

# Middle English

## Lecture 3



# 1. External history

1.1. The Norman Conquest and the Subjection of English 1066 - 1200

1.2. The Re-establishment of English 1200 - 1500

1.3. The Middle English Literature

1.4. Middle English Dialects

# 1.1. The Norman Conquest and the Subjection of English 1066 - 1200

- ◆ At the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century the whole of England came under the Scandinavian rule – the Scandinavian invasion was completed and the Danish king was seated on the English throne.
- ◆ In 1042 England was back under English power, the English king who came to the throne – Edward the Confessor – was to be the last English king for more than three centuries.



- ◆ In 1066 King Edward the Confessor died, and the Norman Duke William, profiting by the weakness of King Harold who succeeded King Edward on the English throne, invaded England.
- ◆ He assembled an army, landed in England and in a battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066 managed to defeat Harold and proclaimed himself King of England.





# Nobility and government

- ◆ The lands of the Saxon aristocracy were divided up among the Normans, who by 1087 composed almost 10% of the total population.
- ◆ Each landlord, in return for his land, had to take an oath of allegiance to the king and provide him with military services if and when required.
- ◆ The Saxon machinery of government was immensely reinforced, with a Norman monarch and his officials.
- ◆ The 13<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the appearance of the first Parliament, or a council of barons, which later was changed to a national Parliament.

# The Position of English

- ◆ In the period up to 1200 the attitude of the king and the upper classes toward the English language may be characterized as one of simple indifference.
- ◆ They did not cultivate English—which is not the same as saying that they had no acquaintance with it—because their activities in England did not necessitate it and their constant concern with continental affairs made French for them much more useful.

# The Linguistic Situation in England 1066 – 1200

The French language - The English language - The Latin Language

Thus came, lo! England into Normandy's hand.  
And the Normans didn't know how to speak then but their own  
speech  
And spoke French as they did at home, and their children did  
also teach;  
So that high men of this land that of their blood come  
Hold all that same speech that they took from them.  
For but a man know French men count of him little.  
But low men hold to English and to their own speech yet.  
I think there are in all the world no countries  
That don't hold to their own speech but England alone.  
But men well know it is well for to know both,  
For the more that a man knows, the more worth he is.

# 1.2. The Re-establishment of English

- ◆ A feature of some importance in helping English to recover its former prestige is the improvement in the condition of the mass of the people and the rise of a substantial middle class.
- ◆ The rise of another important group—the craftsmen and the merchant class. By 1250 there had grown up in England about two hundred towns with populations of from 1,000 to 5,000; some, like London or York, were larger. These towns became free, self-governing communities, electing their own officers, assessing taxes in their own way, collecting them and paying them to the king in a lump sum, trying their own cases, and regulating their commercial affairs as they saw fit.

- ◆ 1258 – Proclamation of King Henry III was published besides French also in English
- ◆ 1362 – the English language became the language of Parliament, courts of law; later, at the end of the century – the language of teaching
- ◆ The rule of King Henry IV (1399-1413) – the first king after the conquest whose native tongue was English.
- ◆ The end of 14<sup>th</sup> century also saw the first English translation of Bible
- ◆ Chaucer was writing his English masterpieces in English

# 1.3. The Middle English Literature

- ◆ Period of Religious Record  
(from 1150 to 1250)
  - ◆ Period of Religious and Secular Literature  
in English (from 1250 to 1350)
  - ◆ Period of Great Individual Writers  
(from 1350 to 1400)
  - ◆ Imitative Period or Transition Period  
(15th century)
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# Geoffrey Chaucer (C.1343-1400)

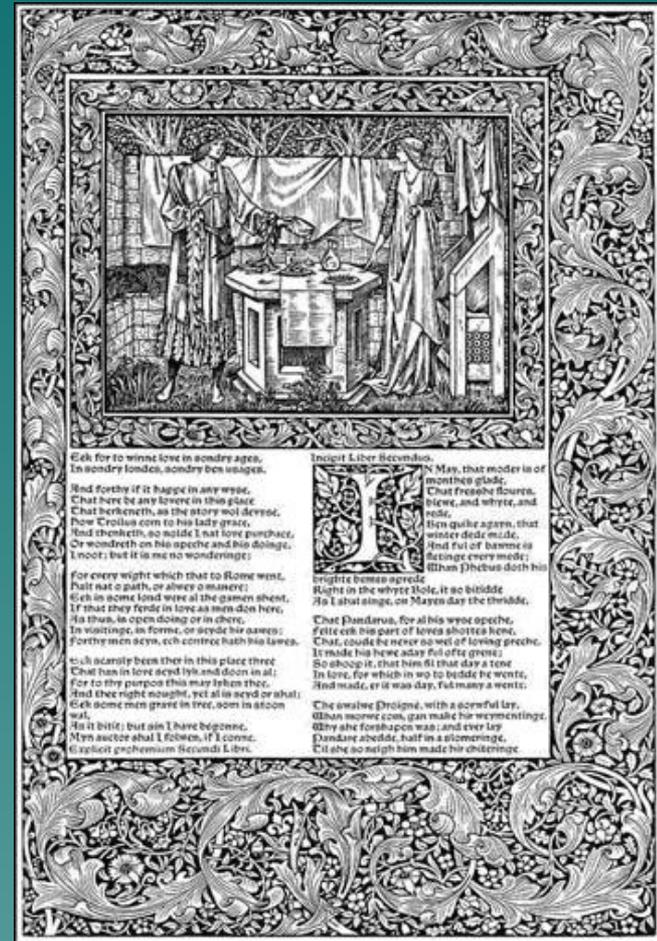
- ◆ **Geoffrey Chaucer** was an English author, poet and philosopher.





- ◆ *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century.

- ◆ *Troilus and Criseyde* is a poem by Geoffrey Chaucer which re-tells in Middle English the tragic story of the lovers Troilus and Criseyde set against a background of war in the Siege of Troy



- ◆ John Gower (c. 1330 – October 1408) was an English poet, a contemporary of William Langland and a personal friend of Geoffrey Chaucer.



- ◆ Vox Clamantis ("the voice of one crying out") is a Latin poem of around 10,000 lines in elegiac verse by John Gower that recounts the events and tragedy of the 1381 Peasants' Rising.



- ◆ Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a Medieval English romance in the Arthurian tradition. The text is thought to have been composed in the mid- to late fourteenth century.

# 1.4. Middle English Dialects

- ◆ The Southern group included the Kentish and the South-Western dialects
- ◆ The group of Midland ('Central') dialect – corresponding to the OE Mercian dialect – is divided into West Midland and East Midland as two main areas
- ◆ The Northern dialects had developed from OE Northumbrian

# 2. Internal History

2.1. Phonetic and Spelling Peculiarities

2.2 Grammatical Changes in Middle English

2.3. Word-Stock Changes



## 2.1. Phonetic and Spelling Peculiarities

- ◆ New accentual patterns are found in numerous ME loan-words from French. Probably, when they first entered the English language they retained their original stress – on the ultimate or pen-ultimate syllable. This kind of stress could not be preserved for a long.
- ◆ In words of three or more syllables the shift of the stress could be caused by the recessive tendency and also by the `rythmic` tendency. Under the `rythmic` tendency, a secondary stress would arise at a distance of one syllable from the original stress. This new stress was either preserved as a secondary stress or else became the only or the principal stress of the word.

- ◆ ME vertu [ver`tju:] > NE virtue ['vɜ:tʃu:]
- ◆ ME recommenden [reko`mendenən] > NE recommend [ˌrekə'mend]
- ◆ ME disobeien [diso`beiən] > disobey [disə'beɪ]
- ◆ ME comfortable [komfor`tablə] > NE comfortable ['kʌmf(ə)təbl]
- ◆ ME consecraten [konse`kra:tən] > consecrate ['kən(t)sɪkreɪt]

## SOUND SYSTEM 1350–1400

By 1400 the sound system emerging in the south-east of the country (as used by the Chancery and Chaucer) would have had the following inventory. (There is continuing controversy over the number and phonetic quality of the diphthongs.)

The spelling shown in the examples is in many cases just one of several possibilities. The asterisk identifies emerging phonemes (see above).

### Consonants

p, b *pin, bit*  
t, d *tente, dart*  
k, g *kin, good*  
tʃ *chirche* 'church'  
dʒ *brigge* 'bridge'  
m, n, ŋ\* *make, name, song*  
l, r *lay, rage*  
w, j *weep, yelwe* 'yellow'  
f, v\* *fool, vertu* 'virtue'  
s, z\* *sore, Zephirus*  
θ, ð *thank, the*  
h *happen*

### Long vowels

i: *ryden*  
e: *sweete*  
ɛ: *heeth*  
ɑ: *name*  
u: *houre*  
o: *good*  
ɔ: *holy*

### Short vowels

ɪ *this*  
ɛ *men*  
a *can*  
ə *aboute* (in unstressed syllables)  
ʊ *but*  
ɔ *oft*

### Diphthongs

æɪ *day*  
oɪ\* *joye*  
ʊɪ\* *joinen* 'join'  
ɪʊ *newe*  
ɛʊ *fewe* 'few'  
aʊ *lawe*  
ɔʊ *growe*

## 2.2 Grammatical Changes in Middle English

The most important grammatical development was the establishment of fixed patterns of word order to express the relationship between clause elements. There was already tendency towards Subject-Verb-Object order

# ME Noun

The plurals of nouns generally end in *-s* or *-es*. However, some nouns end in *-n* or *-en* (like Modern English *ox*, *oxen*), especially in earlier texts.

Possessive forms end in *-s* or *-es*. There is no apostrophe; possessives are distinguished from plurals by context.

# Middle English Verb

## **Principal Changes**

- levelling of inflections
- weakening of endings in accordance with the general tendency
- serious losses suffered by the strong conjugation

New verbs formed from nouns and adjectives or borrowed from other languages were regularly conjugated as weak.

Thus the minority position of the strong conjugation was becoming constantly more evident. After the Norman Conquest the loss of native words further depleted the ranks of the strong verbs. Those that survived were exposed to the influence of the majority, and many have changed over in the course of time to the weak inflection

## *Strong verbs which became weak*

At a time when English was the language chiefly of the lower classes and largely removed from the restraining influences of education and a literary standard, it was natural that many speakers should wrongly apply the pattern of weak verbs to some which should have been strong.

- ◆ The infinitive form (e.g. 'to go', 'to sleep', 'to sing') ends in *-n* or *-en*: e.g. *goon*, *slepen*, *singen*. In later texts, the *-n* may disappear.
- ◆ The *-n* or *-en* ending can also indicate a plural form of the verb: e.g. *they goon*, *they slepen*, *they singen*. In the past tense, the ending may be *-n*, *-en*, or *-ed*.
- ◆ The *-n* or *-en* can also be a past participle (like Modern English *eaten*). In this case the word will generally be preceded by a form of *have* or *be*, or else it will function as an adjective describing a noun.

# ME personal and possessive pronoun

## *Singular*

	<i>1 person</i>	<i>2 person</i>	<i>3 person</i>		
			<i>Masc.</i>	<i>Fem.</i>	<i>Neut.</i>
<i>Nom.</i>	I, ich	thou	hē	hē, shē	hit, it
<i>Obj.</i>	mē	thē	him	hir, her	hit, it

## *Plural*

	<i>1 person</i>	<i>2 person</i>	<i>3 person</i>
<i>Nom.</i>	wē	yē	hī, they
<i>Obj.</i>	ūs	you	hem, them

## 2.3. Word-Stock Changes

### French Loans (about 3500 words)

- ◆ **Administration.** Baron, court, royal, palace, duke, empire, government, liberty, manor, messenger, minister, noble, prince, treason, tyrant, sir, vassal, parliament, crown, reign, statute
- ◆ **Law** arrest, arson, bail, bar, blame, crime, depose, evidence, felon, heir, jury, judge, legacy, pardon, plea, prison, punishment, sue, verdict
- ◆ **Religion** abbey, baptism, cardinal, chant, charity, clergy, communion, confess, faith, friar, heresy, homily, mercy, miracle, novice, parson, prayer, religion, saint, sermon, solemn, temptation, virtue, prelate, ordain, divine.
- ◆ **Military** army, barbican, battle, captain, combat, defend, enemy, lance, moat, navy, peace, retreat, spy, sergeant, guard.
- ◆ **Food and drink** bacon, beef, clove, confection, cream, date, dinner, fruit, fry, gravy, jelly, lemon, mutton, olive, orange, plate, pork, roast, salad, salmon, sardine, saucer, sole, spice, sugar, supper, taste, toast, venison.
- ◆ **Fashion** boots, brooch, button, cape, cloak, dress, fashion, flock, fur, garment, lace, ornament, rode, satin, tassel, train, vell, wardrobe.

- ◆ **General nouns** action, age, air, city, coast, comfort, country, cruelty, debt, dozen, error, face, flower, forest, grief, hour, joy, manner, mountain, noise, number, ocean, pair, people, person, point, poverty, power, rage, reason, river, season, vision, task.
- ◆ **General adjectives** active, blue, brown, clear, cruel, easy, final, gay, honest, horrible, large, mean, natural, nice, perfect, poor, real, rude, safe, second, simple, solid, sure, usual.
- ◆ **General verbs** advise, allow, carry, close, cry, delay, enjoy, enter, form, join, marry, move, obey, pass, please, push, prove, refuse, remember, reply, satisfy, save, serve, suppose, trip, wait, waste.
- ◆ **Turns of phrase** by heart, come to a head, have mercy on, hold one's peace, on the point of, take leave, take pity on

## THE FAMOUS WORD PAIRS

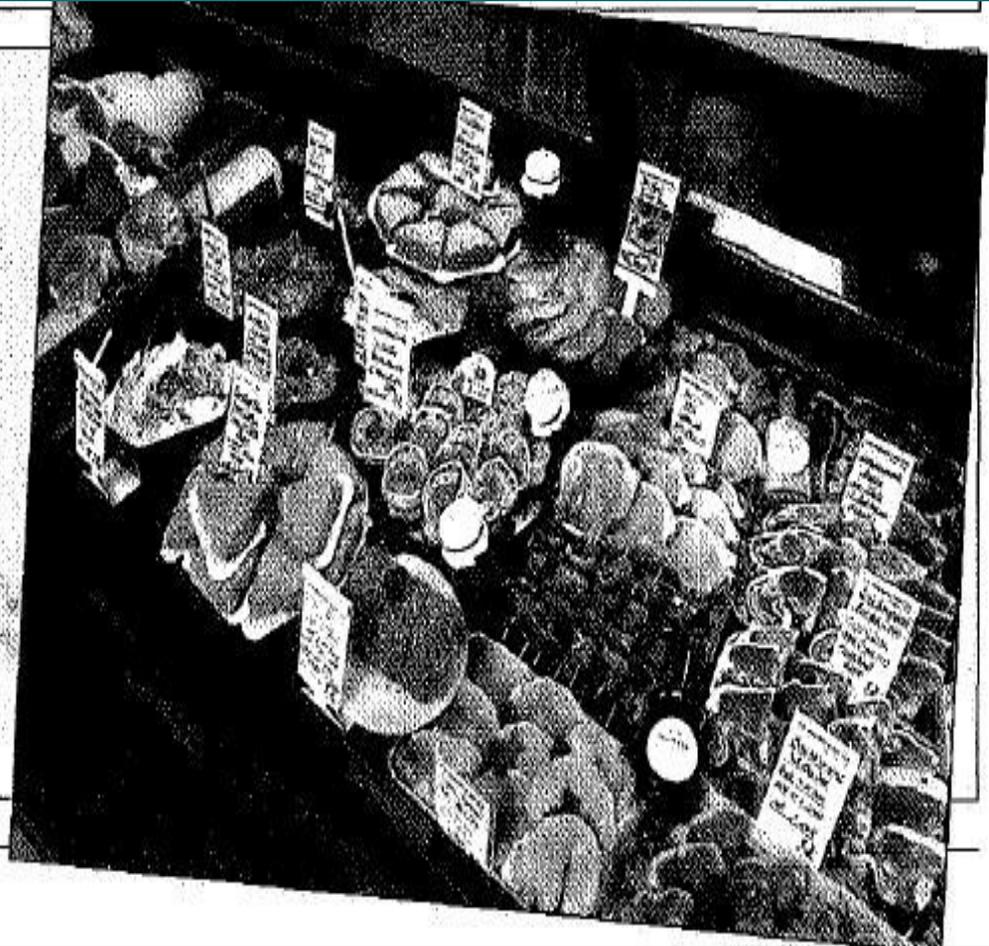
No account of Middle English vocabulary would be complete without a reference to the famous culinary lexical pairs (often attributed to Sir Walter Scott) which resulted from the influx of Romance words.

### *Old English*   *French*

ox	beef
sheep	mutton
calf	veal
deer	venison
pig, swine	pork

There are many other examples:

begin	commence
child	infant
doom	judgment
freedom	liberty
happiness	felicity
hearty	cordial
help	aid
hide	conceal
holy	saintly
love	charity
meal	repast
stench	aroma
wedding	marriage
wish	desire



# Latin Influence

## SOME LATIN LOANS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

### **Administration and law**

alias, arbitrator, client, conspiracy, conviction, custody, gratis, homicide, implement, incumbent, legal, legitimate, memorandum, pauper, prosecute, proviso, summary, suppress, testify, testimony

### **Science and learning**

abacus, allegory, etcetera, comet, contradiction, desk, diaphragm, discuss, dislocate, equator, essence, explicit, formal, genius, history, index, inferior, innumerable, intellect, item, library, ligament, magnify, major, mechanical, minor, neuter, notary, prosody, recipe, scribe, simile, solar, tincture

### **Religion**

collect, diocese, immortal, incarnate, infinite, limbo, magnificat, mediator, memento, missal, pulpit, requiem, rosary, scripture, tract

### **General**

admit, adjacent, collision, combine, conclude, conductor, contempt, depression, distract, exclude, expedition, gesture, imaginary, include, incredible, individual, infancy, interest, interrupt, lucrative, lunatic, moderate, necessary, nervous, ornate, picture, popular, private, quiet, reject, solitary, spacious, subjugate, substitute, temperate, tolerance, ulcer

- ◆ The poetic compounds of Old English declined dramatically at the beginning of the MD period. There are over a thousand compounds in *Beowulf*. Some types of compounding did continue to produce new words: bagpipe, birthday, blackberry, craftsman, grandfather, schoolmaster.
- ◆ New compounds in –er were especially frequent in 14th century: housekeeper, moneymaker.

From *The Canterbury Tales*:  
**General Prologue**

Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury

<http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm>

Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote

The droghte of March hath perced to the roote  
And bathed every veyne And bathed every  
veyne in swich licour,

Of which vertu engendred is the flour;

5 Whan Zephirus Whan Zephirus EEK with his  
sweete breeth

Inspired hath in every holt and heeth

The tendre croppes The tendre croppes, and the  
yonge sonne

Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,

And smale And smale foweles maken melodye,

10 That slepen al the nyght with open eye-  
(So priketh (So priketh hem (So priketh  
hem Nature in hir corages);  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages  
And palmeres And palmeres for to seken  
straunge strondes  
To ferne halwes To ferne halwes, kowthe  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
15 And specially from every shires ende  
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly The hooly blisful The hooly  
blisful martir for to seke  
That hem That hem hath holpen, whan that  
they were seeke.

20 In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay  
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage  
To Caunterbury with ful To  
Caunterbury with ful devout corage,  
At nyght was come into that hostelrye  
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye

25 Of sondry folk 25 Of sondry folk, by  
aventure yfalle

In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they  
alle,

That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.

The chambres and the stables weren wyde,  
And wel we weren esed atte beste;  
30And shortly, whan the sonne30And  
shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,  
So hadde I spoken with hemSo hadde I  
spoken with hem everichon  
That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,  
And made forward erly for to ryse  
To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse.