

9. Early Modern English I

The History of English (Ling 390)

Prof. Pentangelo

Fall 2025

Quiz #7

1. What was the Great Vowel Shift?
2. What's one way that Early Modern English was different from contemporary English? Be specific. Demonstrate that you did the reading.

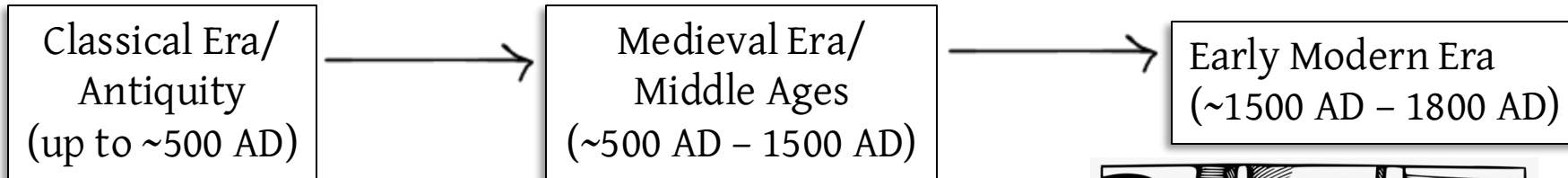
What We'll Cover

1. Early Modern English
2. Discussion of Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588)
3. Reading Early Modern English
4. For next week

I. Early Modern English

“The word stock of English was expanded greatly during the **early Modern period** in three ways. As **literacy increased**, a conscious need was felt to improve and amplify the vocabulary. As English speakers **traveled abroad**, they encountered new things that they needed new words to talk about. And as they traveled, they increasingly met speakers of other languages from whom they borrowed words.” (140)

- When is the “early Modern period”?



- Why did “literacy increase” at this time?

We’ll dive way deeper into the significance of the printing press next week. Later tonight, you’ll practice reading printed materials from this era.

- Why did English speakers “travel abroad” more during this period than during the Middle Ages?



fayn wolde I satysfye euery man/ and so to doo (okie an olde
boke and rede therein/ and certaynly the englysshe was so ru
de and brood that I coude not welk vnderstande it. And also
my lord abbot of Westmynster ded do shewde to me late certa
yn eydences Wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to
our englysshe now vsed/ And certaynly it was Wreton in
suche wyse that it was more lyk to dutche than englysshe
I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be vnderstonden/ And cer
taynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that. Whi
che was vsed and spoken whan I was borne/ For the en
glysshe men/ken borne vnder the compnacyn of the mone.
Whiche is neuer stedfaste/ but euer wauerynge/ weyrynge o
ne season/ and waneth & dyscreaseth 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 attē forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them
And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an
holde and ayed for mete. and specially he ayed after eggys
And the goode wyf answerde. that she coude speke no fren
she. And the marchaut 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 thys dayes now Wryte. eg
ges or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by
cause of dyuersite & charge of langage. For in these dayes
euery man that is in ony reputacyn in his countre. wyll vt
ter his compnacyn and maters in suche maners & ter
mes/ that felde men shall vnderstonde theym/ And som ho

B³L

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

Activity!

- Working in groups, complete activity 1 on your sheet.

Early Modern English

- What are some of the things that make Early Modern English different from Middle English?
- New words, including inkhorn terms



new words based on Latin or Greek roots, many of which appeared only in print

- New words from the Americas, including Indigenous languages and words developed in the colonies
- Widespread printing & reading = relative standardization
- Vowel pronunciation (Great Vowel Shift)

This is what Caxton grappled with: *eggs* or *eyren*?

Long-lived inkhorn terms:

dismiss
celebrate
encyclopedia
commit
irrevocable
irradiation
depopulation

opossum, pecan, raccoon,
woodchuck, squash,
caucus, chipmunk, skunk,
caribou, moose, muskrat,
wigwam, lengthy

The Great Vowel Shift

- A massive transformation in the vowels of English.
- Demarks Early Modern English from Middle English more than any other factor.
- Despite this change, spellings continued to reflect Middle English pronunciations, hence *feet* despite the change from /e:/ to /i/.
- “The most salient of all phonological developments in the history of English.” (144)

The Great Vowel Shift

Long Vowels		
Late Middle English	Early Modern English	Today's English
[a:] name	[æ:]→[ɛ:]→	[e] name
[e:] feet	[i]→	[i] feet
[ɛ:] greet	[e]→	[e] great
[i:] ride	[əɪ]→	[aɪ] ride
[o:] boote	[u]→	[u] boot
[ɔ:] boot	[o]→	[o] boat
[u:] hous	[əʊ]→	[aʊ] house

Table adapted from Algeo (2009).

- What had been phonemically long vowels in Old and Middle English – a true length distinction – dropped out of the grammar of English.
- Many long vowels became diphthongs. (In your Intro. to Ling. class, you may have seen [o] and [e] as diphthongs as well, [oʊ] and [eɪ].)
- “The stages by which the shift occurred and the cause of it are unknown.” (Algeo 2009: 145)

Pink cells are pronounced differently today than they were in Early Modern English.

Tan cells are pronounced the same today as they were in Early Modern English.

The Great Vowel Shift

Stressed Short Vowels		
Late Middle English	Early Modern English	Today's English
[a] that	[æ]→	[æ]
[ɛ] bed	→	[ɛ]
[ɪ] in	→	[ɪ]
[ɔ] on, odd	→	[ɔ] or [ɑ]
[ʊ] but	[ə]→	[ə]

Table adapted from Algeo (2009).

- Most short vowels remained the same from Middle to Early Modern English.
- All but one of these short vowels remained the same from Early Modern English to the English of today.

Pink cells are pronounced differently today than they were in Early Modern English.

Tan cells are pronounced the same today as they were in Early Modern English.

The Great Vowel Shift

Diphthongs		
Late Middle English	Early Modern English	Today's English
[aʊ] lawe	[ɔ]→	[ɔ]
[ɔʊ] snow	[o]→	[o]
[æɪ] nail→[a:]	[æ:]→[ɛ:]	[e]
[ɛʊ], [ɪʊ] fewe, knew	[ju]→	[ju]
[ʊɪ] join	[əɪ]→[aɪ]→	[əɪ]
[ɔɪ] joy	→	[ɔɪ]

Table adapted from Algeo (2009).

- Middle English diphthongs mostly monophthongized.
- [æɪ] merged with [a:], and then followed the course already described for [a:] with the other long vowels.

Pink cells are pronounced differently today than they were in Early Modern English.

Tan cells are pronounced the same today as they were in Early Modern English.

II. Hariot's *A briefe and true
report of the new found land of
Virginia* (1588)

Thomas Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588)

“1607 Jamestown, Virginia, was established as the first permanent English settlement in America.” (Algeo, 140)

“In the summer of 1585, the mathematician and scientist Thomas Harriot docked with a few dozen men in an area they called Virginia (today known as North Carolina’s Roanoke Island and Outer Banks). Harriot was uniquely suited to the voyage: while still in London, he had dedicated himself to learning and phonetically transcribing the oral language of Manteo and Wanchese, two Algonquian-speaking men who returned to England with an earlier expedition. These reconnaissance missions to Virginia were financed by Walter Raleigh, who now employed Harriot and the artist John White to map this area and its inhabitants in preparation for establishing one of the earliest English colonies in America. Harriot’s *Briefe and True Report* would be published in Latin as a pamphlet in 1588, with English, German, and French editions to follow, translated and edited by Richard Hakluyt, Theodor de Bry, and others.”

— Hunter Dukes, “Theodor de Bry’s Engravings for Thomas Harriot’s *Briefe and True Report* (1590)” [[Link](#)]

Thomas Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588)

I haue therefore thought it good beeing one that haue beene in the discoverie and in dealing with the naturall inhabitantes specially imploied; and hauing therefore seene and knowne more then the ordinarie: to imparte so much vnto you of the fruites of our labours, as that you may knowe howe iniuriously the enterprise is slaundered. And that in publike manner at this present chiefelie for two respectes.

First that some of you which are yet ignorant or doubtfull of the state thereof, may see that there is sufficient cause why the cheefe enterpriser with the fauour of her Maiestie, notwithstanding suche reportes; hath not onelie since continued the action by sending into the countrey againe, and replanting this last yeere a new Colony; but is also readie, according as the times and meanes will affoorde, to follow and prosecute the same.

Secondly, that you seeing and knowing the continuance of the action by the view hereof you may generally know & learne what the countrey is, & thervpon consider how your dealing therein if it proceede, may returne you profit and gaine; bee it either by inhabiting & planting or otherwise in furthering thereof.

And least that the substance of my relation should be doubtful vnto you, as of others by reason of their diuersitie: I will first open the cause in a few words wherefore they are so different; referring my selfe to your fauourable constructions, and to be adiudged of as by good consideration you shall finde cause. (6-7)

Thomas Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588)

- In 1590, Hariot's work was republished as volume 1 of Theodore de Bry's *America*, enriched with engravings by de Bry and Gysbert van Veen, based on watercolors made by the colonist and painter John White, who had been part of the efforts to colonize Roanoke Island.
- Here are some of de Bry's illustrations:

Hatorasck





SECOTAN

Pasquenoke

Dasamonguepeuc

WEAPEMEOC

Roanoc

Trinity harbor

Hatorasck

T. B.

2



T. B.





13







T B

J6



T. B.

19



T B 20

Report back

Take about 10 minutes with your group to prepare.

- Group 1: pp.9–16
- Group 2: pp.17–24
- Group 3: pp.25–30
- Group 4: pp.34–44

What was your section about?

Did it feature any loanwords from Indigenous languages?

How was the language different from Middle English?

How was it different from Modern English?

III. Reading Early Modern English

How the land of England Was fyrst named Albion/ And
By what enclifon it Was so named.

In the noble land of Sicilie/ther Was a noble kyng & myghty &
a man of grete renōme/that me callid Dioclesian, that Well & Wor
thely hym gouerned & ruled thurgh his noble chpyualtye/so that
he cōquerd all the londes about hym/so that almost all the kynges
of the World to him Were entendant/Hit befel thus that this dy
oclesian spoused a gentil damisel/that Was wōder fayr that Was
his emes daughter Labana/and she loued hym as reison Wold/so
that he take vpon hir myghty daughter.

From *The Cronycles of England*, printed by William Caxton in 1482.

- At the cusp between Middle and Early Modern English.

How the land of Englonð was fyrst named Albyon/And
by what encheson it was so named?

How the land of Englonð was fyrst named Albyon/And
by what encheson it was so named

How the land of Englonð was fyrst named Albyon/And
by what encheson it was so named

How the land of Englonð was fyrst named Albyon/And
by what encheson it was so named

How the land of Englonde was fyrst named Albyon/And
by what encheson it was so named?

¶ How the land of Englonde was fyrst named Albyon/And
by what encheson it was so named

- <¶> is a symbol used to mark off these lines as a heading
- <f> is simply the way <s> was written (except at the end of a word)
- </> is a generalized punctuation mark which mostly sets apart clauses.
- *Albyon* is an old name for England, now spelled Albion
- *encheson* is a Middle English word meaning ‘cause,’ ‘purpose,’ or ‘reason.’
- Mark off and look up unfamiliar words. OED, Middle English Compendium, even Google if all else fails. (ChatGPT is hit or miss.)

¶ How the land of England was first named Albion/And
why it was so named

In the noble land of Sirrie/ther Was a noble kyng & myghty &
a man of grete renōme /that me callid Dioclisian, that well & wor
thely hym gouerned & ruled thurgh his noble chyualrye /so that
he cōquered off the lande about...

In the noble land of Sirrie/ther was a noble kyng & myghty &
a man of grete renōme /that me callid Dioclisian, that well & wor
thely hym gouerned & ruled thurgh his noble chyualrye /

- & = <&>
- r̄ = <r> after some letters, including <o>

In the noble land of Sirrie/ther was a noble kyng & myghty &
a man of grete renōme /that me callid Dioclisian, that well & wor
thely hym gouerned & ruled thurgh his noble chyualrye /so that

- <u> and <v> were interchangeable
- <~> over a vowel indicated a following nasal, <n> or <m>

In the noble land of Sirrie/ther Was a noble kyng & myghty &
a man of grete renōme/that me callid Dioclisian, that Well & wor
thely hym gouerned & ruled thurgh his noble chyualrye/so that
he cōquered off the lande about...

In the noble land of Sirrie/ther was a noble kyng & myghty &
a man of grete renōme/that me callid Dioclisian, that well & wor
thely hym gouerned & ruled thurgh his noble chyualrye/so that

- *Sirrie* = Syria
- *renōme* is *renomme*, a Middle English word meaning ‘renown’
- *Dioclisian* is *Diocletian*, the Roman emperor
- *thurgh* is *through* (metathesis moved the /r/ over time)

In the noble land of Syria / there was a noble king & mighty &
a man of great renown/ that I called Diocletian, that well & wor-
thily he governed & ruled through his noble chivalry/so that

Unusual characters

- <¶> is a punctuation mark which can be used to set off a heading
- <ſ> is how <s> was written except at the end of a word
- </> is a punctuation mark which can be used to separate clauses
- & is the same as <&>
- ŕ is the same as <r>, and usually follows <o> or other round-looking vowels
- <~> over a vowel means either <n> or <m> follow it

Unusual spellings

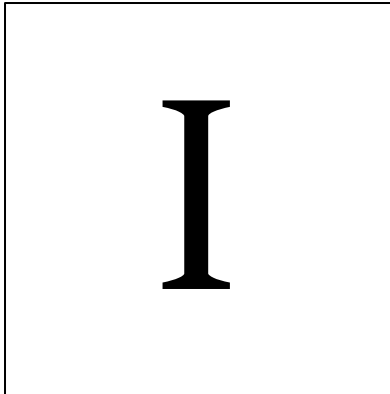
- <u> and <v> are interchangeable
- <y> is often used in place of <i>



In Primis that one father Rosimonde, dwellyng in Farneham Parishe, be- yng a widower, and also a daughter of his, are both Witches or Inchanters, which Rosimōd she saith hath and can transforme hymself by Diuelishe meanes, into the shape and likenesse of any beaste whatsoeuer he will.



2 Item, that one Mother Dutton dwellyng within A.v. within



In Primis that one father Rosimonde, dwellyng in Farneham Parishe, be- yng a widower, and also a daughter of his, are both Witches or Inchanters, which Rosimōd she saith hath and can transforme hymself by Diuelishe meanes, into the shape and likenesse of any beaste whatsoeuer he will.

Item, that one Mother Dutton dwellyng within

Now let's work through the next two pages. Underline or circle any stumbling blocks.

within one Hoskins in Cleworthe Parithe,
can telleuery ones message, allone as she seeth
them approche nere to the place of hir abroade,
and further, she keepeth a Spirite or Feende
in the likenesse of a Toade, and sedeth thesame
Feende liyng in a border of greene Hearbes,
with in her Garden, with blood whiche she cau-
seth to issue from her owne flanke.



3 Item, that one Mother Deuell, dwelling
nigh the Honde in Windesore aforesaid, bee-
yng a verie pooze woman, hath a Spirite in the
shape of a Blacke Catte, and calleth it Gille,
whereby she is aided in her Witchcrafte, and
she daiely fedeth it with Milke, mingled with
her owne blood.

4 Item

4 Item, that one Mother Margaret dwell-
yng in the Almes house at Windesore, goeth
with two Crouches, dooth feede a Kitting
or Feende by her named Simie, with crum-
mes of bread and her owne blood.

5 Item, the sated Elizabeth Stile, alias
Rockyngham, of her self confesseth that she the
same Elizabeth, vntill the tyme of her appre-
hension, kepte a Ratte, beeyng in very deede a



wicked Spirite, nampng it Phillip, and that
she fedde the same Ratte with bloode, issuyng
from her right handwrest, the markes where-
of euidently remaine, and also that she gaue her
right soe to the Deuill, and so did the residue
of the Witches befoze named.

And

Complete activity 2
on your sheet.

Reading Early Modern English

- Good news – not all Early Modern printing was done with a blackletter typeface.
- Many of the orthographic conventions remained.

A Relation of a terrible Monster

called a Toad-fish, &c.

GOD sheweth his wonders in the deep, (saith the royall Prophet) but those wonders are never without wonder, when once they leave their wonted stations, and come (upon what message God knows) to visit us in an unknowne world: their shapes being as miraculous to us, as our element unnaturall unto them. But to the purpose. *Friday morning, July 15. between 4. and 5. of the clock in the morning, a little above Wollage, one Thomas West, casting his net upon the comming in of the tide, for Salmon, upon the drawing in of the net, (whose weight and difficulty in dragging portended to him good tidings) on a sudden he found a strange alteration: he sees in the net a Fiend, not a Fish; at the least a Monster, not an ordinary creature. Had not his companion had a better resolution, he would rather have been rid of his net, then troubled with his guest, so deeply was he struck with the odious shape of it. I now proceed to its shape and dimensions. It is by the vote of divers Gentlemen of great quality that went to see it, such a monstrous creature as scarce can be beleev'd ever to have been seen: this morning brought alive into Glove-Alley in Kings street. It is called a Toad-fish, and with good reason, for the head and eyes, when it lyes upon its belly, doe perfectly resemble a Toad. But here lyes the wonder, turne him up, or but a little raise his head, and you shall behold the perfect breast and chest of a man: nay you may evidently tell*

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?

Witches?

- During this time, practically everyone accepted that witches existed.
- But some people still suspected that a lot of the women accused of being witches were actually innocent.
- On a case-by-case basis, some thought their supposed victims, bewitched people, were faking it.
- Others thought the victims really were afflicted, but by illness or madness, not by supernatural powers.
- Edward Jorden was one of these people.

In 1602 English physician Edward Jorden spoke at a trial in defense of Elizabeth Jackson, a London shopkeeper who stood accused of bewitching fourteen-year-old Mary Glover. For over two months Glover had been ill — pale, weak, and in pain — and suffering from ‘fittes or passions’ every other day (Swan 1603, 4 and 15–16). She was attended to by a series of physicians and preachers, and it was generally (but not unanimously) decided that she had in fact been bewitched (Swan 1603, 4). Jorden and John Argent, both doctors from the College of Physicians, insisted that Glover’s symptoms arose from a natural illness — hysteria, also known as ‘suffocation of the mother’. (‘Mother’ was a popular word for ‘uterus’.) Despite the men’s expert testimony, Jackson was found guilty.

Frustrated by this experience, Jorden wrote *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603), in order to fight against what he saw as the overwillingness to assign supernatural causes to the ‘strange’ symptoms of ‘natural diseases’ (Jorden 1603, iii). Jorden thus laid out the first English-language case for hysteria (MacDonald 2005, vii). In his work, Jorden noted that the symptoms of this illness were ‘monstrous and terrible to behold’, and that those who were unfamiliar with this disease had ‘sought above the Moone for supernaturall causes: ascribing these accidents either to diabolicall possession, to witchcraft, or to the immediate finger of the Almightye’ (1603, 2r).

Mercifully, she was quickly freed from prison, perhaps receiving a royal pardon (MacDonald 2005, xviii–xviv). For more on the Glover-Jackson case, see Michael MacDonald (2005). This Mary Glover should not be confused with the Mary Glover executed for witchcraft in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1688 (Godbeer 2005, 140).

From Pentangelo, “Burning Feathers: A Hint at Hysteria in a Connecticut Witch Trial” (2021)

For next time:

- Read pp.156–170 in Algeo and Cap. 1 and 2 in Jordan (16pp.)

