## Middle English vocabulary



- 10,000 French words entered Middle English vocabulary;
- Law and administration, medicine, art and fashion (3/4 still used today);
- New French words substituted the Old English ones, but in most cases the two versions co-existed;
- O XIV-XV century: new flux of Latin words (1348: John Wycliffe's Bible) → sets of 3 words expressing the same concept (e.g. Old English 'time', French 'age', Latin 'epoch') with the Old English version being 'popular', the French one literary and the Latin one learned

## Middle English grammar, spelling and pronunciation

- O Declensions finally died away (except the possessive 's and some accusative forms of personal pronouns) → word order becomes strict;
- Verb endings remained the same ( present –s and past tense –ed simplification occurred after Middle English);
- Some irregular verbs became regular;
- -s was employed for most plural nouns;
- Spelling changed a lot thanks to Norman scribes who didn't understand Old English sounds (e.g.  $cw \rightarrow qu$ ;  $c \rightarrow ch$ ; thorn **b**, eth **ð** and ash **æ** disappeared);
- Some words beginning with /h/ dropped the /h/ sound.

## Middle English literary output

### XIV century:

- 1. Sir Gawayne an the Grene Knight (c. 1350);
- 2. Langland's Piers Plowman (c. 1360);
- 3. Pearl (c. 1375);
- 4. Wycliffe's Bible (1382-1395);
- 5. Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales (most important achievement in Middle English) 1387-1400 (published 1476)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVG77xTPH6E



## **The Great Vowel Shift**

- O 1400-1600: 7 long vowels of Middle English varied (higher and forward) very quickly  $\rightarrow$  pronunciation changed;
- O 1476: Caxton brought printing in England  $\rightarrow$  spelling was fixed;
- As a consequence, while pronunciation evolves even today, we use the same spelling Chaucer used!

ME		1300	1400	1500	1600	1700		ModE		$\overline{}$
a:]	name	-		* [æ:]	[:3]	▶ [e:] -	•[e1]	name		$\Delta$
[13]	beeme				▶ [e:]—		▶ [i:]	beam	(E)	OG IG
[e:]	feet			► [i:] =			► [i:]	feet	T	$\mathbf{X}$
[i:]	rise(n)		[ii] -	▶ [∧î] —			▶ [aɪ]	rise		aiao
[o:]	ston	-			• [o:]	• [ou]	[au]	stone	1 ×	$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$
[o:]	goos			-> [u:]			► [u:]	goose		
[u:]	mouth		[UU]_	▶ [∧u]			[au]	mouth	∖ær	•



# Middle English dialects: towards standard English

- East Midland dialect at the base of modern standard English ('Golden triangle': London, Oxford and Cambridge);
- O Agricultural area and wool trade;
- Bridge between Northern and Southern dialects;
- O Caxton set up his printing press in Westminster, London

### Table Alphabeticall, contayning and teaching the true writing and vnderstanding of hard vluall English words, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French, &c.

With the Interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit and help of all viskifull performs.

Whereby they may the more eafily and better understand many bard English words, which they fluil heare or tead in Scriptures, Scrmons, or elle where and alfo be made able to vie the fame apely themfeines.

Set forth by R. C. and newly corrected, and much inlarged with many words now in vie.

The 3. Edition.

Legere, & non intelligere, neelogere eff. As good notto read, as not to vndetfland.

LONDON: Printed by 7. S. for E. m. and Weasser, and are to be fold at his fhop at the great North dore at Paules Church. 1613.

### Dr. Fabio Ciambella

# (Early) Modern English (1)

- XVI century: scholars begin to talk about language (Cheke proposed to eliminate all the silent letters in 1569, Bullokar proposed a new alphabet of 37 letters in 1560, and in 1604 Cadrey published a first, rudimental modern English dictionary, A Table Alphabeticall);
- Standard English had to be defined if people wanted to understand what books contained;
- This process took 100 years (XVII century)

# (Early) Modern English (2): The Renaissance



- From Caxton (XV century) to mid-XVII century (Cromwell's civil war);
- O Interest for new publications and Latin and Greek classics;
- Double tendency: 'inkhorn' terms (new words from over 50 foreign languages come into English through affixation and conversion), Chaucerism (willingness to revive obsolete English words);
- Latin was used by scientists and in the XVII century by the Church (only Catholic)



## (Early) Modern English (3): Shakespeare and the Bible

k	feparated from the waters, 11 and made fruitfull, 14 of the Sunne, Moone, and Starres, 20 of fifth and fowle, 24 of beafts		
anter	and cattell, 26 of Man in the Image of God. 29 Alfo the appointment of food.	peare: and it was fo. 10 And God called the dry land, Carth, and the gatheringtogether of	
2	Athe beginning God created the	the waters called hee, Seas: and God law that it was good.	
A Call	beauen, and the Earth. 2 And the	footh t graffe, the herbe veelding feed.	
W AUCTORNESSINGAL	earth was with out forme, and	kinde, whole feed s in it felfe, byou the earth: and it was fo.	
600	face of the beepe: and the Spirit	graffe, and herbe veelding feed after his	1
1 Altons	300 mooued byon the face of the	kinde, and the tree yeelding fruit, whole feed was in it felfe, after his kinde; and God faw that it was good.	
Contraction of the second	to God faid, *Let there be light: e was light.	13 And the Suching and the Doz-	
	D Diuideo † the light from	14 C And God laide, Letthere bee "lights in the firmament of the heauen, to binnet the bay from the night: and	pains -
	the light , Day, alled Right; tand	and for dayes and yeeres.	
	*Let there be a	15 And let them bee for firmament of the heaven, to give light bpon the earth : and it was fo.	
CO CO DO	of the waters: ters from the	16 And God made two great lights: the greater light ito rule the can and	

- Two main influences of the time (apart from Caxton's printing press): works by William Shakespeare and the Authorized Version of the Bible (or King James's Bible, 1611);
- Shakespeare introduced a lot of idioms (e.g. 'It's Greek to me', 'Make a virtue of necessity', etc.) – his vocabulary was of about 20,000 words;
- O The language in King James's Bible (and consequently in the Book of the Common Prayer, 1549 and 1662, this latter the version we still use today) is more conservative – 8,000 words, look backwards in grammar



https://www.youtube.com/w atch?v=qYiYd9RcK5M&t=25s

# (Early) Modern English (4): Shakespeare vs. Bible

- O Irregular verbs still have their old forms in the Bible (e.g. 'spake' for 'spoke' or 'holpen' for 'helped');
- O Old words are still in use; no use of 'do' in questions or negative form (Shakespeare alternates);
- The northern form of the 3rd person's –s is found sometimes in Shakespeare, but the Bible still always uses eth;
- 2nd person singular subject pronoun was thou, the object thee, the possessive adj. thy and the possessive pronoun thine;
- 2nd person plural subject pronoun was ye, the object you, the possessive adj. your and the possessive pronoun yours;
- His was used also for its;
- Will was found only in informal context (so in Shakespeare), shall was used in formal contexts;
- O Double superlatives (e.g. the most highest);
- O Prepositions were used differently