THE CAMBRIDGE
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE

DAVID CRYSTAL

CONTENTS

PREFACE

A book about the English language – or about any individual language – is a daring enterprise, for it has as many perceptive critics as there are fluent readers. The language as a whole belongs to no one, yet everyone owns a part of it, has an interest in it, and has an opinion about it. Moreover, whenever people begin to talk about their own language, they all have something to offer – favourite words or sayings, dialect anecdotes and observations, usage likes and dislikes. Individual linguistic memories, experiences, and abilities enable everyone to make a personal contribution to language chat. In a sense, we are all truly equal when we participate – even though this democratic vision is disturbed by the widely-shared perception that some (notably, those who have learned the terminology of language study) are more equal than others.

The stories of English

That is why the metaphor of 'the story' (as in 'the story of English') is somewhat misleading. There is no one 'story' of English. There are innumerable individual stories. And even if we look for broad narrative themes, there are several dimensions competing for our attention. For example, there is the structural story – the way the sounds, grammar, and vocabulary of the language have evolved. There is the social story – the way the language has come to serve a multiplicity of functions in society. There is the literary story – the way writers have evoked the power, range, and beauty of the language to express new orders of meaning. And there is the chronological story – apparently the most straightforward, though even here it is not possible to give a simple account, in terms of a beginning, middle, and end. There is no single beginning to the story of English, but several, with waves of Anglo-Saxon invaders arriving in various locations, and laying the foundations of later dialect difference. There is no single middle, but several, with the language diverging early on in England and Scotland, then much later taking different paths in Britain, North America, and elsewhere. And, as we observe the increasingly diverse directions in which English is currently moving around the world, there is certainly no single end.

A traveller's guide

The biggest problem in compiling this book, accordingly, was what order to impose upon the mass of material which presents itself for inclusion. I have started with history, moved on to structure, and concluded with use. But it might have been otherwise, and I have written the six parts so that it is possible for readers to begin with any one of them and move in any direction. The same principle was applied to the structure of each part. While there is a certain logic of exposition in some topics (such as Part I, the history of English), there is none in others (such as Part V, the account of major regional or social varieties). In all cases, therefore, chapters, and sections within chapters, have been planned as self-contained entities, with relevant conceptual underpinning provided by the frequent use of cross-references.

The basic unit of organization in the book is the double-page spread. Sentences never cross turn-over pages, and the vast majority of topics are treated within the constraints of a single spread. I have tried to ensure that it will be possible for readers to dip into this book at any point, and find a coherent treatment of a topic in a single opening. There is too much in any language for the information to be assimilated in a continuous reading, and this is especially so in the case of English, with its lengthy history and vast range of use; and while some may wish to read this book 'from left to right', I suspect most will prefer to make more leisurely excursions over a period of time – more a casual stroll than a guided tour. The double-page spread approach is designed for that kind of traveller. Indeed, the metaphor of travelling is far more suitable for this book than the metaphor of story-telling.

Treatment and coverage

I have kept several criteria in mind while writing CEEL (pronounced 'seal', as we have come to call it). I have tried to find a balance between talking about the language and letting the language speak for itself. Most spreads distinguish between an expository overview and detailed examples (largely through the typographic convention of main text vs panels). Then within each spread, I have tried to provide examples of the wonder which can be found when we begin to look carefully at the language. All languages are fascinating, beautiful, full of surprises, moving, awesome, fun. I hope I have succeeded in provoking at least one of these responses on every page. I would be disappointed if, after any opening, a reader did not feel to some extent entertained, as well as informed.

Obviously it has all been a personal selection. The hardest part, in fact, was the choosing. Once I had decided on a topic for a spread, I would collect material relating to it from as many sources as I could find. I would write the opening perspective, and then look at all the material to find textual and pictorial illustrations. Invariably I had enough material to fill several spreads, and choosing what to put in and what to leave out was always painful. The moral is plain. There are several other possible encyclopedic worlds.

Wider horizons

In particular, there has not been space to go into the many applications of English language studies in proper detail. I touch upon some of these areas in Part VI, but the aim of that part is not to be comprehensive, but simply to illustrate the various directions that applied language studies can take. There are many other horizons which can only be approached by using systematic information about the language, but this book does not try to reach them. However, in view of its special place in the history of language study, I do try to reach out in the direction of literature as often as possible, and it is perhaps worth drawing attention to the way that literary examples are dispersed throughout the book. I have always been strongly

opposed to the great divide which traditionally separates 'lang' and 'lit'. It seemed to me that it would only reinforce that divide if I were to include a separate chapter called something like 'literary language', so I have not done so – a position which is discussed towards the end of Chapter 22. Many pages, accordingly, display a literary presence – sometimes by way of stylistic comment, often through extensive quotation.

Acknowledgements

1 · MODELLING ENGLISH

An essential early step in the study of a language is to model it. A 'model', in this context, is not a three-dimensional miniature replica: this book does not devote its space to techniques of moulding the English language in Play-Doh®, Meccano®, or Lego®. To model the English language is, rather, to provide an abstract representation of its central characteristics, so that it becomes easier to see how it is structured and used.

Two models provide this first perspective. The first, shown below, breaks the structure of English down into a series of components; and these will be used to organize the exposition throughout Parts II to IV. On the facing page, there is a model of the uses of English; and this will be used as a perspective for Parts I and V. The omnicurious eye of the English linguist surveys the whole scene, in ways which are examined in Part VI.

Text
A coherent, self-contained unit of discourse. Texts, which may be spoken, written, or signed, vary greatly in size, from such tiny units as posters, captions, and bus tickets, to such large units as novels, sermons, and conversations. They provide the frame of reference within which grammatical, lexical, and other features of English can be identified and interpreted. (See Part V, §19.)

Sign
A visual language used chiefly by people who are deaf. This book refers only to those signing systems which have been devised to represent aspects of English structure, such as its spelling, grammar, or vocabulary. (See §23.)

Graphology
The writing system of a language. Graphological (or orthographic) study has two main aspects: the visual segments of the written language, which take the form of vowels, consonants, punctuation marks, and certain typographical features; and the various patterns of graphic design, such as spacing and layout, which add structure and meaning to stretches of written text. (See Part IV, §18.)

Phonology
The pronunciation system of a language. Phonological study has two main aspects: the sound segments of the spoken language, which take the form of vowels and consonants; and the various patterns of intonation, rhythm, and tone of voice, which add structure and meaning to stretches of speech. (See Part IV, §17.)

Lexicon
The vocabulary of a language. Lexical study is a wide-ranging domain, involving such diverse areas as the sense relationships between words, the use of abbreviations, puns, and euphemisms, and the compilation of dictionaries. (See Part II.)

Grammar
The system of rules governing the construction of sentences. Grammatical study is usually divided into two main aspects: *syntax*, dealing with the structure and connection of sentences; and *morphology*, dealing with the structure and formation of words. (See Part III.)
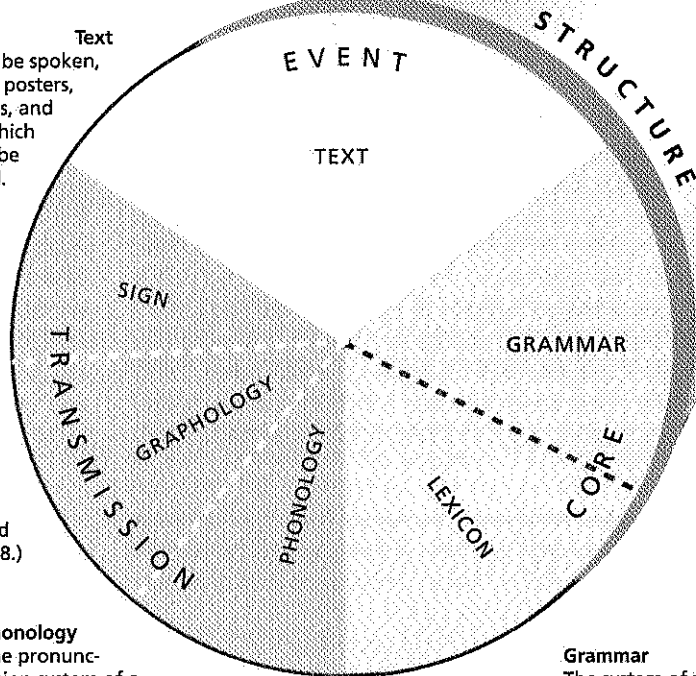
BUT IS IT ART?

Just occasionally, someone tries to visualize language in a way which goes beyond the purely diagrammatic. This print was made by art students as part of their degree. They were asked to attend lectures from different university courses, and then present an abstract design which reflected their perception of the topic. As may perhaps be immediately obvious, this design is the result of their attending a lecture on the structure of the English language, given by the present author. The design's asymmetries well represent the irregularities and erratic research paths which are so much a part of English language study. (Equally, of course, they could represent the structural disorganization of the lecturer.)
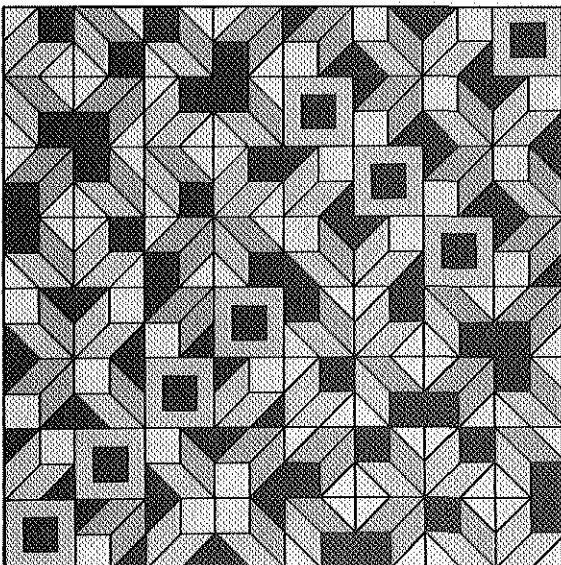
The Roman god, Janus, here seen on a Roman coin in his usual representation with a double-faced head. A spirit associated with doorways and archways, looking backwards as well as forwards, he is also often regarded as the god of beginnings. The month of January is named after him.

His location on this opening spread has, however, a further significance. The two facets of language study represented on these pages – of structure and use – have traditionally been studied independently of each other (§14). A major theme of the present book is to assert their interdependence. What are English structures for, if not to be used? And how can we understand the uses of English, without investigating their structure? Structure and use are two sides of the same coin, Roman or otherwise, and this principle is reflected in the organization of the present book (see Preface).

Temporal variation

Time affects a language, both in the long term and short term, giving rise to several highly distinctive processes and varieties.

Long term: English has changed throughout the centuries, as can be seen from such clearly distinguishable linguistic periods as Old English, Middle English, and Elizabethan English. Language change is an inevitable and continuing process, whose study is chiefly carried on by philologists and historical linguists. (See Part I.)

Short term: English changes within the history of a single person. This is most noticeable while children are acquiring their mother tongue, but it is also seen when people learn a foreign language, develop their style as adult speakers or writers, and, sometimes, find that their linguistic abilities are lost or seriously impaired through injury or disease. Psycholinguists study language learning and loss, as do several other professionals, notably speech therapists and language teachers. (See Part VI, §23.)

Social variation

Society affects a language, in the sense that any important aspect of social structure and function is likely to have a distinctive linguistic counterpart. People belong to different social classes, perform different social roles, and carry on different occupations. Their use of language is affected by their sex, age, ethnic group, and educational background. English is being increasingly affected by all these factors, because its developing role as a world language is bringing it more and more into contact with new cultures and social systems. (See Part V, §21.)

Personal variation

People affect a language, in the sense that an individual's conscious or unconscious choices and preferences can result in a distinctive or even unique style. Such variations in self-expression are most noticeable in those areas of language use where great care is being taken, such as in literature and humour. But the uniqueness of individuals, arising out of differences in their memory, personality, intelligence, social background, and personal experience, makes distinctiveness of style inevitable in everyone. (See Part V, §22.)

Regional variation

Geography affects language, both within a country and between countries, giving rise to regional accents and dialects, and to the pidgins and creoles which emerged around the world whenever English first came into contact with other languages. *Intranational* regional varieties have been observed within English from its earliest days, as seen in such labels as 'Northern', 'London', and 'Scottish'. *International* varieties are more recent in origin, as seen in such labels as 'American', 'Australian', and 'Indian'. Regional language variation is studied by sociolinguists, geographical linguists, dialectologists, and others, the actual designation depending on the focus and emphasis of the study. (See §7 and Part V, §20.)

(Circular diagram with labels: USE, TEMPORAL VARIATION (LONG TERM, SHORT TERM), SOCIAL VARIATION, REGIONAL VARIATION, PERSONAL VARIATION)

WHY STUDY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

Because it's fascinating
It is remarkable how often the language turns up as a topic of interest in daily conversation – whether it is a question about accents and dialects, a comment about usage and standards, or simply curiosity about a word's origins and history.

Because it's important
The dominant role of English as a world language forces it upon our attention in a way that no language has ever done before. As English becomes the chief means of communication between nations, it is crucial to ensure that it is taught accurately and efficiently, and to study changes in its structure and use.

Because it's fun
One of the most popular leisure pursuits is to play with the English language – with its words, sounds, spellings, and structures. Crosswords, Scrabble®, media word shows, and many other quizzes and guessing games keep millions happily occupied every day, teasing their linguistic brain centres and sending them running to their dictionaries.

Because it's beautiful
Each language has its unique beauty and power, as seen to best effect in the works of its great orators and writers. We can see the 1,000-year-old history of English writing only through the glass of language, and anything we learn about English as a language can serve to increase our appreciation of its oratory and literature.

Because it's useful
Getting the language right is a major issue in almost every corner of society. No one wants to be accused of ambiguity and obscurity, or find themselves talking or writing at cross-purposes. The more we know about the language the more chance we shall have of success, whether we are advertisers, politicians, priests, journalists, doctors, lawyers – or just ordinary people at home, trying to understand and be understood.

Because it's there
English, more than any other language, has attracted the interest of professional linguists. It has been analysed in dozens of different ways, as part of the linguist's aim of devising a theory about the nature of language in general. The study of the English language, in this way, becomes a branch of linguistics – English linguistics.

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PART I

The history of English

The history of English is a fascinating field of study in its own right, but it also provides a valuable perspective for the contemporary study of the language, and thus makes an appropriate opening section for this book. The historical account promotes a sense of identity and continuity, and enables us to find coherence in many of the fluctuations and conflicts of present-day English language use. Above all, it satisfies the deep-rooted sense of curiosity we have about our linguistic heritage. People like to be aware of their linguistic roots.

We begin as close to the beginning as we can get, using the summary accounts of early chronicles to determine the language's continental origins (§2). The Anglo-Saxon corpus of poetry and prose, dating from around the 7th century, provides the first opportunity to examine the linguistic evidence. §3 outlines the characteristics of Old English texts, and gives a brief account of the sounds, spellings, grammar, and vocabulary which they display. A similar account is given of the Middle English period (§4), beginning with the effects on the language of the French invasion and concluding with a discussion of the origins of Standard English. At all points, special attention is paid to the historical and cultural setting to which texts relate, and to the character of the leading literary works, such as *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Early Modern English period (§5) begins with the English of Caxton and the Renaissance, continues with that of Shakespeare and the King James Bible, and ends with the landmark publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*. A recurring theme is the extent and variety of language change during this period. The next section, on Modern English (§6), follows the course of further language change, examines the nature of early grammars, traces the development of new varieties and attitudes in America, and finds in literature, especially in the novel, an invaluable linguistic mirror. Several present-day usage controversies turn out to have their origins during this period. By the end of §6, we are within living memory.

The final section (§7) looks at what has happened to the English language in the present century, and in particular at its increasing presence worldwide. The approach is again historical, tracing the way English has travelled to the United States, Canada, Africa, Australia, South and South-East Asia, and several other parts of the globe. The section reviews the concept of World English, examines the statistics of usage, and discusses the problems of intelligibility and identity which arise when a language achieves such widespread use. The notion of Standard English, seen from both national and international perspectives, turns out to be of special importance. Part I then concludes with some thoughts about the future of the language, and about the relationships which have grown up (sometimes amicable, sometimes antagonistic) between English and other languages.

A map of Anglo-Saxon England taken from Edmund Gibson's 1692 edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Latin caption (top left) explains that the map shows the places mentioned in the Chronicle and in Old English literature.

2 · THE ORIGINS OF ENGLISH

'To Aëtius, thrice consul, the groans of the Britons.' Thus, according to the Anglo-Saxon historian, the Venerable Bede, began the letter written to the Roman consul by some of the Celtic people who had survived the ferocious invasions of the Scots and Picts in the early decades of the 5th century. 'The barbarians drive us to the sea. The sea drives us back towards the barbarians. Between them we are exposed to two sorts of death: we are either slain or drowned.'

The plea fell on deaf ears. Although the Romans had sent assistance in the past, they were now fully occupied by their own wars with Bledla and Attila, kings of the Huns. The attacks from the north continued, and the British were forced to look elsewhere for help. Bede gives a succinct and sober account of what then took place.

They consulted what was to be done, and where they should seek assistance to prevent or repel the cruel and frequent incursions of the northern nations; and they all agreed with their King Vortigern to call over to their aid, from parts beyond the sea, the Saxon nation...

In the year of our Lord 449... the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and obtained the victory; which, being known at home in their own country, as also the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a still greater number of men, which, being added to the former, made up an invincible army...

Bede describes the invaders as belonging to the three most powerful nations of Germany – the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes. The first group to arrive came from Jutland, in the northern part of modern Denmark, and were led, according to the chroniclers, by
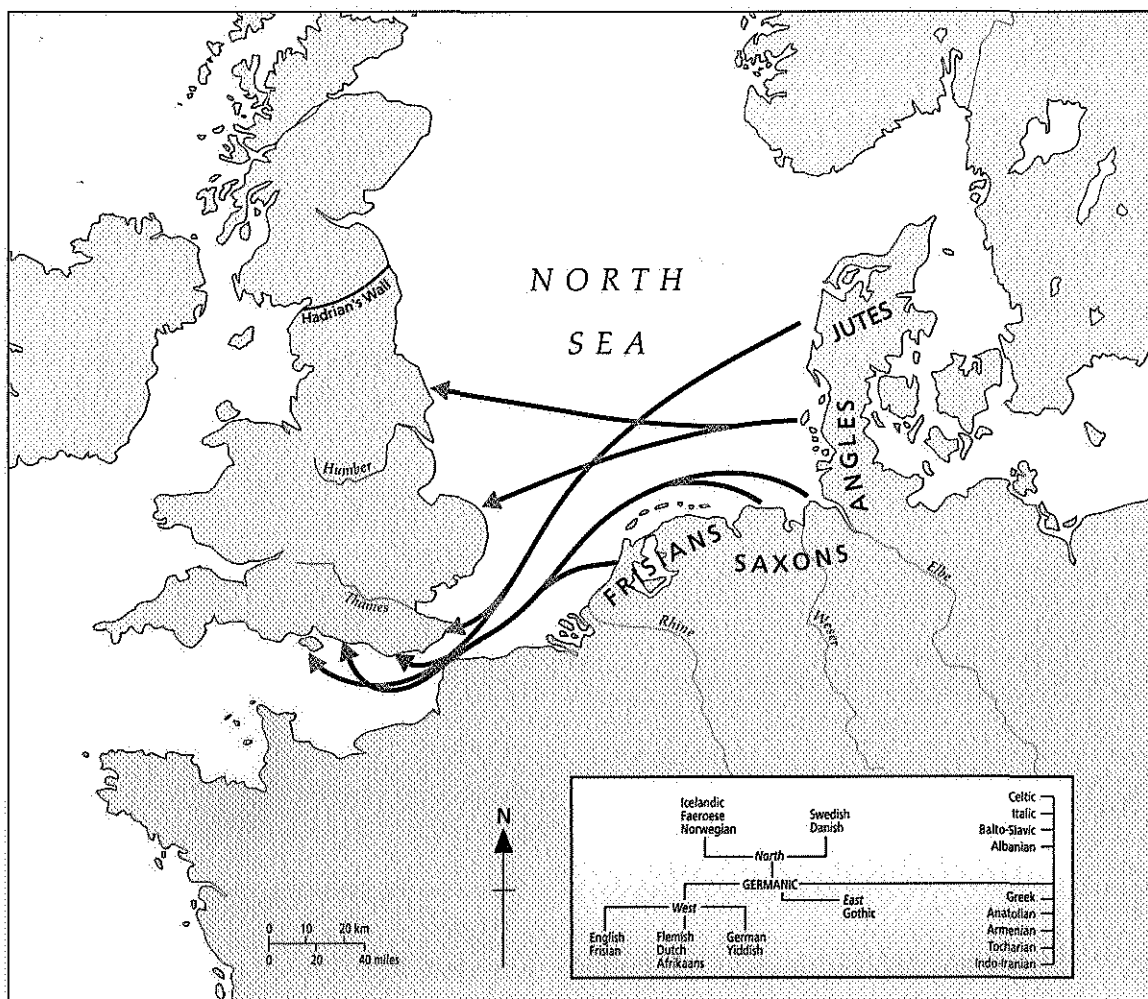
The homelands of the Germanic invaders, according to Bede, and the direction of their invasions. Little is known about the exact locations of the tribes. The Jutes may have had settlements further south, and links with the Frisians to the west. The Angles may have lived further into Germany. The linguistic differences between these groups, likewise, are matters for speculation. The various dialects of Old English (p. 28) plainly relate to the areas in which the invaders settled, but there are too few texts to make serious comparison possible.

English is a member of the western branch of the Germanic family of languages. It is closest in structure to Frisian – though hardly anything is known about the ancient Frisians and their role in the invasions of Britain. Germanic is a branch of the Indo-European language family.

two Jutish brothers, Hengist and Horsa. They landed at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet, and settled in the areas now known as Kent, the Isle of Wight, and parts of Hampshire. The Angles came from the south of the Danish peninsula, and entered Britain much later, along the eastern coast, settling in parts of Mercia, Northumbria (the land to the north of the Humber, where in 547 they established a kingdom), and what is now East Anglia. The Saxons came from an area further south and west, along the coast of the North Sea, and from 477 settled in various parts of southern and south-eastern Britain. The chroniclers talk about groups of East, West, and South Saxons – distinctions which are reflected in the later names of Essex, Wessex, and Sussex. The name Middlesex suggests that there were Middle Saxons too. Bede's account takes up the story:

In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over the island, and they began to increase so much that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time expelled by the force of their arms, they began to turn their weapons against their confederates.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (see p.15), compiled over a century later than Bede under Alfred the Great, gives a grim catalogue of disasters for the Britons.

457 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford, Kent] and

A page from one of the manuscripts of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The language is Latin.

there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.

465 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of the thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.

473 · In this year Hengest and Aesc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English as one flies from fire.

The fighting went on for several decades, but the imposition of Anglo-Saxon power was never in doubt. Over a period of about a hundred years, further bands of immigrants continued to arrive, and Anglo-Saxon settlements spread to all areas apart from the highlands of the west and north. By the end of the 5th century, the foundation was established for the emergence of the English language.

THE NAME OF THE LANGUAGE

With scant respect for priorities, the Germanic invaders called the native Celts *wealas* ('foreigners'), from which the name Welsh is derived. The Celts called the invaders 'Saxons', regardless of their tribe, and this practice was followed by the early Latin writers. By the end of the 6th century, however, the term *Angli* ('Angles') was in use – as early as 601, a king of Kent, Æthelbert, is called *rex Anglorum* ('King of the Angles') – and during the 7th century *Angli* or *Anglia* (for the country) became the usual Latin names. Old English *Engle* derives from this usage, and the name of the language found in Old English texts is from the outset referred to as *Englisc* (the *sc* spelling representing the sound *sh*). References to the name of the country as *Englaland* ('land of the Angles'), from which came *England*, do not appear until *c.* 1000.

3 · OLD ENGLISH

THE EARLY PERIOD

Before the Anglo-Saxon invasions (§2), the language (or languages) spoken by the native inhabitants of the British Isles belonged to the Celtic family, introduced by a people who had come to the islands around the middle of the first millennium BC. Many of these settlers were, in turn, eventually subjugated by the Romans, who arrived in 43 BC. But by 410 the Roman armies had gone, withdrawn to help defend their Empire in Europe. After a millennium of settlement by speakers of Celtic, and half a millennium by speakers of Latin, what effect did this have on the language spoken by the arriving Anglo-Saxons?

Celtic borrowings

There is, surprisingly, very little Celtic influence – or perhaps it is not so surprising, given the savage way in which the Celtic communities were destroyed or pushed back into the areas we now know as Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria, and the Scottish borders. Some Celts (or Romano-Celts) doubtless remained in the east and south, perhaps as slaves, perhaps intermarrying, but their identity would after a few generations have been lost within Anglo-Saxon society. Whatever we might expect from such a period of cultural contact, the Celtic language of Roman Britain influenced Old English hardly at all.

Only a handful of Celtic words were borrowed at the time, and a few have survived into modern English, sometimes in regional dialect use: *crag*, *cumb* 'deep valley', *binn* 'bin', *carr* 'rock', *dunn* 'grey, dun', *brock* 'badger', and *torr* 'peak'. Others include *bannoc* 'piece', *rice* 'rule', *gafeluc* 'small spear', *bratt* 'cloak', *luh* 'lake', *dry* 'sorcerer', and *clucge* 'bell'. A few Celtic words of this period ultimately come from Latin, brought in by the Irish missionaries: these include *assen* 'ass', *ancor* 'hermit', *stær* 'history', and possibly *cross*. But there cannot be more than two dozen loan words in all. And there are even very few Celtic-based place names (p. 141) in what is now southern and eastern England. They include such river names as *Thames*, *Avon* 'river', *Don, Exe, Usk*, and *Wye*. Town names include *Dover* 'water', *Eccles* 'church', *Bray* 'hill', *London* (a tribal name), *Kent* (meaning unknown), and the use of *caer* 'fortified place' (as in *Carlisle*) and *pen* 'head, top, hill' (as in *Pendle*).

Latin loans

Latin has been a major influence on English throughout its history (pp. 24, 48, 60, §9), and there is evidence of its role from the earliest moments of contact. The Roman army and merchants gave new names to many local objects and experiences, and introduced several fresh concepts. About half of the new words were to do with plants, animals, food and drink, and household items: Old English *pise* 'pea', *plante* 'plant', *win* 'wine', *cyse* 'cheese', *catte* 'cat', *cetel* 'kettle', *disc* 'dish', *candel* 'candle'. Other important clusters of words related to clothing (*belt* 'belt', *cemes* 'shirt', *sutere* 'shoemaker'), buildings and settlements (*tigle* 'tile', *weall* 'wall', *ceaster* 'city', *stræt* 'road'), military and legal institutions (*wic* 'camp', *diht* 'saying', *scrifan* 'decree'), commerce (*mangian* 'trade', *ceapian* 'buy', *pund* 'pound'), and religion (*mæsse* 'Mass', *munuc* 'monk', *mynster* 'minster').

Whether the Latin words were already used by the Anglo-Saxon tribes on the continent of Europe, or were introduced from within Britain, is not always clear (though a detailed analysis of the sound changes they display can help, p. 19), but the total number of Latin words present in English at the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period is not large – less than 200. Although Vulgar Latin (the variety of spoken Latin used throughout the Empire) must have continued in use – at least, as an official language – for some years after the Roman army left, for some reason it did not take root in Britain as it had so readily done in Continental Europe. Some commentators see in this the

A reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon huts at West Stow, Suffolk. Each hut is some 15–20 feet (5–6 m) in length.

RUNES

Old English was first written in the runic alphabet. This alphabet was used in northern Europe – in Scandinavia, present-day Germany, and the British Isles – and it has been preserved in about 4,000 inscriptions and a few manuscripts. It dates from around the 3rd century AD. No one knows exactly where the alphabet came from, but it seems to be a development of one of the alphabets of southern Europe, probably the Roman, which runes resemble closely.

The common runic alphabet found throughout the area consisted of 24 letters. It can be written horizontally in either direction. Each letter had a name, and the alphabet as a whole was called by the name of its first six letters, the *futhorc* (in the same way as the word *alphabet* comes from Greek *alpha* + *beta*). The version found in Britain used extra letters to cope with the range of sounds found in Old English; in its most developed form, in 9th-century Northumbria, it consisted of 31 symbols.

The inscriptions in Old English are found on weapons, jewellery, monuments, and other artefacts, and date largely from the 5th or 6th centuries AD, the earliest (at Caistor-by-Norwich) possibly being late 4th century. They often say simply who made or owned the object. Most of the large rune stones say little more than 'X raised this stone in memory of Y', and often the message is unclear.

The meaning of *rune*
What *rune* (OE *run*) means is debatable. There is a long-standing tradition which attributes to it such senses as 'whisper', 'mystery', and 'secret', suggesting that the symbols were originally used for magical or mystical rituals. Such associations were certainly present in the way the pagan Vikings (and possibly the Continental Germans) used the corresponding word, but there is no evidence that they were present in Old English. Current research suggests that the word *run* had been thoroughly assimilated into Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and meant simply 'sharing of knowledge or thoughts'. Any extension to the world of magic and superstition is not part of the native tradition. Modern English *rune* is not even a survival of the Old English word, but a later borrowing from Norse via Latin.

For the modern, magical sense of *rune* we are therefore indebted to the Scandinavian and not the Anglo-Saxon tradition. It is this sense which surfaced in the 19th century in a variety of esoteric publications, and which lives on in the popular and fantastic imagination of the 20th, perhaps most famously in the writing of Tolkien (p. 185). (After C. E. Fell, 1991.)

THE OLD ENGLISH RUNIC ALPHABET

This list gives the names of the symbols in Old English, and their meanings (where these are known). It does not give the many variant shapes which can be found in the different inscriptions. The symbols consist mainly of intersecting straight lines, showing their purpose for engraving on stone, wood, metal, or bone. Manuscript uses of runes do exist in a few early poems (notably in four passages where the name of Cynewulf is represented), and in the solutions to some of the riddles in the *Exeter Book* (p. 12), and are in evidence until the 11th century, especially in the north, but there are very few of them.

Rune	Anglo-Saxon	Name	Meaning (where known)
ᚠ	f	feoh	cattle, wealth
ᚢ	u	ūr	bison (aurochs)
ᚦ	þ	þorn	thorn
ᚩ	o	ōs	god/mouth
ᚱ	r	rād	journey/riding
ᚳ	c	cen	torch
ᚷ	g[j]	giefu	gift
ᚹ	w	wyn	joy
ᚻ	h	hægl	hail
ᚾ	n	nied	necessity/trouble
ᛁ	i	is	ice
ᛄ	j	gear	year
ᛇ	ᵹ	ēoh	yew
ᛈ	p	peor	?
ᛉ	x	eolh	?sedge
ᛋ	s	sigel	sun
ᛏ	t	tiw/tir	Tiw (a god)
ᛒ	b	beorc	birch
ᛖ	e	eoh	horse
ᛗ	m	man	man
ᛚ	l	lagu	water/sea
ᛝ	ng	ing	Ing (a hero)
ᛟ	oe	eþel	land/estate
ᛞ	d	dæg	day
ᚪ	a	ac	oak
ᚫ	æ	æsc	ash
ᚣ	y	yr	bow
ᛠ	ea	ear	?earth
ᚸ	g [ɣ]	gar	spear
ᛣ	k	calc	?sandal/chalice/chalk
ᛤ	k̄		(name unknown)

EARLY INSCRIPTIONS

There are less than 30 clear runic inscriptions in Old English, some containing only a single name. The two most famous examples both date from the 8th century, and represent the Northumbrian dialect (p. 28). Both inscriptions make some use of the Roman alphabet as well.

• The Ruthwell Cross, near Dumfries, Scotland, is 16 feet (5 m) high. Its faces contain panels depicting events in the life of Christ and the early Church, as well as carvings of birds and beasts, and lines of runes around the edges are similar to part of the Old English poem 'The Dream of the Rood' (*rood* = 'cross') in the *Vercelli Book*. A glossed extract is shown below (there are no spaces between the words in the original inscription; also some scholars transcribe 'blood' as *blodi*).
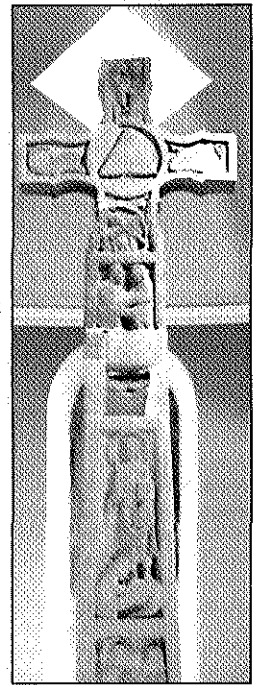
ᛁᚳ ᚦᚪᛋ ᛗᛁᚦ ᛒᛚᚩᚺᚪ ᛒᛁᚻᛏᛖᛗᛁᚻ
ic wæs miþ blodæ bistemid
I was with blood bedewed

• The Franks Casket is a richly carved whalebone box, illustrating mythological and religious scenes, not all of which can be interpreted. The picture shows the panel with the Adoration of the Magi alongside the Germanic legend of Wayland (Weland) the Smith. The inscriptions are partly in Old English, and partly in Latin.
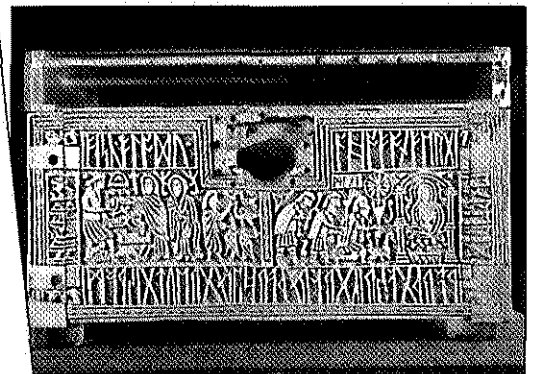
The box first came to light in the 19th century, owned by a farmer from Auzon, France. It is named after Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, through whom it came to be deposited in the British Museum. One side was missing, but it later came into the possession of the Bargello Museum, Florence, and a cast was made of it, so that the box in the British Museum now appears complete.

THE AUGUSTINIAN MISSION

It would be a considerable overstatement to suggest (as one sometimes reads) that St Augustine brought Christianity to Britain. This religion had already arrived through the Roman invasion, and in the 4th century had actually been given official status in the Roman Empire. It was a Briton, St Patrick, who converted Ireland in the early 5th century; and a goodly number of early Welsh saints' names are remembered in place names beginning with *Llan* ('church [of]'). The story of St Alban (said to have been martyred in 305 near the city of Verulam, modern St Albans) is recounted in detail by Bede.

Augustine's task was more specific: to convert the Anglo-Saxons. He had been prior of the monastery of St Andrew in Rome, before being chosen by Pope Gregory for the mission. He and his companions arrived in the Isle of Thanet, to be met by Æthelberht, king of Kent, and they must have been heartily relieved to find that his wife was already a (Celtic) Christian. They were given leave to live and preach in Canterbury, and within a year the king himself was converted. Three bishoprics were established by the end of the decade, with Augustine as archbishop at Canterbury, Justus as bishop at Rochester, and Mellitus at London, as bishop of the East Saxons.

It took some time for this early success to become consolidated. Following Augustine's death (604/5) there was much tension over religious practices between the Roman Christians and their Celtic counterparts, who had lived in isolation from Rome for so long. Matters came to a head in the conflict over the date of Easter, resolved (in favour of Rome) at the Synod of Whitby in 664.

Part of the difficulty in developing the faith must have been linguistic: according to Bede, it was nearly 50 years before Anglo-Saxon was being used as a missionary tongue. King Egbert of Kent in 664 had to make a special plea to ensure that an Anglo-Saxon speaking bishop was appointed, 'so that with a prelate of his own nation and language, the king and his subjects might be more perfectly instructed in the words and mysteries of the faith'. This was the first expression of an issue which would be raised again several hundred years later in English language history (p. 61).

THE OLD ENGLISH CORPUS

There is a 'dark age' between the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and the first Old English manuscripts. A few scattered inscriptions in the language date from the 5th and 6th centuries, written in the runic alphabet which the invaders brought with them (p. 9), but these give very little information about what the language was like. The literary age began only after the arrival of the Roman missionaries, led by Augustine, who came to Kent in AD 597. The rapid growth of monastic centres led to large numbers of Latin manuscripts being produced, especially of the Bible and other religious texts.

Because of this increasingly literary climate, Old English manuscripts also began to be written – much earlier, indeed, than the earliest vernacular texts from other north European countries. The first texts, dating from around 700, are glossaries of Latin words translated into Old English, and a few early inscriptions and poems. But very little material remains from this period. Doubtless many manuscripts were burned during the 8th-century Viking invasions (p. 25). The chief literary work of the period, the heroic poem *Beowulf*, survives in a single copy, made around 1,000 – possibly some 250 years after it was composed (though the question of its composition date is highly controversial). There are a number of short poems, again almost entirely preserved in late manuscripts, over half of them concerned with Christian subjects – legends of the saints, extracts from the Bible, and devotional pieces. Several others reflect the Germanic tradition, dealing with such topics as war, travelling, patriotism, and celebration. Most extant Old English texts were written in the period following the reign of King Alfred (849–99), who arranged for many Latin works to be translated – including Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 7). But the total corpus is extremely small. The number of words in the corpus of Old English compiled at the University of Toronto, which contains all the texts (but not all the alternative manuscripts of a text), is only 3.5 million – the equivalent of about 30 medium-sized modern novels. Only *c.* 5 per cent of this total (*c.* 30,000 lines) is poetry.

THE GREGORIAN PUN

In Bede there is an account of St Gregory's first meeting with the inhabitants of England. Gregory, evidently a punster of some ability, himself asked to be sent to Britain as a missionary, but the pope of the time refused – presumably because of Gregory's social position, the son of a senator and former prefect of the city. When Gregory became pope himself (590), he sent Augustine to do the job for him. Bede tells the story at the end of his account of Gregory's life (Book 2, Ch. 1).

Nor is the account of St Gregory, which has been handed down to us by the tradition of our ancestors, to be passed by in silence, in relation to his motives for taking such interest in the salvation of our nation [Britain]. It is reported that, some merchants, having just arrived at Rome on a certain day, exposed many things for sale in the market-place, and an abundance of people resorted thither to buy: Gregory himself went with the rest, and, among other things, some boys were set to sale, their bodies white, their countenances beautiful, and their hair very fine. Having viewed them, he asked, as is said, from what country or nation they were brought? and was told, from the island of Britain, whose inhabitants were of such personal appearance. He again inquired whether those islanders were Christians, or still involved in the errors of paganism? and was informed that they were pagans. Then, fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart, 'Alas! what pity,' said he, 'that the author of darkness is possessed of men of such fair countenances; and that being remarkable for such graceful aspects, their minds should be *void of inward grace.' He therefore again asked*, what was the name of that nation? and was answered, that they were called Angles. 'Right,' said he, 'for they have an Angelic face, and it becomes such to be co-heirs with the Angels in heaven. What is the name,' proceeded he, 'of the province from which they are brought?' It was replied, that the natives of that province were called Deiri. 'Truly they are *De ira*,' said he, 'withdrawn from wrath, and called to the mercy of Christ. How is the king of that province called?' They told him his name was Ælla; and he, alluding to the name, said, 'Hallelujah, the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts.' (Trans. J. Stevens, 1723.)

SAINT AUGUSTINE   SAINT GREGORY
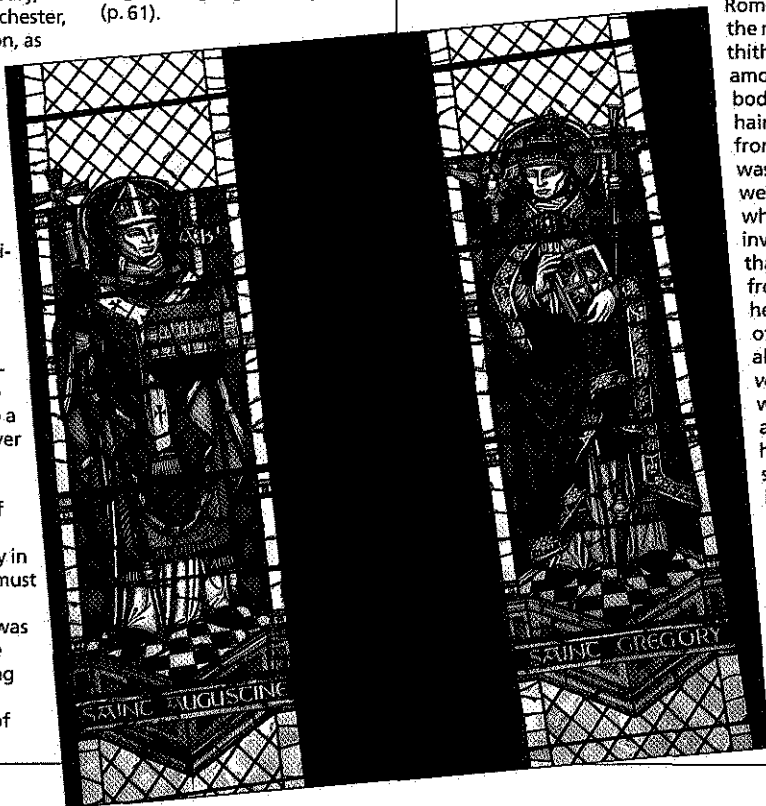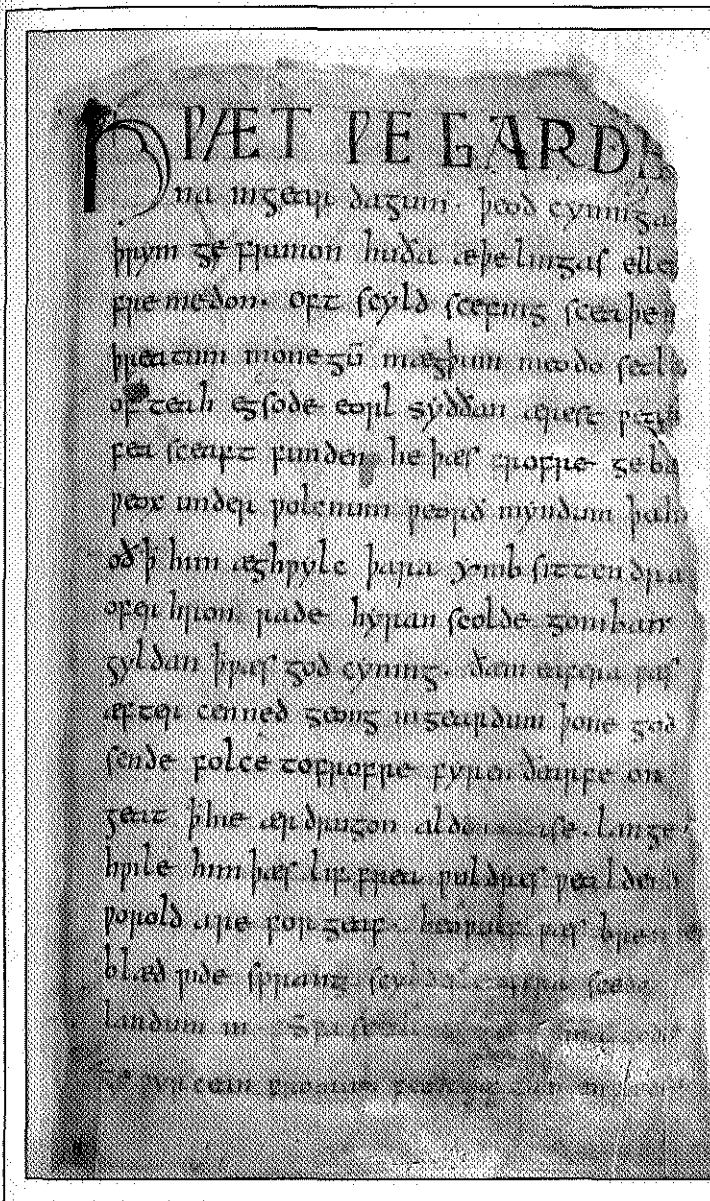
HWÆT WE GARDE-
What!   We Spear-Danes'

na.   in gear-dagum. þeod-cyninga
       in yore-days,   tribe-kings'

þrym ge-frunon huða æþelingas ellen
glory heard,   how the leaders courage

fremedon. Oft scyld scefing sceaþena
accomplished. Often Scyld, Scef's son, from enemies'

þreatum monegum mægþum meodo-setla
bands,   from many tribes   mead-benches

of-teah egsode eorl syððan ærest wearð
seized, terrorised earl[s], since   first he was

fea-sceaft funden he þæs frofre gebad
destitute found; he its relief knew,

weox under wolcnum weorð-myndum þah.
grew under skies,   in honours throve,

oð þæt him æghwylc þara   ymb-sittendra
until   to him each   of the   neighbours

ofer hron-rade hyran scolde gomban
over whale-road submit must,   tribute

gyldan þæt wæs god cyning. ðæm eafera wæs
yield;   that was good king!   To him heir   was

æfter cenned geong in geardum þone god
after born   young in dwellings, him God

sende folce to frofre fyren—ðearfe on-
sent   to folk for solace; intense misery

geat þ   hie ær   drugon aldor-[le]ase. lange
saw when they before felt   leaderless   a long

hwile him   þæs lif-frea wuldres wealdend
while; to them for it Life-Lord, glory's   Ruler

worold-are for-geaf. beowulf wæs breme
world honour gave,   Beow   was famed,

blæd wide sprang scyldes eafera scede-
renown widely sprang of Scyld's heir Danish

landum in. Swa sceal [geong g]uma gode
lands   in. So shall young man   by good [deeds]

ge-wyrcean fromum feoh-giftum. on fæder
ensure,   by fine   fee-gifts   in father's ...

(After
J. Zupitza,
1882. Trans.
J. Porter, 1991.)

THE SCOP'S TALE

This opening page of the Beowulf text is taken from the text now lodged in the British Library, London (manuscript reference, Cotton Vitellius A. xv). The manuscript is a copy made in c. 1000, but it was damaged by a fire at the Cottonian Library in 1731, hence the odd shape to the page. The name of the poet, or scop, whose version is found here is not known, nor is it clear when the work was first composed: one scholarly tradition assigns it to the 8th century; another to a somewhat later date.

This is the first great narrative poem in English. It is a heroic tale about a 6th-century Scandinavian hero, Beowulf, who comes to the aid of the Danish king Hrothgar. Hrothgar's retinue is under daily attack from a monstrous troll, Grendel, at the hall of Heorot ('Hart') in Denmark (located possibly on the site of modern Leire, near Copenhagen). Beowulf travels from Geatland, in southern Sweden, and after a great fight kills the monster, and in a second fight the monster's vengeful mother. Beowulf returns home, recounts his story, and is later made king of the Geats, ruling for 50 years. There, as an old man, he kills a dragon in a fight that leads to his own death.

This plot summary does no justice to the depth of meaning and stylistic impact of the work. Apart from its lauding of courage, heroic defiance, loyalty to one's lord, and other Germanic values, Beowulf introduces elements of a thoroughly Christian perspective, and there are many dramatic undercurrents and ironies. The monster is a classical figure in Germanic tradition, but it is also said to be a descendant of Cain, and a product of hell and the devil. The contrast between earthly success and mortality is a recurrent theme. While Beowulf is being feted in Hrothgar's court, the poet alludes to disastrous events which will one day affect the Geats, providing a note of doom that counterpoints the triumphal events of the narrative. The poem is full of dramatic contrasts of this kind.

Whether the poem is a product of oral improvisation or is a more consciously contrived literary work has been a bone of scholarly contention. Many of its striking features, in particular its alliterative rhythmical formulae (p. 23), are those we would associate with oral composition, for they would be a valuable aid to memorization; on the other hand, modern scholars have drawn attention to the patterned complexity of its narrative structure, its metrical control, and its lexical richness, suggesting a literary process of composition (p. 23). The critic W. P. Ker expressed one view, in The Dark Ages (1904), that Beowulf is a 'book to be read' – but if so it is one which makes maximum use of a style which must originally have evolved for use in oral poetry. (For an account of some modern investigative techniques, see p. 437.)

THE EARLIEST ENGLISH LITERATURE

As with foreign languages, there is never complete agreement about the best way of translating Old English texts; nor is there unanimity about the best way of editing them. The extracts on these and adjacent pages are here to illustrate the range and character of the literature of the period, but they also show the varied editorial practice which exists. Some editors have tried to make their text resemble the original manuscript as closely as possible; others have produced a modernized version.

About the need for editing, there is no doubt. To print a facsimile of Old English texts would be to make them unreadable to all but the specialist. There is plenty of scope for editorial intervention. Scribal habits of capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, word spacing, and word division were diverse and inconsistent, and order needs to be imposed. There are no poetic line divisions in the manuscript of *Beowulf*, for example (p. 11), and these have to be added.

Nonetheless, editorial practices vary greatly in the way texts are made consistent. Some editors silently correct scribal errors; others draw attention to them in parentheses. Missing letters at the edge of a torn or burned manuscript may be restored, or their omission may be indicated by special symbols. Some editions add an indication of vowel length. Some replace outmoded letters (p. 16) by modern equivalents. Poetic half-lines may or may not be recognized (both practices are shown below). And editors vary in the attention they pay to the existence of alternative readings in different copies of a manuscript.

An important feature, which can add a great deal to the 'alien' appearance of a text, is whether the scribe's orthographic abbreviations are retained, or are expanded. In some texts, for example, þ is used as the abbreviation for *þæt* or for *þþ*, 7 for the various forms of *and*, and the tilde (~) marks an expansion, usually to a following nasal. (For later scribal conventions, see p. 40.)

The Battle of Maldon was fought in August 991. A Viking fleet had sailed up the estuary of the River Blackwater to the island of Northey, near Maldon in Essex. Their passage across the river (now called Southey Creek) was opposed by Byrhtnoth, ealdorman of Essex, and his household. The poem, which lacks a beginning and end in the extant manuscript, tells of how the English reject the Viking demand for tribute, then allow them safe passage across the causeway from Northey, to enable a battle to take place. This turned out to be an unfortunate decision:
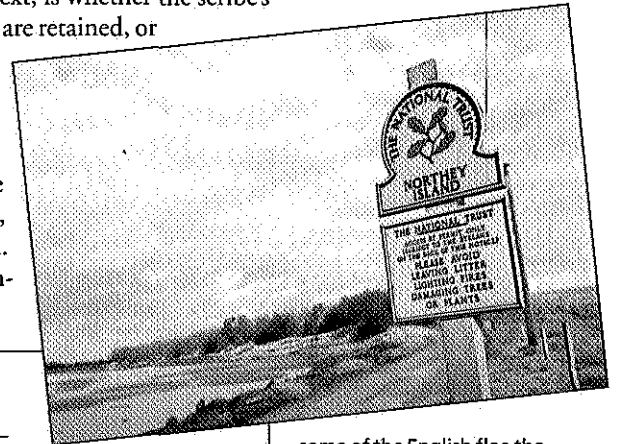
THE BATTLE OF MALDON

Byrhtpold maþelode, bord hafenode—
se þæs eald ʒeneat—æsc acpehte;
he ful baldlice beornas lærde: '
'Hiʒe sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mæʒen lytlað.
Her lið ure ealdor eall forheapen,
ʒod on ʒreote. A mæʒ ʒnornian
se ðe nu fram þis piʒpleʒan pendan þenceð.
Ic eom frod feores. Fram ic ne pille,
ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,
be spa leofan men licʒan þence.'
Spa hi Æþelʒares bearn ealle bylde
ʒodric to ʒuþe. Oft he ʒar forlet,
pælspere pindan on þa picinʒas;
spa he on þam folce fyrmest eode,
heop 7 hynde, oð þæt he on hilde ʒecranc.

Byrhtwold spoke; he grasped his shield—
he was an old follower—he shook the ash spear;
very boldly he exhorted the warriors:
'Courage shall be the fiercer, heart the bolder,
spirit the greater, as our strength lessens.
Here lies our chief all hewn down,
a noble man in the dust. He has cause ever to mourn
who intends now to turn from this war-play.
I am advanced in years. I will not hence,
but I by the side of my lord,
by so dear a man, intend to lie.'
Likewise, Godric, the son of Æthelgar, exhorted them all
to the battle. Often he let the spear fly,
the deadly spear speed away among the Vikings;
as he went out in the forefront of the army,
he hewed and struck, until he perished in the battle.

some of the English flee the field, Byrhtnoth is killed, and the remaining loyal soldiers die heroically. The extract above is from the last few lines of the extant text, when Byrhtwold, an old warrior, expresses the heroism which it is the purpose of the poem to commemorate.

The ford which led to the mainland, now built up into a causeway, is shown in the picture. It is only some 77 yards (70 m) long, which would thus enable the English and Viking leaders to shout their demands to each other – an exchange which is dramatically recorded in the poem.

HOW DO TWELVE BECOME FIVE?

Wer sæt æt wine   mid his wifum twam
ond his twegen suno ond his twa dohtor,
swase gesweostor, ond hyra suno twegen,
freolico frumbearn; fæder wæs þær inne
þara æþelinga æghwæðres mid,
eam ond nefa.   Ealra wæron fife
eorla ond idesa insittendra.

A man sat at wine with his two wives
and his two sons and his two daughters,
beloved sisters, and their two sons,
noble first-born; the father was in there
of both of those princes,
the uncle and the nephew. In all there were five
lords and ladies sitting in there.

This is one of the 95 poetic riddles (some of which date from the 8th century) in the *Exeter Book*, a late 10th-century compilation of secular and religious poetry. By 1072 it belonged to Bishop Leofric of Exeter, who bequeathed it to his cathedral. The solution to the riddle comes from the Book of Genesis, where it is said that Lot's two daughters lay with him, and each bore him a son.

THE RUNE POEM

Each stanza of this poem begins with the name of the rune printed alongside (p. 9). The poem would have been passed on orally, the rhythm and alliteration making it easy to remember, in much the same way as children today learn 'Thirty days hath September'.

Feoh byþ frofur fira gehwylcum—
ᚠ sceal ðeah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dælan
gif he wile for Drihtne domes hleotan.

Ur byþ anmod 7 oferhyrned,
ᚢ felafrecne deor, feohteþ mid hornum,
mære morstapa: þ is modig wuht!

Þorn byþ ðearle scearp, ðegna gehwylcum
ᚦ anfeng ys yfyl, ungemetun reþe
manna gehwylcun ðe him mid resteð.

Os byþ ordfruma ælcre spræce,
ᚩ wisdomes wraþu and witena frofur
and eorla gehwam eadnys and tohiht.

Rad byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum
ᚱ sefte, and swiþhwæt ðam ðe sitteþ onufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpaþas.

Cen byþ cwicera gehwam cuþ on fyre,
ᚳ blac and beorhtlic, byrneþ oftust
ðær hi æþelingas inne restaþ.

Wealth is a joy to every man—
  but every man must share it well
    if he wishes to gain glory in the sight of the Lord.

Aurochs is fierce, with gigantic horns,
  a very savage animal, it fights with horns,
    a well-known moor-stepper: it is a creature of
      courage!

Thorn is very sharp, harmful to every man
  who seizes it, unsuitably severe
    to every man who rests on it.

Mouth is the creator of all speech,
  a supporter of wisdom and comfort of wise men,
    and a blessing and hope to every man.

Journey is to every warrior in the hall
  pleasant, and bitingly tough to him who sits
    on a mighty steed over the mile-paths.

Torch is to every living thing known by its fire;
  bright and brilliant, it burns most often
    where the princes take their rest within.

Old English poetic manuscripts contained no titles. Titles such as *Beowulf* or *The Seafarer* have been added by editors, usually in the 19th century. Most of the poetry is also anonymous, the chief exceptions being the few lines known to be by Cædmon (p. 20) and four poems containing the name of Cynewulf woven in runes into the texts as an acrostic (p. 398), so that readers could pray for him. We know more of the prose authors, who included King Alfred, Archbishop Wulfstan, and Abbot Ælfric, but even here most of the surviving material, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (p. 14), is anonymous.

THE OPENING LINES OF *THE SEAFARER*

Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,
atol yþa gewealc.

Can I about myself true-poem utter,
of journeys tell, how I in toilsome-days
hardship-times often suffered
bitter heart-sorrow have endured,
come to know on ship many sorrow-halls
cruel rolling of waves.

FROM *THE DREAM OF THE ROOD*

Þæt wæs geara iu— ic þæt gyta geman—
þæt ic wæs aheawen holtes on ende
astyred of stefne minum. Genaman me ðær
      strange feondas,
geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me
      heora wergas hebban;
bæron me þær beornas on eaxlum, oð ðæt hie me
      on beorg asetton;
gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge. Geseah ic
      þa Frean mancynnes
efstan elne micle, þæt he me wolde on gestigan.

That was very long ago— I remember it still—
that I was cut down at the forest's edge
stirred from my root. Strong enemies took me there,
made me into a spectacle there for themselves, ordered
      me to lift up their criminals;
men carried me there on shoulders, until they set me on
      a hill;
many enemies fastened me there. I saw then the Lord of
      mankind
hastening with great courage, that he intended to climb
      on me.

The opening lines of *The Seafarer*, from the *Exeter Book*.

455 Her Hengest 7 Horsa fuhton wiþ Wyrt georne þam cyninge, in þaere stowe þe is gecueden Agæles þrep, 7 his broþur Horsan man ofslog. 7 æfter þam Hengest feng [to] rice 7 Æsc his sunu.

455 In this year Hengest and Horsa fought against King Vortigern at a place which is called Agælesþrep [Aylesford], and his brother Horsa was slain. And after that Hengest succeeded to the kingdom and Æsc, his son.

457 Her Hengest 7 Æsc fuhton wiþ Brettas in þære stowe þe is ge cueden Crecgan ford, 7 þær ofslogon .IIII. wera, 7 þa Brettas þa forleton Cent lond, 7 mid micle ege flugon to Lunden byrg.

457 In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford], and there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.

465 Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wið Walas neah Wippedes fleote, 7 þær .XII. Wilisce aldor menn ofslogon, 7 hiera þegn an þær wearþ ofslægen, þam wæs noma Wipped.

465 In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of their thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.

473 Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wiþ Walas, 7 genamon un arimedlico here reaf, 7 þa Walas flugon þa Englan swa fyr.

473 In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English like fire.

477 Her cuom Ælle on Breten lond, 7 his .III. suna. Cymen, 7 Wlencing, 7 Cissa. mid .III. scipum, on þa stowe þe is nemned Cymenes ora, 7 þær ofslogon monige Wealas, 7 sume on fleame bedrifon on þone wudu þe is genemned Andredes leage.

477 In this year Ælle came to Britain and his three sons Cymen, Wlencing, and Cissa with three ships at the place which is called Cymenesora [The Owers to the south of Selsey Bill], and there they slew many Welsh and drove some to flight into the wood which is called Andredesleag [Sussex Weald].

485 Her Ælle gefeaht wiþ Walas neah Meare rædes burnan stæðe.

485 In this year Ælle fought against the Welsh near the bank of [the stream] Mearcrædesburna.

488 Her Æsc feng to rice, 7 was .XXIIII. wintra Cantwara cyning.

488 In this year Æsc succeeded to the kingdom, and was king of the people of Kent twenty-four years.

(After C. Plummer, 1892. Trans. G. N. Garmonsway, 1972.)

SOURCES OF THE CHRONICLE

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is not a single text, but a compilation from several sources which differ in date and place of origin. It takes the form of a year-by-year diary, with some years warranting extensive comment, some a bare line or two, and many nothing at all. Most ancient European chronicles were kept in Latin, but the present work is distinctive for its use of Old English – and also for the vast time-span it covers, from year 1 (the birth of Christ) to various dates in the 11th or 12th century.

There are seven surviving chronicle manuscripts, six of which are completely in Old English, the seventh partly in Latin. Scholars have given each text a distinguishing letter name, but they are more commonly known by the name of their source location or that of an early owner.

• Text A[1]: the *Parker Chronicle*. This is the oldest manuscript, written in a single hand from the beginning to 891, then kept up to date in 13 or 14 other hands up to 1070. Its name derives from a former owner, Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury (1504–75). It is sometimes called the *Winchester Chronicle*, because its 9th-century subject-matter was compiled at Winchester, being later transferred to Canterbury. This is the version from which the facing extract is taken.
• Text A[2]: Fragments of an 11th-century copy of the *Parker Chronicle*, almost completely destroyed in the same Cottonian Library fire that damaged *Beowulf* (p. 9).
• Texts B and C: the *Abingdon Chronicles*. Two West Saxon versions: the first (B), extending to year 977, was copied c. 1000, and kept at Canterbury without additions; the second (C), extending to 1066, is a mid-11th century copy which was kept up to date.
• Text D: the *Worcester Chronicle*. A text, with northern material added, which was sent to the diocese of Worcester. It was written in the mid-11th century, and kept up to date until 1079.
• Text E: the *Peterborough Chronicle*; also called the *Laud Chronicle*, after Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645). This version, copied at Peterborough in a single hand until 1121, extends as far as 1154.
• Text F: the bilingual *Canterbury Epitome*. This is a version of E in Latin and English, written in Canterbury c. 1100.

The Easter Tables
The text opposite shows the years 455 to 490 from Text E, and deals with the events soon after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons (p. 7). In this part of the Chronicle, the scribe has written a series of years on separate lines, assuming that a single line would suffice for each year. (He missed out year 468, and had to insert it afterwards – an interesting example of how scribal errors can be made.)

The Chronicles are not all like this. They change in style as they develop, and lose their list-like appearance. Many of the later entries, especially those written by contemporaries, contain a great deal of narrative, and take on the character of literary essays under their year headings.

The listing technique shown in the illustration is one which originated with the *Easter Tables*, drawn up to help the clergy determine the date of the feast in any year. A page consisted of a sequence of long horizontal lines. Each line began with a year number, which was followed by several columns of astronomical data (e.g. movements of the Sun and Moon), and the results of the calculation. Of particular relevance was the space left at the end of each line, which was used to write short notes about events to help distinguish the years from each other (such as 'In this year Cnut became king'). The Chronicles grew out of this tradition, but as the intention changed, and they became more like historical records, these end-of-line notes took up more space than was expected, and the scribe had to make room where he could find it. This is why some of the entries in the illustration appear opposite several year numbers.
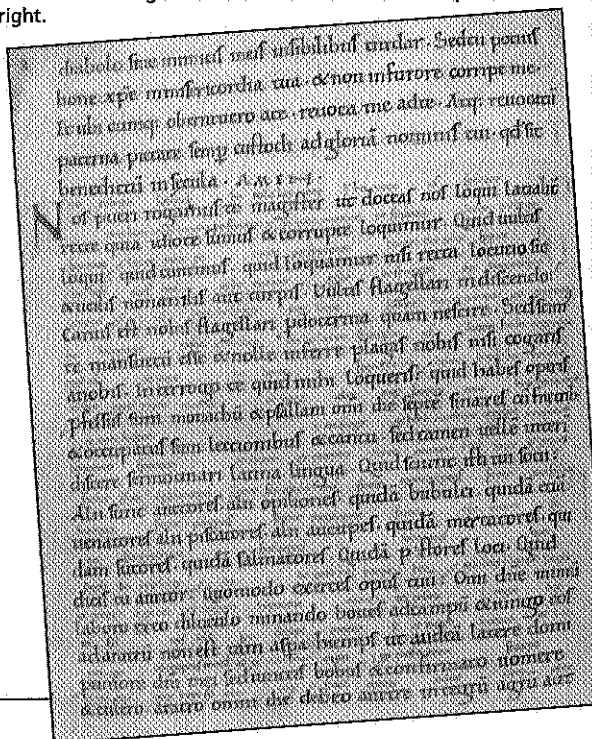
OLD ENGLISH LETTERS

Although there is much in common between Old and Modern English, it is the differences which strike us most forcibly when we first encounter edited Anglo-Saxon texts. The editors have done a great deal to make the texts more accessible to present-day readers, by introducing modern conventions of word spaces, punctuation, capitalization, and line division (p. 12), but there are certain features of the original spelling which are usually retained, and it is these which make the language look alien. Learning to interpret the distinctive symbols of Old English is therefore an essential first step.

Old English texts were written on parchment or vellum. The first manuscripts were in the Roman alphabet, using a half-uncial, minuscule script (p. 258) brought over by Irish missionaries: a good example is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, illustrated on p. 7. The rounded letter shapes of this script later developed into the more angular and cursive style (called the *insular script*), which was the usual form of writing until the 11th century.

The Old English alphabet was very similar to the one still in use, though any modern eye looking at the original manuscripts would be immediately struck by the absence of capital letters.

- A few of the letters were different in shape. There was an elongated shape for *s*, for example. Modern letter *g* appeared as ʒ, often called 'yogh' (for its sound, see p. 18). A few other letter-shapes, such as *e, f,* and *r*, also look rather different.

London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A. xv, fol. 60v. The first five lines of glossed text are transcribed in the panel to the right.

- Several modern letters will not be seen: *j* is usually spelled with a ʒ, *v* with an *f, q, x,* and *z* are very rarely used.
- *w* was written using a runic symbol, 'wynn', ƿ, which can still be seen printed in older editions of Old English texts (p. 12). Modern editions use *w*. Variant forms using *u* or *uu* are sometimes found, especially in early texts.
- *æ* was called 'ash', a name borrowed from the runic alphabet (p. 9), though the symbol is an adaptation of Latin *ae*, which it gradually replaced during the 8th century. Its sound was somewhere between [a] and [e] (p. 18).

ÆLFRIC'S *COLLOQUY*

The *Colloquy* is one of the earliest English educational documents. Colloquies were a standard technique of instruction in the monastic schools of Europe, and were especially used for teaching Latin. Ælfric's *Colloquy* takes the form of a conversation between a teacher and a young monk, and deals largely with the daily tasks of the monk's companions in the school and of the monk's own life there. The work is of considerable historical interest for the picture it provides of the life of ordinary people in Anglo-Saxon society. It is also of great linguistic interest as, in one of the four surviving manuscripts (Cotton Tiberius A.iii, shown below left), someone has added glosses in Old English above the lines. This was almost certainly a later teacher, rather than a pupil or Ælfric himself – though the point has been much debated.

Little is known about Ælfric. He was born *c.* 955, and died *c.* 1020. He was a monk at Winchester, and he became Abbot of Eynsham in *c.* 1005. His other writing includes many homilies, a saints' lives, and a *Latin Grammar* for which later scholars gave him the title of 'Grammaticus'. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest writers of

Old English prose. Certainly, his *Colloquy* is remarkable for the liveliness and realism, tinged with humour, of the dialogue.

The *Colloquy* shows two writing styles. The Latin uses Carolingian minuscule (p. 258), whereas the Old English is in an older style (as shown by such features as the rounded *a*, the insular *s*, the dotted *y*, and the use of *yogh*). Note the early punctuation system, especially the form for the question mark in the Latin text. A period is used to end sentences, and also in some places where we would nowadays use a comma.

The Old English shows typical features of late West Saxon (p. 28), and probably dates from the first half of the 11th century. Basic punctuation has been added to the above transcript, as an aid for the modern reader – but as the text is a gloss, rather than a coherent narrative, the sentences do not always run smoothly. The gloss is almost complete in these opening lines, but there are several omitted words later in the *Colloquy*.

In this transcript, each turn in the dialogue is placed on a new line. Abbreviated forms marked by a tilde in the manuscript have been expanded in square brackets, but 7 (for *et*) has been left. The transcript does not show the dot over the *y*.

ƿe cildra biddaþ þe, eala lareoƿ, þ[æt] þu tæce us sprecan forþam unʒelærede
    ƿe syndon 7 ʒepæmmodlice ƿe sprecaþ.
hƿæt ƿille ʒe sprecan?
hƿæt rece ƿe hƿæt ƿe sprecan, buton hit riht spræc sy 7 behefe, næs idel oþþe
    fracod.
ƿille bespunʒen on leornunʒe?
leofre ys us beon bespunʒen for lare þænne hit ne cunnan.

Nos pueri rogamus te magister ut doceas nos loqui latialit[er] recte quia idiote sumus &
    corrupte loquimur.
Quid uultis loqui?
Quid curamus. quid loquamur nisi recta locutio sit & utilis, non anilis aut turpis.
Uultis flagellari in discendo?
Carius est nobis flagellari p[ro] doctrina quam nescire.

We boys ask you, master, that you teach us to speak Latin correctly, because we are
    ignorant and we speak ungrammatically.
What do you want to speak?
What do we care what we speak, as long as the speech is correct and useful, not foolish
    or base.
Are you ready to be beaten while you learn?
We would rather be beaten for our teaching than not to know it.

• þ was called 'thorn', both the name and symbol being borrowed from the runic alphabet. It represented either of the 'th' sounds [θ] or [ð] (p. 18). This symbol and ð (see below) were in fact interchangeable: a scribe might use first one, then the other, in the same manuscript – though thorn became commoner in the later Old English period. (A *th* spelling was also sporadically used at the very beginning of the Old English period, presumably reflecting Irish influence, but it was quickly replaced by the new symbols.)

• ð was called 'that' in Anglo-Saxon times, though the name given to it by 19th-century editors is 'eth' (pronounced as in the first syllable of *weather*, see p. 18). The origin of this symbol is obscure, though it may be an adaptation of an early Irish letter.

• Numbers were written only in Roman symbols (as can be seen in the dates of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 14). Arabic numerals came much later.

The standard Old English alphabet thus had the following 24 letters:

a, æ, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, þ, ð, u, w, y

Several of these letters were used in combinations (*digraphs*) to represent single sound units, in much the same way as do several modern forms, such as *th* and *ea* (as in *meat*).

One other point about spelling should be noted. There was a great deal of variation, reflecting the different preferences of individual scribes, as well as regional attempts to capture local sounds precisely. Practices also varied over time. But even with a single scribe in a single place at a single time, there could be variation, as can be seen from the existence of several variant forms in manuscripts such as *Beowulf.* The spelling became much more regular by

the time of Ælfric (in the late 10th century), but this was a temporary state of affairs. Change was on the horizon, in the form of new Continental scribal practices, an inevitable graphic consequence of 1066 (p. 40).


THE LINDISFARNE GOSPELS

A page from the Lindisfarne Gospels, written at the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne (also called Holy Island), two miles off the Northumberland coast in NE England, and linked to the mainland by a causeway at low tide. The text was written *c.* 700, if we can trust the brief biographical note added in a space on one of the later pages (fol. 259). This says that Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne (in office, 698–721), wrote the book, that Æthelwald,

Bishop of Lindisfarne (in office, 724–40), bound it, and that Billfrith made an outer casing for it, which he decorated with precious stones. The text is now in the British Museum, but the gems no longer survive.

The illustration shows the opening of Matthew 1.18. This verse was held to be the real beginning of this Gospel, as the preceding verses contained only genealogical material, hence the richness of the illumination at this point. The page is of considerable artistic interest because

of its mixture of Irish, Germanic, and Byzantine motifs; but it is also of great graphological interest, as it displays several styles of writing (§18).

The rubric above the monogram is in uncials. The four lines of text below are in ornamental capitals, with elaborate links between some letters to save space. The first line of the Gospel text has been left unfinished. Between the lines is an Old English gloss written in an insular script by a Northumbrian scribe in the 10th century.
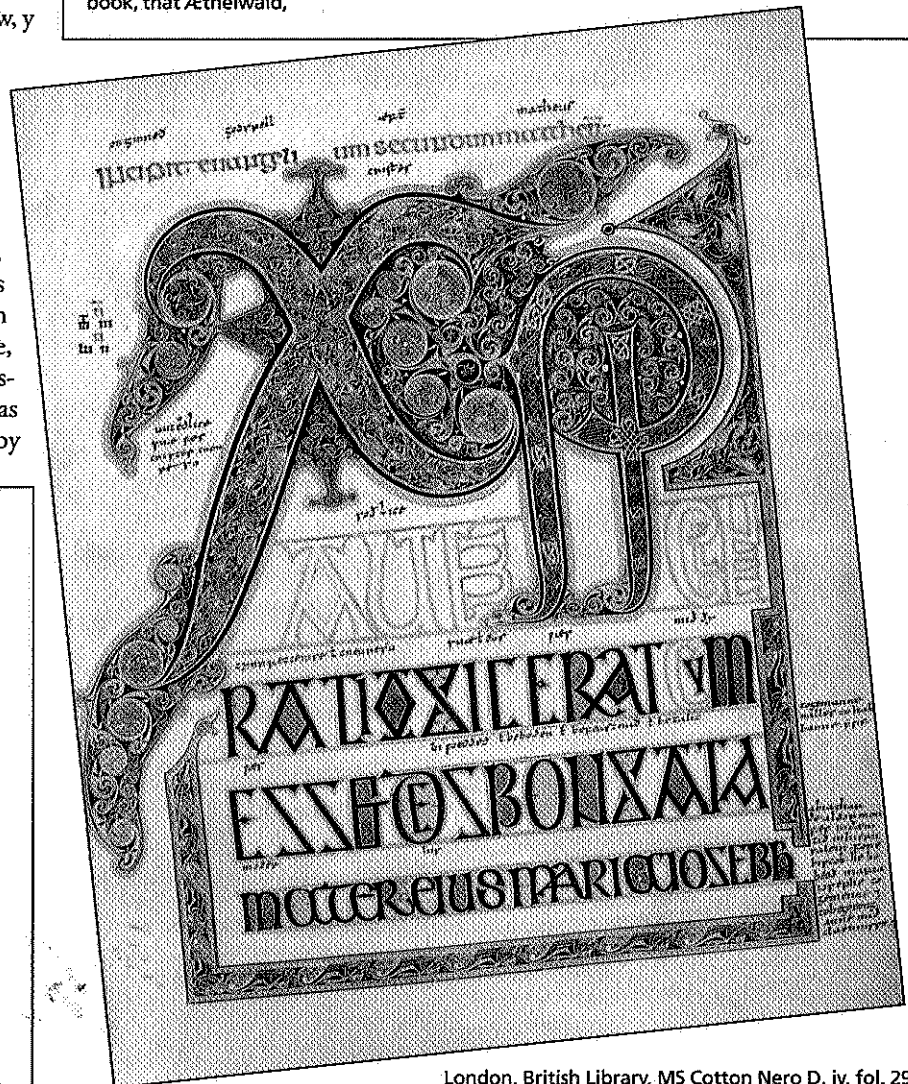
Incipit euangelium secundum mattheum
Christi autem generatio sic
erat cvm esset desponsata
mater eius Maria Iosebh.

onginneð godspell æft- matheus
Cristes soðlice cynnreccenise ɪ cneuresu-
    suæ ɪ ðus
wæs mið ðy wæs biwoedded ɪ beboden ɪ
befeastnad ɪ betaht
moder his

(The glossator is using several Old English words to express one in Latin; these are linked using the abbreviation for Latin *uel* ('or'): ɪ. He also sometimes adds further explanatory comments, in the margins. For the use of ~, see p. 12.)
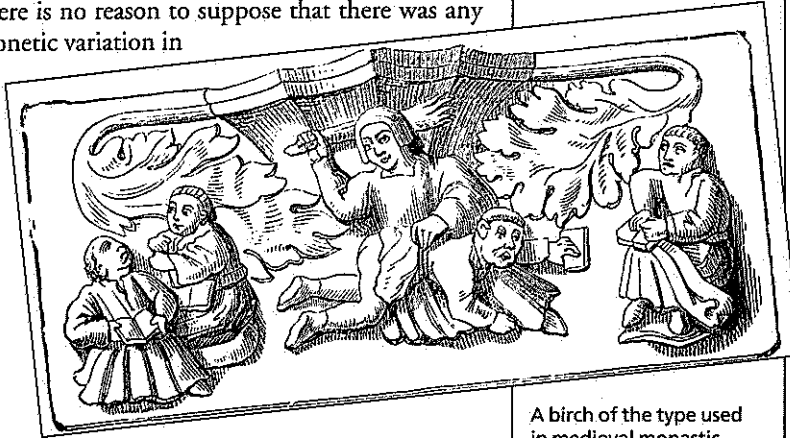
The beginning of the Gospel according to Matthew
Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this wise. When Mary his mother had been betrothed to Joseph...

(After P. H. Blair, 1977.)

London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D. iv, fol. 29.

OLD ENGLISH SOUNDS

How do we know what Old English sounded like? The unhelpful answer is that we do not. In later periods, we can rely on accounts by contemporary writers (p. 69) – but there is none of this in Old English. The best we can do is make a series of informed guesses, based on a set of separate criteria (see below), and hope that the results are sufficiently similar to warrant some general conclusions. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to this issue, and we now have a fair degree of certainty about how most of the sounds were pronounced. If an Anglo-Saxon were available, using the information on these pages we could probably communicate intelligibly.

We would have to get used to each other's accent, of course, in much the same way as modern speakers (unused, say, to Geordie or Cockney speech) need to do. There is no reason to suppose that there was any less phonetic variation in

Anglo-Saxon times than there is today, and the symbols opposite should not be interpreted too narrowly. To say that Old English *æ* was pronounced as an open front vowel (p. 238) is sufficient to distinguish it from *e* and other vowels, but it does not tell us the exact vowel quality which would have been used.

The evidence

There are four main types of evidence used in deducing the sound values of Old English letters.

• *Alphabetical logic* We know a great deal about how the letters of the Roman alphabet were pronounced, and it seems reasonable to assume that, when the missionaries adapted this alphabet to Old English, they tried to do so in a consistent and logical way. The letter representing the sound of *m* in Latin would have been used to represent the same sound in English. Likewise, if they found it necessary to find a new letter, this must have been because they felt no Latin letters were suitable (as in the case of the new symbol *æ*).

Similarly, a great deal of information comes from the way variations of regional accent and changes over time are shown in the spelling of Old English texts. The

GETTING IT RIGHT

Generations of Old English students have pored over tables such as this one, in an effort to work out the 'sound' of the language. Many must have identified during their university days with the students of Ælfric (p. 16), caring not so much about what they said, as long as they said it right. But the analogy is only a partial one: 20th-century university tutors of Old English would not, on the whole, beat their charges.

A birch of the type used in medieval monastic schools.

Notes
Some of the sounds are restricted to certain contexts.

1 before m, n, n(g)
2 before/after i, and often æ, e, y
3 between voiced sounds
4 between back vowels
5 initially
6 after æ, e, i, y
7 after a, o, u
8 between vowels

The following riddle (No. 86 in the *Exeter Book* (p.12)) illustrates the use of this transcription in a continuous piece of writing.

(After R. Quirk, V. Adams, & D. Davy, 1975.)

Letter	Example and its meaning	IPA symbol	Modern example
æ	sæt 'sat'	[æ]	Southern BrE s*a*t
ǣ	dǣd 'deed'	[ɛː]	*French* bê*te*
a	mann 'man'	[ɒ][1]	AmE h*o*t
a	dagas 'days'	[ɑ]	German L*a*nd
ā	hām 'home'	[ɑː]	f*a*ther
c	cyrice 'church'	[tʃ][2]	*ch*ur*ch*
c	cēne 'bold'	[k]	*k*een
cg	ecg 'edge'	[dʒ]	e*dge*
e	settan 'set'	[e]	s*e*t
ē	he 'he'	[eː]	*German* L*e*ben
ea	earm 'arm'	[æə]	*as for* [æ], [ɛː],
ēa	eare 'ear'	[ɛːə]	[e], [eː],
eo	eorl 'nobleman'	[eə]	*followed by the*
ēo	beor 'beer'	[eːə]	*first syllable of a*bout
f	ǣfre 'ever'	[v][3]	e*v*er
f	fīf 'five'	[f]	*f*i*f*e
g	gyt 'get'	[j][2]	*y*et
g	fugol 'bird'	[ɣ][4]	*colloq. German* sa*g*en
g	gān 'go'	[g]	*g*o
h	heofon 'heaven'	[h][5]	*h*eaven
h	niht 'night'	[ç][6]	*German* i*ch*
h	brōhte 'brought'	[x][7]	German bra*ch*te
i	sittan 'sit'	[i]	s*i*t
ī	wīd 'wide'	[iː]	w*ee*d
o	monn 'man'	[ɒ][1]	AmE h*o*t
o	God 'God'	[ɔ]	BrE h*o*t
ō	god 'good'	[oː]	*German* S*oh*n
s	rīsan 'rise'	[z][8]	ri*s*e
s	hūs 'house'	[s]	hou*s*e
sc	scip 'ship'	[ʃ]	*sh*ip
þ, ð	ōþer, ōðer 'other'	[ð][8]	o*th*er
þ, ð	þurh, ðurh 'through'	[θ]	*th*rough
u	ful 'full'	[u]	f*u*ll
ū	hūs 'house'	[uː]	g*oo*se
y	wynn 'joy'	[y]	*German* W*ü*rde
ȳ	rȳman 'make way'	[yː]	*German* G*ü*te

Wiht cwōm gangan   þǣr weras sǣton
[wiçt kwoːm gɒŋgɑn   θeːr weras seːtɒn]

monige on mæðle,   mōde snottre;
[mɒnijə ɔn mæðlə   moːdə snɔtrə]

hæfde ān ēage   ond ēaran twā
[hævdə ɑːn eːəjə   ɒnd eːərɑn twɑː]

ond twēgen fēt,   twelf hund hēafda,
[ɒnd tweːjən feːt   twelf hund heːəvdɑ]

hrycg ond wombe   ond honda twa
[hrydʒ ɒnd wɒmbə   ɒnd hɒndə twɑː]

earmas ond eaxle,   ānne swēoran
[eːərmas ɒnd æəkslə   ɑːnːə sweːərɑn]

ond sīdan twā.   Saga hwæt ic hātte!
[ɒnd siːdɑn twɑː   sɑɣɑ hwæt itʃ hɑːtːə]

scribes generally tried to write words down to show the way they were spoken. They were not in a culture where there were arbitrary rules for standardized spelling (though rigorous conventions were maintained in certain abbeys), so we are not faced with such problems as silent letters: the *w* of *writan*, the ancestor of *write*, was pronounced. Old English is, accordingly, much more 'phonetic' than Modern English (p. 272).

• *Comparative reconstruction* We can work backwards from later states of the language to make deductions about how Old English must have sounded. Several of the sounds of Modern English (especially dialect forms) are likely to have close similarities with those of Old English. It is unlikely that there is any real difference in the way most of the consonants were pronounced then and now. The chief problems are the vowels, whose values are always more difficult to pinpoint (p. 237).

• *Sound changes* We know a great deal about the kinds of sound change which take place as language progresses. It is therefore possible to propose a particular sound value for an Old English letter different from the one in existence today, as long as we are able to give a plausible explanation for the change. For example, the Old English equivalent to *it* was *hit*. If we claim that the *h* was pronounced, we have to assume that people stopped pronouncing it at a later stage in the language. Is this a likely sound change? Given that the dropping of *h* in unstressed pronouns is something that happens regularly today (*I saw 'im*), it would seem so.

• *Poetic evidence* The way in which poets make words rhyme or alliterate can provide important clues about the way the sound system works. So can the rhythmical patterns of lines of verse, which can show the way a word was stressed; and thus indicate what value to give to a vowel appearing in an unstressed syllable – a critical matter in the late Old English period (p. 32).

Complications

There are many pitfalls to trap the unwary philologist. Scribes could be very inconsistent. They were also prone to error. But of course we do not know in advance whether an idiosyncratic form in a manuscript is in fact an error or a deliberate attempt to represent an ongoing sound change or a regionalism. A great deal of detailed comparative work may be required before we can be sure.

The absence of universal spelling rules can also pose a problem, as there was no necessity for scribes to be consistent, and many were not (p. 10). Manuscripts can vary in their use of *þ* and *ð* (p. 16), single or double consonants (*s* or *ss*, *d* or *dd*), and several groups of vowels (notably, *i*, *y*, and *ie*). At one point we might find *hit*, and at another, *hyt*; *gyldan* 'pay' might be spelled *gieldan*; *þær* might be *þar*. Such difficulties, it must be appreciated, contribute only to the fortitude and motivation of the true Old English phonologist. *Hiʒe sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre* (p. 12).

Some English word pairs showing the effects of a phonological change which took place over 1,200 years ago.

goose – geese
tooth – teeth
man – men
mouse – mice
hale – health
doom – deem
full – fill
whole – heal
fall – fell (vb.)
blood – bleed
foul – filth
long – length
broad – breadth
old – elder

THE FIRST VOWEL SHIFT

We can say one thing with certainty about the accent of the Anglo-Saxon invaders after they arrived in Britain: it changed. We know this because the words which emerged in Old English out of the Germanic spoken on the Continent (p. 6) looked (and therefore sounded) very different from their later counterparts in the early days of German. What happened to cause such a difference?

A related observation arises out of the way some Latin words were borrowed into Old English without a change in their vowel, whereas others did change. Latin *caseus* became *cyse* 'cheese' in Old English, but *castellum* became *castel* 'village'. In the first case, the *a* vowel changed; in the second case, it did not. There are many similar examples. What happened to cause such a difference?

i-mutation

The explanation is now a well-established part of Germanic philology. It asserts that the Old English vowels changed in quality between the time the Anglo-Saxons left the Continent and the time Old English was first written down. By examining hundreds of cases, it is possible to establish a pattern in the way this change took place.

In Germanic there were many words where a vowel in a stressed syllable was immediately followed by a high front vowel ([i]) or vowel-like sound ([j]) in the next syllable. The plural of **fōt* is

thought to have been **fōtiz*, with the stress on *fō*. For some reason (see below), the quality of this high front sound caused the preceding vowel to change (mutate). In the case of **fōt*, the *ō* became *ē*, which ultimately came to be pronounced [i:], as in modern *feet*. The *-iz* ending dropped away, for once the plural was being shown by the *e* vowel, it was unnecessary to have an ending as well. *Fēt* therefore emerged as an irregular noun in English – though the process which gave rise to it was perfectly regular, affecting hundreds of cases.

This process has come to be called *i-mutation*, or *i-umlaut* (a German term meaning 'sound alteration'). It is thought to have taken place during the 7th century. There is no sign of the vowels continuing to change in this way in later periods. The process also explains the Latin example above: *caseus* must have been borrowed very early into English, before the time that *i*-mutation was operating, as its vowel has been affected (in this case, the *a* has become *y*); *castellum*, however, must have been borrowed after the time when *i*-mutation stopped taking place, as its *a* vowel has remained in *castel*.

i-mutation is a kind of 'vowel harmony' – a very natural process which affects many modern languages. People, it seems, readily fall into the habit of making one vowel in a word sound more like another in the same word, and this is what happened in 7th-century Old English. All back vowels in the context described above were changed into front vowels – and all short front

vowels and diphthongs were affected, too, being articulated even further forward and higher (with the exception of [i], of course, which is already as far forward and as high in the mouth as any vowel can be).

There are a few exceptions and complications, which analysts still puzzle over, but the general *effect on the language was immense, as this* sound change applied to the most frequently occurring word classes, all of which had *i* sounds in their inflectional endings. This is why we have in Modern English such pairs as *food* / *feed* (from the addition of an **-ian* verb-forming suffix in Germanic), *as well as strong* / *strength and several* others (from the addition of an **-iþ* adjective-forming suffix). Not all the forms affected by *i*-mutation have survived into Modern English, though. In Old English, the plural of *book* was *bec*, but this has not come through into Modern English as *beek*: the forces of analogy (p. 200) have taken over, and caused a change to the regular *books*.

We do not know why *i*-mutation operated when it did. What was it that made 7th-century Anglo-Saxons start pronouncing their vowels more towards the front of their mouths? And why did the process not affect all cases of *i* in a following suffix (words ending in *-ing*, for example, were not affected)? This phonological detective story is by no means over.

The asterisk marks a hypothetical form.

SOME FEATURES OF OLD ENGLISH GRAMMAR

To modern eyes and ears, Old English grammar (for grammatical terminology, see Part III) provides a fascinating mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The word order is much more varied than it would be in Modern English, but there are several places where it is strikingly similar. Adjectives usually go before their nouns, as do prepositions, articles, and other grammatical words, just as they do today. Sometimes, whole sentences are identical in the order of words, or nearly so, as can be seen from the word-for-word translation in the Cædmon text below. The main syntactic differences affect the placing of the verb, which quite often appears before the subject, and also at the very end of the clause – a noticeable feature of this particular story.

In Modern English, word order is relatively fixed. The reason Old English order could vary so much is that the relationships between the parts of the sentence

were signalled by other means. Like other Germanic languages, Old English was *inflected*: the job a word did in the sentence was signalled by the kind of ending it had. Today, most of these inflections have died away, leaving the modern reader with the major task of getting used to the word endings, in order to understand the Old English texts. It is necessary to learn the different forms taken by the verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and the definite article. The irregular verbs, which change their form from present to past tense, are a particular problem (as they continue to be, for foreign learners), because there are so many more of them. Nonetheless, it should be plain from reading the glosses to the Cædmon extract that present-day English speakers already have a 'feel' for Old English grammar. (Long vowel marks (p. 16) are added in the notes below, as an aid to pronunciation.)

---

wæs he se mon in weoruldhade geseted oð þa tide þe he
Was he the man in secular life   settled until the time that he

wæs gelyfdre   ylde; ond he næfre nænig leoð geleornode, ond he
was of-advanced age; and he never any   poem learned,   and he

for þon oft in gebeorscipe, þonne þær wæs blisse intinga
therefore often at banquet,   when there was of-joy occasion

gedemed, þæt heo ealle sceolden þurh endebyrdnesse be hearpan
decided,   that they all   should   by   arrangement   with harp

5 singan, þonne he geseah þa hearpan him nealecan, þonne aras he
to sing, when he saw   the harp   him approach, then   arose he

for scome from þæm symble, ond ham eode to his huse. þa   he
for shame from the feast,   and home went to his house. When he

þæt þa sumre tide dyde, þæt he forlet þæt hus   þæs
that a certain time did,   that he left   the house of the

gebeorscipes, ond ut wæs gongende to neata   scipene,
banquet,   and out was going   to of-cattle stall

þara   heord him wæs þære neahte beboden; þa   he ða þær
of which keeping him was that night entrusted; when he   there

10 in gelimplice tide his leomu on reste gesette ond onslepte,
at suitable   time his limbs at rest set   and fell asleep,

þa stod him sum   mon æt   þurh swefn, ond hine halette
then stood him a certain man beside in   dream, and him hailed

ond grette, ond hine be his noman nemnde, 'Cedmon, sing me
and greeted, and him by his name called.   'Cædmon, sing me

hwæthwugu.' þa   ondswarede he, ond cwæð, 'Ne con ic noht
something.'   Then answered   he, and said,   'Not can I nothing

singan; ond ic for þon of þeossum gebeorscipe ut eode ond hider
sing;   and I for that from this   banquet   out went and hither

15 gewat, for þon ic naht singan ne cuðe.'   Eft he cwæð,
came, because I nothing to sing not knew how.' Again he spoke,

se ðe wið hine sprecende wæs, 'Hwæðre þu meaht me
he that with him speaking was, 'However you can   for-me

singan.' þa cwæð he, 'Hwæt sceal ic singan?' Cwæð he, 'Sing
sing.'   Then said he, 'What shall I sing?'   Said he, 'Sing

me frumsceaft.' þa   he ða þas andsware onfeng, þa ongon he
me creation.'   When he   this answer   received, then began he

sona   singan in herenesse Godes Scyppendes, þa   fers
immediately to sing in praise   of God Creator,   those verses

20 ond þa word þe he næfre gehyrde...
and those words that he never had heard...

WORD ORDER

The varying forms of nouns, adjectives, and articles tell us how the parts of the clause relate to each other. In Modern English, the difference between (i) and (ii) is a matter of word order:

(i) *the woman saw the man*
(ii) *the man saw the woman*

In Old English, the two sentences would be:

(i) *sēo cwēn geseah þone guman*
(ii) *se guma geseah þā cwēn.*

The nominative feminine form *seo* in (i) has changed to an accusative form, *þā*, in (ii). Similarly, the accusative masculine form *þone* in (i) has become a nominative *se* in (ii).

It is thus always clear who is doing what to whom, regardless of the order in which the noun phrases appear: *þone guman geseah sēo cwēn* has the same meaning as (i).

WÆS HE SE MON...

wæs

The past tense of the verb 'be' has changed little since Old English times, apart from the loss of the plural ending.

* *wæs* 'was' 1st/3rd sg.
  wǣre 'were' 2nd sg.
  wǣron 'were' 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

The present tense forms, however, show several differences. To begin with, Old English had two sets of words expressing the notion of 'be', one parallel to Latin *esse* and the other to Latin *fui*.

* *wesan*
  eom 1st sg.
  eart 2nd sg.

is 3rd sg.
sind(on) 1st/2nd/3rd pl.
* *bēon*
  bēo 1st sg.
  bist 2nd sg.
  bið 3rd sg.
  bēoð 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

There were also subjunctive, imperative, and participial forms of both verbs.
    There seem to have been several differences in the way the two sets of verbs were used, though there is insufficient evidence to draw up hard-and-fast rules. The *bēon* forms were preferred in habitual and repetitive contexts, and especially when there was a future implication. Ælfric's *Latin Grammar* actually equates *eom, eart, is* to Latin *sum, es,* *est*, and *bēo, bist, bið* to *erō, eris, erit*. There is a clear example of this difference in one of the Homilies, where the speaker addresses the Holy Trinity:

ðu ðe æfre wære, and æfre *bist*, and nu *eart*, an ælmihtig God... *you who always were, and ever will be, and now*

hē

The personal pronoun system had more members than we find in Modern English, and several of them are well illustrated in this extract (the numbers below refer to lines). Modern equivalent forms are given below, but these do not capture the way in which the pronouns were used in Old English, where gender is grammatical (p. 209): for example, *bōc* 'book' is feminine, and would be referred to as *heo* 'she', whereas *mægden* 'girl' is neuter, and would be referred to as *hit*. (This list gives the standard forms found in late West Saxon (p. 28), and ignores spelling variations.)

* *ic* (13) 'I' nom.
  mē (16) 'me' acc./dat.
  mīn 'mine' gen.
* *wē* 'we' nom.
  ūs 'us' acc./dat.
  ūre 'our' gen.
* *þū* (16) 'thou' (sg.) nom.
  þē 'thee' acc./dat.
  þīn 'thine' gen.

* *gē* 'ye' (pl.) nom.
  ēow 'you' acc./dat.
  ēower 'yours' gen.
* *hē* (1) 'he' nom.
  hine (11) 'him' acc.
  his (6) 'his' gen.
  him (5) '(to) him' dat.
* *hēo* 'she' nom.
  hī 'her' acc.
  hire 'hers' gen./dat.
* *hit* 'it' nom./acc.
  his 'its' gen.
  him '(to) it' dat.
* *hī/hēo* 'they/them' nom./acc.
  hira 'theirs' gen.
  him '(to) them' dat.

In addition, the language showed the remains of a 'dual' personal pronoun system, but only in the 1st and 2nd persons. The 1st person form meant 'we two' (nom. *wit*, acc./dat. *unc*, gen. *uncer*); the 2nd person form 'you two' (nom. *git*, acc./dat. *inc*, gen. *incer*). This disappeared by the 13th century.
    There are obvious correspondences with the modern pronouns in most cases, but not between the old and modern sets of 3rd person plural forms. The West Saxon forms were supplanted by Scandinavian forms some time after the Norman Conquest, perhaps because people felt they needed to make a clear difference in pronunciation between the 3rd person singular and plural forms – *him*, in particular, must have been a source of confusion. Whatever the reason, Viking influence prevailed, and the modern English forms now begin with *th-*. (For the special problem of *she*, see p. 43.)

se

Old English nouns may be masculine, feminine, or neuter, regardless of the biological sex of their referents. They also appear in nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative forms (p. 202), depending on their function in the clause. The nominative masculine form of the definite article, *se*, is seen here with *mon* (a common spelling for *man*); the equivalent feminine form, *sēo*, would be found with *hearpe* 'harp'; and the equivalent neuter form, *þæt*, would be found with *hūs*. Other forms of the article can be seen in the extract – though it should be noted that articles are not used as much as they would be in Modern English, as can be seen from 'in dream' (11) and other such cases:

* *þā* The acc. sg. form of *sēo*, following the preposition *oð* 'until' (1), or as object of the verb (5, 7). It also appears as the acc. pl. of *þæt* (19, 20).
* *þǣm* (6) The dat. sg. of *þæt*, following the preposition *from*.
* *þæs* (7) The gen. sg. of *þæt*.

ABBREVIATIONS

acc.	accusative case
dat.	dative case
gen.	genitive case
nom.	nominative case
pl.	plural
sg.	singular
1st	1st person
2nd	2nd person
3rd	3rd person

... geseted

There are three main kinds of Modern English verbs (p. 204), and all three can be traced back to Old English.

1. Those forming their past tense by adding *-ed* to the root form of the present tense: *jump/jumped*. Then as now, the majority of verbs are of this type.
2. Those forming their past tense by changing a vowel in the root form of the present tense: *see/saw*. These are called *vocalic* or 'strong' verbs in Old English grammars, and the patterned changes in vowel quality which they display are described as *vowel gradation* or *ablaut*.
3. Wholly irregular forms, such as *can, will,* and *be* (see above).

Verb inflections

The modern verb has very few inflectional endings. Past tense for regular verbs is marked by the *-ed* suffix in all persons; and in the present tense only the 3rd person singular is distinctive (*-s*). Old English made far more distinctions, as can be seen from the following paradigm (variation between different classes of verbs is not shown):

Present tense
ic lufie 'I love'
þū lufast 'you (sg.) love'
hē/hēo/hit lufað 'he/she/it loves'
wē, gē, hī lufiað 'we/you (pl.)/they love'

Past tense
ic lufode 'I loved'
þū lufodest 'you (sg.) loved'

hē/hēo/hit lufode 'he/she/it loved'
wē/gē/hī lufodon 'we/you (pl.)/they loved'

Some of the present tense endings weakened and disappeared soon after the Old English period. But the 2nd and 3rd person singular forms stayed on, developing into the familiar *-est* and *-eth* forms of Middle English (*lovest, loveth*). Their later development is described on p. 44.
    There were several other distinctive inflectional features of the Old English verb:

* The infinitive (p. 204): *-an* or *-ian* was added to the root. Examples in the Cædmon text include *singan* 'to sing' and *nealecan* '(to) approach' (5). The infinitive of 'love' was *lufian*. The use of a suffix to mark the infinitive was lost after the Old English period, and the particle *to* came to be used instead.

* The *-ing* form (p. 204): the equivalent form was *-end(e)*. Examples in the text are *gongende* (8) 'going' and *sprecende* (16) 'speaking'. This form hardly survives the beginning of the Middle English period, being replaced by the *-ing(e)* ending which in Old English had been restricted to nouns.

* The *-ed* form (p. 204): this shows the same kind of vowel changes and endings we see today, but it also had a special prefix, *ge-* (as in all other West Germanic languages): the form is well represented in the Cædmon text, being a past narrative – see *geseted* 'settled' (1), *geleornode* 'learned' (2), etc. It stays well into Middle English, but is lost by *c.* 1500, apart from in archaisms (such as *yclept* 'called').

* The subjunctive (p. 216): unlike in Modern English, this mood was systematically used, but it had far fewer endings than the indicative. It can be seen especially in subordinate clauses expressing a subjective attitude. Plural forms in both present and past tenses have a distinctive *-en* ending. An example in the text is *sceolden* 'should' (4).