

English is a Caesar's body



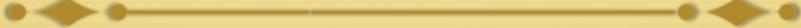
It has had a lot of... *input*... from many different sources.

Old English



Hwæt?

† Old English †



- ✦ Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
- ✦ (Yo! We spear-Danes in yore-days
have heard fame of folk-kings,
how those noblemen did great deeds.)

Time and tide



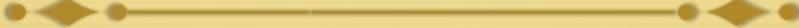
Old English: 625~1066

Middle English: 1066~1476

Early Modern English: 1476~1776

Modern English: 1776~last week

† Time and tide †



- ✦ Letters we stopped using: þ, ð, æ, ƿ, ȝ
- ✦ Sounds we stopped making:
 - ✦ /y, Y, x, ʏ, ç/ spelled y, h, g, ȝ
 - ✦ true length distinctions in vowels and double consonants
- ✦ Onset sound combinations we stopped using:
hl, hr, hn, cn, gn, wr
- ✦ Inflectional endings that got worn off: nearly all of them, with mostly just some *e* and *s* and *es* left

† Time and tide †



✦ Sounds we added:

- ✦ f/v distinction
- ✦ s/z distinction
- ✦ n/ŋ distinction
- ✦ “zh”

✦ Letters we added:

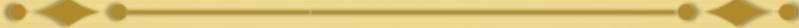
- ✦ q
- ✦ z
- ✦ i/j distinction
- ✦ v/u distinction
- ✦ w for ƿ

French



1066 and all that

† French †



- ✦ Large percentage of modern English vocabulary
 - ✦ *Large percentage of modern English vocabulary*
- ✦ Much from Norman French
- ✦ Brought scribes with them
- ✦ But the words didn't all come at the same time – we have more recent borrowings as well
- ✦ How French the word looks depends on how recently we “borrowed” it

† French †



✦ Less changed:

✦ ballet, corps, macaque, cigarette, rendezvous, chateau, petit, etiquette, avant-garde

✦ More changed:

✦ peasant, money, leaven, castle, petty, ticket, vanguard

† French †

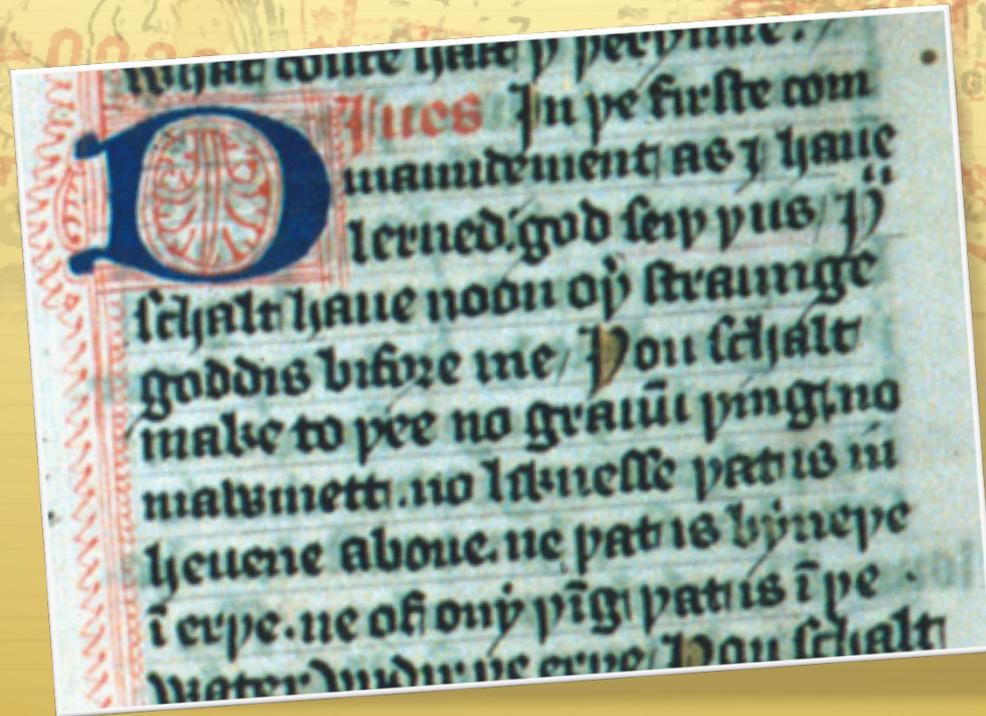


- ✦ In Norman French loans, *ie* usually stood for e: while *ei* usually stood for ε:
 - ✦ As we we will see soon, these became i: and e:, with the ε:>e: finally becoming ei or sometimes i:
- ✦ French gave us:
 - ✦ *g* before *e/i* = “j” and “zh”
 - ✦ *c* before *e/i* = “s”
 - ✦ *c* ≠ “ch”, *g* ≠ “y”
 - ✦ “z” and “v” as distinct sounds

† French †



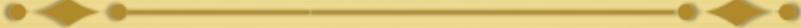
- ✦ Not just words from French; French respellings of existing English words:
 - ✦ hwæt → what
 - ✦ ecg → edge
 - ✦ sinder, is → cinder, ice
 - ✦ mus, mys → mouse, mice
 - ✦ cwen → queen
 - ✦ cyning → king
 - ✦ feond → fiend



Medieval calligraphy!

Lovely, but have you tried reading it?

† Scribes †

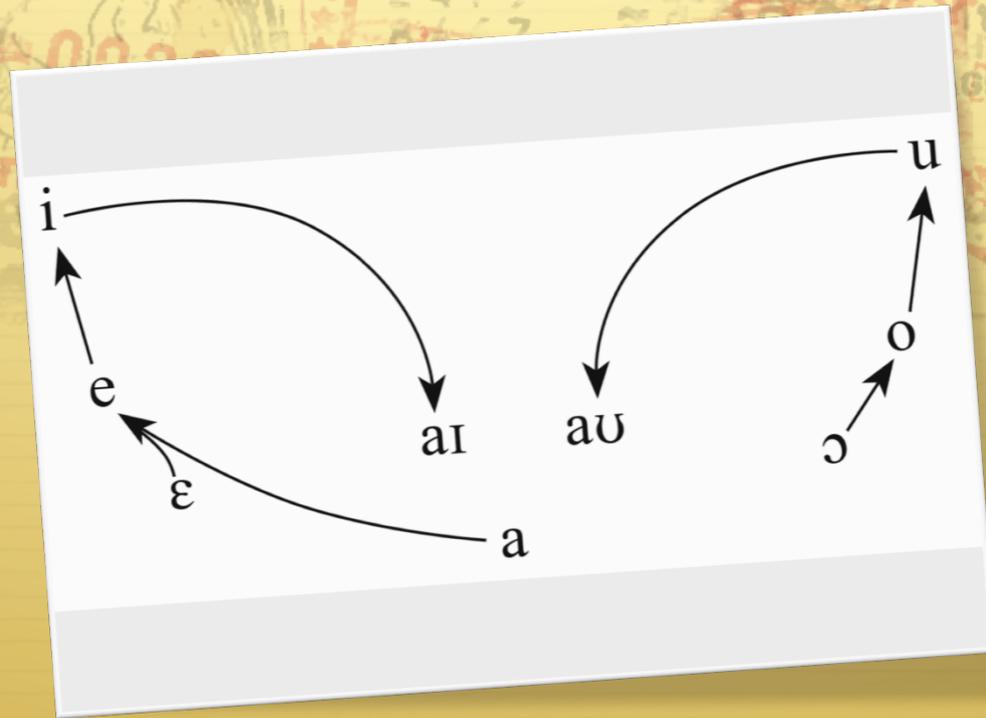


- ✦ Got paid by the letter
- ✦ No standard reference, so they went by what sounded right and by apparent precedent and analogy
- ✦ Respelled words for ease of reading and under influence of French
- ✦ Worked in large part for lawyers and law courts; established the “Chancery standard”

And then...



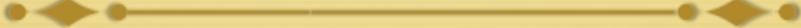
I, aye, eye!



The great vowel shift

Like someone just... swirled the long vowels

† The great vowel shift †



- ✦ Mostly completed by the time of Shakespeare
- ✦ It's why we think:
 - ✦ “long a” is not /a:/ but /eɪ/: *bat* ~ *bate*
 - ✦ “long e” is not /e:/ but /i/: *bet* ~ *beet*
 - ✦ “long i” is not /i:/ but /aɪ/: *bit* ~ *bite*
 - ✦ oo is not /o:/ but /u/ or /ʊ/: *boot* (and how about *bout*)

† Vowel changes †

Data from Problems in the Origins and Development of the English Language, 5th ed., by John Algeo and Carmen Acevedo Butcher

OE sound	OE	ME sound	ME	ModE sound	ModE
æ:, æ:ə, ε	clæne, dæl, beam, stelan	ε:	clene, deel, beem, stelen	i:	clean, deal, beam, steal
e:, æ:, e:ə	ges, slæp, seoþan	e:	gees, sleep, sethen	i:	geese, sleep, seethe
i:, y:	hrim, þif, hydan, mys	i:	rim, wyf, hiden, mys	aɪ	rime, wife, hide, mice

† Vowel changes †

OE sound	OE	ME sound	ME	ModE sound	ModE
a:, ɔ	ham, bat, pa, prote	ɔ:	hoom, boot, wo, throte	o: (ou, ʌʊ)	home, boat, woe, throat
o:	mona, god, flod	o:	mone, good, flood	u:, ʊ, ʌ	moon, good, flood
ʊ	full, bucca, sunne, cuman	ʊ	ful, bukke, sonne, comen	ʊ, ʌ	full, buck, sun, come
u:	mus, bru	u:	mous, brow	aw	mouse, brow

Remember those consonants we lost?



Guess what they did to spelling as we passed through Middle English

† Fun with consonants †



OE sound	OE	ME sound	ME	ModE sound	ModE
æj, εj, æəx	hægl, dæg, segl, þeg, eahta	æɪ	hail, day, seil, wey, eichte	ej	hail, day, sail, way, eight
æ:w, æəw	læþede, feape	ɛʊ	lewed, fewe	ju, rw, u:	lewd, few
i:w, e:ə	nipe, Tipesdæg, cneop	ɪu	newe, Tuesdai, knew	ju, rw, u:	new, Tuesday, knew
a:w, a:ɣ, a:x, o:w, o:ɣ, ɔx	snap, agan, dah, groþan, boga, dohtor, brohte	ɔʊ	snow, owen, dough, growen, bowe, daughter, broughte	o: (ou, ʌʊ), ɔ, ɑ	snow, owe, dough, grow, bow, daughter, brought

The printing press



This is why 1476 is treated as the end of Middle English

† The printing press †



- ✦ Caxton wanted to print a lot of books that would sell so he could make money: poetry, historical & religious prose
- ✦ European typesetters came with it, with their ideas:
 - ✦ gost → ghost
 - ✦ noticed that silent *e*'s seemed to be in near-random distribution, and treated them accordingly to help lines fit
- ✦ Proofing, when it was done, was done by apprentices
- ✦ Later printers (e.g., Pynson) hewed more to the Chancery standard
- ✦ Pronunciation moved on; print... not so quickly

Classical influences



Because the Greeks and Romans were just so goshdarn *noble*

† Latin via French †



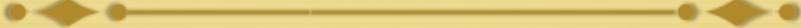
- ✦ creation
- ✦ principle, disciple
- ✦ leopard
- ✦ machine
- ✦ actually most words from French because French is descended from Latin

† Latin direct †



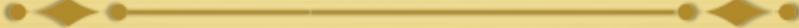
- ✦ pronounce it according to English standards
 - ✦ vacuum, ratio, via, excel, aqueous
- ✦ pronounce it according to some version of Latin standards
 - ✦ via, brachial, paternal, aquatic

† Greek via Latin †



- ✦ Still look like Greek:
 - ✦ physic, Terpsichore, psyche, chaos, elephant, phoenix, rhythm, xylophone
- ✦ Digested all the way through French and/or Old English:
 - ✦ butter (βούτυρον), chair (καθέδρα), bishop (ἐπίσκοπος), priest (πρεσβύτερος), blame (βλάσφημος), surgeon (χειρουργός), jealous (ζήλος)

† Greek direct †



- ✦ Still heavily influenced by Latin conventions; many are modern confections from old Greek roots
 - ✦ phytochemical
 - ✦ psilocybin
 - ✦ helicopter
 - ✦ photograph
 - ✦ pterodactyl
 - ✦ kinetic
- ✦ Some borrowed from modern Greek
 - ✦ bouzouki, ouzo

Pretentious nitwits



“People should know our debt to the classics”

† Pretentious nitwits †



✦ debt, doubt

✦ indict

✦ people

✦ ache

✦ isle, island

✦ scissors

✦ ptarmigan

✦ falcon

✦ foreign

✦ adventure

✦ schism

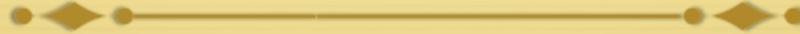
✦ hiccough

Analogy



“That just looks right”

† “That just looks right” †



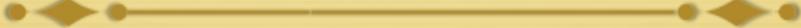
- ✦ cleave vs. cleave
- ✦ schooner (from *scooner/skooner*)
- ✦ could (borrowed silent *l* from *should* and *would*)
- ✦ sovereign (from *soverain*, by analogy with *reign*)

Economy of effort



Our own lazy tongues, and the inertia of published spellings

† Lazy tongues †



- ✦ victuals
- ✦ gunwale
- ✦ boatswain
- ✦ waistcoat
- ✦ handkerchief
- ✦ cupboard
- ✦ Greenwich, Worcester, etc.

Spelling reformers



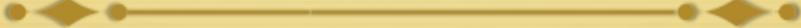
Many have tried. Many have failed, caught on a cot in court.

Noah Webster



Who wanted America to have linguistic independence

† Noah Webster †



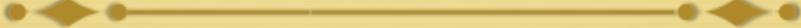
- ✦ color
- ✦ center
- ✦ analyze
- ✦ traveling
- ✦ check
- ✦ anemia
- ✦ magic, music

Rampant theft, part 1



“Stolen words should look like English”

“Make it look like English”



- ✦ Respelling to suit us
 - ✦ gin, catsup, the Hague, pogue, pirogue, Kilkenny
- ✦ Old ways of transliterating
 - ✦ Genghis Khan, Kahlil Gibran, Hiawatha, Chippewa, Ojibway, Calcutta
- ✦ Shifts in pronunciation
 - ✦ colonel, rival

“Leave the spelling as is”

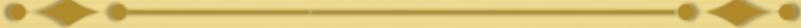


- ✦ Same spelling, new pronunciation
 - ✦ yogurt, sauna, ski, Paris, maraschino
- ✦ Same spelling, original pronunciation (or close)
 - ✦ spaghetti, corps, ballet
- ✦ Same spelling, some disagreement about how to say it
 - ✦ bruschetta, croissant

Rampant theft, part 3

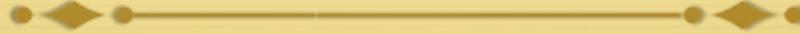
“Stolen words should *not* look like English”

“Don’t Anglicize them”



- ✦ kombucha
- ✦ Ojibwe, Anishnaabe
- ✦ Beijing
- ✦ Pyeongchang
- ✦ Xhosa
- ✦ Kolkata

“If it looks English it can’t be right”



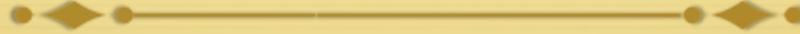
- ✦ Beijing
- ✦ Taj Mahal
- ✦ bergamot
- ✦ claret
- ✦ Kahlil Gibran
- ✦ Genghis Khan

Teh interwebz



Cuz its teh lulz

O brave new world...



- ✦ pwn all teh n00bs for lulz
- ✦ CamelCase
- ✦ Xperiments & phreakishness

Orthographical CSI



Who did what damage?

ie/ei



- ✦ **seize** (OF *seisir*, ModF *saisir*) vs. **siege** (OF *siege*, ModF *siège*) – both borrowed in the 13th c.
- ✦ **weird** (OE *ƿyrd*, respelled in ME under French influence)
- ✦ **friend** (OE *freond* with short *e*, respelled many ways but *friend* stuck) vs. **fiend** (OE *feond* with long *e*)
- ✦ **grieve** (Fr *grever*; *i* added in 15th c) vs. **sieve** (OE *sife*, *e* added in 15th c)

ugh



- ✦ **daughter:** OE *dohtor*, ME *doʒter*
- ✦ **laughter:** OE *hleahtor*, ME *lauʒter*
- ✦ **plough:** OE *ploh*, ME *plouʒ*
- ✦ **through:** OE *þurh*, ME *thorʒ*
- ✦ **tough:** OE *toh*, ME *towʒ*
- ✦ **cough:** OE **cohhian*, ME *couʒe*
- ✦ All of these have had many spellings in each time

sch



- ✦ **school:** Latin *schola*
- ✦ **schooner:** 18th c. *scooner/skooner*, respelled by analogy
- ✦ **schizophrenia:** Greek roots
- ✦ **schedule:** from Fr *cedule*, from L *scedula* but later L *schedula*
- ✦ **schism:** earlier *cism/scism*, from L *schisma*, Gr σχίσμα
- ✦ **schnitzel:** German
- ✦ **bruschetta:** Italian

ch



- ✦ **macho**: Spanish
- ✦ **mocha**: Arabic, *al-Mukhā* (port in Yemen)
- ✦ **machine**: French, from Latin *machina*
- ✦ **ach**: Scots and/or Dutch
- ✦ **loch**: Gaelic
- ✦ **yacht**: early modern Dutch *jaght*

silent l

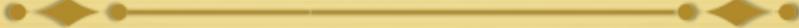
- ✦ **calm** (Fr *calme*) vs. **palm** (L *palma*, Anglo-Norman *paume*) vs. **psalm** (Gr ψαλμός, L *psalmus*, OFr *saume*; has had *many* spellings, including *sphalme* and *salme*)
- ✦ **falcon**: OFr *faucon*, L *falco*; the *l* was readded
- ✦ **Ralph**: OE *Radulf* from *rad* ‘counsel’ *wulf* ‘wolf’
- ✦ **would** (OE *wolde*; the *u* was added 15th c), **should** (OE *sceolde*; the *u* was added 15th c), **could** (OE *cūþe*, ME *cude*; the *l* was added ~14th c by analogy)

silent b



- ✦ **dumb**: OE *dumb*
- ✦ **tomb**: Anglo-Norman *toumbe*, OFr *tombe*; also spelled *tome* in ME
- ✦ **bomb**: Fr *bombe*; ME also spelled *bome*, then added back the *b*; formerly often said like “bum”
- ✦ **comb**: OE *camb*
- ✦ **limb**: OE *lim*; the *b* was added 15th c
- ✦ **debt**: ME *det*, OFr *dette*, L *debitum*; *b* added back in late ME/early ModE

other silent consonants



- ✦ **receipt**: ME *receite*, OFr *recete*, from L *recepta*; *p* ultimately retained, unlike in *conceit* and *deceit* (but cf. *conception*, *deception*)
- ✦ **indict**: ME *endite*, OFr *enditer*, ultimately to L *indicare* and/or *indicare* with spurious conjectural *indictare*; the *c* was inserted in the 16th c
- ✦ **limn** (OFr *lumine*, L *luminare*)
- ✦ **damn** (ME *dampne*, OFr *dampner*, L *damnare*), **condemn** (ME *condempne*, OFr *condemner*, L *conem(p)nare*)

other silent consonants



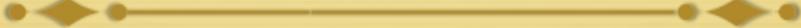
- ✦ **aisle**: ME *eile*, L *ala*; in Fr the *s* indicates vowel quality, but in Eng could just be by analogy
- ✦ **isle**: ME *ile*, OF *ile*, L *insula*; *s* added back in during English Renaissance
- ✦ **island**: OE *igland*, ME *yland*, *iland*; *s* added by mistake on model of *isle* in 17th c

WOR



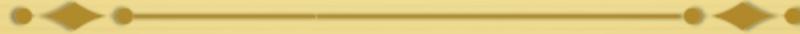
- ✦ **worse:** OE *ƿirsa*, ME *wurse*, *worse*
- ✦ **word:** OE *ƿeord*, ME *wourd*
- ✦ **work:** OE *ƿeorc*, *ƿorc*
- ✦ **worth:** OE *ƿeorþ*
- ✦ **worn:** was *ƿerede* in OE and until late ME, when it became *woryn* and *worne* by analogy with *sworn*, *torn*
- ✦ **wort:** OE *ƿyrt*, ME *wurte*, *worte*
- ✦ **wart:** OE *ƿearte*

more vowel movements



- ✦ **one:** OE *an, a*, ME *an, a, on, un, won*; a:n → o:n is like *stan* → *stone*, but o:n moved further to u:n and ʊn and then got an on-glide
- ✦ **two:** OE *tʀa, tu, to*, ME *to, two*; twa: → two: → twu: → tu:
- ✦ **sew:** OE *seowan, siwian*, ME *sewe, sowe*; the vowel shift is unusual, and modern Scots pronunciation of *sew* is like *shoe*
- ✦ **shoe:** OE *scoh, sceo*, ME *scho, schoo*; blame it on the great vowel shift, just like *to* and *too* (the *e* indicates length)

blame the GVS



- ✦ **bass** (musical): ME *bas*, long *a*, respelled as *base* except in music, where it's *bass* by analogy with Italian *basso*
- ✦ **eye**: OE *æge*, *eage*, ME *eʒe*; *æj* → *i:* → *aɪ*
- ✦ **river** (Anglo-Norman *rivere*, OF *riviere*) vs. **rival** (OF *rival*): a difference in vowel length before the GVS
- ✦ **some** (OE *sum*, ME *soume*) vs. **home** (OE *ham*; *a:* → *o:* in southern England but not Scotland; and then the GVS)
- ✦ **gouge** (Fr *gouge*, *u:* → *ow*) vs. **gauge** (OF *gauge*, *a:* → *eɪ*)

others



- ✦ **busy**: OE *bisig*, *bysig*; the *u* spelling based on *y* has won but the pronunciation based on *i* has won, thanks to deliberate efforts by orthoepists in the 16th c
- ✦ **stranger** (OF *estrangier*) vs. **anger** (Old Norse *anгр*, OE *anger*)
- ✦ **find** (OE *findan*), **bind** (OE *bindan*), **mind** (OE *mynd*), **wind** (OE *windan*) vs. **wind** (OE *wind*, which would in the normal course of things be said like the verb, but in the 18th the current pronunciation prevailed because of *windmill* and *windy*, which always had short vowels)

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