

Fritz Kemmler / Iryna Rieker

# Medieval English: Literature and Language

5<sup>th</sup> Edition

**narr STUDIENBÜCHER**

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## Preface

This book continues the new approach in Medieval English Studies adopted for the fourth edition (2008). Unlike most course books on Medieval English, which focus on either Old *or* Middle English, we have sought to show how interconnected Old and Middle English can and must be. This is seen not only at the level of the language, but also in the texts themselves, in the topics and themes important to Medieval culture.

Numerous years of teaching Old and Middle English have convinced us of the importance of looking at both of these languages in their context: Medieval English. We are confident that the interconnectedness of our approach will make learning one or both of these languages considerably easier.

In order to give the reader a direct impression of Medieval literary production, several manuscript pages have been reproduced in this book: Corpus Christi College Cambridge, MS 173, fol. 10<sup>r</sup> (p. 93), Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 20, fol. 1<sup>r</sup> (p. 111), Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86, fol. 138<sup>r</sup> (p. 197) and British Library, MS Harley 2253, fol. 63<sup>v</sup> (p. 211). Special thanks to these libraries for their permission to reproduce these manuscript pages.

Naturally, many have helped us extensively with this project. First and foremost, we would like to thank Richard Szydlak, Tübingen's cartographer, for creating two maps especially for this book. Thomas Kemmler contributed the Indo-European languages diagram. Also thanks to Wendy Smith for taking care of the proofreading. We would also like to thank our publisher, Gunter Narr, and his team for their continuing support and encouragement as to a fifth edition. Finally, we wish to thank our families for their generous assistance and for putting up with us, especially during the last weeks.

Candlemas, 2012

*Iryna Rieker, Fritz Kemmler*

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in parts 1–6:

A	accusative	WML	West Midlands
C	consonant	WS	West Saxon
D	dative	M 1/17	Middle English Texts: Text 1, line 17
eMnE	early Modern English	O 1/17	Old English Texts: Text 1, line 17
fem.	feminine	ǎ	short vowel
G	genitive	ā	long vowel
l., ll.	line, lines	ǣ	short and long vowel
lME	late Middle English	ɑ̄	closed vowel
masc.	masculine	ɑ̆	open vowel
ME	Middle English	1–7	classes of strong verbs
MnE	Modern English	I–III	classes of weak verbs
MnG	Modern German	*	hypothetical
MS	manuscript	>	becomes
N	nominative	<	was
OHG	Old High German	< >	graph, grapheme
pl.	plural	[ ]	pronunciation
RP	Received Pronunciation	//	phoneme
sg.	singular	‘ ’	meaning
SW	Southwest		
V	vowel		





## Introduction

The focus of this book is on *Medieval English* as a whole – neither exclusively on *Old English* nor on *Middle English*. This means that in the chapters which are concerned with grammar, we have placed emphasis on aspects of continuity, not difference. We treat the development of English as a continuum, not as separate periods with three separate languages. Our selection of both Old and Middle English texts also seeks to present some texts with close thematic affinities.

One of these thematic affinities, for example, is supplied by the Norman Conquest of 1066 and its representation in one of the manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The *Life of Wulfstan* is a Middle English saint's life devoted to the last Anglo-Saxon bishop of the diocese of Worcester – and it presents a rather surprising outlook and 'English' perspective on the theme of the Norman Conquest of 1066.

Continuity is also shown by the maps inside the front and back covers. Many maps in handbooks illustrate the dialects of English, whereas our maps use Modern English place names and show the sites of three battles which were decisive for the history of England. By referring to the maps when studying the texts, readers will be able to contextualise the often abstract geographical information given in a specific text.

Despite the emphasis on aspects of the continuity of English, Old English and Middle English, are *foreign languages*. This means that in order to acquire a basic competence in Medieval English, you should memorise the important inflectional paradigms (especially pronouns) in the Morphology section. You should also be familiar with the most important differences in the area of Syntax. In order to parse verbs, you have to be familiar with the *conjugational endings* and with the so-called 'tense stems' of strong, weak and preterite-present verbs. Finally, the basic paradigms of irregular verbs should be memorised, since they occur with high frequency.

The ability to read Old and Middle English texts in the original is one of the many skills which can be gained by a thorough study of this book. Relying on translations of medieval texts only is a poor substitute for a direct exploration of our cultural past. To facilitate the task of reading and understanding the texts chosen for this book, we provide explanatory and textual notes for every text and detailed glossaries can be found at the back of the book. Students and readers who are prepared to take up this challenge will be able to explore on their own the fascinating world of Medieval English Literature and Language.

## 1. The Origins of English

English belongs to the family of Germanic languages which is part of the even larger family of Indo-European languages. Because there are so many cognates in most of the modern European languages, Sir William Jones hypothesised in 1786 that all of these languages must have a common origin. As a Sanskrit scholar, he noticed strong similarities between Sanskrit and other European languages, for example English *father*, German *Vater*, Icelandic *faðir* as well as Greek and Latin *pater*, Spanish *padre*, French *père*, Persian *pedar* and Sanskrit *pitar*. These languages and many others are all descendants of a single language which is now called Indo-European (see diagram). It was probably spoken around 5000–3000 BC.

Indo-European underwent an initial split into an eastern and a western family. The *k* sound, for example in the Indo-European word for hundred (*\*kmtóm*), became an *s* in the eastern languages; thus, the Indo-European languages can be divided into *centum* (western) and *satem* (eastern) languages. The western branch divided again, and Proto-Germanic (the theorised root of all Germanic languages) had developed by around 100 BC. The main characteristics which all Germanic languages share include initial syllable stress, the appearance of weak verbs as well as a strong and weak declension of adjectives, a simplification of the tense and the case system, and the First Sound Shift (Grimm's Law and Verner's Law). The First Sound Shift had three steps:

voiceless stops became fricatives: *p, t, k* → *f, θ, h*

voiced stops became voiceless stops: *b, d, g* → *p, t, k*

voiceless aspirates became voiced stops: *bh, dh, gh* → *b, d, g*.

As shown above, the Germanic languages all have an initial *f* sound in the word *father*, where the original Indo-European had (and indeed, most surviving descendants still have) a *p*. Similarly, *\*treyes* becomes *three*, *\*krn-* becomes *horn* and so on.

An exception to Grimm's Law can also be seen in the development of the word *father*. We would expect the *t* in Indo-European *\*pātér* to become a *θ* in West Germanic. However, in words in which stress had shifted from the second to the first syllable, according to the normal Germanic development, *t* (provided it was not followed by a voiceless sound; see § 30), first became *θ*, and then *ð*. This can still be seen in Icelandic *faðir*, whereas the *d* in Old English *fæder* is a further West Germanic development of *ð*.

Proto-Germanic was spoken in southern Norway and Sweden, Denmark and the area around the River Elbe. It then split further into West Germanic (English, High and Low German), East Germanic (Gothic) and North Germanic (Scandinavian). After the Romans left Britain in the early 5th century, the West Germanic tribes on the Continent were able to invade and conquer the island. Old English developed out of West Germanic partly due to the subsequent isolation of the Angles and Saxons in Britain. One of the biggest changes was to the vowels, especially lengthening in a nasal context (e. g., *\*uns* becomes *ūs*, *\*andar* becomes *ōper* and *\*fimf* becomes *fīf*).

The diagram illustrates the Indo-European language family tree, showing the relationships between various language groups and their sub-branches. The tree is rooted at the top and branches downwards. Major branches are labeled in bold: GERMANIC, ITALIC, ANATOLIAN, ALBANIAN, BALTO-SLAVIC, INDO-IRANIAN, and TOCHARIAN. Sub-branches are labeled in regular font: WEST, EAST, NORTH, NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN, ANGLO-FRISIAN, English, Old English, Middle English, Modern English, Old Low Franconian, Dutch, Afrikaans, Flemish, Plattdeutsch, Old Saxon, Modern Standard German, Yiddish, HIGH, LOW, BRYTHONIC GOIDELIC, Welsh, Breton, Cornish, Scots, Irish, Manx, Gaelic, Celtic, Faeoese, Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Hellenic, Doric, Mycenaean, Aeolic, Attic-Ionic, Greek (Koine), and Branches: Dead Languages, Living Languages. A vertical line on the left side of the tree is labeled 'Centum' and 'Satem'.

```

graph TD
    IE[Indo-European] --> Centum
    IE --> Satem
    Centum --> GERMANIC
    Centum --> ITALIC
    Centum --> ANATOLIAN
    Centum --> ALBANIAN
    Centum --> BALTO-SLAVIC
    Centum --> INDO-IRANIAN
    Centum --> TOCHARIAN
    Satem --> HIND-ARABIC
    Satem --> DRAVIDIAN
    Satem --> TOCHARIAN

    GERMANIC --> WEST
    GERMANIC --> EAST
    GERMANIC --> NORTH
    GERMANIC --> NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN
    GERMANIC --> ANGLO-FRISIAN
    WEST --> English
    WEST --> Old English
    WEST --> Middle English
    WEST --> Modern English
    EAST --> Old Low Franconian
    EAST --> Dutch
    EAST --> Afrikaans
    EAST --> Flemish
    NORTH --> Plattdeutsch
    NORTH --> Old Saxon
    NORTH --> Modern Standard German
    NORTH --> Yiddish
    NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN --> Faeoese
    NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN --> Icelandic
    NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN --> Norwegian
    NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN --> Danish
    NETHERLANDIC-GERMAN --> Swedish
    ANGLO-FRISIAN --> English
    ANGLO-FRISIAN --> Old English
    ANGLO-FRISIAN --> Middle English
    ANGLO-FRISIAN --> Modern English
    ITALIC --> Portuguese
    ITALIC --> French
    ITALIC --> Romanian
    ITALIC --> Italian
    ITALIC --> Spanish
    ANATOLIAN --> HITTITE
    ANATOLIAN --> LUYIAN
    ANATOLIAN --> TOCHARIAN
    ALBANIAN --> ALBANIAN
    BALTO-SLAVIC --> BALTIC
    BALTO-SLAVIC --> SLAVIC
    BALTIC --> Old Prussian
    BALTIC --> Lithuanian
    BALTIC --> Latvian
    SLAVIC --> SOUTH
    SLAVIC --> WEST
    SLAVIC --> EAST
    SOUTH --> Bulgarian
    SOUTH --> Slovenian
    SOUTH --> Serbo-Croatian
    WEST --> Polish
    WEST --> Czech
    WEST --> Slovak
    EAST --> Ukrainian
    EAST --> Russian
    INDO-IRANIAN --> IRANIC
    INDO-IRANIAN --> INDIC
    IRANIC --> Old Persian
    IRANIC --> Modern Persian
    IRANIC --> Hindi
    IRANIC --> Bengali
    IRANIC --> Gypsy
    INDIC --> Sanskrit
    INDIC --> Hindi
    INDIC --> Bengali
    INDIC --> Gypsy
    TOCHARIAN --> TOCHARIAN
    
```

Dead Languages  
Living Languages

The table below provides examples which indicate both similarities and differences of cognate words. Examples from Latin and the medieval and modern varieties of both German and English are depicted here to show similar vowel qualities to Indo-European.

IE	Latin	OHG	MnG	OE	MnE
a	ager	ackar	Acker	æcer	acre
e	edō	eʒzan	essen	etan	eat
i	vidua	wituwa	Witwe	widewe	widow
o	octo	ahto	acht	eahta	eight
u	—	sunu	Sohn	sunu	son
ə	pater	fater	Vater	fæder	father
ā	frāter	bruoder	Bruder	brōpor	brother
ē	sēmen	sāt	Saat	sæd	seed
ī	suīnus	swīn	Schwein	swīn	swine
ō	flōs	bluoma	Blume	blōma	‘bloom’
ū	mūs	mūs	Maus	mūs	mouse
ai	haedus	geiz	Geiß	gāt	goat
ei	—	stīgan	steigen	stīgan	—
oi	—	ein	ein	ān	one
au	augēre	ouhhōn	—	ēacian	‘to eke’
eu	—	cheosan, kiosan	‘küren’	cēosan	to choose
ou	rūfus	rōt	rot	rēad	red

## Old and Middle English Dialects

Our knowledge of ‘early English history’ derives to a considerable extent from the Venerable Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Church History of the English People* – see O 3), written in the early decades of the 8th century. In book I, chapter xv, a detailed account of the arrival of the Germanic tribes in England is provided:

The 449th year of the incarnation of our Lord, Marcian having with Valentinian obtained the kingdom, the 46th in succession from Augustus, held it seven years. In whose time the nation of the English or Saxons, being sent for of the said king into Britain, landed there in three long ships . . . Now the strangers had come from three of the more mighty nations in Germany, that is, the Saxons, the Angles and the Jutes. Of the Jutes came the people of Kent and the settlers in Wight, that is the folk that hold the Isle of Wight, and they which in the province of the West Saxons are called unto this day the nation of the Jutes, right over against the Isle of Wight. Of the Saxons, that is, of that region which now is called of the Old Saxons [i. e. Holstein], descended the East Saxons, the South Saxons and the West Saxons. Further, of the Angles, that is, of that country which is called Angeln [i. e. Slewsick] and from that time to this is said to stand deserted between the provinces of the Jutes and the Saxons, descendeth the East Angles, the Uplandish Angles, the Mercians and all the progeny of the Northumbrians, that is, of the people that inhabiteth the north side of the flood Humber, and the other nations of the Angles.



In the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia* this account is somewhat more difficult to understand and also shorter:

Ða wæs ymb feower hund wintra 7 nigon 7 feowertig fram ures Drihtnes menniscnyse, þæt Martianus casere rice onfeng 7 vii gear hæfde. Se wæs syxta eac feowertigum fram Augusto þam casere. Ða Angel þeod 7 Seaxna wæs gelaðod fram þam foresprecenan cyninge, 7 on Breotone com on þrim myclum scypum . . . Comon hi of þrim folcum ðam strangestan Germanie, þæt of Seaxum 7 of Angle 7 of Geatum. Of Geata fruman syndon Cantware, 7 Wihtsætan; þæt is seo ðeod þe Wiht þæt ealond oneardað. Of Seaxum, þæt is of ðam lande þe mon hateð Ealdseaxan, coman Eastseaxan 7 Suðseaxan 7 Westseaxan. And of Engle coman Eastengle 7 Middelengle 7 Myrce 7 eall Norðhembra cynn; is þæt land ðe Angulus is nemned, betwyh Geatum 7 Seaxum; is sæd of þære tide þe hi ðanon gewiton oð to dæge, þæt hit weste wunige.

Since Bede mentions three 'nations' (þrim folcum), it can be assumed that the language now called Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) would have been far from homogeneous. Indeed, the written records of Old English show a considerable amount of variation, especially in the written representation of vowels in stressed syllables (see *Writing Systems* and § 2, 3 and 9).

It has become customary to differentiate between several major dialects in Old English times: Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon and Kentish (see map inside the front cover). Since Northumbrian and Mercian have several linguistic features in common, these two dialects are often referred to as Anglian. The majority of the extant Old English texts show marked features of the West Saxon dialect.

Remark: See Bähr (2001), Appendix 2, "Methods in Old English Dialectology", pp. 176–191, on the problems of differentiating Old English dialects.

It should be pointed out that the map for Old English dialects inside the front cover is highly arbitrary as to dialectal borders. Dialectal areas are based on the ancient borders of the former territories of Northumbria, Mercia, Kent and Wessex. Both maps have been supplied with the aim of contextualising and explaining the largely abstract terms for Old and Middle English dialects.

The majority of early Middle English texts originate in a different area of England – in the so-called East Midland region, and are not descended from West Saxon. With reference to the major Old English dialectal areas these early Middle English texts are based on the Mercian dialect. In addition, the East Midland provenance of early Middle English texts is one of the major reasons for a high number of Scandinavian loan-words in these texts – a considerable part of the East Midland region had been granted to the Scandinavian invaders by the 'Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum' of 886. The long-standing use of the West Saxon standard had prevented a large-scale adoption of Scandinavian loan-words even into late West Saxon texts; however, loan-words must have been a regular feature of spoken late Old English.

For Middle English a distinction of six major dialects has become customary: Northern, West Midlands, East Midlands, Southern, Kentish and London (see map inside back cover). Since the corpus of Middle English texts includes texts from all over the country, dialectal variation is a heavily marked feature of Middle English literature.



















## Remark:

The most important dialectal features of the individual texts will be pointed out at the end of the introductory sections.

While in the past Middle English dialectology was based on the reflexes of Old English vowels and consonants in the five major dialects, the publication of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (1986) has led to a major change in methodology. The criteria used in the *Atlas* (hereafter referred to as *LALME*) are a list of highly frequent words and their spellings (questionnaire method). On the basis of manuscripts to which a definite area of origin can be attributed, item maps were compiled. These item maps can then be used to determine the origin of other Middle English texts. Since this book contains earlier texts than those considered for the *Atlas* ("The period chosen for the *Atlas* is, in general, to be regarded as the century from 1350 to 1450, but the choice is itself problematic, and it has not been found practicable to keep strictly to those limits."; I.3) and since the *Atlas of Early Medieval English* has not yet been published, some of the traditional methods have been used for determining the provenance of Middle English texts not covered by *LALME*. Information on the provenance of early Middle English texts found in Laing (1993) is also provided.

## Writing Systems

Before Christian monks began to use the Latin alphabet from about the 7th century onwards, one of the runic alphabets (the 'futhork', see table below) was used by the Germanic tribes who had settled on the British Isles. A comparison of both writing systems will show that the runic alphabet had more signs than the Latin alphabet with its twenty-three characters. Compared to the alphabet used in Modern English, the Latin alphabet used in Old English times lacked the following characters: *v* (represented by *u*), *j* (represented by *i*) and *w*.

										
f	u	th	o	r	k		g (palat.)	w		
										
h	n	i	j	ch	p	eo	s	t	b	e
										
m	l	ng	æ	d	g (gutt.)	a	æ	y	ea	

The Anglo-Saxon Runic Alphabet ('futhork')

Since Old English had additional sounds not found in Latin, the Old English scribes added several characters accordingly. Two characters for consonantal sounds were taken over from the runic alphabet: *þ*, *ƿ* (thorn) and the so-called 'wynn' rune (for *w*). Only one character for a vowel sound had to be taken over from the runic alphabet: *æ*, *Æ* (aesh). A further character, *ð*, *Ð* (eth), was borrowed from the Irish inventory of characters. Occasionally, *d* and the digraph *th* were used instead of *þ* and *ð*, and <*w*> appeared as <*uu*>, <*vv*> or even <*vu*> or <*uv*>.

Although Old English, Middle English and Modern English writing is based on the Latin alphabet, the letter shapes in both Old English and Middle English manuscripts are somewhat different if compared to contemporary practice (see pp. 93, 111, 197 and 211). The most conspicuous differences can be seen in the shapes of *e*, *f*, *g*, *r*, *s* and *w*.

A composite alphabet for both Old English and Middle English includes the following series of characters: *a*, *æ*, *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g/ȝ*, *h*, *i*, *j*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *o*, *p*, *q*, *r*, *s*, *t*, *th/þ/ð*, *u/v*, *v/u*, *w/uu/vv*, *x*, *y* and *z*; occasionally the ligature <*æ*> was used by Old English scribes. These characters could be used as single characters, double characters or in particular combinations.

In Old English, two identical vowel signs in sequence are not very frequent (cf. O 7/4 *aa* and O 3/127 *booc*); however a fixed set of combinations occurs frequently: *ea*, *eo*, *io* and *ie*. It can be said with a high degree of certainty that these combinations represent diphthongs. With the exception of *w*, consonantal signs occur frequently as doublets (geminales). Special combinations of consonantal signs are: *cg* (always in post-vocalic position), *sc* (in pre- and post-vocalic position) and word initial *cw*-, *hl*-, *hr*-, *hw*- and *wl*-, *wr*-.

In Middle English, two identical vowel signs in sequence are quite frequent and usually indicate a long vowel, e. g. <*ee*>, whereas the sequence *ea* does not represent, as it did in Old English, a diphthong but a long, open *e*-sound. Since all Old English diphthongs were modified in Middle English times, typical graph-sequences indicating diphthongs in Middle English are: *V+i* or *V+u/w*, e. g. *ai*, *au/aw*; *ei*, *eu/ew*; *oi*, *ou/ow* and *iu/iw*. Special combinations of two different consonantal characters are also a feature of Middle English; however, of the typical Old English word-initial patterns, only *wr*- was retained and *hw*- is now written *wh*-.

## Pronunciation

In contrast to Modern English, it can be said that every letter should be pronounced in reading Old English – thus, *-mm-* should be pronounced as a sequence of two *m*'s, *cn-* as *k+n*, and word-final *-e* following a consonant must also be pronounced – e. g. *swimman*: *s+w+i+m+m+a+n*; *cniht*: *k+n+i+/x/+t*; *cume*: *k+u+m+e*.

### Old English Consonants

Most consonants in Old English and Middle English may be pronounced as in Modern English: *b d k l m n p t*. In Old English and in most cases in Middle English *w* is much the same as in Modern English.

- c* is pronounced /k/ when it occurs in combination with other consonants (except -cg-) or when it is preceded or followed by one of the vowels *a*, *o*, *u* or *y*; is pronounced /tʃ/ in word-initial position when followed by *i* or in medial position between *æ/i* and *e* and in word-final position when preceded by *i*. In O 1, this 'palatalised' *c* is marked by a superscript dot <ċ>. Examples are: *ċild*, *ċiriċe*, *iċ*.
- cg* is pronounced as its corresponding sequence *dg* /dʒ/ in Modern English. Thus, Old English *bricge* can be pronounced as Modern English *bridge*; however, the word-final -*e* has to be pronounced as well.
- f, s* can be voiced /v/, /z/ and voiceless /f/, /s/. Voiced pronunciation only occurs in voiced contexts (i. e. between vowels and voiced consonants) and voiceless in all other positions, especially word-initial and word-final.
- g* is pronounced as /g/ before *a*, *o* and *u* and when followed by a consonant; is pronounced /j/ in word-initial position when followed by *i* or *e*; in medial and final position when preceded by *æ*, *e* and *i*. In O 1 this palatalised *g* is indicated by a superscript dot, ġ. Examples are: *ġif*, *ġēar*, *dæġ*, *hīġ*; in medial position it was pronounced similarly to *ch* as in Scottish *loch* or *g* as in some varieties of Modern German; e. g. *magan* /maxan/.
- h* in word-initial position is pronounced just as in Modern English; is pronounced /ç/ after *i* or *e*; is pronounced /x/ after other vowels.
- r* in word-initial position was pronounced probably as a trilled sound; in other positions it was pronounced as a guttural *r*.
- sc* in word-initial position is usually pronounced just as *sh* in Modern English; is pronounced as /sk/ in words like *āscian*, and maybe in *Scottas* (however, the variant *Sceotta* seems to indicate a pronunciation of *sh*- /ʃ/).
- þ, ð* have a voiced articulation in voiced contexts; they were pronounced voiceless in all other positions, especially in word-initial and word-final position.

### Old English Vowels: Monophthongs

It is important to be aware of the fact that Old English vowels are contrasted in two ways: according to their *quality* (just as in Modern English we differentiate between *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u* etc.) and according to their *quantity* (i. e. length). In other words, in Old English, quantity always had phonemic implications, as in the two words *gōd* (short) = Modern English *god* and *gōd* (long) = Modern English *good*.

ǣ resembles the quality of the *u* in Modern English *cut*; ā is similar to the quality of the *a* in Modern English *father*.

æ resembles the quality of the *a* in Modern English *cat*; ē is a 'lengthened' pronunciation of the same Modern English vowel.

ē resembles the quality of the *e* in Modern English *set*; ē is a 'lengthened' pronunciation of the same Modern English vowel.

ī resembles the quality of the *i* in Modern English *pit*; ī is pronounced as *ee* in Modern English *meet*.

ō resembles the quality of the *o* in Modern English *god*; ō is a 'lengthened' and 'closed' pronunciation of the same Modern English vowel.

ǔ resembles the quality of the *u* in Modern English *put*; ū is pronounced as *oo* in Modern English *tooth*.

ȳ and ȕ have no correspondence in Modern English; the quality of these vowels resembles that of German *ü* or *u* in French, e. g. *tu*.

### Old English Vowels: Diphthongs

As noted above, there were four diphthongs in Old English, *ea*, *eo*, *io* and *ie*, and these can be long or short.

In all probability, ēa and ēa were pronounced as the combination of æ+a; ēo and ēo as ē+o; ĭe and ĭe as ĭ+e; ĭo and ĭo as ĭ+o.

### Middle English Consonants

The Middle English consonants *b d h l m n p s t r w* were probably pronounced as they are pronounced in Modern English. However, *w* in post-vocalic position is in many instances the second element of a diphthong (just as in Modern English *know*) or, always in combination with *o*, a digraph representing a 'long' *u* (as in *found*, which was pronounced as the <oo> in *food*). In general, there is a greater variety of spellings in Middle English due to the adoption of French writing practices in the wake of the Norman Conquest of 1066.

It should be noted that after the feature 'consonantal length' (signalled by geminates) had been abolished and word-final *-e* was no longer pronounced, the above consonants can be found as geminates in medial position, i. e. *-VCCe*, as in *wedde* /wed/. However, word-final *-e* could still be pronounced in poetry if required by the metre. The pattern *-VCCe* was used to indicate a short vowel from late Middle English onwards.

The pronunciation of the other Middle English consonants and their representation in writing can be found in the table below.

- /tʃ/ as in Modern English *cheese* is usually written <c> and later increasingly as <ch>, in medial position also <cch>.
- /k/ is usually written <c>, <k> (when followed by <i, e, n, l>), <qu>, <kk> and <ck>.
- /dʒ/ as in Modern English *bridge* between vowels is usually written <gg>, in word-initial position <g, j> and <i>; between palatal vowels and followed by *n* it is usually written <ng>, cf. Middle English *senge*, Modern English *singe*; in word-final position from the 15th century onwards it is increasingly written <dg>.
- /g/ is written <3, g> and <gu>; after consonantal length had been abolished the digraph <gg> can also be found.
- /f/ is usually written <f>, in French loanwords it is occasionally written <ph>; after consonantal length had been abolished the pattern <ff> was also used.
- /v/ is usually written <f, u, fu>, later also <v>.
- /θ/ as in Modern English *thanks* is usually written <þ, ð, th, thþ>, occasionally <ht>.
- /ð/ as in Modern English *that* is usually written <þ, ð, th>, occasionally <ht>.
- /z/ is usually written <s, 3, z>.
- /ʃ/ as in Modern English *ship* is usually written <sc, ss, sh, sch>; later also <ch, schch, ssh, ssch, schs, sshs>.

- /x/ as in German 'ach' is usually written <h, ʒ, g, ʒh>, rarely <gh>; later on usually <gh>, in the northern areas also <ch>.
- /ʍ/ as in Modern English aspirated (i. e. with breath) *which* is usually written <wh, w>, in the northern areas also <quh, qu, qw>.
- /ŋ/ as in Modern English *thing* and always preceding *g* and *k*: <ng> and <nk>.
- /w/ in the earliest texts the 'wynn' rune can still be found; later it is written <w, u, v>.
- /j/ as in Modern English *yes* is usually written <ʒ> and <g>; in late Middle English <y>, in the northern areas <yh>.

### Middle English Vowels: Monophthongs

The short monophthongs *e, o* are mostly written <e> and <o>. Vowels in unstressed syllables are usually written <e>.

- /i/ is usually written <i>; from the 13th century onwards and in the context of *n, m, v, u, w* it is frequently written <y>, occasionally <u>.
- /œ/ as in Modern German 'hölzern' retained in the dialect of the WML and the South until the late 12th century is written <eo, ue, œ, o> and later <u>.
- /a/ <a, æ, e> and <ea> in early texts.
- /u/ <u> or <v>, in the context of *m, n, v, w* it is frequently written <o>.
- /y/ as in Modern German 'Mütze' is usually written <u> in the areas where it had not been unrounded (see § 10).

The word-final pattern *-V+C+e* is increasingly used to indicate words with a long monophthong.

- /i:/ is usually written <i>, occasionally <ii>, <ij> and later, especially in the context of *m, n* and *v* also <y>; in addition, the digraphs <ei> and <ey> can be found.
- /e:/ is written <e, eo, œ, ue, o, eu, u> in early texts, later usually <e> and <ei>.
- /ɛ:/ as in Modern German 'schwer' is written <æ, ea> and <e> until 1300, later usually written <e> and <ee>, from the 15th century onwards <ea>.
- /a:/ is usually written <a>, sometimes <aa>; in the north <ai, ay> are also used.
- /ɔ:/ as in Modern English *thought* up to the 13th century usually written <a, o, oa>, later <o> and <oo>; in late Middle English <oa> can be found again; French practice can be seen in <oe>.
- /o:/ until the 14th century written <o>; later frequently <oo>, still later occasionally <ou, oe>.
- /u:/ until the 13th century usually written <u, uw, ow>, thereafter <ou, ov, ow>, in northern areas <o> can be found.
- /ø:/ as in Modern German 'schön' only in the dialects of the WML and the SW until the 14th century; there it is written <eo, oe, ue, o, eu, u>.
- /y:/ as in Modern German 'triibe' is usually written <y, u, ui, uy> in the areas where it had not been unrounded (see § 10).

### Middle English Vowels: Diphthongs

As pointed out above, none of the Middle English diphthongs are based on the diphthongs of Old English. Middle English diphthongs are the product of contextually conditioned changes of earlier monophthongs; see § 4 for the origin of Middle English diphthongs.

/ai/ as in Modern English *aye* is usually written <æi, ei, ey, eɜ, æɜ, aɜ>; later, however, written <ai, ay, ei, ey>.

/au/ as in Modern English *now* is usually written <au>; when followed by a *v* is usually written <aw>.

/ou/ as in Modern English *show* is usually written <aw, au, ou, ow>; later on exclusively <ou> and <ow>.

/iu/ as in Modern English *few* is usually written <iw, eow, uw, ew, eu>; later also written <ew, eu, uw, u, w, iu, iw, yw, ui>.

/eu/ as in Modern German ‘*Feuer*’ is usually written <eouw, eow, uw, eaw, ew, eu>; later generally <eu> and <ew>.

/oi/ is written <oi> and <oy>.

/ui/ as in Modern English *gooy* is written <oi> and <oy>; occasionally also <ui>.

For the system of phonemic contrast consult Samuels (1972:135–153). Detailed accounts can be found in Barber (2006), Baugh/Cable (1978), Berndt (1982), Brunner (1960–62), Faiß (1989), Görlach (1994), Lass (1999), Luick (1964), Pinsker (1969), Pyles (1971/2004), Romaine (1998) and Strang (1970).



## 2. Phonology

### § 1 General Remarks

This section is concerned first of all with those specific phonetic contexts which can be shown to have been decisive in the history of English. Thus, the history of vowels and consonants from West Germanic to Old English will not be traced, as is often the case in introductory handbooks; the focus is rather on the influence of these contexts on the development of vowels and consonants in stressed syllables.

The first of these contexts to be considered is restricted to Old English and affects the development of West Germanic *\*a* (both short and long). According to traditional terminology the context is that of *brightening* and *retraction* and involves the quality of the vowels which follow the accented syllable. As will be seen below, this development is the root of some of the dialectal differences in Middle English.

The second context can be called 'the influence of post-vocalic consonants and consonant groups'; according to the terminology of older accounts these contexts comprise *West Saxon and Kentish breaking* in Old English times; *new diphthongs* in Middle English; and the *early modern changes* due to the influence of tautosyllabic (i. e. belonging to the same syllable) post-vocalic *r*.

The third area concerns differences in vowel quality which cannot be directly attributed to a specific and well definable context. In traditional terminology, this is the process called *i-mutation*.

In a fourth section, the important quantitative changes in the history of English will be considered.

Finally, there is a brief account of one of the most decisive changes in the history of English vowel sounds: the Great Vowel Shift.

A summary of the reflexes of Old English vowels (both monophthongs and diphthongs) in Middle English will also be provided.

### § 2 West Germanic Monophthongs and Diphthongs

West Germanic *\*ǣ* was regularly raised ('brightened') to *æ* in West Saxon and Northumbrian; however, it was raised even further to *ē* in the Mercian and Kentish dialects.

West Germanic *\*ā* was regularly raised to *ē* in West Saxon, but to *ē* in the other dialects of Old English. This difference can be seen in examples like West Saxon *dæg* versus Kentish and Mercian *deg* 'day'; and West Saxon *lēdan* and Anglian and Kentish *lēdan* 'to lead'.

This regular process was blocked by a nasal consonant (*m* or *n*) immediately following West Germanic *\*ǣ*. In this phonetic context the short vowel is written both *a* and *o*: *land*, *lond* 'land'. The long vowel is written *o*: *spōn* 'spoon', *mōna* 'moon'.

The regular development of West Germanic *\*ǣ* was also blocked by a velar vowel (*a*, *o*, *u*) in the next syllable. This special development can still be seen in the paradigm of the nouns *dæg* 'day' and *mæg* 'kinsman':



N sg.	dæg	mǣg	N pl.	dagas	māgas
G sg.	dæges	mǣges	G pl.	daga	māga
D sg.	dæge	mǣge	D pl.	dagum	māgum
A sg.	dæg	mǣg	A pl.	dagas	māgas.

In Middle English times, this difference was levelled out. However, in earlier texts it can still be found, written as *dayes* M 11/11 (from the singular, see § 5) versus *dawes* M 5/19 (from the plural, see § 6).

The regular development of West Germanic \*ǣ in West Saxon was also blocked by the processes called ‘breaking’ (see next section), i-mutation (short *a* only; see § 9), and when the consonant *w* followed directly after the vowel. This can be seen for example in the third tense stem of the strong verb *sāwon* ‘(they) saw’, in contrast to *cwǣdon* ‘(they) spoke’, both belonging to class 5.

Remark: For the process called ‘back umlaut’ or ‘back mutation’ and its consequences on *æ* see Brunner (1967: 80–89), Campbell (1974: 85–93), and Hogg (1992: 152–166).

All West Germanic diphthongs were modified in Old English, as a comparison with Modern German will show.

- \**ai* > *ā*: *stān*, *hāt*: ‘Stein, heiß’
- \**au* > *ēa*: *ēage*, *ēac*: ‘Auge, auch’
- \**eu* > *ēo*: *dēop*, *dēor*: ‘tief, Tier’
- \**iu* > *īo* > *ēo*: *līode*, *lēode*: ‘Leute’.

## Vowel Change: Post-vocalic Consonants and Consonant Groups

### § 3 West Saxon and Kentish Breaking

Evidence of breaking is an important criterion in Old English dialectology; it can be used to differentiate the southern from both the midlands and northern dialects, i. e. ‘Anglian’ versus West Saxon and Kentish texts.

Primary *short* palatal monophthongs (i. e. original, not palatal as a result of i-mutation, see § 9) followed by r+C or l+C are represented by a sequence of two vowel signs representing a diphthong in West Saxon and Kentish. In the Anglian dialects a monophthong remains; however, in the case of *æ*+l+C the *æ* is lowered to *a*; cf. WS *eald*, Anglian *ald*.

- ǣ > ēa: *ǣarm* ‘arm’; *hǣard* ‘hard’
- ĕ > ĕo: *hĕorte* ‘heart’; *ĕorl* ‘earl’
- ī > īo > ĕo: *hīorde*, *hĕorde*, WS *hierde* ‘shepherd’
- ǣ > ēa *ǣald* ‘old’
- ĕ > ĕo *seolh* ‘seal’

It should be noted that the combination r+C seems to have had a stronger effect on the preceding vowel than the combination l+C; in West Saxon, breaking occurs regularly only before l+h and l+c, whereas in Kentish l+f also leads to breaking – WS, Anglian *self*, Kentish *seolf*.

Both *short* and *long* primary palatal vowels were subject to breaking when they were followed by *h* (which could be followed by a second consonant).

$\check{a} > \check{e}a$ : *nēah* ‘near’

$\check{e} > \check{e}o$ : *fēohtan* ‘to fight’ (no forms with  $*\bar{e}$  have survived)

$\check{i} > \check{i}o > \check{e}o$ : *mīox*, *mēox* (<x> for /xs/) ‘dung’; *lēoht* ‘light’ (adjective).

Breaking can be seen especially in the first and second tense stems of strong verbs belonging to classes 3 and 5 (see § 69, 71) where verbs with and without breaking can be found:

<i>feohtan</i>	<i>feahht</i>	breaking throughout (V+h)
<i>sēon</i>	<i>seah</i>	breaking throughout (V+h)
<i>ceorfan</i>	<i>cearf</i>	breaking throughout (V+r+C)
<i>helpan</i>	<i>healp</i>	breaking second stem only (V+l+C)
<i>specan</i>	<i>spæc</i>	no breaking context.

#### § 4 New Diphthongs in Middle English

New diphthongs in Middle English can be attributed to the context specified above: V+C. Some of the changes occurred in late Old English times already, in particular in the sequence palatal vowel+*g* (where *g* represented the semi-vowel /j/). In Middle English times, there is an even greater variety of post-vocalic contexts, all of which led to new diphthongs or, in some instances, long monophthongs.

The new Middle English diphthongs share an important feature: the second element is *i* in palatal contexts and *u* in velar contexts. Middle English words with the diphthongs *oi* and *ui* do not fit this pattern, as the first elements are velar vowels. It can thus be inferred that these words must have a different origin; indeed, they are loan-words, for example French *noise*; in *boy*, the etymology is far from being clear.

#### § 5 Old English Palatal Vowels + <g>

A palatal vowel followed by *g* (/j/) became a diphthong of which the second vowel was written either <i> or <y>:

OE  $\check{a}+g > \check{a}i$ , *ai*, *ay*: OE *dæg*, *fæger* > ME *dai*, *day*, *fair*

OE  $\check{a}+g > ei$ , *ey* and later *ai*, *ay*: OE *lægon* > ME *laie(n)*, *laye(n)*

OE  $\check{e}+g > ei$ , *ey* and later *ai*, *ay*: OE *plegian* > ME *pleie(n)*, *playe(n)*

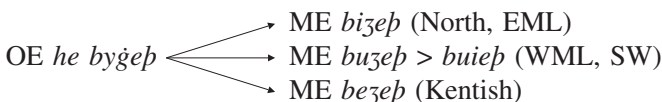
OE  $\check{e}+g > ei$ , *ey* and later *ai*, *ay*: Old Kentish *grēg* > ME *grai*, *gray*.

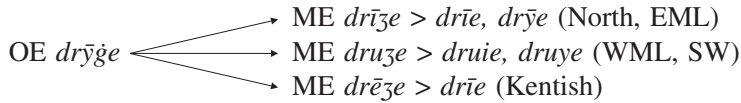
When followed by a vowel the usual development is to Middle English

$\bar{i}$  followed by schwa (ə): OE *ēage* > *ye* [i:(j)ə]

OE  $\check{i}+g > \bar{i}$  beginning in late Old English: OE *nigon* > ME *nīn(e)*

The development of Old English  $\check{y}+g$  into Middle English is more complicated because the dialects have different results:





## § 6 Old English Velar Vowels + <g>

Following a velar vowel, *g* represented a voiced fricative /ɣ/. This fricative was replaced by the velar vowel *u* (written both *u* and *w*) and became thus the second element of a new diphthong.

OE *ǣ*+*g* > *au*, *aw*: OE *dagas* > ME *dawes*

OE *ā*+*g* > *ou*, *ow*: OE *āgen* > ME *owen*

OE *ō*+*g* > *ou*, *ow*: OE *boga*, *slōgon* > ME *bowe*, *slowen*

OE *ū*+*g* > *u*, *uu*, *ou* and *ow*: OE *fugol*, *būgan* > ME *foul*, *bouen*

## § 7 Old English Vowels + <w>

In OE, a post-vocalic <*w*> represented a semi-vowel; in ME times the semi-vowel became a full vowel and combined with the preceding vowel to form a diphthong with *u* as the second element. This process had already begun in late Old English times. In many such instances OE *w* continued to be written <*w*> in ME times.

OE *ǣ*+*w* > *au*, *aw*: OE *awel* > ME *awel*, *aul*

OE *ā*+*w* > *ou*, *ow*: OE *blāwan* > ME *blowe(n)*

OE *ō*+*w* > *ou*, *ow*: OE *flōwan* > ME *flowe(n)*

OE *ē*+*w* > *eu*, *ew*: OE *lāwed* > ME *lewed*

OE *ēa*+*w* > *eu*, *ew*: OE *fēawe* > ME *fewe*

OE *ēo*+*w* > *eu*, *ew*: OE *speowian*, *brēowan* > ME *spewe(n)*, *brew(e)n*

OE *ī*+*w* > *iw*, *ue*: OE *Tīwesdæg* > ME *Tiwesday*, *Tuesday*

Remark: Post-vocalic *w* in Old English when preceded by *ǣ* or *ī* generally caused diphthongs, as can be seen in OE *hweowol* 'wheel' and *ðrīowa* 'thrice'. Post-vocalic *w* following West Germanic \**ǣ* blocked the usual development to Old English *ǣ* (see § 2).

## § 8 Old English Vowels + <h>

It is important to bear in mind that there are two basic contexts which need to be differentiated: palatal V+h resulting in the new sequence palatal V+i+h/gh and velar V+h resulting in the new sequence velar V+u/w+h/gh. The post-vocalic fricative written <*h*> ultimately became silent and the new diphthong or long monophthong was a compensation for the loss of a consonant. In some cases, the former fricative *h* developed into a new fricative *f* in which case it is always preceded by either a long or a short vowel, as in *laugh* and *cough*.

It should be noted that the vowel glides in Middle English times and their subsequent developments are very different from West Saxon and Kentish breaking (see § 3), in which the post-vocalic fricative seems to have been retained and in which only palatal vowels followed by *h* were affected.

OE *ē*+*h* > *ei* > *ai*: OE *peh* > ME *peigh*

OE *ē*+*h* > *ei* > *ī*: OE *nēh* > ME *neih*

OE *ǣ*+*h* > *au*: OE *naht* > ME *naught*

OE *ā+h* > *ou*: OE *nāht* > ME *nought*  
 OE *ō+h* > *ou*: OE *gefohten* > ME *foughte(n)*  
 OE *ō+h* > *ou* > *ū*: OE *genōh* > ME *ynough*

## Old English Vowels: Further Changes

Even today, different vowel qualities can be found in etymologically related words, such as *tooth* versus *teeth*, *brother* vs. *brethren* and so on. In Old and Middle English these differences were even more numerous. They can be traced back to the influence of the vowel *i* or the semi-vowel *j* in the next syllable. This syllable was either syncopated (see § 21) or the *i* or *j* was weakened to *e*. This process is called i-mutation and can also be found in other Germanic languages, for example German.

### § 9 Old English i-mutation

Except for *e* and *æ* (from West Germanic \**ā*, see § 2) Old English vowels were subject to i-mutation, as can be seen in the following table:

ū	> ȳ, later ī	– as in <i>mūs</i> (singular) and <i>mȳs</i> (plural)
ō	> ǣ > ě	– as in <i>long</i> (positive) and <i>lengra</i> (comparative)
ǣ, æ	> e	– as in <i>lang</i> (positive) and <i>lengra</i> (comparative)
ā	> æ	(from West Germanic * <i>ai</i> ) – as in <i>stān</i> (noun) and <i>stānen</i> (adjective)
īo	> ĩe > ĩ, ȳ	– as in <i>wulle</i> (noun) and <i>wyllen</i> (adjective)
ēa	> ĩe > ĩ, ȳ	in West Saxon, otherwise ě – as in <i>gelēafa</i> (noun) and <i>geliefan</i> (verb)
ēo	> ĩe	– <i>sēon</i> (infinitive) and <i>siehp</i> (3rd singular present indicative)

The results of i-mutation are therefore a *raising* of palatal vowels and a *fronting* of velar vowels. While it is difficult to point out the factors responsible for these changes, it would appear that the results of i-mutation (raising and fronting) contributed to a kind of vocalic harmony, avoiding extreme qualitative contrast between two adjoining syllables.

The effects of i-mutation in Old English can easily be seen in the following contexts:

1. In the 2nd and 3rd person singular present of strong verbs (abolished in early Middle English)
2. In the dative singular and nominative and accusative plural (occasionally also in the genitive singular) of athematic nouns (i-mutation in the dative singular was abolished in early Middle English; it was retained and indeed generalised throughout the plural)
3. In the dative singular of three of the five nouns expressing family relationship: *brōþor*, *mōdor* and *dohtor* (abolished in early Middle English)
4. In the comparative and superlative of certain adjectives and adverbs (abolished in early Middle English except for *elder*, *eldest*)
5. In the present stem of the weak verbs belonging to class Ib (as for example *tell* versus *told*)

In the following areas i-mutation was a regular feature, even though there are no longer any non-mutated forms:

6. In class I weak verbs derived from nouns (*dēman* ‘deem’ and *dōm* ‘doom’)
7. In nouns belonging to the i-stems (*cyme* ‘arrival’ and *cuman* ‘come’)
8. In adjectives derived from nouns using the suffix *\*-iþ-* (*lengþu* ‘length’ and *lang*, *long* ‘long’)
9. In adjectives derived from nouns using the suffix *\*-īna* (*gylden* ‘golden’ and *gold*)
10. In feminine nouns derived from masculine nouns (*wylf* ‘she-wolf’ and *wulf* ‘he-wolf’).

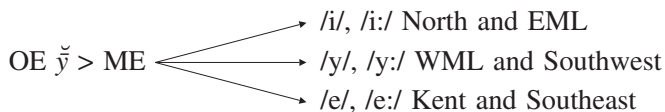
## Old English Vowels and their Continuation in Middle English

### § 10 Monophthongs

Old English *short* monophthongs remained much the same in Middle English times, except for /æ/ which was lowered to /a/ and /y/ which was either unrounded or remained the same (see below).

Old English *long* monophthongs also remained much the same in Middle English, except for *ā* which was raised to a long open *o* /ɔ:/ in the areas south of the River Humber; in the north, Old English *ā* remained unchanged. Old English *æ* was slightly raised to a long, open *e*-sound /ɛ:/ and West Saxon *æ*, derived from West Germanic *ā*, was also raised to /ɛ:/.

The development of Old English *ȳ* in the various dialects of Middle English can be summarised thus:



### § 11 Diphthongs

All Old English diphthongs became monophthongs in Middle English; these changes had already started in late Old English times, with transitional stages in the 11th century.

- OE *ǣa* > ME *æ* > *a*
- OE *ǣo* > ME /ø/ > *e*
- OE *ēa* > ME /æ:/ > *ē*, approximately MnE /ɛ:/
- OE *ēo* > ME /ø:/ > *ē*, approximately MnE /e:/

## English Vowels: Quantitative Changes

### § 12 Old English Lengthening

Lengthening took place either very early, i. e. before our first written records, or in late Old English times. *Early* lengthening results from the loss of a consonant in certain contexts: the consonants involved are *h*, *w* and *g*.

Loss of *h* occurred regularly when the consonant was preceded and followed by a vowel. Thus, the infinitive *sēon* has a long diphthong, whereas the preterite *seah* has a short diphthong, because the *h* was retained. There are quite a number of verbs in Old English showing quantitative differences in the present tense forms on the one hand and the preterite on the other; these verbs are called ‘contracted verbs’. A similar quantitative contrast sometimes occurs in the inflection of nouns ending in *-h*: the consonant is lost when the inflectional syllable begins with a vowel. This is the case in OE *feoh* (nominative) and *fēos* (genitive): the inflectional syllable for the genitive is *-es*, therefore *-h-*, now in intervocalic position, was dropped and compensatory lengthening occurred. A similar loss of *h* occurred in the combination *-rhV-* and *-lhV-*, see for example OE *fēolan* (infinitive) and *fealh* (preterite).

Word-final *w* after vowels was also dropped, with compensatory lengthening; see for example, OE *cnēo* (nominative) and *cneowes* (genitive).

Especially in late West Saxon, palatal *g* was dropped when it was followed by either *d* or *n*; see for example *sægde* and *sēde* as well as *frignan* and *frīnan*.

In late Old English times, lengthening occurred before consonant groups consisting of either a liquid (*l*, *r*) or nasal (*m*, *n*) followed by a homorganic voiced plosive (*b*) or any other homorganic voiced consonant. The consonant groups which triggered lengthening are *mb*, *nd*, *ng*, *ld*, *rd* as well as *rl*, *rn* and *rð*, *rs* when followed by a vowel. As a rule, vowel length remained stable for *i* and *u* when followed by *ld*, *mb*, *nd* and for *a* when followed by *ld*. Modern English examples which were subject to late Old English lengthening are: *child*, *climb*, *bind* and *bound* as well as *old*.

Lengthening, however, did not occur when a third consonant followed. This can be seen in Modern English *child*, based on lengthened /i:/, and Modern English *children* where lengthening was blocked by the third consonant. As a rule, lengthening also did not occur when a word was used in an unstressed position, such as auxiliaries (*scolde*, *wolde*), prepositions (*under*) and conjunctions (*and*).

### § 13 Old English Shortening

Originally long vowels were shortened before three consonants (*gōdspell* > *gōdspell*) and also before two consonants, if at least two unstressed syllables followed (*hlāfmæsse* > *hlamæsse*). Shortening also occurred in words which were used in unstressed positions (*þēah* > *þeah*).

In the period of transition from Old to Middle English, shortening also took place when a long vowel was followed by two consonants (except for homorganic groups) which require great articulatory effort. This condition is fulfilled for example in OE *brōhte* with its sequence long vowel followed by a fricative followed by a voiceless dental stop.

## § 14 Middle English Lengthening

This process can be assigned to the 12th and 13th centuries. Lengthening only took place in words consisting of two syllables of which the first ended in a vowel (an ‘open syllable’) and the second had a vowel other than *i*. Lengthening in this context occurred regularly with *a*, *e*, *o* in the first syllable. Examples are:

OE *nǣ-ma* > ME *nā-me*

OE *bē-ran* > ME *bē-re*

OE *nō-su* > ME *nō-se*

As a rule, lengthening did not occur when a word was used in an unstressed position, as for example *have*, versus Modern English *behave*. Lengthening also did not occur when the vowel of the second syllable was *i*: see OE *ma-nig* ‘many’, *he-fig* ‘heavy’, *pe-nig* ‘penny’ which have a short vowel in Modern English.

With *i* or *u* in the first syllable, lengthening also involved a lowering of the initial quality of the vowel and occurred mainly in the northern areas. Some northern lengthened forms were taken over by the standard language. Examples are:

OE *wū-du* > ME *wō-de* ‘wood’

OE *wī-cu* > ME *wē-ke* ‘week’

Middle English lengthening probably occurred as compensatory lengthening in order to avoid too great a number of monosyllabic words with a short syllable. It should also be seen in the context of the loss of word-final *e* (see § 22).

## § 15 Middle English Shortening

Shortening took place in later Middle English when a long vowel was followed by two (or more) consonants, occasionally even before two homorganic consonants (see § 12). Shortening also took place when two unstressed syllables followed, as for example ME *hōliday* versus the adjective *holy* /hɔ:li/.

## § 16 Early Modern English Quantitative Changes

Long monophthongs could be shortened in the 16th or 17th century when either a dental consonant or the consonant /k/ followed immediately. This shortening has occurred in *book*, *foot*, *good* with underlying late Middle English *ō*, raised to [u:] by the Great Vowel Shift (see § 18) and thereafter shortened to /ʊ/. Shortening of late Middle English *ō* has also taken place in *blood*; however, the Modern English pronunciation is /ʌ/. These differences clearly indicate that the present distribution of /u:/, /ʌ/ and /ʊ/ must have evolved gradually and over a longer period of time.

Late Middle English short *a* was lengthened before voiceless fricatives and became [æ:], such as in *staff*, *glass* and *path*. This lengthened vowel [æ:] is still a feature of American English, while in British English it was lowered to [α:].

## Late Middle and Early Modern English Developments

### § 17 Post-vocalic *r* and *l*

In Modern British English, a post-vocalic *r* belonging to the same syllable is not pronounced. As a rule, the vowel preceding the *r* is either pronounced as a long monophthong, a diphthong or a triphthong, as for example in *bird*, *moor* and *fire*.

The silencing of *r* in post-vocalic position started in late Middle English times and its effects can readily be seen in the lowering of earlier *e+r* to *a+r*, as for example in ME *fer*, *ferre* > late ME *far*; see M 6/13 *fer* and M 14/40 *far*.

In late Middle English *u*-glides developed where short *a*, *o*, *u* is immediately followed by *l*, see for example *tauld* (M 14/140). The diphthong resulting from this change meant in many instances that further changes occurred during the Great Vowel Shift (see next section). In some words, the *u*-glide may have been responsible for the silencing of the post-vocalic *l* when it was followed by a further consonant, as for example in *half*.

### § 18 The Great Vowel Shift

This change is perhaps the most important in the history of English vowel sounds. It began in the late 15th century and extended over several centuries, affecting late Middle English long monophthongs and diphthongs. The changes can be summarised thus: long vowels were raised and *i* as well as *u* became diphthongs; all diphthongs were monophthongised. So far no convincing hypotheses have been advanced as to the reasons for this change. The following table shows the major developments.

IME	eMnE	MnE	RP	(as in)
[a:]	[æ:]	[ɛ:] [e:]	[eɪ]	name
[e:]	[i:]	[i:]	[i:]	meet
[ɛ:]	[e:]	[e:]	[eɪ]	great
[i:]	[əi]	[aɪ]	[aɪ]	ride
[o:]	[u:]	[u:]	[u:]	boot
[ɔ:]	[o:]	[o:]	[əʊ]	boat
[u:]	[əʊ]	[əʊ]	[aʊ]	house
[aʊ]	[ɔ:]	[ɔ:]	[ɔ:]	law
[ɔʊ]	[o:]	[o:]	[əʊ]	snow
[aɪ]	[æ:]	[ɛ:] [e:]	[eɪ]	day
[əʊ] [iʊ]	[yu]	[yu]	[ju:]	few
[ɔi]	[ɔɪ]	[ɔɪ]	[ɔɪ]	boy
[ʊɪ]	[əɪ]	[əɪ] [ɔɪ]	[ɔɪ]	join

### § 19 Early Modern English Short Vowels

In general, most short vowels have remained much the same since late Middle English, unless they are followed by *r* or *l* (see § 17). Only late Middle English *a* and *u* show considerable changes:



IME	eMnE	MnE	RP	(as in)
[a]	[æ]	[æ]	[æ]	that
[ʊ]	[ə] [ʌ]	[ʌ]	[ʌ]	but

## Vowels in Unstressed Syllables

### § 20 Qualitative Changes

In Old English, the most important qualitative change is certainly the increasingly indistinct quality of the vowels of inflectional syllables. Originally, these vowels had the function of marking grammatical categories. Thus, in the case of nouns belonging to the *a*-stems, the ending *-as* marked both nominative and accusative plural, as for example *stan-as*; the ending *-es* marked genitive singular, as for example *stan-es*. Since in unstressed syllables *a* lost its former quality and tended towards schwa /ə/, written <e>, the inflectional syllable for the nominative/accusative plural and for the genitive singular was no longer distinct. Therefore the different functions once signalled by the inflectional endings had to be inferred more and more from the context. The 'new' construction *of+noun*, expressing the concept *possession*, one of the chief functions of the inflected genitive, was increasingly adopted to distinguish the inflectional genitive from the plural, since both were marked by the same inflectional syllable.

A similar development can be seen in the area of conjugational endings. In Old English, the ending *-on* indicates the category 'preterite plural indicative', whereas *-en* indicates 'present and preterite plural subjunctive', and *-an* 'present infinitive'. A similarly poorly marked differentiation can be seen in the form of the third person present singular indicative, ending in many cases in *-eþ*, and the present plural indicative, ending mainly in *-aþ*. When the original quality of the vowel of these inflectional endings tended towards schwa /ə/ and was increasingly written <e>, new means had to be found to differentiate the vitally important category *mood*, i. e. *indicative* versus *subjunctive*.

### § 21 Syncope

The term 'syncope' denotes the loss of the medial syllables when inflectional syllables are added: *hālig* (nominative) plus dative ending (-um) would have led to *\*hāl-ig-um*, but actually resulted in *hāl-gum*. Syncope after *long syllables* had already occurred before the first written records. This is the explanation for apparent irregularities in the paradigms of nouns and adjectives with a long vowel, as for example in *brōðres* (genitive) and *brōðor* (nominative); similarly *hālgan* (genitive singular) and *hālig* (nominative singular).

In late Old, English syncope occurred also after a short vowel, in particular when the new sequence was *C+l/r*, as can be seen in *fingres* (genitive) and *finger* (nominative) as well as *micle* and *micele*.

## § 22 Apocope

The term ‘apocope’ denotes the loss of final vowels and consonants. Apocope is a marked feature especially of Middle English and should be seen together with Middle English Lengthening (see above, § 14).

Apocope had already begun in late Old English, particularly in the northern dialect, where word-final *-n* in inflectional syllables disappeared. This process gained considerable momentum in Middle English and increasingly began to affect the vowel preceding the word-final *-n*. Ultimately, apocope led to the loss of almost all conjugational endings of verbs, including the infinitive. With reference to nouns, apocope resulted in the almost total abolition of the once highly frequent plural morphs *-an*, *-en* which survive only in Modern English *oxen*.

It should be noted that even though word-final *-n* in inflectional syllables disappeared almost completely, it has been retained in the past participle of strong verbs in those cases where the contrast between present tense and non-finite preterite had originally been a quantitative one, as for example in Middle English *wrīte(n)* (infinitive) and *written* (past participle).

It should also be noted that even though the final *-n* in inflectional syllables disappeared almost completely, the now word-final vowel, which gradually became silent, was retained in writing. Retaining the mute word-final *-e* in writing was an efficient means of indicating that the preceding vowel was long. In Modern English, the structure (C)+V+C+e is a reliable indication that the vowel is either pronounced as a diphthong or a long monophthong, as for example *ate*, *write* and *rude*.

## § 23 Parasitic Vowels

Parasitic vowels may occur in unstressed syllables, especially when the stressed syllable ends in *r* or *l* and a further consonant follows. The parasitic vowel *u* is inserted after a velar vowel, *i* after a palatal vowel, in order to facilitate pronunciation. A parasitic vowel can be found in the genitive *heriges* (O 9/31; nominative *here*) and in the dative *byrig* (O 2/22 etc.; nominative *burh*).

## Consonants

### § 24 Fronting and Assibilation

These two changes are very complex and affect the pronunciation of the original velar consonants *g* and *k* (written <c>), as well as the consonant group *sk* (written <sc>). It can be said with certainty that in a palatal context, the velar consonant *g* was either fronted to the semi-vowel *j* or became the affricate /dʒ/; original velar *k* was fronted to /tʃ/ and the consonant group *sk* became /ʃ/. These changes occurred before the earliest written records.

Word initial *k* became /tʃ/ and *g* became /j/ when followed by primary palatal vowels: see for example *ceorl* /tʃeorl/ (‘churl’) as opposed to the German cognate ‘Kerl’ and *giefan* /jjevan/ (‘give’) as opposed to German ‘geben’.

Medially in palatal contexts, *g* became /j/ and /dʒ/ and /k/ became /tʃ/ as in *dæges* /dæjes/ ('day'), *sengan* /sendʒan/ ('singe') and *sēcan* /se:tʃan/ ('seek') as well as *pencan* /θentʃan/ ('think').

Word-final /k/ preceded by *i* became /tʃ/ as in *pic* /pitʃ/ ('pitch'); geminated *g* became /dʒ/ when it followed a palatal vowel, as in *secg* /sedʒ/ ('man'), and /j/ as in *dæg* /dæj/ ('day').

## § 25 Initial Palatal Consonants

Palatal consonants in word-initial position are frequently followed by vocalic digraphs; it is difficult to say whether these digraphs represent diphthongs proper or are simply an indication of the palatal quality of the preceding word-initial consonant or consonant group. The consonants involved are Germanic \**j* (<g>, <i>), and the fronted consonants *k*, *c* and *g*, as well as the consonant group *sk* (see § 24).

Germanic \**j* in word-initial position followed by the velar vowel *u* is written as <iu>, <gio> and <geo>, as for example in *iung*, *giong*, *geong* 'young'; followed by *ō* the written forms are *io* and *eo* and when *ā* followed the form was *ēa*: as for example *geoc*, *gioc* 'yoke' and *gēara* 'yore'. It can be shown by the later development of *yoke* and *yore* that the pattern is different from the ordinary Old English diphthongs which show a falling stress from the first to the second element; here, however, the second element was stressed.

Word-initial palatal *sc*- followed by a velar vowel frequently triggers digraphs, as for example in *sceolde* compared to *scolde* 'should' or *sceacan* 'shake'.

Word-initial palatal *sc*-, *g* and *c* /tʃ/ followed by a palatal vowel in West Saxon produced the following changes: *ĕ* > *ĭe*; *ǣ* > *ĕa*. Compare for example *giefan* 'give' and *gĭet* 'yet'; *sceaft* 'shaft', *ceaster* 'city', *geat* 'gate'.

## § 26 Assimilation and Dissimilation

Both assimilation and dissimilation should be seen as strategies to facilitate the pronunciation of unwieldy consonant clusters.

Assimilation is mainly a feature of word formation (composition and derivation) which often produces a direct sequence of two difficult consonants. Thus, *-fm-* is usually assimilated to *-mm-*, as for example in *Lammasse* (M 1/1; < OE *hlāfmæsse*); it also occurs with *-pf-*, as for example in *chaffare* (M 7/33 < OE *cēap+faru*); *-vd-* usually becomes *-dd-*, as in ME *hadde*, *hadden* based on OE *hæfde*, *hæfdon* (see Old English Glossary under *habban* and Middle English Glossary under *have*). Old English *blētsunge* (O 1/32) appears as Middle English *blessyng* (M 10.1/8) and Middle English *lossum* is based on OE *lēofsum*. Assimilation also affects the dental consonants *þ* and *d* when followed by either a liquid (*l*, *r*) or a nasal (*m*, *n*). Examples are OE *fæder* and Modern English *father*. Sequences of two words are also subject to assimilation when the first ends in and the second begins with a dental, as for example in *atte* on the basis of *at+þe*.

Dissimilation took place in awkward consonant clusters, especially *h* or *s* preceding *f* or *þ*. This is the case in Modern English *nostrils* on the basis of Middle English *nosethirles* and Middle English *is tat* (M 2/30) based on *is þat*.

### § 27 Parasitic Consonants

Parasitic consonants were added to facilitate the pronunciation of unwieldy consonant clusters: *b*, *d* in a voiced context and *p*, *t* in a voiceless context. In Middle English, parasitic consonants appear in the context of *mr*, *nr*, *ml*, *nl*, *lr*, *mn* as well as *mt*, *ms*, *sn*.

A parasitic *b* appears in *thromblede* (M 3/38; ‘stumbled’); a parasitic *d* appears in Modern English *thunder* (< OE *þunres* (genitive) from *þunor* (nominative)). The voiceless parasitic *p* appears in *nempnede* (M 7/178) versus *nemne* (M 10.8/9).

### § 28 Metathesis

Metathesis (i. e. transposition of two letters or sounds) most frequently occurs in the sequence *–Vrh(t)* in Old English which appears as *–rV(g)h(t)* in Middle English. Examples are ME *wrohte*, *wroht*, *ywroght* based on OE *worhte*, *geworht* (see glossaries under ‘wyrca(n)’ and ‘work’) and OE *þurh* versus Modern English *through*.

A further context is Old English *–rV+dental* which appears later as *–Vr+dental*: OE *þritig* (O 6/94) becomes Modern English *thirty*.

### § 29 Simplification of Consonant Groups

This process affects mainly the consonants *l*, *w*, *v*, *þ*, as can be seen in the following examples. Old English *–lc-* /*lʃ*/ becomes Middle English /*tʃ*/ as in *suilce* and *swiche*, Modern English *such*. Old English *eal swā* is simplified to Middle and Modern English *also*. The voiced fricative *v* frequently disappears when followed by *n* or *d*, as for example in Middle English *han*, based on *hav(e)n*, or *hed*, *heed*, based on Old English *hēafod*.

### § 30 Verner’s Law

An exception to Grimm’s Law (see chapter 1) seems to be evident in the various qualities of stem-final consonants in the tense stems of some strong verbs. Verner’s Law provides an explanation for these differences. This variation can be seen in the first and second tense stems of strong verbs on the one hand, and the third and fourth stems on the other. The different consonants which result are a consequence of the shifting accent in Indo-European and its effects on fricatives. Verner’s Law states that fricatives become voiced when they occur in a voiced context, provided the accent does not fall on the preceding syllable. Since in Indo-European the position of the word accent depended on the number of syllables, whereas in Germanic it fell on the first syllable, the variation between voiced and voiceless fricatives was a regular phenomenon.

Verner’s Law accounts for the regular variation between these pairs of voiced and voiceless fricatives:

–*f* and *v*–; –*θ* and *ð*–; –*x* and *ȝ*– and –*s* and *z*–  
(– indicates the position of the accent).

In Old English, the first and second tense stems can be traced back to Indo-European forms in which the accent preceded the stem-final consonant; fricatives in this position therefore remained voiceless. The third and fourth stems, however, are based on forms in which the accent in Indo-European shifted to a syllable following the stem-final

consonant; fricatives in this position therefore became voiced. Subsequent changes in the system of consonants and the peculiarities of the Old English writing system (no differentiation between voiceless /f/ and voiced /v/) have obscured this regular variation. Further, voiced /z/ became /r/; /ȝ/ in certain contexts became /w/ and /ð/ became /d/. As a result, the manifestation of Verner's Law in Old English can be summarised as the variation between þ/d, s/r and h/w – as in:

weor <b>þ</b> an, wear <b>þ</b>	wur <b>d</b> on, wor <b>d</b> en
cēo <b>s</b> an, cēa <b>s</b>	cu <b>r</b> on, co <b>r</b> en
sēo <b>n</b> , seah <b>h</b>	saw <b>o</b> n, sew <b>e</b> n.

Old English strong verbs like *rīsan* – *rās* – *rīson* – *risen* show that Verner's Law was gradually abandoned. In Modern English, Verner's Law can still be seen in *was* – *were* and *seethe* – *sodden*.

The operation of Verner's Law will be pointed out in the section concerning strong verbs in Old English (see § 66 ff.).

## Loanwords

### § 31 Scandinavian Loanwords

Most Scandinavian loanwords could be easily assimilated in Old English, with only slight changes, as both are Germanic languages. For most Scandinavian vowels Middle English had corresponding qualities, except for *au* which can be found with a wide variety of spellings; thus *vindauga* 'window' is written both *windoze* and *windowe*.

Scandinavian *iū* usually appears as long close *e* in Middle English: *miūkr* – *meke* (M 11/2).

As far as word-initial consonants followed by a palatal vowel are concerned, Middle English shows a mixture of forms involving the consonants *g*, *k* and *sk*. Words inherited from Old English show a palatal word-initial consonant (see § 24), Scandinavian loanwords, however, guttural *g*, *k* and *sk*:- /jive/ versus /give/ 'give'; /ʃirtʃe/ versus /kirk/ 'church' and the characteristic word-initial /sk-/ as in *skill*, *skies*, etc.

### § 32 French Loanwords

Since Old French was not a Germanic language, more efforts and a number of compromises had to be made in accommodating Old French loanwords within the phonetic system of Middle English.

Whereas the Old French diphthongs *ai*, *ei*, *au*, *eu*, *öu* and *ue* could be easily adapted, *oi* had no correspondence in Middle English and was therefore adopted probably without any changes.

Apart from in the West Midlands and the Southwest, there were no corresponding vowels for French /y/; it was in most cases taken over as /u/.

In Old French the sequence *a+nasal+b/f/g/ch* was quite frequent, whereas in Middle English this pattern was not available. To accommodate the original pattern as closely as possible, diphthongs in *au* appear frequently: *chaumber*, *sauf*, *aungell*, *braunch*.

### 3. Morphology

#### Introduction

This chapter will cover the following areas for both Old and Middle English: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, numerals and verbs. An introduction to every part of speech summarises their pertinent properties, usually in contrast to Modern English, with occasional reference to Latin. An additional section is devoted to the discussion of the most important diachronic changes. Paradigms, supplemented with notes, show the most important inflectional forms.

#### Nouns

##### § 33 General Remarks

For a better understanding of the several declensional classes of nouns and their development from Old to Middle English, some general remarks on the morphological properties of nouns and their grammatical categories are appropriate.

In Indo-European, nouns consisted of a *stem* (root and suffixes, if any), a so-called *thematic element* indicating the declensional class, and an ending for *case and number*. For the nominative and accusative singular, the ending could be Ø. The few nouns without a thematic element are usually called *athematic nouns*.

These early characteristics of nouns can be illustrated by a few examples taken from Latin. Latin *piscis* ‘fish’ can be divided into stem – thematic element – inflectional ending: *pisc-i-s*; since the thematic element is *i*, *piscis* belongs to the so-called *i-stems*. Latin *homo* ‘man’ can be assigned to the so-called *n-stems* on the basis of the declensional form for the dative singular: *hom-in-i*. Latin *genus* ‘gender’, i. e. *gen-us-Ø* in combination with its inflectional form for the dative singular *gen-er-i* can be assigned to the so-called *s-stems*. Finally, Latin *urb-s* ‘town’ shows that there is no thematic element between the stem and the declension ending; it therefore belongs to the *athematic nouns*.

In Proto-Germanic and to an even greater extent in Old English, final syllables indicating both thematic element and inflection became indistinct when the word accent shifted to the preceding root syllable. This means there are hardly any characteristics left that indicate to which inflectional class a certain noun belongs. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics which help to determine the original final syllables through their influence on the vowel of the stressed syllable. Thus, the *y* in the Old English noun *hyge* ‘thought’ is a secondary palatal vowel caused by *i*-mutation of *u* (cf. Odin’s raven called ‘Huginn’) and therefore must have had the ending *-iz*, thus *\*hug-iz*.

In Old English, just as in Latin and Modern German, nouns had the following grammatical categories or parameters:

1. *gender*: feminine, masculine and neuter; starting in late Old English times, this category gradually became unimportant, and was practically abolished in Middle English;
2. *case*: nominative (vocative), genitive, dative (which could have instrumental function) and accusative; this category began to lose its importance from late Old English times onwards and was almost totally abolished in Middle English;
3. *number*: singular and plural.

Most of these categories were poorly marked. *Gender* is unmarked and can only be determined for the singular in combination with demonstrative pronouns because their inflections express gender. Most endings can indicate several different cases and/or numbers. The only ending which definitively marks the categories *case* and *number* is the sequence V+s. This is only found in the a-stems, as for example *dæg-es* (genitive singular) and *dag-as* (nominative or accusative plural). Since vowels in unstressed syllables (and inflectional syllables are never stressed) began to lose their once distinctive quality and were increasingly pronounced with the quality of a schwa /ə/, the word-final sequence V+s in late Old English can be assumed to have expressed the basic oppositions *singular* versus *plural* and *common case* versus *possessive case*. Retaining the original graph in these contexts (-es and -as) was the result of the stable writing system in West Saxon which was used until the 13th century. Diachronically, the word-final sequence V+s is the only stable inflectional element.

In Middle English times, the category *gender* with its poor inflectional marking was abandoned quite early. The only indicator of gender in Middle English was the personal pronoun for the third person singular, since it retained the category gender. Under the influence of Norman, some Old English nouns took on a new gender, as for example *love*, *sun*, and *moon*; the first two were feminine in Old English and became masculine in Middle English, whereas the third was masculine in Old English and became feminine in Middle English.

In Middle English writings *feminine* gender is sometimes associated with small birds, such as the nightingale. In M 8/6–7 reference to the fox is made by means of the personal pronoun *he*. Gender can also be expressed in allegorical poetry, when personifications like *justice*, *love* or *truth* are referred to by pronouns; see M 7/241–242: *Til Abstinence myn aunte haue zeue me leue – / And zut haue y hated here al my lyf-tyme*. In many of these instances, gender is taken over from the source language, usually either Latin or French.

The category *case* was retained in early Middle English, especially in the (linguistically) more conservative southern areas. Nevertheless, it was gradually replaced – except for the inflected genitive – by analytical means, such as prepositions and word order, differentiating direct and indirect objects, as well as marking adverbials. In late Old English, constructions can be found which express the idea *origin*, one of the major functions of the genitive, by the preposition *of*. Under the influence of *de*, which in French marks origin and expresses a possessive relation, the prepositional phrase *of+noun* gradually took over all the other functions of the old inflected genitive (see § 98).

Of the former grammatical categories, *number* has remained fairly stable. There were some changes; however, these led to a more reliable distinction between singular



and plural. The phonologically stable word-final pattern *V+s* from the *a*-stems to show *plural* gradually replaced the other inflectional endings which had also expressed plural. The significance of the almost universal plural marker is underlined by the fact that in a few instances, a new singular without *-s* was introduced for nouns inherited from Old English or borrowed from Norman which ended in *-s*; as for example Old English *piose*, *peose* and the Modern English singular *pea*, and Old French *cherise* and the Modern English singular *cherry*.

Even though the number of Old English nouns which express plural by the ending *-an* was very high, only Modern English *oxen* has retained this marking.

Athematic nouns (see § 44) had different vowel qualities in the nominative and accusative plural, cf. *mūs* (singular) and *mȳs* (plural). This characteristic was also retained to a small extent.

In general, it can be said that the major changes in the system of English nouns had been effected by late Middle English times.

### § 34 Inflection of Nouns

In Old English, three basic types of inflection have to be considered: nouns with a vocalic thematic element, nouns with a consonantal thematic element and the so-called athematic nouns (radical consonant declension). As a rule, it is very difficult to infer the inflectional class to which a noun belongs on the basis of the data available. This is due to the reduction of unstressed syllables which once conveyed this information (see § 21 and 22).

With reference to the older Indo-European languages, ten declensions or stems can be reconstructed: four vocalic declensions (also called 'strong' declension), five consonantal declensions (also called 'weak' declension) and the so-called athematic declension.

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. <i>a</i> -stems (Indo-European <i>o</i> -stems) | 6. <i>r</i> -stems   |
| 2. <i>ō</i> -stems (Indo-European <i>ā</i> -stems) | 7. <i>nt</i> -stems  |
| 3. <i>i</i> -stems                                 | 8. <i>s</i> -stems   |
| 4. <i>u</i> -stems                                 | 9. <i>t</i> -stems   |
| 5. <i>n</i> -stems                                 | 10. athematic stems. |

Despite this great diversity and a general lack of clearly marked categories, there are three rules for determining both case and number, though not gender, for all stems:

- the nominative and accusative plural have the same ending;
- the genitive plural of all nouns ends in *-a*;
- the dative plural of all nouns ends in *-um* (late West Saxon in *-an*).



## § 35 The a-stems

Nouns belonging to this class are either masculine or neuter. The declension of masculine nouns is illustrated by *dæg* ‘day’, *stān* ‘stone’ and *finger*. The declension of neuter nouns is illustrated by *lim* ‘limb’, *word* and *hēafod* ‘head’.

	short-		long-		polysyllabic	
N sg.	dæg	lim	stān	word	finger	hēafod
G	dæges	limes	stānes	wordes	fingres	hēafdes
D	dæge	lime	stāne	worde	fingre	hēafde
A	dæg	lim	stān	word	finger	hēafod
N pl.	dagas	limu	stānas	word	fingras	hēaf(o)du
G	daga	lima	stāna	worda	fingra	hēafda
D	dagum	limum	stānum	wordum	fingrum	hēafdum
A	dagas	limu	stānas	word	fingras	hēaf(o)du

Remark: Neuter nouns with a short stem have *-u* in the nominative and accusative plural (see *lim*), those with a long stem do not have an ending at all (see *word*). The Modern English noun *sheep* was a neuter noun with a long stem in Old English; this explains why there is no *-s* marking the plural in Modern English.

The a-stems have two subgroups: the so-called *ja-stems* and the *wa-stems*. Nouns belonging to the first subgroup show i-mutation and gemination when the stem syllable is short; those belonging to the second subgroup have either *-u* or *-w* following the stem-final consonant.

The paradigm for the *ja-stems* is for *here* ‘army’ and *secg* ‘man’, both masculine, and *cynn* ‘race’ and *wīte* ‘punishment’, both neuter. The paradigm for the *wa-stems* is for *bearu* ‘grove’ (masc.) and *searu* ‘device’ (neuter).

N sg.	here	secg	cynn	wīte	
G	herges	secges	cynnes	wītes	
D	herge	secge	cynne	wīte	
A	here	secg	cynn	wīte	
N pl.	hergas	secgas	cynn	wītu	
G	herga	secga	cynna	wīta	
D	hergum	secgum	cynnum	wītum	
A	hergas	secgas	cynn	wītu	
N sg.	bearu	searu	N pl.	bearwas	searu
G	bearwes	searwes	G	bearwa	searwa
D	bearwe	searwe	D	bearwum	searwum
A	bearu	searu	A	bearwas	searu

§ 36 The *ō*-stems

All nouns in this class are feminine. The paradigm is for *talū* ‘tale’, *wund* ‘wound’, and *sāwol* ‘soul’.

	short-	long-	polysyllabic
N sg.	talū, -o	wund	sāwol
G	tale	wunde	sāwle
D	tale	wunde	sāwle
A	tale	wunde	sāwle
N pl.	tala, -e	wunda, -e	sāwla, -e
G	tala, -ena	wunda, -ena	sāwla
D	talum	wundum	sāwlum
A	tala, -e	wunda, -e	sāwla, -e

The *ō*-stems also have two subgroups; the so-called *jō*-stems and the *wō*-stems. The paradigm for the first subgroup is for *synn* ‘sin’ and *gierd* ‘rod’. The paradigm for the second subgroup is for *sinu* ‘sinew’ and *læs* ‘pasture’.

N sg.	synn	gierd	sinu	læs
G	synne	gierde	sinwe	læswe
D	synne	gierde	sinwe	læswe
A	synne	gierde	sinwe	læswe
N pl.	synna, -e	gierda, -e	sinwa, -e	læswa, -e
G	synna	gierda	sinwa	læswa
D	synnum	gierdum	sinwum	læswum
A	synna, -e	gierda, -e	sinwa, -e	læswa, -e

§ 37 The *i*-stems

Nouns in this class can be any gender. In late Old English, the masculine and neuter nouns joined the *a*-stems; the feminine nouns joined the *ō*-stems. The paradigm is for *stice* ‘stitch’ and *giest* ‘guest’ (masc.), *spere* ‘spear’ (neuter) and *dæd* ‘deed’ (fem.).

N sg.	stice	g(i)est	spere	dæd
G	stices	g(i)estes	speres	dæde
D	stice	g(i)este	spere	dæde
A	stice	g(i)est	spere	dæd
N pl.	stice, -as	g(i)estas	speru, -o	dæde, -a
G	stica	g(i)esta	spera	dæda
D	sticum	g(i)estum	sperum	dædum
A	stice, -as	g(i)estas	speru, -o	dæde, -a

Remark: Abstract nouns ending in *-scipe* are declined like masculine nouns with a short syllable.