

10. Early Modern English II

The History of English (Ling 390)

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Fall 2025

What We'll Cover

1. Discussion of Jordan (1603)
2. The Printing Press
3. Early Modern English – Differences hiding in similarities
4. For next week

I. Jordan (1603)

Anything that stuck out to you in this reading?

Any questions you had about it?

Note: Page numbering was weird and the first word of a given page appeared at the bottom-right of the previous page.

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Ut

In the 17th century, there was a raging debate about witches.

The standard view was that witches did exist, but themselves had no supernatural powers. Instead, they worked with evil spirits, and those spirits used their own powers to cause injury and otherwise impact the world.

Some argued partially against this view, saying that there was no way for witches to do some of the things ascribed to them, like “flying out of windows [...] their transformation into Cats, Hares, and other Creatures [...] raising Tempests.” These things were argued to be “inconsistent with the nature of Spirits, and above the powers of those poor and miserable Agents.”

This argument was put forward by Joseph Glanville in 1667.
What does he mean?

“We cannot conceive how the Faetus is form’d in the womb, nor as much as how a Plant springs from the Earth we tread on; we know not how our Souls move the Body, nor how these distant and extreme natures are united; And if we are ignorant of the most obvious things about us, and the most considerable within our selves, ’tis then no wonder that we know not the constitution and powers of the Creatures, to whom we are such strangers. Briefly then, matters of fact well proved ought not to be denied, because we cannot conceive how they can be perform’d. Nor is it a reasonable method of inference, first to presume the thing impossible, and thence to conclude that the fact cannot be proved.”

Amatus Lusitanus reporteth of one *Diua Clara*, a maide of 18. yeares of age, which had euey day two or three such strange fits, as those that were about her, gaue out that that she was haunted with an euill spirit.

In those fits euey part of her body was distorted, she felt nothing, nor perceiued any thing: but had all her sences benumbed, her hart beating, her teeth close shut together: yet for an houres space or two she would haue such strong motions, that shee would weary the strongest men that came at her. When she had beene three weeke in this case, her left arme began to be resolued with a palsie, &c. He being called vnto her prescribed such remedies as are vsuall in this case, and within few dayes recouered her, to the great admiration of the beholders.

Petrus Forreſtus maketh mention of another maid
of 22. yeares old, which dwelt with a Burgermaſter
of *Delft* in *Holland*, who falling in loue with a yong
man, fell alſo into theſe fits of the Mother : which
held her many houres together with ſuch violent
horrible accidents, as hee neuer ſawe the like ; her
whole body being pulled to and fro with convul-
ſiue motions, her belly ſometimes liſted vp, and
ſometimes depreſſed, a roaring noiſe heard within
her, with crying and howling, a diſtortion of her
armes and handes : in ſomuch as thoſe about her
thought her to be poſſeſſed with a diuell, and out
of all hope of recouery. He being called vnto her
in Ianuarie 1565. applied conuenient remedies as
there he ſetteth downe, and in a ſhort time reſtored
her to her health againe.

“maketh,” not yet “makes”

Jorden (1603)

- What does Jordan say caused the “strange fits” in these two cases?
- What is “the Mother”?
- Does Jordan think that these mysterious symptoms have a supernatural cause?

*What this disease is, and by what meanes it causeth such
varietie of Symptoms.*



His disease is called by diuerse names amongst our Authors. *Pas-
sio Hysterica, Suffocatio, Praefocatio,*
and *Strangulatus veri, Caducus
matricis, &c.* In English the Mo-
ther, or the Suffocation of the
Mother, because most common-
ly it takes them with choaking in the throat: and
it is an affect of the Mother or wombe wherein the princ-
pal parts of the bodie by consent do suffer diuersly accor-
ding to the diuersitie of the causes and diseases wherewith
the matrix is offended.

And hereupon the *Symptoms* of this disease are sayd to be monstrous and terrible to beholde, and of such a varietie as they can hardly be comprehended within any method or boundes: Inſomuch as they which are ignorant of the ſtrange affects which naturall cauſes may produce, and of the manifold examples which our profeſſion of Phiſicke doth miniſter in this kind, haue ſought aboue the Moone for ſupernaturall cauſes: aſcribing theſe accidents either to diabolicall poſſeſſion, to witchcraft, or to the immediate finger of the Almighty.

“naturall cauſes”?

But it is no marvell though the common people and men also in other faculties verie excellent may bee deceyued by the rarenesse and straungenesse of these matters, which are hidden out of their Horizon amongst the deepest mysteries of our profession : when as Phisitions themselves, as *Cornelius Gemma* testifieth. If they bee not verie wel exercised in the practise of their profession, are oftentimes deceyued, imagining such manifolde straunge accidents as their hee mencioneth to accompanie this disease, (as *suffocation* in the throate, croaking of Frogges, hissing of Snakes, crowing of Cockes, barking of Dogges, garring of Crowes, frenzies, convulsions, hickcockes, laughing, singing, weeping, crying, &c.) to proceede from some metaphysicall power, when in deede (as hee there sayeth) they are meereley naturall.

“meereley naturall”?

Jorden (1603)

- What is “suffocation of the mother”?
- What’s its connection to witchcraft?
- How does suffocation of the mother cause such diverse symptoms?
- What’s the system of humors? (Think back to Old English – we discussed it with reference to Bald’s Leechbook.)

Jorden (1603)

- Jorden describes three “faculties” – animal, vital, and natural – which could be impacted by suffocation of the mother, causing diverse symptoms.

Organ	Faculty	Function
Brain	Animal	Movement, motivation, senses
Heart	Vital	Bloodflow, immune system, bodily functions
Liver	Natural	Digestion, distribution of humors

Jorden (1603)

- Jorden's work shows that medicine (or "physick") was cosmopolitan, similar to Bald's Leechbook.
- In it, Jorden mentions:
 - Avicen – Ali al-Hussein Ibn Sina, aka Avicenna (Persian, medieval)
 - Cornelius Gemma – Dutch, Early Modern
 - Hippocrates – Greek, ancient
 - Amatus Lusitanus – Portuguese Jewish, Early Modern

II. The Printing Press

Before Printing

- How were books made before the printing press?
- Texts were produced by hand, one-by-one, usually by monks, usually for a particular buyer. (Not mass produced.)
- These handwritten texts are **manuscripts**.
- Manuscripts were expensive. Owning one was often a status symbol.



From *Marvels of the East*, c. 1000 AD



Scribe copying a manuscript, c. 1320. (Royal MS 14 E III)
The room where monks did this work was called the *scriptorium*.

Printing

- The printing press was invented by Johann Gutenberg in the 1450s, in Mainz, Germany.
- Movable type: Metal letter-forms arranged in what's essentially a giant stamp. (Origin of typesetting, i.e. setting type in the form.)
- Hugely influential – spread through Europe rapidly in the mid-late 15th century.
- Set the stage for growing literacy, language standardization, and various social movements (including the Protestant reformation, English Civil War, and witch-hunts).



Excerpt from the Gutenberg Bible, c. 1455.
Note printed text + hand illustrations.



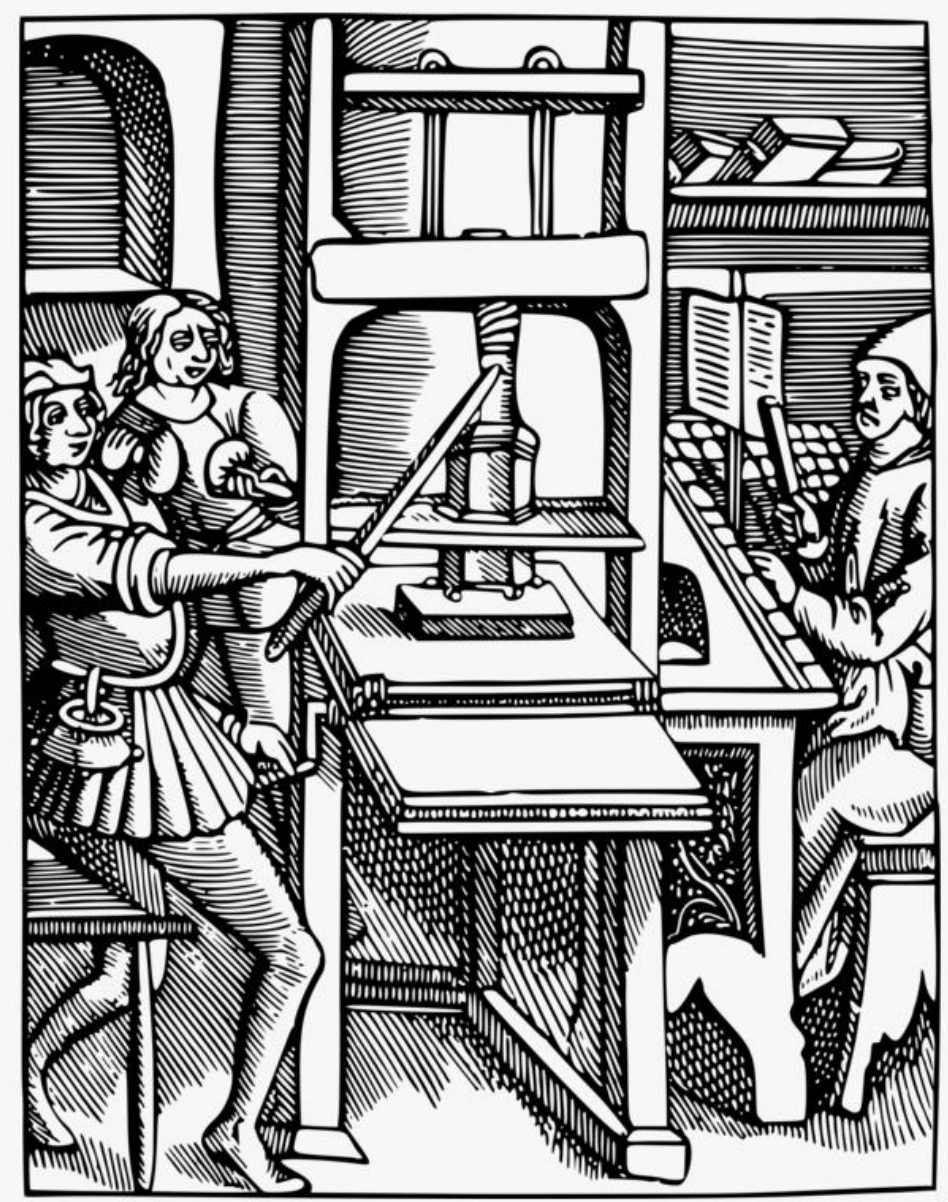
A printing press in use.



Movable type was a huge innovation.

How does a Gutenberg printing press work?

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6ny9oyrJwo>



Printing and English



- William Caxton, an English merchant, born in Kent about 1420.
- Worked in the Low Countries, modern-day Netherlands and Belgium, especially Bruges.
- Learned printing in Cologne/Köln, involved in printing *De Proprietatibus Rerum* in 1472.
- About 1473, printed the first English-language book in Bruges or Ghent, *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*.
- Set up England's first printing press in Westminster in 1476. Printed about 100 books, many his own translations into English. Mostly literary works.

William Caxton, our hero.



Westminster, where he set up England's first printing press, 1476. (Westminster is part of London.)

Kent, where Caxton was born, ~1420.

Bruges, where he often worked.

Ghent, where he also worked. He printed *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*, ~1473, here or in Bruges.

Cologne, where he learned to print, ~1470.

Note: This base map is anachronistic, showing 21st-century borders.

Remember this?

fayn wolde I satysfye euery man/ and so to doo toke an olde boke and redde therein/ and certaynly the englysshe was so rude and brood that I coude not wele vnderstande it. And also my lorde abbot of Westmynster ded do shewe to me late certain euydences wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to our englysshe now vsid/ And certaynly it was wretton in suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche than englysshe I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be vnderstonden/ And certaynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that. Whiche was vsed and spoken whan I was borne/ For we englysshe men/ ben borne vnder the domynacyon of the mone. Whiche is neuer stedfaste/ but euer wauerynge/ wexyngge o; ne season/ and waneth & dycreaseth another season/ And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that certayn marchautes were in a ship in tanyse for to haue sayled ouer the see into zelande/ and for lacke of wynde thei taryed atte forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an hows and axed for mete. and specyally he axyd after eggys And the goode wyf answerde. that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaüt was angry. for he also coude speke no frenshe. but wolde haue hadde eggys/ and she vnderstode hym not/ And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/ then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thysse dayes now wryte. eggys or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by cause of dyuersite & chaunge of langage. For in these dayes euery man that is in ony reputacyon in his couñtre. wyll vter his comynycacyon and maters in suche maners & termes/ that fewe men shall vnderstonde theym/ And som ho;

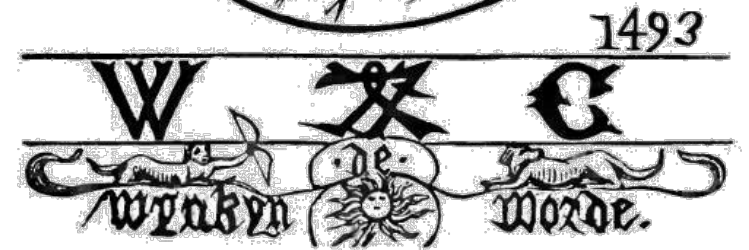
B³L

From the preface to *Eneydos*, Caxton's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, 1490.

fayn wolde I satysfye euery man/ and so to doo toke an olde boke and redde therein/ and certaynly the englysshe was so rude and brood that I coude not wele understande it. And also my lorde abbot of Westmynster ded do shewe to me late certain euydences wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to our englysshe now usid/ And certaynly it was wretton in suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche than englysshe I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be vnderstonden/ And certaynly our language now used varyeth ferre from that. Which was used and spoken whan I was borne/ For we englysshe men/ ben borne under the domynacyon of the mone. whiche is neuer stedfaste/ but euer wauerynge/ wexyngge one season/ and waneth & dycreaseth another season/ And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that certayn marchautes were in a ship in tanyse for to haue sayled ouer the see into zelande/ and for lacke of wynde thei taryed atte forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an hows and axed for mete. and specyally he axyd after eggys And the goode wyf answerde that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaüt was angry. for he also coude speke no frenshe. But wolde haue hadde eggys/ and she vnderstode hym not/ And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/ then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thysse dayes now wryt. eggys or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by cause of dyuersite & chaunge of langage. For in these dayes euery man this is in ony reputacyon in his couñtre. wyll utter his comynycacyon and maters in suche maners & termes that fewe men shall understone theym

Elite vs. Popular Press

- Caxton's works were still geared towards the affluent.
- Wynkyn de Worde, who worked with Caxton, would move press in a more popular direction, producing more (and cheaper) works for the general public.
- He printed about 600 different titles, including children's books and how-to books.
- By 1500, still only 5 printers in England. About 30 years later, Henry VIII passed laws to restrict foreigners from operating as printers in England.



Wynkyn de Worde, our other hero.

Print and Language Standardization

- Printed books flip the old standard. Now, you mass produce books, and find buyers.
- With printing, you need to find a form that is acceptable to a diversity of readers, as Caxton's prologue to *Eneydos* shows.
- Literacy expanded with broader access to print materials.
- People come to see texts as primary, oral language as secondary. (Sense of written English as 'real' English, and spoken English as something inferior.)
- This contributed to a broader standardization of the language, internationally.

Print & Orthography

- Caxton and the printers who followed him based their spellings on late medieval manuscripts, not contemporary pronunciations, even though the great vowel shift had already taken place (Algeo 2009: 141). This transformed the sounds that many English letters represented.
- Type was often imported from the continent, where innovative English letters never occurred. This led to the demise of þ (thorn) and ȝ (yogh).
- þ became *th* in virtually all contexts, but sometimes also *y*, e.g. ‘ye’, as in ‘ye olde’
- ȝ became *gh* in most contexts, but *z* in Scottish, e.g. in the surname Menzies [mɪŋɪs] (because ȝ looks a lot like ȝ, a variant form of z)

Workshop

Access the texts on the homepage of our course site. The excerpt you'll work on depends on your group number, as shown below:

1. From *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches* (1566)
2. From *A Rehearsall Both Straung and True* (1579)
3. From *The Witches of Huntingdon* (1646)
4. From *The Discovery of Witches* (1647)

Your task is to:

1. Read through the document.
2. Make note of unfamiliar words and of stumbling blocks.
3. Tell us about the text – what is it about?

On the final, you'll all be tasked with transcribing an Early Modern English text into Modern English. You'll:

- replace <f> with <s>
- resolve the <v> and <u> inconsistencies
- replace tildes with following nasal consonants
- but otherwise retain spellings and orthographic conventions

III. Early Modern English

Differences hiding in similarities

Caution!

- What you've read so far seems a lot like today's English, at times much more than e.g. Shakespeare's works do.
- Despite the similarity of language, Jordan wrote at a time when we barely understood the natural world or the human body, as Glanville's quote makes clear to us.
- But often, words' meanings can be quite different from then to today.
- Would you have guessed that "mother" meant "uterus"?

"We cannot conceive how the Faetus is form'd in the womb, nor as much as how a Plant springs from the Earth we tread on; we know not how our Souls move the Body, nor how these distant and extreme natures are united." – Glanville

“Respecting ye evidence of ye afflicted maid we find some things testified . . . that plainly intimate her trouble from ye mother which improved by craft may produce ye most of those strange & unusuall effects affirmed of her. . . .”

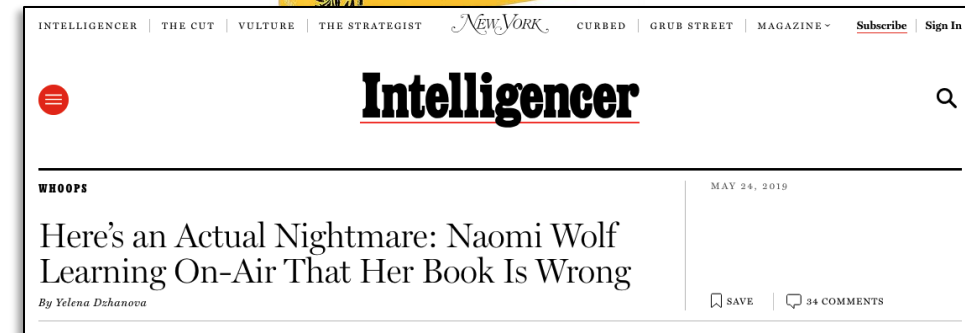
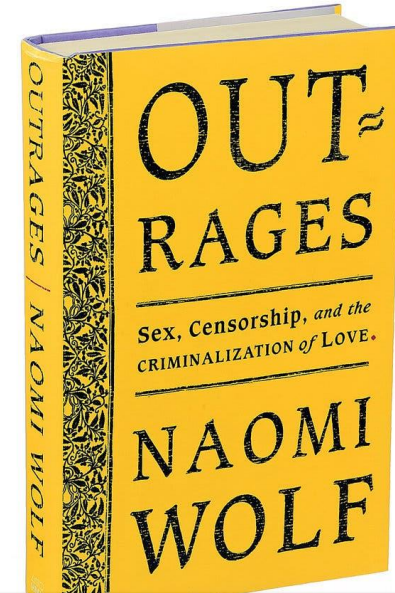
What does this mean?

“... throughout *Escaping Salem*, Godbeer modernizes the seventeenth-century text to make its meaning clearer to modern readers (2005, 134). But in this instance, one such modernization obscures the actual meaning. Where the original text notes that some of the girl’s apparent symptoms ‘plainly intimate her trouble from ye mother’, Godbeer writes that they ‘plainly intimate her trouble as coming from her mother’ (2005, 117). But trouble coming from ‘the mother’ was entirely different from trouble coming from ‘her mother’. The ministers never suggested that Katherine’s own mother was causing her symptoms, but that her uterus was.”

See Pentangelo (2021) “Burning Feathers: A Hint at Hysteria in a Connecticut Witchcraft Case.”

“Death Recorded”

- Naomi Wolf’s *Outrages* (2019) explored the legal persecution of gay men in 19th century England – even more recent than the Early Modern Era (which ended in about 1800)
- Or... did it?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uRCcEoGWxs>



Pronouns

- Pronouns worked very similarly to today, but not quite the same.
- How do “my” and “mine” work today?
- “Her” and “hers”?
- What about “his”?
- And “its” or “it’s”?
- How did they work differently in Early Modern English?

PERSONAL PRONOUNS OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH					
	Nominative	Objective	Possessive		
			Attributive	Nominal	
<i>Singular</i>					
1 pers.	I	me		my/mine	
2 pers.	thou	thee		thy/thine	
3 pers., masc.	he, a	him		his	
fem.	she	her	her		hers
neut.	(h)it	(h)it		his, it, its	
<i>Plural</i>					
1 pers.	we	us	our		ours
2 pers.	ye/you	you/ye	your		yours
3 pers.	they	them, (h)em	their		theirs

For next time:

- Read pp.170–179 in Algeo and:
 - Group 1: Cap. 3 and 7 in Jordan
 - Group 2: Cap. 4 in Jordan
 - Group 3: Cap. 5 and 6 in Jordan
- There will be a quiz on this reading. Come ready to discuss.

