



**PREFACE TO *ENEYDOS*  
BY WILLIAM CAXTON**

# Biography

- *Caxton was the first English printer and a translator and importer of books into England.*
- He was born in around 1422 in Kent. He went to London at the age of 16 to become an apprentice to a merchant, later moving to Bruges, the centre of the wool trade, where he became a successful and important member of the merchant community.
- The duchess of Burgundy encouraged Caxton to translate 'The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye' from French to English.
- In the early 1470s Caxton spent time in Cologne learning the art of printing. He returned to Bruges in 1472 where he and a Flemish calligrapher set up a press.
- In 1476 Caxton returned to London and established a press at Westminster, the first printing press in England. He printed more than 100 books in his lifetime, books which were known for their craftsmanship and careful editing.



fayn wolde I satisfye every man/ and so to doo toke an olde  
 boke and rede therein/ and certaynly the englysshe was so ru  
 de and woode that I coude not wele vnderstande it. And also  
 my lorde abbot of westmyenster ded so shewe to me late certa  
 yn eydences wyrtton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to  
 our englysshe now vsid/ And certaynly it was wyrtton in  
 suche wyse that it was more lyk to dutche than englysshe  
 I coude not reduce ne bryngge 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 we en  
 glysshe men/ken borne vnder the comynacyon of the mone.  
 Whiche is neuer stedfaste/ but euer vauerynge/ 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  
 tarped att forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them  
 And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an  
 holbe and ayed for mete. and specially he aydd after egges  
 And the goode wyf answered. that she coude speke no fren  
 she. And the marchaut was angry. for he also coude speke  
 no frenshe. but wolde haue hadde egges/ 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/ Zoo what sholde a man in thys dayes now wyrt. eg  
 ges or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse every man/ by  
 cause of dyuersite & chaunge of langage. For in these dayes  
 euery man that is in ony reputacyon in his countre. wyll vt  
 ter his comynacyon and maters in suche maners & ter  
 mes/ that felde men shall vnderstode theym/ And som ho

B 34



of hys frater  
 we corrected my book /  
 myghty god that folowe / and accompe  
 our and glorie / and that alle ye that shall in  
 here / wyll of the sayd Gofferey chaucer first auctour / and  
 be the solle of the sayd Gofferey chaucer first auctour / and  
 them / may so take and vnderstode the good and vertuous sa  
 les / that it may so prouffite / vnto the helthe of our solles / that  
 after thys short and transitorye tyme we may come to everlasting  
 life in heuyn / Amen

By William Caxton

# The preface to the Eneydos

- *'And specyally he axyed after eggys. And the good wyf answerde that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaunt was angry for he also coude speke no frenshe but wold haue hadde egges and she vnderstode hym not. And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren. Then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstood hym wel'*
- *'Loo what sholde a man in thyse dayes now wryte egges or eyren? Certaynly it is harde to playse euery man by cause of dyuersite and chaunge of langage'*
- *'Therfor in a meane bytwene bothe I haue reduced and translated this sayd booke in to our englysshe not ouer rude ne curyous but in such termes as shall be vnderstanden by goddys grace'*

# The orthography of Early Modern English

- The orthography of Early Modern English was fairly similar to that of today, but spelling was unstable.
- Early Modern English orthography had a number of features of spelling that have not been retained:
  - *⟨u⟩ and ⟨v⟩ were considered as not two distinct letters but as still different forms of the same letter. Typographically, ⟨v⟩ was frequent at the start of a word and ⟨u⟩ elsewhere. Also, ⟨w⟩ was frequently represented by ⟨vv⟩.*
  - *⟨i⟩ and ⟨j⟩ were also still considered not as two distinct letters, but as different forms of the same letter: hence ioy for joy and iust for just.*
  - *The letter ⟨þ⟩ was still in use during the Early Modern English period but was increasingly limited to handwritten texts. In Early Modern English printing, ⟨þ⟩ was represented by the Latin ⟨Y⟩. Thorn had become nearly totally disused by the late Early Modern English period*
  - *A silent ⟨e⟩ was often appended to words. The last consonant was sometimes doubled when the ⟨e⟩ was added: hence manne (for man) and runne (for run).*
  - *⟨y⟩ was often used instead of ⟨i⟩*

# The grammar of Early Modern English.

## Pronouns

		Nominative	Oblique	Genitive	Possessive
1 <sup>st</sup> person	singular	I	me	My/mine	mine
	plural	we	us	our	ours
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	Singular informal	thou	thee	Thy/thine	thine
	Plural or formal singular	Ye, you	you	your	yours
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	singular	He, she, it	Him/her/it	His/her/his	His/hers/his
	plural	they	them	their	theirs

# Verbs

- The number of weak verbs is increasing due to French borrowings.
- The number of strong verbs is decreasing more and more.
- The decay of the system of strong verbs is marked by the elimination of the differences between the singular and plural past stems.
- New verbal forms are appearing, including Gerund and Continuous.
- The development of analytical forms with *do*

# Vocabulary

- A number of words that are still in common use in Modern English have undergone semantic narrowing.
- The main sources of borrowing are Latin and French covering 60% of the new words. Words with Germanic origin in contrast, make only 20% of the Early Modern English lexis. Latin contributes the majority of loan words throughout the Early Modern English period and thus, it outdoes the French borrowings.
- It is surprising that merely 1% of the new words are drawn from Greek since antiquity played a dominant role in the cultural life of the Renaissance. The reason for this low percentage may be due to the fact that “many Greek loans were filtered through Latin or French, and Latin loans through French”.