text. The rate of French borrowing reaches a peak in the second half of the 14th century.

Such global figures need to be taken cautiously, for they hide several kinds of variation. In the early Middle English period, for example, there was a greater incidence of French loan words in courtly poetry, they were more common in the south of the country, and they were much more likely in works which were translations from French. By the end of the period, however, there is no doubting the extent to which they had permeated the language. Using Chaucer as a yardstick, in the 858 lines of the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, there are nearly 500 different French loans.

A TOUCH OF CLASSE



Almost all the English words to do with the aristocracy and their servants are of French origin (though the meaning of these words in medieval times was often rather different from what it is today). The chief examples are *baron*, *count(ess)*, *courtier*, *duchess*, *duke*, *marchioness*, *marquis*, *noble*, *page*, *peer*, *prince*, *princess*, *squire*, and *viscount(ess)*. *King*, *queen*, *lord*, *lady*, *knight*, and *earl* are the Anglo-Saxon exceptions.

Similarly, the names of all the best-known precious stones are French: *amethyst*, *diamond*, *emerald*, *garnet*, *pearl*, *ruby*, *sapphire*, *topaz*, *turquoise*.

SOME FRENCH LOANS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

Administration

authority, bailiff, baron, chamberlain, chancellor, constable, coroner, council, court, crown, duke, empire, exchequer, government, liberty, majesty, manor, mayor, messenger, minister, noble, palace, parliament, peasant, prince, realm, reign, revenue, royal, servant, sir, sovereign, squire, statute, tax, traitor, treason, treasurer, treaty, tyrant, vassal, warden

Law

accuse, adultery, advocate, arrest, arson, assault, assize, attorney, bail, bar, blame, chattels, convict, crime, decree, depose, estate, evidence, executor, felon, fine, fraud, heir, indictment, inquest, jail, judge, jury, justice, larceny, legacy, libel, pardon, perjury, plaintiff, plea, prison, punishment, sue, summons, trespass, verdict, warrant

Religion

abbey, anoint, baptism, cardinal, cathedral, chant, chaplain, charity, clergy, communion, confess, convent, creator, crucifix, divine, faith, friar, heresy, homily, immortality, incense, mercy, miracle, novice, ordain, parson, penance, prayer, prelate, priory, religion, repent, sacrament, sacrilege, saint, salvation, saviour, schism, sermon, solemn, temptation, theology, trinity, vicar, virgin, virtue

Military

ambush, archer, army, barbican, battle, besiege, captain, combat, defend, enemy, garrison, guard, hauberk, lance, lieutenant, moat, navy, peace, portcullis, retreat, sergeant, siege, soldier, spy, vanquish

Food and drink

appetite, bacon, beef, biscuit, clove, confection, cream, cruet, date, dinner, feast, fig, fruit, fry, grape, gravy, gruel, herb, jelly, lemon, lettuce, mackerel, mince, mustard, mutton, olive, orange, oyster, pigeon, plate, pork, poultry, raisin, repast, roast, salad, salmon, sardine, saucer, sausage, sole, spice, stew, sturgeon, sugar, supper, tart, taste, toast, treacle, tripe, veal, venison, vinegar

Fashion

apparel, attire, boots, brooch, buckle, button, cape, chemise, cloak, collar, diamond, dress, embroidery, emerald, ermine, fashion, frock, fur, garment, garter, gown, jewel, lace, mitten, ornament, pearl, petticoat, pleat, robe, satin, taffeta, tassel, train, veil, wardrobe

Leisure and the arts

art, beauty, carol, chess, colour, conversation, courser, dalliance, dance, falcon, fool, harness, image, jollity, joust, juggler, kennel, lay, leisure, literature, lute, melody, minstrel, music, noun, painting, palfrey, paper, parchment, park, partridge, pavilion, pen, pheasant, poet, preface, prose, recreation, rein, retrieve, revel, rhyme, romance, sculpture, spaniel, stable, stallion, story, tabor, terrier, title, tournament, tragedy, trot, vellum, volume

Science and learning

alkali, anatomy, arsenic, calendar, clause, copy, gender, geometry, gout, grammar, jaundice, leper, logic, medicine, metal, noun, ointment, pain, physician, plague, pleurisy, poison, pulse, sphere, square, stomach, study, sulphur, surgeon, treatise

The home

basin, blanket, bucket, ceiling, cellar, chair, chamber, chandelier, chimney, closet, couch, counterpane, curtain, cushion, garret, joist, kennel, lamp, lantern, latch, lattice, pantry, parlour, pillar, porch, quilt, scullery, towel, tower, turret

General nouns

action, adventure, affection, age, air, city, coast, comfort, country, courage, courtesy, cruelty, debt, deceit, dozen, envy, error, face, fault, flower, forest, grief, honour, hour, joy, labour, manner, marriage, mischief, mountain, noise, number, ocean, opinion, order, pair, people, person, piece, point, poverty, power, quality, rage, reason, river, scandal, season, sign, sound, spirit, substance, task, tavern, unity, vision

General adjectives

active, amorous, blue, brown, calm, certain, clear, common, cruel, curious, eager, easy, final, foreign, gay, gentle, honest, horrible, large, mean, natural, nice, original, perfect, poor, precious, probable, real, rude, safe, scarce, scarlet, second, simple, single, solid, special, strange, sudden, sure, usual

General verbs

advise, allow, arrange, carry, change, close, continue, cry, deceive, delay, enjoy, enter, form, grant, inform, join, marry, move, obey, pass, pay, please, prefer, prove, push, quit, receive, refuse, remember, reply, satisfy, save, serve, suppose, travel, trip, wait, waste

Turns of phrase

by heart, come to a head, do homage, do justice to, have mercy on, hold one's peace, make complaint, on the point of, take leave, take pity on

The Role of Latin

French is the most dominant influence on the growth of Middle English vocabulary (p. 46), but it is by no means the only one. During the 14th and 15th centuries several thousand words came into the language directly from Latin (though it is often difficult to exclude an arrival route via French). Most of these words were professional or technical terms, belonging to such fields as religion, medicine, law, and literature. They also included many words which were borrowed by a writer in a deliberate attempt to produce a ‘high’ style. Only a very small number of these ‘aureate terms’ entered the language, however (e.g. *meditation*, *oriental*, *prolixity*). The vast majority died almost as soon as they were born (e.g. *abusion*, *sempitern*, *tenebrous*).

The simultaneous borrowing of French and Latin words led to a highly distinctive feature of Modern English vocabulary – sets of three items all expressing the same fundamental notion but differing slightly in meaning or style, such as *kingly / royal / regal* and *rise / mount / ascend* (p. 134). The Old English word is usually the more popular one, with the French word more literary, and the Latin word more learned.

Other Sources

The effects of the Scandinavian invasions also made themselves felt during this period. Although the chief period of borrowing must have been much earlier, relatively few Scandinavian loans appear in Old English, and most do not come to be used in manuscripts until well into the 13th century, and then mainly in northern areas where Danish settlement was heaviest. A list is given in the section on Old English (p. 25).

Several other languages also supplied a sprinkling of new words at this time, though not all survived. Contact with the Low Countries brought *poll* (‘head’), *doten* (‘be foolish’), *bouse* (‘drink deeply’), and *skipper* (‘ship’s master’), resulting from commercial and maritime links with the Dutch. Other loans included *cork* (Spanish), *marmalade* (Portuguese), *sable* (Russian), *lough* (Irish), and many words from Arabic, especially to do with the sciences (*saffron*, *admiral*, *mattress*, *algebra*, *alkali*, *zenith*). In most cases, the words arrived after they had travelled through other countries (and languages), often entering English via French. A good example is the vocabulary of chess (*chess*, *rook*, *check*, *mate*), which came directly from French, but which is ultimately Persian.

The effect of all this borrowing on the balance of words in the English lexicon was dramatic. In early Middle English, over 90 per cent of words (lexical types, p. 133) were of native English origin. By the end of the Middle English period this proportion had fallen to around 75 per cent.

SOME LATIN LOANS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

Administration and law

alias, arbitrator, client, conspiracy, conviction, custody, gratis, homicide, implement, incumbent, legal, legitimate, memorandum, pauper, prosecute, proviso, summary, suppress, testify, testimony

Science and learning

abacus, allegory, comet, contradiction, desk, diaphragm, discuss, dislocate, equator, essence, etcetera, explicit, formal, genius, history, index, inferior, innumerable, intellect, item, library, ligament, magnify, major, mechanical, minor, neuter, notary, prosody, recipe, scribe, simile, solar, tincture

Religion

collect, diocese, immortal, incarnate, infinite, limbo, magnificat, mediator, memento, missal, pulpit, requiem, rosary, scripture, tract

General

admit, adjacent, collision, combine, conclude, conductor, contempt, depression, distract, exclude, expedition, gesture, imaginary, include, incredible, individual, infancy, interest, interrupt, lucrative, lunatic, moderate, necessary, nervous, ornate, picture, popular, private, quiet, reject, solitary, spacious, subjugate, substitute, temperate, tolerance, ulcer

THE WYCLIFFITE BIBLE

The authorship of the Bible translation attributed to John Wycliff (d. 1384) is uncertain. Because of the unorthodox nature of Wycliff’s opinions, the early manuscripts of his writings were widely destroyed. Also, his followers included several scholars who helped him carry out the task of translation. But there is no doubt that the inspiration for the work came from Wycliff himself, who was particularly concerned that lay people should be able to read the Bible in their own language. The first translation, using the Latin version of St Jerome, was made between 1380 and 1384.

Wycliff’s method was to rely greatly on glossing the Latin text, seeking where possible to preserve the original style. As a consequence, there are over a thousand Latin words whose use in English is first recorded in his translation. Almost any extract shows the influence of Latin vocabulary, either directly

imported, or known through French, and these items are in italics below.

And it was don, in tho daies: a *maundement* went out fro the *emperroure* august: that al the world schulde be *discryued* / this first *discryvynge* was made of *siryng iustice* of *sirie* / and alle men wenten to make *professioun* eche in to his owne *citee* / *Ioseph* wente up fro galile, fro the *citee nazareth*, in to iudee, in to a *citee* of davith that is clepid bethleem, for that he was of the hous and of the *meynee* of davith, that he schulde knowleche with marie, his wiif that was weddid to hym, and was greet with child / ... ye schuln fynde a yunge child wlapid in clothis: and leide in a *cracche* / and *sudeynli* there was made with the *aungel* a *multitude* of heuenli knyghthod: heriynge god and seiynge / *glorie* be in the highest thingis to god: and in erthe *pees* be to men of good wille. (From Luke 2.1–14.)

The burning of John Wycliff’s bones, 41 years after his death.



LEXICAL IMPRESSIONS

One way of developing a sense of the extensiveness of foreign borrowing during Middle English is to take a text and identify the loan words – using the *Oxford English Dictionary* or a more specialized etymological work (p. 146). If this were done for the early Middle English *Peterborough Chronicle* extract (p. 33), very few such words would be identified. The only items which have no antecedents in Old English are Scandinavian *hærnes* (l. 2), *drapen* (l. 4), and *rachen-teges* (l. 9), and Latin *crucethus* (l. 5).

By contrast, the following extracts, both taken from late Middle English texts, and containing similar subject-matter, show the major impact of borrowing (all loans are italicized).

- Scandinavian loans include *get*, *wayk*, *haile*, *sterne*, *ball*, *birth*, and *fro*.
- Words directly from French include *empryce*, *riall*, *spyce*, *crystall*, *soverayne*, and *flour*.
- Words from Latin via French include *sapiencie*, *reverence*, *magnificence*, *science*, and *suffragane*.

The second passage has a large number of distinctively Latin words – an example of the ‘aureate diction’ consciously employed by several authors in the late Middle English period and beyond (p. 61). These include *imperatrice*, *mediatrice*, *salvatrice*, *virginall*, *pulcritud*, and *celsitud*. (After D. Burnley, 1992.)

The Canterbury Tales

(from the Prologue of *The Prioress’s Tale*)

O mooder Mayde! o mayde Mooder free!
 O bussh unbrent *brennyng* in Moyses
 sighte,
 That *ravyshedest* down *fro* the *Deitee*
 Thurgh thyn *humblesse* the Goost that in
 th’alighte,

Of whos *vertu*, when he thyn herte lighte
Conceyved was the *Fadres sapiencie*,
 Help me to telle it in thy *reverence*!

Lady, thy *bountee*, thy *magnificence*,
 Thy *vertu*, and thy grete *humylitee*,
 Ther may no tonge *expresse* in no *science*;
 For somtyme, Lady, er men *praye* to thee,
 Thou goost biforn of thy *benyngnytee*,
 And *getest* us the lyght, of thy *preyere*,
 To *gyden* us unto thy Sone so deere.

My konnyng is so *wayk*, o blisful Queene,
 For to *declare* thy grete *worthynesse*
 That I ne may the weighte nat *susteene*;
 But as a child of twelf month oold, or
 lesse,
 That kan unnethes any word *expresse*,
 Right so fare I, and therefore I yow *preye*,
*Gyde*th my song that I shal of yow seye.

From a poem by William Dunbar (p. 53)

Empryce of *prys*, *imperatrice*,
 Bricht *polist precious* stane;
Victrice of *vyce*, hie *genitrice*
 Of *Jhesu lord soverayne*;
 Our wys *pavys fro enemys*
 Agane the *Feyndis trayne*;
Oratrice, *mediatrice*, *salvatrice*,
 To God gret *suffragane*;
Ave Maria, *gracia plena*:
Haile, *sterne*, *meridiane*;
Spyce, *flour delice* of *paradys*
 That baire the *gloryus grayne*.

Imperiall wall, *place palestrall*
 Of *peirles pulcritud*;
Tryumphale hall, hie *trone regall*
 Of *Godis celsitud*;
Hospitall riall, the lord of all
 Thy *closet* did *include*;
 Bricht *ball cristall*, *ros virginall*
 Fulfillit of *angell fude*.
Ave Maria, *gracia plena*:
 Thy *birth* has with his blude
Fra fall mortall originall
 Us *raunsound* on the rude.

NEW WORD FORMATION

Loan words were by no means the only way in which the vocabulary of Middle English increased. The processes of word formation which were already established in Old English continued to be used, and were extended in various ways.

Compounding

The poetic compounds of Old English (p. 23) declined dramatically at the beginning of the Middle English period. There are over a thousand compounds in *Beowulf*, but *Lazamon’s Brut*, also an alliterative poem (p. 36), and ten times as long, has only around 800. Nonetheless, some types of compounding did continue to produce new words: noun examples include *bagpipe*, *birthday*, *blackberry*, *craftsman*, *grandfather*, *highway*, and *schoolmaster*. New compounds in *-er* were especially frequent in the 14th century: *bricklayer*, *housekeeper*, *moneymaker*, *soothsayer*. Compounds of the type *he-lamb* date from c. 1300. Adjective examples from the period include *lukewarm*, *moth-eaten*, *new-born*, and *red-hot*. Phrasal verbs (p. 224) also increased in frequency, sometimes coexisting with an earlier prefixed form, as in the case of *go out* (alongside *outgo*) and *fall by* (alongside *bifallen*).

Affixation

Only a few of the Old English prefixes (p. 22) continued into Middle English, but the system was supplemented by several new items from French and Latin, and the range of suffixes also increased (p. 46). New words formed include *author-ess*, *consecration*, *duckling*, *forgetful*, *greenish*, *manhood*, *napkin*, *uncover*, *unknowable*, *withdraw*, and *wizard*. By no means all of the new

formations were to stay in the language: for example, a different suffix eventually replaced several words ending in *-ship* (such as *boldship*, *cleanship*, and *kindship*), and several of the items which began life using *with-* were eventually replaced, such as *withsay* (*renounce*), *withspeak* (*contradict*), and *withset* (*resist*).

A sense of the range of words which came into the language through prefixation can be seen in the following selection of *dis-* items found in Chaucer (only one meaning is given in each case). The list also illustrates some of the suffixes typical of the time.

disavauncen set back
disaventure misadventure
disblamen exonerate
disceyven deceive
dischevele dishevelled
disclaundenen slander
discomfit discomfited
disconfiture disconfiture
disconfort discomfited
disconforten discourage
discorden disagree
discoveren uncover
discuren discover
disdeinous disdainful
disencresen decrease
disese discomfort
disezen trouble
disesperate desperate
disfigurat disguised
disgyssen disguise
dishonest dishonourable
disobeysaunt disobedient
displeasaunce displeasure
displeasaunt displeasing
disposicioun disposition
disrewlely irregularly
disseveraunce separation
dissolucioun dissoluteness
distemperaunce inclemency

THE FAMOUS WORD PAIRS

No account of Middle English vocabulary would be complete without a reference to the famous culinary lexical pairs (often attributed to Sir Walter Scott) which resulted from the influx of Romance words.

<i>Old English</i>	<i>French</i>
ox	beef
sheep	mutton

calf	veal
deer	venison
pig, swine	pork
There are many other examples:	
begin	commence
child	infant
doom	judgment
freedom	liberty
happiness	felicity

heartly	cordial
help	aid
hide	conceal
holy	saintly
love	charity
meal	repast
stench	aroma
wedding	marriage
wish	desire



MIDDLE ENGLISH DIALECTS

The main dialect divisions traditionally recognized in Middle English broadly correspond to those found in Old English (p. 28), but scholars have given different names to some of the dialects, and there has been one important development. *Kentish* remains the same, but West Saxon is now referred to as *Southern*, and Northumbrian as *Northern*. The Mercian dialect area has split in two: there is now an eastern dialect (*East Midland*) and a western one (*West Midland*). And the East Anglian region is sometimes separately distinguished. The map shows the traditional picture; but the result of a great deal of modern research (as illustrated opposite) has demonstrated that there is an enormous amount of oversimplification in such displays.

What evidence is there for dialect difference? The evidence lies in the distinctive words, grammar, and spellings found in the manuscripts. The way verb endings change is one of the main diagnostic features:

- The *-ing* participle ending (as in Modern English *running*) appears as *-and(e)* in Northern; as *-end(e)* in parts of the East Midlands; as *-ind(e)* in parts of the West Midlands; and as *-ing* elsewhere.
- The *-th* ending (as in *goeth*) appears as *-s* in Northern and throughout most of the north Midland area – a form which ultimately becomes standard.
- The verb ending used in the present tense with plural forms such as *we* and *they* also varies: it is *-es* in Northern and the northern parts of the East Midlands; *-eth* in Southern, Kentish, and the southern parts of the West Midlands; and *-en* elsewhere. (None of these endings has survived in Modern English.)

There were several other reliable indicators, apart from verbs:

- *They*, *their*, and *them* are found in Northern and the West Midlands, but they appear as *his*, *here*, and *hem* in the south – at least until towards the end of the Middle English period (p. 45).
- *Shall*, *should*, and a few other words appear without an *h* in Northern and Kentish (as *sal*, etc.), but keep it elsewhere.
- There are several distinctive uses of individual vowels and consonants. *Stane* in the north corresponds to *stone* in the south; *for* in the north Midlands to *vor* in the south; *kirk* in the north to *church* in the south; and so on. But in each case, we must remember, what we mean by ‘north’ and ‘south’ differs: there is no single, neat dividing line.

There are of course many manuscripts where it is not easy to determine the dialect. Sometimes the spellings of a text seems to reflect a mixture of dialects, perhaps because an author (or scribe) lived in a boundary area, or had moved about the country. Quite often, an author is

not particularly consistent – as would be likely to happen in a period when sounds and spellings were changing so rapidly (p. 32) and texts were being copied repeatedly. Sometimes, most of the forms reflect one dialect, and there is a scattering of forms from another – suggesting that the person who was copying the manuscript came from a different part of the country from the original author. And analysts need always to be watchful for the possibility that a form in a manuscript never had any linguistic existence at all – in other words, the copyist made a mistake.



FOXED



Sometimes, sounds from different dialects have survived in alternative forms of a word in Modern English. *Fox* has an /f/, reflecting its Northern/ Midlands origins. *Vixen* has a /v/, reflecting its origins as a Southern word. In origin a feminine form of *fox* (compare German *Füchsin*), forms in *fixen(e)* are recorded from the early 15th century, both for the animal and (later) for its sense of a ‘quarrelsome woman’, and can be found until the early 17th century. The *v-* forms then become standard, but it is not known why this preference prevailed.

Rise and Fall

By the end of the 13th century, the English of Scotland and that of England had markedly diverged. A major social factor had been the split between the nations which followed Edward I of England's attempt at annexation, and the subsequent long period of conflict. From 1424, the Scottish Parliament wrote its statutes in English. By the late Middle Ages, Middle Scots had evolved as far from Old English as had the Middle English of England, and in a different direction. It is often said that the two varieties were as far apart as, say, Danish and Swedish are today – largely mutually intelligible, but capable of supporting national identities. As a result, some writers on the period refer to the two varieties as distinct 'languages' – and continue to do so when discussing modern Scots. The term 'Scottis' (as opposed to the previously used 'Ingliſ') comes to be used in the late 15th century. The period as a whole (*Older Scots*) tends to be divided into *Early Scots* (1100–1450) and *Middle Scots* (1450–1700).

From the end of the 14th century to the beginning of the 17th, there was a flowering of literature in Scots – a period which reached its peak in the poetry of the 15th-century *makars* ('makers'), such as Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas. Southern English literature exercised considerable influence, especially the poetry of Chaucer, to such an extent that this group is often called the 'Scottish Chaucerians'. Scots also increasingly replaced Latin as an administrative language, and came to be widely used in sermons, diaries, letters, and other private and public literature. By the end of the century it had effectively established itself as a regional standard.

This course of development altered during the 16th century, as Scots fell progressively under the influence of the strongly emerging Standard English of the south. Southern words and spellings became increasingly evident in Scottish writing, and printers began to anglicize material presented to them in Scots. The main factor was the uniting of the crowns of Scotland and England in 1603, and the move to London of James VI and the Scottish court – a move which led in due course to the adoption among the upper classes of southern English norms of speech. As James I of England, the new king ordered that the Authorized Version of the Bible (p. 66) be used in Scotland, thus spreading further the influence of the southern standard as a prestige form. There is very little sign of a distinctive variety of Scots in published material at the end of the 17th century. However, Scots English was not fated to become extinct: its later history is reviewed on pp. 348–53.



THE MAKARS

The leading poets of Scotland from c. 1425 to c. 1550 are usually grouped together as the 'Scottish Chaucerians', because of the way they were influenced by the themes and verse style of Chaucer (p. 38). In fact, their poetry shows a mixture of influences, ranging from a courtly 'aureate' style, full of Latinate diction, to forceful abuse (flying) in Scots vernacular. *The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* – a conversation between two married women and a widow – illustrates something of this range. The poem is by William Dunbar (c. 1460–c. 1520), who was employed at the Scottish court. It parodies the high style of the literary pastoral, and juxtaposes earthy comments in colloquial Scots, as the women talk about their husbands.

I saw thre gay ladeis sit in ane grein arber
[arbour]
All grathit [decked] into garlandis of freshe
gudlie flouris;

So glitterit as the gold wer thair gloriſ gilt tressis,
Quhill [*While*] all the gressis [*grass*] did gleme of
the glaid hewis;
Kemmit [*combed*] was thair cleir hair, and curi-
ouslie shed
Attour thair shulderis doun shyre [*clear*], shyning
full bricht...

I have ane wallirag [*sloven*], ane worme, ane
auld wobat [*caterpillar*] carle
A waistit wolroun [*boar*], na worth but wordis
to clatter;
Ane bumbart [*driveller*], ane dron bee, ane bag
full of flewme,
Ane skabbit skarth [*scurvy cormorant*], ane
scorpioun, ane scutarde behind;
To see him scart [*scratch*] his awin skyn grit
scunner [*disgust*] I think.

The meaning of all the words in this passage is not entirely clear – but their sound leaves no doubt about their intent. The /sk-/ sequence is particularly notable (p. 263).

AN EFFORT 'TO REFORM AN ERROUR'

The Scots were well aware of what was happening to their language, as is clear from this story, told by Alexander Hume in his *Orthographie and Congruitie of the Bripan Tongue*, written c. 1617, and intended for use in Scottish schools. He is defending the Scots spelling *quh-* for *wh-* against some unsympathetic English colleagues. Despite the *quh-* spellings put into the mouths of the English, the passage is full of southernisms, such as *laughed* (which has no *ch*, and uses the *-ed* inflection) and *a* or *an* (instead of *ane*). It shows how much influence southern English had exercised on Scots by this time – even on a staunch defender.

...to reform an error bred in the south, and now usurped be our ignorant printeres, I wil tel quhat befel my-self quhen I was in the south with a special gud frende of myne. Ther rease [*rose*], upon sum accident, quhither [*whether*] quho, quhen, quhat, etc., sould be symbolized with q or w, a hoat [*hot*] disputation betuene him and me. After manie conflictes (for we oft

encountered), we met be chance, in the cite of baeth [*Bath*], with a doctour of divinitie of both our acquentance. He invited us to denner. At table my antagonist, to bring the question on foot amangs his awn condisciples, began that I was becum an heretik, and the doctour spering [*asking*] how, answered that I denyed quho to be spelled with a w, but with qu. Be quhat reason? quod the Doctour. Here, I beginning to lay my grundes of labial, dental, and guttural soundes and symboles, he snapped me on this hand and he on that, that the doctour had mikle a doe to win me room for a syllogisme. Then (said I) a labial letter can not symboliz a guttural syllab [*syllable*]. But w is a labial letter, quho a guttural sound. And therfoer w can not symboliz quho, nor noe syllab of that nature. Here the doctour staying them again (for al barked at ones), the proposition, said he, I understand; the assumption is Scottish, and the conclusion false. Quherat al laughed, as if I had bene dryven from al replie, and I fretted to see a frivolouse jest goe for a solid ansuer.

A NEW NATION

In 1604 James made a speech to his first Parliament, in which he declared his intentions to rule a single nation:

I am the Husband and the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the Head and it is my Body; I am the Shepherd and it is my flocke; I hope therefore no man will be so unreasonable as to

think that I that am a Christian King under the Gospel should be a polygamist and husband to two wives; that I being the Head should have a divided and monstrous Body.

In such circumstances, two written standards could not possibly co-exist. What is remarkable is that Scots was able to survive the court's move to London, the Union of Parliaments a century later (1707), and a great deal of later ridicule levelled at those who continued to use 'Scotticisms', to surface again in the 20th century.

THE ORIGINS OF STANDARD ENGLISH

The variety which we now call Standard English (p. 118) is the result of a combination of influences, the most important of which do not emerge until the Middle English period. There is no direct connection between West Saxon, the written standard of Old English (p. 28), and the modern standard. The political heart of the country moved from Winchester to London after the Conquest, and the major linguistic trends during Middle English increasingly relate to the development of the capital as a social, political, and commercial centre. A written standard English began to emerge during the 15th century and its rise has traditionally been explained with reference to the following factors (after M. L. Samuels, 1963, and the further context provided by L. Wright, 2000).

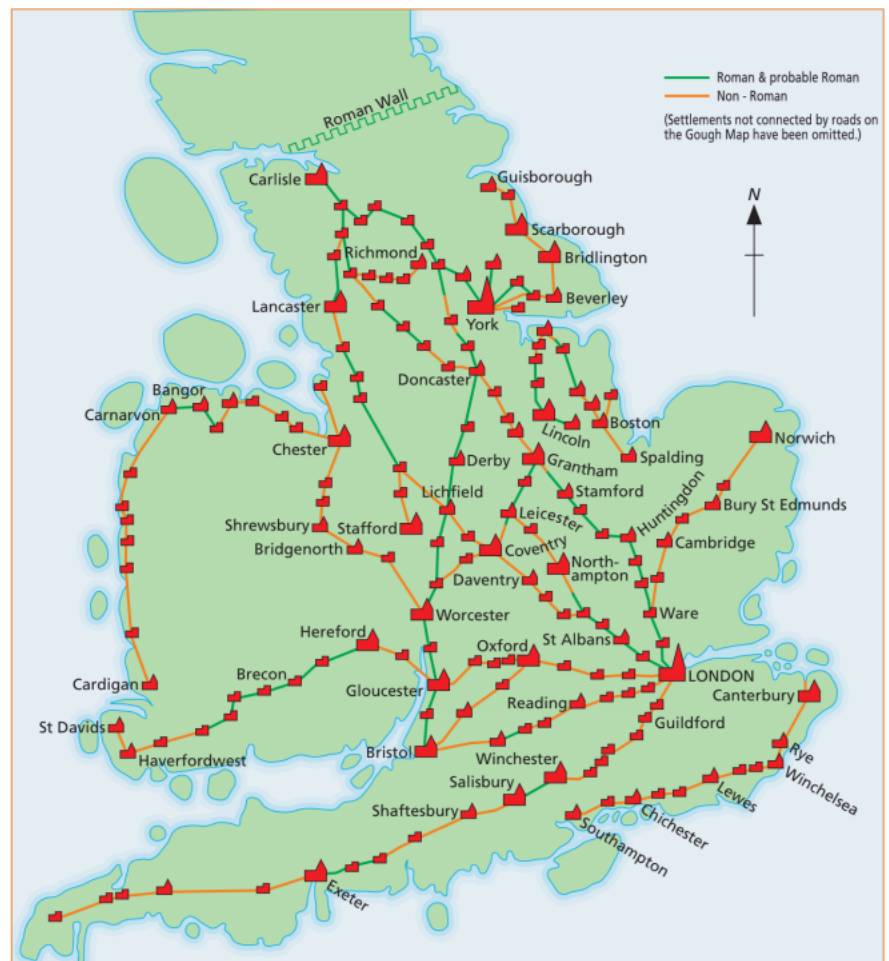
- A regionally standardized literary language appeared in the last part of the 14th century, based on the dialects of the Central Midland counties, especially Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, and Bedfordshire. This is chiefly found in the large number of Wycliffite manuscripts which have survived (p. 48), including sermons, tracts, prayers, poems, and the different versions of the Wycliff Bible, as well as several secular works. The Lollards spread this variety widely, even into south-west England, thus increasing its status as a standard. In the long term, it was unable to compete with the quantity of material emanating from the capital; but its Central Midland origins are nonetheless noteworthy (see below).
- The growth of a standard from the London area can be seen by the mid-14th century. Although London was very much a dialectal hybrid (with the City influenced by the Essex dialect, and Westminster, some distance further west, showing the influence of Middlesex), patterns of standardization gradually appear. There is a small group of manuscripts, written prior to 1370, which are noted for their uniformity of spelling. A later and much larger group of diverse manuscripts include the work of Chaucer and Langland. These texts in their different ways represent London English of around 1400, but the amount of variation they display suggests that they cannot be called a standard, in any strict sense. Not even Chaucer's writing, traditionally thought to be a precursor of modern Standard English, exercised a specific influence on the form this standard took – nor is it likely that poetic usage would ever influence general usage in any real way (p. 438). It can hardly be doubted, though, that Chaucer's literary standing would have greatly added to the prestige associated with written language in the London dialect.
- The most significant factor must have been the emergence of London as the political and commercial

centre of the country. In particular the influence of the administrative offices of the London Chancery (p. 41) was important, especially after c.1430. Vast amounts of manuscript copying took place within the London area, and standards of practice emerged among the Chancery scribes. These practices interacted with those used by other groups of London scriveners, and spelling slowly became increasingly standardized, eventually affecting all kinds of material, including literary texts. The directions of influence were multiple and complex, and are still not entirely understood. But when Caxton set up his press in Westminster (p. 56), and chose local London speech as his norm, the lasting influence of his scrivening neighbours was assured.

These observations add up to the claim that the standard language was the result of an accumulation of influences from different kinds of writing, as well as an accommodation to dialects from different parts of the country, especially the Central Midlands area. That the central area could exercise such influence is suggested by a number of contemporary comments, as well as by deductions based on social history. John of

DIALECT ROUTES

A map of 14th-century roads, based on an original by Richard Gough, showing the most important routes in and out of London – notably, the Great North Road and Watling Street, leading to the Central Midlands. No other part of the country had better communications with the capital. If people were to bring their dialects to London in ever-increasing numbers, most would travel along these roads.



Trevisa, translating Higden's *Polychronicon* (p. 35) in c. 1387, identifies its function as a communication 'bridge' between north and south:

for men of þe est wiþ men of þe west, as it were vndir þe same partie of heuene, acordeþ more in sownynge of speche [pronunciation] þan men of þe norþ wiþ men of þe souþ; þerfore it is þat Mercii [Mercians], þat beþ men of myddel Engeland, as it were parteners of þe endes, vnderstondeþ better þe side langages, norþerne and souþerne, þan norþerne and souþerne vnderstondeþ eiþer oþer.

By way of social considerations, we have evidence of a marked population shift in the 14th century. In the earlier part of that century, immigration to the London area was highest from the East Midlands counties of Norfolk, Essex, and Hertfordshire, but it later increased dramatically from such Central Midlands counties as Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Bedfordshire. As a result, the London dialect became increasingly exposed to many of the linguistic features of Midland writing.

These observations bring a fresh perspective to the traditional map of Middle English dialects (p. 50), where no recognition is given to a Central Midlands area, and where special attention is paid to an East Midlands 'triangle' bounded by London, Cambridge, and (on the borders with Southern) Oxford – an area of high population, containing the main social and political centre, and the main seats of learning. This was a wealthy agricultural region, and the centre of the growing wool trade. Its role in promoting the importance of the south-east in the Middle Ages is clear. However, its linguistic influence was far less important than that of the area further west.

The final factor in the emergence of a southern literary standard was the development of printing (p. 56). This resulted in the spread of a single norm over most of the country, so much so that during the early 16th century it becomes increasingly difficult to determine on internal linguistic grounds the dialect in which a literary work is written – apart from the northern dialects, such as Scots, which retained their written identity longer (p. 52). People now begin to make value judgments about other dialects. In the *Towneley Plays* (p. 58), Mak the sheep-stealer masquerades as a person of importance, and adopts a southern accent. John of Trevisa comments that northern speech is 'scharp, slitting, and frotynge and vnschape' ('shrill, cutting, and grating and ill-formed'), giving as one of the reasons that northerners live far away from the court. And in *The Arte of English Poesie*, attributed to George Puttenham (c. 1520–90), the aspiring poet is advised to use 'the usuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within ix. myles, and not much above'. There was never to be total uniformity, but the forerunner of Standard English undoubtedly existed by the end of the 15th century.

THE GREAT VOWEL SHIFT

Why does the sound system used in Chaucer's time (p. 38) seem so different from that found in Shakespeare's (p. 25)? Why is Chaucer so much more difficult to read than Caxton, less than a century later? The answer to both these questions lies in a major change in pronunciation which took place at the very end of the Middle English period. Chaucer probably heard it beginning, but it did not take proper effect until the early decades of the 15th century. Because of the way the vowel system of the language was fundamentally affected, the change has been called the *Great Vowel Shift*.

The changes affected the seven long vowels in the language (p. 42), shown in Figure A on a cardinal vowel diagram (p. 250). Each vowel changed its sound quality, but the distinction between one vowel and the next was maintained. (The two front vowels /e:/ and /ɛ:/ did merge as /i:/, but not until the 18th century.) In two cases, just a single move was involved (B3, B4); in others, the movement had further consequences which sometimes took 200 years to work themselves out. It is the first main stage in this

development which is usually referred to as the 'shift'.

Push-me, pull-you

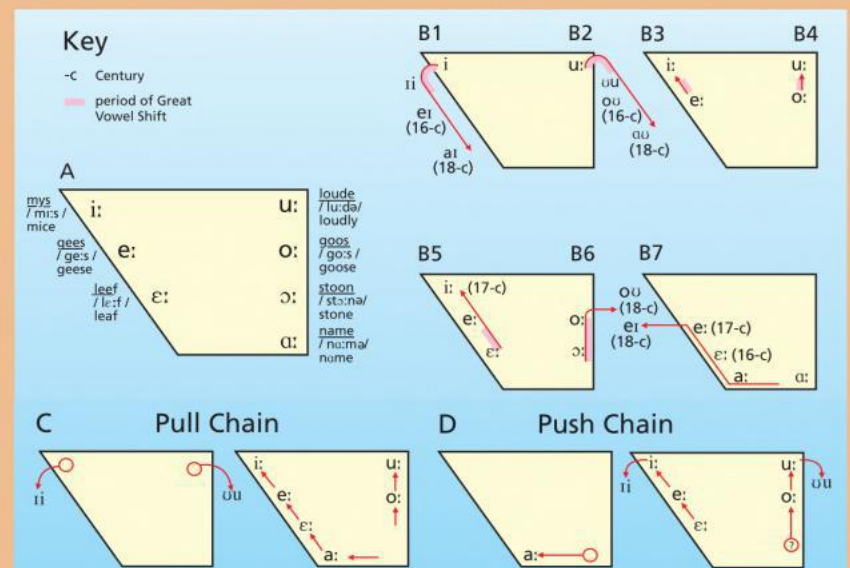
The traditional view is that the series of changes was connected, a move in one of the vowels causing a move in another, and so on throughout the system, with each vowel 'keeping its distance' from its neighbour. However, there is a long-standing dispute over which vowel moved first.

- In one view, the /i:/ vowel was the first to change (becoming a diphthong), which left a 'space' into which the next vowel came, 'pulling' other vowels upwards in a chain reaction (Figure C).
- Alternatively, the /a:/ vowel was the first to move (further forwards), 'pushing' the next vowel upwards, and starting off a different chain reaction (Figure D). The problem with this view is finding a reason for the back vowel movement, once /a:/ is used to start the front vowel chain reaction.

Whether we favour pushing or pulling, we seem to be dealing with a sound change that is simple and symmetrical. The vowels appear to be moving 'in pairs', with the

same things happening at the front and the back of the mouth. A great deal of evidence has been used to support this interpretation, in the form of the order in which new spellings appeared (such as *ei* for /i:/), the use of new rhymes, and the descriptions of contemporary writers.

In the 1980s, as more textual evidence and dialect survey material became available, the simplicity of this explanation was called into question. Some scholars now doubt the connectedness of the changes, either in whole or in part. Some think that there were two separate chain-like movements which belonged to different parts of the country, but which came together in certain texts – two 'small' vowel shifts (raising and diphthongization) rather than one 'big' one. The sifting of the textual evidence, it seems, has hardly begun, and suddenly what was for so long an uncontroversial issue has become an open question. It is one of many reanalyses which are ongoing, as scholars get to grips with the data being provided by the major Middle English surveys. It is an exciting time for linguistic medievalists.



An impressionistic 'translation': the Modern English sentence: *so it is time to see the shoes on the same feet now* before the Great Vowel Shift would have sounded something like this: *saw it is team to say the shows on the sarm fate noo*.

There is no doubt that an Early Modern English period needs to be recognized in the history of English. The jump from Middle English to Modern English would be too great without it. Between the time of Chaucer and the time of Johnson, roughly 1400 to 1800, the language continues to change in quite noticeable ways, and there are many points of difference with modern usage. By the end of the 18th century, however, very few linguistic differences remain. Reading a Jane Austen novel does not require the same kind of effort or editorial elaboration as is needed to understand Shakespeare (p. 80).

There is no consensus about when the Early Modern English period begins. Some opt for an early date, 1400–50, just after Chaucer and the beginning of the pronunciation shift which identifies a major intelligibility barrier between Middle and Modern English (p. 55). Some opt for a late date, around 1500, after the effects of the printing revolution had become well established. But it is the advent of printing itself which many consider to be the key factor, and this section accordingly begins in 1476, when William Caxton set up his press in Westminster.

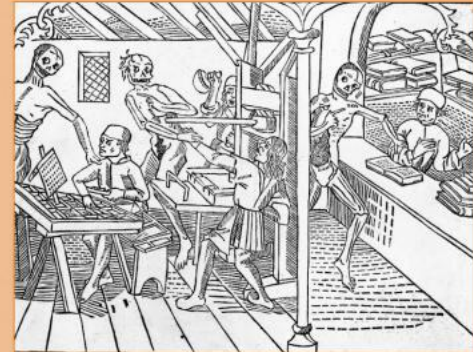
The new invention gave an unprecedented impetus to the formation of a standard language and the study of its properties. Apart from its role in fostering norms of spelling and punctuation, the availability of printing provided more opportunities for people to write, and gave their works much wider circulation. As a result, more texts of the period have survived. Within the following 150 years, it is estimated that nearly 20,000 books appeared. The story of English thus becomes more definite in the 16th century, with more evidence available about the way the language was developing, both in the texts themselves, and in a growing number of observations dealing with such areas as grammar, vocabulary, writing system, and style. In that century, scholars seriously got down to talking *about* their language (p. 61).

THE FIRST ENGLISH PRINTER

William Caxton was born in Kent, and by 1438 is known to have been apprenticed to a London textile dealer, or mercer. This suggests a birth-date any time between 1415 and 1424. He went to Bruges during the early 1440s, where he prospered as a mercer, and in 1462 was appointed governor of the English trading company there, the Merchant Adventurers.

In 1469 he began work on his first translation, a French account of the Trojan Wars, and two years later received the patronage of Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, which enabled him to complete it. In 1471 he travelled to Cologne, where he stayed for 18 months, and learned the technique of printing. Back in Bruges he collaborated with the Flemish calligrapher Colard Mansion to set up a press, and in late 1473 or early 1474 put through his 700-page translation of *The Recuyell* [French *recueil* 'compilation'] of the *Historyes of Troye*, the first book printed in English. Returning to England, in 1476 he set up his wooden press in a shop somewhere within the precincts of Westminster Abbey, to be near the court.

He published nearly 80 items, several in more than



The earliest known representation of a printing office: *La grante danse macabre* (1499), with death coming to take wicked printers away.

one edition. We know very little about how long he took to translate or print a work, despite the details he provides in his prologues and epilogues, because we do not know how conditions changed as he and his staff grew in experience. We do not even know how many presses he had, or whether he worked on more than one book at a time. Evidently, some works were produced quite slowly; others very rapidly. For example, it took him about seven weeks to print *Cordial* (1479) – a book of 74 leaves with 28/29 lines per page; but in 1483, a book of 115 leaves with 38 lines per page

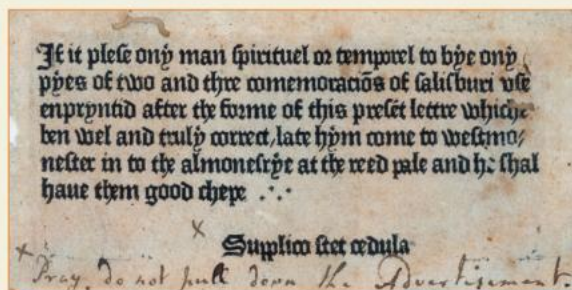
(*Festial*) was completed in just 24 days.

After his death, his business was taken over by his assistant, Wynkyn de Worde, who in 1500 moved the press to Fleet Street in London – from the court to the city – and a new era in printing began.

Caxton shows his handiwork to Edward IV at the almonry, Westminster.



THE ADVERTISEMENT



If it plese any man spirituel or temporel to bye any pyes of two and thre comemoracions of Salisburi Use enpryntid after the forme of this present lettre, whiche ben

wel and truly correct, late hym come to Westmonester in to the Almonesrye at the Reed Pale and he shal have them good chepe. *Supplico sted cedula.*

The 'pye' which was for sale was the *Ordinale*, a book of Latin liturgical directions also printed by Caxton in c. 1477, and evidently in the same typeface ('forme'). A pye was a collection of rules showing how to act liturgically on a day when there was more than one office, or 'commemoration'. The 'Salisbury Use' was the widely practised form of the liturgy originally developed at Salisbury Cathedral. The commemorations are to the Virgin Mary and the saints. The last sentence tells the audience that a printed book will be cheap (that is, compared with the price of a copied manuscript). The shop in the almonry at Westminster was within the Abbey precincts. The significance of Caxton's sign, the Red Pale, is unknown: it may have been on the shop already, before he rented it. Someone has glossed the Latin, for the benefit of the less well educated.

The First Printed Works

We know of 103 separate items printed by Caxton, several of which are different editions of the same work. They can be grouped into four categories (after N. Blake, 1969):

- His own translations, such as *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* and *The Knight of the Tower*. This is the largest category, its prologues and epilogues providing a great deal of information about Caxton's aims as a publisher.
- Works of the courtly poets of 1350–1450 – chiefly, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate – and including two editions of *The Canterbury Tales*. Caxton's concentration on these authors shows him aware of the fashionable demand for an 'elevated' style of writing.
- Prose works in English, also including many translations, such as Chaucer's *Boethius*, Trevisa's *Polychronicon* (p. 35), and Malory's *Morte Darthur* (p. 58).
- A miscellaneous group of works, probably produced for particular clients. They include statutes, books of indulgences, phrase books, devotional pieces, and a Latin grammar.

A TIME OF CHANGE

From the epilogue to *Charles the Great*, the 'first Cristen Kyng of Fraunce':

The whyche werke was fynnysshed in the reducyng of hit into Englysshe the xviii day of Juyn the second yere of Kyng Rychard the Thyrd and the yere of Our Lord MCCCClxxv, and emprynted the fyrst day of Decembre the same yere of Our Lord and the fyrst yere of Kyng Harry the Seventh.

In the meantime, there had been the Battle of Bosworth: 22 August 1485.

CAXTON'S PROBLEM

Caxton was a merchant, not a linguist or a literary scholar. Faced with the task of translation, he had to deal with several major problems:

- Should he use foreign words in his translation or replace them by native English words?
- Which variety of English should he follow, given the existence of major regional differences?
- Which literary style should be used as a model? Chaucer? Or something less 'ornate'?
- How should the language be spelled and punctuated, given the scribal variations of the previous centuries?
- In publishing native writers, should he change their language to make it more widely understood?

If the books were to sell, the language they contained had to be understood throughout the country; but, as he complained, how could he satisfy everyone? A famous extract from one of his prologues gives a vivid account of the size of the problem. If even a simple little word like *eggs* cannot be universally understood, what hope was there for him?

Caxton made his decisions, as did other publishers of the time, and in due course a consensus arose (p. 68). His own work is in fact extremely inconsistent. It is not until nearly a century later that there is uniformity in the appearance of printed texts – and indeed some matters (such as the use of the apostrophe) never settle down at all (p. 215).

WITHOUT WHOM . . .

A page from the first English printed book, *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*. In the prologue, Caxton tells and adds some interesting remarks about his own background.

And afterward when I remembryd my self of my symplenes and vnperfightnes that I had in bothe langages, that is to wete [namely] in Frenshe and in Englishe, for in France was I neuer, and was born & lerned myn Englissh in Kente in the Weeld, where I doubtte not is spoken as brode and rude Englissh as is in ony place of Englonde; & haue contynued by the space of xxx yere for the most parte in the contres [countries] of Braband, Flandres, Holand, and Zeland; and thus when alle thys thynges cam tofore me aftyr that Y had made and wretyn a fyue or six quayers [books], Y fyll in dispayr of thys werke and purposid no more to haue contynuyd therin, and tho [those] quayers leyd apart; and in two yere aftyr laboured no more in thys werke. And was fully in wyll to haue lefte hyt tyll on a tyme hit fortunet that the ryght hyghe excellent and right vertuous prynces my ryght redoughted lady, my Lady Margarete . . . sente for me to speke wyth her good grace of dyuerce maters. Among the whyche Y lete her Hyenes haue knowleche of the forsayd begynnynge of thys werke, whiche

Thus ende I this booke whiche I haue translacyd after myn auctor as nyghe as godd hitth gyfyn me a nyngynge to wryte be gryn the laude a pryng / And for as moche as in the wrytyng of the same my penne is wounn / myn hande wey a notstedfast paper / and my conyge not so prone and redy to laboure as hit hitth ben / and that age crepeth on me dayly and febleth all the hodye / and also be cause I haue promysid to dyuerce gentylmen and to my frendes to adresse to hem as hastely as I myghte this sayd booke / Therfore I haue prayd a lerned at my grete charge and dyspense to ordeyne this sayd booke my prynces after the maner a forme as ye may here see / and is not wryton with penne and ynke as other booke ben / to the ende that euery man may haue them at once / ffor all the bookes of this maner may med the rule of the hystories of troyes thus empryntid as ye here see were begonne in oon day / and also fynnysshid in oon day / whiche booke I haue presented to my sayd redoubtid lady as a fore is sayd / And she hitth well acceptid hit / and largely rewarded me / wherfore I beseeche almyghty godd to reward her euerlastyng blyssed afre this lyf. Praying her sayd grace and all them that shall red this booke not to desdaine the symple and rude werke . nether to replie agaynst the sayyng of the matre to the translacyon of other whiche haue wryton hit / ffor dyuerce men haue made dyuerce bookes / whiche in all ffor dyuerce a corde not as Dares . Dares . and Homerus ffor dyuerce a homerus as greke sayn and wryten ffor

anone comanded me to shewe the sayd v or vi quayers to her sayd grace. And when she had seen hem, anone she fonde [found] a defaute in myn Englissh whiche sche comanded me to amende and moreouer comanded me straytly to contynue and make an ende of the resydue than not translated . . .

This book was printed in Bruges. The first book Caxton printed in England was *The Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres* (1477), translated from French by the second Earl Rivers.

THE 'EGG' STORY

And also my lorde abbot of westmynster ded [did] do shewe to me late certayn euydences [documents] wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to our englysshe now vsid [used] / And certainly it was wretyn in suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche [German] than englysshe I coude not reduce ne bryng it to be vnderstonden / And certainly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that. whiche was vsed and spoken when I was borne / For we englysshe men / ben [are] borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone. [moon] whiche is neuer stedfaste / but euer wauerynge / wexyng o:ne season / and waneth & dyscreaseth another season / And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that certayn marchauntes were in a shiþ in tamyse [Thames] for to haue sayled ouer the see into zelande / and for lacke of wynde they taryed attle forlonde. [Foreland] and wente to lande for to refreshe them And

one of them named sheffelde a mercer cam into an hows and axed [asked] for mete. and specyally he axyd after eggys And the good wyf answerde. that she coude speke no fren:she. And the marchaūt was angry. for he also coude speke no fren:she. but wold haue hadde egges / and she vnderstode hym not / And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren / then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel / Loo what sholde a man in thys dayes now wryte. eg:ges or eyren / certainly it is harde to playse euery man / by cause of dyuersite & chaūge of langage.

Sheffield's problem arose because *egges* was a northern form, from Old Norse, whereas *eyren* was a southern form, from Old English. The passage also shows some of Caxton's spelling inconsistencies and idiosyncratic capitals and punctuation (: marks a line-break) . (Prologue, Virgil's *Booke of Eneydos*, c. 1490.)

ENGLISH DURING THE RENAISSANCE

During the 16th century there was a flood of new publications in English, prompted by a renewed interest in the classical languages and literatures, and also in the very rapidly developing fields of science, medicine, and the arts. This period, from the time of Caxton until around 1650, was later to be called the ‘Renaissance’, and it included the Reformation, the discoveries of Copernicus, and the European exploration of Africa and the Americas. The effects of these fresh perspectives on the English language were immediate, far-reaching, and controversial.

The focus of interest was vocabulary. There were no words in the language to talk accurately about the new concepts, techniques, and inventions which were coming from Europe, and so writers began to borrow them. Most of the words which entered the language at the time were taken from Latin, with a good number from Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Then, as the period of worldwide exploration got under way, words came into English from over 50 other languages, including several indigenous languages of North America, Africa, and Asia. Some words came into English directly; others came by way of an intermediate language. Many came indirectly from Latin or Italian via French.

Some writers, such as Thomas Elyot, went out of their way to find new words, in order (as they saw it) to ‘enrich’ the language. They saw their role as enabling the new learning to be brought within the reach of the English public – whether this was access to the old classical texts, or to the new fields of science, technology, and medicine. There were many translations of classical works during the 16th century, and thousands of Latin or Greek terms were introduced, as translators searched for an English equivalent and could not find one. Some, indeed, felt that English was in any case not an appropriate vehicle for the expression of the new learning. English, in this view, did not compare well with the tried and tested standards of Latin or Greek, especially in such fields as theology or medicine. It was a language fit for the street, but not for the library.

Then as now, the influx of foreign vocabulary attracted bitter criticism, and people leaped to the language’s defence. Purists opposed the new ‘inkhorn’ terms, condemning them for obscurity and for interfering with the development of native English vocabulary. Some writers (notably, the poet Edmund Spenser) attempted to revive obsolete English words instead – what were sometimes called ‘Chaucerisms’ – and to make use of little-known words from English dialects. *Algate* (‘always’), *sicker* (‘certainly’), and *yblent* (‘confused’) are examples (p. 135). The scholar John Cheke used English equivalents for classical terms whenever he could, such as *crossed* for ‘crucified’ and *gainrising* for ‘resurrection’ (p. 134).

The increase in foreign borrowings is the most distinctive linguistic sign of the Renaissance in English. Purist opinion did not, in the event, stem the influx of new words – nor has it ever, in the history of this language.

SOME RENAISSANCE LOAN WORDS IN ENGLISH

From Latin and Greek

absurdity, adapt, agile, alienate, allusion, anachronism, anonymous, appropriate, assassinate, atmosphere, autograph, benefit, capsule, catastrophe, chaos, climax, conspicuous, contradictory, crisis, criterion, critic, delirium, denunciation, disability, disrespect, emancipate, emphasis, encyclopedia, enthusiasm, epilepsy, eradicate, exact, exaggerate, excavate, excursion, exist, expectation, expensive, explain, external, extinguish, fact, glottis, habitual, halo, harass, idiosyncrasy, immaturity, impersonal, inclemency, jocular, larynx, lexicon, lunar, malignant, monopoly, monosyllable, necessitate, obstruction, pancreas, parasite, parenthesis, pathetic, pneumonia, relaxation, relevant, scheme, skeleton, soda, species, system, tactics, temperature, tendon, thermometer, tibia, tonic, transcribe, ulna, utopian, vacuum, virus

From or via French

alloy, anatomy, battery, bayonet, bigot, bizarre, chocolate, colonel, comrade, detail, docility, duel, entrance, equip, explore, grotesque, invite, moustache, muscle, naturalize, passport, pioneer, probability, progress, shock, surpass, ticket, tomato, vase, vogue, volunteer

From or via Italian

argosy, balcony, ballot, cameo, carnival, concerto, cupola, design, fuse, giraffe, grotto, lottery, macaroni, opera, piazza, portico, rocket, solo, sonata, sonnet, soprano, stanza, stucco, trill, violin, volcano

From or via Spanish and Portuguese

alligator, anchovy, apricot, armada, banana, barricade, bravado, cannibal, canoe, cockroach, cocoa, corral, desperado, embargo, guitar, hammock, hurricane, maize, mosquito, mulatto, negro, potato, port (wine), rusk, sombrero, tank, tobacco, yam

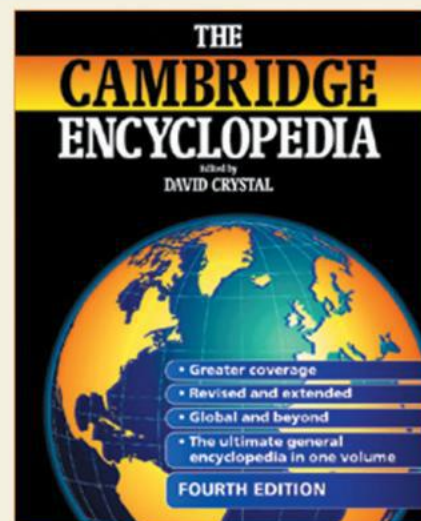
From other languages

bamboo (Malay), bazaar (Persian), caravan (Persian), coffee (Turkish), cruise (Dutch), curry (Tamil), easel (Dutch), flannel (Welsh), guru (Hindi), harem (Arabic), horde (Turkish), keelhaul (Dutch), ketchup (Malay), kiosk (Turkish), knapsack (Dutch), landscape (Dutch), pariah (Tamil), raccoon (Algonquian), rouble (Russian), sago (Malay), sheikh (Arabic), shekel (Hebrew), shogun (Japanese), troll (Norwegian), trousers (Irish Gaelic), turban (Persian), wampum (Algonquian), yacht (Dutch), yoghurt (Turkish)

EXPLAIN THYSELF

The inventors of neologisms were well aware of the need to explain their coinages. One strategy was to pair a new word with a familiar equivalent, such as *persist and continue*, and *animate or gyue courage to*. Another was to expound a meaning at greater length, as does Sir Thomas Elyot in introducing *encyclopedia*:

in an oratour is required to be a heape of all manner of lernyng: whiche of some is called the worlde of science: of other the circle of doctrine / whiche is in one worde of greeke *Encyclopedia*.



THE INKHORN CONTROVERSY

Monetary metaphors were especially popular in the 16th-century controversy over the use of foreign words in English. Supporters use such terms as 'enrich' and 'credit'; opponents talk about 'bankruptcy' and 'counterfeiting'.



FOR
Thomas Elyot
(c. 1490–1546)

I am constrained to vsurpe a latine word callyng it *Maturitie*: whiche worde though it be strange and darke / yet by declaring the vertue in a fewe mo wordes / the name ones [*once*] brought in custome / shall be as facile to vnderstande as other wordes late comen out of Italy and France / and made denizins amonge vs. ... And this I do nowe remembre for the necessary augmentation of our langage. (*The boke named the Governour*, 1531.)

George Pettie (1548–89)
Wherefore I marueile how our english tongue hath crackt it [*its*] credite, that it may not borrow of the Latine as well as other tongues: and if it haue broken, it is but of late, for it is not vnknown to all men how many woordes we haue fetcht from thence within these fewe yeeres, which if they should be all counted inkpot termes, I know not how we should speake any thing without blacking our mouthes with inke: for what woord can be more plaine then this word *plaine*, and yet what can come more neere to the Latine? (Preface to *The ciuile conversation of M. Steeuen Guazzo*, 1581.)

The impossibility of the purist ideal, as Pettie points out, is well illustrated by such passages, which all contain several words of non-Germanic origin (such as *bankrupt* and, indeed, the word *pure* itself).

AGAINST
Thomas Wilson (?1528–81)

Among all other lessons this should first be learned, that wee never affect any straunge ynkehorne termes, but to speake as is commonly received: neither seeking to be over fine, nor yet living over-carelesse, using our speeche as most men doe, and ordering our wittes as the fewest have done. Some seeke so far for outlandish English, that they forget altogether their mothers language. And I dare swear this, if some of their mothers were alive, they were not able to tell what they say; and yet these fine English clerkes will say, they speake in their mother tongue, if a man should charge them for counterfeiting the Kings English. (*The Arte of Rhetorique*, 1553.)

John Cheke (1514–57)
I am of this opinion that our tung shold be written cleane and pure, vnmixt and vnmangeled with borowing of other tungen, wherein if we take not heed bi tijm, euer borowing and neuer payeng, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tung naturallie and praisable vtter her meaning, when she bouroweth no counterfeitness of other tungen to attire her self withall. . . . (*Letter to Thomas Hoby*, 1557.)

WORSHIPFULL SIR

The rhetorician Thomas Wilson was one of the most ferocious critics of the new Latinate vocabulary emerging in England. In *The Arte of Rhetorique* he cites a letter written (he claims) by a Lincolnshire gentleman asking for assistance in obtaining a vacant benefice. It is likely that the letter is a parody, Wilson's own concoction, but the words he uses seem to be genuine, and in most cases are attested elsewhere. The following extract illustrates its style: Pondering expending [*weighing*], and reolutyng [*revolving*] with my self your ingent [*enormous*] affabilitie, and ingenious capacitee, for mundane affaires: I cannot but celebrate and extolle your magnificall dexterteite, aboue all other. For how could you haue adepted [*acquired*] suche illustrate prerogatiue [*illustrious pre-eminence*], and dominicall [*lordly*] superiorteite, if the fecunditee of your ingenie [*intellectual powers*] had not been so fertile, and wouderfull prenaunt. Now therefore beeyng accersited [*summoned*], to suche

splendent renoume, and dignitee splendidi-ous: I doubt not but you will adiuuate [*help*] such poore adnichilate [*destitute*] orphanes, as whilome ware condisciples [*schoolfellows*] with you, and of antique familiarite in Lincolnshire. What is noteworthy is that several of these new Latinate words have since entered the language (e.g. *ingenious*, *capacity*, *mundane*, *celebrate*, *extol*, *dexterity*). By contrast, most of the native coinages invented by contemporary writers as alternatives to Latin loans have failed to survive. An example is the set of terms proposed by Ralph Lever in his *Arte of Reason*, *rightly termed, Witcraft* (1573) for the study of logic. They include such Latin equivalents as *endsay* ('conclusio'), *ifsay* ('propositio conditionalis'), *naysay* ('negatio'), *saywhat* ('definitio'), *shewsay* ('propositio'), and *yeasay* ('affirmatio'). Though most of Lever's coinages had no future, a few of his forms emerged independently in regional use (especially *naysay(er)* and *yeasay(er)*). All of them intriguingly anticipate Newspeak (p. 145).

DERUNCINATED WORDS
cohibit ('restrain'), *deruncinate* ('weed'), *eximious* ('excellent'), *ilicebrous* ('delicate'), *suppeditate* ('supply')...

During the Renaissance, many words were coined which did not survive. What is interesting, but little understood, is why some words were retained while others were not. For example, both *impede* and *expede* were introduced during this period, but only the former has survived. *Demit* ('send away') has been replaced by *dismiss*, though the parallel items *commit* and *transmit* have remained; and *disadorn* and *disaccustom* have been lost, though *disagree* and *disabuse* have been kept. In Wilson's letter, from which an extract is quoted above, most of the new Latin words survived, but *obtestate* and *fatigate* did not. In certain cases, the existence of perfectly satisfactory words in the language for a particular concept militated against the introduction of a further item: what need of *aspectable*, when we already have *visible*? It is mostly impossible to say why one word lived and another died.

NEW FORMATIONS
The influx of foreign words was the most noticeable aspect of lexical growth; but throughout the period the vocabulary was steadily expanding in other ways. Far more new words in fact came into English by adding prefixes and suffixes, or by forming new compounds (p. 128). It is also important to note the use of the process of word-class conversion, much encountered in Shakespeare (p. 63).

Prefixation
bedaub, counterstroke, disabuse, disrobe, endear, forename, interlink, nonsense, submarine, uncivilized, uncomfortable

Suffixation
blandishment, changeful, considerable, delightfulness, drizzling, frequenter, gloomy, immaturity, laughable, lunatical, murmurous

Compounding
chap-fallen, commander-in-chief, Frenchwoman, heaven-sent, laughing-stock, pincushion, pine-cone, rose-wood, spoonwort

Conversion
Noun from verb: invite, laugh, scratch
Verb from noun: gossip, launder, season ('Season your admiration for a while...')

ENGLISH RECOGNIZED
The controversy over which kind of English lexicon to use should not be allowed to obscure the fact that English was now widely accepted as the language of learning. At the beginning of the 16th century, the situation had been very different, with Latin still established as the normal language of scholarship. All over Europe, vernaculars were criticized as crude, limited, and immature – fit for popular literature, but little else.

Richard Mulcaster (?1530–1611), headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, was a leading supporter of the capabilities and value of the mother tongue in all subjects:

I do not think that anie language, be it whatsoever, is better able to utter all arguments, either with more pith, or greater planesse, than our English tung is, if the English utterer be as skilfull in the matter, which he is to utter: as the foren utterer is ... I love Rome, but London better, I favor Italie, but England more, I honor the Latin, but I worship the English.

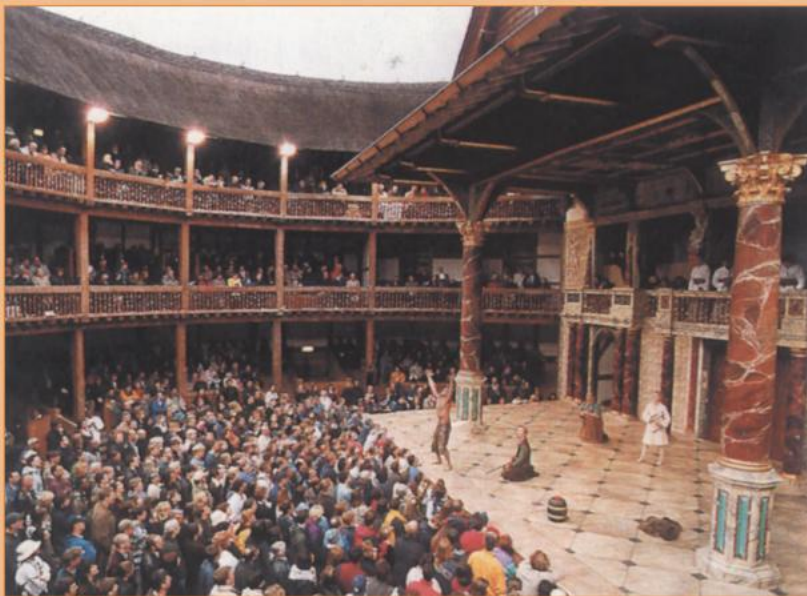
By the end of the 16th century, the matter was resolved. English became the language of learning.

THE INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE

All textbooks on the history of English agree that the two most important influences on the development of the language during the final decades of the Renaissance are the works of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) and the King James Bible of 1611 (p. 66). ‘Influence’ does not here refer to the way these works use language in a beautiful or memorable way. Extracts from both sources predominate in any collection of English quotations; but the present section is not primarily concerned with issues of aesthetic excellence or quotability (p. 184). ‘To be or not to be’ is a quotation, but it is unimportant in discussing the development of the language’s grammar or vocabulary. On the other hand, Shakespeare’s use of *obscene* to mean ‘loathsome’ (in *Richard II*) is not part of any especially memorable quotation, but it is the first recorded use of this word in this sense in English. And even though he may not have been the very first to use it (some Shakespearean ‘firsts’, such as *puppi-dogges*, will undoubtedly have been present in the spoken language already), his usage would have been influential in developing popular awareness of it, and thus increasing its circulation.

The Shakespearean impact on the language was chiefly in the area of the lexicon, as the examples on these pages suggest. His work, however, also provides countless instances of the way English was developing at the time, and illustrations from his poems and plays are unavoidable in any discussion of contemporary pronunciation (p. 71), word formation, syntax (p. 74), or language use (p. 75). In return, the studies of Renaissance language in general have contributed many insights into Shakespeare’s own use of language.

THE NEW GLOBE



A scene from the 2000 production of *The Tempest* at Shakespeare’s Globe in London – a reconstruction of the Globe theatre used by Shakespeare and his associates in the early 17th century.

The first wooden structure opened in 1599, but was burned down in 1613 – it is said, by a spark from a cannon during a performance of *Henry VIII*. Although immediately rebuilt, the theatre was closed by the Puritans in 1642, and subsequently demolished.

The reconstruction was the brainchild of American actor-director Sam Wanamaker who died in December 1993, aged 74. The Globe Playhouse Trust was

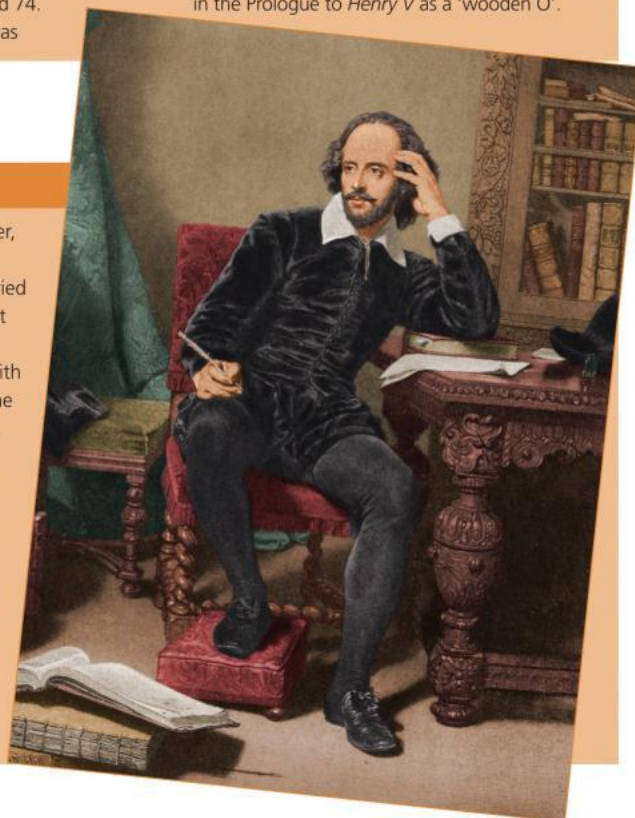
formed in 1970, but building work on the site, some 500 yards from the original location, did not begin until 1989. Elizabethan building techniques were used to create a replica of the oak-framed theatre, based on contemporary sketches and records. The aim of the project was to restore an appreciation of the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as they were first performed. Opened for its first season in 1996, the Globe has a capacity of 1,500, including 300 standing in the theatre’s open yard. Many plays are produced in the style of Elizabethan drama, and in the setting described in the Prologue to *Henry V* as a ‘wooden O’.

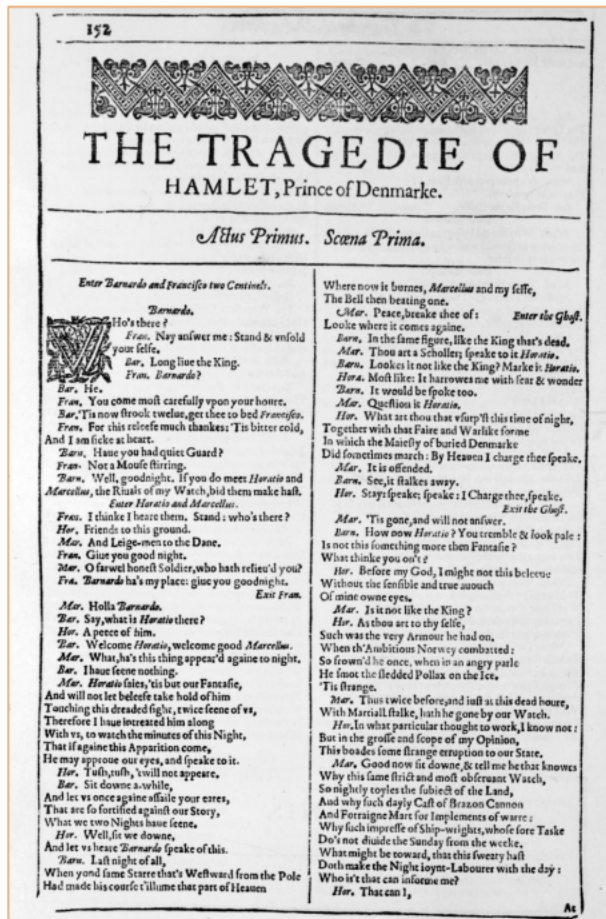
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, the son of John Shakespeare, a glover, and Mary Arden, of farming stock. Much uncertainty surrounds his early life. He was the eldest of three sons, and there were four daughters. Educated at the local grammar school, in 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, from a local farming family. Their children were Susanna (1583) and twins Hamnet and Judith (1585).

In about 1591 he moved to London and became an actor. The first evidence of his association with the stage is in 1594, when he was acting with the Lord Chamberlain’s company of players, later ‘the King’s Men’. When the company built the Globe theatre, he became a partner, living modestly in a house in Silver Street until c. 1606, then moving near the Globe. He returned to Stratford c. 1610, living as a country gentleman at his house, New Place. His will was made in March 1616 (p. 159), just before he died, and he was buried at Stratford.

The modern era of Shakespearean scholarship has long been noted for its meticulous investigation of the text, chronology, and authorship of the plays, and of the theatrical, literary, and socio-historical contexts which gave rise to them. To all this has now been added a comparatively small but rapidly growing contribution from linguistically inspired approaches such as stylistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and computational linguistics (pp. 63, 163). Of particular interest is the extent to which the remaining controversial questions of authorship (such as *Henry VI Part I* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*) can be illuminated using modern stylostatistical and computational techniques (pp. 278, 449).





A page from the First Folio, the first complete edition of Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623.

SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS AND DATES

The following abbreviations are used in the lexical illustrations on pp. 63–5. Text dates follow the chronology used in *Shakespeare's Words* (D. Crystal & B. Crystal, 2002).

AC Antony and Cleopatra (1606–7)

AW All's Well That Ends Well (1603–5)

AY As You Like It (1599–1600)

CE The Comedy of Errors (1592–4)

Cor Coriolanus (1608)

Cym Cymbeline (1610–11)

Ham Hamlet (1600–1)

1H4 Henry IV Part 1 (1596–7)

2H4 Henry IV Part 2 (1597–8)

H5 Henry V (1599)

1H6 Henry VI Part 1 (1591–2)

2H6 Henry VI Part 2 (1590–1)

3H6 Henry VI Part 3 (1590–4)

H8 Henry VI (1613)

JC Julius Caesar (1599)

KJ King John (1594–6)

KL King Lear (1605–8)

LC A Lover's Complaint (1609)

LL Love's Labour's Lost (1593–5)

Luc The Rape of Lucrece (1594)

MA Much Ado About Nothing (1598–9)

Mac Macbeth (1606)

MM Measure for Measure (1604)

MND A Midsummer Night's

Dream (1594–5)

MV The Merchant of Venice (1596–7)

MW The Merry Wives of

Windsor (1597)

Oth Othello (1603–4)

Per Pericles (1608–9)

PP The Passionate Pilgrim (1599)

PT The Phoenix and the Turtle (1601)

R2 (Richard II) 1594–6

R3 (Richard III) 1592–3

RJ (Romeo and Juliet) 1594–5

Sonn Sonnets (1609)

TA Titus Andronicus (1590–1)

TC Troilus and Cressida (1602–3)

Tem The Tempest (1610)

TG The Two Gentlemen of

Verona (1589–93)

Tim Timon of Athens (1604–7)

TN Twelfth Night (1601–2)

TNK The Two Noble Kinsmen (1613–15)

TS The Taming of the Shrew (1590–3)

VA Venus and Adonis (1593)

WT The Winter's Tale (1609–10)

FALSE FRIENDS

False friends ('faux amis') are words in one language which look the same as words in another: we therefore think their meanings are the same, and are surprised when we find they are not. The same problem arises when we compare the different historical stages within a language. A Shakespearean word may look the same as its Modern English equivalent, but its meaning might have significantly changed. (After D. Crystal, 2008a.)

Word	Modern meaning	Usual meaning in Shakespeare	Example
awful (adj)	exceedingly bad, terrible	awe-inspiring	Gower describes Pericles as one who 'will prove awful both in deed and word' (<i>Per</i> 2. <i>Chorus</i> .4)
excrement (n)	waste matter from the bowels	outgrowth (eg of hair)	Don Armado boasts that the King would 'with his royal finger thus dally with my excrement, my mustachio' (<i>LL</i> 5. 1.98)
naughty (adj)	badly behaved, improper	wicked, evil, vile	Gloucester calls Regan a 'naughty lady' (<i>KL</i> 3.7.37)
revolve (v)	perform a circular motion	ponder, meditate	Malvolio reads a letter: 'If this fall into thy hands, revolve' (<i>TN</i> 2.5.139)

GRAMMATICAL CONVERSIONS

One of the consequences of the falling away of inflectional endings in English (p. 44) was a marked growth in the process of grammatical conversion – the use of one word class with the function of another (p. 139) – and this became particularly noticeable during the later Renaissance period, especially in dramatic writing. Contemporary rhetoricians called it *anthimeria*. Shakespeare made copious use of it, and was especially fond of making verbs from nouns.

Season your admiration for a while...

It *out-herods* Herod...

No more shall trenching war *channel* her fields...

Grace me no gracing, nor *uncle* me no uncle...

Julius Caesar, / Who at Phillipi the good Brutus *ghosted*...

Destruction straight shall *dog* them at the heels...

I am *proverbed* with a grandsire phrase...

DIVERSE HYPHENATIONS

Any study of Shakespeare's lexicon would be inadequate if it did not draw attention to his use of hyphenated compounds. Many of these (such as *hugger-mugger*) are uniquely and recognizably his, and they thus form an uncertain category between those neologisms in his writing which have survived into the modern language and those which have died (see above). It is their structural diversity which is so noticeable, as is suggested by this set of examples from *King John* (each occurs in the play just once):

arch-heretique	breake-vow	halfe-blowne	ore-look'd	smooth-fac'd
baby-eyes	canker-sorrow	heauen-mouing	pale-visag'd	thin-bestained
bare-pickt	faire-play	ill-tuned	pell-mell	vile-concluded
basilisco-like	giant-world	kindred-action	sinne-conceiuing	widow-comfort

(After W. F. Bolton, 1992.)

SUCH KNAVERY

One approach to Shakespeare's linguistic creativity takes an everyday concept and shows the imaginative range of the expressions used to convey it. Even the commonest notions display a remarkable variety, as shown by this collection of insulting phrases using the word *knave*.

wrangling knave; foul knave; Fortune's knave; fantastical knave; naughty knave; Sir knave; arrant knave; a devilish knave; lousy knave; lunatic knave; muddy knave; unthrifty knave; a thin-faced knave; a subtle knave; beastly knave; untaught knaves; bacon-fed knaves; gorbellied knaves; crafty knaves; lazy knaves; most unjust knave; most villainous knave; thou most untoward knave; poor gallant knave; base notorious knave; scurvy, lousy knave; a counterfeit cowardly knave; arrant, malmsy-nose knave; scurvy railing knave; rascally yea-forsooth knave; stubborn ancient knave; jealous rascally knave; poor cuckoldy knave; a pestilent complete knave; foul-mouthed and caluminous knave; sly and constant knave; a slipper and subtle knave; shrewd knave and unhappy; a young knave and begging; knaves that smell of sweat; shrewd and knavish sprite; knave very voluble; little better than false knaves; the lying'st knave in Christendom; the rascally, scald, beggarly, lousy, bragging knave; scurvy, doting, foolish knave; whoreson beetle-headed, flap-ear'd knave; poor, decayed, ingenius, foolish, rascally knave; base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy worsted-stocking knave. (After W. J. Hill & C. J. Ötchen, 1991.)

SHAKESPEAREAN IDIOMS

Bernard Levin's compilation of 61 Modern English expressions found in Shakespeare's plays (for sources, see below) can be seen as a poster or on a T-shirt in many a theatre shop. His selection clearly illustrates the influence of Shakespeare's writing on modern idiom – though to include such colloquialisms as *tut tut* and *O Lord* perhaps unduly stretches the notion of what counts as a 'quotation'. He gets one wrong: 'but me no but's' is not in Shakespeare at all, though its model is: 'Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle' (*R2* 2.3.86). Also, some of his expressions are not specifically Shakespearean: several other writers used *hoodwink*, *tongue-tied*, *laughing-stock*, and *eyesore* before Shakespeare did, and some of the other idioms would have been in common use. The Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (2.4.162) actually says as much: 'If ye should lead her in a fool's paradise, as they say...' But without its use in this play, that idiom might never have achieved the usage it now has.

QUOTING SHAKESPEARE

IF YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND MY ARGUMENT, AND DECLARE: it's Greek to me, you are quoting Shakespeare. If you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare. If you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare. If you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied – a tower of strength – hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows – made a virtue of necessity insisted on fair play – slept not one wink – stood on ceremony – danced attendance on your lord and master – laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift – cold comfort, or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days, or lived in a fool's paradise, why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are as good luck would have it, quoting Shakespeare. If you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time, and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up, and that truth will out, even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have teeth set on edge at one fell swoop – without rhyme or reason, then to give the devil his due if the truth were known for surely you have a tongue in your head, you are quoting Shakespeare. EVEN: If you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I was dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore – a laughing stock – the devil incarnate – a stony-hearted villain – bloody-minded, or a blinking idiot, then by love – O Lord – tut, tut! – For goodness' sake – what the dickens! – but me no but's – it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare...

BERNARD LEVIN



AN EXTENSION

The list is by no means complete. We could continue in a Levinesque manner for quite some time:

The game's afoot! O brave new world, that has such people in it, good men and true, to the manner born, treading the primrose path, as merry as the day is long, full of the milk of human-kindness, acting as ministering angels, killing with kindness, holding the mirror up to nature, telling truth to shame the devil, wearing their heart on their sleeve, avoiding pomp

and circumstance, not laying it on with a trowel, and telling 'knock knock' jokes for ever and a day to their heart's content. The world is their oyster, indeed, especially when they snatch their pound of flesh out of the jaws of death, to prepare a dish fit for the gods. Presenting caviare to the general is meat and drink to them. In my mind's eye, their work beggars all description. They have never been on a wild-goose chase or stood with bated breath waiting for

someone to break the ice. Would they eat me out of house and home? It would be a sorry sight to have no more cakes and ale, or see them hoist with their own petard. I must be cruel only to be kind, a Daniel come to judgement, as white as driven snow. There's method in my madness, for the wheel has come full circle, but perhaps that's neither here nor there. Come what come may, brevity is the soul of wit, and love is blind, that's the be-all and end-all of it...

SOURCES

Levin sometimes adapts a quotation to suit his purpose. The actual quotes are as follows (etc indicates that there are other sources than the one cited here):

it was Greek to me (*JC* 1.2.281)
more sinned against than sinning (*KL* 3.2.60)
my salad days (*AC* 1.5.73)
more in sorrow than in anger (*Ham* 1.2.232)
thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought (*2H4* 4.5.93)
are melted into thin air (*Tem* 4.1.150)
not budge an inch (*TS Induction*.1.12)
green-eyed jealousy (*MV* 3.2.110)
play fast and loose (*KJ* 3.1.242)
tongue-tied (*R3* 4.4.132 etc)
a tower of strength (*R3* 5.3.12)
hoodwink (*Mac* 4.3.72 etc)
I have been in such a pickle (*Tem* 5.1.282)
knit his brows (*2H6* 1.2.3)
to make a virtue of necessity (*TG* 4.1.62)
fair play (*TC* 5.3.43 etc)
have not slept one wink (*Cym* 3.4.102)
I never stood on ceremonies (*JC* 2.2.13)
dance attendance (*H8* 5.2.30, *R3* 3.7.55)
lord and master (*AW* 2.3.185 etc)
laugh yourselves into stitches (*TN* 3.2.65)
make a short shrift (*R3* 3.4.95)
cold comfort (*KJ* 5.7.42, *TS* 4.1.28)

too much of a good thing (*AY* 4.1.112)
we have seen better days (*AY* 2.7.121 etc)
lead her in a fool's paradise (*RJ* 2.4.162)
be it as it may (*3H6* 1.1.194)
the more fool you (*TS* 5.2.128)
a foregone conclusion (*Oth* 3.3.425)
as good luck would have it (*MW* 3.5.76)
early days (*TC* 4.5.12)
bag and baggage (*AY* 3.2.157 etc)
'tis high time (*CE* 3.2.165)
the short and the long is (*MND* 4.2.34 etc)
the game is up (*Cym* 3.3.107)
truth will out (*MV* 2.2.74)
flesh and blood (*MV* 3.1.31 etc)
lie low (*MA* 5.1.52)
the crack of doom (*Mac* 4.1.116)
foul play (*Ham* 1.2.256, *KJ* 4.2.93 etc)
set my teeth nothing on edge (*1H4* 3.1.127)
at one fell swoop (*Mac* 4.3.218)
neither rhyme nor reason (*AY* 3.2.381 etc)
he will give the devil his due (*H5* 1.2.118)
if the good truth were known (*WT* 2.1.199)
keep a good tongue in thy head (*Tem* 3.2.113)
a good riddance (*TC* 2.1.119)
send him packing (*1H4* 2.4.290, etc)
dead as a door-nail (*2H6* 4.10.38)
an eye-sore (*TS* 3.2.100)
his vlouting-stog [laughing stock] (*MW* 3.1.108)

devils incarnate (*H5* 2.3.30)
the stony-hearted villains (*1H4* 2.2.25)
bloody-minded (*2H6* 4.1.36 etc)
blinking idiot (*MV* 2.9.54)
by Jove (*AW* 5.3.285 etc)
O Lord (*AW* 2.2.40 etc)
tut, tut (*1H4* 4.2.63)
for goodness' sake (*H8 Prologue* 23 etc)
what the dickens (*MW* 3.2.17)
all one to me (*AY* 3.5.133 etc)

DC's continuation

the game's afoot (*H5* 3.1.32)
O brave new world, / That has such people in't (*Tem* 5.1.183)
good men and true (*MA* 3.3.1)
to the manner born (*Ham* 1.4.15)
himself the primrose path of dalliance treads (*Ham* 1.3.50)
as merry as the day is long (*KJ* 4.1.18)
full o'the milk of human-kindness (*Mac* 1.5.15)
a ministering angel (*Ham* 5.1.237)
to kill a wife with kindness (*TS* 4.1.194)
hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature (*Ham* 3.2.22)
tell truth, and shame the devil (*1H4* 3.1.55 etc)
I will wear my heart upon my sleeve (*Oth* 1.1.165)
pomp and circumstance (*Oth* 3.3.351)

that was laid on with a trowel (*AY* 1.2.99)
knock knock, who's there (*Mac* 2.2.70)
for ever and a day (*AY* 4.1.134 etc)
my heart's content (*TC* 1.2.294 etc)
The world's mine oyster (*MW* 2.2.2)
a pound of flesh (*MV* 3.3.33 etc)
out of the jaws of death (*TN* 3.4.351)
a dish fit for the gods (*JC* 2.1.173)
caviary to the general (*Ham* 2.2.435)
meat and drink to me (*AY* 5.1.10 etc)
it beggared all description (*AC* 2.2.203)
run the wild-goose chase (*RJ* 2.4.70)
with bated breath (*MV* 1.3.121)
break the ice (*TS* 1.2.264)
eaten me out of house and home (*2H4* 2.1.72)
a sorry sight (*Mac* 2.2.20 etc)
no more cakes and ale (*TN* 2.3.112)
hoist with his own petard (*Ham* 3.4.208)
I must be cruel only to be kind (*Ham* 3.4.179)
a Daniel come to judgement (*MV* 4.1.220)
as white as driven snow (*WT* 4.4.220)
though this be madness, yet there is method in't (*Ham* 2.2.205)
the wheel is come full circle (*KL* 5.3.172)
'tis neither here nor there (*Oth* 4.3.56 etc)
come what come may (*Mac* 1.3.146)
brevity is the soul of wit (*Ham* 2.2.90)
love is blind (*TG* 2.1.67 etc)
the be-all and the end-all (*Mac* 1.7.5)

A Conservative Style

The style of the King James Bible is much more conservative than that found in Shakespeare. As the team of translators say in their Preface, their aim was not to make a new translation, 'but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one'. They aimed for a dignified, not a popular style, and often opted for older forms of the language, when modern alternatives were available. Their text therefore does not contain large numbers of new words, as Shakespeare's plays did (p. 63). One estimate finds in it only about 8,000 different words, which is less than half of the Shakespearean total (p. 133).

Similarly, the King James Bible looks backwards in its grammar, and preserves many of the forms and constructions which were falling out of use elsewhere. Some of these features are as follows:

- Many irregular verbs are found in their older forms: examples include *digged* ('dug'), *gat* ('got') and *gotten*, *bare* ('bore'), *spake* ('spoke'), *clave* ('cleft'), *holpen* ('helped'), and *wist* ('knew'). Other archaic forms are also found, such as *brethren*, *kine*, and *twain*.
- Older word orders are still in use, such as *follow thou me*, *speake ye unto*, *cakes unleavened*, and *things eternal*. In particular, the modern use of *do* with negatives and in questions is missing: we find *they knew him not* instead of *they did not know him*. By contrast, both old and new constructions are used in Shakespeare, and the *do* construction became standard by about 1700.
- The third person singular of the present tense of verbs is always *-(e)th*. In other texts of the period, it is being replaced by *-s* – a northern form which was moving south in the 16th century (p. 50), and which is often found in Shakespeare (along with the *-eth* ending).
- The second person plural pronouns were changing during this period (p. 75). Originally, *ye* was the subject form, and *you* was the form used as object or after a preposition. This distinction is preserved in the Bible, as can be seen in such examples as *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you...* But in most writing, by the end of the 16th century, *you* was already being used for *ye*, which disappeared from standard English in the late 17th century (apart from in some poetic and religious use).
- *His* is used for *its*, as in *if the salt has lost his savour; wherewith shall it be salted*. Although *its* is recorded as early as the end of the 16th century, it does not become general until 100 years later. Similarly, the modern use of the genitive was still not established, as can be seen in such usages as *for Jesus Christ his sake*.
- Several prepositions have different uses from today. *Of*, in particular, is widespread: *the zeal of ('for') thine house, tempted of ('by') Satan, went forth of ('from') the Arke*. Other examples include *in ('at') a good old age, taken to (as a) wife, and like as ('like', 'as') the sand of the sea*.
- *An* is used before many nouns beginning with *h-* in a stressed syllable, such as *an hundred, an helpe, an harlot*. This usage, begun by Wycliff, is still to be found as late as the 19th century.



Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556)

TWO SAMPLE TEXTS

The first extract represents the 1611 printing, apart from the replacement of long 's' by s; the second extract is from a 19th-century printing, with modernized spelling and punctuation, which is closer to the versions that most people see today.

Luke 15.29–32

And he answering said to his father, Loe, these many yeeres doe I serue thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandement, and yet thou neuer gauest mee a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soone as this thy sonne was come, which hath deuored thy liuing with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calfe. And he said vnto him, Sonne, thou art euer with me, and all that I haue is thine. It was meete that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alieue againe: and was lost, and is found.

Genesis 27.10–22

And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun set: and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

And he dreamed, and beheld a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and beheld the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed:

And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

A related influential text was the Prayer Book, which appeared in 1549 with the full title of *The Booke of the Common Prayer and administration of the Sacramentes, and other Rites and Ceremonies after the Use of the Churche of England*. It provided a single order of public worship to be followed throughout the country. The first edition was compiled by a group of bishops and scholars led by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Thomas Cranmer), and radically revised, after its controversial reception, in 1552. A later revision, generally known as the 1662 Book (from the date of enforcement of its use), substituted the text of the King James Bible, and introduced a degree of linguistic modernization. This version continued as the only official text in the Church of England until the adoption of an alternative liturgy in contemporary language at the end of the 1970s (p. 429).

The Prayer Book is responsible for a great deal of the vernacular idiom of English prayer, such as 'As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen', 'Lord have mercy upon us', 'be amongst you and remain with you always'. A few of its phrases (such as *holy wedlock*) have achieved broader currency, and a much larger number have achieved the status of quotations:

Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest (*Collect, 2nd Sunday in Advent*)
 Renounce the devil and all his works (*Public Baptism*)
 Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife? (*Solemnization of Matrimony*)
 earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust (*The Burial of the Dead*)

Growing Regularization

Mulcaster's own views did a great deal to hasten the growth of regularization at the end of the 16th century. His *Elementarie* provided a table listing recommended spellings for nearly 9,000 words, and influenced a generation of orthoepists (pronunciation teachers) and grammarians. Several other works of the period focused on the writing system, and a climate emerged which fostered standardization – at least in print (manuscript practices took much longer to conform).

Vowels especially came to be spelled in a more predictable way. There was increased use of a double-vowel convention (as in *soon*) or a silent *-e* (as in *name*) to mark length; and a doubled consonant within a word became a more predictable sign of a preceding short vowel (*sitting*) – though there continued to be some uncertainty over what should happen at the end of a word (*bed* and *glad*, but *well* and *glasse*). Then, in the 1630s, one of the most noticeable variations in medieval English came to be standardized: the use of *u* and *v*. These symbols were at first interchangeable (p. 41), and then positionally distinguished (with *v* used initially and *u* medially in a word); they later followed Continental practice and adopted fixed phonetic values, with *v* representing a consonant and *u* a vowel. A similar standardization affected *j* (earlier a variant form of *i*) and *i*.

During the 17th century, an increasing number of spelling guides came to be published, which inevitably influenced printing practice. Children's schoolbooks began to contain lists of homophones (such as *made* and *maid*) and irregular spellings, which had to be learned by heart. And a considerable pressure for standardization followed the arrival of the first dictionaries (from 1604, p. 76). By the middle of the century, printing conventions had become highly regularized, and the gulf established between the forms of speech and their written representation. The modern system, in which irregular spellings can be explained but not predicted, had arrived. The period of social tolerance of variant spellings came to an end; and as 18th-century notions of correctness emerged (p. 76), poor spelling became increasingly stigmatized.

CAPITALIZATION

Hart recommended his readers to use a capital letter at the beginning of every sentence, proper name, and important common noun. By the early 17th century, the practice had extended to titles (*Sir, Lady*), forms of address (*Father, Mistress*), and personified nouns (*Nature*). Emphasized words and phrases would also attract a capital. By the beginning of the 18th century, the influence of Continental books had caused this practice to be extended still further (e.g. to the names of the branches of knowledge), and it was not long before some writers began using a capital for any noun that they felt to be important. Books appeared in which all or most nouns were given an initial capital (as is done

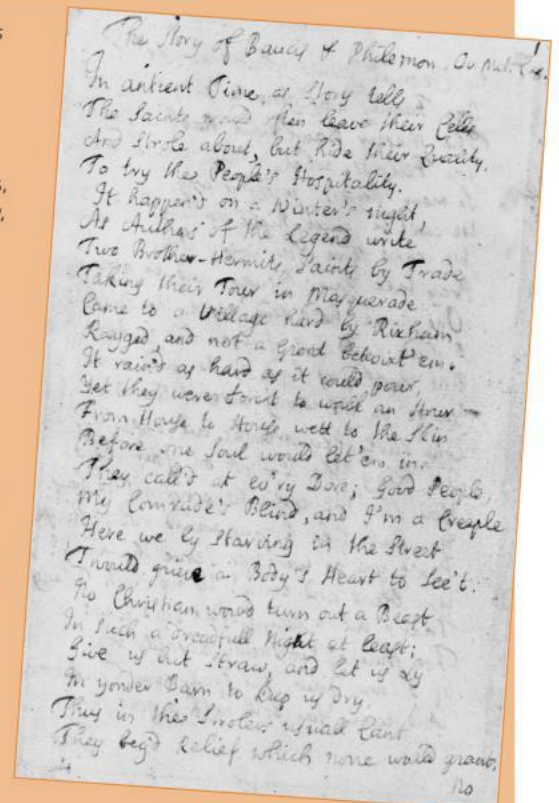
systematically in modern German) – perhaps for aesthetic reasons, or perhaps because printers were uncertain about which nouns to capitalize, and so capitalized them all.

The fashion was at its height in the later 17th century, and continued into the 18th. The manuscripts of Butler, Traherne, Swift, and Pope are full of initial capitals. However, the later 18th-century grammarians were not amused by this apparent lack of order and discipline in the written language. In their view, the proliferation of capitals was unnecessary, and causing the loss of a useful potential distinction. Their rules brought a dramatic reduction in the types of noun permitted to take a capital letter (p. 133).

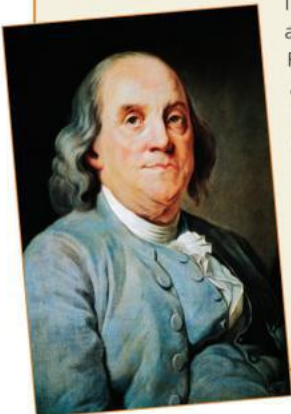
An extract from Jonathan Swift's *Baucis and Philemon* (1706), showing almost every noun capitalized. (After P. J. Croft, 1973.)

In antient Time, as Story tells
The Saints would often leave their Cells,
And strol'd about, but hid'd their Quality,
To try the People's Hospitality.

It happen'd on a Winter's night,
As Authors of the Legend write
Two Brother-Hermits, Saints by Trade
Taking their Tour in Masquerade
Came to a Village hard by Rixham
Ragged, and not a Groat behixt' em.
It rain'd as hard as it could pour,
Yet they were forc't to walk an Hour
From House to House, wett to the Skin
Before one Soul would let 'em in.
They call'd at ev'ry Dore; Good People,
My Comrade's Blind, and I'm a Creepie
Here we ly starving in the Street
'Twould grieve a Body's Heart to see't;
No Christian would turn out a Beast
In such a dreadfull Night at least;
Give us but Straw, and let us Ly
In yonder Barn to keep us dry.
Thus in the Strolers usuall Cant
They beg'd Relief which none would
grant;



IN FAVOUR OF CAPITALS



The American statesman and scientist, Benjamin Franklin (1706–90), had a keen interest in the English language, and especially in its typography (having been a printer in his youth). In a letter to Noah Webster (p. 84), written in 1789, he mourns the passing of the age of noun capitalization.

In examining the English books that were printed between the restoration and the accession of George the Second [1660–1727], we may observe, that all substantives were begun with a capital, in which we imitated our mother tongue, the German. This was more particularly useful to those who were not well acquainted with the English, there being such a prodigious number of our words that are both verbs and substantives, and spelt in the same manner, though often accented differently in pronunciation. This method has, by the fancy of printers, of late years been entirely laid aside; from an idea, that suppressing the capitals shews the character to greater advantage; those letters,

prominent above the line, disturbing its even, regular appearance. The effect of this change is so considerable, that a learned man of France, who used to read our books, though not perfectly acquainted with our language, in conversation with me on the subject of our authors, attributed the greater obscurity he found in our modern books, compared with those of the period above mentioned, to a change of style for the worse in our writers; of which mistake I convinced him, by marking for him each substantive with a capital, in a paragraph, which he then easily understood, though before he could not comprehend it. This shews the inconvenience of that pretended improvement.

RENAISSANCE PUNCTUATION

The basis of the modern punctuation system emerged during the Renaissance. Caxton was heir to a graphic tradition which was limited, unclear, and inconsistent. In common with classical models, the symbols were used rhetorically (p. 290), showing readers where to breathe, how long to pause, and how to introduce emphasis and rhythmical balance into their speech. Even so, there was a great deal of idiosyncrasy and arbitrariness in their use, and attempts to find a neat correlation between punctuation and prosody in Early Modern English texts have never succeeded.

The chief symbols were the *virgule*, or oblique stroke (/), found in both short and long forms; the *period* (.), found at various heights; and the *colon* (:). There is no correspondence with modern uses. In Caxton, the virgule variously had the function of a modern comma, period, or semi-colon; it fell out of use in the 16th century, and was largely replaced by the comma. The period was often used where today we would have a comma (as in the closing lines of the ‘egg’ text, p. 57). The colon had a broad range of rhetorical functions, and was not restricted to introducing a list or summary, as it is now. It was also used to mark a divided word at the end of a line, where today we would use a hyphen.

John Hart (p. 66) had a great deal to say about both the rhetorical and grammatical functions of ‘pointing’. He distinguished the period (‘point’), colon (‘joint’), comma, question mark (‘asker’), exclamation mark (‘wonderer’), parentheses (‘clozer’), square brackets (‘notes’), apostrophe (‘tourner’), hyphen (‘joiner’), diaresis (‘sondrer’), and capital (‘great’) letters. His detailed account greatly influenced the way grammarians and printers dealt with this area, and punctuation marks in books came to be more widely used as a result.

Other marks emerged in English Renaissance printing. The *semi-colon* (also called a *comma-colon*, *hemi-colon*, or *sub-colon*) came into use during the 16th century, and for a while was used interchangeably with the colon. ‘Turned double commas’, later called *quotation marks* or *inverted commas*, made their appearance to open direct speech, and some time afterwards double raised commas were brought in to close it. But not only did new symbols emerge; older symbols developed new uses. In the 18th century, for example, the apostrophe (p. 295) extended its range, first marking the genitive singular of nouns, then the genitive plural. There was also a much heavier use of the comma than is typical today, as the extract from Benjamin Franklin illustrates (p. 69). By the end of the Early Modern English period, the system of modern punctuation was in most respects established. (After D. Crystal, 2015.)

QUOTE ... UNQUOTE

Joshua Steele includes this letter as an Appendix to his treatise on *The Melody and Measure of Speech* (1775). Because he is thinking of it as a quotation, he encloses the whole thing in double inverted commas, following the conventions current at that time. Each new line is opened by these commas, with just one pair of raised commas to mark the close (not shown here). An interesting feature is the inclusion of the date within the quotation.

[93]

TO THE AUTHOR OF THE TREATISE ON THE MELODY
AND MEASURE OF SPEECH.

“ May 14, 1775.

“ YOU have inclofed my remarks, which are too long; but
“ as you defired them soon, I had not time to make them
“ shorter. I am glad that you are to give your syftem to the
“ public. * * * * As to the queries and obfervations I fent
“ you formerly, and have now fent you, you may make what
“ ufe of them you think proper; and if they contribute in the
“ leaft to make more compleat fo ingenious a performance, I
“ fhall think they do me honour.

“ I am, &c.”

EDITING THE TEXT

A modern edition of a Renaissance text may introduce several differences in punctuation which affect the way the passage is to be interpreted (and, in the case of drama, how the actor should present it). Whether the emendations help or hinder is a matter for discussion; but the first thing is to be aware that they exist. The following extract from *King Lear* illustrates the issue (l.i.55–61). The first version is from the First Folio (1623); the second is from the New Penguin edition (1972).

GONERILL: Sir, I loue you more than words can weild ye matter,
Deerer then eye-sight, space, and libertie,
Beyond what can be valewed, rich or rare,
No lesse then life, with grace, health, beauty, honor:
As much as Childe ere lou'd, or Father found.
A loue that makes breath poore, and speech vnable,
Beyond all manner of so much I loue you.

GONERILL: Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter,
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
Beyond what can be valued rich or rare,
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour,
As much as child e'er loved or father found;
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of 'so much' I love you.

There are several differences which could lead to an interesting argument.

- Does the removal of the comma after *valewed* (l. 3) alter the meaning of the phrase *rich or rare* (to mean ‘what can be valued as rich or rare’ rather than ‘no matter how rich or rare’)?
- Does the replacement of the colon after *honor* (l. 4) by a comma reduce the dramatic impact of the pause following the list of nouns?
- Does the removal of the comma after *lou'd* (l. 5) lessen the force of the contrast between *Childe* and *Father*? Similarly, is its removal desirable after *poore* in the next line?
- Does the replacement of the period after *found* (l. 5) by a semi-colon reduce the summarizing prominence of the final two lines?

(After G. Ronberg, 1992.)

PAUSAL PRECISION

Many writers of the time draw attention to the rhetorical role of punctuation marks, often computing pausal values with mathematical precision. An example is Simon Daines, in *Orthoepia Anglicana* (1640), who defines the period in this way:

The *Period* ... is altogether used at the end of every speech or sentence ... and signifies *conclusion*. The pause or distance of

speaking hereto appropriate is sometime more, sometime lesse: for ... when in the middle of a line it cuts off any integrall part of a complete Tractate [*treatise*], which goes not on with the same, but begins a new line, it requireth double the time of pause, that it doth when the treatise persists in the same line: being then four times as long as a *Colon*, which in the same line is but twice.

SOUND CHANGES

The pronunciation changes which took place during Early Modern English have been studied in considerable detail. Not only is there a great deal of literary evidence, derived from the rhymes and rhythms of poetry, there are also detailed accounts of contemporary pronunciation from phoneticians and spelling reformers. The changes were many and complex. The effects of the Great Vowel Shift (p. 55) were still slowly working their way through the sound system, and several other important developments were in progress.

A GREAT FEAST OF LANGUAGES

Dramatists can provide a source of insight into contemporary pronunciation, partly because of their use of rhymes and word-play, but also because of what they make their characters say. A famous Shakespearean example is in *Love's Labour's Lost* (5.1.15), where the schoolmaster Holofernes complains about Don Armado's pronunciation.

I abhor such fanatical phantasimes, such insociable and point-devise companions; such rackers of orthography, as to speak 'dout' fine, when he should say 'doubt'; 'det' when he should pronounce 'debt' – d, e, b, t, not d, e, t. He clepeth [*calls*] a calf 'cauf', half 'hauf'; neighbour vocatur [*is called*] 'nebour'; 'neigh' abbreviated 'ne'. This is abominable – which he would call 'abominable'.

There were evidently two styles of pronunciation current in the late 16th century, and there is no doubt about which the schoolmaster prefers – the more conservative one, which most closely reflects the spelling (p. 68).

SOUND DESCRIPTION

The precision with which some writers could describe the sounds of English is well illustrated by this extract from John Wallis's account of [n] in his *Treatise on Speech* (1st edition, 1653). (Translated from the Latin by J. A. Kemp, 1972.)

For there is a difference between the sound of the letter *n* in the words *thin, sin, in*, and that in *thing, think, sing, single, sink, ink, lynx*, etc. Similarly in *hand, band, ran* the *n* is not the same as it is in *hang, bank, rank*, etc. ... In the former of each of these two groups the pronunciation of *n* always involves the tip of the tongue striking the front of the palate, near the roots of the upper teeth; whereas in the latter the tip of the tongue is normally moved down to the roots of the lower teeth, and the back of the tongue is raised up to the back of the palate, blocking the sound at this point.



Precision indeed – and in 1653!

NEW SOURCES OF VARIATION

Some of the most important pronunciation indicators of present-day regional and social variation emerged during this period.

- The distinction in modern British Received Pronunciation (RP, p. 245) between *cut* (*son, run*, etc.) and *put* (*pull, wolf*, etc.) developed in the 17th century. Previously, both types of word had a high, back vowel, perhaps rounded /u/ – the quality heard in modern *put* – or perhaps unrounded. This quality remained in certain phonetic contexts (e.g. preceded by a labial consonant, as in *full, wolf, put*), but elsewhere the vowel became more open and lost its rounding, resulting in /ʌ/. In due course, pairs of words began to be contrasted using these qualities (such as *look vs luck*), and a new phonemic distinction emerged (p. 248). However, the change was ignored in many regions, with people continuing to use /u/ in both types of word, and this is now one of the chief means of telling whether someone has been brought up in the North of England.
- Throughout this period, /r/ was sounded before consonants and at the end of a word, as is suggested by the way it has been preserved in modern spelling (*jar, corn, fire*, etc.). It stopped being pronounced in RP during the 19th century, with various effects on the preceding vowel: sometimes the vowel became a diphthong (as in *peer* and *bear*); sometimes it lengthened (as in *barn, corn*, and *clerk*). The RP change proved to be something of an exception: most British and American regional accents retained the /r/, and the discrepancy between sound and spelling later became a focus of purist criticism (p. 365).
- Two new consonants emerged during this period. The [ŋ] sound in such words as *sing* was pronounced in Middle English, but always followed by [g] or [k], so that it never had any independent status as a phoneme. By the early 17th century, this final [-g] was no longer being pronounced in RP, leaving /tʃ/ as a separate contrastive unit. Soon after, 'g-dropping' became a social issue (p. 77).
- The /ʒ/ phoneme also emerged in the 17th century, a development of /zj/ – in much the same way as in Modern English a rapid pronunciation of *was your* readily results in a coalescence of the two sounds. The change chiefly affected such words as *occasion* and *vision, measure* and *pleasure*, and later appeared in final position in such loan words as *beige* and *garage*. The French overtones of the sound are a source of controversy still, as when people argue the case of /gə'ra:ʒ/ vs /'gærɪdʒ/.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

The reconstruction of pronunciation from earlier periods of English, before the arrival of recorded sound, relies on six kinds of evidence.

- Rhymes that fail to work in Modern English: *stars/Wars, love/prove*.
- Puns that fail to work in Modern English: *tongues/tongs, hour/whore*.
- Spellings that indicate a pronunciation: *philome* for *film*, *apparision* for *apparition*.
- Metrical constraints that show a different stress pattern (see above right).
- Descriptions by contemporary writers: according to Ben Jonson, the same short vowel is used in *love* and *prove*.
- Detailed accounts by historical phonologists of the nature and rate of sound change during the history of English.

It is the combined force of these different kinds of evidence that has led to the growth of the modern movement to present plays in original pronunciation (p. 72).

STRESS SHIFTS

Many words could be heard with a different stress pattern from the one found today.

- First syllable stressed: *antique, convenient, distinct, entire, extreme, July*.
- Second syllable stressed: *advertise, character, demonstrate, sinister*.
- Final syllable stressed: *aspect, expert, paramount, parent, yesterday*.

Secondary stress (p. 248) also often differed: for example, at one time *academy* had such a stress on its third syllable (so that it was rhythmically like *helicopter*). Many poetic rhymes do not make sense until this extra stress (and its effect on the vowel) is taken into account: Donne rhymes *make us one* and *propagation*, and Shakespeare *never die* and *memory*.

It is in fact difficult to be definite about word stress during this period. There was an unusual amount of variation, because native stress patterning (which tended to put the stress on the root syllable of a word) was in competition with the pattern heard in Romance loan words (which tended to put the stress on a syllable at or near the end of a word). Stress might also vary depending on the position in which a word appeared in a sentence or metrical line. *Complete*, for example, has a stress on its first syllable in 'A thousand complete courses of the Sun' (*Troilus and Cressida*), but on the second in 'never complete' (*Timon of Athens*).

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

The major shifts in English grammatical structure were over by the time of the Renaissance (p. 44); but even a casual glance at texts from the period shows that many important changes were continuing to take place, although of a more limited kind. For example, several features of verb use show differences from today: 'My life is run his compass', says Cassius (*Julius Caesar*, 5.3.25), where today we should say *has run* – and this sentence also illustrates one of the pronoun uses typical of the time. Constructions involving a double negative (*I cannot go no further*) were commonplace; there are still signs of impersonal verbs (*me thinks he did*); and during the period a number of verb inflections (e.g. *pleaseth, know'st, spake*) fell out of standard use (for other examples, see pp. 63, 67).

There were also significant stylistic developments in sentence structure (p. 226). In Caxton and Malory, the sentences tend to be loose and linear, with repeated *and* or *then* coordination, and a limited amount of subordination, mostly introduced by *which* or *that*. Here is a typical sentence, taken from Caxton's prologue to the *Golden Legend* (for other extracts, see pp. 57–8).

And I shal praye for them vnto Almyghty God that he of his benygne grace rewarde them etc., and that it prouffyte to alle them that shal rede or here it redde, and may encrease in them vertue and expelle vyce and synne that by the ensauple of the holy sayntes amende theyr luyng here in thys shorte lyf that by their merytes they and I may come to everlastyng lyf and blysse in heuen.

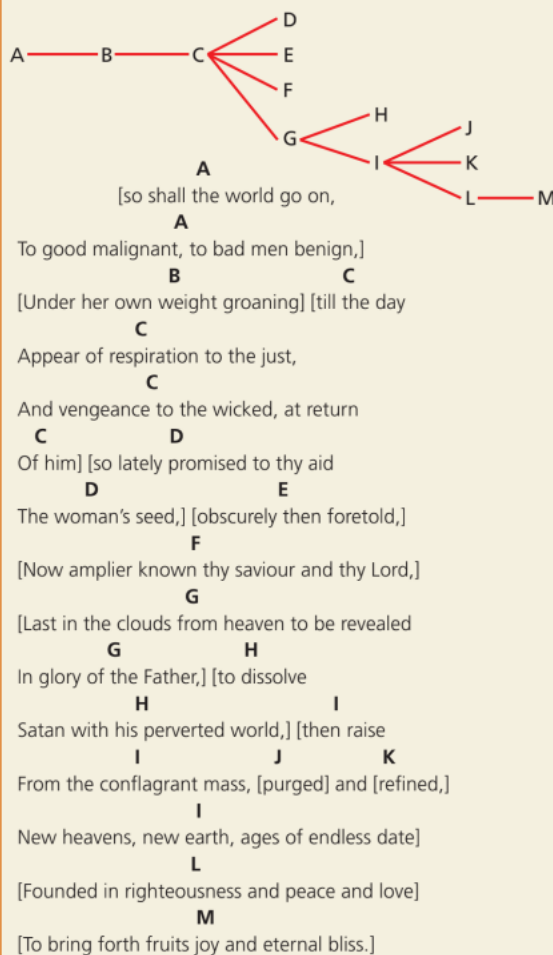
The influence of Latin syntactic style on English became marked in the 16th century. Cicero in particular was much imitated. There is a more complex use of subordination, and a search for rhetorical contrast and balance, as is shown by this extract from William Camden's *Remaines Concerning Britain* (1605):

As for the *Monosyllables* so rife in our tongue which were not so originally, although they are vnfitting for verses and measures, yet are they most fit for expressing briefly the first conceipts of the minde, or *Intentionalia* as they call them in schooles: so that we can set downe more matter in fewer lines, than any other language.

The awkwardness or uncertainty which a modern reader often feels in reading early Renaissance prose is chiefly a consequence of the way writers were beginning to explore the language's potential for complex sentence construction (p. 238). There was conscious experimentation with new grammatical patterns, supported by an increasingly standardized punctuation system (p. 70). New conjunctions emerged: *because*, for example, first appears in Chaucer, but *for* (*that*) remained the normal way of expressing cause until the early 17th century. Participial constructions became extremely common, and

added greatly to the length of sentences which, in more complex writers, might run to 20 lines or more. In the early period, such sentences often appear incomplete or ill-formed to modern eyes (failing in concord, for example, or displaying an unattached subordinate clause); but it is important to appreciate that at the time such variability was normal. By the 17th century, however, sophisticated and carefully crafted sentences, following a variety of Latin models, were commonplace, as can be seen in the writing of John Lyly, Philip Sidney, and John Milton.

THE SUSPENDED SENTENCE

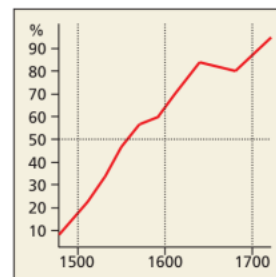


The controlled complexity of sentence construction is well illustrated by this extract from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (XII, 537–51), in which archangel Michael concludes his account of the future of mankind. The diagram shows the formal balance involved. Each clause is identified by a capital letter (A–M). At each level of subordination there is a cluster of clauses, but only the last clause in each cluster (C, G, I, L) acts as a starting-point for further structural development. The effect is rather like a series of waves of meaning – as one critic has put it, 'surge follows surge in the relentless tide of Michael's vision' – until we reach the final clause (M), syntactically dependent on the opening clause (A), six levels of structure away. Constructions which display such a marked delay in grammatical and semantic resolution are often described as 'suspended sentences'. (After T. N. Corns, 1990.)

SAY YOU SO? I DO

One of the most important syntactic developments of this period concerned the use of *do* as an auxiliary verb (p. 224). The differences from modern usage can be seen in such interrogative and negative sentences as *Says she so?* and *Believe him not*, where today we would introduce a *do*-form (*Does she say so?*, *Do not believe him*). By Shakespeare's time, it was possible to use *do* in these sentences, but it was not obligatory. Also, *do* could be used in a declarative affirmative sentence without conveying any extra emphasis, again unlike today, as in 'they do offend our sight' (*Henry V*, 4.6.56), which means no more than 'they offend our sight'.

During the period, it became increasingly usual to insert *do*-forms into negative and interrogative sentences, and to omit them from declarative affirmative ones (except in cases of emphasis). In one study of this topic, only c. 20 per cent of interrogative sentences used *do*-forms in 1500, whereas over 90 per cent did so by 1700. The graph shows the steady growth of *do*-forms in one of these contexts: affirmative questions (such as *Do they know?*). (After A. Ellegård, 1953.)



The Thou/You Question

The second person pronoun system of Renaissance English has been the subject of much investigation – not simply because the forms provide an obvious point of contrast with Modern English, but because they perform a central role in the expression of personal relationships, and are thus crucial to any study of contemporary drama. Understanding the Early Modern English functions of *thou* (*thee, thine, thy, thyself*) and *you* (*ye, yours, your, yourself*) can be critical in interpreting the emotions of the characters, as well as their varying attitudes towards each other during the course of a play.

The chief stages in the development of the system were as follows:

- In Old English (p. 20), *thou* (and its related forms) was used for addressing one person; *ye* (and its related forms) for more than one. Within these categories, *thou* and *ye* were used as clause subject, *thee* and *you* as object.
- During Middle English, *ye/you* came to be used as a polite singular form alongside *thou/thee*, a situation which was probably influenced by French *vous vs tu*.
- During Early Modern English, the distinction between subject and object uses of *ye* and *you* gradually disappeared, and *you* became the norm in all grammatical functions and social situations. *Ye* continued in use, but by the end of the 16th century it was restricted to archaic, religious, or literary contexts. By 1700, the *thou* forms were also largely restricted in this way.

WHY THOU, TO GOD?

We might have expected the deity to be addressed as *You* in Early Modern English, given such descriptions as 'king', 'father', and 'most high'. In fact, during this period he is always addressed as *Thou*. This may be because the usage was consciously archaic – a recollection of the early Middle English situation when *Thou* would have been the only possible form of address in the singular. Alternatively, the usage may show the influence of the first Bible translators (p. 59), who were following languages that distinguished second person singular and plural pronouns (as in Latin *tu vs vos*). As God would have been referred to by the singular pronoun in these languages, this practice may have influenced the choice of *Thou* in English, even in an age when a singular *you* would have been possible.

The Renaissance System

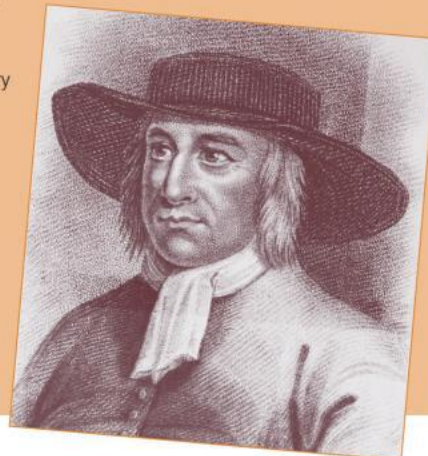
By the time of Shakespeare, *you* had developed the number ambiguity it retains today, being used for either singular or plural; but in the singular it also had a role as an alternative to *thou/thee*. It was used by people of lower rank or status to those above them (such as ordinary people to nobles, children to parents, servants to masters, nobles to the monarch), and was also the standard way for the upper classes to talk to each other. By contrast, *thou/thee* were used by people of higher rank to those beneath them, and by the lower classes to each other; also, in elevated poetic style, in addressing God, and in talking to witches, ghosts, and other supernatural beings. There were also some special cases: for example, a husband might address his wife as *thou*, and she reply with *you*.

Of particular interest are those cases where an extra emotional element entered the situation, and the use of *thou* or *you* broke the expected conventions. *Thou* commonly expressed special intimacy or affection; *you*, formality, politeness, and distance. *Thou* could also be used, even by an inferior to a superior, to express such feelings as anger and contempt (as in the biblical text on p. 67). The use of *thou* to a person of equal rank could thus easily count as an insult, as Sir Toby Belch well knows when he advises Sir Andrew Aguecheek on how to write a challenge to 'the Count's youth' (Viola): 'if thou thou'st him some thrice, it shall not be amiss' (*Twelfth Night*, 3.2.42), himself using a demeaning *thou* in a speech situation where the norm is *you*. Likewise, the use of *you* when *thou* was expected (such as from master to servant) would also require special explanation.

PURE PROPER UNTO ONE

By the middle of the 17th century, *thou* was disappearing from standard usage; but it was kept alive by members of the emerging Society of Friends, or Quakers, who disapproved of the way singular *you* had come to be part of social etiquette, and who accordingly used *thou* forms to everyone. This usage, it was felt, was closer to the way Christ and his disciples spoke, avoided unnecessary social distinction, and was grammatically more exact, being a 'particular, single, pure proper unto one'. The singular use of *you*, by contrast, was considered a corruption, a form of worldly honour, to be shunned along with all other empty social customs. The point was forcibly made by one of the first Quakers, Richard Farnsworth, in *The Pure Language of the Spirit of Truth* (1655), from which the above quotation also comes: 'That which cannot bear thee and thou to a single person, what sort soever, is exalted proud flesh, and is accursed.'

The use of *thou* forms often brought angry reactions, especially from those in authority who still sensed the words' former association with 'lower' speech situations, and found them objectionable. At one point in his *Journal*, George Fox recalls that Friends were 'in danger many times of our lives, and often beaten, for using those words to some proud men, who would say, "Thou'st 'thou' me, thou ill-bred clown", as though their breeding lay in saying "you" to a singular'.



SIGNIFICANT SWITCHING

Switching between *thou* and *you* is so common in some texts that it may appear to lack purpose. However, if we adopt a sociolinguistic perspective, readings of considerable interest can result, as can be seen in the following Shakespearean examples.

- In the opening scene of *King Lear*, Lear's daughters address him as *you*, and he addresses Goneril and Regan as *thou* (as would be expected); but his opening remark to his 'best' daughter, Cordelia conveys special respect: 'what can you say...'. Then, when he is displeased by her response, he switches to an angry *thy*: 'But goes thy heart with this?'
- Hamlet uses *thou* to the Ghost throughout Act 1, as is normal in addressing spirits, but changes to *you* in the closet scene (3.4), presumably because his doubts about the identity of the Ghost have been removed. The *you* is now one of respect of son to father.
- The murderers of Clarence in *Richard III* (1.4) address him as *you*, and he addresses them separately as *thou*. But his speech threatening God's vengeance provokes an angry retort, and their pronoun alters with their mood: 'And that same Vengeance doth he hurl on thee'.
- In *Henry VI Part 3* (3.2), Edward IV is trying to persuade a reluctant Lady Gray to be his queen. At one point, after a sequence in which the King uses only *thou* forms, her evasion provokes him to an irritated *you* response – but he soon regains his composure:

EDWARD: Sweet widow, by my state I swear to thee I speak no more than what my soul intends, And that is to enjoy thee for my love.

LADY GRAY: And that is more than I will yield unto. I know I am too mean to be your queen, And yet too good to be your concubine.

EDWARD: You cavil, widow – I did mean my queen.

LADY GRAY: 'Twill grieve your grace my sons should call you father.

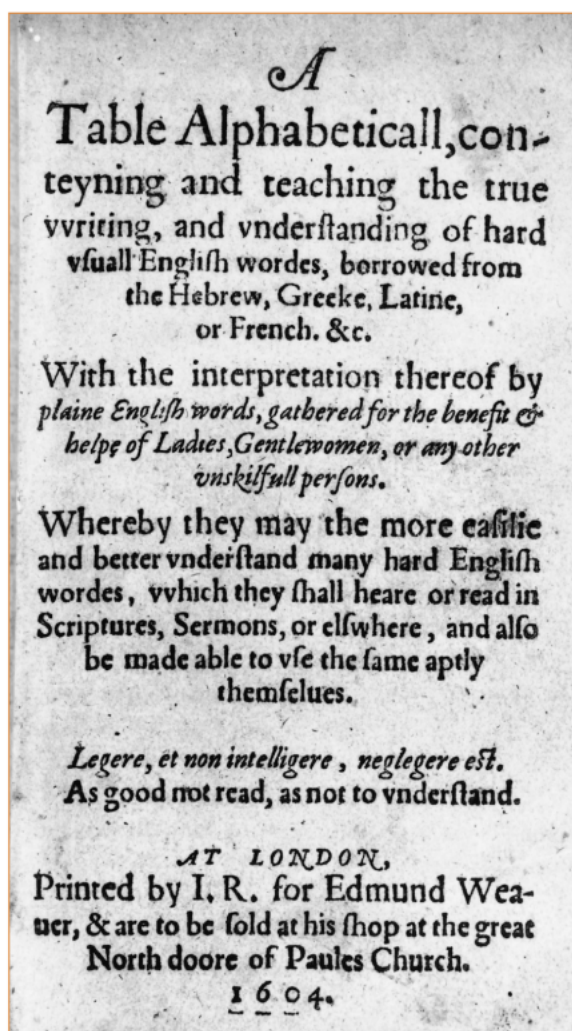
EDWARD: No more than when my daughters call thee mother.

THE SEARCH FOR STABILITY

The great age of Elizabethan literature brought an unprecedented breadth and inventiveness in the use of English, especially in the area of vocabulary (p. 60). It has been estimated that the period between 1530 and the Restoration (1660) displayed the fastest lexical growth in the history of the language. Nearly half of the new words were borrowings from the many cultures with which English was coming into contact; the remainder were different types of word formation using native resources. There was also a great deal of semantic change, as old words acquired new senses – a factor particularly noticed by those involved in the production of religious texts. The authors of the revised edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1662) comment that most of their alterations to the 1552 version were made ‘for the more proper expressing of some words or phrases of ancient usage, in terms more suitable to the language of the present times’.

This unprecedented growth brought with it unprecedented uncertainty. By the end of the 17th century there was a widespread feeling of unease about the direction in which the language was moving. Many critics felt that English was changing too quickly and randomly, and applied such terms to it as ‘unruly’, ‘corrupt’, ‘unrefined’, and ‘barbarous’. A particular area of concern was the lack of consistency in spelling or punctuation (pp. 68–71): at one extreme, there were people who spelled as they spoke (such as *sartinly* for *certainly*); at the other, there were those who took pains to reflect Classical etymology in their spelling (often mistakenly, such as by adding an *s* to *island* or a *c* to *scissors*). There was also a fear that foreign words and neologisms were entering the language in an uncontrolled way. The critics could see no order in the lexical inventiveness of the Elizabethan dramatists. Many of Shakespeare’s new words had become part of the language, but many had not (p. 63), and it was unclear how such anomalies should be dealt with.

Contemporary linguistic fashions and trends provided no solace. John Dryden, in *Defence of the Epilogue* (1672) complains about those ‘who corrupt our English Idiom by mixing it too much with French’. Joseph Addison, in a *Spectator* essay (4 August 1711), complains about the use of contracted forms, which has ‘untuned our Language, and clogged it with Consonants’: he cites such contractions as *mayn’t* and *wo’n’t*, as well as such abbreviations as *rep* (*reputation*) and *ult* (*ultimate*). Daniel Defoe, in *An Essay upon Projects* (1697), complains about the ‘inundation’ of swear-words in the language of his time, and hopes that the introduction of an Academy might stem what he calls a ‘Frenzy of the Tongue, a Vomit of the Brain’. Fifteen years later, Jonathan Swift takes up the challenge.

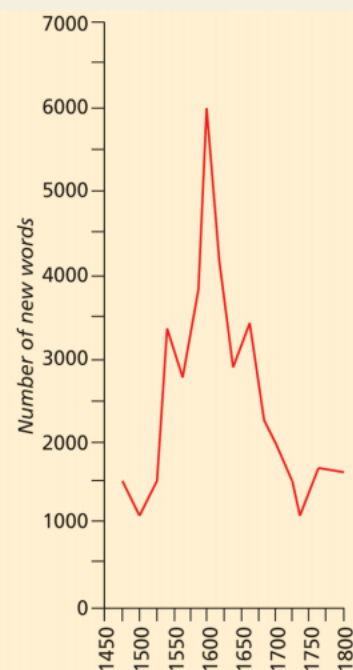


THE FIRST SYNONYM DICTIONARY

An important step forward in organizing the English lexicon took place when Robert Cawdrey published the first ‘dictionary of hard words’ in 1604. *A Table Alphabeticall* contained glosses for 3,000 ‘hard vsuall English wordes’, such as *abbettors*, glossed as ‘counsellors’, and *abbrevuiat*, glossed as ‘to shorten, or make short’. It was a commercial success, and was followed by several other compilations on similar lines.

LEXICAL SUMMITS

The peak of vocabulary growth in the Renaissance period is clearly shown by this graph, which is based on a count of items appearing in an abridged version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (p. 500). Graphs of this kind must not be interpreted too precisely, however. Because of the bias adopted by the *OED* (as stated in its original Preface) towards ‘great English writers’, the lexicon of many ‘ordinary’ texts of the Early Modern English period is not fully taken into account. Several studies have shown that quite a large number of words and senses are not included in the *OED*, and that its first citations can often be antedated by many years. A German investigator of the period, Jürgen Schäfer, has estimated that, if all types of correction are taken into account, the total number of discrepancies in the *OED* database might be as many as half a million. Graphs such as the above are thus likely to be serious underestimates of the true lexical resources of Early Modern English; the late 15th century, in particular, is thought to be poorly represented. But the general impression of lexical growth conveyed by the graph is reasonable enough, and certainly corresponds to any intuitive sense of what was happening throughout this period. (After T. Nevalainen, 1999.)



The Academy Issue

Authors such as Swift were deeply worried about the speed at which the language was changing. Without proper controls, would their work still be intelligible in a generation or so? In 'A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue' (1712), Swift presented his case:

if it [English] were once refined to a certain Standard, perhaps there might be Ways found out to fix it for ever; or at least till we are invaded and made a Conquest by some other State; and even then our best Writings might probably be preserved with Care, and grow in Esteem, and the Authors have a Chance for Immortality.

He submitted his proposal to the Earl of Oxford:

My Lord; I do here, in the Name of all the Learned and Polite Persons of the Nation, complain to Your LORDSHIP, as *First Minister*, that our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; that the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar.

Swift attacked in all directions: he was against Restoration licentiousness, the sloppiness of the young nobility, the abbreviations used by poets, the spelling proposals which tried to reflect speech, the fashionable slang of university people – 'illiterate Court-Fops, half-witted Poets, and University-Boys'. His solution was to follow the example of the French (whose Academy was founded in 1635):

a free judicious Choice should be made of such Persons, as are generally allowed to be best qualified for such a Work, without any regard to Quality, Party, or Profession. These, to a certain Number at least, should assemble at some appointed Time and Place, and fix on Rules by which they design to proceed ... what I have most at Heart is, that some Method should be thought on for *ascertaining* and *fixing* our Language for ever, after such Alterations are made in it as shall be thought requisite. For I am of Opinion, that it is better a Language should not be wholly perfect, than that it should be perpetually changing...

Swift was not the first person to propose an Academy for English: Dryden and Defoe had also done so. But even though the idea attracted a great deal of interest, it never got off the ground. Many saw that language cannot be kept static, and that standards always change. Dr Johnson was one who derided the notion:

When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from

mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay...

Neither Britain nor the United States (p. 81) chose the Academy solution; and although the idea has been raised at intervals ever since, it has never found widespread support within those nations.

The debate about language corruption during the 17th century did, however, focus the public's attention on the existence of a problem and the need for a solution. If the language needed protection, or at least consistency and stability, these could be provided by dictionaries, grammars, spelling guides, and pronunciation manuals. Standards of correctness would thereby emerge, which all could follow. It was Johnson himself who put the first part of this solution into place (p. 78).

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

The sense of chaos and confusion which surrounded the language was attacked in several ways. Some scholars proposed radical systems of spelling reform (p. 66). Some, such as the mathematician Bishop John Wilkins (1614–72), tried to develop a logical alternative to English, which would do away with all irregularity – one of the first attempts at a universal language.

When the Royal Society for the Promotion of Natural Knowledge was founded in 1660, a scientific approach was proposed. A group of its members formed a committee to 'improve the English tongue, particularly for philosophic [i.e. scientific] purposes'. The aim was to develop a plain, objective style, without rhetoric and classical vocabulary, which would be more suitable to scientific expression. The committee achieved no consensus, and did not exist for long, but a 'naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses' was said to have been a hallmark of the founder members' style. This group was the nearest Britain ever came to having an Academy.

An allegorical engraving by Hollar, representing the foundation of the Royal Society (from Bishop Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*). Fame crowns the bust of Charles II, 'Royal Author and Patron'. On the right sits Francis Bacon, 'Artium Instaurator' (Renewer of the Arts); on the left is Lord Brouncker, the first president. Scientific instruments and books surround them.



THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXCEPTION



The only part of the English-speaking world which has ever set up an Academy is South Africa. 'The English Academy of Southern Africa' was established in 1961, and promotes 'the effective use of English as a dynamic language in Southern Africa'. Based in Johannesburg, it arranges lectures and conferences, administers prizes, participates in national bodies, and dispenses language information. It also operates an English advisory service, popularly known as 'Grammar-phone'.