

*A Structural
History of English*

John Nist

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For Jo, Brian, Brice, and Brent.



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5) Questions for research and discussion at the close of each chapter, to stimulate both classroom liveliness and personal mastery of significant linguistic issues.

Depending upon the amount of supplementary reading and the number of individual reports and research papers assigned, this book can form the basis for either a one-semester or a two-semester course in the English language.

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CHAPTER 5

The History of Middle English

1150-1500 A.D.

IMPORTANT DATES

- 1204 Loss of Normandy as the property of the English king; it marks the beginning of the rise of English nationalism.
- 1250 The double allegiance of the English nobility ends; thus the most valid reason for the use of the French language in England is gone.
- 1258-1265 Barons' War, in which the English upper and middle classes unite against the "foreign element" to strengthen the doctrine of "England for the English."
- 1300 The English language once again becomes the native tongue of the nobility.
- 1337-1453 Hundred Years' War strengthens English patriotism, which ultimately leads to the total disuse of French in England.
- 1344-1400 Lifetime of Geoffrey Chaucer, champion of the vernacular and father of mainstream English poetry.

- 1348–1350 The Black Death (bubonic plague) causes a serious shortage of labor and therefore strengthens the role of the lower classes and the importance of the language they speak: English.
- 1356 The Sheriff's Court in London and Middlesex is conducted in English.
- 1362 Parliament opens with a speech in English. *The Statute of Pleading* demands that the King's Court and all other courts be henceforth conducted in English. This act constitutes the official and legal recognition of the language.
- 1381 The Peasants' Revolt further strengthens the role of the laborers and the importance of their language, English.
- 1385 Date by which the English language is in general use throughout the schools.
- 1400 Date by which English is used in the writing of wills.
- 1415 Battle of Agincourt, in which Henry V, with his English longbowmen, establishes a pride in all things English.
- 1423 The records of Parliament begin to be written in English.
- 1425 English is adopted as the language of writing.
- 1450 English becomes the language of written town laws.
- 1476 William Caxton introduces printing into England, hastening the end of Middle English and the commencement of the Early Modern English of the Renaissance.
- 1489 All statutes in England are written in English.
- 1500 Approximate date of the end of Middle English.

OUTSTANDING PERSONS

William Caxton Father of English printing (1476), champion of middle-class literacy, and hastener of Modern English.

Geoffrey Chaucer Author of Middle English masterpieces *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–95) and *Troilus and Criseyde* (1382–86), champion of the vernacular, literary supporter of the London dialect, importer of the European Renaissance, and father of English poetry.

Edward I The monarch who during his reign (1272–1307) develops a national consciousness and unity and demands the preservation of the English language against the incursions of French.

Eleanor of Provence Wife of Henry III, Eleanor symbolizes the dominance of French—in language, literature, and general culture—both in England and on the Continent.

John Gower Leading literary contemporary (1325?–1408) of Chaucer, who epitomizes in his poetry the three levels of language usage in medieval England: Latin, French, and English.

Henry III His long reign (1216–72) opens the gates for the great influx of French and Latin that ultimately changes English from a one-tradition language to a hybrid of several heritages. His French favoritism leads to the strengthening of English nationalism.

Henry V Great English king (1413–22) who ends the military dominance of France at the Battle of Agincourt (1415), strongly influences the ascendancy of English in Britain, and leads the way for its general adoption as the language of writing.

King John The monarch who loses England's Norman estates (1204) and signs the Magna Carta (1215), granting greater political and civil liberties to his subjects.

William Langland Most important literary figure in the Alliterative Revival (1350–1400), Langland writes one of the poetic masterpieces of Middle English and the greatest social document of its kind: *Piers Plowman* (1362–87).

Simon de Montfort Norman-born baron who leads the coalition of barons and the middle class, which produces the Provisions of Oxford (1258) and the Barons' War (1258–65), thereby curtailing the foreign element in England, strengthening English nationalism, and preparing the way for the predominantly English government of Edward I.

Wat Tyler Leader of the Peasants' Revolt (1381), which strengthens the role of the laboring class and therefore the importance of the English tongue; the subsequent rise of trade unions and guilds hastens the advent of Early Modern English.

John Wycliffe Leading writer of English prose in the fourteenth century, Wycliffe (1328?–84) champions the first English translation of the Bible.

MAJOR ATTRIBUTES OF THE LANGUAGE

Undergoes great changes in vocabulary and grammar.

Receives immense influx of Norman, French, and Latin words to become a hybrid language, flexible and resourceful.

- Experiences a gradual leveling of inflections.
- Develops a dominant system of "weak" (regular) verbs.
- Transforms old grammatical gender into new natural (logical) gender.
- Suppresses much of the older West Teutonic vocabulary and weakens the Old English morphological processes.
- Evolves a more analytic and hypotactic syntax, in which word order determines function: a major basis of Modern English.
- Distills a Standard Spoken and Literary English by 1450 out of four major dialects: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, and Southern.
- Specializes into three levels of expression: *Popular* (native English), *Literary* (assimilated French), and *Learned* (reintroduced Latin and its cognate Greek).
- Disseminates its final achievements in London version via printing after 1476 to hasten the entrance of Early Modern (Renaissance) English.

THE HISTORY OF MIDDLE ENGLISH is the history of the rise of English nationalism and the fall of medieval chivalry, of growing restrictions on the monarchy and the expanding influence of the middle class. Within the three and a half centuries of this history, three distinct phases of the language stand out in bold relief. Phase one is Early Middle English; it extends from the end of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (1154) to the close of the reign of Edward I (1307). The outstanding historical characteristic of Early Middle English is the struggle for the survival of the language. Phase two constitutes Mature Middle English; this period runs from the death of Edward I (1307) to the death of Henry V (1422). The slow ascendancy of the language is the major historical attribute of Mature Middle English. Phase three is the brief history of Late Middle English, which spans the time from the death of Henry V (1422) to the commencement of the Tudor dynasty in the coronation of Henry VII (1485). Late Middle English is the language triumphant.

So impressive is the change wrought in the native tongue of Britain during these three and a half centuries that even a schoolboy can detect the vast differences between what was and what became the English language. At the start of phase one, the language sounds a good deal like present-day German. After a dozen generations of refinement in a French finishing academy run by Latin professors, the language graduates at the end of phase three with hybrid honors and talks very much like Modern

English. During the evolution from Old English to Early Modern, the linguistic emphasis shifts from the auditory morpheme to the visual, from the spoken word to the written.

EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL, 1154-1307

HENRY PLANTAGENET, COUNT OF ANJOU, assumed the English throne in 1154, the year in which *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* comes to an end. England was exhausted from twenty years of anarchy and her people were sick of the excesses of Norman brutality. Duke of Normandy and ruler of all western France, Henry II crushed his baronial opposition in Britain, developed an efficient judicial and administrative system, established a habit of obedience to government, and prepared the way for subsequent constitutional reforms. What he could not do was put a halt to the aristocratic neglect of the English language. For almost a century and a half—from William the Conqueror's victory at Hastings in 1066 to the loss of the Norman estates by King John in 1204—the French-speaking upper class remained indifferent to the English language.

In twelfth-century England, the symbol of the vast social separation between manor lord and serf was a simple matter of not speaking the same language. Dependence upon bailiffs and men-at-arms to act as interpreters merely complicated an already bad situation. Celtic prevailed in Wales and Cornwall; Latin dominated the conservative clergy; French controlled the thought patterns of the king and his court, the nobility, the high churchmen, the knights, and the merchants. As for the common people, only 1 percent of whom understood the language of their masters, they were divided into various dialects of Middle English and archaic carry-overs from Old. It is no wonder that the French lyrics and epic romances that were sweeping Europe should implant a foreign literary tradition on the soil of England, for English was out of favor, its literature in decay, and there was no means of reviving an earlier heroic age by importing the great Icelandic sagas.

The English nationalism that demanded the universal use of the language of the people instead of the aristocratic tongue of their Norman masters is rooted in the reigns of the two Plantagenet brothers, Richard

the Lion-Heart (1189–99) and King John (1199–1216). During the decade of absenteeism of Richard, his efficient Archbishop of Canterbury and Justiciar of the Crown, Hubert Walter, governed England well and instituted several policies of immense social and political significance. Through charters, Hubert granted to the towns the privilege of self-government by elected officials. By entrusting municipal independence to the middle class, he strengthened the democratic role of London against the authority of the throne. In extending self-government to the shires by placing power in the hands of the local gentry, Hubert Walter permitted the election of coroners from the suitors of the Shire Court and the selection of juries by those coroners. Thus to self-government was added the principle of representation, both indispensable for the future development of a national Parliament. Before such a development could take place, of course, the King of England would have to concentrate upon affairs at home and submit his person to the obedience of a common law considered higher than the exercise of regal will.

When King John lost Normandy to Philip of France in 1204, he ensured the ultimate disuse of French in Britain. Gradually relinquishing their continental estates, the English nobility cultivated a rivalry with France that culminated in the Hundred Years' War. Thanks to the selfish bungling of John, the English kings who succeeded him—even while still speaking a caricature of the French tongue—had to deal with questions peculiar to the country they governed: relations with Wales and Scotland, the development of a legal code, and the establishment of a Parliament. Once the barons of Runnymede had forced John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215, the English nobility saw to it that class alliances should prevent “taxation without representation” and the return of feudal anarchy. No longer would the life of the nation be the instrument of one man's desires. Although protection against the officers of the king and the right to a fair and legal trial originally applied only to “freemen,” as guaranteed by Magna Carta, three hundred years later all Englishmen were “freemen” before the law.

During the reign of Henry III (1216–72), the impulse to English nationalism gradually gained momentum in reaction to foreign abuses at home and the French favoritism of the English court. The double allegiance of the Norman-English barons to Henry III and Louis IX had to end, and Louis himself told these barons, convoked at Paris, that they must make up their minds as to which properties they preferred: Eng-

lish or French. By 1250, the double allegiance was over. But such a termination did not stop the immense influx of foreigners into Britain. Beginning in the reign of John and continuing into that of Henry III, the French invasion of the island kingdom took place in three distinct stages: from Poitou, from Provence, and again from Poitou.

Completely French in taste, education, and association, Henry III in 1233 dismissed all native-born officers from his court and filled the vacancies with lackeys from Poitou. Under the dominating advice of Peter des Roches, the Poitevin clerk whom he made bishop of Winchester, the king flooded England with two thousand knights from Poitou and Brittany and put them in charge of the castles that controlled the various baronies and counties of the country. In 1236 he married Eleanor of Provence, who prevailed upon him to fatten the fortunes of her many relatives with lands and money. For at least ten years after the wedding, Provençals poured into England. At times to reward favorites, at times to please the Pope, Henry III dispensed ecclesiastical dignities to foreigners. Before long the French clergy in England had a combined income three times their patron king's.

As a result of the abuses of Henry III, the English barons and middle class united to drive the foreign element out of office and even out of the country. Struggling to extend the political guarantees of Magna Carta, the self-seeking barons forced the Provisions of Oxford (1258) upon the throne. The rising class of knights and gentry, the “bachelors” accustomed to a measure of self-government as coroners and jurymen, extracted the same rights and privileges of vassalage and tenantry from the barons. Thus a third power, of great democratic possibilities, came into being, and it demanded an “England for the English.” Led by Simon de Montfort, this power joined with liberal-minded barons, a band of rebellious clergy, a hard core of free-thinking Oxford University students, and a popular front of the poor to fight for reforms in the bloody seven years of the Barons' War (1258–65).

A disciple of Grossetête, Bishop of Lincoln (d. 1253), Simon de Montfort stood unalterably opposed to royal and papal self-indulgence in England. Considering reforms as the will of God, Simon looked upon the law as an authority higher than that of the king. With his victory at the Battle of Lewes in 1264, Simon became the *de facto* monarch of England. Though he died in defeat a year later at the Battle of Evesham, Simon

was a conqueror: he dominated the thinking of Henry III's son and heir Edward I.

During the reign of Edward I (1272–1307), a growing sense of national consciousness dictated an ever widening use of the English language. Though French continued to be the official language of Parliament, law court, and contractual negotiation, upper-class knowledge of it in England was diminishing. The gradual wane of French is unmistakable from two important pieces of evidence: the translation of polite society French literature into English, and the vastly quickened pace of the adoption of French words into English. So long as people read a foreign language with native ease, there is no need for translations; when those same people abandon the foreign language in a return to their own, they take a fund of familiar and useful expressions from the foreign language with them.

Despite the influence of his Provençal mother, Edward I spoke English as his first language. His anti-French attitude resulted in the appointment of government officials who were English. They in turn encouraged the use of their native tongue among the upper classes. Espousing English thus became a matter of patriotism. By 1300 the English nobility looked upon French as a foreign language, to be learned for purposes of cultural refinement and with some degree of difficulty.

THE LANGUAGE. By the time the upper classes of England had to come to terms with the language of the common people, the language had undergone vast changes from Old English. Early Middle English is a record of those changes, and it says that the most important single influence of the Norman Conquest upon English was the removal of the conservative pressures that tended to impede its evolution. As the tongue of a subjugated country, Old English immediately lost prestige. West Saxon was no longer the literary standard of the conquered Britons, and the Anglo-Saxon scribal tradition was suppressed. Neither church nor state had much time to give to the language of the English peasants, and the socially and intellectually elite could not be bothered with it.

Under such conditions of *laissez faire*, the language benefited from a return to oral primacy: colloquial ease determined usage and variant dialect forms competed for acceptance. Unhindered by rules of prescription and proscription, the English peasants demanded stress on the root syllable and remodeled the language with tongue and palate. After two centuries of such uninhibited remodeling, by the end of the reign of

Edward I the English language had begun its evolution toward a cosmopolitan vocabulary and had initiated several processes of great linguistic change: inflectional leveling and the loss of grammatical gender, a simple morphology for the plural, clarity and order among the pronouns and the demonstratives, a reduction of irregular verbs, and a fixing of word order for the development of an analytic syntax.

The most significant change wrought in the grammar, as distinct from the vocabulary, of Early Middle English was the *general reduction of inflections*. Three factors were responsible for the gradual phonetic transmutations that resulted in the loss of almost all inflectional endings in the English language: 1) the Old English habit of stressing the root syllable, an intonation pattern that guaranteed the forward positioning of accent and a phonemic weakening of syllables in unstressed positions; 2) a morphological simplification, due to the speech interference of Scandinavian and French, for the sake of an easier communication; 3) the suppression of West Saxon as a standard dialect, thereby permitting variant forms of the language to compete for ascendancy.

The inflectional leveling of Early Middle English followed this general scheme. First, the final *-m* in dative constructions of the strong declensions shifted to *-n*; in other words, a grave labial nasal became an acute apical nasal. Second, this dative *-n* then fell away from the inflection, influencing similar constructions (as in the infinitive form of the verb, for example) into dropping the *-n* also. Third, unsupported by any final consonant and standing in the non-accented position of the inflectional vestige, the remaining vowels (*a, o, u, e*) lost their phonemic coloring and became the "indeterminate" *schwa* (ə). Graphemically equated with the letter *e* (or occasionally *i, y, or u*), this *schwa* eventually fell silent. The unpronounced final *e* of Modern English, therefore, is a visual morphemic relic of inflectional leveling.

The inflectional leveling produced immediate effects. The morphological simplification resulted in the establishment of *-s* as the distinctive form of the possessive singular and the nominative and accusative plural in the noun. With *-es* as an alternate form of the plural in the strong declension and *-en* in the weak, the noun case endings were vastly reduced. In some instances the inflections for both case and number were completely destroyed. The adjective too changed, for the nominative singular soon dominated all cases in the singular and the nominative plural all cases in the plural. In the weak declension of the adjective, both singular and

plural ended in *-e* and hence number no longer made a distinction. Since the strong declension of the adjective often supported the same *-e* ending, by 1250 the only remaining distinctions between singular and plural in the adjective were in strong monosyllabic forms that had terminated in a consonant in Old English.

A corresponding loss of pronominal inflections led to an immense streamlining of the demonstratives. Although a plural *tho* (those) persisted into Shakespeare's day, the demonstrative forms contracted from a confusing eighteen to a manageable five: *the, that, this, those, these*. In addition to the loss of their entire dual system, the personal pronouns combined their accusatives and datives into one form: *him, her, and them*. It became the oblique as well as the nominative form in the neuter. With the Scandinavian introduction of the third person plurals *they, their, and them*, the pronoun system of the language was greatly clarified. By 1500, through a gradual penetration southward, these Scandinavian forms became the normal English plurals.

By that time, a linguistic phenomenon of far greater importance had taken place—the establishment of a fixed word order as the chief determinant of function in an analytic syntax. With the leveling of inflections, the language had to resort to some other means of indicating function and therefore meaning. Through the evolution of a fixed word order, the use of juxtaposition, prepositions, and other function words, Middle English achieved the bases of Modern English syntax by the reign of Henry VII. Within such a syntax, grammatical gender gave way to natural gender when the gender-distinguishing modifiers—the strong adjectives and the demonstratives—were reduced to one uninflected form.

Inflectional leveling in the Early Middle English verbs was less spectacular than in the nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. The strong or irregular verbs had always been a minority, even in the earliest days of Old English. After the Norman Conquest two factors united to reduce the strong verbs to a minimum: the loss of native words and the conversion of newly formed verbs into the weak or regular conjugation. At least one-third of the Old English strong verbs disappeared during the period of Early Middle English—more than a hundred key words. In the evolution of the language, nearly another hundred strong verbs have died out, and a sizable number have been regularized. The habit of regularizing newly adopted verbs and functionally shifted nouns and adjectives in Modern English is the natural outcome of a process started in Early

Middle English. With the removal of conservative pressures for "correct" usage, the English peasants acted on analogy and changed the patterns of some strong verbs to those of the weak. In the thirteenth century verbs such as *burn, brew, bow, climb, flee, flow, help, mourn, row, step, walk, and weep* were being regularized. Had not the prestige of English risen at the time when printing stabilized a revived conservatism, the language might have been rid of all irregular verbs. Even though the past participles of some regularized verbs have survived in their strong forms (*cloven, graven, hewn, laden, molten, mown, shaven, sodden, swollen*) as adjectives, today the strong verbs themselves have been reduced to a few score.

INFLUX OF NORMAN FRENCH. The great changes that took place in the grammar of Early Middle English were accompanied by an immense influx of Norman French into its vocabulary. At least 10,000 French terms entered English before the onset of the Tudor dynasty; about 7,500 of these Middle English borrowings are still in use. The period of largest French influx began late in Early Middle English, around 1250, and extended for a century and a half, to 1400. Approximately 40 percent of the entire English appropriation of French words occurred in this span of one hundred fifty years. But the precedent for such linguistic acquisition had been set in the century between 1150 and 1250, when some nine hundred Norman terms entered the English vocabulary.

The Normans assumed a different role than the Scandinavians, who had mingled with the English more or less on a basis of equality. The Normans formed the upper class; their language was consequently aristocratic. Norman cultural leadership is evident in the terminology of church, government, military establishment, legal system, master-servant relationship, cuisine, fashion, leisure-time activity, commerce, and the arts. So strong was the need for these early Norman loans to a more impoverished culture that most of the French words that entered the English language before 1350 have not only remained in use but have also achieved the force of native stock.

The borrowed Norman words tended to be functional and essential rather than decorative and refining. These early linguistic appropriations began with the church; in matters of doctrine and faith, the French clergy had to reach their English communicants as soon as possible. With French as the official vernacular of monastery and convent, the

following words soon entered the English language: *religion, theology, sermon, homily, sacrament, baptism, communion, confession, penance, prayer, orison, lesson, passion, psalmody, clergy, clerk, prelate, cardinal, legate, dean, chaplain, parson, pastor, vicar, sexton, abbess, novice, friar, hermit, crucifix, crosier, miter, surplice, censer, incense, lectern, image, chancel, chantry, chapter, abbey, convent, priory, hermitage, cloister, sanctuary, creator, saviour, trinity, virgin, saint, miracle, mystery, faith, heresy, schism, reverence, devotion, sacrilege, simony, temptation, damnation, penitence, contrition, remission, absolution, redemption, salvation, immortality, piety, sanctity, charity, mercy, pity, obedience, virtue, solemnity, solemn, divine, reverend, devout, preach, pray, chant, repent, confess, adore, sacrifice, convert, anoint, and ordain.*

The church was not the only institution that channeled Norman French into the English language; government was hard at work borrowing, and so were the army, the navy, the law courts, the fashion salons, and the kitchens. The following selective lists indicate the extent of the Norman influx into Early Middle English:

1) Government Terms: *government, govern, administer, crown, state, empire, realm, reign, royal, prerogative, authority, sovereign, majesty, scepter, tyrant, usurp, oppress, court, council, parliament, assembly, statute, treaty, alliance, record, repeal, adjourn, tax, subsidy, revenue, tally, exchequer, subject, allegiance, rebel, traitor, treason, exile, public, liberty, office, chancellor, treasurer, chamberlain, marshal, governor, councilor, minister, viscount, warden, castellan, mayor, constable, coroner, crier, noble, nobility, peer, prince, princess, duke, duchess, count, countess, marquis, baron, squire, page, courtier, retinue, sir, madam, mistress, manor, demesne, bailiff, vassal, homage, peasant, bondman, slave, and caitiff.*

2) Military Terms: *army, navy, peace, enemy, arms, battle, combat, skirmish, siege, defense, ambush, stratagem, retreat, soldier, garrison, guard, spy, captain, lieutenant, sergeant, dart, lance, banner, mail, buckler, hauberk, archer, chieftain, portcullis, moat, havoc, array, harness, brandish, vanquish, besiege, and defend.*

3) Legal Terms: *justice, equity, judgment, crime, bar, assize, plea, suit, plaintiff, defendant, judge, advocate, attorney, bill, petition, complaint, inquest, summons, indictment, jury, juror, panel, felon, evidence, proof,*

bail, ransom, verdict, sentence, decree, award, fine, forfeit, punishment, prison, gaol, pillory, pardon, trespass, assault, arson, larceny, fraud, property, estate, tenant, dower, legacy, patrimony, heritage, heir, executor, entail, just, innocent, and culpable.

4) Fashion Terms: *fashion, dress, apparel, habit, gown, robe, garment, attire, cape, cloak, coat, frock, collar, veil, train, chemise, petticoat, lace, embroidery, pleat, gusset, buckle, button, tassel, plume, kerchief, mitten, garter, boots, satin, taffeta, fur, sable, beaver, ermine, blue, brown, vermillion, scarlet, saffron, russet, tawny, jewel, ornament, brooch, chaplet, ivory, enamel, turquoise, amethyst, topaz, garnet, ruby, emerald, sapphire, pearl, diamond, and crystal.*

5) Culinary Terms: *dinner, supper, feast, repast, collation, mess, appetite, taste, victuals, viand, sustenance, mackerel, sole, perch, bream, sturgeon, salmon, sardine, oyster, porpoise, venison, beef, veal, mutton, pork, bacon, sausage, tripe, loin, chine, haunch, brawn, gravy, poultry, bullet, pigeon, mallard, partridge, pheasant, quail, plover, squirrel, pottage, gruel, toast, biscuit, cream, sugar, olives, salad, lettuce, endive, almond, fruit, raisin, fig, grape, orange, lemon, pomegranate, cherry, peach, confection, pastry, tart, jelly, treacle, spice, clove, thyme, herb, mustard, vinegar, marjoram, cinnamon, nutmeg, goblet, saucer, cruet, plate, platter, roast, boil, parboil, stew, fry, broach, blanch, grate, and mince,*

6) Domestic and Social Terms: *arras, curtain, couch, chair, cushion, screen, lamp, lantern, sconce, chandelier, blanket, quilt, coverlet, counterpane, towel, basin, dais, parlor, wardrobe, closet, pantry, scullery, garner, recreation, solace, jollity, leisure, dance, carol, revel, minstrel, juggler, fool, ribald, lute, tabor, melody, music, chess, checkers, dalliance, conversation, ambler, courser, hackney, palfrey, rounchy, stallion, rein, curb, crupper, rowel, curry, trot, stable, harness, mastiff, terrier, spaniel, leash, kennel, scent, retrieve, forest, park, covert, warren, joust, tournament, and pavilion.*

7) High Cultural Terms: *art, painting, sculpture, beauty, color, figure, image, tone, cathedral, palace, mansion, chamber, ceiling, joist, cellar, garret, chimney, lintel, latch, lattice, wicket, tower, pinnacle, turret, porch, bay, choir, cloister, baptistry, column, pillar, base, poet, rime, prose, romance, lay, story, chronicle, tragedy, prologue, preface, title, volume, chapter, quire, parchment, vellum, paper, pen, treatise, compilation*

tion, study, logic, geometry, grammar, noun, clause, gender, copy, expound, and compile.

8) Medical Terms: *medicine, chirurgery, physician, surgeon, apothecary, malady, debility, distemper, pain, ague, palsy, pleurisy, gout, jaundice, leper, paralytic, plague, pestilence, contagion, anatomy, stomach, pulse, remedy, ointment, balm, pellet, alum, arsenic, niter, sulphur, alkali, and poison.*



MIDDLE ENGLISH DIALECTS. With the eventual rise of the London dialect as the standard version of the language, regional variants lost some of their distinctive differences. From the four dialects of Old English, five major dialects of Middle English evolved: West Saxon became Southern; Kentish remained the speech in the Southeast; Mercian divided into East Midland and West Midland; Northumbrian remained Northern. Since the Middle English dialects developed within geographic barriers, they may be delineated graphically, as in Map 2.

The five major versions of Middle English all had linguistic features peculiar to themselves. Southern and Kentish, for example, were more conservative in the retention of Old English inflections; thus they maintained a decayed use of the past participle prefix (original *ge-* transmuted to either *y-* or *i-*) into the fourteenth century. Northern, on the other hand, had liberal flavor and a high density of Scandinavian terms in its vocabulary, and exerted immense influence on East Midland when the London version of that dialect was becoming Received British Standard. Both East Midland and West Midland developed a spirit of linguistic compromise that made use of Northern and Southern elements and eventually led to a general convergence of dialects.

Before such convergence took place, however, the major five Middle English dialects could be briefly characterized as follows:

Northern. Spoken north of the Humber River and including Early Scottish and such provincial variants as that of Yorkshire, Northern Middle English 1) retained Old English *ā* as an unrounded vowel /a:/ or /æ:/ (*stane* for *stone*, *ham* for *home*), 2) employed *-and* for the ending of the present participle, 3) spelled Old English *hw* and Middle English *wh* as *qu*, 4) used *-es* as the final inflection of the present indicative plural of the verb, 5) substituted *them* for *him* and *their* for *here* in the third person plural of the pronoun, 6) preferred the phoneme /s/ to the phoneme /ʃ/ in the equivalents of Modern *shall* (*sal*) and *should* (*soldē*), 7) made *are* predominate as the present plural of the verb *to be*, 8) did not soften Old English /k/ to /c/ before front vowels (thus *kirk* instead of *church*), and 9) kept *at* in general use for *to*.

West Midland. Spoken south of the Humber, north of the Severn, and east of Wales, West Midland Middle English 1)

changed Old English *a* before *m* and *n* (except *ng*, *nd*, *mb*) to *o* (thus *mon* for *man*, *nome* for *name*, *ronk* for *rank*), 2) maintained two forms of present indicative third person singular for the verb (-*eth* in southern part and -*es* in northern), 3) substituted *v* for initial *f* in southern part, 4) used both -*and* and -*end* as the ending of the present participle, 5) retained Old English *y*, *ȳ*, *eo*, and *ēo* as front rounded vowels (*u*, *ui*, *eo*, *o*, *oe*, *u*, *ue*), and 6) employed the distinctive forms *ho* and *ha* for the feminine third person singular pronoun.

Southern. Spoken west of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex and south of the Severn and the Thames, Southern Middle English 1) substituted *v* for initial *f*, 2) behaved exactly like West Midland in the retention of Old English *y*, *ȳ*, *eo*, and *ēo*, 3) used both -*ing* and -*ind* as the ending of the present participle, 4) preferred -*eth* as the inflection for the present plural indicative of the verb, and 5) retained Old English *i*, *y*, *ī*, and *ȳ* so that *u* or *i* substituted for the *e* in other dialects (for example, *huren* or *hiren* instead of *heren*, "hear").

Kentish. Spoken in the extreme southeastern tip of England (Kent, Surrey and Sussex), Kentish Middle English 1) substituted *v* for initial *f*, 2) used both -*ing* and -*ind* as the ending of the present participle, 3) preferred -*en* as the inflection for the present plural indicative of the verb, 4) interjected a semi-vowel before *o* when preceded by *b* or *g* (for example, *quod* instead of *god*, "good"), and 5) occasionally lowered high-front *i* to mid-front *e* in words like *pet* for *pit* and *fer* for *fire*.

East Midland. Spoken between the Thames and the Humber in the eastern section of the Midlands, East Midland Middle English 1) did not support most of the distinguishing features of the other dialects, 2) eventually borrowed functional items from other dialects (for example, plural pronouns from Northern and the -*ing* form of the present participle from Kentish), 3) preferred -*en* as the inflection for the present plural indicative of verbs, and 4) used -*end* as the ending of the present participle.

In the general convergence of these five major dialects, East Midland

acted as the gathering magnet. The primary reason for this attractive power, of course, was the city of London.

EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE. The impact of Norman French upon Early Middle English was not confined to linguistic matters *per se*; it extended to the artistic use of language as well. Under this Norman French influence, English storytelling softened its earlier heroic tone. Enjoying the fresh technique of full description, detailed setting, psychological characterization, and exploitation of crisis, the romance became the central form of narrative art, courtly in manner and worldly wise in outlook. The forerunner of the modern novel and a literary equivalent of the present-day Western, the medieval romance abounded in number, subject matter, spies, battles, conversions of the heathen, intrigues, and love affairs. Although drawing on material from ancient Greece and Rome, from Spain and France, the medieval English romance chose King Arthur as its hero par excellence. From Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh chronicler of the mid-twelfth century, to Malory, who published his *Morte Darthur* in 1485, English patriotism and mysticism combined to make the little finger of Arthur stronger than the back of Charlemagne or Alexander.

The courtly love depicted in the medieval romance was supported by the sentiments developed in ballad and lyric, as imported from Provence via Normandy. Nor could the church stamp out the religion of courtly love, for the church was engaged in advancing a Mariolatry that sanctified the courtly love of religion. Despite the labored dullness of such long homilies and treatises as the *Ormulum* (c. 1215), the *Ancren Riwle* (c. 1220), and *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1300), the hand of the church on Early Middle English literature was not altogether detrimental. On the contrary, it was in the church that the great secular and democratic art form of England got its start: the drama.

Even before the Norman Conquest, the Mass of Easter contained the rudimentary play of a simple colloquy known as the *Quem quaeritis* ("Whom seek ye?"). This question the angel asks the three Marys, who answer: "Jesus of Nazareth." Then the angel replies, "He is not here, he is risen." From such a bare beginning evolved the greatest dramatic literature of the Western world. Mainly in the hands of the clergy for some three hundred years, Early Middle English drama finally emerged

from the church, secularized itself with non-Biblical figures (clowns and native types), and performed beyond the churchyard in pageant carts drawn through the town. With the trade guilds undertaking their production, the plays evolved into three basic types: mystery, miracle, and morality. Mystery plays dealt with Biblical subjects (Creation, the Slaughter of the Innocents, the Sacrifice of Isaac); miracle plays portrayed the lives of the saints; morality plays dramatized the conflict of good and evil in the soul of man. If *Everyman* (c. 1500) is the only undisputed masterpiece among the cycles of medieval drama, they are still extremely important for the development of English literature: they prepared the cultural setting for Shakespeare.

MATURE MIDDLE ENGLISH THE SLOW ASCENDANCY OF THE LANGUAGE, 1307-1422

DURING THE THIRTY YEARS BETWEEN the death of Edward I and the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War (1307-1337), French continued to decline in importance in England. English had become so much the viable tongue of all classes in the early fourteenth century that both the church and the universities undertook measures to sustain an artificial use of French. French was the speech of conversation in the Benedictine monasteries at Canterbury and Westminster. Students at Oxford University were required to make grammatical analyses of French and translate their Latin studies into that language. Statutes of several of the Oxford colleges demanded that students converse in either Latin or French. In 1332 the English Parliament felt compelled to bolster the sagging use of French by decreeing that all members of the nobility and the gentry should see to it that their children were properly instructed in that language. This political preferment of French joined with a scholarly abuse of English in a vain attempt to maintain the linguistic supremacy of an aristocratic conservatism. But the grammatical treatises after 1250 indicate that by this time French was considered a foreign language in England. The political rise of Paris assured the dominance of Central French upon the continent, and in comparison with the refinements of that tongue the artificial French of England sounded somewhat ridiculous.

From the beginning of the Hundred Years' War in 1337 to the

Peasants' Revolt in 1381, the growing prestige of English was supported by the nationalism induced through open conflict with France and by the rise of a substantial English middle class. The military victories over the French at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) injected a new sense of patriotism in the British people, who quite naturally nurtured feelings of animosity toward the enemy and his language. This hostility toward all things French contributed in large measure to the ultimate disuse of the language in England. In support of this patriotic tendency, a middle class growing in size, wealth, and political strength sanctioned the importance of the English language.

A general improvement of the status of the English villeins and in the standard of living among the free laborers contributed to the rising prestige of the language they spoke. A sharp reduction of the labor market, brought about by the terrible bubonic plague of 1348-50, resulted in an immediate escalation of wages. The serious shortage of labor that produced monetary gains for the English workers also enhanced the value of their native tongue, for the importance of a language is directly related to the importance of its speakers. The expanding economic strength of the middle class led to the development of trade unions and guilds, which reinforced the power of the craftsmen and merchants. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 showed that in time every area of England would have to acknowledge the growing dignity and importance of labor. The final triumph of English, therefore, was a direct outcome of the enlarged role of the common man in the political, economic, and military affairs of his country.

The four decades between the Peasants' Revolt and the death of Henry V (1381-1422) mark the official recognition and the general use of English in Britain. A generation earlier, the language had been accorded certain legal advantages over French: in the Sheriff's Court of London and Middlesex (1356) and in the King's Court and others (1362). Although court records were still to be written in Latin, the Statute of Pleading—enacted by Parliament in 1362—demanded that the pleading of all cases be conducted in English. Parliament itself opened that year with the chancellor giving an address in the native tongue. By 1385 English had become the classroom language of the British schools.

At the start of the fifteenth century, then, French had been reduced to a linguistic luxury for culture and fashion. Meanwhile, English was becoming the official written word, as well as spoken. The beginning

of this elevation took place in legal documents, especially in wills. After 1400 the growth of English usage in private correspondence was also remarkable. Extremely influential, the reign of Henry V (1413-22) served as the turning point in the establishment of the written English word. Not only did Henry V defeat the French forces at Agincourt (1415), strike a death blow at medieval chivalry and the use of cumbersome armor, and revive a pride in all things English, but he also promoted by example the adoption of his language as the means of written communication in Britain.

Mature Middle English covered about 115 years in the history of the language. This linguistic era was a time in which the greatest influx of French words into English took place, an influx marked by two signs of profound penetration: assimilation and hybrid formation. It was a time that witnessed the continued loss of native words from the Anglo-Saxon. An intensified differentiation of meaning nurtured a tri-level vocabulary, rich in synonyms and adequate for any language situation. Mature Middle English also experienced a reduction in the morphological processes inherited from Old English and a corresponding growth in a Latinic system of affixing.

While all these changes were happening, the London version of the East Midland dialect kept gaining linguistic ascendancy until it finally became the Spoken Standard. Soon the Spoken Standard became the Written Standard. Meanwhile, a sprinkling of Low Countries vocabulary (from Flemish, Dutch, and Low German) seasoned Mature Middle English. During this period of the language, moreover, several important literary efforts transpired: the Biblical translations of John Wycliffe, a pioneer in the refinement of English prose; the Alliterative Revival, as led by the *Pearl* poet and William Langland; and above all the creation of a new verse tradition in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, the artistic fountainhead of the English Renaissance.

FRENCH INFLUENCE. During Mature Middle English the entrance rate of French words into the language was at its highest. The peak of the invasion was reached in the half century between 1350 and 1400, during the full flower of Chaucer's literary career and at a time when a patriotic nationalism was reorienting every class of British society back to the uses of the native tongue. In the return to English, the carry-over from French was enormous.

A sampling of French loan words active in the English language by the fourteenth century reads as follows: *action, adventure, affection, age, air, bucket, bushel, business, calendar, carpenter, cheer, city, coast, comfort, cost, country, courage, courtesy, coward, cruelty, damage, debt, deceit, dozen, ease, envy, error, face, faggot, fame, fault, flower, folly, force, gibbet, glutton, grain, grief, gum, harlot, honor, hour, jest, joy, labor, malice, manner, marriage, mason, metal, mischief, mountain, noise, number, ocean, odor, opinion, order, pair, people, peril, person, pewter, piece, point, poverty, powder, power, quality, quart, rage, rancor, reason, river, scandal, seal, season, sign, sound, sphere, spirit, square, strife, stubble, substance, sum, tailor, task, tavern, tempest, unity, use, vision, and waste; able, abundant, active, actual, amiable, amorous, barren, blank, brief, calm, certain, chaste, chief, clear, common, contrary, courageous, courteous, covetous, coy, cruel, curious, debonair, double, eager, easy, faint, feeble, fierce, final, firm, foreign, frail, frank, gay, gentle, gracious, hardy, hasty, honest, horrible, innocent, jolly, large, liberal, luxurious, malicious, mean, moist, natural, nice, obedient, original, perfect, pertinent, plain, pliant, poor, precious, principal, probable, proper, pure, quaint, real, rude, safe, sage, savage, scarce, second, secret, simple, single, sober, solid, special, stable, stout, strange, sturdy, subtle, sudden, supple, sure, tender, treacherous, universal, and usual; advance, advise, aim, allow, apply, approach, arrange, arrive, betray, butt, carry, chafe, change, chase, close, comfort, commence, complain, conceal, consider, continue, count, cover, covet, cry, cull, deceive, declare, defeat, defer, defy, delay, desire, destroy, embrace, enclose, endure, enjoy, enter, err, excuse, flatter, flourish, force, forge, form, furnish, grant, increase, inform, inquire, join, languish, launch, marry, mount, move, murmur, muse, nourish, obey, oblige, observe, pass, pay, pierce, pinch, please, practice, praise, prefer, proceed, propose, prove, purify, pursue, push, quash, quit, receive, refuse, rejoice, relieve, remember, reply, rinse, rob, satisfy, save, scald, serve, strangle, strive, stum, succeed, summon, suppose, surprise, tax, tempt, trace, travel, tremble, trip, wait, waive, waste, and wince.*

This selective list indicates the breadth and depth of the French influence upon Mature Middle English. It extends to phrases as well: *plenty of, to the contrary, if need be, because of, to make peace, tender age, to take leave, to draw near, to hold one's peace, to come to a head, to make believe, hand to hand, on the point of, according to, subject to,*

at large, by heart, in vain, without fail. All these expressions are English versions of original French models.

During the fourteenth century the English language borrowed French words and phrases in their Anglo-Norman forms. In the fifteenth century, however, French had become a completely artificial tongue in Britain; consequently, a large portion of the English borrowing from French during this period was from the Central or Parisian dialect of that language. Since most French loans before 1350 tended to develop a native force in English, this general observation seems to hold true: Norman French influence upon English is basically popular and reflects the intimacy of the spoken word; Central French influence, on the other hand, is basically literary and reflects the formal elegance of the written word. Before the close of the fifteenth century, Caxton was looking into print such literary borrowings from Central French as *adolescence, affability, aggravation, appellation, cohort, combustion, destitution, diversify, furtive, harangue, immensity, ingenuous, pacification, prolongation, ravishment, representation, and sumptuous*.

Apart from the fundamental difference between spoken and written attributes, Norman loans are distinguished from Central or Parisian by the simple means of phonology. The outstanding phonological criteria for such discrimination are as follows:

- 1) Central French dropped the Norman *s* before *t* at the end of the twelfth century; thus Norman *feast* and *hostel* contrast with Parisian *fete* and *hotel*.
- 2) Central French softened Norman /j/ and /c/ to /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ sometime in the thirteenth century; hence Norman *charge, change, chamber, chase, chair, chimney, just, jewel, journey, majesty, and gentle* contrast with Parisian *chamois, chaperon, chiffon, chevron, jabot, and rouge*.
- 3) Central French forwarded and broke Norman /k/ to /c/ early in the Middle English period; thus Norman *cattle* contrasts with Parisian *chattel*.
- 4) Norman French maintained an initial /w/ in place of Central /g/; hence Norman *warden* contrasts with Parisian *guardian*.

5) Central French dropped the /w/ from Norman /kw/ in initial positions on stressed syllables; thus the Modern English pronunciation of words like *quit, quarter, quality, question, and require* shows that they were early Anglo-Norman entrants into the language.

6) Central French shifted the Anglo-Norman diphthong *ei* to *oi* early in the twelfth century; *ei* evolved to phonemic /iy/, whereas *oi* became /ɔy/; hence Norman *real* contrasts with Parisian *royal*.

7) Central French changed Anglo-Norman *-arie* and *-orie* to *-aire* and *-oire*; thus Modern English words like *salary* and *victory* show that they are relatively early borrowings from Norman French rather than from Parisian.

In addition to these seven criteria, other less general phonological differences between Central and Norman French existed.

Far more important than the influx of French words into the English vocabulary was the rapid assimilation of these foreign words. As Jespersen remarked, the juxtaposition of French synonyms with their English equivalents helped to quicken the process of assimilation. Taking such assimilation for granted, Chaucer employed double expressions—one native and one foreign—to heighten his style: *make* and *endyte, faire* and *fetisly, swynken* and *laboure, cure* and *hede, poynaunt* and *sharp, lord* and *sire*. What was elevated style in Chaucer, however, became a mannerism of learned redundancy in Caxton: *awreke* and *avenge, honour* and *worship, olde* and *auncyent, feblest* and *wekest, glasse* and *mirrour, fowle* and *dishonestly*. A greater indication of assimilation is the union of French roots with English words and affixes to form hybrid compounds and derivatives. The use of *gentle* in such words as *gentlewoman, gentleman, gentleness, and gently*, therefore, constitutes a clear portrait of the progress of assimilation in the century between 1230 and 1330.

In a similar manner, *faith* soon combined with Middle English elements of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to produce such derivatives as *faithless, faithful, faithfully, and faithfulness*. Many borrowed French adjectives combined with the native adverbial morpheme *-ly* to form such hybrid contributions as *commonly, courteously, eagerly, faintly, feebly, fiercely, justly, and peacefully*. Quick assimilation did not always

guarantee survival of the derivative term; archaic combinations like *chasthed* (chastity), *lecherness*, *debonairship*, *poorness*, *spusbruche* (adultery, spouse-breach), and *becatch* have long since fallen into disuse. Other derivatives and compounds of early formation, on the other hand, have remained viable to the present-day: *ungracious*, *overpraising*, *com-monweal*, and *battle-ax*.

The influx and assimilation of French words into English produced quite a few duplications of meaning, which inevitably led to either a synonymous differentiation or a suppression and loss of one of the duplicates. Many times the suppression applied to the challenging French term itself; more often, however, it was the native Old English word that fell into complete disuse. Though Chaucer uses *em* (from Old English *ēam*) in his *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, it is the French equivalent *uncle* which has survived into modern times—a result predictable from the frequency of appearance of *uncle* in that same poem: it vastly predominates over *em*. In like manner, *anda* gave way to *envy*, *andig* to *envious*.

The following list of French replacements and English losses makes a graphic demonstration of this process of linguistic suppression:

FRENCH REPLACEMENTS	ENGLISH LOSSES	FRENCH REPLACEMENTS	ENGLISH LOSSES
noble	æþeþe	gracious	hold
people	lēode	glory	wuldor
crime	firen	cruel	slibe
army	here	beauty	wlīte
peace	sibb	confess	andettan
flower	blæd	compose	dihtan
disease	ādl	improve	gōdian
age	ieldu	pity	miltisan
praise	lof	reward	lēanian
air	lyft		

French replacements were not always responsible for the loss of a native English term. Now and then another native word took the ascendancy and suppressed its own English equivalent. Thus *lord* overcame both *dryhten* and *frēa*. Similarly, *guilty* purged the language of *scyldig*, and *warrior* got rid of *cempa*.

If French replacements did not succeed in suppressing native English terms, then the duplicates usually separated into synonyms of differ-

tiated meaning. The result for the language was increased flexibility of expression and enriched diction in the vocabulary. Synonyms permit the avoidance of a trite repetition of morphemes; they also allow for a greater differentiation of styles—in both formal and informal usage. Synonyms are also a basis for subtle shades of meaning, the leisurely processes of philosophical reflection, and the scientific accuracies inherent in specialized vocabularies.

The differentiation of meaning in Mature Middle English, therefore, was of distinct advantage; from the very outset of this development, the language can speak from either heart or head in terms appropriate to each and without confusion. Thus the native English vocabulary is more emotional and informal, whereas the imported French synonyms are more intellectual and formal. The warmth and force of the former contrast with the coolness and clarity of the latter. If a speaker can be intimate, blunt, and direct in basic English, he can also be discreet, polite, and courteously elegant in the diction of borrowed French. The central features of both linguistic methods are apparent in the following list of synonyms developed in the period of Mature Middle English:

NATIVE ENGLISH	FRENCH EQUIVALENT	NATIVE ENGLISH	FRENCH EQUIVALENT
hearty	cordial	might	power
friendship	amity	ask	demand
loving	amorous	shun	avoid
help	aid	seethe	boil
stench	odor	wish	desire
house	mansion		

One of the strongest examples of this differentiation between warm force and cool clarity may be seen in the later opposition between the synonyms *God* and the *Deity*. Many French loans, however, carry native force with them; *boil* is an example. Regardless of their intimacy or detachment, special French entries like *beef*, *mutton*, *pork*, and *veal* are indispensable linguistic commodities.

DECLINE OF NATIVE MORPHOLOGICAL PROCESSES. With the vast influx and profound assimilation of French into English, several native methods of word formation declined. Reduced in importance were the morphological processes of internal modification and terminal inflectionalizing. At the same time the linguistic habit of combining free morphemes

into self-explanatory compounds was curtailed. Basically Germanic modes of language behavior gave way to Latinic—a surrender which may be seen in the loss of vitality in the affixes inherited from Old English.

The intensifying prefix *for-* (like German *ver-*) maintained a dim life in Middle English, but such combinations as *forhang* (kill by hanging), *forcleave* (cut to pieces), and *forshake* (shake off) did not survive. Although *for-* persists into Modern English in such words as *forbear*, *forbid*, *forget*, *forgive*, *forgo*, *forsake*, *forswear*, and *forlorn*, it is an obsolete relic. The prefix *to-*, similar to *for-* in intensifying destructive or prejudicial meaning, was once used with the force of German *zer-*; today it is extinct. The prefix *with-* (against) has all but disappeared; it survives in such words as *withdraw*, *withhold*, and *withstand*, but no new derivatives are being formed with it. Suffering from the same disuse after the Norman Conquest, such viable prefixes as *over-*, *under-*, and *un-* owe their life to a revival in Modern English: thus *overkill*, *undersell*, and *unzip*.

Several Old English suffixes met a similar decline: *-lock*, *-red*, *-dom*, *-hood* and *-ship*. Despite the appearance of these suffixes in such words as *wedlock*, *hatred*, *wisdom*, *falsehood*, and *kinship*, they are seldom utilized. Modern English uses *-ness*, the most viable of the Old English suffixes, as its noun formant: thus *bookishness* and *togetherness*. The adjective endings *-ful*, *-less*, *-some*, and *-ish* have remained vital.

RENEWED LATIN INFLUENCE. During the period of Mature Middle English, Latin reasserted its invasion rights. With the influx of French terms after the Norman Conquest, Latin cognates and progenitors filtered directly into English via literature at an impressive rate. Although spoken among ecclesiastics and scholars, medieval Latin was for practical purposes a dead language confined to the literature of the written word. The Latin terms that entered English during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, therefore, were less popular than the French.

In the monumental work of translating the Bible into English, John Wycliffe and his associates probably let in more than a thousand Latin words that have passed into common use. Through the work of Wycliffe and other writers, many Latin terms became permanent additions to the English language. Coming from such diverse fields as law, medicine, theology, science, and literature, these Latin additions often began as professional specialist and ended up by being widely accepted as gen-

eral learned. According to the *New English Dictionary*, some of the direct borrowings from Latin during this period are *abject*, *adjacent*, *allegory*, *conspiracy*, *contempt*, *custody*, *distract*, *frustrate*, *genius*, *gesture*, *history*, *homicide*, *immune*, *incarnate*, *include*, *incredible*, *incubus*, *incumbent*, *index*, *individual*, *infancy*, *inferior*, *infinite*, *innate*, *innumerable*, *intellect*, *interrupt*, *juniper*, *lapidary*, *legal*, *limbo*, *lucrative*, *lunatic*, *magnify*, *malefactor*, *mechanical*, *minor*, *missal*, *moderate*, *necessary*, *nervous*, *notary*, *ornate*, *picture*, *polite*, *popular*, *prevent*, *private*, *project*, *promote*, *prosecute*, *prosody*, *pulpit*, *quiet*, *rational*, *reject*, *remit*, *reprehend*, *rosary*, *script*, *scripture*, *scrutiny*, *secular*, *solar*, *solitary*, *spacious*, *stupor*, *subdivide*, *subjugate*, *submit*, *subordinate*, *subscribe*, *substitute*, *summary*, *superabundance*, *supplicate*, *suppress*, *temperate*, *temporal*, *testify*, *testimony*, *tincture*, *tract*, *tributary*, *ulcer*, *zenith*, and *zephyr*.

A larger Latin influence than that of vocabulary enrichment was the development of a new system of derivative formation. With the decline of the native morphological processes, English experienced an accompanying growth in the use of Latin, often reinforced by French, affixes. With the entrance of such prefixes as *counter-*, *dis-*, *re-*, *trans-*, *sub-*, *super-*, *pre-*, *pro-*, *de-* and of such suffixes as *-able*, *-ible*, *-ent*, *-al*, *-ous*, and *-ive*, the evolutionary history of English derivatives was forever changed. So linguistically rich was the contribution of Latin affixes to the word-formation methods of English that Shakespeare could make poetry out of a bound morpheme: *melt* becomes *discandy*.

LONDON DIALECT: STANDARD ENGLISH. In the period of Mature Middle English, the London dialect rose to the eminence of Received British Standard, both in the spoken and in the written word. Considering the economic, political, and military importance of London, such linguistic conquest was inevitable. But the admixture of Mercian (East End of London), West Saxon (West End of London) and Kentish (South London) contributed largely to the development of the Standard, even as it had previously helped to create the poetic dialect. With the influx of Northern laborers, tradesmen, and seamen into the city, moreover, a mixing of radical and conservative elements of the language took place. London English maintained an intermediate position that could draw upon the best features of the extremes of Southern conservatism and Northern radicalism. Sharing characteristics with each of the other dialects, London English found little trouble in gaining adherents.

Of the several reasons for the rise of the London dialect to Standard English, three predominate: 1) the national importance of the city itself as the political capital, commercial center, and cultural heart of Britain; 2) the numerical superiority and social status of the speakers of the London dialect, and 3) the intelligently utilitarian evolution of the dialect itself. A secondary factor in the rise of the London dialect is the prominence of the East Midland region in the political life of the country. Within this region operated two mighty forces in favor of learning, Oxford and Cambridge, and both helped support the development and the dissemination of the London dialect. In like manner, though he was aristocratically somewhat Southern and conservative, Chaucer became a powerful artistic ally of the emerging Standard English. Within a half century after his death in 1400, Standard had grown from Spoken to Written to Literary. And Caxton was soon to spread it throughout the island kingdom.

LINGUISTIC SEASONING FROM THE LOW COUNTRIES. In the half century between 1327 and 1377, scores of words from Flemish, Dutch, and Low German entered English. They were the advance scouts for a steady invasion that has accounted for at least 2500 Low Dutch verbal immigrants into the language. The major impetus to such language entrance in the Middle Ages was commercial—the woolen industry. Exported English wool supplied looms in Flanders, Holland, and northern Germany. Superior weavers from the continent took up residence in England in considerable numbers, and with them they brought further sources to enrich the English vocabulary. Subsequent trade and travel among English, Flemish, Dutch, and German merchants strengthened the trend of linguistic borrowing from the Low Countries. Such words as *nap*, *deck*, *bowsprit*, *lighter*, *dock*, *freight*, *rover*, *mart*, *groat*, and *guilder* were in English usage before the advent of the Renaissance. Later loans include *cambric*, *boom*, *beleaguer*, *furlough*, *commodore*, *gin*, *gherkin*, *dollar*, *easel*, *etching*, *landscape*, *cruller*, *cookie*, *cranberry*, *bowery*, *boddle*, and the like.

LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT. Great literary efforts in the vernacular during Mature Middle English constituted the dawn of both prose and poetry in the language. The three outstanding cultural events during this

period were John Wycliffe's translation of the Bible, the Alliterative Revival, and the career of Geoffrey Chaucer.

One of the most influential of all English preachers, John Wycliffe (1328?-84) bent his energies to the task of achieving social and ecclesiastical reform. Believing that the church should have no concern with temporal matters, that the clergy should minister to the people and not be allowed to own property, and that the Bible is its own absolute authority, Wycliffe was a master of moderate treatment, Biblical precept, and good common sense. With the help of such scholars as Nicholas of Hereford and John Purvey, Wycliffe made the entire Bible available to the people of England for the first time—and in their common idiom. With his faith in the superiority of personal piety over external form and ritual, Wycliffe helped give religion back to the individual. In so doing, he influenced the sentence structure and turn of phrase in the Authorized Version of 1611. He was thus a pioneer in the perfecting of a simple, direct, yet eloquent and dignified English prose style.

About midway in Wycliffe's life there was a return to the earlier tradition of alliterative poetry in the accentual rhythms of Old English. This poetic revival concentrated in the North and in the Northwest Midlands, although the most famous work of the movement, *Piers Plowman*, originated in the West Midlands. The two outstanding figures of the Alliterative Revival were the *Pearl* poet and William Langland. The *Pearl* poet gave English literature dream-vision allegory, personal elegy, and dramatic debate noted for sensuousness, metrical versatility, and control. The purity of his method was extremely rare in Middle English literature. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this unknown genius (if the same author) fashioned the finest Arthurian romance in the language, masterful in plot, background description and local color, narrative thrust, suspense, and dialogue. In the masterpiece of Langland, on the other hand, social criticism asserted itself as a major force in the literary life of the nation. With deadly accuracy and sometimes blunt vulgarity, Langland castigated the miserable conditions of the working man, the basic dishonesty of the English courts, the material greed of the church, and the ignorance and stupidity of the clergy. In the great A and B versions, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman* was the massed cry of suffering humanity for a redress of injuries. As a means of democratic protest, the poem stands as one of the most intense social documents of the Western world.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHAUCER. The literary contributions of Geoffrey Chaucer (1344–1400) to the cultural life of Britain were the supreme artistic achievement of Mature Middle English. Chaucer passed through three phases of creative growth. In the first two he was imitative, derivative, and translated from continental sources: the Latin of Ovid; the French of the *Roman de la Rose* and the poetry of Machaut, Des-camps, and Froissart; the Italian of Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante. In the mature phase of his English period, Chaucer wrote two masterpieces: *Troilus and Criseyde* (1382–86) and *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–95). Through Chaucer, European literary conventions, epic machinery, romantic motifs, verse forms, and stylistics made a new fountainhead of English poetry and hastened the Renaissance in the island kingdom. He gave an artistic refinement to dream-vision, allegory, and elegy, and he launched English poetry into a new metrical tradition: the classical foot, in which stress and syllable counting still play a major role.

Chaucer was not only the chief introducer of "iambic pentameter" into English poetry but also the adopting father of such foreign strophic modes as the "heroic couplet" and the *terza rima* immortalized by Dante in his *Commedia*. Chaucer invented his own stanzaic unit, the seven-lined verse paragraph (ababbcc) known as rhyme royal. Using this verse form to tell the tragicomic love affair between mysterious Criseyde and transparent Troilus is a stroke of genius. Rhyme royal permits Chaucer to exploit a stanzaic pattern that can constantly threaten the action of high tragedy with the superb language of high comedy. Chaucer thus capitalizes on the tension between these aesthetic oppositions—by dissipating true pathos with the emotional excesses of apostrophic melodrama. The result is the first psychological novel in the English language, a novel enjoying an economy of poetry and built upon the quiet humor of the intellectual laugh.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, courtly love is only one of several primary bases for Chaucer's insight into human nature. The characterization of the pilgrims themselves becomes Chaucer's great literary gift to the spirit of modernity, for the intrigues, rivalries, and passions among the travelers to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket constitute a *comédie humaine* of more intrinsic interest and formal value than are generated by the stories they tell. As a medieval anthology in which courtly romances, parodies, lays, classical legends, folk-tales, fabliaux, saints' lives, miracles, tragic stories, exempla, sermons, beast fables, and short lyrics appear, *The*

Canterbury Tales remains an artistic panorama of the fourteenth century in England. From the dirty joke to the battle of the sexes, from the criticism of a corrupt clergy to the affirmation of human goodness, from the use of dream psychology to the abuse of astrology, from a mastery of the four elements to a submission to the Trinity, Chaucer has created in this incomplete work a vivid, fascinating, and credible world in which sanity, tolerance, whimsical humor, and gentle satire act for the imagination rather than for the moral will. In this world where the Wife of Bath is an earth-goddess progenitor of James Joyce's Molly Bloom, *to make* is *to mean*. From his making as supreme comic poet of the Middle Ages, Chaucer is a worthy companion of Dante and the English narrative harbinger of a vaster literary universe to come in the dramas of Shakespeare.

LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH THE LANGUAGE TRIUMPHANT, 1422–1489

THE MOST OUTSTANDING HISTORICAL FEATURE of Late Middle English is the growing importance of the written word. From the death of Henry V in 1422 to the final abolition of French from the legal statutes of England in 1489, the position of English as the language of writing in Britain constantly improved. After 1423 the records of Parliament were kept in the native tongue of Chaucer. By 1425 the language of correspondence, private and public, informal and formal, was English. By 1450 the town laws of the country had been translated into the language of the people, and a Literary Standard English, based upon the Received Spoken Standard of the London dialect, had been established.

In 1476 William Caxton introduced printing into England, to spread the Literary Standard and a popular literacy, with vast implications for both the language and its literature. In 1489, four years after his accession, Henry VII put an absolute end to the use of French in the statutes of England. With that act the language that had gone underground in 1066 emerged completely triumphant over foreign domination. What came out on top, however, was a far cry from what had gone under: the changes wrought in the English language during the four intervening centuries were enormous.

As a transition period between the age of Chaucer and the age of

Shakespeare, Late Middle English was a time of literary imitations. This era of the written word produced the writers Lydgate, Hoccleve, Skelton, Hawes, Malory, and Caxton, and witnessed the emergence of the Scottish Chaucerians: Henryson, Dunbar, Gavin Douglas, and Lindsay. The renewed influx of exotic Latin terms into Late Middle English gave the language a rash of *aureate diction*, a kind of Latin gilding that resulted in artificial and stilted elegance. Moderate with his own use of aureate diction, Chaucer introduced such words as *laureate*, *mediation*, *oriental*, and *prolixity* into the vocabulary of the language. Later and lesser poets rioted with *abusion*, *dispone*, *diurne*, *equipotent*, *palestral*, *semipitern* and *tenebrous*.

Far more valuable than aureate diction was the further development of the rich tri-level structure of synonyms during Late Middle English. In the specializations of vocabulary, popular, literary, and learned expressions graced the language with accuracy and flexibility. If basic English during this period was strong and simple, it was also not wholly basic English—that is to say, many French adoptions struck with the same native force: *bar*, *beak*, *cell*, *cry*, *fool*, *frown*, *fury*, *glory*, *guile*, *gullet*, *horror*, *humor*, *isle*, *pity*, *river*, *rock*, *ruin*, *stain*, *stuff*, *touch*, and *wreck*; *calm*, *clear*, *cruel*, *eager*, *fierce*, *gay*, *mean*, *rude*, *safe*, and *tender*. But as a general rule, the three levels of synonymous statement achieved in Late Middle English follow the pattern of popular English, literary French, and learned Latin. This pattern for synonyms may be seen in the following few examples:

ENGLISH	FRENCH	LATIN
rise	mount	ascend
ask	question	interrogate
goodness	virtue	probity
fear	terror	trepidation
holy	sacred	consecrated

In addition to aureate diction, literary imitation, and the development of a tri-level system of synonyms, Late Middle English was marked by four general attributes attendant upon a Written Standard. First, during this period the leveling of inflections begun in the closing stages of Old English was completed. Second, dialect differences were further reduced so that the future history of London English became that of British English as a whole. Third, in this evolutionary state of the language the

principles of word order put the final touches upon a functionally analytic syntax; future developments were merely stylistic refinements. Fourth, Late Middle English supported a phonetic instability that led to the Great Vowel Shift, the silencing of certain consonants, and the phonemic transmutation of others. This phonetic instability was the progenitor of Early Modern English.

QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

- Organize a series of reports on the importance of the following historical figures in the development of Middle English: William Caxton, Geoffrey Chaucer, Henry V, William Langland, and John Wycliffe.
- Let four members of the class engage in a round table discussion of the major attributes of the four leading dialects of Middle English: Northern, East Midland, West Midland, and Southern. What are some of the outstanding literary productions of these various dialects? What chief features of each did the London Standard come to use in its linguistic compromise? Now let the entire class write a brief critical paper on the advantages inherent in dialect rivalry.
- Make a study of the 85 percent of the Old English vocabulary that was suppressed in the evolution of Middle English. Are there any apparent patterns in the dropping of these thousands of terms from the active vocabulary of the language? Give some examples of words and phrases you think it would have been well for the language to have retained in common use. Defend your choices.
- Draw up two lists of loans into Middle English—one Norman, one Central French—that you think have achieved the status of native force. What are the chief characteristics of these terms? In what ways do they resemble the original Anglo-Saxon stock? Be specific in your answers.
- Let three members of the class organize a dramatization of the three levels of expression that came into specialization during the period of Middle English: *Popular* (native English), *Literary* (assimilated French), and *Learned* (reintroduced Latin and its cognate Greek). Dramatize these three levels by translating the Twenty-third Psalm into the terminology appropriate to each of these levels. Now engage the class in a discussion of the values and the dangers inherent in such a specialization of vocabulary. Is literary grace in the English language dependent upon maintaining a purity of diction on one level or another? or does it consist in mixing the various levels? or is there no direct correlation at all? Defend your answer in detail.

6. Using Middle English as a starting point, investigate the correlation between use of a native tongue and the development of patriotic nationalism. Now extend your research to encompass the current political-linguistic problems in India, Ireland, Union of South Africa, Russia, the Spanish-speaking republics of Latin America, the Philippines, Israel, Canada, and Puerto Rico. From this study, would you say that there is any hope for one language to dominate the world in the foreseeable future? Defend your answer in detail.
7. Discuss the liberal and the conservative forces behind the evolution of Middle English. Now let the class choose four of its members—two to represent the liberal forces, two the conservative—to debate the following proposition: *That the rise of a democratic spirit in England was beneficial to the progress of the language.*
8. Organize a series of reports on the aesthetic achievements of Middle English in the following areas of literary endeavor: the medieval romance, the dream allegory, the social satire, the religious lyric, the folk ballad, and the cycles of mystery, miracle, and morality plays.
9. Write a major research paper on the importance of the morphological process of affixing in Middle English. Pay particular attention to the use of French and Latin imports in this process.
10. Illustrate the literary genius of Chaucer by comparing his poetry with that of his leading contemporary John Gower. What major advantages does Chaucer enjoy over his rival? In what ways is Chaucer the English Dante? Develop your answers with detailed examples.

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