

# Chapter 6: Middle English

c. 1100-c. 1500 C.E.

Part I: The History

#### This part of the lecture

- Major historical and cultural influences on Middle English
- Impact of Norman Conquest on Middle English lexis
- Introduction of class, politics, and gender as factors in language use and choice
- Changes in technology and beginnings of language standardization

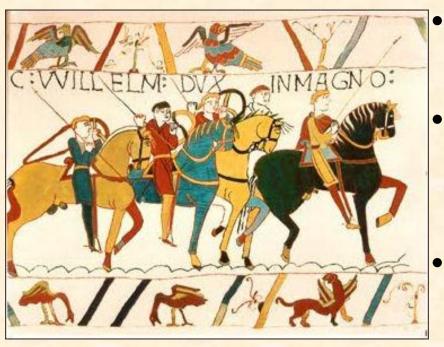
#### Before the Norman Conquest

- Ædelræd had a Norman queen
- His son Edward the Confessor was fostered & educated in Normandy
- William of Normandy was his 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin
- Nobles elected Harald, who was English, over William, who was Norman, to succeed Edward
- William wins Battle of Hastings (1066 & all that)





#### Norman Conquest



- William speaks Norman French, lives in France
- Took 4 years to consolidate his claim to English throne
  - Imposed Norman society top-to-bottom over Anglo-Saxon society

#### Cultural impositions of the Normans



- By 1076, all 12 Earls in England are Norman
- Most lesser noble estates also given to Normans
- Archbishops of Canterbury & York are Norman
- In 1075, 13/21 abbots are English; in 1087, 3/21 abbots are English

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#### Domesday Boke

- Completed in 1086
- First public record of who owns what land & property in England
- In Latin but many OE place names—fixes names in history
- Shows both Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon landowners

### When does Middle English 'start'?



- Imposition of Norman government after 1066 marks an important point, but Peterborough MS of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (left) continues to add entries in Old English thru 1154 C.E.
- Algeo's 1100 is a convenience date.

#### Trilingual language situation

- The church, the royal court, and all legal documents used Latin as "official" language
- Courtiers and those who wished to reach that status spoke & wrote Norman French in society
- Merchants learned to do business in both languages
- They all spoke English to their servants
- Average folk spoke English to each other

#### Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, ~1300

bus com, lo, Engelond in-to Normandies hond: And Pe Normans ne couPe speke Po bote hor owe speche, And speke French as hij dude atom, and hor children dude also teche, So pat heiemen of pis lond. pat of ho blod come, HoldeÞ alle Þulke speche Pat hij of hom nom: Vor bote a man conne Frenss men telb of him lute. Ac lowe men holdep to Engliss, and to hor owe speche-ute. Ich wene ber ne beb in al the world contreyes none Pat ne holdep to hor owen speche, bote Engelond one. Ac wel me wote uor to conne bobe wel it is, Vor Pe more Pat a mon can, be more wurbe he is.

Thus came, lo, England into Normandy's hand: and the Normans then knew how to speak only their own language, and spoke French as they did at home, and also had their children taught it, so that noblemen of this land, that come of their stock, all keep to the same speech that they received from them; for unless a man knows French, people make little account of him. But low men keep to English, and to their own language still. I think that in the whole world there are no countries that do not keep their own language, except England alone. But people know well that it is good to master both, because the more a man knows the more honoured he is.

### Multilingual Composition

Marie de France, c. 1170

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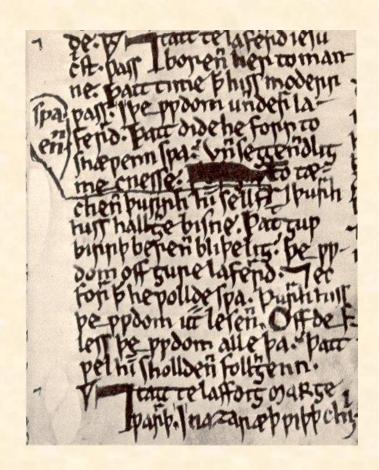
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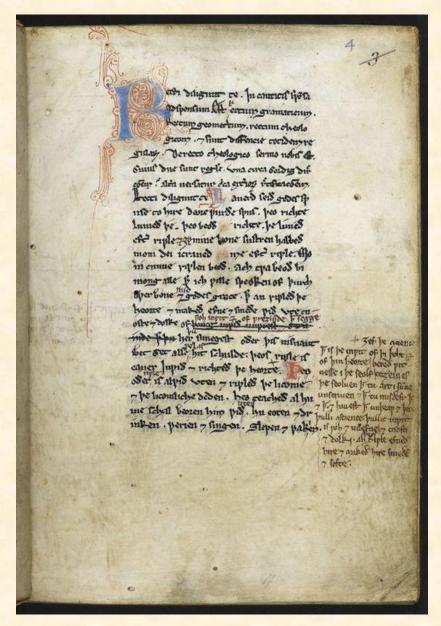
Orm, The Ormulum, c. 1200

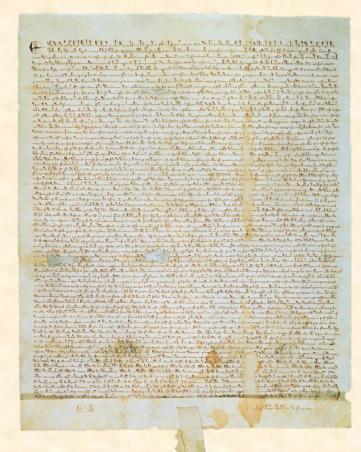


## Pastoral Care & Spiritual Instruction in English

A number of didactic works were written in English to explain religion and to provide spiritual guidance to both lay and religious people. *Ancrene Wisse*, c. 1220, was written for three sisters who had chosen to live a reclused life; it's written in a very distinctive Worcestershire dialect. Shortly thereafter it was translated into Anglo Norman and Latin as well, but it started in Middle English.

Collections of sermons, saints' lives, and homilies are prevalent from this period, and from about 1250 we see the beginnings of literature in English—romances, debate poems, and versified histories and Biblical paraphrases. It seems clear that the laity, at least, expected its instruction in Middle English, even though "official" scriptures were still in Latin.





## Beginnings of the Political/Linguistic Shift

- England loses control of Normandy in 1204
- John Lackland forced to sign Magna Carta in 1215
- Rise of Parisian French;
   Norman dialects lose prestige
- By 1250, manuals in Latin & English for teaching French
- Oxford undergrads still required to converse in French and Latin at dinner table

#### Political Impetuses Change

- Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) sets England at political odds with France
- Edward III addresses Parliament in English for first time in 1361
- England becomes a merchant power in its own right—wool exports
- England no longer a province of France but a recognized international player

bis ilk bok es translate Into Inglis tong to rede For the love of Inglis lede,1 Inglis lede of Ingland, For the commun at2 understand. Frankis rimes here I redd Comunlik in ilka sted:3 Mast4 es it wroght for Frankis man, Quat<sup>5</sup> is for him na Frankis can? In Ingland the nacion, Es Inglis man bar in commun; be speche bat man wit mast may spede; Mast barwit to speke war nede. Selden was for ani chance Praised Inglis tong in France; Give we ilkan<sup>6</sup> bare langage, Me think we do bam non outrage. To laud and Inglis man I spell Pat understandes bat I tell . . . (Cursor Mundi, Prologue, Il. 232-50) our acompt, & les compeller de faire pleine distribucion. Item, p' ce q monstre est soventfoitz au Roi, p relatz. Ducs Counts Barons & tout la coc, les g'ntz neschiefs q sont advenuz as plusours du realme de e q les leyes custumes & estatutz du dit realme ne ont pas conuz coement en mesme le realme, p cause ils sont pledez monstrez & juggez en la lange Franeis, gest trop desconue en dit realme; issint q les entz à pledent ou sont empledez en les Courtz le Roi e les Courtz dautres, nont entendement ne conissance le ce gest dit p' eulx ne contre eulx p lour Sercantz & auts pledours; et q resonablement les dites eves & custumes Bront le plus tost apris & conuz k mieultz entenduz en la lange usee en dit realme, t p tant chescun du dit realme se p'roit mieultz rovner sanz faire offense a la leye, & le mieuitz rarder sauver & defendr ses heritages & possessions: k en divses regions & palis, ou le Roi les nobles & utis du dit realme ont este, est bon govnement & lein droit fait a chescun p cause q lour leyes & cuaumes sont apris & usez en la lange du paiis : Le Roi lesirant le bon govnement & t'ngillite de son poeple, e de ouster & eschure les maulx & meschiefs q sont dvenuz, & purront avener en ceste piie, ad p' les causes usdites ordeigne & establi del assent avantdit q toutes plees q gront a pleder en ses Courtz queconqes, devant es Justices queconges ou en ses autres places ou deant ses autrs Ministres quonques ou en les Courtz

ITEM, Because it is often shewed to the King by the Prelates, Dukes, Earls, Barons, and all the Commonalty, of the great Mischiefs which have happened to divers of the Realm, because the Laws, Customs, and Statutes of this Realm be not commonly [holden and kept '] in the same Realm, for that they be pleaded, shewed, and judged in the French Tongue, which is much unknown in the said Realm; so that the People which do implead, or be impleaded, in the King's Court, and in the Courts of other, have no Knowledge nor Understanding of that which is said for them or against them by their Serjeants and other Pleaders; and that reasonably the said Laws and Customs [the rather shall be perceived ' ] and known, and better understood in the Tongue used in the said Realm, and by so much every Man of the said Realm may the better govern himself without offending of the Law, and the better keep, save, and defend his Heritage and Possessions; and in divers Regions and Countries, where the King, the Nobles, and other of the said Realm have been, good Governance and full Right is done to every Person, because that their Laws and Customs be learned and used in the Tongue of the Country: The King, desiring the good Governance and Tranquillity of his People, and to put out and eschew the Harms and Mischiefs which do or may happen in this Behalf by the Occasions aforesaid, hath ordained and stablished by the Assent aforesaid, that all Pleas which shall be pleaded in [any 5] Courts whatsoever, before any of his Justices whatsoever, or in his other Places, or before any of His other Ministers whatsoever, or in the Courts

\* upon such shewing 2 and other profites MS. Tr. 2.

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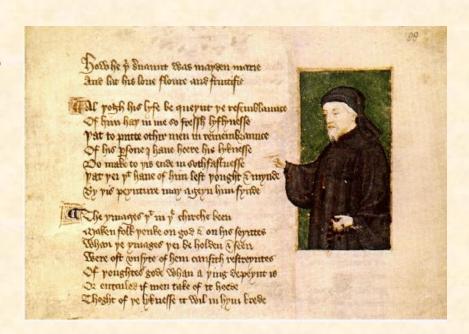
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#### The Statute of Pleading, 1362

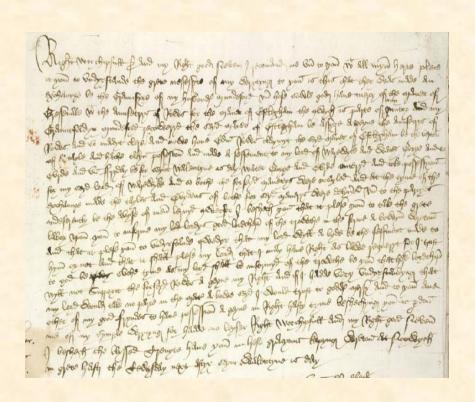
It becomes law in England that courts and Parliament must conduct business in "la langue engleise"—English—because so few people understand French. Records were still to be "enrouliez en latin"—written in Latin.

#### The vernacular explosion

- "Alliterative revival" of the 1350s-1400:
  - Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
  - Piers Plowman
- John Wyclif & followers translate the Bible, 1380s
- Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1365-1400) develops English as a literary language



#### Rise of Personal Literacy



- After Black Death, less control of literacy by the clergy
- Guild and parish schools
- Rise of mercantile class
- Literacy meant reading, not necessarily writing
- Demand for books and reading

#### **Chancery Standard**

- Was developing in Chaucer's time
- Promoted especially by Henry V (reigned 1413-1422)
- Developed as a standard written language by clerks in the court of the royal chancery (federal government)
- Privileged the dialects of London & the East Midlands but used some Northern forms, especially pronouns, to avoid confusion
- Developed a fairly standardized sense of grammar, word order, and spelling that were scriveners around Westminster
- Therefore very influential when the printing presses start around Westminster



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### The Printing Press





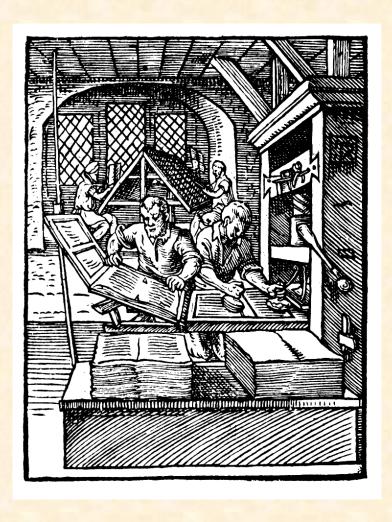
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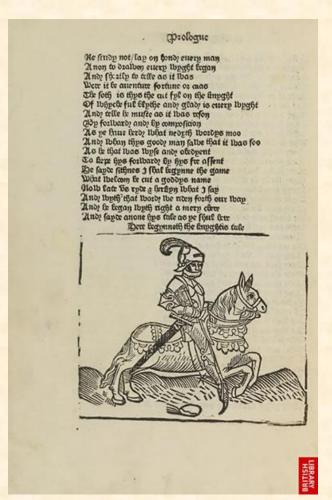
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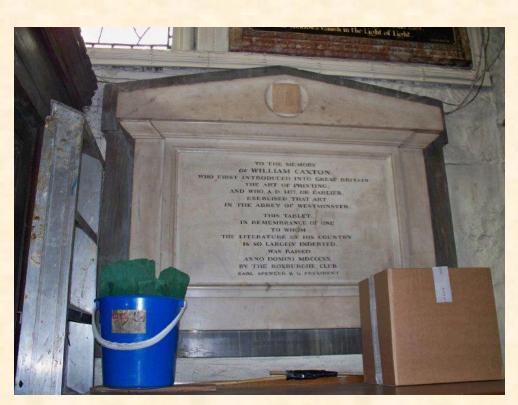
### Gutenberg gets the credit...





## In 1475 William Caxton brings printing to England





#### The New World



#### CABOT'S LANDFALL IN THE NEW WORLD L'ARRIVÉE DE CABOT AU NOUVEAU-MONDE

In early May, 1497, John Cabot, (Giovanni Caboto), a Venetian citizen bearing letters patent from Henry VII sailed from Bristol in the MATTHEW, to seek a western passage to Asia. On June 24, he made land somewhere on the east coast of Canada. Although the sources do not allow unequivocal identification of the site, local tradition records Cape North as the landfall. From this, the first official English voyage of exploration in the Western Ocean, derived Britain's subsequent claims in the New World and the beginnings of her overseas empire.

Au début de mai 1497, le Vénitien Jean Cabot, (Giovanni Caboto), à qui le roi Henry VII avait accordé des lettres patentes, partit de Bristol sur le MATTHEW en quête d'une route maritime vers l'Asic. Le 24 juin, il aborda la côte atlantique du Canada. Les sources historiques ne permettent pas de préciser le point exact de son arrivée, mais la tradition prétend qu'il s'agit du Cap du Nord. Ce premier voyage officiel d'exploration donna lieu à des revendications anglaises en Amérique et marqua le début de l'Empire britannique outremer.

Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du Canada

Government of Canada Gouvernement du Canada



### Does Middle English "end"?

- Diachronically, no...nothing severe like the Norman Conquest as a historical event
- Grammatically, sort of...after Chancery
   Standard and printing
- Phonologically, yes... the Great Vowel Shift