The historical development of the English spelling system

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Summary

The English language is a complex system and it is difficult to know what to expect, when a language develops a worldwide presence to the extent that English has. The history of English is a fascinating system of its own. The sound, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary – every aspect of the language has a rich history of development, influenced by other languages during its journey towards standardization.

This paper focuses on one aspect – the spelling. Its development will be traced through all the important periods of the English language (Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, and Modern English) in section two (*The English language*). The Early Modern English period was the period of the English Renaissance and the spelling reforms. The wish for standardization was at its highest state. In section three, some of the changes that occured in the spelling system, will be taken from some of the most important works of English literature (*Beowulf*, *The Peterborough Chronicles*, *The Ormulum*, *The Canterbury Tales*) and language development (*A Guide to the English Tongue*, *The Universal Spelling-Book or, A New and Easy Guide to the English Language*, *The American Spelling Book: Containing the Rudiments of the English Language, for the Use of Schools in the United States*), as well as named and compared.

In the conclusion, all the important facts connected with the history of the English language and the historical development of its spelling system, will be briefly summarized.

Key words: English language, history, spelling system, changes

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1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental human faculty used for creative expression, face-to-face communication, scientific inquiry, and many other purposes, so says Gelderen (2006), but there are many other definitions to find. The number of languages is decreasing rapidly as some languages disappear and a few others — English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and Hindi — become more widespread as a result of globalization. All languages are systems, or, more precisely, series of interrelated systems governed by rules. Languages consist of patterns that can occur in various combinations and rules we need to apply in order to produce these patterns. Phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, and semantics are what constitutes the language and they have each changed affecting one another, and therefore changing the language. Languages that have a written representation (and not all languages do) also have a system of graphics.

English spelling was first developed in the 7th century, but this early version was much altered later. The English language itself has also changed a great deal since then. The language we now call English is actually a blend of many languages. Even the original Anglo-Saxon, also called Old English, was already a blend of the dialects of west Germanic tribes living in the coastal area. This paper will focus on one aspect of the language – spelling. It will introduce all the major periods the language went through, and some of the most significant changes in the spelling system that occured during the journey towards a standardized spelling.

2. The English language

2.1. The history of English

The British Isles have been inhabited by different people for at least 50,000 years, but we know very little about the languages spoken at that time in this area. With the coming of the first great nation, the Celts, historians start tracing the origin and development of the English language. The Celts lived in tribes, whose names can still be found in the names of the Celtic languages spoken in Britain, but they are not considered English, more as varieties of English influenced by Celtic languages, for example Scottish and Irish Gaelic. The Roman Empire ruled much of Europe until 476, when it collapsed. The first Roman emperor who tried to conquer Britain was Julius Caesar, but his attempts failed. Claudius was the one who succeeded, and brought Celtic Britain under Roman domination in AD 43. The Romans ruled until 410, when their troops were withdrawn from Britain and called back to Rome to defend it from barbarian attacks. This event marked the end of the great power of the Roman Empire over the British Isles. The troops left but the fortifications, which the Romans established in the more than three centuries of rulership, remained and because of the political power the Roman Empire had, Latin was spoken in parts of Britain and Europe and it had a strong influence on Celtic and Germanic languages. (Gelderen 2006)

So, according to van Gelderen (2006), words such as *wall, kitchen, wine, mile* and *street* were borrowed from Latin into Germanic (and through Germanic into English) during this time, and thanks to the Catholic Church and intellectual developments such as Humanism and the Renaissance, the Latin influence continues through medieval and renaissance times.

Historians say that the English language officially started when the Germanic tribes and their languages reached the British Isles, in 449. English, a Germanic dialect spoken only in a small part of England, is now a language spoken by over a billion people in many parts of the world, as a first or second language. (Gelderen, ibid.)

Table 2.1. Periods of English (from Gelderen 2006)

Old English (OE)	450–1150
Middle English (ME)	1150–1500
Early Modern (EMod)	1500–1700
Modern (ModE)	1700–now

It is hard to set a fixed boundary to divide the periods, this is visible in the brief description by Hogg and Denison (2006), which differs a little from the boundaries set by Gelderen (2006) in the table above. Hogg and Denison (2006) say that the period from its introduction on the island of Britain to the end of the 11th century is called Old English, then from c. 1100 to around the end of the 15th century is the Middle English period, the period from c. 1500 to the present day is called Modern English. They also explain that the Modern English period is distinct from present-day English (PDE), because the period of PDE extents from the early 20th century to the present. Furthermore, they mention that it sometimes happens that the main periods are divided into early and late sub-periods, like Early Modern English (see Table 2.1.).

2.2. External and internal change

A language is not a fixed, stable system, it is always open for changes. The question of language change is really a question of why varieties develop within a language. Languages can be politically, geographically, and socially motivated to change, and this is known as external change, but when a language is linguistically motivated to change, it is called internal change. External and internal change are sometimes ascribed to 'chance' and 'necessity', respectively. (Gelderen 2006:7, External and Internal Change)

External changes, so describes Gelderen (2006) are brought about by language contact (between speakers of different languages), or innovations by speakers, or issues of political or social identity. External changes are also unpredictable since it is impossible to foresee where people will migrate, or what new fashion will catch on.

Internal changes, on the other hand, occur when, for instance, speakers stop using endings (or inflections) and start to rely on words such as *of, for, the*, and *have*. They are more predictable. Gelderen (2006) states that "internal reasons have to do with children analyzing the language they hear in a slightly different way from the generation before them (and building their grammars accordingly). These can be cases of changing a vowel or a consonant: Old English *ham* changing to *home* and *skip* to *ship*."

2.3. Old English (450-1150)

The language spoken by the native inhabitants of the British Isles belonged to the Celtic family, introduced by people who had come to the islands about 3000 years ago. The Romans came in 43 BC and their invasion of the British Isles began. By 410 the Romans left the islands

to go back to Europe and defend Rome from barbarian attacks. The Isles were not left in the hands of the Celts, who remained on the grounds of Britain, for too long.

The English language had its start around 449 (Gelderen 2006:2, The origins and history of English), when Germanic tribes (the Anglo-Saxons) came to England and settled there. Crystal (1995), on the other hand, was surprised that there was very little Celtic influence in the language spoken by the new invaders. However, this fact is not surprising, if we take into consideration the savage way in which the Celts or Celtic communities were destroyed.

Eventually the Anglo-Saxons would push some of the native inhabitants westwards, but initially they coexisted with them and even adopted some customs and linguistic features. Two cultures colided, but the stronger one took over – some Celts who remained on the grounds, lost their identities after a few generations, being totally overpowered by the Anglo-Saxons. (Crystal, ibid.)

According to Crystal (1995), only a small number of Celtic words were borrowed at the time, and a few of them can still be found in Modern English: *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'.

Another language that influenced English was Latin. It was a major influence throughout history. Even a few Celtic words in the Old English period ultimately come from Latin, brought in by the Irish missionaries (*assen* 'ass', *ancor* 'hermit', *stær* 'history'). Evidence that shows what a great role Latin played from the earliest moments of the English language are names of many local objects and experiences the Romans gave, but also half of the new words were to do with plants, animals, food and drink, and household items (*plante* 'plant', *win* 'wine', *cyse* 'cheese', *disc* 'dish', *candel* 'candle'). (Crystal 1995:8, Latin loans)

Gelderen (2006) comments, that the existing evidence about the nature of Old English comes from a collection of texts from a variety of regions and it indicates that Old English differs from Modern English in spelling, phonetics, morphology, and syntax.

Table 2.2. Some works in Old English (from Gelderen 2006)

Beowulf. Mixed dialect Northumbrian/West Saxon; manuscript from c.1000 but based on earlier version.
Lindisfarne Gospels. Northumbrian interlinear gloss; c.950.
Rushworth Glosses. Interlinear gloss; c.970. Matthew is Mercian; Mark, Luke and John are Northumbrian.

The Junius Manuscript. Written between the 7th and 10th centuries (some argue partly by the Caedmon poet); compiled towards the late 10th; contains *Genesis, Exodus, Christ and Satan*.
The Exeter Book. Early poetry; contains *Riddles, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wanderer*, and the *Seafarer*.
Gregory's Pastoral Care. Early West Saxon, late 9th century, ascribed to King Alfred.
Boethius and *Orosius*. Early West-Saxon, ascribed to King Alfred.
Homilies, by Aelfric. West Saxon, circa 1000.
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Many versions, one composed in Peterborough that continues to 1154.

Old and Modern English have much in common, but the differences (mentioned above) are the facts that catch our attention when we encounter edited Anglo-Saxon texts. The editors of these texts introduced modern conventions of word spaces, punctuation, capitalization, and line division to make these texts simpler and more accessible to the present-day readers. Certain features of the original spelling are still there and usually retained, and it is these that make the language look alien, unfamiliar, according to Crystal (1995).

2.3.1. Old English spelling

Old English texts were written on parchment or vellum. Most of these texts, especially manuscripts such as *Beowulf*, use a modified Roman alphabet, which was introduced by Irish missionaries (a minuscule script). The script had rounded letter shapes, which later developed into the more angular and cursive style (also called insular script), which was the usual form of writing until the 11th century. An interesting fact is that the Old English alphabet was very similar to the one still in use, but the absence of capital letters would immediately strike any modern eye looking at original manuscripts. (Crystal 1995:16, Old English Letters)

Table 2.3. Special symbols in Old English (from Gelderen 2006)

spelling	**name**	**sound**	**word**
æ	ash	[æ]	*hwæt* 'what'
þ	thorn	[th or ð]	*þat* 'that'
ð	eth	[th or ð]	*ðat* 'that'
ȝ	yogh	[j]	*maniȝ* 'many'
ƿ	wynn or wen	[w]	*we* 'we'

u(u)	–	[w]	*werc* ‘work’
y	–	[y]	*syððan* ‘since’
7 or &	–/ampersand	–	‘and’

A few of the letters were different in shape, not identical to those of Modern English. Crystal (1995) and Gelderen (2006) provided some examples. For instance, Crystal (1995) mentions the elongated shape for *s*, the modern letter g appearing for ȝ (called ‘yogh’), and that the letters *e*, *f*, and *r* also looked different. Furthermore, he and Gelderen (2006) state that there is also an *æ* (called *ash*), a runic letter *þ* (called *thorn*, which represented either of the ‘th’ sounds [θ] or [ð]), and a *ð* (called *eth*). The last two are used interchangeably. Gelderen (2006) also explains that, originally, a *w* was written as one *u* or two *u* symbols (hence the term *double u*), but it is also written using a runic *ƿ* (and called *wynn* or *wen*, which can still be seen printed in older editions of Old English texts), and that capital letters are often absent as are most punctuation marks, whereas abbreviations are frequently used, e.g. *7* stands for *and.* Crystal (1995) also points out, that numbers were written only in Roman symbols and that Arabic numbers came much later.

Crystal (1995) states that the standard Old English alphabet had 24 letters, but what is interesting is that a great deal of variation existed, which reflected the different preferences of individual scribes. The spelling became more regular by the time of Ælfric, in the late 10th century, but this was a temporary state of affairs. A change came very soon in form of new Continental scribal practices, an inevitable graphic consequence of 1066.

2.3.2. Transition from Old to Middle English

The transition from Old to Middle English, according to Gelderen (2006), involves external and internal changes. A considerable amount of words from the Old English vocabulary is replaced by French and Latin words and noun, verb, and adjective endings disappear. The latter is possibly the result of contact with Scandinavian and Celtic languages during the Old English period. Each of these languages mentioned above, that have influenced the English language, has a unique relationship with English, noticeable in the kinds of words borrowed and in how the grammar is affected. For example, French has an enormous influence on late Old and Middle English vocabulary, which makes Middle English look very different from Old English, and Scandinavian influences the grammar.

2.4. Middle English (1150-1500)

The year 1066 marked the beginning of a social and linguistic era in Britain, but it didn't mark the boundary between Old and Middle English. Despite the fact that changes took place, Old English continued to be used. Even a century later, texts were still composed in the West Saxon variety which developed in the years following the reign of King Alfred. (Crystal, ibid.)

As there is no concrete boundary between the periods, according to Crystal (1995), the Middle English period runs from the beginning of the 12th century (around 1150, when the synthetic character of Old English starts to change) until the middle of the 15th century. It is a difficult period to define and to discuss, largely because of the changes taking place between Old and Modern English.

Table 2.4. Some works in Miidle English (from Gelderen 2006)

The History of the Holy Rood Tree: West-Saxon, 12th century.
Ormulum: East Midlands, 12th century.
Katherine Group (e.g. *Katerine*, *Margarete*, *Juliene*, *Hali Meidhad* and *Sawles Warde*, but also *Ancrene Wisse* and some other texts): various manuscripts; e.g. Bodley 34: South West Midlands, early 13th century.
Layamon's *Brut*: Caligula and Otho manuscripts, now both considered to be from the second half of the 13th Century, (N) Worcestershire.
Cursor Mundi: various manuscripts; e.g. Cotton Ms: northern, 1300.
Gawain and the Green Knight, St. Erkenwald, Pearl, Cleanness, and *Patience*: assumed to be by the Gawain Poet, NW Midlands, mid 14th century.
Langland's *Piers Plowman*: West Midlands, late 14th century.
Morte d'Arthur: East Midlands, late 14th century.
Chaucer's the *Canterbury Tales*, *Boethius*, and *Astrolabe*: Southern, late 14th century.
Wycliff and followers: Midlands, late 14th century.
Chancery Documents: Southern, 14th and15th century.
The York Plays: Northern, 15th century.
The Paston Letters: Norfolk, 15th century.

Gelderen (2006) states that most Middle English texts are available as manuscripts (written on vellum because paper becomes available sometime in the 12th century) which give an

impression of considerable linguistic variety and rapid transition. Another factor that gives this period an unfocused character is the gradual decay of Anglo-Saxon tradition and literary practices, overlapping with the sudden emergence of French and Latin literacy. (Crystal 1995:30, Middle English)

Norman French was the main influence on English, introduced to Britain by the invaders. After William of Normandy came to power, French rapidly established itself as the main language, followed by the appointment of French-speaking barons, abbots and bishops. The rise of French did not bring just a new language, it brought new opportunities as well. A great number of French merchants and craftsmen crossed the Channel in order to take advantage of the commercial opportunities provided by the new regime. Bilingualism quickly flourished because of that. On one side, the English people learned French in order to gain advantages from the aristocracy, on the other, the people who were part of the aristocracy or baronial staff, learned English as part of the daily contact with local communities. English was hardly used among the new hierarchy – French dominated and this continued for over a century. (Crystal, ibid.)

In 1204 a different political climate emerged. King John of England was obliged to give up control of Normandy because he came into conflict with King Philip of France.The status of French diminished as a spirit of English nationalism grew. In 1362 English was used for the first time at the opening of Parliament and by 1425 English was widely used in England, in writing as well as in speech. (Crystal 1995:31, The rise of English)

Taking into consideration all the historical changes and problems that the English language went through, one question comes up: how did the language manage to survive the French invasion? After all, Celtic did not survive the Anglo-Saxon invasion 500 years before. Crystal (1995) says that the answer lies in the fact that the 11th-century English was too well established for it to be supplanted by another language. It had a considerable written literature and a strong oral tradition, what we can not say for Celtic.

The good relations between England and France lasted for 150 years, which was not enough to make great changes. Nonetheless, these 150 years can be called the ‘dark age’ in the history of the English language (Crystal 1995:31, Reasons for survival) because during that period there is hardly any written evidence of English. Judging by the documents which have survived, it seems that French was the language of government, law, administration, literature, and the Church with Latin also used in administration, education and worship. As Crystal (1995) states, in the 13th century we find an increasing number of sermons, prayers, romances, songs, and other documents written in English, which make the position of the English language

become clearer at this period. The major achievement of Middle English literature, can finally be found in the 14th century, culminating in the writing of Geoffrey Chaucer.

2.4.1. Middle English spelling

The extraordinary diversity of Middle English spelling was far greater than found in Old English. When introduced with an Middle English text, readers quickly learn the skill of glossary delving (Crystal 1995:40, Middle English spelling), because while reading they encounter a variant spelling in edited texts. They have to go to the back of the book to track down what variant of which word it is. Crystal (1995) claims that a good editor makes the job easier by providing cross-references, because some words have a dozen or more variants. This situation results from a combination of historical, linguistic, and social factors which influenced the language and the writing system. A marked contrast is visible between the diverse and idiosyncratic forms used at the beginning of the period and the highly regularized system of spelling which began to appear in the 15th century (in the works of Chancery scribes and William Caxton).

The *Peterborough Chronicle* (from the beginning of the period) shows some of the important features of Middle English spelling. Old English runic symbols are still in use but there are inconsistencies, for example the *–th* spelling appeares for *þ*/*ð* (Crystal 1995:40, Some textual features). Each Middle English text is unique. For instance, the letters *v* (*u* is used where we would now find the letter *v)* and *w* [*p* has been represented by *w* (*uu* is also a common spelling for this sound)] are introduced, but their use is different from text to text: *vppen* ‘up’ and *wiues* ‘wives’ in Layamon and *vertu* ‘virtue’ in Chaucer. Furthermore, the letter *g* is used for ȝ, there is some alternation between *æ* and *a*, the *double c* spelling (‘*cc*’) represents a *ch* sound, and *i* stood for the same sound as modern *y*. The *t* in words such as *Artur, Antony,* and *Katerine* changes to *th*, such as *Arthur* in *Gawain*, which remains to this day. This respelling is a result of the Renaissance realization that Latin has *th* in those words even though Middle English and French do not. (Crystal, ibid.; Gelderen, ibid.)

2.4.1.1. Norman influence

The spelling changed as the period progressed. The Norman scribes listened to the English spoken around them and began to spell the words according to the conventions they had previously used for French, for example they used *qu* for the sound *cw* (*queen* for *cwen*). Crystal

(1995) states that the Norman scribes brought in the *gh* instead of *h* in such words as *night* or *enough*, *ch* instead of *c* in words as *church*, and *ou* for *u* (house). They began to use *c* before *e* (instead of *s*) in words like *cercle* ('circle') and *cell*. The letter *u* was more complex because it was written in a very similar way to *v*, *n*, and *m*, so words containing a sequence of these letters were difficult to read. In such cases the scribes replaced the *u* with an *o* (come, love, one, son). The letters *k*, *j*, and *z* came to be increasingly used – *j* was a visually more distinct form of *i*. The letters *v* and *u* came to be used in complementary ways: *v* at the beginning of a word (*vnder*) and *u* in the middle of a word, whether consonant or vowel (*haue*). Other changes Gelderen (2006) paid attention to, are the introduction of *k* alongside *c* and the switch from *hw* in *hwat* to *wh* in *what*, as in Chaucer.

Crystal (1995) points out that the English spelling was a mixture of two systems by the beginning of the 15th century: Old English and French. Several consonant sounds came to be spelled differently, especially because of the 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 /ʤ/, 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 *sēe*) 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 were 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'. 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*. 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 *tease/teas* and *to/toe*. According to Gelderen (2006) books start to get printed at the end of the Middle English period.

2.4.2. Transition from Middle to Early Modern English

The transitional period between late Middle and Early Modern English is marked by texts in form of letters (family letters), mostly from the 1450s-1480s[1]. In this example, a letter from the Paston family (written in 1465), we can see variable spelling:

"Tho my wele be-louyd son John Paston be þis delyuered in haste.

Sonne, I grete 3ow wele and lete 3ow wete þat, for as myche as 3oure broþir Clement leteth me wete þat 3e desyre feythfully my blyssyng, þat blyssyng þat I prayed 3oure fadir to gyffe 3ow þe laste day þat euer he spakke, and þe blyssyng of all seyntes vndir heven, and myn, mote come to 3ow all dayes and tymes..." (for the whole letter see appendix)

The main difficulties we experience while reading this text are the variable spelling and the use of the letters þ "thorn" (which would now be spell "th") and 3 "yogh," which mostly in this passage would be the modern consonant "y." We have to remember that this text comes from before the introduction of printing to Britain, and with those spelling changes in mind, this is still very much English. Very little vocabulary is actually strange or unusual here, especially if we encountered a little Old or Middle English before.

2.5. Early Modern English (1500-1700)

What we today call Standard English is, so says Crystal (1995), a language variety, which is the result of a combination of influences, the most important of which do not emerge until the Middle English period. These are the origins of Standard English. The jump from Middle to Modern English would be too great without the Early Modern English period between it. The language continued to change in noticeable ways, and by the end of the 18th century very few linguistic differences remain.

There is no concrete year set as the beginning of the Early Modern English period, Crystal (1995) explains, some opt for 1400-1450 (the time period just after Chaucer and the beginning of the pronunciation shift), some opt for around 1500 (after the effects of the printing revolution). Many consider the development of printing to be the key factor, so they count this event, when

[1] http://www.uta.edu/english/tim/courses/4301w00/modhist.html

William Caxton set up his printing press in Westminster 1476, as the beginning of this period. The first book printed in the English language was Caxton's own translation, *"The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye"*, actually printed in Bruges in 1473 or early 1474[2]. The printing press had a significant role, from setting norms of spelling and punctuation to the availability of printing, which provided more opportunities for people to write, and gave their works much wider circulation. The result, as Crystal (1995) states, is that more texts of the period have survived, and within the following 150 years nearly 20000 books appeared.

2.5.1. The English Renaissance

The period, from the time of Caxton until around 1650, was called the 'Renaissance' in England, which was an intellectual and cultural development initially inspired by the desire to revive Greek and Latin culture, as indicated by its name, meaning 'rebirth'. The English Renaissance is often referred to as the "Elizabethan Era" or the "Age of Shakespeare" after the most important monarch and most famous writer of the period. The additions to English vocabulary during this period were deliberate borrowings, and not the result of any invasion or influx of new nationalities[3]. During the 16th century there was an enourmous number of publications in English, prompted by a renewed interest in the classical languages and literatures (mentioned earlier). (Crystal 1995)

Table 2.5. Early Modern English authors (from Gelderen 2006)

Elizabeth I (1533–1603)	Edmund Spenser (1552–1599)
Walter Ralegh (1552–1618)	Philip Sidney (1554–1586)
John Lyly (1554–1606)	Thomas Kyd (1558–1594)
Francis Bacon (1561–1626)	Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)
William Shakespeare (1564–1616)	Thomas Dekker (1570–1632)
Cyril Tourneur (1570/80–1626)	Ben Jonson (1572–1637)
John Donne (1572–1631)	John Fletcher (1579–1625)
John Webster (1580–1625)	Thomas Middleton (1580–1627)
Philip Massinger (1583–1639)	Francis Beaumont (1584–1616)
John Ford (1586–1640)	John Milton (1608–1674)

[2] http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_early_modern.html
[3] http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_early_modern.html

Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673)	John Bunyan (1628–1688)
John Dryden (1631–1700)	Samuel Pepys (1633–1703)
Aphra Behn (1640–1689)	

The Renaissance is a time of freedom of ideas; for language that means freedom in creating and borrowing words (from Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish). During the Renaissance, English continues to become more analytic. In the 16th century the story of English becomes more definite, more evidence is available about the way the language was developing (texts and observations dealing with areas such as grammar, vocabulary, writing system, and style). (Crystal 1995:57, Early Modern English)

The Bible and William Shakespeare are major factors in the standardization of Early Modern English. The King James Version was the standard Bible in English for almost 300 years, and remains a powerful influence on 21st-century English. William Shakespeare was just another popular playwright, one of many whose works were revived after the reopening of English theatres in 1660; but the 18th and 19th centuries made him the supreme English literary writer, and his influence on popular culture and education continues strong in the 21st century[4].

2.5.2. Early Modern English spelling

The spelling of Early Modern English shows more variation than Modern English. Even a generation after Caxton, the English writing system is in an inconsistent state. There was still a considerable lack of uniformity in spelling and punctuation, which can be seen between printed and handwritten texts, between practices of different printers, but also within the work of an individual printer or author, for example William Caxton. (Crystal 1995:66, The emerging orthographic system)

The Chancery of Westminster made some efforts from the 1430s onwards to set standard spellings for official documents, specifying *I* instead of *ich* and various other common variants of the first person pronoun that were used, *land* instead of *lond*, and modern spellings of *such*, *right*, *not*, *but*, *these*, *any*, *many*, *can*, *cannot*, *shall*, *should*, *could*, *ought*, *thorough*, etc, all of which previously appeared in many variants. Chancery Standard contributed significantly to the development of a Standard English, and the political, commercial and cultural dominance of the

[4] http://www.uta.edu/english/tim/courses/4301w00/modhist.html

"East Midlands triangle" (London-Oxford-Cambridge) was well established long before the 15th century, but it was the printing press that was really responsible for carrying through the standardization process[5]. With the progress of mass printing, the spelling of the East Midlands and the capital city, London, became the standard one and spelling and grammar gradually became more and more fixed over time.

Even a century after Caxton, spelling variation is still clearly visible. This situation, as Crystal (1995) observes, was a great motivation for teacher and scholar Richard Mulcaster to find out how words are correctly written. The writing system of that time was chaotic, and the printers were blamed for it because many of them were foreigners, who introduced their native conventions, and they did not know much about the orthographic traditions in English. Proof-reading was not always carried out by educated people (Crystal 1995:66, The emerging orthographic system), so errors remained. Arbitrary spellings were often introduced, for example when printers changed the spelling (such as adding or deleting a final *–e*) in order to make the print look neat and clean. The English writing system was a mess in the early 17th century and there was no recognized standard spelling. As Crystal (1995) states, Mulcaster did much for the growth of regularization at the end of the 16th century. In his work *Elementarie* (1582), he provided a table listing recommended spellings for nearly 9000 words. He influenced a generation of orthoepists and grammarians with his views and works. The problems presented by the writing system were the main concearn authors of this period focused on, so they tried to find proper solutions, which brought them closer to standardization with every progress they made.

The special fondness for classical languages also influenced the spelling of words. For example *debt* and *doubt* had a silent "b" added, because writers wanted to defend the Latin roots of these words (*debitum* and *dubitare*). For the same reason, *island* gained its silent "s", *scissors* its "c", *anchor, school* and *herb* their "h", *people* its "o" and *victuals* gained both a "c" and a "u". In the same way, Middle English *perfet* and *verdit* became *perfect* and *verdict* (the added "c" at least being pronounced in these cases), *faute* and *assaut* became *fault* and *assault*, and *aventure* became *adventure*. However, this attempt to bring logic and reason into the existing chaos of the language has actually had the effect of just adding to the chaos[6].

Crystal (1995) also observed, that the spelling of vowels changed because there was an increased use of double-vowels (*soon*) or the *silent –e* (*name*) to mark length. A doubled consonant within a word became a sign of a preceding short vowel (*sitting*).

[5] http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_early_modern.html
[6] http://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_early_modern.html

The use of *u* and *v*, which was one of the most noticeable variations in English, came to be standardized in the 1630s. At first they were used interchangeably, and then they started to be distinguished according to their position. Later these two symbols adopted fixed phonetic values, with *v* representing a consonant and *u* a vowel. A similar standardization affected *j* and *i*. (Crystal, ibid.)

By the middle of the century, printing conventions had become highly regularized, and the English writing system became a modern system. In Early Modern English, according to Gelderen (2006), capital letters are used more frequently than in Middle English, where they only occur at the beginning of the line, if they can be found in the text at all. Shakespeare was the one who capitalized nouns and sometimes adjectives in his works. In many Early Modern English texts punctuation is still stylistic rather than grammatical, which means that it is used more as a 'beauty' feature.

The basis of the modern punctuation system emerged during the Renaissance. Crystal (1995) quoted Marta Zapala Kraj (2010) in his book, who said that Caxton was heir to a graphic tradition which was limited, unclear, and inconsistent. The symbols were used rhetorically, showing readers where to breathe, how long to pause, and how to introduce emphasis and rhythmical balance into their speech.

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* (:) (Crystal 1995:68, Renaissance punctuation). There is no correspondence with modern uses of the punctuation marks. In Caxton's works, the virgule variously had the function of a modern comma, period, or semi-colon, which 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. The colon had a broad range of rhetorical functions, and was not restricted to introducing a list or summary, as it is now. (Crystal, ibid.)

Other marks emerged in printing as well, for example the semi-colon, then quotation marks, the apostrophe (which extended its range of usage), and there was also a much heavier use of the comma than is typical today. By the end of the Early Modern English period, the modern punctuation system was in most respects established. (Crystal, ibid.)

2.5.3. English spelling reform

The language clearly needed improvement, and the first concern was spelling. So a large number of the early works on the English language dealt with "correct writing". During the 16th

and 17th century numerous proposals are made: Hart, *The Opening of the Unreasonable Writing of Our Inglish Toung* (1551); *An Orthographie* (1569); *A Methode or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned* (1570); Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementarie* (1582)[7]. John Hart and Richard Mulcaster can be considered as the best representatives of the English Renaissance spelling debate.

2.5.3.1. John Hart

John Hart, phonetician, diplomat and spelling reformer, is best known for proposing a reformed spelling system for English, which has been described as the first truly phonological scheme of the 16th century[8]. His system was purely phonetic which is more than we can say of any other system introduced in that period. He was aware of the spelling reform movement in France (Louis Meigret of Lyon[9]) at that time, on which content and principles he later based his own reform. He expressed the idea that writing should imitate speech. It was generally argued that Traditional Orthography had the merit of indicating the origin of words. In his works, he criticises the contemporary spelling practices of his day as chaotic and illogical, and argues for a radically reformed orthography on purely phonological principles. His goal was to introduce a spelling system with a one-to-one relationship between sounds and symbols. Hart remarks that there is no natural law nor human agreement that may "oblige" languages to keep special marks for loanwords, although this is considered as a kind of duty by his contemporaries[10]. He says that we derive from the Saxons, but we do not write like them. He was against showing difference and with a Reformed Orthography homophones would no longer be distinguished. Hart was against showing time, so he advocates the abolition of mute *–e* to indicate length, whereas Traditional Orthography used consonant doubling and final mute *–e* to indicate it. In 1569 Hart devises a diacritic mark to show time, but later, he allowed the use of double consonants to indicate shortness of a preceding vowel. In his work *The Methode* (1570) Hart makes up a new method for teaching orthography through the use of pictures for letters[11].

[7] Susana Doval Suarez, *The English Spelling Reform in the Light of the Works of Richard Mulcaster and John Hart* sederi.org/docs/yearbooks/07/7_13_doval.pdf
[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hart_%28spelling_reformer%29
[9] A major vernacular translator of ancient and more modern authors in sixteenth-century France, also sought to bring greater order to the French language so that the arts could be more uniformly established in French. He hoped to re-establish French grammar and orthography on systematic rational principles. The author of the *Tretté de la Grammaire française*, which was published in 1550 (this was the first grammatical description of French).
[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hart_%28spelling_reformer%29
[11] Susana Doval Suarez, *The English Spelling Reform in the Light of the Works of Richard Mulcaster and John Hart* sederi.org/docs/yearbooks/07/7_13_doval.pdf

One interesting fact, that Crystal (1995) provides for Hart, is that he 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 this practice had extended to titles (like Sir, Lady), forms of address (Father), and personified nouns (Nature). By the beginning of the 18th century, the influence of Continental books had caused this practice of capitalization to be extended still further, and it did not take long before some writers took the liberty and began using a capital for any noun that they felt to be important. However, the later 18th-century grammarians were not very amused by this new trend that emerged, i.e. lack of order and discipline in the written language. Their rules brought a dramatic reduction in the types of noun permitted to take a capital letter.

Hart's arguments are still valid today, which proves the validity of his proposal. His concern for literacy and his social criticism show a concern for the less favoured that makes his proposal even more "modern" in the light of the present period. He did not hurry with his reform, he saw it more as a gradual process. The key to his failure was not a technical or economic problem, it was the problem of acceptance. Furthermore, Hart, unlike Mulcaster, did not receive any official support and, under such poor conditions, his reform did not really catch on.

2.5.3.2. Richard Mulcaster

The basis for the spelling of English today is the model that Richard Mulcaster, the first headmaster of the Merchant Taylor's School, and High Master of St. Pauls (between 1608 and 1611)[12], set in his book commonly referred to as *The Elementarie* (1582). He was a very unusual teacher, and in many ways revolutionary. He introduced music, physical education and drama into the classroom, believing these disciplines to be as important as reading and writing. His pupils even performed masques for the Queen and her court. Mulcaster also believed in the right for girls to receive an education. Although Mulcaster's lessons were known for being disciplined and orderly, he was notorious for snoozing at his desk during lessons, while his boys obediently wrote out their lines[13].

His interest in Spelling Reform arises from his being a pedagogue and this justifies his position against phonetic Spelling Reform, since, as he was a schoolmaster, had to teach the established spelling. He was strongly opposed to any new alphabets, preferring to stay with

[12] Susana Doval Suarez, *The English Spelling Reform in the Light of the Works of Richard Mulcaster and John Hart* sederi.org/docs/yearbooks/07/7_13_doval.pdf

[13] http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/dic/mul/elementarie.html

Traditional Orthography, but used in a more principled way. Richard Mulcaster's *Elementarie* was first published in 1582. It was written as a pedagogical guide, and was an attempt to make English language and culture more respected and accessible. It is his most enduring work and ends with a list of 8000 "hard words" called "The Generall Table". Mulcaster does not define any of them, but attempts to lay down a standard spelling for them at a time when English lacked universal standardized spellings. Besides making movements toward spelling rules for English (such as the role of the *silent -e* in vowel length in such pairs as *bad* and *bade*), the list represents a call for English to have its first dictionary[14]. Over the following decades, the first dictionaries of English appeared.

Furthermore, in his *Elementarie* (1582) Mulcaster explains why he defends the case against Spelling Reform, but he is not completely against past reformers. He recognizes the good intentions they had, but he thinks they failed because their proposals went against common practice and use. Even though Mulcaster opposed the works of previous reformers, he was for stabilization. He designed a system which should improve the teaching of reading. It was ruled by these precepts: *General rule*, *Proportion*, *Composition*, *Derivation*, *Distinction*, *Enfranchisment*, and *Prerrogative*. Some recommendations he made, such as the use of silent –e and consonant doubling, were successful and some others were not. In any case, Mulcaster played an important role in the standardization of spelling, even though his spelling might have been "modern" in his own time[15].

Mulcaster placed himself in a middle position – he was against the reformers, but he also admited that help is needed in some places. As a language planner, he saw clearly that language resists private innovation, that change cannot be forced. His reform was based on tradition and supported by Elizabeth I, which must have been the reason for his success.

2.6. Modern English (1700-now)

After 1700, there are fewer major language internal changes than in the previous periods - English lost the most noticeable remaining features of structural difference, which distance the Early Modern English period from us, and became more recognizable for speakers of Modern English. The spelling is relatively stable and changes such as the GVS are nearing completion in many varieties. By the end of the century the spelling, punctuation, and grammar are very close

[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Mulcaster

[15] Susana Doval Suarez, *The English Spelling Reform in the Light of the Works of Richard Mulcaster and John Hart* sederi.org/docs/yearbooks/07/7_13_doval.pdf

to what they are today. The closer we get to Modern English, the better we can investigate the details of language use, such as differences due to the gender, age, region, and socio-economic status of the speakers (Gelderen 2006:203, Modern English). For example, in the works of Jane Austen we can find unfamiliar vocabulary in some places, idioms are occasionally unusual or old-fashioned, and the style of writing elegant or quaint but we do not need to consult a special dictionary in order to understand what is written, as O'Dell and Broadhead (2008) observed.

Table 2.6. Some Modern English writers in Britain and the US (from Gelderen 2006)

(late) 17th and 18th century	
Isaac Newton (1643–1727)	Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)	David Hume (1711–1776)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)	Jane Austen (1775–1817)
19th century	
Charles Dickens (1812–1870)	Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855)
George Eliot (1819–1880)	Emily Dickenson (1830–1886)
Lewis Carroll (1832–1898)	Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Early Modern English and Late Modern English vary essentially in vocabulary. Late Modern English has many more words, arising from the Industrial Revolution and the technology that created a need for new words as well as international development of the language. British English and American English, the two major varieties of the language, are spoken by 400 million people. Received Pronunciation (or RP) of British English is considered the traditional standard, while General American English is more influential because of the media and movie industry. The total number of English speakers worldwide may exceed one billion[16].

2.6.1. Modern English spelling

By the mid-seventeenth century printers followed general principles of spelling much like the present ones. Notably the modern distinctions between *i* and *j* and *u* and *v* were established by about 1630[17]. The spelling of nearly all individual words was also identical with present-day forms in printed books. In ordinary handwritten documents, however, even those of well-

[16] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_English_language

[17] http://public.oed.com/aspects-of-english/english-in-time/early-modern-english-pronunciation-and-spelling/

educated people, spelling continued to vary noticeably until well into the eighteenth century. Despite this continuity, the language at the end of the 18th century is by not identical to the language we use today. Many words though are spelled the same as today, but they had a different meaning back then.

According to Gelderen (2006), there are still variant spellings even in formal writing: *honor* and *honour, vnitie* and *unity, iournal* and *journal*, and *magic* and *magick.* Attempts to regularize or reform the language, including spelling reform, have usually met with failure. The only significant exceptions were the reforms of Noah Webster which resulted in many of the differences between British and American spelling, such as *center/centre*, and *dialog/dialogue*[18]. Currently, spelling is relatively standardized but there are exceptions. If we look at e-mails and other ways of modern comunication, we can clearly see that people are using a modified spelling, far away from the standard.

Gelderen (2006) says that Modern English has 13 or 14 different vowels: *bit, beet, bait, bet, bat, but, bye, boy, boat, boot, bout, bath*, and *bore* all contain different vowel sounds. However, English has no tone and no nasalized or lengthened vowels. English has at least 25 consonants. The most unusual English consonant is perhaps the one spelled as *th,* which represents two different sounds. Many other languages, and many varieties of English, do not have this sound. When speakers of such languages first learn a variety of English where *th* does occur, they often pronounce *th* as *d* in *that,* as *t* in *thing*, as *f* in *mouth,* or as *v* in *mother*. Substituting *d, t, f,* or *v* for *th* does not happen randomly.

Correct spelling becomes a concern in the Early Modern English period and remains so to the present. Johnson adjusts the orthography because it "had been unsettled and fortuitous" (from 1755 Preface). He explains that "these spots of barbarity" cannot be washed away. According to him, part of the problem is that the loan words have different origins. Webster's speller (1783) sold 100 million copies (Algeo 2001:34). As mentioned earlier, some of his initial choices were later modified: *favour* and *honour* lose their *u*. Throughout Webster's (1828) dictionary, *music* and *logic* are written without a final *–k* (which is transferred into British English as well); *behavior, honor,* and *color* are spelled with *-or*, not *-our*; *center* and *theater* with *-er*, not *-re*; and *defense* and *offense* with a final *-se*, not *-ce*. Thomas Dyche and Daniel Fenning produced spelling guides in 1723 and 1756, respectively. Societies for the improvement of English, such as the Society for Pure English (1919–48) also came into being in this period. (Gelderen 2006:226, Attitudes towards Linguistic Differences)

[18] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_orthography

2.6.2. American influences: The comic-spelling genre

Crystal (1995) observed that by the 1860s the American spelling system had become so established that writers dared to play about with it. The comic-spelling genre was extremely popular in the later decades of the century. Its homespun wits and down-to-earth sentiments expressed in a style which seemed to reflect the sounds and rhythms of local speech. The formula for success was a simple combination of informal non-standard forms with a subject-matter normally associated with formal Standard English. He mentions two leading proponents of the comic-spelling genre - Artemus Ward and Josh Billings.

2.6.2.1. Artemus Ward

Artemus Ward, pseudonym of Charles Farrar Browne, one of the most popular 19th-century American humorists. An interesting fact about Browne is that at birth, his surname was "Brown" and he added the "e" after he became famous[19]. His lecture techniques exercised much influence on humorists such as Mark Twain, who held lectures in which he talked about and praised Artemus Ward:

> My lecture is about Artemus Ward. It is my purpose to show that Artemus Ward was America's greatest humorist, and I will give you a skeleton outline -- I have not time for more -- of his life. Artemus Ward's real name, as most of you are probably aware, was Charles F. Brown. He was born in Waterford, Me., in 1834. His personal appearance was not like that of most Maine men. He looked like a glove-stretcher. His hair, red and brushed well forward at the sides, reminded one of a divided flame. His nose rambled on aggressively before him, with all the strength and determination of a cow-catcher, while his red moustache -- to follow out the simile -- seemed not unlike the unfortunate cow. He was of Puritan descent, and prided himself not a little on being derived from that stern old stock of people, who had left their country and home for the sake of having freedom on a foreign shore, to enjoy their own religion, and, at the same time, to prevent other folks from enjoying theirs. [20]

[19] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Farrar_Browne
[20] *The Brooklyn Daily Union.* Mark Twain on Artemus Ward. http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/roughingit/lecture/7172rev08.html

Artemus Ward was the favorite author of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. Before presenting "The Emancipation Proclamation" to his Cabinet, he read to them the latest episode of Ward's work, "Outrage in Utiky", also known as *High-Handed Outrage at Utica*[21].

2.6.2.2. Josh Billings

Josh Billings was the pen name of 19th century American humorist Henry Wheeler Shaw. He was perhaps the second most famous humor writer and lecturer in the United States in the second half of the 19th century after Mark Twain, although his reputation has not endured so well with later generations. Under the pseudonym "Josh Billings" he wrote in an informal voice full of the slang of the day, with often eccentric phonetic spelling, dispensing wit and folksy common-sense wisdom. His books include *Farmers' Allminax, Josh Billings' Sayings*, *Everybody's Friend*, *Choice Bits of American Wit* and *Josh Billings' Trump Kards*. He toured, giving lectures of his writings, which were very popular with the audiences of the day.[22] His saying, "In the whole history of the world there is but one thing that money can not buy... to wit the wag of a dog's tail" appears at the beginning of the Disney film *Lady and the Tramp*.[23]

In 1859 he wrote out "An Essay on the Mule" but could not find any editor to publish it. A year later, though – perhaps influenced by the recent success of the younger Charles Farrar Browne - he recast the essay with comic misspellings and awkward grammar. The resulting "Essa on the Muel" (Crystal 1995:84, Josh Billings) was a great success and the beginning of a long career as a humorist and lecturer for Shaw.

3. Spelling changes throught the periods: A comparison

As English is a language that went through a lot of changes during its history of existence, the following part of this paper will focus on the spelling changes through the periods of the language: Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English, and Modern English. Since the beginnig, the English language longed for standardization, so a few of the significant spelling books/guides will be presented and compared, as well as some of the most significant written works of each period. As already mentioned, the main focus is on the spelling and its changes

[21] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Farrar_Browne
[22] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josh_Billings
[23] http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Josh_Billings

through history in search for standardization. In the previous part, a few of the major changes were presented and now examples will be provided.

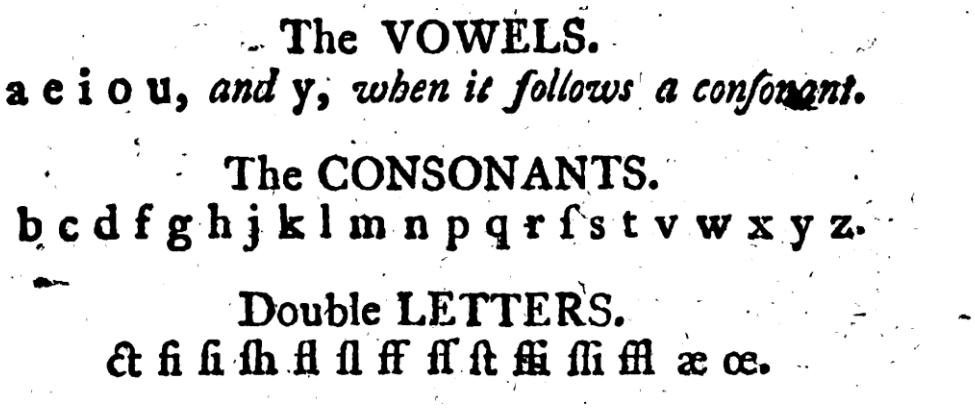
3.1. Spelling books

3.1.1. Thomas Dyche : *A Guide to the English Tongue* (1723)

This book is divided in two parts. Part one is proper for beginners and describes the early method how to learn to pronounce and express both common words and proper names, in which particular care is given to the accent to prevent vitious pronunciation. Part two is for the advanced learners and contains observations on the sounds of letters and diphthongs; rules for the true division of syllables, and the use of capitals, stops, and marks. It also contains large tables of abbreviations and distinctions of words; and several alphabets of copies of young writers.

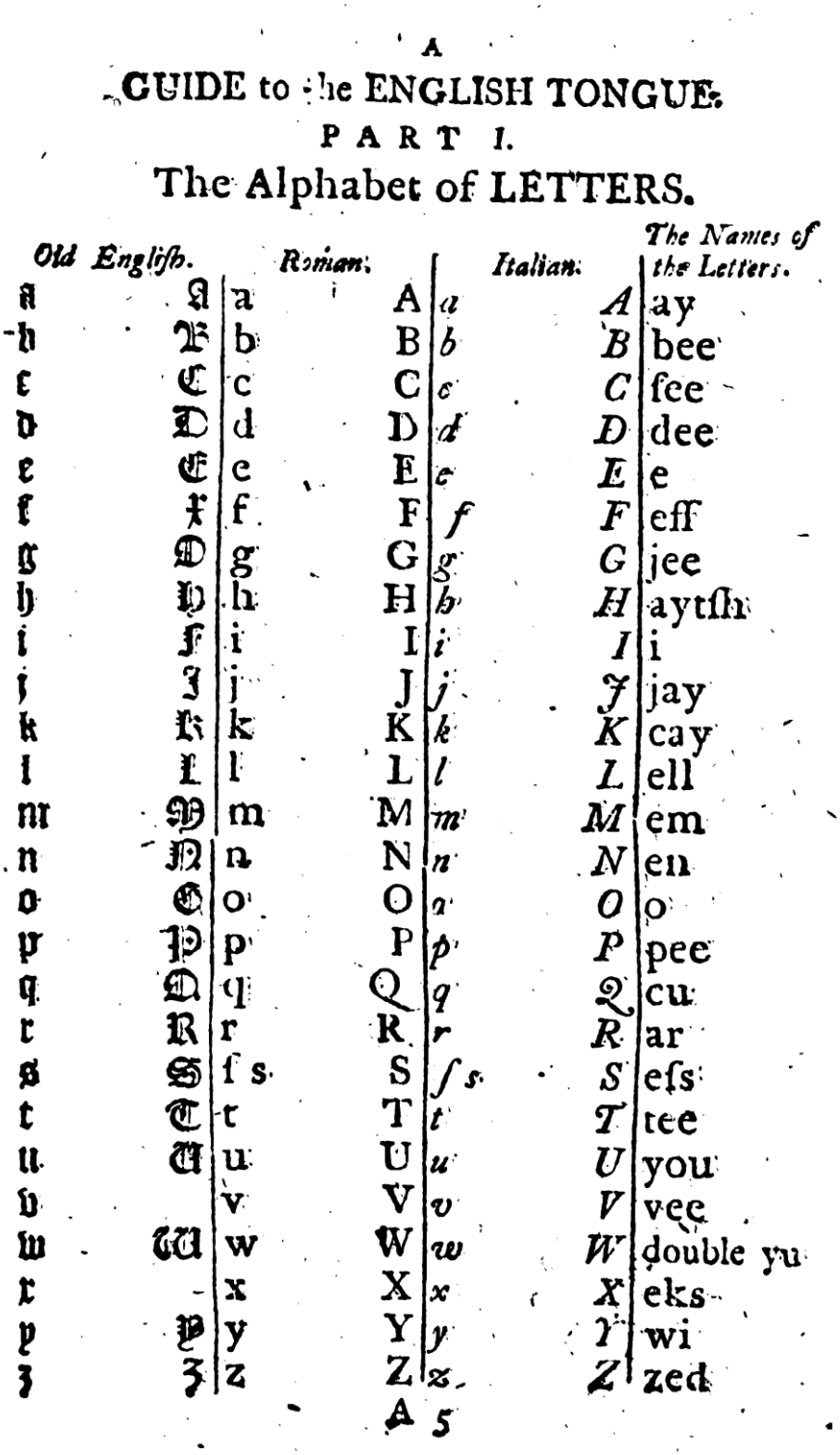
In the preface, written by Dyche, we can clearly see that the Old English elongated form of *s* (ſ) is still used, together with its modern form (s). He also provides the alphabet of the letters (see Figure 3.2.) at the beginning of the guide, giving the Old English, Roman, and Italian letters, but also the names of the letters, so readers know how each letter is correctly pronounced. Interesting is that Dyche uses double vowels to mark length – this is visible in the names of the letters that he provides (eg. B b – bee ([bi:] today in the phonetic transcription). The alphabet contains 26 letters, which are almost the same as the ones used today. The elongated ſ and some of the double letters differ from the modern alphabet. Dyche also mentions the distinction of the letters, dividing them into two groups: vowels and consonants, plus 14 double letters (see Figure 3.1.).

Figure 3.1. The classification of the letters (from Dyche 1723)


The VOWELS.
a e i o u, *and* y, *when it follows a consonant.*
The CONSONANTS.
b c d f g h j k l m n p q r ſ s t v w x y z.
Double LETTERS.
ct fi fl fh ff fl ff ſt ffi ffi ffl æ œ.

The tables that Dyche provides in the book, are in fact not all tables in the literal sense, but rows of words divided by periods. The first word at the beginning of the page and the first word after the period are capitalized.

Figure 3.2. Dyche's alphabet (from Dyche 1723)



A
GUIDE to the ENGLISH TONGUE.
PART I.
The Alphabet of LETTERS.

Old English.	Roman.		Italian.	The Names of the Letters.
𝔞 𝔄	a	A *a*	*A*	ay
𝔟 𝔅	b	B *b*	*B*	bee
𝔠 ℭ	c	C *c*	*C*	fee
𝔡 𝔇	d	D *d*	*D*	dee
𝔢 𝔈	e	E *e*	*E*	e
𝔣 𝔉	f	F *f*	*F*	eff
𝔤 𝔊	g	G *g*	*G*	jee
𝔥 ℌ	h	H *h*	*H*	aytſh
𝔦 𝔍	i	I *i*	*I*	i
𝔧 𝔍	j	J *j*	*J*	jay
𝔨 𝔎	k	K *k*	*K*	cay
𝔩 𝔏	l	L *l*	*L*	ell
𝔪 𝔐	m	M *m*	*M*	em
𝔫 𝔑	n	N *n*	*N*	en
𝔬 𝔒	o	O *o*	*O*	o
𝔭 𝔓	p	P *p*	*P*	pee
𝔮 𝔔	q	Q *q*	*Q*	cu
𝔯 ℜ	r	R *r*	*R*	ar
𝔰 𝔖	ſ s	S *ſ s*	*S*	eſs
𝔱 𝔗	t	T *t*	*T*	tee
𝔲 𝔘	u	U *u*	*U*	you
𝔳	v	V *v*	*V*	vee
𝔴 𝔚	w	W *w*	*W*	double yu
𝔵	x	X *x*	*X*	eks
𝔶 𝔜	y	Y *y*	*Y*	wi
𝔷 ℨ	z	Z *z*	*Z*	zed

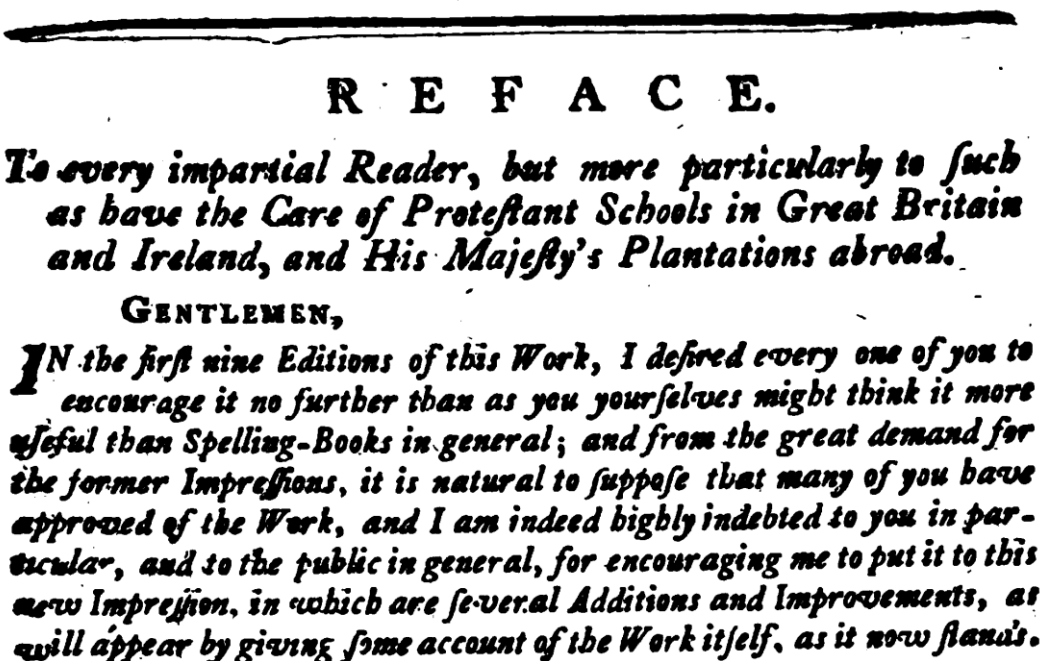
A 5

3.1.2. Daniel Fenning: *The Universal Spelling-Book or, A New and Easy Guide to the English Language* (1756)

The book consists of five parts. Part I introduces tables of words in one, two, three, and four syllables; with natural and easy lessons in each. The book is adapted to the capacity of children; comprehending a variety of passages both on moral and divine subjects, also fables and pleasant stories, in order to improve the mind and the understanding. Part II is a very easy and rational guide to English grammar, for schools or private use. Part III is a collection of near 5000 of the most useful words of two, three, and four syllables. Part IV contains many useful things necessary to help young beginners, and inform the more grown up youth. It also contains a variety of alphabetical copies and pieces of writing, both in prose and verse. Part V, the last part, consists of chronological tables of the succession of the kings of England, and many of the most memorable occurences in history.

In the preface, written by Daniel Fenning, it is visible that he still uses variant spelling. The letter *s* is sometimes written as the elongated ſ (as in Old English), but also in the modern form (s). Even in the same word we can find both forms, for example "yourſelves" or "Uſe of Numbers".

Figure 3.3. The elongated ſ forms in the *Preface* of the book (from Fenning 1756)



R E F A C E.

To every impartial Reader, but more particularly to ſuch as have the Care of Proteſtant Schools in Great Britain and Ireland, and His Majeſty's Plantations abroad.

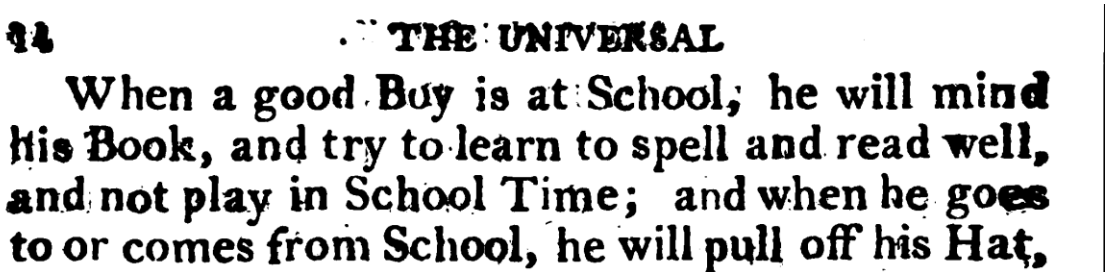
GENTLEMEN,

IN the firſt nine Editions of this Work, I deſired every one of you to encourage it no further than as you yourſelves might think it more uſeful than Spelling-Books in general; and from the great demand for the former Impreſſions, it is natural to ſuppoſe that many of you have approved of the Work, and I am indeed highly indebted to you in particular, and to the public in general, for encouraging me to put it to this new Impreſſion, in which are ſeveral Additions and Improvements, as will appear by giving ſome account of the Work itſelf, as it now ſtands.

We can also notice that Fenning capitalizes all the nouns in the sentences, but when he lists them in the tables, only the first noun (word) is capitalized, the others are not, although they

are nouns as well. John Hart recommended this rule of capitalization to his readers (see 2.5.3.1.), and some writers used this rule for every noun, like Fenning did.

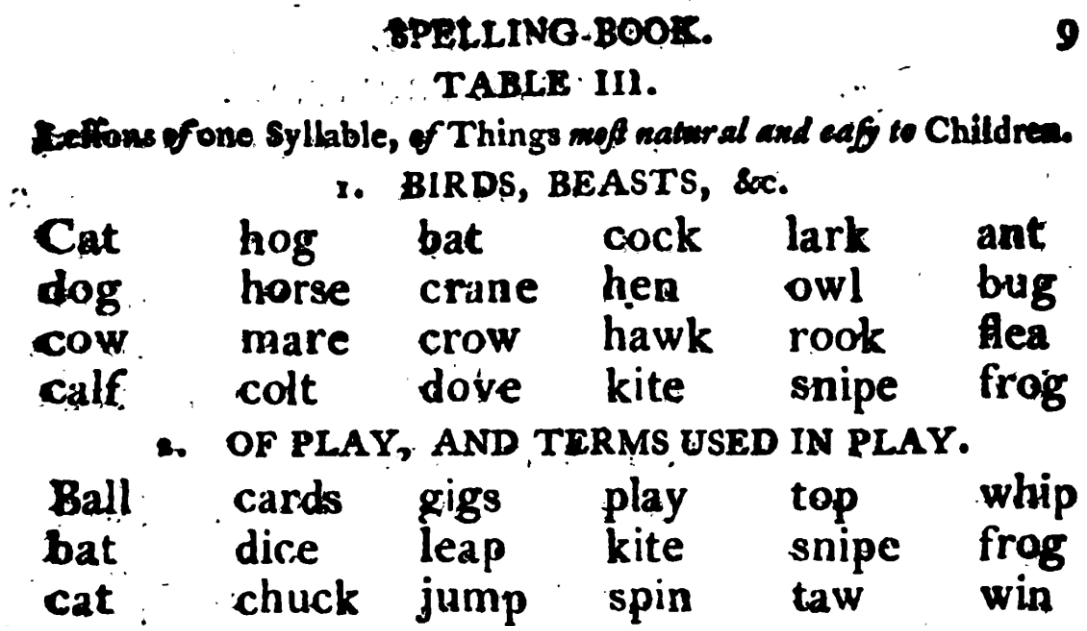
Figure 3.4. The capitalization of nouns in sentences (from Fenning 1756)



14 THE UNIVERSAL

When a good Boy is at School; he will mind his Book, and try to learn to spell and read well, and not play in School Time; and when he goes to or comes from School, he will pull off his Hat,

Figure 3.5. The capitalization in the tables (from Fenning 1756)



SPELLING-BOOK. 9

TABLE III.

Lessons of one Syllable, of Things *most natural and easy to* Children.

1. BIRDS, BEASTS, &c.

Cat	hog	bat	cock	lark	ant
dog	horse	crane	hen	owl	bug
cow	mare	crow	hawk	rook	flea
calf	colt	dove	kite	snipe	frog

2. OF PLAY, AND TERMS USED IN PLAY.

Ball	cards	gigs	play	top	whip
bat	dice	leap	kite	snipe	frog
cat	chuck	jump	spin	taw	win

When he leaves out the classification of the words, and only lists them in the table, as in *Table IV*, he marks the beginning of the words with a different first letter by capitalizing the first letter.

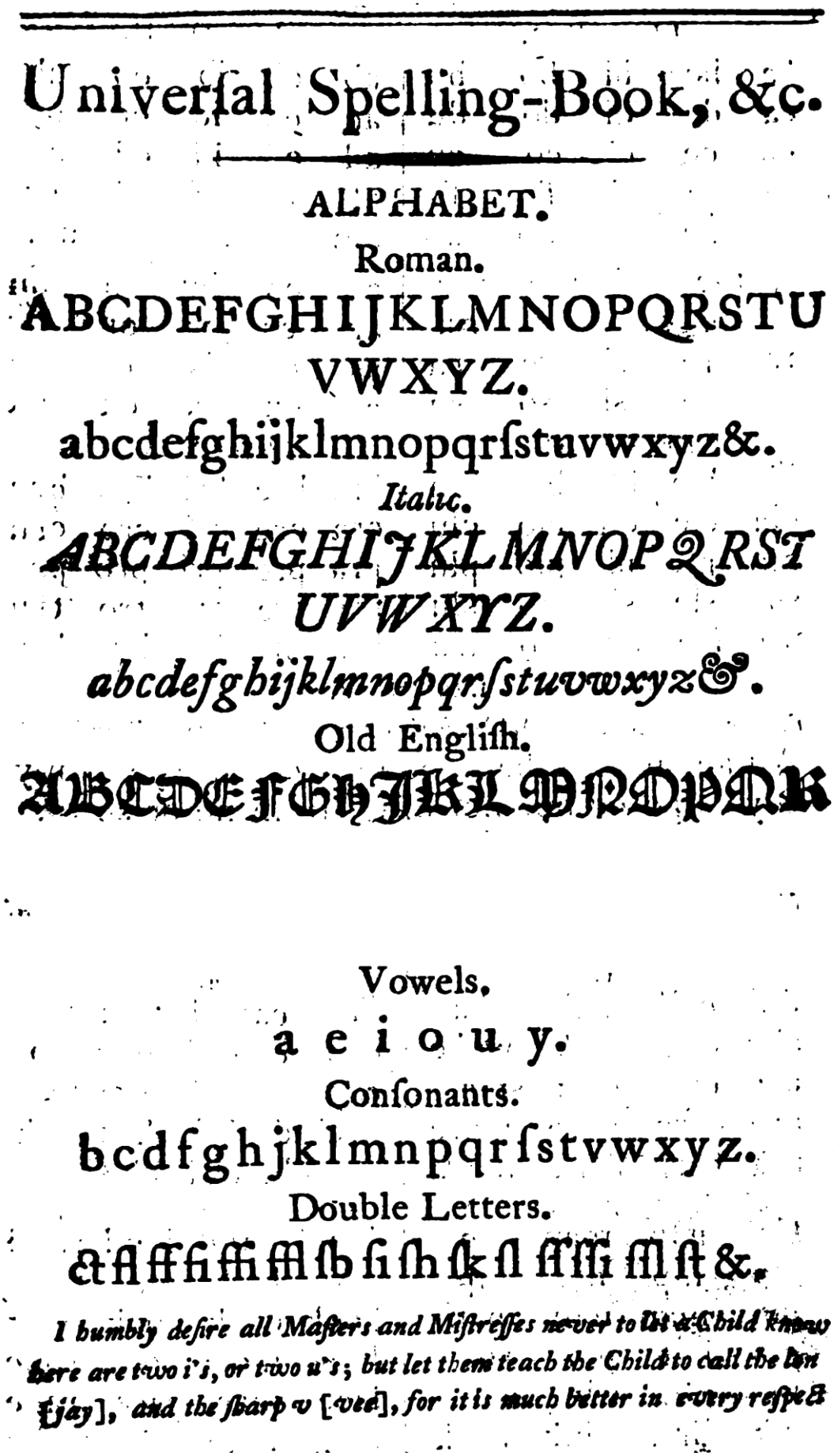
Figure 3.6. An example from *Table IV* (from Fenning 1756)

El-bow	fun-nel	han-ger	ju-ry
em-bers	fur-long	hang-ings	Ken-nel
em-blem	Gal-lon	hap-py	ker-nel
en-ter	gal-lop	har-lot	kin-dred
e-vil	game-ster	har-per	king-dom
Fac-tor	gam-mon	harts-horn	kins-man
fag-got	gan-der	har-vest	kit-chen
fan-cy	gar-den	has-ty	Lad-der
fare-well	gar-land	hat-chet	la-dy
far-mer	gar-ment	help-ful	land-lord

One entry in the tables stands out, it is the name of God – Jehovah. It is the only word in all tables that is written completely capitalized (JE-HO-VAH → he divided the syllables with a hyphen).

The other tables in the book are also significant. For example, in *Table XX,* Fenning introduces the punctuation signs (period, comma, colon, questionmark, etc.) through a dialog between a master and a scholar, explaining the role of every sign. In *Table XXI,* he presents the other marks used (semi-colon, apostrophe, etc.). *Table XXII* is about the English alphabet, again explained through the dialog of the master and the scholar. According to Fenning, the English alphabet has 26 letters, which are called by two names: vowels and consonants. He provides the alphabet at the beginnig of the book, like Thomas Dyche did (see Figure 3.7.). Furthermore, he explains what an alphabet is and states that there are 6 vowels and 21 consonants. The letter *y* is a vowel in all words, except such as those beginning with a *y*, then it is a consonant. This rule differs a little bit from the one that Dyche gave in his spelling guide. Dyche stated that the letter *y* is a vowel when it follows a consonant, in all other situations it is a consonant. Fenning also states that the English alphabet is vulgarly called *the Criss-Cross-Row*.

Figure 3.7. Fenning's alphabet (from Fenning 1756)



Universal Spelling-Book, &c.

ALPHABET.

Roman.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTU
VWXYZ.

abcdefghijklmnopqrſtuvwxyz&.

Italic.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRST
UVWXYZ.

abcdefghijklmnopqrſtuvwxyz&.

Old Engliſh.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQR

Vowels.

a e i o u y.

Conſonants.

b c d f g h j k l m n p q r ſ t v w x y z.

Double Letters.

ct ff fi ffi fl ſb ſi ſh ſk ſl ſſ ſſi ſl ſt &.

I humbly deſire all Maſters and Miſtreſſes never to let a Child know there are two i's, or two u's; but let them teach the Child to call the long [jay], *and the ſharp v* [vee], *for it is much better in every reſpect*

3.1.3. Noah Webster: *The American Spelling Book; Containing the Rudiments of the English Language, for the Use of Schools in the United States* (1836)

Noah Webster, also called “the man of words“, was the compiler of a dictionary which has become the standard for American English. He also compiled *The American Spelling Book*, which was the basic textbook for young readers in early 19th-century America. Webster's book, with its polysyllabic words broken into individual syllables and its precepts and fables, became the favorite spelling guide. It was revised several times by Webster, as the "blue-back speller" and it taught generations of Americans how to read and how to spell correctly. Today, the *Spelling Book* is useless as a children's textbook, but it provides us an example of what Webster thought to be important to tell young learners about morality and the principles of American government.

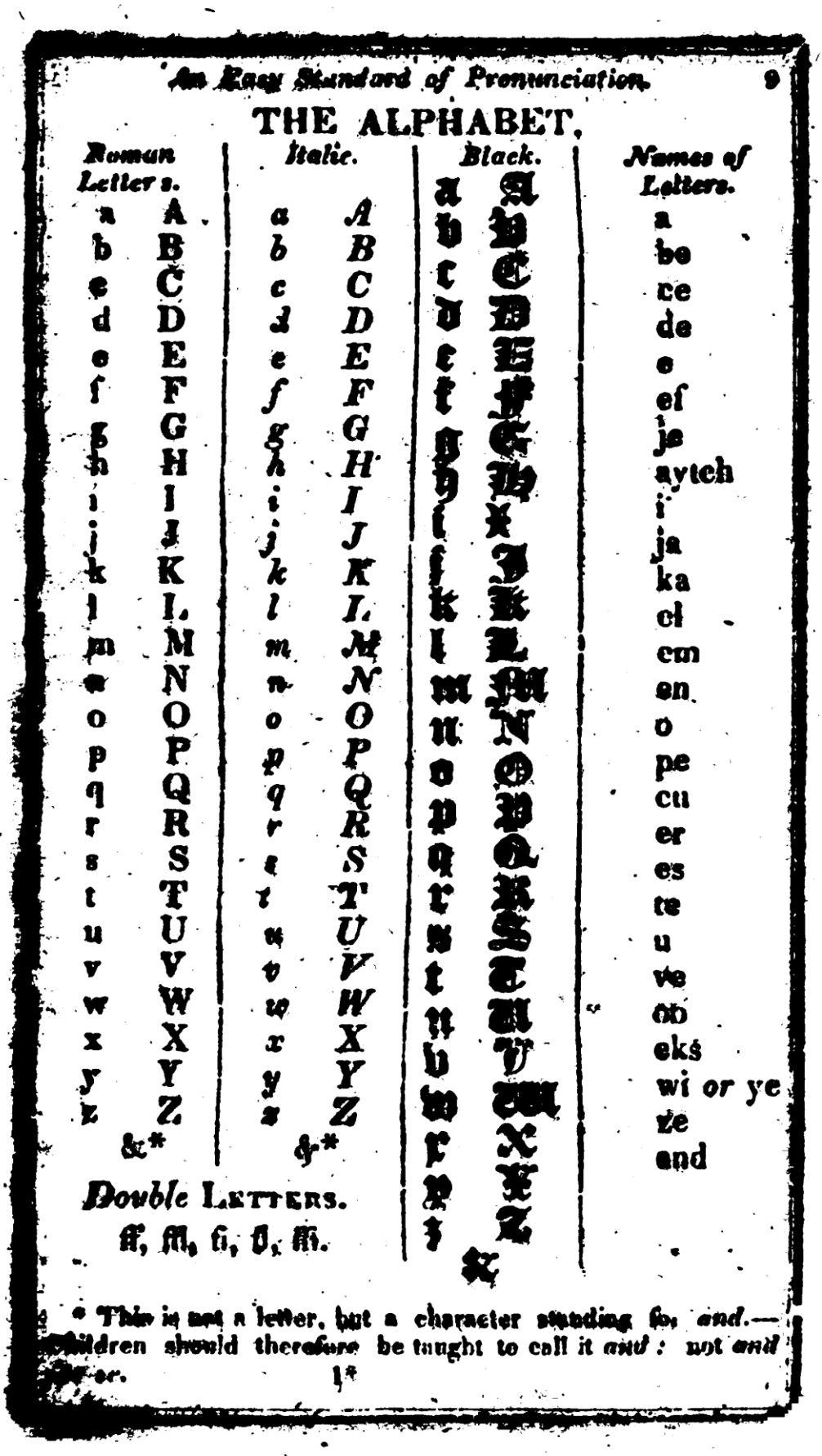
One of Webster's most important and lasting contributions to American English was to change the spelling of certain groups of words from their British spelling for the better. He used the principle of uniformity to justify his alterations, arguing that words that were alike, such as nouns and their derivatives, should be spelled alike.[24] He therefore transformed words such as *honour* to *honor*, *musick* to *music*, *defence* to *defense* and *centre* to *center*. Webster also respelled many anomalous British spellings, writing *gaol* as *jail*, and *plough* as *plow*. His ability to introduce his major classes of spelling reform into his spellers and dictionaries was crucial to their success, as they became imprinted on the minds of each new generation.

The elongated ſ is no longer in use, the modern letter *s* became the standard form. The alphabet still contains 26 letters, as in the former two spelling guides. Webster as well provides the alphabet in his book, but some features differ from the previous two. He gave the names of the letters in his table, but he did not use the double vowels to mark length, Dyche and Fenning, on the other hand, used it. His alphabet has less double letters and he does not capitalize the nouns as Fening did.

His speller reflected his principle that spelling, grammar, and usage should be based upon the living, spoken language rather than on artificial rules.

[24] http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2544/Webster-Noah-1758-1843.html

Figure 3.8. Webster's alphabet (from Webster 1836)



An Easy Standard of Pronunciation. 9

THE ALPHABET.

Roman Letters.		Italic.		Black.		Names of Letters.
a	A	*a*	*A*	𝔞	𝔄	a
b	B	*b*	*B*	𝔟	𝔅	be
c	C	*c*	*C*	𝔠	ℭ	ce
d	D	*d*	*D*	𝔡	𝔇	de
e	E	*e*	*E*	𝔢	𝔈	e
f	F	*f*	*F*	𝔣	𝔉	ef
g	G	*g*	*G*	𝔤	𝔊	je
h	H	*h*	*H*	𝔥	ℌ	aytch
i	I	*i*	*I*	𝔦	ℑ	i
j	J	*j*	*J*	𝔧	𝔍	ja
k	K	*k*	*K*	𝔨	𝔎	ka
l	L	*l*	*L*	𝔩	𝔏	el
m	M	*m*	*M*	𝔪	𝔐	em
n	N	*n*	*N*	𝔫	𝔑	en
o	O	*o*	*O*	𝔬	𝔒	o
p	P	*p*	*P*	𝔭	𝔓	pe
q	Q	*q*	*Q*	𝔮	𝔔	cu
r	R	*r*	*R*	𝔯	ℜ	er
s	S	*s*	*S*	𝔰	𝔖	es
t	T	*t*	*T*	𝔱	𝔗	te
u	U	*u*	*U*	𝔲	𝔘	u
v	V	*v*	*V*	𝔳	𝔙	ve
w	W	*w*	*W*	𝔴	𝔚	ob
x	X	*x*	*X*	𝔵	𝔛	eks
y	Y	*y*	*Y*	𝔶	𝔜	wi *or* ye
z	Z	*z*	*Z*	𝔷	ℨ	ze
&*		&*		&		and

Double Letters.

ff, fi, fl, ffi, ffl.

* This is not a letter, but a character standing for *and*.—Children should therefore be taught to call it *and*: not *and per se*.

1*

3.2. Famous works

3.2.1. Beowulf

It is an Old English heroic epic poem consisting of 3182 alliterative long lines, set in Scandinavia, commonly cited as one of the most important works of Anglo-Saxon literature.The story of Beowulf and his hard-fought victory over the monster Grendel has captured the imagination of millions of readers and listeners. (Kevin S. Kiernan 1996)

The heroic Anglo-Saxon story survives as one eleventh-century manuscript that was badly burned in 1731, and in two eighteenth-century transcriptions of the manuscripts.

In the poem, Beowulf, a hero of the Geats in Scandinavia, comes to the help of Hroðgar, the king of the Danes, whose mead hall (in Heorot) has been under attack by a monster known as Grendel. After Beowulf slays him, Grendel's mother attacks the hall and is then also defeated. Victorious, Beowulf goes home to Geatland in Sweden and later becomes king of the Geats. After a period of fifty years has passed, Beowulf defeats a dragon, but is fatally wounded in the battle. After his death, his attendants bury him in a tumulus, a burial mound, in Geatland[25].

Figure 3.9. A part from *Beowulf* (original Old English and Middle English translation)

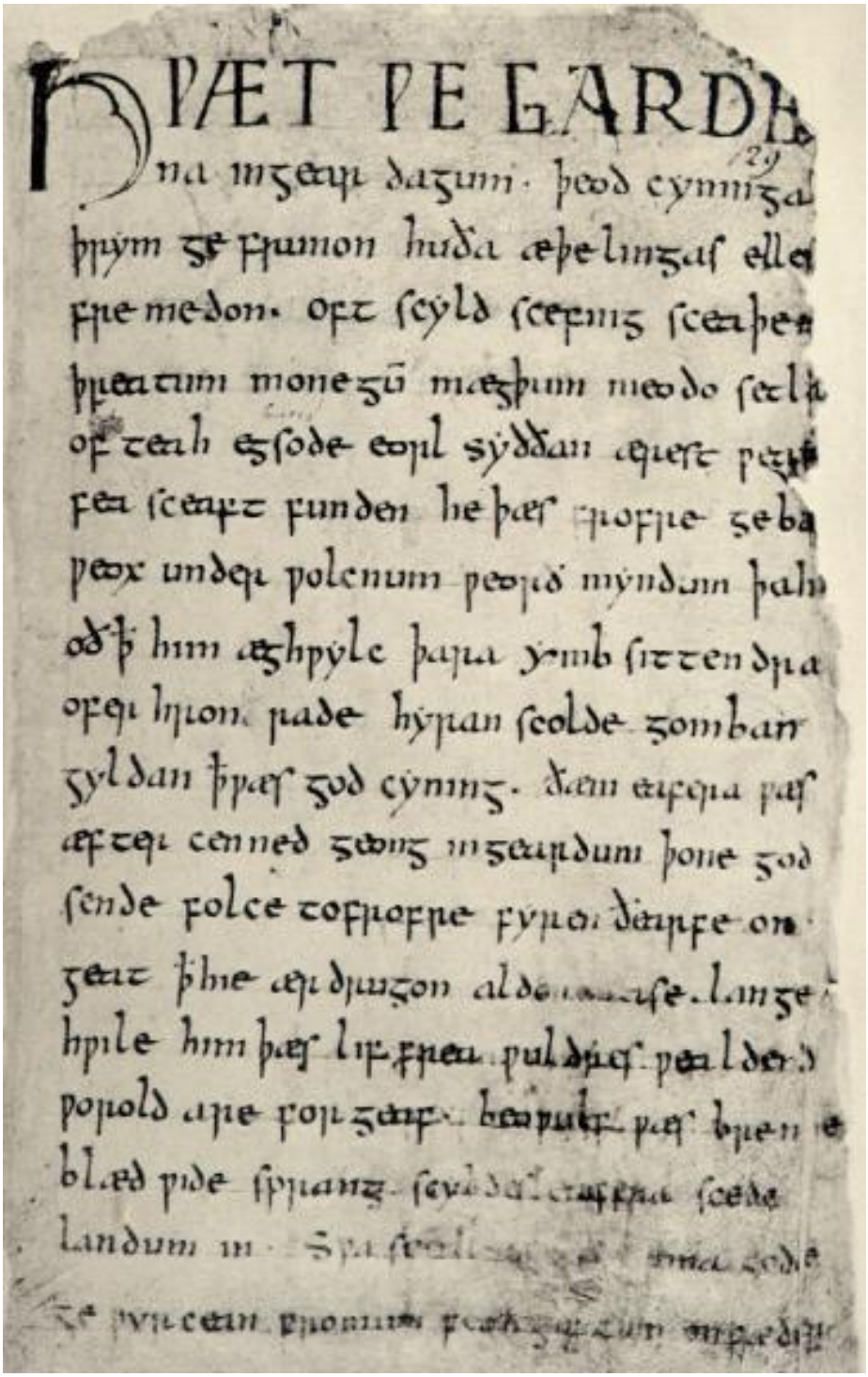
Hpæt! Pe Gaɒena in geaɒagum,	Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
þeoɒcyninga, þrym gefrunon,	þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.	hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,	Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,	monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð	egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
feasceaft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,	feasceaft funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,	weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra	oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,	ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
gomban gyldan.	gomban gyldan.

Some changes visible when comparing the original and a ME translation:

a) OE hpæt > ME hwæt p > w
b) OE ȝeaɾdaȝum > ME geardagum ȝ > g
c) OE æþelınȝaſ > ME æþelingas æ > æ þ > þ ſ > s
d) OE Sẏððan > ME Syððan ẏ > y ð > ð

[25] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf

Figure 3.10. The first page of *Beowulf*



In the first example, we can see that the OE *ƿ* ('wynn') is replaced by *w*, later in the ModE period the *h* is put after *w*, and *hwæt* becomes *what*. In example b), the OE *ȝ* ('yogh') is replaced by the modern letter *g*. The OE letters *æ* ('ash') and *þ* ('thorn') do not change in the translation, but the elongated *ſ* is replaced by the modern form (*s*), in example c). The *ẏ* loses the dot above in ME, the *ð* ('eth') stays unchanged (example d).

Considering the 'poor' punctuation used, reading 3,000 lines of *Beowulf* without any modern punctuation, only with an occasional bit of "pointing" as decoration, is very hard for a modern eye.

3.2.2. *The Peterborough Chronicle*

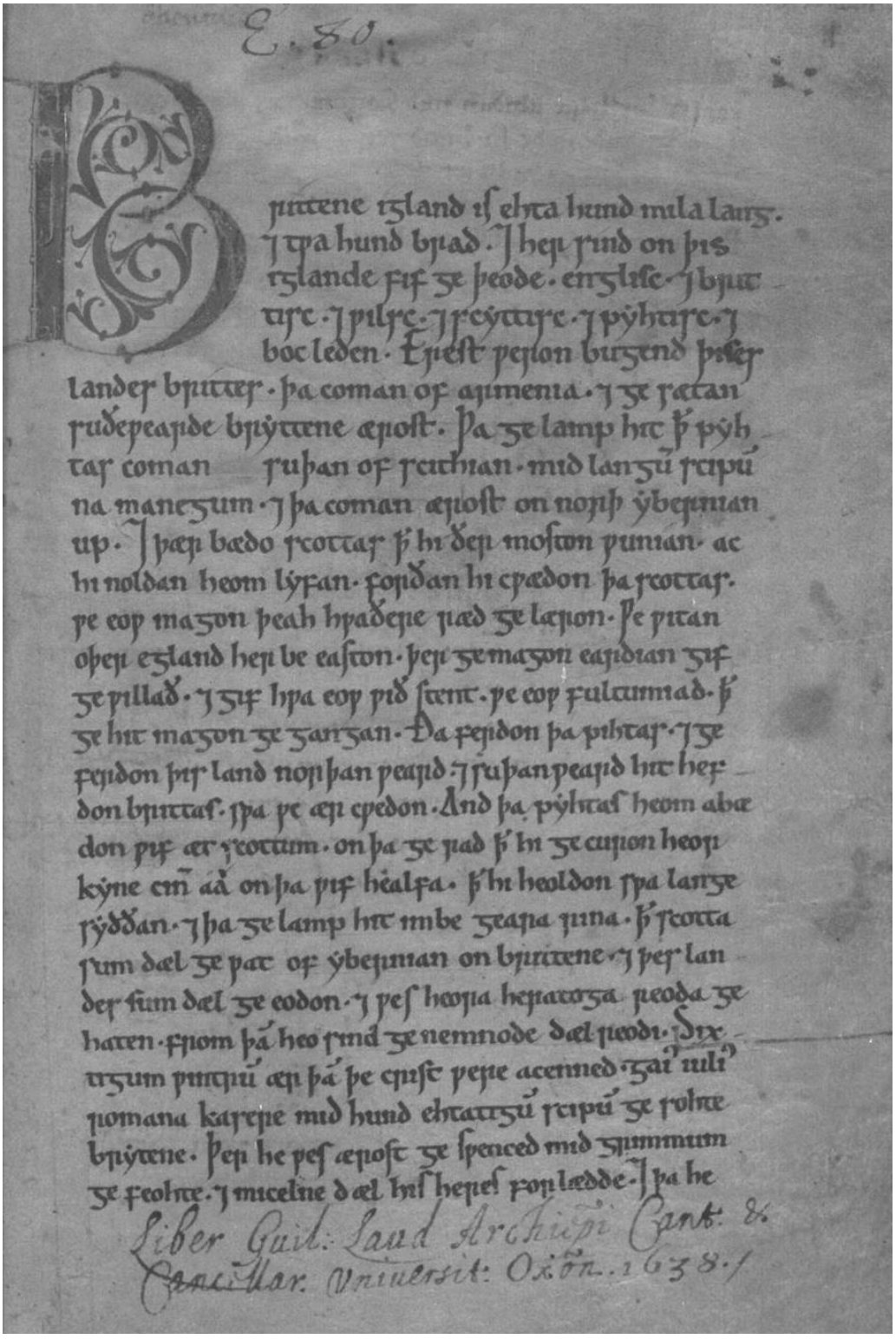
The *Peterborough Chronicle* is the most recent and the longest sustained of the seven extant manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Each manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the original account of the history of Britain from 60 B.C.E. until the reign of King Alfred the Great in 891. What scholars refer to as “Manuscript E” of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (catalogued in Oxford’s Bodleian Library as MS. Laud 636) is also called the *Peterborough Chronicle*, after the monastery in which the text was copied and maintained up until 1154, when its last entry records the death of King Stephen. In addition to its historical interest, the *Peterborough Chronicle* is a valuable text for linguists. Since it covers the period from before the Norman Conquest (1066) to almost 100 years later, the *Chronicle* is a written record of the transition of English from the OE period into the early ME.

Some examples of differences we can find comparing the original Old English text and a Middle English translation:

a) OE ɪʒland > ME igland ʒ > g
b) OE ɪſ > ME is ſ > s
c) OE tƿa > ME twa ƿ > w
d) OE þɪs > ME þis þ > þ
e) OE sentence: .enʒlɪſc. 7 bɽɪttɪſc. 7 ƿɪlſc. > ME sentence: .Englisc. 7 Brittisc. 7 Wilsc.
f) OE boc > ME booc o > oo
g) OE ʒeſatan > ME gesætan a/æ
h) OE Bɽɪttene, bɽyttene > ME Brittene, Bryttene i/y
i) OE ſuðepeaɽde > ME suðewearde ð > ð

In example a), we can see that the OE *ʒ* ('yogh') is replaced by the modern letter *g*. In example b), the OE elongated *ſ* is replaced by the modern letter *s*, although the modern form is also used in OE along with the elongated form. This tendency of using both forms, we can also find in the Early Modern English period (Dyche's spelling guide, see 3.1.1.). The OE letter *ƿ* ('wynn') is in ME spelling replaced by *w*, in example c). In the next example d), we can see that the OE letter *þ* ('thorn') is unchanged in ME.

Figure 3.11. The opening page of the *Manuscript E* (Oxford, Bodlean Library, MS Laud, 636)



The example sentence in e), does not only show how OE 'yogh' changes into *g* in ME, but also that the period (.) is used as a punctuation mark in OE, but not in the sense like it is used today. The period was just used to divide the sentences in some places, it had no specific

function as it has today. The prevalent punctuation mark used in ME and in the *Chronicles* is the *punctus*, which is used to indicate both major and minor sense divisions. What is also interesting, there is no capitalization in OE and after the period the scribes continued to write uncapitalized, but in the ME translation all words are capitalized after the period. We can also see that the modern *s* replaces the OE elongated *ſ*, but together with the *c*, it is pronounced /ʃ/ (OE ſc > ME sc > ModE sh). The ampersand (7) would today be 'and', and in this example sentences it is standing in the place where we today would find a comma (,). The long vowel ō (written with a macron[26]) was in later ME written as a double vowel (oo), and this doubling of vowels marked a following long vowel, visible in example *f*. The following two examples (*g* and *h*), show the alternation between *a* and *æ* (*æ* was used to show the ME equivalent of the modern letter a or e, and this letterform was used throughout Old and Middle English), and the interchangeability between *i* and *y* (also found in Chaucer's works). The word Brittene is in ME capitalized in both cases, the position in the sentence does not matter. The OE ð ('eth') stays unchanged in ME, but later in the ModE period it will replaced by *th*.

3.2.3. The Ormulum

The Ormulum is an early Middle English poetic text of some 20,000 short, unrhymed lines, produced in the North East Midlands late in the 12th century. Its author, who was apparently also the scribe of the poem's surviving manuscript, identifies himself as *Orm* (an Old Norse name meaning "Serpent"), and says that he is an Augustinian canon. He addresses his manuscript to his brother and fellow Augustinian Walter, who seems to have been in an administrative position in the abbey in which Orm lived and worked. At Walter's request, Orm says in his dedication, he is producing an English translation of the entire year's gospel texts as listed in the Mass book, with each text accompanied by an interpretive homily in English verse. Orm lists 242 texts and homilies in his table of contents. The extant manuscript, however, contains only 32 entries. Possibly, a part of the manuscript has been lost, but most scholars believe that the prodigious task Orm set for himself was never finished. At any rate, Orm must have worked on this major project for many years, perhaps decades, and the manuscript shows signs of both large-scale revisions and smaller corrections. Readers generally agree that *The Ormulum* is a very tedious work. But whatever its shortcomings as a literary text, *The Ormulum* is of great interest to linguists, especially because of the spelling system adopted by Orm, who consistently doubles

[26] The macron (the line above the letter) was used in the OE period to mark a long vowel. It can not be found in the original *Manuscript E*, but in the later phase of the period. In the ME period the macron was abandoned and the doubling of vowels came into use as a length marker.

consonants after short vowels. The idiosyncratic spelling system which is used throughout the whole text, is applied with remarkable consistency and it is one of the striking features of the *Ormulum*. There are, however, some of the new features, which will be compared with the older spelling rules, in the excerpt taken from the *Ormulum* (whole excerpt in the appendix).

original text	**in normalised Early Middle English**
N**u** wile icc here **sh**æwenn *3*uw;	N**ū** wille ic hēr **sc**æwen *3*ow
O**ff** ure laffdi*3* mar*3*e.	O**f** ūre lafdi*3* Mar*3*e.
Off - hu ***3h***o barr þe laferrd crist;	Of hū **h*3***o bar þe lāferd Crīst
Att hire ri**hh**te time.	At hire ri**h**te tīme.
Swa þatt *3*ho þohh þæraffterr wass;	Swā þat h*3*o þoh þǽrafter was
A***33*** ma***33***denn þw**eo**rrt űt clene!	A***3*** ma***3***den ***þwe****r**t* ūt clǽne.

Its chief characteristic is the doubling of a consonant after a short vowel in a closed syllable, as in *Off , rihhte, hiss*. Richard Mulcaster was for consonant doubling during the spelling reform in the Early Modern english period, so we can say that Orm set some "trends" without even knowing. In modified versions short vowels are not indicated by doubling the following consonant; instead, long vowels are indicated by a macron (see the modern eME text above). The motivation behind a very great number of changes in the manuscript was clearly a wish to eliminate variant forms, because he stated that he dislikes the way in which people are mispronouncing English. Therefore, he decided that he will spell words exactly as they are pronounced, and described a system whereby vowel length and value are indicated unambiguously. In addition to this, he used two distinct letter forms for *g*, using the old *yogh* for [d͡ʒ] and [j], and the new *g* for [g]. One may also note that Orm had been consistently progressive in his choice of variant forms during the editing stage (i.e. switching to forms which have more in common with Modern English than with Old English). Having originally used *eo* and *e* inconsistently for words such as "*eorþe*" and "*weorelld*", which had been spelled with *eo* in Old English, at some place during his work, he changed his mind and went back to change all "eo" spellings, replacing them solely with "e" alone ("*erþe*" and "*werelld*"), to reflect the pronunciation. Furthermore, Orm uses *ch* and *sh* as we do now ("*riche*"**,** "*shæwenn*"). The OE verbal prefix *ġe-* is retained, so OE *ġehāten* > Orm *3ehatenn*, while OE final *c* /k/, remains as *c* ("*illc*").

The h-dropping in the early Middle English period was most common in texts from the East Midlands. The *Ormulum* has always stood out as an exception: Orm apparently had complete control over his h's, despite the fact that he came from the heart of the h-dropping

area. His dialect (southern Lincolnshire at the middle of the twelfth century) was obviously characterised by h-dropping: among the originally written forms we find *imm* (for *himm* < OE *him*) or *iss* (for *hiss* 'his' < OE *his*)[27].

In the end, this elaborate and cumbrous system found no imitators, but it is one of the most important aids for ascertaining the English pronunciation of the time.

3.2.4. The Canterbury Tales

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century. Chaucer's generation of English-speakers was among the last to pronounce *e* at the end of words (for example, the word "care" was pronounced [ˈkaːrə], not /ˈkɛər/ as in modern English). This meant that later copyists of Chaucer's works tended to be inconsistent in their copying of final *-e* and this for many years gave scholars the impression that Chaucer himself was inconsistent in using it. However, it has now been established that *-e* was an important part of Chaucer's morphology. The pronunciation of Chaucer's writing otherwise differs most prominently from Modern English in that his language had not undergone the Great Vowel Shift. In addition, sounds now written in English but not pronounced were still pronounced by Chaucer: the word *knight* for Chaucer was [kniçt], not [naɪt]. Chaucer is credited with bringing back a lot of legitimacy to written English.

The famous opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote, / The drought of March hath perced to the roote[28]" is not too difficult to comprehend. "Shoures soote" may sound unfamiliar until you realize that "shoures" and "showers" sound remarkably similar. "Soote", on the other hand, is not a word that we encounter anymore, nor does it sound much like its modern decendent "sweet." This means that Chaucer's language does not really seem too strange to the modern eye, but still, a good glossary is needed to understand the whole.

Below are some examples of language change from the *General Prologue*:

OE *ē* > *ee*

OE *ī* > *y*

OE *ō* > *oo*

[27] http://www2.english.su.se/nlj/ormproj/Jestin97.htm
[28] from the *General Prologue*, see appendix

OE *sċ* > *sh*
OE *þ* > *th*

The macron was abandoned and a double vowel was again the marker for long vowels ("*sweete*", "*roote*"). The great majority of the words Chaucer uses are the same in meaning and function as their Modern English counterparts. They usually differ greatly in spelling. But this initial difficulty soon disappears as one reads through the text -- especially if one reads the text aloud. It is soon apparent that "y" and "i" are interchangeable ("*veyne*"). Chaucer used the modern *sh*, like Orm in his work ("*shoures*"), and the OE thorn was replaced by *th* ("*hath*"). As already mentioned before, the most important difference between Chaucer's language and our own is due to the fact that in the change from Middle to Modern English the language lost the inflectional or "final e". In Chaucer's language, the inflectional endings (*-e*, *-ed*, *-en*, *-es*) were pronounced in almost all cases. In Modern English the final *-e* has become the "silent e". If we recall Hart's basic proposition that we "write as we speak" and that each sound should be represented by one letter, and one letter only, we can say that Chaucer followed this rule before Hart even proposed it. Furthermore, Hart was for the abolition of the *mute –e*, Mulcaster on the other hand was for keeping it to show length – the only difference between them and Chaucer was that Chaucer pronounced the *final –e*, which became the *silent –e* in the Early Middle English period and was not pronounced (note that Chaucer belongs to the Middle English period, whereas Hart and Mulcaster were Early Modern English language reformers).

Indeed, in some ways Chaucer's vocabulary may be easier for a modern reader than it would have been for many unsophisticated Middle English readers.
In the *Prologue* we can see how some of our modern words looked, as they evolved from Old English into Middle English. Some examples:

shoures became showers

droghte became drought

veyne became vein

sonne became sun

nyght became night

This is because one of the most important characteristics of his language and syle is his practice of "borrowing" from mainly French and Latin. He and his contemporaries introduced ("borrowed") words into the English language, moving them practically unchanged from Latin or French into English (Aprill, veyne, licour, etc.).

4. Conclusion

The history of the English language began with the first settlers on the British Isles, the Celts. Then the Romans and after them the Anglo-Saxons changed the native language spoken on this territory. These were the roots of the language which is today called Anglo-Saxon or Old English. The regular spelling system that Old English had, was swept away by the Norman Conquest (1066), and English itself was replaced in some spheres by Norman French for three centuries (during which only a few monks continued to write in English), eventually emerging with its spelling much influenced by French. English also borrowed large numbers of words from French, which naturally kept their original spellings as there was no reason to change them.

When England began to re-establish its own identity around 1350, the English writing had to be rediscovered too. The spelling of Middle English is very irregular and inconsistent, so it happens that the same word is spelled in different ways, sometimes even in the same sentence. Early Modern English writers, like Geoffrey Chaucer, tried to give English a consistent spelling system, but their efforts were much undermined. Educated people had only written French or Latin before. They continued to use many of the French spellings they had become used to, so English was still far from a standardized spelling.

The arrival of the printing press in England (1476) froze the current system, rather than providing a stimulus for a realignment of spelling with pronunciation. When books began to be printed in England, the newly invented spelling system brought many spelling errors because nearly all the early London printers were foreign and used the spelling norms they were used to. Also the imported Latin and Greek words kept their original spellings, which made the spelling more difficult. The English language always longed for standardization, a norm that every speaker of English would and should use, so ideas and new rules that characterized the emerging spelling reform, were nothing new. Richard Mulcaster and John Hart were two of the names that influenced this reform period the most. By the time dictionaries were introduced, Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755, the spelling system of English had started to stabilise.

By the 19th century, most words had set spellings, though it took some time before they spread throughout the English-speaking world. Following the path of Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster did the same in America, publishing his dictionary in 1828. The modern English spelling system spread together with the expansion of public education later in the 19th century. There were also people, like Josh Billings and Artemus Ward, who dared to play

with the language and made errors on purpose. We can say that this was maybe a kind of rebellion against all the new conventions introduced to alter the language and current spelling, to bring it closer to the wished standard form, but it could also have been writing out of pure amusement. Be as it may, since it was established, the English language never stopped changing. Consequently, Modern English came to use a purely Latin alphabet of 26 letters and became the language we know and speak today.

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APPENDIX

Paston Family Letter

"Tho my wele be-louyd son John Paston be þis delyuered in haste.

Sonne, I grete 3ow wele and lete 3ow wete þat, for as myche as 3oure broþir Clement leteth me wete þat 3e desyre feythfully my blyssyng, þat blyssyng þat I prayed 3oure fadir to gyffe 3ow þe laste day þat euer he spakke, and þe blyssyng of all seyntes vndir heven, and myn, mote come to 3ow all dayes and tymes. And thynke veryly non oþer but þat 3e haue it, and shal haue it wyth þat þat I fynde 3ow kynde and wyllyng to þe wele of 3oure fadres soule and to þe welfare of 3oure breþeren. Be my counseyle, dyspose 3oure-selfe as myche as 3e may to haue lesse to do in þe worlde, 3oure fadyr sayde, 'In lityl bysynes lyeth myche reste.' þis worlde is but a þorugh-fare and ful of woo, and whan we departe þer-fro, ri3th nou3ght bere wyth vs but oure good dedys and ylle. And þer knoweth no man how soon God woll clepe hym, and þer-for it is good for euery creature to be redy. Qhom God vysyteth, him he louyth. And as for 3oure breþeren, þei wylle I knowe certeynly laboren all þat in hem lyeth for 3ow. Oure Lorde haue 3ow in his blyssed kepyng, body and soule. Writen at Norwyche þe xxix day of Octobyr. "

Beowulf

Old English	PDE translation	
Hwæt! Wé Gárdena in géardagum	Listen! We --of the Spear-Danes in the days of yore,	**PRELUDE OF THE FOUNDER OF THE DANISH HOUSE** LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped, we have heard, and what honor the athelings won! Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes, from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore, awing the earls. Since erst he lay friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him: for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve, till before him the folk, both far and near, who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate, gave him gifts: a good king he! To him an heir was afterward born, a son in his halls, whom heaven sent to favor the folk, feeling their woe that erst they had lacked an earl for leader so long a while; the Lord endowed him, the Wielder of Wonder, with world's renown. Famed was this Beowulf:[1] far flew the boast of him, son of Scyld, in the
þéodcyninga þrym gefrúnon·	of those clan-kings-- heard of their glory.	
hú ðá æþelingas ellen fremedon.	how those nobles performed courageous deeds.	
Oft Scyld Scéfing sceaþena þréatum	Often Scyld, Scef's son, from enemy hosts	
monegum maégþum meodosetla oftéah·	from many peoples seized mead-benches;	
egsode Eorle syððan aérest wearð	and terrorised the fearsome Heruli after first he was	
féasceaft funden hé þæs frófre gebád·	found helpless and destitute, he then knew recompense for that:-	
wéox under wolcnum· weorðmyndum þáh	he waxed under the clouds, throve in honours,	
oð þæt him aéghwylc þára ymbsittendra	until to him each of the bordering tribes	
ofer hronráde hýran scolde,	beyond the whale-road had to submit,	
gomban gyldan· þæt wæs gód cyning.	and yield tribute:- that was a good king!	

		Scandian lands. So becomes it a youth to quit him well with his father's friends, by fee and gift, that to aid him, aged, in after days, come warriors willing, should war draw nigh, liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds shall an earl have honor in every clan.
Đaém eafera wæs æfter cenned	To him a heir was born then	
geong in geardum þone god sende	young in the yards, God sent him	
folce tó frófre· fyrenðearfe ongeat·	to comfort the people; He had seen the dire distress	
þæt híe aér drugon aldorléase	that they suffered before, leader-less	
lange hwíle· him þæs líffréä	a long while; them for that the Life-Lord,	
wuldres wealdend woroldáre forgeaf:	Ruler of Glory, granted honour on earth:	
Béowulf wæs bréme --blaéd wíde sprang--	Beowulf (Beaw) was famed --his renown spread wide--	
Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in.	Scyld's heir, in Northern lands.	

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original text

Nu wile icc here shæwenn *3*uw;
Off ure laffdi*3* mar*3*e.
Off - hu *3*ho barr þe laferrd crist;
Att hire rihhte time.
Swa þatt *3*ho þohh þæraffterr wass;
A*33* ma*33*denn þweorrt űt clene!

vii. Secundum lucam. Exíít edictum.

An romanisshe ke*33*seking.
Wass augusstuss *3*ehatenn.
& he wass wurrþenn ke*33*seking;
Off all mannkinn onn eorþe.
& he gann þennkenn off himm sellf;
& off hiss miccle riche.
& he bigann to þennkenn þa;
Swa sum þe boc uss kiþeþþ.
Off - þatt he wollde witenn wel;
Hu mikell fehh himm come.
3iff himm off all hiss kine|dom;
Illc mann an peninng *3*æfe.
& he badd settenn upp o writt;
All mannkinn forr to lokenn.
Hu mikell fehh he mihhte swa;
Off all þe weorelld sammnenn.
Þurrh þatt himm shollde off illc an mann;
An pening wurrþenn reccnedd.
& ta wass sett tatt iwhillc mann.
Whær summ he wære o lande.
Ham shollde wendenn to þatt tun;
Þatt he wass borenn inne.
& tatt he shollde þær forr himm;
Hiss hæfeddpeninng reccnenn.
Swa þatt he *3*æn þe ke*33*seking.
Ne felle nohht i wíte.
& i þatt illke time wass;
Iosæp wiþþ sannte mar*3*e.
I galilew. & i þatt tun;
Þatt nazaræþ wass nemmnedd.
& ta ðe*33* baþe forenn ham;
Till þe*33*re baþre kinde.
Inntill þe land off *3*errsalæm;
Þe*33* forenn samenn baþe.
& comenn inntill beþþleæm;
Till þe*33*re baþre birde.

Þær wass hemm baþe birde to;
Forr þatt te*33* baþe wærenn.
Off dauiþþ kingess kinness menn.
Swa summ þe goddspell kiþeþþ.
& dauiþþ kingess birde wass;
I beþþleæmess chesstre.
& hemm wass baþe birde þær;
Þurrh dauiþþ kingess birde.
Forr þatt te*33* wærenn off hiss kinn;
& himm full neh bitahhte.
& sannte mar*3*ess time wass;
Þatt *3*ho þa shollde childenn.
& tær *3*ho barr allmahhti*3* godd;
Ðatt all þiss weorelld wrohhte.
& wand himm sone i winndeclűt;
& le*33*de himm inn a cribbe.
Forrþi þatt *3*ho ne wisste whær;
3ho mihhte himm don i bure.
& tohh þatt godd wass borenn þær.
Swa dærnelike onn eorþe.
& wundenn þær swa wreccheli*3*.
Wiþþ clutess inn a cribbe;
Ne wollde he nohht forrholenn ben.
Þohhwheþþre i þe*33*re clutess.
Acc wollde shæwenn whatt he wass;
Þurrh heofenlike takenn.
Forr sone anan affterr þatt he.
Wass borenn þær to manne;
Þær onnfasst i þatt illke land.
Wass | se*3h*enn mikell takenn.
An enngell comm off heoffness ærd;
Inn aness weress hewe.
Till hirdess þær þær þe*33* þatt nihht;
Biwokenn þe*33*re faldess.
Þatt enngell comm. & stod hemm bi;
Wiþþ heoffness lihht. & leome.
& forrþrihht summ þe*33* sæ*3h*enn himm;
Þe*33* wurrdenn swiðe offdredde.
& godess enngell hemm bigann;
To frofrenn. & to beldenn.
& se*33*de hemm þuss o godess hallf;
Wiþþ swiþe milde spæche.
Ne beo *3*e nohht forrdredde off me;
Acc beo *3*e swiþe bliþe.
Forr icc amm sennd off heoffness ærd;
To kiþenn godess wille.
To kiþenn *3*uw þatt all follc iss;
Nu cumenn mikell blisse.

Forr *3*uw iss borenn nu to da*33*;
Hælennde off *3*ure sinness.
An wennchell þatt iss iesu crist;
Þatt wĭte *3*e to soþe.
& her onnfasst he borenn iss;
I dauiþþ kingess chesstre.
Þatt iss *3*ehatenn beþþleæm;
I þiss iudisskenn birde.
& her icc wile shæwenn *3*uw;
Summ þing to witerr tákenn.
3e shulenn findenn ænne child;
I winndeclutess wundenn.
& itt iss inn a cribbe le*33*d;
& tær *3*ët mu*3h*enn findenn.
& sone anan se þiss wass se*33*d.
Þurrh an off godess enngless;
A mikell hĕre off enngleþeod.
Wass cumenn űt off heoffne.
& all þatt hirdeflocc hemm sahh;
& herrde whatt te*33* sungenn.
Þe*33* alle sungenn ænne sang;
Drihhtin to lofe. & wurrþe.
& tuss þe*33* sungenn alle imæn;
Swa summ þe goddspell kiþeþþ.
Si drihhtin upp inn heoffness ærd;
Wurrþminnt. & loff. & wullderr.
& upponn eorþe griþþ. & friþþ;
Þurrh godess mildheorrtnesse.
Till iwhillc mann þatt habbenn shall;
God heorrte. & gode wille.
& sone anan se þiss wass þær.
Þurrh godess enngless awwnedd;
Þe*33* wenndenn fra þa wăkemenn.
All űt off þe*33*re sihhþe.
Annd te*33* þa sone tokenn þuss.
To spekenn hemm bitwenenn.

Ga we nu till þatt illke tun;
Þatt beþþleæm iss nemmnedd.
& loke we þatt illke word;
Þatt iss nu wrohht onn eorþe.
Þatt drihhtin godd uss hafeþþ wrohht;
& awwnedd þurrh hiss are.
& sone anan ðe*33* *3*edenn forþ;
Till beþþle|æmess chesstre.
& fundenn sannte mar*3*e þær;
& iosæp hire macche.
& ec þe*33* fundenn þær þe child;
Þær itt wass le*33*d i cribbe.
& ta þe*33* unnderrstodenn wel;
Þatt word tatt godess enngless.
Hemm haffdenn awwnedd off þatt child;
Þatt te*33* þær haffdenn fundenn.
& ta þe*33* wenndenn hemm onn*3*æn;
Wiþþ rihhte læfe o criste.
& tokenn innwarrdlike godd;
To lofenn. & to þannkenn.
All þatt te*33* haffdenn herrd off himm;
& se*3h*enn þurrh hiss are.
& sone anan þe*33* kiddenn forþ;
Amang iudisskenn þeode.
All þatt te*33* haffdenn herrd off crist.
& se*3h*enn wel wiþþ e*3h*ne;
& iwhillc mann þatt herrde itt ohht;
Forrwunndredd wass þæroffe.
& ure laffdi*3* mar*3*e toc;
All þatt *3*ho sahh. & herrde.
& all *3*hőt held inn hire þohht;
Swa summ þe goddspell kiþeþþ.
& le*33*de itt all tosamenn a*33*;
I swiþe þohhtfull heorrte.
All þatt *3*ho sahh. & herrde off crist;
Whas moderr *3*ho wass wurrþenn.

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in a normalised Early Middle English (East Midland dialect c 1200)

Nū wille ic hēr scǽwen *3*ow
Of ūre lafdi*3* Mar*3*e.
Of hū h*3*o bar þe lāferd Crīst
At hire rihte tīme.
Swā þat h*3*o þoh þǽrafter was
A*3* ma*3*den *þwert* ūt clǽne.

vii. Secundum lucam. Exit edictum.

Ān romanisce *ke3se*king
Was *Augustus* ihāten.
& hē was wurþen *ke3se*king
Of al mankin on erþe.
& hē gan þenken of him self
& of his micele rīce.
& hē began to þenken þā
Swā *som* þe bōk us kīþeþ.
Of þat hē wolde witen wel
Hū micel feh him cōme. *col.84*
*3*if him of al his kinedōm
Ælc man ān pening *3*æfe.
& hē bad setten up on writ
Al mankin for tō lōken
Hū micel feh hē mihte swā
Of al þe wereld samnen
Þurh þat him scolde of ælc ān man
Ān pening werþe rekned.
& þā was sett þat ihwilc man
Hwǽr swā hē wǽre on lande.
Hām scolde wenden to þat tūn
Þat hē was boren inne.
& þat hē scolde þǽr for him
His hǽfedpening reknen.
Swā þat hē *3*ǽn þe *ke3se*king
Ne felle noht in wīte.
& in þat ilke tīme was
Iosǽp wiþ sancte Mar*3*e
In Galilew, & in þat tūn
Þat Nasareþ was nemned.
& þā þe*3* bāþe fōren hām
Til here bāþe kīnde.
Intil þe land of *3*ersalem
Þe*3* fōren samen bāþe.
& cōmen intil Beþleǽm
Til here bāþe birde.
Þǽr was hem bāþe birde tō
For þat þe*3* bāþe wǽren
Of Dauiþ kinges kines men
Swā *som* þe godspell kīþeþ.
& Dauiþ kinges birde was
In Beþleǽmes cestre.
& hem was bāþe birde þǽr
Þurh Dauiþ kinges birde.
For þat þe*3* wǽren of his kin
& him ful nēh betahte.
& sancte Mar*3*es tīme was
Þat h*3*o þā scolde cīlden.
& þǽr h*3*o bar almihti*3* God
Þat al þis wereld wrohte.
& wānd him sōne in wīndeclūt
& le*3*de him in a cribbe.
Forþī þat h*3*o ne wiste hwǽr
h*3*o mihte him dōn in būre.
& þoh þat God was boren þǽr
Swā dǽrnelīce on erþe
& wūnden þǽr swā wreccelic
Wiþ clūtes in a cribbe
Ne wolde hē noht forholen bēn.
Þohhweþre in here clūtes.
Ak wolde scǽwen hwat hē was
Þurh hefenlice tāken.
For sōne anān after þat hē.
Was boren þǽr tō manne
Þǽr onfast in þat ilke land.
Was segen micel tāken. *col.85*
Ān engel com of hefnes ǽrd
In āne weres hēwe.
Til hirdes þǽr þǽr þe*3* þat niht
Bewōken here fāldes.
Þat engel cōm, & stōd hem bī
Wiþ hefnes liht & lēme.
& forþriht *som* þe*3* sǽgen him
Þe*3* wurþen swīþe ofdræd.
& Godes engel hem began
Tō frōfren & tō bēlden.
& sa*3*de hem þus on Godes half
Wiþ swīþe mīlde spēce:
Ne bē *3*ē noht fordræd of mē
Ak bē *3*ē swīþe blīþe.
For ic am send of hefnes ǽrd
Tō kīþen Godes wille,
Tō kīþen *3*ow þat all folk is

Nū cumen micel blisse.
For *3*ow is boren nū tō da*3*
Hǽlende of *3*owre sinnes.
Ān wencel þat is Iesu Crīst
Þat wite *3*ē tō sōþe.
& hēr onfast hē boren is
In Dauiþ kinges cestre.
Þat is ihāten Beþleǽm
In þis iūdēisce birde.
& hēr ic wille scǽwen *3*ow
Sum þing tō *wīter* tāken.
*3*ē sculen fīnden āne cīld
In wīndeclūtes wūnden.
& it is in a cribbe le*3*d
& þǽr *3*ē't mugen fīnden.
& sōne anān se þis was sa*3*d
Þurh ān of Godes engles
Ān micel here of engelþēd
Was cumen ūt of hefne.
& all þat hirdeflock hem sah
& hērde hwat þe*3* sungen.
Þe*3* alle sungen āne sāng
Drihten tō lofe & wurþe.
& þus þe*3* sungen alle imǽn
Swā *som* þe godspell kīþeþ.
Sī drihten up in hefnes ǽrd
Wurþmint & lof & wulder.
& upon erþe griþ & friþ
Þurh Godes mīldhertnesse.
Til ihwilc man þat habben scal
Gōd herte & gōd wille.
& sōne anān se þis was þǽr
Þurh Godes engles *awned*
Þe*3* wenden frā þā wakemen.
Al ūt of here sihþe.

Secundum Lucam. viii. Pastores loquebantur ad inuicem. Transeamus usque bethleem.

& þe*3* þā sōne tōken þus
Tō speken hem betwēnen.
Gā wē nū til þat ilke tūn
Þat Beþleǽm is nemned.
& lōke wē þat ilke word
Þat is nū wroht on erþe.
Þat Drihten God us hafeþ wroht
& *awned* þurh his āre.
& sōne anān þe*3* *3*ēden forþ
Til Beþleǽmes cestre. *col. 86*
& fūnden sancte Mar*3*e þǽr
& Iosǽp hire macce.
& ēk þe*3* fūnden þǽr þe cīld
Þǽr it was le*3*d in cribbe.
& þā þe*3* understōden wel
Þat word þat Godes engles
Hem hafden *awned* of þat cīld
Þat þe*3* þǽr hafden fūnden.
& þā þe*3* wenden hem on*3*ǽn
Wiþ rihte lǽfe on Crīste.
& tōken inwardlīce God
Tō lofen & tō þanken
Al þat þe*3* hafden hērd of him
& segen þurh his āre.
& sōne anān þe*3* kīþden forþ
Amāng iūdēisce þēde.
Al þat þe*3* hafden hērd of Crīst
& segen wel wiþ ēgen;
& ihwilc man þat hērde it oht
Forwundred was þǽrof.
& ūre lafdi*3* Mar*3*e tōk
Al þat h*3*o sah & hērde,
& al h*3*o't hēld in hire þoht
Swā *som* þe godspell kīþeþ.
& le*3*de it al tōsamen a*3*
In swīþe þohtful herte.
Al þat h*3*o sah & hērde of Crīst
Hwās mōder h*3*o was worþen.

From *The Canterbury Tales*:

General Prologue

Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury

Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open eye-
(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages);
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seeke.
Bifil that in that seson, on a day,

In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste;
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse
To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse.
But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne;
And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.