



# Algeo Ch. 7: Society, Spellings, Sounds, 1500-1800

Part I: People, Politics, Power, and  
Phonology

# The Middle English → Early Modern English Transition



- Spellings are stabilizing thanks to printing
- Vowels are still shifting
- Vocabulary is expanding rapidly
- Literacy is increasing: by 1600, at least half the English population can read (a little) in English

# The Print Explosion



- Before 1500, the total number of **copies** of books printed in Europe is about 30,000—mostly in Latin
- Between 1475 and 1640, according to the *Short Title Catalog*, almost 20,000 **titles** were printed in **English alone**, not to mention all those in Latin and other languages—if you estimate a print run of between 100 and 1000 per title, you can see the scale.
- This doesn't count flyers, broadsides, and other incunabula.





# The Complication: English Orthography



- Long  $\int$  still used by printers= confusion with  $f$
- Still fluctuation between  $u$  and  $v$
- Still fluctuation between  $i$  and  $j$
- Use of  $y$  for  $\beta$  in abbreviations like  $y^t$  'that',  $y^e$  'the, thee'
- May use a macron instead of printing the final nasal:  $\text{f}\bar{o}$  instead of  $\text{fom}$ , etc.
- Inverse spellings: *delight* for *delite*, etc.
- Apocope: removing a historical prefix or unstressed syllable from the beginning of a word: *an atomy* for *anathomia*

*An. Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears:*

*I come to bury Casar, not to praise him:  
The euill that men do, liues after them,  
The good is oft entered with their bones,  
So let it be with Casar. The Noble Brutus;  
Hath told you Casar was Ambitious:  
If it were so, it was a greeuous Fault;  
And greeuoufly hath Casar answer'd it.  
Heere, vnder leaue of Brutus, and the rest  
(For Brutus is an Honourable man,  
So are they all; all Honourable men)  
Come I to speake in Casars Funerall.*

## 4 Characteristics of Early Modern English

- Linguistic **expansion**—some 12,000 words added to the lexis in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I alone (1558-1625)
- Linguistic **politics**—translations of the Bible & necessity to understand it for salvation
- Linguistic **anxiety**—necessity for education and “fixing” the language to be the equal of Latin and Greek
- Linguistic **beauty**—age of Spenser, Shakespeare, KJV

# Expansion of the EModE Lexis

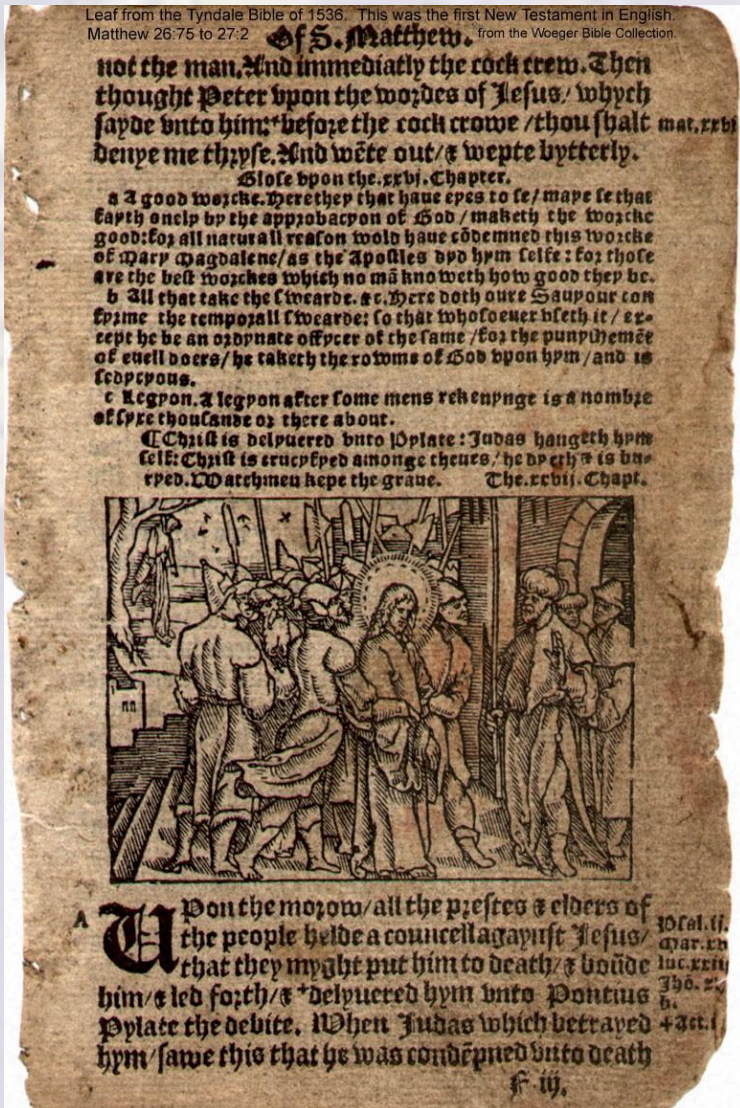
- Greek and Latin technical vocabulary;
- Continued borrowing from French: *comrade, duel, ticket, volunteer*
- More Spanish & Portuguese: *armada, bravado, desperado, peccadillo*
- Dutch: *smuggle, cruise, yacht, knapsack, landscape*
- Italian: *cameo, cupola, piazza, portico*
- Words from at least 50 other languages borrowed through Continental languages: *bamboo, bazaar, curry, alcohol, coffee*
- “inkhorn terms”: scholars’ neologisms such as *anacephalize, adnichilate, eximious, exolete, illecebrous, ingent, and obtestate* (look them up in the *OED!*)

# Politics: Basic Attitude Differences

- “I defie the Pope and all his lawes. If God spare my life, ere many yeares I wyl cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture, than he doust.” —William Tyndale, about 1521, quoted in Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*
- Sir Thomas More scorned “the word of God in the tongue of ploughboys” —regarded vernaculars as the *vulgar* tongue (language of the unwashed masses) (*Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 1529)
- Many others saw English as “the mother tongue” —the natural and appropriate language for the best thoughts of Englishmen—successors to Chaucer’s viewpoint



# The Protestant Reformation

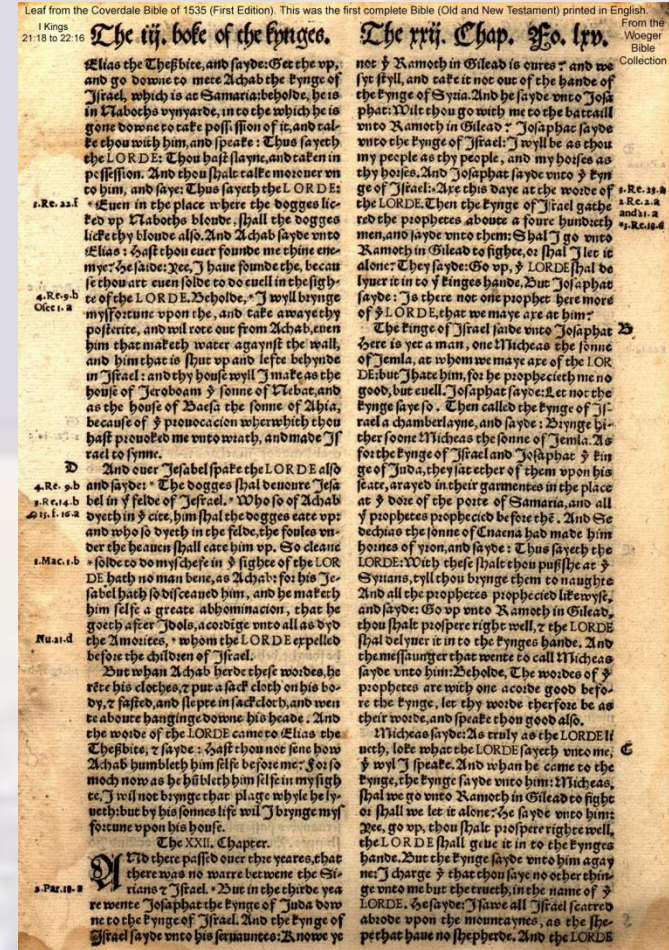


- “Every man his own salvation” means pressure to have Scriptures common to people can read and study
- Translation opposed by English church as late as 1535: Tyndale executed for heresy in 1536
- After Henry VIII Anglicizes the English church, change of strategy. By 1538, Henry orders that every English church have an English Bible available.
- *Book of Common Prayer* (1549, 1552, 1559)...



# Political Pressures for an “English” Bible Translation

- Miles Coverdale 1535; printed 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 1539 with royal endorsement—  
“The Great Bible”
- Geneva Bible (1560) with apparatus: the translation used by Shakespeare, Cromwell, Donne & Milton, and taken to America on the *Mayflower*
- 5 major translations between 1535 and 1568



# The King James Bible (1611): the KJV



- Formal name is the Authorized Version (AV)
- Often called the most influential single book written in English
- Committee of 47 scholars
- Used Tyndale, Coverdale, and the Geneva Bible as bases
- Attempt not only to translate effectively but to improve expression of God's word in mother tongue—linking politics and linguistic beauty
- See *The Story of English* and *Adventures in English* (linked on class calendar) for wonderful background



# English Humanism, Linguistic Anxiety, and Linguistic Beauty

- Humanism: first, a basically academic movement with roots in the 15th century; focused attention on **classical** learning and vocabulary, and culminated in the works of Erasmus, Sir Thomas Elyot, and Roger Ascham
- Second, a literary revolution led by Skelton, Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, and influenced by the precepts of Richard Mulcaster



# Humanism & The Latinists: Sir Thomas Elyot (1489-1546)

- [Book Named the Governor](#) (1531)
- A sound education, incorporating language, geography and history, was seen as the basis of all good government. It ensured that leaders were fully prepared for their role, and intellectually capable of coping with decision making.
- Teachers must speak elevated and correct language; according to Elyot, women have a big problem with this
- Strong proponent of borrowing Latinate words into English
- Coined the word '*encyclopedia*'

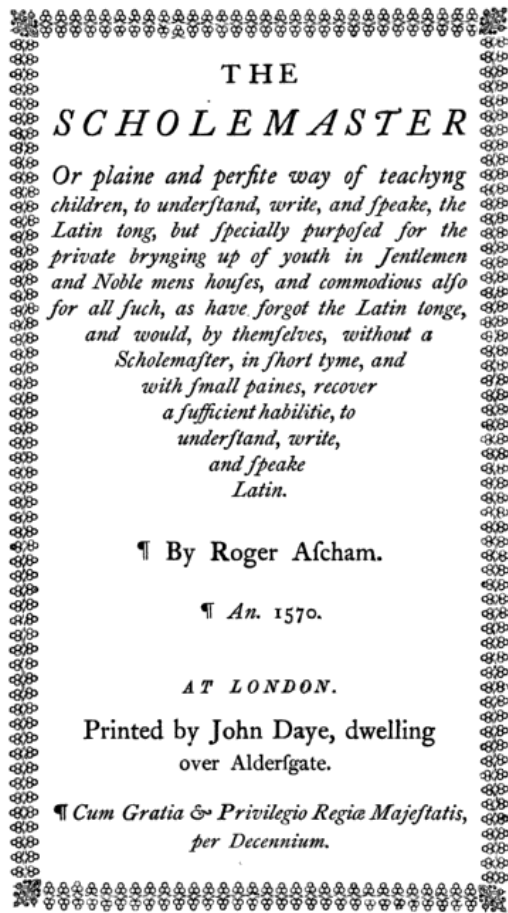
hit shall be expedient / that a noble mannes sonne in his infancie haue with hym continually / onely suchg / as may accustom him by litle and litle to speake pure and elegant latin. Semblably the nourises & other women aboute hym / if it be possible / to do the same: or at the leste way / that they speake none englisse but that / whiche is cleane / polite / perfectly / and articulately pronounced / omittinge no lettre or sillable / as foliif he women often times do of a wantonnesse / wherby diuers noble men / and gentilmenes chyldren (as I do at this daye knowe) haue attained corrupte and foule pronuntiation.

# Thomas Elyot

- Added *consultation, fury, majesty*
- perceived lexicon inadequacies,
- borrowing from Latin,
- deliberate attempts to improve & enrich the language
- Used exaggeratedly Latinate root morphemes and derivational suffixes: neologisms (neo- + -logos- + -ism)



# Humanism's Second Wave: Roger Ascham (1515-1568)



- Elizabeth I's tutor
- “English matter, in English speech, for Englishmen”—*Toxophilus*
- *The Scholemaster* (1570)
- Proponent of literary language and style: “ye know not what hurt ye do to learning that are not for words but for matter, and do make a divorce betwixt the tongue and the heart.”



# Anxiety & The Orthoepists: First Wave of Schoolmastering

- John Cheke (1569): proposal for removal of all silent letters
- Sir Thomas Smith (1568): proposal to make letters into "pictures" of speech; elimination of redundant letters like *c* and *q*; reintroduction of thorn (*þ*), use of *θ* for [ð]; vowel length marked with diacritical symbols like the macron (a horizontal bar on top of a vowel to indicate a long sound)
- William Bullokar (1580): proposed diacritics and new symbols, noted the desirability of having a dictionary and grammar to set standards



*Bullokar's Booke at large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English speech: wherein, a most perfect supplie is made, for the wantes and double founde of letters in the olde Orthographie, with Examples for the same, with the easie conference and vse of both Orthographies, to save expences in Bookes for a time, until this amendement grow to a generall vse, for the easie, speedie, and perfect reading and writing of English, (the speech noe changed, as some vnuly and maliciously, or at the least ignorantlie blowe abroade) by the which amendement the same Authour hath also framed a ruled Grammar, to be imprinted heereafter, for the same speech, to no small comoditie of the English Nation, not only to come to easie, speedie, and perfect vse of our owne language, but also to their easie, speedie, and readie entrance into the secretes of other Languages, and easie and speedie pathway to all Straungers, to vse our Language, heerebefore very hard vnto them, to no small profic. and credite to this our Nation, and stay therevnto in the weightiest causes.*  
There is also imprinted with this Orthographie a short Pamphlet for all Learners, and a Primer agreeing to the same, and as learners shall go forward therein, other necessarie Bookes shall speedily be provided with the same Orthographie.

Heerevnto are also ioyned written Copies with the same Orthographie.

Giue God the praise, that reacheth alwaies.

When truth trieth, errour flieth.

Secne and allowed according to order.

*Imprinted at London by  
Henrie Denham.*

1580.

# Opponents of the “improvement of English” & nostalgia for “Saxon”

- Wilson, Ascham, Cheke opposed Elyot’s ‘**inkhorn terms**’; Cheke tried to translate the New Testament using only native English words
- Arthur Golding (1587): “*fleshstrings*” (instead of the French borrowing “*muscles*”), “*grosswitted*” (instead of the French borrowing “*stupid*”);
- Others tried to produce English technical vocabulary: *threlike* (equilateral triangle), *likejamme* (parallelogram), *endsay* (conclusion), *saywhat* (definition), *dry mock* (irony)

# Literary Resistance to Inkhorn Terms: Beauty & Politics Vs. Anxiety

- Many attempts to preserve "purity" of English, reviving older English words
- John Cheke (tutor to Edward VI): "I am of this **opinion** that our own tung should be written cleane and **pure**, unmixt and **unmangeled** with **borowing** of other tungen... For then doth our tung **naturallie** and **praisable** utter her meaning when she boroweth no **counterfeitnes** of other tungen to **attire** herself withall, but useth **plainlie** her own, with such shift as **nature**, craft, **experiens** and following of other excellent [writers] doth lead her unto."

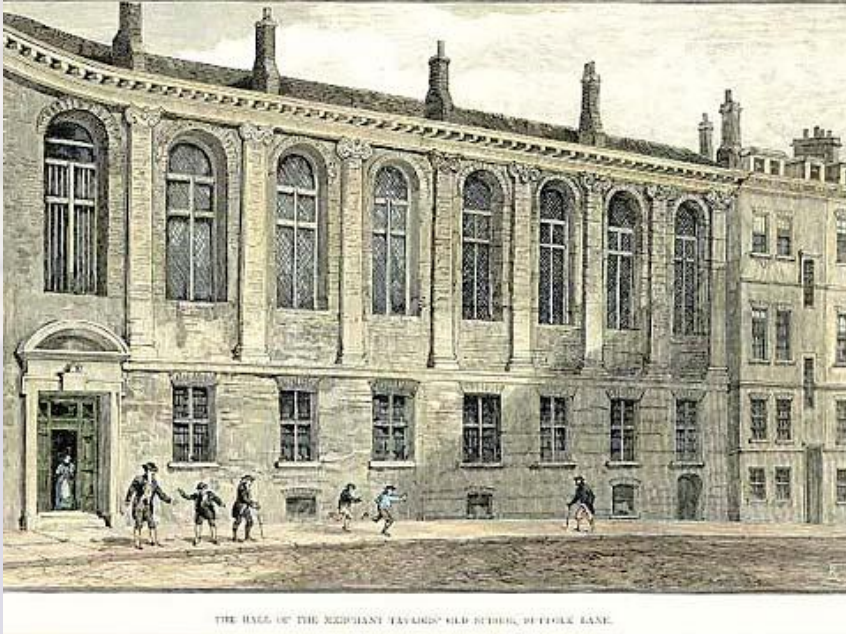




# John Skelton (1460-1529)

- *accumulate* (L *accumulare*)
  - *attempt* (L *attemptare*)
  - *celebrate* (L *celebrare*)
  - *concern* (L *concernere*)
  - *describe* (L *describere*)
  - *economy* (Gk *oikonomia*)
  - *gravity* (L *gravis*, heavy)
  - *imitation* (L *imitatus* from *imitari*, to copy)
  - *lucky* (ME *lucke*, from Middle High German *gelücke*)
  - *miserable* (L *miserabilis*)
  - *seriousness* (Fr *serieux* [from L *serius*] + OE suffix *-nes*)
  - *steadily* (OE *stede*, place)
  - *variety* (L *varietas*)
- Poet and essayist
  - May be responsible for adding as many as 1500 words to the English lexis
  - Notice the Anglicization of spellings, affixes, etc.: the process of assimilation continues.

# Richard Mulcaster (1532-1611)

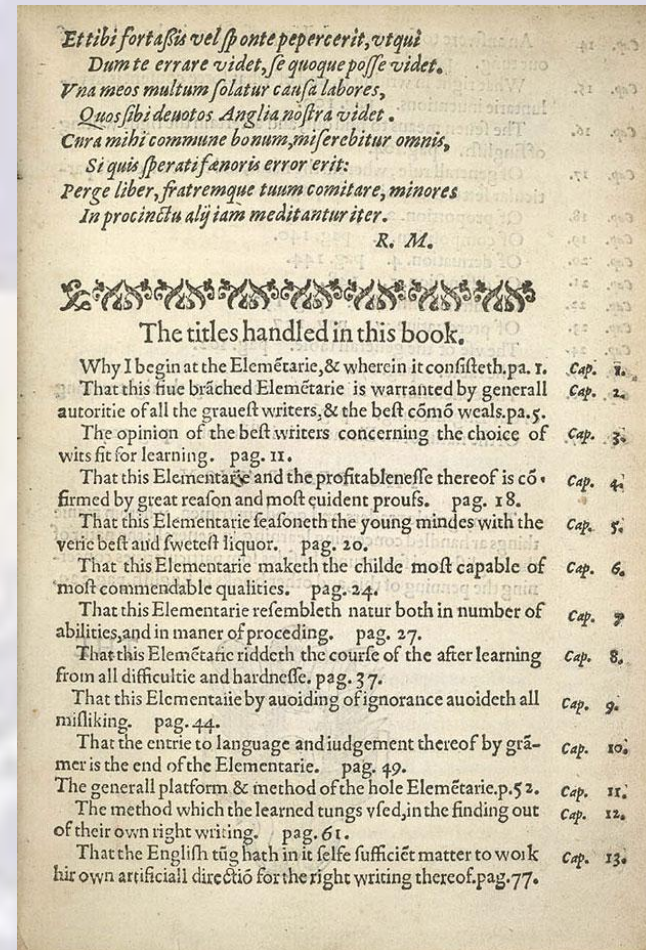
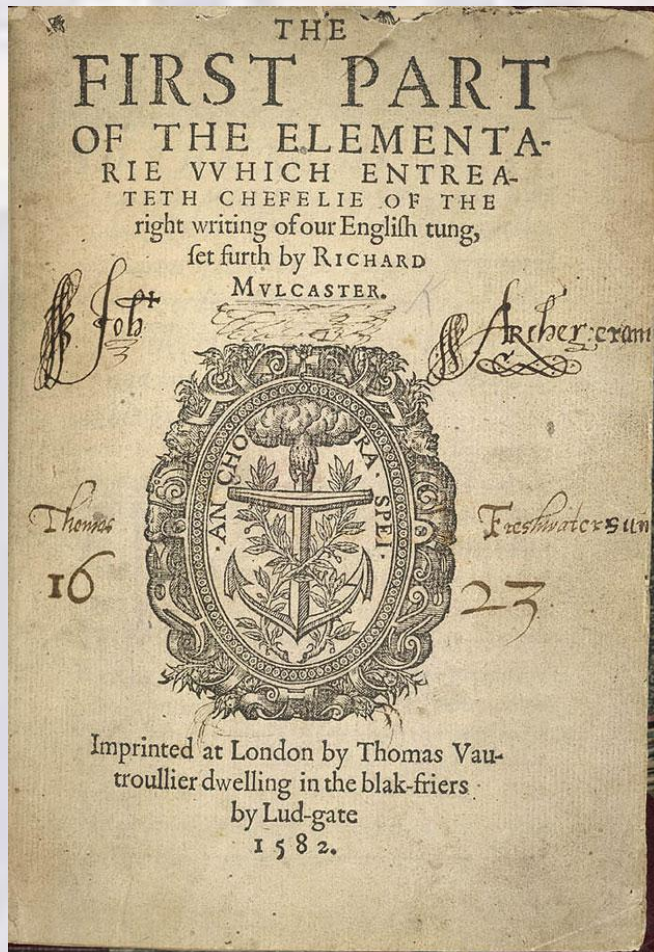


- First headmaster of Merchant Tailors' School (opened 1561)
- “I love Rome, but London better, I favour Italy, but England more, I honour Latin, but worship English.”
- *The Elementarie* (1582): 8,000 English words but no definitions



# The Elementarie: Teaching ENGLISH, not IN English

‘Forenners and strangers do wonder at vs, both for the vncertaintie in our writing, and the inconstancie in our letters.’



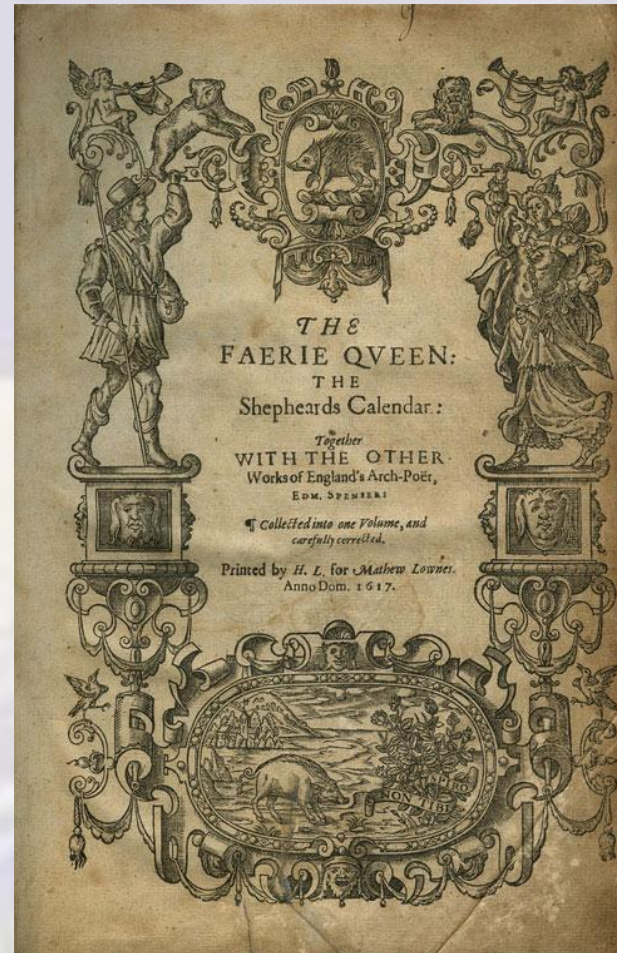


# Mulcaster's Spelling Proposals

1. Remove all unnecessary letters. *Mulcaster* established the Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC) pattern as the norm for spelling words or syllables with short vowels (*tub, bed* instead of *tubbe, bedde*).
2. Include letters that are needed to indicate correct pronunciation (the *t* in *catch*, for example).
3. Use a final silent *e* to mark long vowels and to distinguish them from short vowels (e.g., *hop* for the short vowel and *hope* for the long vowel). *Mulcaster* called this the **qualifying E**: “I call that *E*, *qualifying*, whose absence or presence, sometime altereth the vowel, sometime the consonant going next before it”

# Edmund Spenser—student of Mulcaster

- Writers like Edmund Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*, 1590) deliberately chose to use archaic vocabulary words and spellings and grammatical constructions that represented a “golden age” of “pure” English [that never historically existed, of course]
- Spenser adds only 2 words to English: *blatant* and *braggadocio*



# William Shakespeare (1564-1616)



## Linguistic Beauty

Listen to David & Ben  
Crystal read [Shakespeare in  
his native dialect  
pronunciations](#)

- Native dialect is provincial (Warwickshire)
- By early 1590s working in London, writing for courtiers (city dialects)
- Estimated that by 1598, that 1 out of 2 Londoners saw his plays
- Because his plays were so influential, his language is incredibly influential



# Shakespeare's education



- Learned Latin (and probably some Greek) at the Stratford Grammar School
- London-educated Ben Jonson took shots at Shakespeare's education but it's there
- Must have read voraciously— vocabulary estimated around 30,000 words

# Impact on the language

- Added between 1700 and 4000 words to the language (best estimate, c. 2000, comparable to Chaucer)
- Innovator in syntax, compounding
- Vocabulary from wide swath of social registers
- Added *barefaced*, *puppy-dog*, *obscene*, *premeditation*, *courtship*, *accommodation*, *linguist*, etc.

