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The Renaissance, 1500–1650

152. Changing Conditions in the Modern Period.

In the development of languages particular events often have recognizable and at times far-reaching effects. The Norman Conquest and the Black Death are typical instances that we have already seen. But there are also more general conditions that come into being and are no less influential. In the Modern English period, the beginning of which is conveniently placed at 1500, certain of these new conditions come into play, conditions that previously either had not existed at all or were present in only a limited way, and they cause English to develop along somewhat different lines from those that had characterized its history in the Middle Ages. The new factors were the printing press, the rapid spread of popular education, the increased communication and means of communication, the growth of specialized knowledge, and the emergence of various forms of self-consciousness about language.

The invention of the process of printing from movable type, which occurred in Germany about the middle of the fifteenth century, was destined to exercise a far-reaching influence on all the vernacular languages of Europe. Introduced into England about 1476 by William Caxton, who had learned the art on the continent, printing made such rapid progress that a scant century later it was observed that manuscript books were seldom to be seen and almost never used. Some idea of the rapidity with which the new process swept forward may be had from the fact that in Europe the number of books printed before the year 1500 reaches the surprising figure of 35,000. The majority of these, it is true, were in Latin, whereas it is in the modern languages that the effect of the printing press was chiefly to be felt. But in England over 20,000 titles in English had appeared by 1640, ranging all the way from mere pamphlets to massive folios. The result was to bring books, which had formerly been the expensive luxury of the few, within the reach of many. More important, however, was the fact, so obvious today, that it was possible to reproduce a book in a thousand copies or a hundred thousand, every one exactly like the other. A powerful force thus existed for promoting a standard, uniform language, and the means were now available for spreading that language throughout the territory in which it was understood.

Such a widespread influence would not have been possible were it not for the fact that education was making rapid progress among the people and literacy was becoming much more common. In the later Middle Ages a surprising number of people of the middle class could read and write, as the Paston Letters abundantly show. In Shakespeare's London, though we have no accurate means of measurement, it is probable that not less than a third and probably as many as half of the people could at least read. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there arose a prosperous trades class with the means to obtain an education and the leisure to enjoy it, attested to, for example, by the great

increase in the number of schools, the tremendous journalistic output of a man like Defoe, and the rapid rise of the novel. Nowadays, when practically everyone goes to school, we witness the phenomenon of newspapers with circulations of several hundred thousand copies daily, even up to 2 million, and magazines that in an exceptional case reach a total of 80 million copies per month. As a result of popular education the printing press has been able to exert its influence upon language as upon thought.

A third factor of great importance to language in modern times is the way in which the different parts of the world have been brought together through commerce, transportation, and the rapid means of communication we have developed. The exchange of commodities and the exchange of ideas are both stimulating to language. We shall see later how the expansion of the British Empire and the extension of trade enlarged the English vocabulary by words drawn from every part of the world, besides spreading the language over vast areas whose existence was undreamed of in the Middle Ages. But while diversification has been one of the results of transportation, unification has also resulted from ease of travel and communication. The steamship and the railroad, the automobile, and the airplane have brought people into contact with one another and joined communities hitherto isolated, while the post office and the telegraph, the telephone, the radio, the movies, television, and electronic data transmission have been influential in the intermingling of language and the lessening of the more easily altered local idiosyncrasies.

The fourth factor, the growth of specialized knowledge, has been important not only because new knowledge often requires new vocabulary but also because, in the early centuries of the modern period, Latin became less and less the vehicle for learned discourse. Both trends accelerated strongly during the seventeenth century. As we shall see in the next chapter, the rapid accumulation of new knowledge was matched by a rapid trend away from publishing specialized and learned works in Latin.

Finally, there is the factor which we have referred to as self-consciousness about language. This has two aspects, one individual, one public. At the individual level we may observe a phenomenon that has become intensely important in modern times: as people lift themselves into a different economic or intellectual or social level, they are likely to make an effort to adopt the standards of grammar and pronunciation of the people with whom they have identified, just as they try to conform to fashions and tastes in dress and amusements. However superficial such conformity might be, people are as careful of their speech as of their manners. Awareness that there are standards of language is a part of their social consciousness. Most people are less aware that such standards are largely accidental rather than absolute, having developed through the historical contingencies of economics, culture, and class. At the public level a similar self-consciousness has driven issues of language policy over the past four centuries, long before "language policy" acquired its modern meaning. The beginnings of this public discussion are evident in the sixteenth-century defense of English and debates about orthography and the enrichment of the vocabulary. As we shall see in the next chapter, anxiety about language policy reached a new urgency in the second half of the seventeenth century. From that time, through eighteenth-century proposals for an academy to twentieth-century efforts at language planning in former colonies of European powers, a self-consciousness about the shape that English ought to take has been an endless source of concern. This concern has been no less passionate for often

being fueled by naive beliefs about the nature of language and the determinants of linguistic change.¹

153. *Effect upon Grammar and Vocabulary.*

The forces here mentioned may be described as both radical and conservative—radical in matters of vocabulary, conservative in matters of grammar. By a radical force is meant anything that promotes change in language; by conservative, what tends to preserve the existing status. Now it is obvious that the printing press, the reading habit, the advances of learning and science, and all forms of communication are favorable to the spread of ideas and stimulating to the growth of the vocabulary, while these same agencies, together with social consciousness as we have described it, work actively toward the promotion and maintenance of a standard, especially in grammar and usage. They operate both singly and in combination. Education, for example, exerts its influence not only through formal instruction in language—grammar, spelling, pronunciation, etc.—but also by making possible something more important, the unconscious absorption of a more or less standard English through books, magazines, and newspapers. We shall accordingly be prepared to find that in modern times changes in grammar have been relatively slight and changes in vocabulary extensive. This is just the reverse of what was true in the Middle English period. Then the changes in grammar were revolutionary, but, apart from the special effects of the Norman Conquest, those in vocabulary were not so great.

154. *The Problems of the Vernaculars.*

In the Middle Ages the development of English took place under conditions that, because of the Norman Conquest, were largely peculiar to England. None of the other modern languages of Europe had had to endure the consequences of a foreign conquest that temporarily imposed an outside tongue upon the dominant social class and left the native speech chiefly in the hands of the lower social classes. But by the close of the Middle English period English had passed through this experience and, though bearing deep and abiding marks of what it had gone through, had made a remarkable recovery. From this time on the course of its history runs in many ways parallel with that of the other important European languages. In the sixteenth century the modern languages faced three great problems: (1) recognition in the fields where Latin had for centuries been supreme, (2) the establishment of a more uniform orthography, and (3) the enrichment of the vocabulary so that it would be adequate to meet the demands that would be made upon it in its wider use. Each of these problems received extensive consideration in the England of the Renaissance, but it is interesting to note that they were likewise being discussed in much the same way in France and Italy, and to some extent in Germany and Spain. Italy

¹ See the history of attitudes toward English traced by Richard W. Bailey, *Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991).

had the additional task of deciding upon the basis of its literary dialect, a matter that in France and England had been largely taken care of by the ascendancy of Paris and London.

155. *The Struggle for Recognition.*

Although English, along with the other vernaculars, had attained an established position as the language of popular literature, a strong tradition still sanctioned the use of Latin in all the fields of knowledge. This tradition was strengthened by the “revival of learning,” in which the records of Greek civilization became once more available in the original. Latin and Greek were not only the key to the world’s knowledge but also the languages in which much highly esteemed poetry, oratory, and philosophy were to be read. And Latin, at least, had the advantage of universal currency, so that the educated all over Europe could freely communicate with each other, both in speech and writing, in a common idiom. Beside the classical languages, which seemingly had attained perfection, the vulgar tongues seemed immature, unpolished, and limited in resource. It was felt that they could not express the abstract ideas and the range of thought embodied in the ancient languages. Scholars alone had access to this treasure; they could cultivate the things of the spirit and enrich their lives. It would seem at times as though they felt their superiority to the less educated and were jealous of a prerogative that belonged to them alone. The defenders of the classical tradition were at no loss for arguments in support of their position. It was feared that the study of the classical languages, and even learning itself, would suffer if the use of the vernaculars were carried too far. And there were many who felt that it would be dangerous if matters like the disputes of theology and discussions in medicine fell into the hands of the indiscreet.

Against this tradition the modern languages now had their champions. In Italy as early as 1434 Alberti, himself a humanist whose reputation was secured by numerous works in Latin, defends his use of the vernacular also, saying: “I confess that the ancient Latin language is very copious and highly adorned; but I do not see why our Tuscan of today should be held in so little esteem that whatever is written in it, however excellent, should be displeasing to us.... And if it is true, as they say, that this ancient language is full of authority among all people, only because many of the learned have written in it, it will certainly be the same with ours if scholars will only refine and polish it with zeal and care.”² His position had strong supporters in Speroni and Cardinal Bembo. In France Du Bellay wrote his vigorous *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Françoysse* (1549) “in order to show that our language did not have at its birth such enemies in the gods and the stars that it cannot arrive one day at the same state of excellence and of perfection as others, inasmuch as all sciences can be faithfully and copiously treated in it.” Du Bellay’s point of view was expressed many times by other members of the Pléiade. And in England likewise there were many defenders of English against those who wished to

² *Proemio* to Book III of his *Della Famiglia* (*Opera Volgari di Leon Batt. Alberti* (5 vols., Florence, 1843–1849), II, 221–22). Cf. G. Mancini, *Vita di Leon Battista Alberti* (2nd ed., rev., Florence, 1911), p. 198.

discriminate against it, among them influential names like Elyot and Ascham, Wilson, Puttenham, and Mulcaster. Of those champions none was more enthusiastic than Richard Mulcaster, Head Master of the Merchant Taylors' School: "But why not all in English, a tung of it self both depe in conceit, and frank in deliverie? I do not think that anie language, be it whatsoever, is better able to utter all arguments, either with more pith, or greater planesse, then our English tung is, if the English utterer be as skilfull in the matter, which he is to utter: as the foren utterer is." He expresses his opinion many times, but perhaps nowhere more eloquently than in the words: "For is it not in dede a mervellous bondage, to becom servants to one tung for learning sake, the most of our time, with losse of most time, whereas we maie have the verie same treasur in our own tung, with the gain of most time? our own bearing the joyfull title of our libertie and fredom, the Latin tung remembring us of our thraldom and bondage? I love Rome, but London better, I favor Italie, but England more, I honor the Latin, but I worship the English."

Influential as utterances such as these were, their importance lies in the fact that they voiced a widespread feeling. The real force behind the use of English was a popular demand, the demand of all sorts of men in practical life to share in the fruits of the Renaissance. The Revival of Learning had revealed how rich was the store of knowledge and experience preserved from the civilizations of Greece and Rome. The ancients not only had lived but had thought about life and drawn practical conclusions from experience. Much was to be learned from their discussion of conduct and ethics, their ideas of government and the state, their political precepts, their theories of education, their knowledge of military science, and the like. The Renaissance would have had but a limited effect if these ideas had remained the property solely of academicians. If the diplomat, the courtier, and the man of affairs were to profit by them, they had to be expressed in the language that everybody read.

The demand was soon met. Translations (and, it might be added, original works generated by the same intellectual ferment) virtually poured from the press in the course of the sixteenth century. The historians were great favorites, probably because their works, as so often described on the title pages, were "very delectable and profitable to read." Thucydides and Xenophon had been Englished before Shakespeare started school, and Herodotus appeared before the dramatist had begun his career. Caesar was translated by Arthur Golding in 1565, Livy and Sallust and Tacitus before the close of the century, and one of the great translations of the age, Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, in the version of Sir Thomas North, was published in 1579. Works dealing with politics and morals were equally popular. *The Doctrinal of Princes, made by the noble oratour Isocrates* was translated from the Greek as early as 1534 by Sir Thomas Elyot, who had already given the English a taste of Plato in *The Knowledge Which Maketh a Wise Man*. Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius appeared in whole or in part, while the poets and dramatists included Virgil, Ovid (1567), Horace (1566–1567), Terence, Theocritus, and most of the lesser names. Various partial translations of Homer were printed before Chapman's version began to appear in 1598. The translators did not stop with the great works of antiquity but drew also upon medieval and contemporary sources. Saint Augustine, Boethius, Peter Martyr, Erasmus, Calvin, and Martin Luther were among those rendered into English. It would seem that while scholars

were debating the merits of Latin and English, the issue was being decided by the translators.

Other factors, however, contributed to the victory. One was the overzeal of the humanists themselves. Not content with the vigorous and independent Latin that was written in the Middle Ages, they attempted to reform Latin prose on the style and vocabulary of Cicero. Ciceronianism substituted slavish imitation for what had been a natural and spontaneous form of expression. Not only was the vocabulary of Cicero inadequate for the conveyance of modern ideas, but there was no hope of being able to surpass one's model. As Ascham confessed in his *Toxophilus*, "as for ye Latin or greke tonge, every thyng is so excellently done in them, that none can do better." Another factor was the Protestant Reformation, itself a phase of the Renaissance. From the time that Wycliffe refused to carry on his quarrel with the church in the language of the schools and took his cause directly to the people in their own tongue, one of the strongholds of Latin was lost. The amount of theological writing in English is almost unbelievable, for as one Elizabethan remarked, "The dissension in divinity is fierce beyond God's forbid." Finally, we must not overlook the fact that the contest between Latin and English had a commercial side. The market for English books was naturally greater than for Latin, and we cannot blame the Elizabethan printer if he sometimes thought, as one said to Thomas Drant in 1567, "Though, sir, your book be wise and full of learning, yet peradventure it will not be so saleable."

Although it is plain to us nowadays that from the beginning the recognition of English was assured, the victory was not lightly won. The use of English for purposes of scholarship was frankly experimental. Sir Thomas Elyot in his *Doctrinal of Princes* (1534) says: "This little book...I have translated out of greke ...to the intent onely that I wolde assaie, if our English tongue mought receive the quicke and proper sentences pronounced by the greekes." The statement is slightly apologetic. Certainly those who used English where they might have been expected to write in Latin often seem to anticipate possible criticism, and they attempt to justify their action. Ascham prefaces his *Toxophilus* with the statement: "And althoughe to have written this boke either in latin or Greke... had bene more easier and fit for mi trade in study, yet neverthesse, I supposinge it no point of honestie, that mi commodite should stop and hinder ani parte either of the pleasure or profite of manie, have written this Englishe matter in the Englishe tongue, for Englishe men." In his *Castle of Health* (1534) Elyot is somewhat bolder in his attitude: "If physicians be angry, that I have written physicke in englishe, let them remember that the grekes wrate in greke, the Romains in latine, Avicenna, and the other in Arabike, whiche were their own proper and maternall tongues. And if thei had bene as much attached with envie and covetise, as some nowe seeme to be, they wolde have devised some particular language, with a strange cipher or forme of letters, wherein they wold have written their scyence, whiche language or letters no manne should have knowen that had not professed and practised physicke." All these attempts at self-justification had as their strongest motive the desire to reach the whole people in the language they understood best. This is stated with engaging frankness by Mulcaster: "I do write in my naturall English tounge, bycause though I make the learned my judges, which understand Latin, yet I meane good to the unlearned, which understand but English, and he that understands Latin very well, can understand English farre better, if he will confesse the trueth, though he thinks he have the habite and can Latin it exceeding

well.” Statements such as these, which could be multiplied many times from the literature of the period, show that the recognition of English was achieved in spite of a rather persistent opposition.

As we approach the end of the century and see that English has slowly won recognition as a language of serious thought, we detect a note of patriotic feeling in the attitude of many people. They seem to have grown tired of being told that English was crude and barbarous. This is apparent in the outburst of George Pettie in his book on *Civile Conversation* (1586): “There are some others yet who wyll set lyght by my labours, because I write in Englysh: and...the woorst is, they thinke that impossible to be doone in our Tongue: for they count it barren, they count it barbarous, they count it unworthy to be accounted of.” “But,” he adds, “how hardly soever you deale with your tongue, how barbarous soever you count it, how litle soever you esteeme it, I durst my selfe undertake (if I were furnished with Learnyng otherwyse) to wryte in it as copiously for varietie, as compendiously for brevitie, as choycely for woordes, as pithily for sentences, as pleasauntly for figures, and every way as eloquently, as any writer should do in any vulgar tongue whatsoever.” Mulcaster goes so far as to say: “I take this present period of our English tung to be the verie height therof, bycause I find it so excellentlie well fined, both for the bodie of the tung it self, and for the customarie writing thereof, as either foren workmanship can give it glosse, or as homewrought hanling can give it grace. When the age of our peple, which now use the tung so well, is dead and departed there will another succede, and with the peple the tung will alter and change. Which change in the full harvest thereof maie prove comparable to this, but sure for this which we now use, it semeth even now to be at the best for substance, and the bravest for circumstance, and whatsoever shall becom of the English state, the English tung cannot prove fairer, then it is at this daie, if it maie please our learned sort to esteeme so of it, and to bestow their travell upon such a subject, so capable of ornament, so proper to themselves, and the more to be honored, bycause it is their own.” In 1595 Richard Carew wrote a discourse on *The Excellency of the English Tongue*, and about 1583 Sir Philip Sidney could say, “But for the uttering sweetly and properly the conceit of the minde, which is the end of speech, that [English] hath it equally with any other tongue in the world.”

156. The Problem of Orthography.

Spelling is for most people a pedestrian subject, but for the English, as for the French and the Italians, in the sixteenth century the question of orthography or “right writing,” as Mulcaster preferred to call it, was a matter of real importance and the subject of much discussion. The trouble was not merely that English spelling was bad, for it is still bad today, but that there was no generally accepted system that everyone could conform to. In short, it was neither phonetic nor fixed. Speaking generally, the spelling of the modern languages in the Middle Ages had attempted with fair success to represent the pronunciation of words, and this is true of English in spite of the fact that Norman scribes introduced considerable confusion when they tried to write a language that they imperfectly knew and carried over habits that they had formed in writing French. The confusion was increased when certain spellings gradually became conventional while the

pronunciation slowly changed (see, for example, § 177). In some cases a further discrepancy between sound and symbol arose when letters were inserted in words where they were not pronounced (like the *b* in *debt* or *doubt*) because the corresponding word in Latin was so spelled (*debitum*, *dubitare*), or in other cases (for example, the *gh* in *delight*, *tight*) by analogy with words similarly pronounced (*light*, *night*) where the *gh* had formerly represented an actual sound. The variability of English spelling was an important part of the instability that people felt characterized the English language in the sixteenth century, especially as compared with a language like Latin. To many it seemed that English spelling was chaotic.

In reality it was not so bad as that. There were limits to its variety and inconsistency. It varied more from writer to writer, according to education and temperament, than within the practice of the individual. Then as now, some people were more inclined than others to adopt a given way of doing a thing and to stick to it. Consistency in a matter like spelling often went with a scholarly temperament. Sir John Cheke, for example, has a system of spelling that he adheres to fairly closely. He doubles long vowels (*taak*, *haat*, *maad*, *mijn*, *thijn*, etc., for *take*, *hate*, *made*, *mine*, *thine*), discards final *-e* (*giv*, *belev*), always uses *i* for *y* (*mighiti*, *dai*), and so forth. It is not our system or that of most of his contemporaries, but it is a system, and he observed it.³ Some writers observed a system for a particular reason. Thus Richard Stanyhurst, attempting a translation of Virgil (1582) in quantitative verse after the model of Latin poetry, employs a special spelling to help bring out what he believes to be the length of English syllables. He is consistent about spellings like *thee* (for *the*), *too* (for *to*), *mee*, *neere*, *cooning*, *woorde*, *yeet*, but he writes *featlye*, *neatlie*, *aptly* within three lines. He is strictly speaking consistent only so far as it serves his purpose to be. On the other hand, it is clear from the letters of such a man as John Chamberlain, which begin toward the end of the century, that the average educated person in Shakespeare's day did not spell by mere whim or caprice but had formed fairly constant spelling habits.⁴ Such habits were to some extent personal with each individual and differed in some particulars from one person to the next, but most writers show a fair degree of consistency within their own practice. It was somewhat different with the hastier writing of the more popular playwrights and pamphleteers. It is not always clear how much of their spelling is to be credited to them and how much to the printer. Most printers probably took advantage of the variability of English spelling to "justify" a line, with as little scruple about optional letters as about extra spaces. In any case a certain difference is to be noticed between the spelling of pamphlets like those of Robert Greene, which we can hardly believe were proofread, and a book like North's *Plutarch* or Holinshed's *Chronicles*. In one of Greene's coney-catching pamphlets, *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage* (1591), we find *coney* spelled *cony*, *conny*, *conye*, *conie*, *connie*, *coni*, *cuny*, *cunny*, *cunnie*, while in other words there are such variations as *coosnage*, *coosenage*, *cosenage*, *cosnage*, *been*, *beene*, *bin*, *fellow*, *felow*, *felowe*, *fallow*, *fallowe*, *neibor*, *neighbor*, *go*, *goe*, *their*, *theyr*, and others. But in spite of all the variety that Elizabethan spelling presents, there was by 1550 a nucleus of common practice, and many of the features of English spelling today were clearly becoming established.

³ There were some spellings about which he had apparently not made up his mind. He writes *borrowing* in three ways within a single paragraph.

⁴ See Appendix B.

That the problem of bringing about greater agreement in the writing of English was recognized in the sixteenth century is apparent from the attempts made to draw up rules and to devise new systems. The earliest of these, *An A.B.C. for Children* (before 1558), is almost negligible. It consists of only a few pages, and part of the space is devoted to "precepts of good lyvyng," but the author manages to formulate certain general rules such as the use of the final *e* to indicate vowel length (*made, ride, hope*). Certain more ambitious treatises attacked the problem in what their authors conceived to be its most fundamental aspect. This was the very imperfect way in which the spelling of words represented their sound. These writers were prepared to discard the current spelling entirely and respell the language phonetically with the use of additional symbols where needed. Thus in 1568 Thomas Smith published a *Dialogue concerning the Correct and Emended Writing of the English Language*. He increased the alphabet to thirty-four letters and marked the long vowels. Smith's reform did not win much favor. His work, moreover, was in Latin, and this would further limit its chance of popular influence. The next year another attempt at phonetic writing was made in a work by John Hart called *An Orthographie*, elaborated in the following year in *A Method or Comfortable Beginning for All Unlearned, Whereby They May Bee Taught to Read English* (1570).⁵ Hart makes use of special characters for *ch, sh, th*, etc., but his system seems to have won no more favor than Smith's. A more considerable attempt at phonetic reform was made in 1580 by William Bullokar in his *Booke at Large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English Speech*. He confesses that he has profited by the mistakes of Smith and Hart, whose works were "not received in use (the chiefe cause whereof, I thinke, was their differing so farre from the old)." So he says, "My chiefe regard (from the beginning) was to follow the figures of the old letters and the use of them...as much as possible." He accordingly invents few special characters but makes liberal use of accents, apostrophes, and numerous hooks above and below the letters, both vowels and consonants. If his innovations in this way had been more moderate, English spelling might have come to the use of accents such as were being adopted for French at this time, but one glance at a specimen page printed according to his system shows why it could not possibly win acceptance.⁶ Attempts such as the foregoing continued well into the seventeenth century. Many of them represented mere exercises in ingenuity, as when Charles Butler, in *The English Grammar, or The Institution of Letters, Syllables, and Woords in the English Tung* (1634), substitutes an inverted apostrophe for final *e*'s and *ʃ* for (*boʃ, wiʃout, ʃird*)

Efforts at such a radical reform as these enthusiasts proposed were largely wasted.

⁵ On Hart see Bror Danielsson, *John Hart's Works on English Orthography and Pronunciation* (2 vols., Stockholm, 1955-1964), a model of scholarly editing.

⁶ Bullokar's *Booke at Large* has been reprinted in facsimile with an introduction by Diane Bornstein (Delmar, NY, 1977).

WILLIAM BULLOKAR'S *BOOKE*
AT LARGE (1580)
(see § 156)

This was clearly perceived by Richard Mulcaster, the teacher of Spenser, whose *Elementarie* (1582), "which entreateth chefelie of the right writing of our English tung," is the most extensive and the most important treatise on English spelling in the sixteenth

century. Mulcaster's great virtue is his moderation. He saw the futility of trying to make English spelling phonetic in any scientific sense. He was therefore willing to compromise between the ideal and the practical. He did not believe that the faults of English spelling were so desperate that they could be removed only by desperate remedies. The way to correct an existing difficulty was not to substitute a new and greater one. This seemed to him to be the effect of all those proposals that took into consideration only the sound of words. Even at its best, he did not think that spelling could ever perfectly represent sound. The differences between one sound and another were often too subtle. "Letters," he says, "can expresse sounds withall their joynts & properties no fuller then the pencill can the form & lineaments of the face." It was inevitable, he thought, that the same letter must sometimes be used for different sounds, but this was no worse than to use the same word, as we often do, in very different senses. Another difficulty that he saw was that pronunciation constantly changes. These were his theoretical reasons for refusing to go along with the phonetic reformers. His practical reason was that their systems were too cumbersome ever to be accepted. "But sure I take the thing to be to combersom and inconvenient,...where no likelielihood of anie profit at all doth appear in sight." Every attempt to force people against established custom "hath alwaie mist, with losse of labor where it offered service."

The basis of his reform, therefore, was custom or usage. This he defines not as the practice of the ignorant, but that "wherein the skilfull and best learned do agre." "The use & custom of our cuntrie hath allredie chosen a kinde of penning wherein she hath set down hir religion, hir lawes, hir privat and publik dealings." This cannot now be completely changed, although it can be pruned "so that the substance maie remain, and the change take place in such points onelie as maie please without noveltie and profit without forcing." "I will therefor do my best," he says, "to confirm our custom in his own right, which will be easilie obtained where men be acquainted with the matter allredie and wold be verie glad to se wherein the right of their writing standeth." In making usage his point of departure he does not ignore sound; he merely insists that it shall not be given an undue share of attention. We must use common sense and try to remove defects in the existing system, not substitute a new one. He thinks ease and convenience in writing should be considered, for popular approval is the final authority. Only a general goodness, not perfection in each detail, can be expected. No set of rules can cover all points; some things must be left to observation and daily practice.

We cannot enter into the details of his system here but must be content with a statement of his general aims. He would first of all get rid of superfluous letters. There is no use in writing *putt*, *grubb*, *ledd* for *put*, *grub*, *led*, "and a thowsand such ignorant superfluities." On the other hand, we must not omit necessary letters such as the *t* in *fetch* or *scratch*. He allows double consonants only where they belong to separate syllables (*wit-ting*), and almost never at the end of a word except in the case of *ll* (*tall*, *generall*). Words ending in *-ss* he writes *-sse* (*glasse*, *confesse*). Otherwise final *-e* is used regularly to indicate a preceding long vowel, distinguishing *made* from *mad*, *stripe* from *strip*, and at the end of words ending in the sound of *v* or *z* (*deceive*, *love*, *wise*). An *e* is added to words that end in a lightly pronounced *i*: *daie*, *maie*, *trewlie*, *safetie*; but when the *i* is sounded "loud and sharp" it is spelled *y*: *deny*, *cry*, *defy*. Analogy, or as he calls it, "proportion," plays a justly important part in his system. Since we write *hear*, we should therefore write *fear* and *dear*. This principle, he admits, is subject to exceptions that must

be made in deference to "prerogative," that is, the right of language to continue a common custom, as in employing an analogous spelling for *where*, *here*, *there*. In such a case he becomes frankly the apologist, justifying the common practice. He is really more interested in having everyone adopt the same spelling for a given word than he is in phonetic consistency. It is not so much a question of whether one should write *where* as that one should adopt a single spelling and use it regularly instead of writing *where*, *wher*, *whear*, *weare*, *were*, *whair*, etc. To this end he prints in the latter part of his book a *General Table* giving the recommended spelling for some 7,000 of the most common words. Mulcaster's spelling is not always the one that ultimately came to be adopted. In spite of his effort for the most part to follow current usage, he seems sometimes to have gone counter to the tendency of his own and later times. He advocates spelling *guise*, *guide*, *guest*, and the like without the *u* and writes *băble*, *dăble*, indicating the length of the vowel by a short mark over it. But his book had the great merit—or demerit—of standardizing a large number of current spellings, justifying them, and advocating the consistent use of them.

It is impossible to say how influential Mulcaster's work was. The effect of his precepts seems to be evident in certain later writers. Ben Jonson quotes from him, often without acknowledgment. That English spelling developed along the lines laid down by him is certain, but this may have been due largely to the fact that it was already developing along these lines and would have done so even without the help of his book.

During the first half of the next century the tendency toward uniformity increased steadily. The fixation of English spelling is associated in most people's minds with the name of Dr. Johnson, and a statement in the preface of his dictionary, published in 1755, might lend color to this idea. In reality, however, our spelling in its modern form had been practically established by about 1650. In *The New World of English Words* published in 1658 by Milton's nephew Edward Phillips, the compiler says: "As for orthography, it will not be requisite to say any more of it then may conduce to the readers direction in the finding out of words," and he adds two or three remarks about Latin *prae-* being rendered in English by *pre-*, and the like. Otherwise he seemed to think that the subject did not call for any discussion. And in reality it did not. The only changes we should make in the sentence just quoted are in the spelling *then* (for *than*) and the addition of an apostrophe in *readers*. A closer scrutiny of the preface as a whole⁷ would reveal a few other differences such as an occasional *e* where we have dropped it (*kinde*), *ll* and *sse* at the end of words (*gratefull*, *harshnesse*), *-ick* for *-ic* (*logick*), and a contracted form of the past participle (*authoriz'd*, *chanc't*). Even these differences are not very noticeable. Spelling was one of the problems that the English language began consciously to face in the sixteenth century. During the period from 1500 to 1650 it was fairly settled.⁸

157. *The Problem of Enrichment.*

In 1531 Sir Thomas Elyot, statesman as well as scholar, published what has been described as the first book on education printed in English. He called it *The Governour* because it had to do with the training of those who in the future would be occupied at court. The dedication to Henry the Eighth is couched in the following terms:

I late consideringe (moste excellent prince and myne onely redoughted soveraigne lorde) my duetie that I owe to my naturall contray with my faythe also of aliegeaunce and othe...I am (as God juge me) violently sterred to *devulgate* or sette fourth some part of my studie, trustynge therby tacquite me of my dueties to God, your hyghnesse, and this my contray. Wherefore takinge comfort and boldenesse, partly of your graces moste benevolent inclination towarde the universall weale of your subjectes, partly inflamed with zeale, I have now enterprised to *describe* in our vulgare tunge the fourme of a juste publike weale:... Whiche *attemptate* is nat of presumption to teache any persone, I my selfe havinge moste nede of teachinge: but onely to the intent that men which wil be studious about the weale publike may fynde the thinge therto expedient compendiously writen. And for as moch as this present

⁷ See the extract printed in Appendix B.

⁸ For a comprehensive account of the English orthoepists see E.J.Dobson, *English Pronunciation 1500–1700* (2 vols., 2nd ed., Oxford, 1968), vol. 1.

boke treateth of the *education* of them that hereafter may be demed worthy to be governours of the publike weale under your hyghnesse... I *dedicate* it unto your hyghnesse as the fyrste frutes of my studye, verely trustynge that your moste excellent wysedome wyll therein *esteme* my loyall harte and diligent endeavour...Protestinge unto your excellent majestie that where I commende herin any one vertue or *dispraise* any one vice I meane the generall description of thone and thother without any other particular meanyng to the reproche of any one persone. To the whiche protestation I am now dryven throughe the malignite of this present tyme all disposed to malicious detraction...

In this passage we have an early example of the attempt to improve the English language. The words printed in italics were all new in Elyot's day; two of them (*education*, *dedicate*) are first found in the English language as he uses them in this dedication. Two others (*esteem* and *devulgate*) are found in the sense here employed only one year earlier. Several others could be instanced which, although recorded slightly earlier, were not yet in general use.⁹ In so short a passage these new words are fairly numerous, but not more numerous than in the rest of his book, and, what is more important, they are not the innovations of a pedant or an extremist. Other writers who could be cited were less restrained in their enthusiasm for words drawn from Latin, Greek, and French. Nor are these new words in Elyot the result of chance. They are part of a conscious effort to enrich the English vocabulary.

We have already indicated that enlarging the vocabulary was one of the three major problems confronting the modern languages in the eyes of men in the sixteenth century. And it is not difficult to see why this was so. The Renaissance was a period of increased activity in almost every field. It would have been strange if the spirit of inquiry and experiment that led to the discovery of America, the reform of the church, the Copernican theory, and the revolution of thought in many fields should have left only language untouched. The rediscovery of Latin and Greek literature led to new activity in the modern languages and directed attention to them as the medium of literary

⁹ *Benevolent, enterprise, studious, endeavor, protest, reproach, malignity*. The statements in the text are based upon the dated citations in the *OED*. An earlier occurrence of any word is always possible. For example, in a translation by Skelton (c. 1485) of the *History of the World* by Diodorus Siculus, more than 800 Latin innovations occur, many earlier than the first instance recorded in the *OED*. But the work exists in a unique MS and has never been published. While its influence on the English language was probably negligible, it shows that the attitude of the sixteenth-century innovators was not without precedent. See F.M.Salter, *John Skelton's Contribution to the English Language* (Ottawa, 1945; Trans. Royal Soc. of Canada). The purpose of this and the following paragraphs, of course, is to record the efforts of Elyot and others to enrich the English language by the conscious importation of words that they believed were needed.

expression. The result was a healthy desire for improvement. The intellectual aspect of the Revival of Learning had a similar effect. The scholarly monopoly of Latin throughout the Middle Ages had left the vernaculars undeveloped along certain lines. Now that this monopoly was being broken, the deficiencies of English were at the same time revealed. English was undoubtedly inadequate, as compared with the classical languages, to express the thought that those languages embodied and that in England was now becoming part of a rapidly expanding civilization. The translations that appeared in such numbers convinced people of the truth of this fact. The very act of translation brings home to the translators the limitations of their medium and tempts them to borrow from other languages the terms whose lack they feel in their own. For writers to whom Latin was almost a second mother tongue the temptation to transfer and naturalize in English important Latin radicals was particularly great. This was so, too, with French and Italian. In this way many foreign words were introduced into English. One may say that the same impulse that led scholars to furnish the English mind with the great works of classical and other literatures led them to enrich the English language with words drawn from the same source. New words were particularly needed in various technical fields, where English was notably weak. The author of a *Discourse of Warre* justifies his introduction of numerous military terms by an argument that was unanswerable: "I knowe no other names than are given by strangers, because there are fewe or none at all in our language."

It is not always easy, however, to draw the line between a word that is needed because no equivalent term exists, and one that merely expresses more fully an idea that could be conveyed in some fashion with existing words. We can appreciate the feeling of scholars for whom a familiar Latin word had a wealth of associations and a rich connotation; we must admit the reasonableness of their desire to carry such a word over into their English writing. The transfer is all the more excusable when one is convinced that English would be better for having it and that it is a patriotic duty to employ one's knowledge in so worthy a cause as that of improving the national speech. This motive actuated many people who were both earnest and sincere in their desire to relieve English of the charge of inadequacy and inelegance. Thus Elyot apologizes for introducing the word *maturity*: "Wherfore I am constrained to usurpe a latine worde..., which worde, though it be strange and darke [obscure], yet...ones brought in custome, shall be facile to understande as other wordes late comen out of Italy and Fraunce.... Therefore that worde *maturitie* is translated to the actis of man,...reservyng the wordes *ripe* and *redy* to frute and other thinges separte from affaires, as we have nowe in usage. *And this do I nowe remembre for the necessary augmentation of our langage.*" In another place he says, "I intended to augment our Englyshe tongue, wherby men shulde as well expresse more abundantly the thyng that they conceyved in theyr hartis,...havyng wordes apte for the pourpose: as also interprete out of greke, latyn or any other tonge into Englysshe as sufficiently as out of any one of the said tongues into an other." In any case, whether "of pure necessitie in new matters, or of mere braverie to garnish it self withall"—to quote a phrase of Mulcaster's—English acquired in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries thousands of new and strange words.

The greater number of these new words were borrowed from Latin. But they were not exclusively drawn from that source. Some were taken from Greek, a great many from French, and not a few from Italian and Spanish. Even the older periods of English and

occasionally the local dialects were drawn upon to embellish the language, in this case chiefly the language of poetry. We shall see more particularly in a moment the character of the additions made at this time, but before doing so we must consider the conflicting views that different people held concerning their desirability.

158. *The Opposition to Inkhorn Terms.*

The wholesale borrowing of words from other languages did not meet with universal favor. The strangeness of the new words was an objection to some people. As Edward Phillips said in his *New World of Words*, "some people if they spy but a hard word are as much amazed as if they had met with a Hobgoblin." Even Elyot's prestige did not save him from criticism on this score. In a book published two years after *The Governour* he alludes to "divers men...[who] doo shewe them selves offended (as they say) with my strange termes," and he attempts to justify his practice. Other men were purists by nature and took their stand on general principles. Such a man was Sir John Cheke. His attitude is interesting because he was himself a fine classical scholar and might have been expected to show sympathy for classical borrowings. In a letter to Sir Thomas Hoby, prefaced to Hoby's translation of *The Courtier* (1561), he wrote:

I am of this opinion that our own tung shold be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmangeled with borowing of other tungen, wherin if we take not heed by tijm, ever borowing and never payeng, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tung naturallie and praisablie utter her meaning, when she bouroweth no counterfeitness of other tungen to attire her self withall, but useth plainlie her own, with such shift, as nature, craft, experiens and folowing of other excellent doth lead her unto, and if she want at ani tijm (as being unperfight she must) yet let her borow with suche bashfulnes, that it mai appeer, that if either the mould of our own tung could serve us to fascion a woord of our own, or if the old denisoned wordes could content and ease this neede, we wold not boldly venture of unknownen wordes.

Ascham's admiration for Cheke led him to a similar attitude. Some considered the use of learned words mere pedantry and tried to drive them out by ridicule, calling them "inkhorn" terms. Sir Thomas Chaloner, who translated Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* in 1549, is an example:

Such men therefore, that in deede are archdoltes, and woulde be taken yet for sages and philosophers, maie I not aptelie calle them foolelosophers? For as in this behalfe I have thought good to borowe a littell of the Rethoriciens of these daies, who plainely thynke them selves demygods, if lyke horsleches thei can shew two tongues, I meane to mingle their writings with words sought out of strange langages, as if it were alonely thyng for them to poudre theyr bokes with ynkehorne termes, although perchaunce as unaptly applied as a gold rynge in a sowes nose. That and if

they want suche farre fetched vocables, than serche they out of some rotten Pamphlet foure or fyve disused woords of antiquitee, therewith to darken the sence unto the reader, to the ende that who so understandeth theim maie repute hym selfe for more cunningg and litterate: and who so dooeth not, shall so muche the rather yet esteeme it to be some high mattier, because it passeth his learnyng.

The strongest objection to the new words, however, was on the score of their obscurity. The great exponent of this view was Thomas Wilson, whose *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) was several times reprinted in the course of the century and was used by Shakespeare. In a classic passage on "Plainnesse, what it is" he makes a savage attack on inkhorn terms and illustrates the fault by a burlesque letter overloaded with them:

Among all other lessons this should first be learned, that wee never affect any straunge ynkehorne termes, but to speake as is commonly received: neither seeking to be over fine, nor yet living over-carelesse, using our speeche as most men doe, and ordering our wittes as the fewest have done. Some seeke so far for outlandish English, that they forget altogether their mothers language. And I dare sweare this, if some of their mothers were alive, thei were not able to tell what they say: and yet these fine English clerkes will say, they speake in their mother tongue, if a man should charge them for counterfeiting the Kings English. Some farre journeyed gentlemen at their returne home, like as they love to goe in forraine apparell, so thei wil powder their talke with oversea language. He that commeth lately out of Fraunce will talke French English and never blush at the matter. An other chops in with English Italianated, and applieth the Italian phrase to our English speaking, the which is, as if an Oratour that professeth to utter his mind in plaine Latine, would needes speake Poetrie, and farre fetched colours of straunge antiquitie....The unlearned or foolish phantasticall, that smelles but of learning (such fellowes as have seen learned men in their daies) wil so Latin their tongues, that the simple can not but wonder at their talke, and thinke surely they speake by some revelation. I know them that thinke *Rhetorique* to stande wholie upon darke wordes, and hee that can catche an ynke horne terme by the taile, him they coumpt to be a fine Englisheman, and a good *Rhetorician*. And the rather to set out this folly, I will adde suche a letter as William Sommer himselfe, could not make a better for that purpose. Some will thinke and sweare it too, that there was never any such thing written: well, I will not force any man to beleewe it, but I will say thus much, and abide by it too, the like have been made heretofore, and praised above the Moone.

A letter devised by a Lincolneshire man, for a voyde benefice, to a gentleman that then waited upon the Lorde Chauncellour, for the time being.

Pondering, *expending*,¹⁰ and *revoluting* with my selfe, your *ingent*¹¹ *affabilitie*, and *ingenious capacity* for *mundaine* affaires: I cannot but *celebrate*, & *extol* your *magnifical dexteritie* above all other. For how could you have *adepted*¹² such *illustrate* prerogative, and *dominical superioritie*, if the fecunditie of your *ingenie*¹³ had not been so *fertile* and wonderfull pregnant. Now therefore being *accersited*¹⁴ to such *splendente* renoume and dignitie *splendidious*: I doubt not but you will *adjuvate*¹⁵ such poore *adnichilate*¹⁶ orphanes, as whilome ware *condisciples*¹⁷ with you, and of *antique* familiaritie in Lincolneshire. Among whom I being a *scholasticall panion*,¹⁸ *obtestate*¹⁹ your *sublimitie*, to *extoll* mine infirmitie. There is a Sacerdotall dignitie in my *native* Countrey, *contiguate* to me, where I now *contemplate*: which your worshipfull benignitie could sone *impetrate*²⁰ for mee, if it would like you to extend

¹⁰ weighing mentally (L. *expendere*)

¹¹ huge (L. *ingens*)

¹² attained (L. *adeptus*)

¹³ mind, intellect (L. *ingenium*)

¹⁴ brought (L. *accersitus*)

¹⁵ aid (L. *adjuvare*)

¹⁶ reduced to nothing (L. *ad nihil*)

¹⁷ fellow-students

¹⁸ companion

¹⁹ call upon (L. *obtestari*, to call upon as a witness)

²⁰ procure (L. *impetrare*)

your sedules, and *collaude*²¹ me in them to the right honourable Lord Chauncellor, or rather *Archgrammacian* of Englande. You know my literature, you knowe the *pastorall* promotion. I *obtestate* your *clemencie*, to *invigilate*²² thus much for me, according to my *confidence*, and as you knowe my condigne merites for such a *compendious* living. But now I *relinquish* to *fatigate* your intelligence, with any more *frivolous verbositie*, and therefore he that rules the climates, be evermore your beauteux, your fortresse, and your bulwarke. *Amen*.

Dated at my *Dome*²³ or rather Mansion place in Lincolnshire, the *penulte* of the moneth Sextile. *Anno Millimo, quillimo, trillimo*.

Per me Johannes Octo.

What wiseman reading this Letter, will not take him for a very Caulf that made it in good earnest, and thought by his ynke pot termes to get a good Parsonage?

In the letter included in the above passage the italicized words were new in Wilson's day and therefore somewhat strange and obscure—dark, as he says—to the ordinary reader. Of the forty-five, thirty are not found before the sixteenth century, and the remaining fifteen are of such infrequent occurrence as to be considered by him inkhorn terms. It is interesting to note in passing that many of them are in common use today.

159. *The Defense of Borrowing.*

The attitude revealed in these utterances was apparently not the prevailing one. There were many more who in precept or practice approved of judicious importations. As Dryden wrote somewhat later, "I trade both with the living and the dead, for the enrichment of our native tongue. We have enough in England to supply our necessity, but if we will have things of magnificence and splendour, we must get them by commerce."²⁴ The innovators had precedent on their side. Not only had English borrowed much in the past, but, as they frequently pointed out, all other languages, including Latin and Greek, had enriched themselves in this way.²⁵ The strangeness of the new words, they argued, would soon wear off. As Mulcaster observed, we must first become acquainted with any new thing

²¹ recommend

²² be watchful

²³ house (L. *domus*)

²⁴ Dedication to his translation of the *Aeneid* (1697).

²⁵ In France the same argument was being employed: "To wish to take away from a learned man who desires to enrich his language the freedom sometimes to adopt uncommon words would be to restrain our language, not yet rich enough, under a more rigorous law than that which the Greek and Romans gave themselves" (Du Bellay, *Deffence et Illustration*, chap. 6).

“and make the thing familiar if it seme to be strange. For all strange things seme great novelties, and hard of entertainment at their first arrivall, till theie be acquainted: but after acquaintance theie be verie familiar, and easie to entreat.... Familiaritie and acquaintance will cause facilitie, both in matter and in words.” The charge of obscurity was also met. Elyot maintained that throughout *The Governour* “there was no terme new made by me of a latine or frenche worde, but it is there declared so playnly by one mene or other to a diligent reder that no sentence is therby made derke or harde to be understande.” Not all men could say as much, but in theory this was their aim. The position of the defender was in general summed up by George Pettie, the translator of Guazzo’s *Civile Conversation*:

For the barbarousnesse²⁶ of our tongue, I must lykewyse say that it is much the worse for them [the objectors], and some such curious fellowes as they are: who if one chaunce to derive any woord from the Latine, which is insolent to their eares (as perchaunce they wyll take that phrase to be) they foorthwith make a jest at it, and terme it an Inkehorne terme. And though for my part I use those woords as litle as any, yet I know no reason why I should not use them, and I finde it a fault in my selfe that I do not use them: for it is in deed the ready way to inrich our tongue, and make it copious, and it is the way which all tongues have taken to inrich them selves.... Wherefore I marveile how our English tongue hath crackt it credite,²⁷ that it may not borrow of the Latine as well as other tongues: and if it have broken, it is but of late, for it is not unknowen to all men how many woordes we have fetcht from thence within these fewe yeeres, which if they should be all counted inkepot termes, I know not how we should speake any thing without blacking our mouthes with inke: for what woord can be more plaine then this word *plaine*, and yet what can come more neere to the Latine? What more manifest then *manifest*? and yet in a maner Latine: What more commune then *rare*, or lesse rare then *commune*, and yet both of them comming of the Latine? But you wyll say, long use hath made these woords curraunt: and why may not use doo as much for these woords which we shall now derive? Why should not we doo as much for the posteritie as we have received of the antiquitie?²⁸

A little later some sanction for the borrowings was derived from authority. Bullokar says (1616) “it is familiar among best writers to usurpe strange words.”

²⁶ Corruption by foreign elements.

²⁷ An allusion to Cheke’s statement quoted on page 217.

²⁸ Edited by Sir Edward Sullivan (2 vols., London, 1925), Pettie’s Preface.

160. *Compromise.*

The opposition to inkhorn terms was at its height in the middle of the sixteenth century. At the end of Elizabeth's reign it had largely spent its force. By this time borrowing had gone so far that the attack was rather directed at the abuse of the procedure than at the procedure itself. The use of unfamiliar words could easily be overdone. It was the enthusiast and the pedant who brought down the criticism of reasonable people upon the practice and caused them to condemn it in more sweeping terms than they knew at heart were justified or were consistent with their own usage. Puttenham, for example, although issuing a warning against inkhorn terms, admits having to use some of them himself and seeks to justify them in particular instances. He defends the words *scientific*, *major domo*, *politien* (politician), *conduct* (verb), and others. The word *significative*, he says, "doth so well serve the turne, as it could not now be spared: and many more like usurped Latine and French words: as, *Methode*, *methodicall*, *placation*, *function*, *assubtiling*, *refining*, *compendious*, *prolix*, *figurative*, *inveigle*, a term borrowed of our common lawyers, *impression*, also a new terme, but well expressing the matter, and more than our English word.... Also ye finde these wordes, *penetrate*, *penetrable*, *indignitie*, which I cannot see how we may spare them, whatsoever fault wee finde with Ink-horne termes: for our speach wanteth wordes to such sence so well to be used." Even Wilson, after exercising his wit in the lively bit of burlesque quoted above, proceeds at once to qualify his disapproval: "Now whereas wordes be received, as well Greke as Latine, to set furthe our meanyng in thenglishe tongue, either for lacke of store, or els because wee would enriche the language: it is well doen to use them, and no man therin can be charged for any affectation when all other are agreed to folowe the same waie," and he cites some that meet with his approval. Each person who used a new word doubtless felt the justification of it and, in a matter about which only time could bring agreement, ran the risk of having their innovations disliked by others. As Ben Jonson remarked in his *Discoveries*, "A man coins not a new word without some peril and less fruit; for if it happen to be received, the praise is but moderate; if refused, the scorn is assured." Some of the words that Puttenham defends have not stood the test of time, and some of those he objects to, such as *audacious*, *egregious*, *compatible*, have won a permanent place in the language. One who used any considerable number of new words was in a way on the defensive. Chapman in presenting his translation of Homer says: "For my varietie of new wordes, I have none Incepot I am sure you know, but such as I give pasport with such authoritie, so significant and not ill sounding, that if my countrey language were an usurer, or a man of this age speaking it, hee would thanke mee for enriching him." Obscurity is always a valid object of criticism, and if the word "inkhorn" could be hurled at an opponent, it was sure to strike him in a vulnerable spot. It was thus that Nash attacked Harvey,²⁹ who, it must be confessed, lent himself to such an attack. He replied in kind³⁰ and was able to convict Nash of *interfuseth*, *finicallitie*, *sillogistrie*, *disputative*, *hermaphrodite*, *declamatorie*, *ensoriall moralizers*, *unlineall usurpers of judgement*, *infringement to destitute the inditement*, and a dozen similar expressions. Not the least interesting feature about the whole question of learned borrowings is the way it aroused popular interest. It even got into the playhouses. In the stage quarrel known as the "War of the Theatres"

Ben Jonson delivered a purge to Marston in the *Poetaster* (1601), relieving him of *retrograde*, *reciprocal*, *incubus*, *lubrical*, *defunct*, *magnificate*, *spurious*, *inflate*, *turgidous*, *ventosity*, *strenuous*, *obstupefact*, and a number of similar words. The attitude of most people seems to have been one of compromise. No Elizabethan could avoid wholly the use of the new words. Writers differed chiefly in the extent to which they allied themselves with the movement or resisted the tendency. As is so often the case, the safest course was a middle one, to borrow, but “without too manifest insolence and too wanton affectation.”

161. *Permanent Additions.*

From the exaggeration of a critic like Wilson one might get the impression that much of the effort to introduce new words into the language was pedantic and ill-advised. Some of the words Wilson ridicules seem forced and in individual cases were certainly unnecessary. But it would be a mistake to conclude that all or even a large part of the additions were of this sort. Indeed the surprising thing about the movement here described is the number of words that we owe to this period and that seem now to be indispensable. Many of them are in such common use today that it is hard for us to realize that to the Elizabethan they were so strange and difficult as to be a subject of controversy. When Elyot wished to describe a democracy he said, “This manner of governaunce was called in Greke *democratia*, in Latine *popularis potentia*, in Englissh the rule of the comminaltie.” If he were not to have to refer to “the rule of the commonalty” by this roundabout phrase, he could hardly do better than to try to naturalize the Greek word. Again he felt the need of a single word for “all maner of lerning, which of some is called the world of science, of other the circle of doctrine, which is in one word of Greke, *encyclopedia*” Though purists might object, the word *encyclopedia* filled a need in English, and it has lived on. The words that were introduced at this time were often basic words—nouns, adjectives, verbs. Among nouns we may note as random examples *allurement*, *allusion*,

²⁹ In *Strange Newes, or Four Letters Confuted* (1592).

³⁰ *Pierce's Supererogation* (1593).

anachronism, atmosphere, autograph, capsule, denunciation, dexterity, disability, disrespect, emanation, excrescence, excursion, expectation, halo, inclemency, jurisprudence. Among adjectives we find *abject* (in our sense of “down in spirit”), *agile, appropriate, conspicuous, dexterous, expensive, external, habitual, hereditary, impersonal, insane, jocular, malignant.* Few of these could we dispense with. But it is among the verbs, perhaps, that we find our most important acquisitions, words like *adapt, alienate, assassinate, benefit* (first used by Cheke, who thought “our language should be writ pure”!), *consolidate, disregard* (introduced by Milton), *emancipate, emdicate, erupt, excavate, exert, exhilarate, exist, extinguish, harass, meditate* (which Sidney apparently introduced). It is hard to exaggerate the importance of a movement that enriched the language with words such as these.

Most of the words in this list are Latin. But some of them were earlier acquired by Latin from Greek. Examples are *anachronism, atmosphere, autograph.* Others might be added, such as *antipathy, antithesis, caustic, chaos, chronology, climax, crisis, critic, dogma, emphasis, enthusiasm, epitome, parasite, parenthesis, pathetic, pneumonia, scheme, skeleton, system, tactics.* Indeed most of the Greek words in English until lately have come to us either through Latin or French. But in the Renaissance the renewed study of Greek led to the introduction of some Greek words at first hand. Such, for example, are *acme, anonymous, catastrophe, criterion, ephemeral, heterodox, idiosyncrasy, lexicon, misanthrope, ostracize, polemic, tantalize, thermometer, and tonic.*

162. *Adaptation.*

Some words, in entering the language, retained their original form; others underwent change. Words like *climax, appendix, epitome, exterior, delirium, and axis* still have their Latin form. The adaptation of others to English was effected by the simple process of cutting off the Latin ending. *Conjectural* (L. *conjectural-is*), *consult* (L. *consult-are*) *exclusion* (L. *exclusion-em*), and *exotic* (L. *exotic-us*) show how easily in many cases this could be done. But more often a further change was necessary to bring the word into accord with the usual English forms. Thus the Latin ending *-us* in adjectives was changed to *-ous* (*conspicu-us*>*conspicuous*) or was replaced by *-al* as in *external* (L. *externus*). Latin nouns ending in *-tas* were changed in English to *-ty* (*brevity*<*brevitas*) because English had so many words of this kind borrowed from French where the Latin *-tatem* regularly became *-té*. For the same reason nouns ending in *-antia, -entia* appear in English with the ending *-ance, -ence* or *-ancy, -ency*, while adjectives ending in *-bilis* take the usual English (or French) ending *-ble*. Examples are *consonance, concurrence, constancy, frequency, considerable, susceptible.* Many English verbs borrowed from Latin at this time end in *-ate* (*create, consolidate, eradicate*). These verbs were formed on the basis of the Latin past participle (e.g., *exterminatus*, whereas the French *exterminer* represents the Latin infinitive *exterminare*). The English practice arose from the fact that the Latin past participle was often equivalent to an adjective, and it was a common thing in English to make verbs out of adjectives (*busy, dry, darken*).

163. *Reintroductions and New Meanings.*

Sometimes the same word has been borrowed more than once in the course of time. The Latin words *episcopus* and *discus* appear in Old English as *bishop* and *dish* and were again borrowed later to make our words *episcopal* and *disc* (also *dais*, *desk*, and *discus*). In the same way *chaos* and *malignity* were apparently reintroduced in the sixteenth century. The word *intelligence* is used once in Gower and occasionally in the fifteenth century, but in *The Governour* Elyot remarks that "*intelligence* is nowe used for an elegant worde where there is mutuall treaties or appoyntementes, eyther by letters or message." A word when introduced a second time often carries a different meaning, and in estimating the importance of the Latin and other loanwords of the Renaissance it is just as essential to consider new meanings as new words. Indeed, the fact that a word had been borrowed once before and used in a different sense is of less significance than its reintroduction in a sense that has continued or been productive of new ones. Thus the word *fastidious* is found once in 1440 with the significance 'proud, scornful,' but this is of less importance than the fact that both More and Elyot use it a century later in its more usual Latin sense of 'distasteful, disgusting.' From this it was possible for the modern meaning to develop, aided no doubt by the frequent use of the word in Latin with the force of 'easily disgusted, hard to please, over nice.' Chaucer uses the words *artificial*, *declination*, *hemisphere* in astronomical senses, but their present use is due to the sixteenth century; and the word *abject*, although found earlier in the sense of 'cast off, rejected,' was reintroduced in its present meaning in the Renaissance.

164. *Rejected Words.*

There are some things about language that we cannot explain. One of them is why certain words survive while others, apparently just as good, do not. Among the many new words that were introduced into English at this time there were a goodly number that we have not permanently retained. Some are found used a few times and then forgotten. Others enjoyed a rather longer life without becoming in any sense popular. A few were in sufficiently common use for a while to seem assured of a permanent place but later, for some reason, lost favor and dropped out of use. *Uncounsellable*, for example, was very common in the seventeenth century but after that practically disappeared. Some of the new words were apparently too learned and smelled too much of the lamp. *Anacephalize*, a Greek word meaning "to sum up," was of this sort and the more unnecessary since we had already adopted the Latin *recapitulate*. *Deruncinate* (to weed) was another, although it was no worse than *eradicate* for which we had the English expression *to root out*. Elyot's *adminiculation* (aid) and *illecebrous* (delicate, alluring) are of the same sort. Some words might logically have survived but did not. *Expede* (to accomplish, expedite) would have been parallel to *impede*. *Cohibit* (to restrain) is like *inhibit* and *prohibit*. *Demit* (to send away) was common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and would have been as natural as *commit* or *transmit*, but *dismiss* gradually replaced it. It is in fact not uncommon to find words discarded in favor of somewhat similar formations. Examples are *exsiccate* (to dry) alongside of *desiccate*, *emacerate* (emaciate), *discongruity* (incongruity), *appendance* (appendage). In some cases we have preferred a

word in a shorter form: *cautionate* (caution), *consolate* (console), *attemptate* (attempt), *denunciate* (denounce). Often there seems to be no explanation but chance or caprice to account for a word's failure to survive. *Eximious* (excellent, distinguished) is frequently found in seventeenth-century literature and was used by Browning, but is now unknown or at least very rare. Similarly, *mansuetude* (mildness) has a history that extends from Chaucer to Browning, but it is no longer used. We have given up *disaccustom*, *disacquaint*, *disadorn*, etc., but we say *disabuse*, *disaffect*, *disagree*. Shakespeare used *disquantity* as a verb meaning 'to lessen in quantity' or 'diminish.' Sometimes we have kept one part of speech and discarded another. We say *exorbitant* but not *exorbitate* (to stray from the ordinary course), *approbation* but not *approbate*, *consternation* but not *consternate*. The most convincing reason for the failure of a new word to take hold is that it was not needed. *Aspectable* (visible), *assate* (to roast) and the noun *assation*, *exolete* (faded), *suppeditate* (furnish, supply), and many other rejected words were unnecessary, and there was certainly no need for *temulent* when we had *drunk*, *intoxicated*, and a score of other expressions of various degrees of respectability to express the idea. We must look upon the borrowings of this period as often experimental. New words were being freely introduced at the judgment or caprice of the individual. They were being tried out, sometimes in various forms. In Shakespeare's day no one could have told whether we should say *effectual*, *effectuous*, *effectful*, *effectuating*, or *effective*. Two of these five options have survived. It was necessary for time to do the sifting.

165. Reinforcement through French.

It is not always possible to say whether a word borrowed at this time was taken over directly from Latin or indirectly through French, for the same wholesale enrichment was going on in French simultaneously and the same words were being introduced in both languages. Often the two streams of influence must have merged. But that English borrowed many words from Latin firsthand is indicated in a number of ways. The word *fact* represents the Latin *factum* and not the French *fait*, which was taken into English earlier as *feat*. Many verbs like *confiscate*, *congratulate*, and *exonerate* are formed from the Latin participle (*confiscat-us*, etc.) and not from the French *confisquer*, *congratuler*, *exonerer*, which are derived from the infinitives *confiscare*, etc. Caxton has the form *confisk*, which is from French, but the word did not survive in this shape. The form *prejudicate* is from Latin while *prejudge* represents the French *prejuger*. In the same way *instruct* and *subtract* show their Latin ancestry (*instructus*, *subtractus*) since the French *instruire* and *subtraire* would have become in English *instroy* (like *destroy*) and *subtray* (which is found in the fifteenth century). Our word *conjugation* is probably a direct importation from Latin (*conjugation-em*) since the more usual form in French was *conjugaison*. Sometimes the occurrence of a word in English earlier than in French (e.g., *obtuse*) points to the direct adoption from Latin, as do words like *confidence*, *confident*, which are expressed in French by the forms *confiance*, *confiant*, but which in English are used in senses that the French forms do not have.

There still remain, however, a good many words that might equally well have come into English from Latin or French. Verbs like *consist* and *explore* could come either from the Latin *consistere* and *explorare* or the French *consister* and *explorer*. *Conformation*,

conflagration, and many other similar nouns may represent either Latin *conformation-em*, *conflagration-em*, or French *conformation*, *conflagration*. It is so with words like *fidelity*, *ingenuity*, *proclivity*, where the Latin *fidelitat-em* developed into French *fidélité*, but English possessed so many words of this kind from French that it could easily have formed others on the same pattern. So adjectives like *affable*, *audible*, *jovial* may represent the Latin *affabilis* or the French *affable*, etc., and others like *consequent*, *modest*, *sublime* can have come equally well from the Latin or the French forms. It is really not important which language was the direct source of the English words because in either case they are ultimately of Latin origin. In many cases French may have offered a precedent for introducing the Latin words into English and may have assisted in their general adoption.

166. Words from the Romance Languages.

Sixteenth-century purists objected to three classes of strange words, which they characterized as *inkhorn terms*, *oversea language*, and *Chaucerisms*. For the foreign borrowings in this period were by no means confined to learned words taken from Latin and Greek. The English vocabulary at this time shows words adopted from more than fifty languages,³¹ the most important of which (besides Latin and Greek) were French, Italian, and Spanish. English travel in France and consumption of French books are reflected in such words as *alloy*, *ambuscade*, *baluster*, *bigot*, *bizarre*, *bombast*, *chocolate*, *comrade*, *detail*, *duel*, *entrance*, *equip*, *equipment*, *essay*, *explore*, *genteel*, *mustache*, *naturalize*, *probability*, *progress*, *retrenchment*, *shock*, *surpass*, *talisman*, *ticket*, *tomato*, *vogue*, and *volunteer*. But the English also traveled frequently in Italy, observed Italian architecture, and brought back not only Italian manners and styles of dress but also Italian words. Protests against the Italianate Englishman are frequent in Elizabethan literature, and the objection is not only that the Englishmen came back corrupted in morals and affecting outlandish fashions, but that they “powdered their talk with oversea language.”³² Nevertheless, Italian words, like Italian fashions, were frequently adopted in England. Words like *algebra*, *argosy*, *balcony*, *cameo*, *capriccio* (the common form of *caprice* until after the Restoration), *cupola*, *design*, *granite*, *grotto*, *piazza*, *portico*, *stanza*, *stucco*, *trill*, *violin*, *volcano* began to be heard on the lips of Englishmen or to be found in English books. Many other Italian words were introduced through French or adapted to French forms, words like *battalion*, *bankrupt*, *bastion*, *brigade*, *brusque*, *carat*, *cavalcade*, *charlatan*, *frigate*, *gala*, *gazette*, *grotesque*, *infantry*, *parakeet*, and *rebuff*. Many of these preserved for a time their Italian form. From Spanish and Portuguese, English adopted *alligator* (*el lagarto*, the lizard), *anchovy*, *apricot*, *armada*, *armadillo*, *banana*, *barricade* (often *barricado*, as in Shakespeare), *bastiment*, *bastinado*, *bilbo*, *bravado*, *brocade* (often employed in the form *brocado*), *cannibal*, *canoe*, *cedilla*, *cocoa*, *corral*, *desperado*, *embargo*, *hammock*, *hurricane*, *maize*, *mosquito*, *mulatto*, *negro*, *peccadillo*, *potato*, *renegado* (the original form of *renegade*), *rusk*, *sarsaparilla*, *sombrero*, *tobacco*, and *yam*. Many of these words reflect the Spanish enterprise on the sea and colonization of the American continent. Like Italian words, Spanish words sometimes entered English through French or took a French form. *Grenade*, *palisade*, *escalade*, and *cavalier* are examples, although commonly found in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries in the form *grenado*, *palisado*, *escalado*, and *cavaliero*, even when the correct Spanish form would have been *granada*, *palisada*, *escalada*, and *caballero*. Sometimes the influence of all these languages combined to give us our English word, as in the case of *galleon*,

gallery, *pistol*, *cochineal*.³³ Thus the cosmopolitan tendency, the spirit of exploration and adventure, and the interest in the New World that was being opened up show themselves in an interesting way in the growth of our vocabulary and contributed along with the more intellectual forms of activity to the enrichment of the English language.

167. *The Method of Introducing New Words.*

The Latin words that form so important an element in the English vocabulary have generally entered the language through the medium of writing. Unlike the Scandinavian influence and to a large extent the French influence after the Norman Conquest, the various Latin influences, except the earliest, have been the work of churchmen and scholars. If the words themselves have not always been learned words, they have needed the help of learned people to become known. This was particularly true in the Renaissance. Even the words borrowed from the Romance languages in this period often came in through books, and the revivals and new formations from native material were due to the efforts of individual writers and their associates. It is impossible, of course, to say who was responsible for the introduction of each particular word, but in certain cases we can see individual writers at work—like Sir Thomas Elyot—conscious of their innovations and sometimes pausing to remark upon them. Another writer who introduced a large number of new words was Elyot's older contemporary Sir Thomas More. To More we owe the words *absurdity*, *acceptance*, *anticipate*, *combustible*, *compatible* (in our sense), *comprehensible*, *concomitance*, *congratulatory*, *contradictory*, *damnability*, *denunciation*, *detector*, *dissipate*, *endurable*, *eruditely*, *exact*, *exaggerate*, *exasperate*, *explain*, *extenuate*, *fact*, *frivolous*, *impenitent*, *implacable*, *incorporeal*, *indifference*, *insinuate*, *inveigh*, *inviolable*, *irrefragable*, *monopoly*, *monosyllable*, *necessitate*, *obstruction*, *paradox*, *pretext*, and others. Elyot, besides using some of these, gives us *accommodate*, *adumbrate*, *adumbration*, *analogy*, *animate*, *apply* (as an alternative to the older *apply*), *beneficence*, *encyclopedia*, *exerp* (now spelled *excerpt*), *excogitate*, *excogitation*, *excrement*, *exhaust*, *exordium*, *experience* (verb), *exterminate*, *frugality*, *implacability*, *infrequent*, *inimitable*, *irritate*, *modesty*, *placability*, etc. The lists have been made long,

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galleon = F. *galion*, Sp. *galeon*, Ital. *galeone*.

gallery = F. *galerie*, Sp., Port. and Ital. *galeria*.

pistol = F. *pistole*, Sp. and Ital. *pistola*.

cochineal = F. *cochenille*, Sp. *cochinilla*, Ital. *cocciniglia*.

That the Italian and Spanish words borrowed by English at this time reflect the general commerce of ideas is clear from the fact that the same words were generally being adopted by French. Cf. B.H. Wind, *Les Mots italiens introduits en français au XVI^e siècle* (Deventer, Netherlands, 1928),

and Richard Ruppert, *Die spanischen Lehn-und Fremdwörter in der französischen Schriftsprache* (Munich, 1915).

at the risk of being wearisome, in order that they might be the more impressive. So far as we now know, these words had not been used in English previously. In addition both writers employ many words that are recorded from only a few years before. And so they either introduced or helped to establish many new words in the language. What More and Elyot were doing was being done by numerous others, and it is necessary to recognize the importance of individuals as “makers of English” in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

168. *Enrichment from Native Sources.*

By far the greater part of the additions to the English vocabulary in the period of the Renaissance was drawn from sources outside of English. The popular favor shown to all kinds of foreign words seems to have implied a disparagement of English resources that was resented in some quarters. Gabriel Harvey remarked that “in Inglande... nothing is reputid so contemptible, and so baselye and vilelye accountid of, as whatsoever is taken for Inglish, whether it be handsum fasshions in apparrell, or seemely and honorable in behaviur, or choise wordes and phrases in speache, or anye notable thinge else...that savorith of our owne cuntrye and is not ether merely or mixtely outlandishe.”³⁴ But, as we have seen, there were purists like Cheke, and there were also others who believed that English could very well develop new words from old roots or revive expressions that had gone out of use. Cheke was so strongly opposed to the borrowing of Latin and Greek words that he sought wherever possible English equivalents. Thus, in his translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew, where the Authorized Version reads *lunatic* he wrote *mooned*, and in the same way he said *toller* for *publican*, *hundreder* for *centurion*, *foresayer* for *prophet*, *byword* for *parable*, *freshman* for *proselyte*, *crossed* for *crucified*, *gainrising* for *resurrection*. The poets, of course, were rather more given to the revival of old words, especially words that were familiar to them in Chaucer. For this reason their revivals and new formations that suggested an older period of English were sometimes referred to as “Chaucerisms.” Among poets who consciously made use of old words to enlarge the poetical vocabulary the most important was Spenser, although there were also others, such as Thomas Drant, the translator of Horace, whose influence on Spenser has not been fully appreciated, and to a lesser degree Milton.

These poetical innovations were of several kinds. Some were old words revived, like *astound*, *blameful*, *displeasance*, *enroot*, *doom*, *forby* (hard by, past), *empight* (fixed, implanted), *natheless*, *nathemore*, *mickle*, *whilere* (a while before). Others were new, such as *askew*, *filch*, *flout*, *freak*. The origin

³⁴ *Eliz. Crit. Essays*, I, 124.

of these is often uncertain; they may have been of dialectal provenience. Some were definitely coinages, such as Spenser's *bellibone* (a fair maid, possibly from *belle et bonne*), *blatant*, *braggadocio*, *chirrup*, *cosset* (lamb), *delve* (pit, den), *dit* (song), *scruze* (apparently a telescope word combining *screw* and *squeeze*), *squall* (to cry), and *wrizzled* (wrinkled, shriveled). Finally, many were simply adaptations and derivatives of old words, such as *baneful*, *briny*, *changeful*, *drear* (from *dreary*), *hapless*, *oaten*, *sunshiny*, or *wolfish*. Some of the innovations had a look much more rustic and strange than these, and, as in the case of inkhorn terms and oversea words, opinion varied as to their desirability. Sidney criticized Spenser for the "framing of his stile to an old rustick language," and Ben Jonson went so far as to say that "Spenser in affecting the ancients writ no language." But the poet also had his defenders. His friend "E.K." wrote, "...in my opinion it is one special prayse of many whych are dew to this poete, that he hath laboured to restore as to their rightfull heritage such good and naturall English words as have ben long time out of use and almost cleane disherited." The defenders, moreover, could have pointed to the fact that the same method of enriching the language was being urged in France. The words that English acquired in this way are not nearly so numerous as those obtained from outside, but when all is said the fact remains that to Spenser and others who shared his views we owe a great many useful words. *Belt*, *bevy*, *craggy*, *dapper*, *forthright*, *glen*, *glee*, *glance*, *surlly*, *blandishment*, *birthright*, *changeling*, *elfin*, *endear*, *disrobe*, *don*, *enshrine*, *drizzling*, *fleecy*, *grovel*, *gaudy*, *gloomy*, *merriment*, *rancorous*, *shady*, *verdant*, *wakeful*, *wary*, and *witless* by no means exhaust the list. Many of these have passed from the language of poetry into common use, and, what is equally important, a vital principle of English word formation was being kept alive.

169. *Methods of Interpreting the New Words.*

The difficulty for the reader presented by these new words of many different origins was met in various ways. In many cases the context or the reader's knowledge of Latin was expected to make the meaning clear. But the interpretation was not left entirely to chance. Explanations were sometimes added parenthetically. When Elyot uses the word *circumspection* he adds, "whiche signifieth as moche as beholdynge on every parte." In using the word *magnanimity* he says, "But nowe I remembre me, this worde *magnanimitie* beinge yet straunge, as late borrowed out of the latyne, shall nat content all men"; he therefore explains what it means. Again, he says, "*Industrie* hath nat ben so longe tyme used in the englisshe tonge.... It is a qualitie procedyng of witte and experience, by the whiche a man perceyveth quickly, inventeth fresshly, and consayleth spedily." This is not our way of using the word, but he also uses it in the sense of diligence in performance. A simpler way, where an equivalent word or expression existed, was to combine the new and the old in a self-interpreting pair. Thus he says "*animate* or give courage," "*devulgate* or set forth," "*explicating* or unfolding," "*difficile* or hard," "*education* or bringing up of children," "*adminiculation* or aid," "*ostent* or show," "*excerped* or gathered out of," "*obfuscate* or hid," and "*celerity*, commonly called speediness." Where no help like this was given, however, many a word must have

remained troublesome to ordinary readers. Another means was therefore provided for their “adminiculation.”

170. *Dictionaries of Hard Words.*

As early as 1582 Mulcaster had written: “It were a thing verie praiseworthy in my opinion, and no lesse profitable than praiseworthy, if som one well learned and as laborious a man, wold gather all the words which we use in our English tung, whether naturall or incorporate, out of all professions, as well learned as not, into one dictionarie, and besides the right writing, which is incident to the alphabete, wold open unto us therein both their naturall force and their proper use.” This statement shows another of the many ways in which Richard Mulcaster was in advance of his time. It was not until nearly 150 years later, when Nathaniel Bailey published his *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721), that anyone attempted to list all the words in the language. The earliest dictionaries were those explaining the words in Latin or some other foreign language, and the earliest English dictionaries were dictionaries of hard words. The first of these was a little book of 120 pages by Robert Cawdrey, called *A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Words* (1604), explaining some 3,000 terms.³⁵ It was followed in 1616 by John Bullokar’s *English Expositor* and in 1623 by the *English Dictionarie* of Henry Cockeram, both of which passed through numerous editions. Blount’s *Glossographia* (1656), Edward Philipps’ *New World of Words* (1658), and other later compilations continued to treat only the more difficult words until the time of Bailey, whose book held the field until the appearance of Dr. Johnson’s. An interesting feature of Cockeram’s work and the later editions of Bullokar was a section “serving for the translation of ordinary English words into the more scholastick, or those derived from other languages.” By means of this supplement a person might write in ordinary English and then, by making a few judicious substitutions, convey a fine impression of learning. The development of dictionaries was a consequence of the extensive additions that had been made to the language and in turn helped to facilitate their adoption into general use.

171. *Nature and Extent of the Movement.*

In order to appreciate the importance of the Renaissance in enriching the English vocabulary it is worth-

³⁵ Cawdrey’s little book has been reprinted in facsimile, with an introduction by Robert A. Peters (Gainesville, FL, 1966).

while to form some idea of the number of new words added at this time. A calculation based upon the data available in the *Oxford Dictionary* gives a figure somewhat above 12,000. This number is certain to be reduced somewhat when all of the materials assembled for the *Middle English Dictionary* are published; but it is likely to remain close to 10,000, since the calculation has been made conservatively, taking no account of minor variations of the same word, or of words which, while appearing before 1500, were

reintroduced in the sixteenth century or first gained currency at that time. Many of the new words, of course, enjoyed but a short life. Some even appeared only once or twice and were forgotten. But about half of the total number have become a permanent part of the language. A very large majority were from Latin, and this accession from Latin is sometimes known as the Latin Influence of the Fourth Period. Not all of the additions filled gaps in the existing vocabulary, but they gave the language a wealth of synonyms. In the course of time these have often become differentiated, enabling us to express slight shades of meaning that would otherwise have been unattainable. Most of the new words entered English by way of the written language. They are a striking evidence of the new force exerted by the printing press. They also furnish a remarkable instance of the ease with which the printed word can pass into everyday speech. For although many of the new words were of a distinctly learned character in the beginning, they did not remain so very long, a fact that not only can be inferred from their widespread popular use today but also can be illustrated from the plays of Shakespeare or almost any of his contemporaries.

172. *The Movement Illustrated in Shakespeare.*

It is a well-known fact that, except for a man like the Elizabethan translator Philemon Holland, Shakespeare had the largest vocabulary of any English writer. This is due not only to his daring and resourceful use of words but also in part to his ready acceptance of new words of every kind. It is true that he could make sport of the inkhorn terms of a pedant like Holofernes, who quotes Latin, affects words like *intimation*, *insinuation*, *explication*, and *replication*, and has a high scorn for anyone like the slow-witted Dull who, as another character remarks, "hath not eat paper." Shakespeare had not read Wilson in vain (see p. 218). But he was also not greatly impressed by Wilson's extreme views. Among Shakespearian words are found *agile*, *allurement*, *antipathy*, *catastrophe*, *consonancy*, *critical*, *demonstrate*, *dire*, *discountenance*, *emphasis*, *emulate*, *expostulation*, *extract*, *hereditary*, *horrid*, *impertinency*, *meditate*, *modest*, *pathetical*, *prodigious*, *vast*, the Romance words *ambuscado*, *armada*, *barricade*, *bastinado*, *cavalier*, *mutiny*, *palisado*, *pell-mell*, *renegado*—all new to English in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Some of the words Shakespeare uses must have been very new indeed, because the earliest instance in which we find them at all is only a year or two before he uses them (e.g., *exist*, *initiate*, *jovial*), and in a number of cases his is the earliest occurrence of the word in English (*accommodation*, *apostrophe*, *assassination*, *dexterously*, *dislocate*, *frugal*, *indistinguishable*, *misanthrope*, *obscene*, *pedant*, *premeditated*, *reliance*, *submerged*, etc.). He would no doubt have been classed among the liberals in his attitude toward foreign borrowing. Shakespeare's use of the new words illustrates an important point in connection with them. This is the fact that they were often used, upon their first introduction, in a sense different from ours, closer to their etymological meaning in Latin. Thus, *to communicate* nowadays means to exchange information, but in Shakespeare's day it generally preserved its original meaning 'to share or make common to many'. This is its force when Adriana says in the *Comedy of Errors*:

Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,
 Whose weakness married to thy stronger state
 Makes me with thy strength to *communicate*,

that is, she shares his strength with him. When Lorenzo in the *Merchant of Venice* says “let’s in and there *expect* their coming,” he is using *expect* in its original sense of ‘to await’. In the sixteenth century, when the verb to atone was first used, it did not have its modern meaning, ‘to make amends’ but simply ‘to set at one, reconcile’, as when Desdemona says, “I would do much to atone them.” *Enlargement* meant freedom from confinement (“take this key, give *enlargement* to the swain”) and *humorous* might mean ‘damp’ (as in “the *humorous* night” of *Romeo and Juliet*) or ‘capricious’, ‘moody’, ‘peevish’, that is, showing the effect of the various bodily humors which, according to medieval belief, determined one’s disposition. The word did not acquire its present meaning until the time of Addison. It would be easy to multiply examples from almost any page of Shakespeare. The few that have been given will suffice to show that the new words often remained close to their etymological meaning.

173. Shakespeare’s Pronunciation.

Shakespeare’s pronunciation, though not ours, was much more like ours than has always been realized. He pronounced [e] for [i] in some words just as Pope could still say *tay* for *tea*.³⁶ The falling together of *er*, *ir*, *ur* (e.g., *herd*, *birth*, *hurt*) was under way but not yet completed. As explained in § 175, ME *ē* was sometimes open, sometimes close [ɛ: e:] and the two sounds were still distinct in Shakespeare’s day, [e:] and [i:] respectively. Consequently *sea* [se:] does not normally rhyme with *see* [si:],

³⁶ Cf. page 19.

heap with *keep*, *speak* with *seek*, etc. Toward the close of the fifteenth century an attempt was made to distinguish between them by the spelling. The closer sound was often spelled with *ee* or *ie* (*deep*, *field*) while the more open sound was as often written *ea* (*sea*, *clean*). But the practice was not consistently carried out. Although the two sounds are now identical, this variation in spelling is a reminder of the difference in pronunciation that long existed. We should also probably notice considerable difference in the

pronunciation of words containing a ME \bar{o} . This regularly developed into [u:], as in *room*, *food*, *roof*, *root*, and it retains this sound in many words today. In some words the vowel was shortened in the fifteenth century and was unrounded to the sound in *blood*, *flood*. In still other words, however, it retained its length until about 1700 but was then shortened without being unrounded, giving us the sound in *good*, *stood*, *book*, *foot*. It is apparent that in Shakespeare's day there was much fluctuation in the pronunciation of words containing this Middle English vowel, both in the different parts of the country and in the usage of different individuals. Consequently we find in the poetry of the period a word like *flood* rhyming not only with *blood* but also with *mood* and *good*. In fact, as late as Dryden we find in the same rhyme *flood—mood—good*, the three developments of the sound at the present day. It is only in recent times that the pronunciation of these words has been standardized, and even today there is some vacillation between a long and short vowel in some of them, for example, in *broom*, *room*, and *roof*. In addition to such differences in the quality of vowels there were some differences of accent. Shakespeare said *persever*, *demonstrate*, and generally *aspect*, *deftestable*, while he has *character*, *commendable*, *envy*, *secure*, *welcome*, etc., in contrast to the accentuation that is customary in these words today. On the whole, however, we should probably have little more difficulty in understanding Shakespeare's pronunciation than we experience in listening to a broad Irish brogue. The situation would be very different with the language of Chaucer. And the reason is that in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the vowels of Middle English, especially the long vowels, underwent a wholesale but quite regular shifting, about which something must be said.

174. The Importance of Sound-changes.

The subject of sound-changes is just as important in the history of languages as the changes in grammar and vocabulary. But it lends itself less readily to generalization and brief presentation. Any treatment of even the vowels, if it would have value, must proceed by examining each of the vowel sounds individually, determining its character at a given time, tracing its source in the preceding period, and following its subsequent development both independently and under the influence of neighboring sounds and varying conditions of accent, often noting significant differences in its development in different dialects, and, sometimes, in individual words, its modification through the analogical influence of other words. It is obviously impossible to enter upon such a study here. Some sounds in English have been less subject to change than others and would offer little difficulty. For example, the short *e* under certain conditions has remained unchanged since Old English times: OE *bēdd* is still *bed* today. On the other hand, to take a fairly simple case, the *ā* in OE *stān* (stone) became about 1100 a sound like that in *law*

[stɔ:n] in central and southern England. In the great vowel shift that began to take place in all long vowels in the fifteenth century this sound underwent a further change so that in Shakespeare's pronunciation it has become a close \bar{o} similar to its pronunciation at the present day (*stone*). Today the *o* is followed by a slight *u* glide [stɔ^un] or [stɔUn] which some authorities believe arose in the nineteenth century, while others trace it back as far as the seventeenth. On the other hand, the development here described did not take place in the north of England. There the OE \bar{a} instead of being rounded to an \bar{o} developed into a sound that rhymes with *lane* (*stane*), and this is its pronunciation in Scotland today. For the detailed treatment of English sounds the student must be referred to the various historical grammars and works that make it their special concern.³⁷ Here we must confine ourselves to a few broad observations.

175. *From Old to Middle English.*

In considering the changes in pronunciation that English words underwent in passing from Old to Middle English we may say that qualitatively they were slight, at least in comparison with those that

³⁷ The study of sounds and sound-changes is known as *phonology*. Most of the grammars of Old and Middle English deal fully with this aspect of the language. Standard treatments of Old English have been mentioned in the footnote of § 40. The principal Middle English grammars are those of Morsbach (1896), Wright (2nd ed., 1928), and Jordan (1925; 3rd ed. 1968, trans. and rev. Eugene J. Crook, 1974). An exhaustive treatment of Middle English phonology is contained in K. Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache* (1914–1940), the final fasciculi edited by Fr. Wild and H. Koziol; reprinted with a new index (2 vols., Oxford, 1964). Vol. 2 of Max Kaluza's *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache* (2nd ed., 1907) covers the same period, and a briefer treatment is offered by Kluge in Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie* (vol. I, 2nd ed., 1901). B. A. Mackenzie's *The Early London Dialect* (1928) is important for the sources of the standard speech. In the study of English pronunciation in the modern period Ellis was a pioneer, but his work *On Early English Pronunciation* (5 vols., 1869–1889) must now be considered an unsafe guide, to be used with extreme caution. The best introduction to modern views of the later English sound-changes is to be found in W. Horn, *Historische neuenglische Grammatik* (1908); Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar* (vol. I, 1909); R. E. Zachrisson, *Pronunciation of English Vowels 1400–1700* (1913); Joseph and E. M. Wright, *An Elementary Historical New English Grammar* (1924); E. Ekwall, *Historische neuenglische Laut und Formenlehre* (3rd ed., 1956); and the works of Wyld mentioned below. The more important surveys covering the whole or most of the sound-history of English are Henry Sweet, *History of English Sounds* (1888), the same author's *New English Grammar*, Part I (1892), both now somewhat antiquated, and the following works of H. C. Wyld: *Historical Study of the Mother Tongue* (1906), *A History of Modern Colloquial English* (3rd ed., 1936), *A Short History of English* (3rd ed., 1927). The same author's *Studies in English Rhymes from Surrey to Pope* (1924) presents some of the more important changes in popular form. A comprehensive and indispensable treatment based on a fresh study of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century orthoepists is E. J. Dobson, *English Pronunciation 1500–1700* (2 vols., 2nd ed., Oxford, 1968).

occurred later. Changes in the consonants were rather insignificant, as they have always been in English. Some voiced consonants became voiceless, and vice versa, and consonants were occasionally lost. Thus *w* before a following *o* was lost when it followed another consonant: *sō* (OE *swā*), *hō* (who, OE *kwā*). *Sc* became *sh* (OE *scip* > ME *ship* or *schip*), or had already done so in Old English. But we do not expect much change in the consonantal framework of words. Nor was there much alteration in the quality of vowels in accented syllables. Most of the short vowels, unless lengthened, passed over into Middle English unaltered. But short *æ* became *a*, and *y* [y] was unrounded to *i* in most districts, either early or eventually (OE *cræft* > ME *craft*; *brycg* > *brigge*). The other short vowels, *ā*, *ē*, *ī*, *ō*, *ū*, remained (OE *catte* > *cat*, *bedd* > *bed*, *scip* > *schip*, *folc* > *folk*, *full* > *ful*).

Among the long vowels the most important change was that of *ā* to *ē*, mentioned in the preceding paragraph (OE *bān* > *bēn*, bone; *bāt*, > *bēt*, boat). The long *ȳ* developed in the same way as short *ȳ* (OE *brȳd* > *brīde*, bride; *fȳr* > *fīr*, fire). The long *ā* so characteristic a feature of Old English spelling, represented two sounds. In some words it stood for an *ā* in West Germanic. This sound appears as a close *ē* outside the West Saxon area and remains *ē* in Middle English (Non-WS *dēd* > *dēd*, deed; *slēpan* > *slēpen*, sleep). In many words OE *ā* was a sound resulting from the *i*-umlaut of *ā*.³⁸ This was a more open vowel and appears as *ē* in Middle English (OE *clāne*, > *clēne*, clean; *dāelan* > *dēlen*, deal). These two sounds have now become identical (cf. *deed* and *clean*). The other long vowels of Old English preserved their original quality in Middle English (*mēd* > *mēde*, meed; *fīf* > *fīf*, five; *bōc*, > *bōk*, book; *hūs* > *hūs*, house, often written *hous* through the influence of Anglo-Norman scribes). The Old English diphthongs were all simplified, and all diphthongs in Middle English are new formations resulting chiefly from the combination of a simple vowel with a following consonant (*γ*, *w*) which vocalized.

If the quality of Old English vowels did not change much in passing into Middle English, their quantity or length was subject to considerable alteration. For example, Old English long vowels were shortened late in the Old English period or early in Middle English when followed by a double consonant or by most combinations of consonants (*grētter*, comparative of *grēt* < OE *grēat*; *āskan* < *āxian*, ask). Conversely, short vowels in open syllables were lengthened in Middle English (OE *bācan* > ME *bāken*, bake; *ētan* > *ēten*, eat). Such changes in length are little noticeable in the spelling, but they are of great importance because they determine the course which these vowels pursued in their subsequent development.

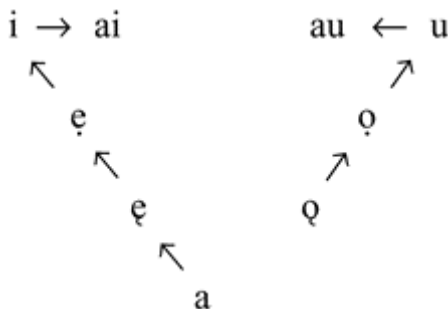
³⁸ See page 78.

176. *From Middle English to Modern.*

When we come to the vowel changes in Modern English we see the importance of the factors that determined the length of vowels in Middle English. All Middle English long vowels underwent extensive alteration in passing into Modern English, but the short vowels, in accented syllables, remained comparatively stable. If we compare Chaucer's pronunciation of the short vowels with ours, we note only two changes of importance, those of *a* and *u*. By Shakespeare's day (i.e., at the close of the sixteenth century) Chaucer's *a* had become an [æ] in pronunciation (*cat, thank, flax*). In some cases this ME *a* represented an OE *ǣ* (*at, apple, back*), and the new pronunciation was therefore a return to approximately the form that the word had had in Old English. It is the usual pronunciation in America and a considerable part of southern England today. The change the *u* underwent was what is known as unrounding. In Chaucer's pronunciation this vowel was like the *u* in *full*. By the sixteenth century it seems to have become in most words the sound we have in *but* (e.g., *cut, sun; love*, with the Anglo-Norman spelling of *o* for *u*). So far as the short vowels are concerned it is clear that a person today would have little difficulty in understanding the English of any period of the language.

177. *The Great Vowel Shift.*

The situation is very different when we consider the long vowels. In Chaucer's pronunciation these had still their so-called "continental" value—that is, *a* was pronounced like the *a* in *father* and not as in *name*, *e* was pronounced either like the *e* in *there* or the *a* in *mate*, but not like the *ee* in *meet*, and so with the other vowels. But in the fifteenth century a great change is seen to be under way. All the long vowels gradually came to be pronounced with a greater elevation of the tongue and closing of the mouth, so that those that could be raised (*a, e, ē, o, o*) were raised, and those that could not without becoming consonantal (*i, u*) became diphthongs. The change may be visualized in the following diagram:



Such a diagram must be taken as only a very rough indication of what happened, especially in the breaking of *i* and *u* into the diphthongs *ai* and *au*. Nor must the changes indicated by the arrows be thought of as taking place successively, but rather as all part of a general movement with slight differences in the speed with which the results were accomplished (or the date at which evidence for them can be found).³⁹ The effects of the shift can be seen in the following comparison of Chaucer's and Shakespeare's pronunciation:

<i>M.E.</i>	<i>Chaucer</i>		<i>Shakespeare</i>	
ī	[fi:f]	<i>five</i>	[faIv] ⁴⁰	
ē	[me:də]	<i>meed</i>	[mi:d]	
ē	[kle:nə]	<i>clean</i>	[kle:n]	(now [kli:n])
ā	[na:mə]	<i>name</i>	[ne:m]	
ō	[gɔ:tə]	<i>goat</i>	[go:t]	
ō	[ro:tə]	<i>root</i>	[ru:t]	
ū	[du:n]	<i>down</i>	[daUn] ⁴⁰	

From this it is apparent that most of the long vowels had acquired at least by the sixteenth century (and probably earlier) approximately their present pronunciation. The most important development that has taken place since is the further raising of ME ē to ī. Whereas in Shakespeare *clean* was pronounced like our *lane*, it now rhymes with *lean*.⁴¹ The change occurred at the end of the seventeenth century and had become general by the middle of the eighteenth.⁴² Such other changes as have occurred are slight and must be sought by the interested reader in the books devoted especially to the history of English sounds.⁴³

³⁹ Furthermore, it is important to be aware that the diagram, although a useful summary and mnemonic, is an oversimplification and idealization in hindsight of a process that developed at different rates in the different dialects. Empirical and ontological problems in this idealization are discussed with evidence from current dialectal change by Robert Stockwell and Donka Minkova, "Explanations of Sound Change: Contradictions between Dialect Data and Theories of Chain Shifting," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 30 (1999), 83–102.

⁴⁰ The pronunciations [aI] and [au] may not have been fully attained in Shakespeare's day, but they were apparently well on the way. Cf. Wyld, *History of Modern Colloquial English*, pp. 223 ff., 230 ff.

⁴¹ A pronunciation approximating that of today was apparently in use among some speakers but was considered substandard.

⁴² There are three exceptions: *break*, *great*, *steak*. The pronunciation [i] was apparently considered vulgar at first, later alternated with [e], and finally became the accepted form in most words. See Wyld, *Short History of English*, p. 173.

⁴³ For a description of the vowel shift within the theory of generative phonology, see Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle, *The Sound Pattern of English* (New York, 1968).

It will be noticed that the Great Vowel Shift is responsible for the unorthodox use of the vowel symbols in English spelling. The spelling of English had become fixed in a general way before the shift and therefore did not change when the quality of the long vowels changed. Consequently our vowel symbols no longer correspond to the sounds they once represented in English and still represent in the other modern languages.⁴⁴

178. *Weakening of Unaccented Vowels.*

A little observation and reflection shows us that in unaccented syllables, too, the spelling does not accurately represent the pronunciation today. This is because in all periods of the language the vowels of unstressed syllables have had a tendency to weaken and then often to disappear. This is true of all parts of a word. For example, we do not distinguish in ordinary or rapid speech between the vowels at the beginning of *ago*, *upon*, *opinion*. The sound in all three words is [ə]; in other cases it is commonly [ə], or [ɪ]. Consider the unstressed middle or final syllable in the words *introduce*, *elegant* [ə, ɪ], *drama*, *color*, *kingdom*, *breakfast* (brɛkfəst or brɛkf'st), *Monday* [i]. The weakening is especially noticeable in words from French where an accented vowel came to be unaccented in English (cf. French *mouton*, *raisin*, *bonté* with English *mutton*, *raisin*, *bounty*). One must not be misled by the spelling. The original spelling was generally retained and in recent times has occasionally influenced the pronunciation so that the quality of the vowel has been restored to something like its earlier character. *Window* now has a fairly well-defined diphthong in the final syllable [oʊ] or [o^u], but the weakened vowel is evident in the dialectal pronunciation *winder*. Misguided purists often try to pronounce the final syllable of *Monday*, with the full quality of the diphthong in *day*. But even when the vowel has been restored in standard speech the weakened form is generally apparent in informal speech and in the dialects.

179. *Grammatical Features.*

English grammar in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century is marked more by the survival of certain forms and usages that have since disappeared than by any fundamental developments. The great changes that reduced the inflections of Old English to their modern proportions had already taken place. In the few parts of speech that retain some of their original inflections, the reader of Shakespeare or the Authorized Version is conscious of minor differences of form and in the framing of sentences may note differences of syntax and idiom that, although they attract attention, are not sufficient to interfere seriously with understanding. The more important of these differences we may pass briefly in review.

⁴⁴ A comprehensive history of English spelling has yet to be written. The fullest survey is by D.G.Scragg, *A History of English Spelling* (New York, 1974). For a brief treatment the reader may consult W.W.Skeat, *Principles of English Etymology*, First Series (2nd ed., Oxford, 1892). chap. 16. A clear statement of modern usage is given in W.A.Craigie, *English Spelling: Its Rules and Reasons* (New York, 1927).

180. *The Noun.*

The only inflections retained in the noun were, as we have seen above, those marking the plural and the possessive singular. In the former the *s*-plural had become so generalized that except for a few nouns like *sheep* and *swine* with unchanged plurals, and a few others like *mice* and *feet* with mutated vowels, we are scarcely conscious of any other forms. In the sixteenth century, however, there are certain survivals of the old weak plural in *-n* (see § 113). Most of these had given way before the usual *s*-forms: *fon* (foes), *kneen* (knees), *fleen* (fleas). But beside the more modern forms Shakespeare occasionally has *eyen* (eyes), *shoon* (shoes), and *kine*, while the plural *hosen* is occasionally found in other writers. Today, except for the poetical *kine* and mixed plurals like *children* and *brethren*, the only plural of this type in general use is *oxen*.

An interesting peculiarity of this period, and indeed later, is the *his*-genitive. In Middle English the *-es* of the genitive, being unaccented, was frequently written and pronounced *-is*, *-ys*. The ending was thus often identical to the pronoun *his*, which commonly lost its *h* when unstressed. Thus there was no difference in pronunciation between *stonis* and *ston is* (his), and as early as the thirteenth century the ending was sometimes written separately as though the possessive case were a contraction of a noun and the pronoun *his*.⁴⁵ This notion was long prevalent, and Shakespeare writes '*Gainst the count his galleys I did some service* and *In characters as red as Mars his heart*. Until well into the eighteenth century people were troubled by the illogical consequences of this usage;⁴⁶ Dr. Johnson points out that one can hardly believe that the possessive ending is a contraction of *his* in such expressions as *a woman's beauty* or *a virgin's delicacy*. He, himself, seems to have been aware that its true source was the Old English genitive, but the error has left its trace in the apostrophe, which we still retain as a graphic convenience to mark the possessive.

One other construction affecting the noun becomes established during this period, the group possessive: *the Duke of Gloucester's niece*, *the King of England's nose*, *somebody else's hat*. The construction is perhaps illogical, since even a king may be considered to have some rights to his nose, and the earlier construction was *the Duke's niece of Gloucester*, etc. But the expressions *Duke of Gloucester*, *King of England*, and the like, occurred so commonly as a unit that in the fifteenth century we begin to get the sign of the possessive added to the group. Instances are not common before the sixteenth century, and the construction may be thought of properly as belonging to the modern

⁴⁵ Wyld, *History of Modern Colloquial English*, p. 315, calls attention to instances in *Genesis and Exodus* (c. 1250).

⁴⁶ For example, Robert Baker in his *Remarks on the English Language* (2nd ed., 1779) enters into a long polemic against Dr. Johnson and others on the subject. Logic was sometimes conciliated by expressions like *my sister her watch*.

period. Nowadays we may say *the writer of the book's ambition* or *the chief actor in the play's illness*.⁴⁷

181. The Adjective.

Because the adjective had already lost all its endings, so that it no longer expressed distinctions of gender, number, and case, the chief interest of this part of speech in the modern period is in the forms of

the comparative and superlative degrees. In the sixteenth century these were not always precisely those now in use. For example, comparatives such as *lenger*, *strenger* remind us that forms like our *elder* were once more common in the language. The two methods commonly used to form the comparative and superlative, with the endings *-er* and *-est* and with the adverbs *more* and *most*, had been customary since Old English times. But there was more variation in their use. Shakespearian comparisons like *honester*, *violentest* are now replaced by the analytical forms. A double comparative or superlative is also fairly frequent in the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries: *more larger*, *most boldest*, or Mark Antony's *This was the most unkindest cut of all*. The chief development affecting the adjective in modern times has been the gradual settling down of usage so that monosyllables take *-er* and *-est* while most adjectives of two or more syllables (especially those with suffixes like those in *frugal*, *learned*, *careful*, *poetic*, *active*, *famous*) take *more* and *most*.

182. The Pronoun.

The sixteenth century saw the establishment of the personal pronoun in the form that it has had ever since. In attaining this result three changes were involved: the disuse of *thou*, *thy*, *thee*; the substitution of *you* for *ye* as a nominative case; and the introduction of *its* as the possessive of *it*.

(1) In the earliest period of English the distinction between *thou* and *ye* was simply one of number; *thou* was the singular and *ye* the plural form for the second person pronoun. In time, however, a quite different distinction grew up. In the thirteenth century the singular forms (*thou*, *thy*, *thee*) were used among familiars and in addressing children or persons of inferior rank, while the plural forms (*ye*, *your*, *you*) began to be used as a mark of respect in addressing a superior.⁴⁸ In England the practice seems to have been

⁴⁷ See Eilert Ekwall, *Studies on the Genitive of Groups in English* (Lund, Sweden, 1943) and Cynthia L. Allen, "The Origins of the 'Group Genitive' in English," *Trans. Philological Soc.*, 95 (1997), 111–31.

⁴⁸ Cf. A.G. Kennedy, *The Pronoun of Address in English Literature of the Thirteenth Century* (Stanford University, 1915); R.O. Stidston, *The Use of Ye in the Function of Thou in Middle English Literature from MS. Auchinleck to MS. Vernon: A Study of Grammar and Social Intercourse in*

suggested by French usage in court circles, but it finds a parallel in many other modern languages. In any case, the usage spread as a general concession to courtesy until *ye*, *your*, and *you* became the usual pronoun of direct address irrespective of rank or intimacy. By the sixteenth century the singular forms had all but disappeared from contexts in which the plural forms were deemed proper and were maintained into the twentieth century only among the Quakers.⁴⁹

(2) Originally a clear distinction was made between the nominative *ye* and the objective *you*. But because both forms are so frequently unstressed, they were often pronounced alike [jə]. A tendency to confuse the nominative and the accusative forms can be observed fairly early, and in the fourteenth century *you* began to be used as a nominative. By a similar substitution *ye* appears in the following century for the objective case, and from this time on the two forms seem to have been used pretty indiscriminately until *ye* finally disappeared. It is true that in the early part of the sixteenth century some writers (Lord Berners, for example) were careful to distinguish the two forms, and in the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611) they are often nicely differentiated: *No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you* (Job). On the other hand Ascham and Sir Thomas Elyot appear to make no distinction in the nominative, while Shakespeare says *A southwest wind blow on ye And blister you all over!* In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* occurs the line *Stand, sirs, and throw us that you have about ye*, where the two pronouns represent the exact reverse of their historical use. Although in the latter instance, *ye* may owe something to its unemphatic position, as in similar cases it does in Milton, it is evident that there was very little feeling any more for the different functions of the two words, and in the course of the seventeenth century *you* becomes the regular form for both cases.

(3) In some ways the most interesting development in the pronoun at this time was the formation of a new possessive neuter, *its*. As we have seen above, the neuter pronoun in Old English was declined *hit*, *his*, *him*, *hit*, which by the merging of the dative and accusative under *hit* in Middle English became *hit*, *his*, *hit*. In unstressed positions *hit* weakened to *it*, and at the beginning of the modern period *it* was the usual form for the subject and object. *His*, however, remained the proper form of the possessive. Although it was thus identical with the possessive case of *he*, its occurrence where we should now use *its* is very common in written English down to the middle of the seventeenth century. Thus Portia's words *How far that little candle throws his beams* are quite natural, as is the Biblical *if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?*

If grammatical gender had survived in English the continued use of *his* when referring to neuter nouns would probably never have seemed strange. But when, with the substitution of natural gender, meaning came to be the determining factor in the gender of nouns, and all lifeless objects were thought of as neuter, the situation was somewhat different. The personal pronouns of the third person singular, *he*, *she*, *it*, had a distinctive form for each gender in the nominative and objective cases, and a need seems to have been felt for some distinctive form in the possessive case as well. Various substitutes

Fourteenth-Century England (Stanford University, 1917); and Thomas Finkenstaedt, *You und Thou: Studien zur Anrede im Englischen* (Berlin, 1963).

⁴⁹ On the Quaker position, see William Penn's *No Cross, No Crown* (1669), in *A Collection of the Writings of William Penn*, vol. 1 (London, 1726).

were tried, clearly indicating a desire, conscious or unconscious, to avoid the use of *his* in the neuter. Thus, we find frequently in the Bible expressions like *Two cubits and a half was the length of it* and *nine cubits was the length thereof*. Not infrequently the simple form *it* was used as a possessive, as when Horatio, describing the ghost in *Hamlet*, says *It lifted up it head*, or when the Fool in *Lear* says:

The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it had it head bit off by it young.

The same use of the pronoun *it* is seen in the combination *it own*: *We enjoin thee...that there thou leave it, Without more mercy, to it own protection* (*Winter's Tale*). Similarly, *the* was used in place of the pronoun: *growing of the own accord* (Holland's *Pliny*, 1601). Both of these makeshifts are as old as the fourteenth century.

It was perhaps inevitable that the possessive of nouns (*stone's*, *horse's*) should eventually suggest the analogical form *it's* for the possessive of *it*. (The word was spelled with an apostrophe down to about 1800.) The first recorded instance of this form is in *The Second Book of Madrigals*, published by Nicholas Yonge in 1597,⁵⁰ but, like most novelties of this kind in language, it had probably been in colloquial use for a time before it appeared in print. Nevertheless, it is not likely to have been common even at the end of the sixteenth century, considering the large amount of fairly colloquial English that has come down to us from this period with no trace of such a form. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it was clearly felt as a neologism not yet admitted to good use. There is no instance of it in the Bible (1611) or in any of the plays of Shakespeare printed during his lifetime. In the First Folio of 1623 there are only ten instances, and seven of these were in plays written near the end of the dramatist's career. Milton, although living until 1674, seems to have admitted it but grudgingly to his writings; there are only three occurrences of the word in all his poetry and not many in his prose. Yet so useful a word could hardly fail to win a place for itself among the rank and file of speakers. Toward the close of the seventeenth century its acceptance seems to have gained momentum rapidly, so that to Dryden (1631–1700) the older use of *his* as a neuter seemed an archaism worthy of comment.⁵¹

Finally, mention should be made of one other noteworthy development of the pronoun in the sixteenth century. This is the use of *who* as a relative. Refinements in the use of subordinate clauses are a mark of maturity in style. As the loose association of clauses (parataxis) gives way to more precise indications of logical relationship and subordination (hypotaxis) there is need for a greater variety of words effecting the union. Old English had no relative pronoun proper.

⁵⁰ See C.L. Quinton in *LTLS*, April 29, 1944, p. 211

⁵¹ *Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age*.

It made use of the definite article (*sē, sēo, þæf*), which, however it was felt in Old English times, strikes us as having more demonstrative force than relative. Sometimes the indeclinable particle *þe* was added (*sē, þe*, which that) and sometimes *þe* was used alone. At the end of the Old English period the particle *þe* had become the most usual relative pronoun, but it did not long retain its popularity. Early in the Middle English period its place was taken by *þat* (that), and this was the almost universal relative pronoun, used for all genders, throughout the Middle English period. In the fifteenth century *which* begins to alternate fairly frequently with *that*. At first it referred mostly to neuter antecedents, although occasionally it was used for persons, a use that survives in *Our Father, which art in heaven*. But the tendency to employ *that* as a universal relative has never been lost in the language, and was so marked in the eighteenth century as to provoke Steele to address to the *Spectator* (No. 78) his well-known "Humble Petition of *Who and Which*" in protest. It was not until the sixteenth century that the pronoun *who*⁵² as a relative came into use. Occasional instances of such a use occur earlier, but they are quite exceptional. There is no example of the nominative case in Chaucer. Chaucer, however, does use the oblique cases *whose* and *whom* (infrequently) as relative pronouns, and it is clear that the use of *who* as a pure relative began with these forms. Two earlier uses of *who* are the sources of the new construction: *who* as an indefinite pronoun (*Who hath ears to hear, let him hear; Who steals my purse steals trash*) and as an interrogative in indirect questions. The latter appears to have been the more important. The sequence *Whom do you want?* (direct question), *They asked whom you wanted* (indirect question), *I know the man whom you wanted* (relative) is not a difficult one to assume. In any case, our present-day widespread use of *who* as a relative pronoun is primarily a contribution of the sixteenth century to the language.

183. *The Verb.*

Even the casual reader of Elizabethan English is aware of certain differences of usage in the verb that distinguish this part of speech from its form in later times. These differences are sometimes so slight as to give only a mildly unfamiliar tinge to the construction. When Lennox asks in *Macbeth*, *Goes the King hence today?* we have merely an instance of the more common interrogative form without an auxiliary, where we should say *Does the king go?* or *Is the king leaving today?* Where we should say *has been* Shakespeare often says *is*: *Is execution done on Cawdor?* and *'Tis unnatural, Even like the deed that's done;* or *Arthur, whom [who] they say is killed tonight*. A very noticeable difference is the scarcity of progressive forms. Polonius asks, *What do you read, my Lord?—that is, What are you reading?* The large increase in the use of the progressive is one of the impor-

⁵² *Hwā* was in Old English an interrogative pronoun.

tant developments of later times (see §§ 209–10). Likewise the compound participle, *having spoken thus*, *having decided to make the attempt*, etc., is conspicuous by its infrequency. There are only three instances in Shakespeare and less than threescore in the Bible. The construction arose in the sixteenth century.⁵³ On the other hand, impersonal uses of the verb were much more common than they are today. *It yearns me not*, *it dislikes me*, *so please him come* are Shakespearian expressions which in more recent English have been replaced by personal constructions. In addition to such features of Elizabethan verbal usage, certain differences in inflection are more noticeable, particularly the ending of the third person singular of the present indicative, an occasional -s in the third person plural, and many forms of the past tense and past participle, especially of strong verbs.

The regular ending of the third person singular in the whole south and southeastern part of England—that is, the district most influential in the formation of the standard speech—was *-eth* all through the Middle English period. It is universal in Chaucer: *telleth*, *giveth*, *saith*, *doth*, etc. In the fifteenth century, forms with *-s* occasionally appear. These are difficult to account for, since it is not easy to see how the Northern dialect, where they were normal, could have exerted so important an influence upon the language of London and the south. But in the course of the sixteenth century their number increases, especially in writings that seem to reflect the colloquial usage. By the end of this century forms like *tells*, *gives*, *says* predominate, though in some words, such as *doth* and *hath*, the older usage may have been the more common. One was free to use either. In the famous plea for mercy in the *Merchant of Venice* Portia says:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:...

It is worth noting, however, that in the trial scene as a whole, forms in *-s* outnumber those in *-eth* two to one. Certainly, during the first half of the next century *-s* had become universal in the spoken language. This is beyond doubt, even though *-eth* continued to be quite commonly written. A writer toward the middle of the century observes that “howsoever wee use to Write thus, *leadeth* it, *maketh* it, *noteth* it, *raketh* it, *per-fumeth* it, & c. Yet in our ordinary speech (which is best to bee understood) wee say, *leads* it, *makes* it, *notes* it, *rakes* it, *per-fumes* it.”⁵⁴ It is altogether probable that during Shake-

⁵³ Jespersen, *Modern English Grammar*, IV, 94.

⁵⁴ Richard Hodges, *A Special Help to Orthographie* (London, 1643), p. 26.

spere's lifetime -s became the usual ending for this part of the verb in the spoken language.

Another feature of the English verb in the sixteenth century, more noticeable at the close than at the opening, is the occurrence of this -s as an ending also of the third person plural. Normally at this time the plural had no ending in the language of literature and the court, a circumstance resulting from the disappearance of the East Midland -en, -e, the characteristic endings of the plural in Chaucer. But alongside this predominant plural without ending, we find occasionally expressions like *troubled minds that wakes* in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, or *Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect the deeds of others* in the *Merchant of Venice*. These are not solecisms or misprints, as the reader might suppose. They represent forms in actual, if infrequent, use. Their occurrence is also often attributed to the influence of the Northern dialect, but this explanation has been quite justly questioned,⁵⁵ and it is suggested that they are due to analogy with the singular. While we are in some danger here of explaining *ignotum per ignotius*, we must admit that no better way of accounting for this peculiarity has been offered. And when we remember that a certain number of Southern plurals in -eth continued apparently in colloquial use, the alternation of -s with this -eth would be quite like the alternation of these endings in the singular. Only they were much less common. Plural forms in -s are occasionally found as late as the eighteenth century.

We have already seen (§ 117) that during the Middle English period extensive inroads were made in the ranks of the Old English strong verbs. Many of these verbs were lost, and many became weak. Moreover, those that remained were subject to considerable fluctuation and alteration in the past tense and past participle. Since all of these tendencies were still operative in the beginning of the modern period, we may expect to find them reflected in the language of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Among verbs that developed weak forms in this period were *bide*, *crow*, *crowd*, *flay*, *mow*, *dread*, *sprout*, and *wade*, and we accordingly find corresponding strong forms that have since disappeared, still in common use. Strong forms also alternate with weak in verbs that had begun to change earlier. Some of these are mentioned in § 118. Others were *waxen*, more frequent in the Bible than *waxed*, *sew* beside *sowed*, *gnew* beside *gnawed*, *holp* beside *helped*. A number of weak forms like *blowed*, *growed*, *shined*, *shrinked*, *swinged* were in fairly common use, although these verbs ultimately remained strong. In certain common verbs the form of the past tense differed from that of today. Such preterites as *brake* and *spake*, *drave* and *clave*, *tare*, *bare*, and *sware* are familiar to us from the

⁵⁵ Wyld, *History of Modern Colloquial English*, p. 340.

Bible. *Bote* as the past tense of *bite* (like *write*—*wrote*) was still in occasional use. The participle *baken* is more frequent in the Bible than *baked*. *Brent* and *brast* were common forms for *burnt* and *burst*, while *wesh* and *washen* were prevalent as the past tense and past participle of *wash* until the close of the sixteenth century. Because in all these cases the forms current today were also in use, it is apparent that in Shakespeare's day there was much more latitude in the inflection of the verb than is permitted today.

184. *Usage and Idiom.*

Language is not merely a matter of words and inflections. We should neglect a very essential element if we failed to take account of the many conventional features—matters of idiom and usage—that often defy explanation or logical classification but are nevertheless characteristic of the language at a given time and, like other conventions, subject to change. Such a matter as the omission of the article where we customarily use it is an illustration in point. Shakespeare says *creeping like snail, with as big heart as thou, in number of our friends, within this mile and half, thy beauty's form in table of my heart*, where modern idiom requires an article in all these cases. On the other hand, where we say *at length*, *at last*, Shakespeare says *at the length*, *at the last*. Again, usage permitted a different placing of the negative—before the verb—as in such expressions as *I not doubt*, *it not appears to me*, *she not denies it*. For a long time English permitted the use of a double negative. We have now discarded it through a false application of mathematical logic to language; but in Elizabethan times it was felt merely as a stronger negative, as indeed it is today in the instinct of the uneducated. So Shakespeare could say *Thou hast spoken no word all this while—nor understood none neither; I know not, nor I greatly care not; Nor this is not my nose neither; First he denied you had in him no right; My father hath no child but I, nor none is like to have; Nor never none shall mistress be of it, save I alone*. It is a pity we have lost so useful an intensive.

Perhaps nothing illustrates so richly the idiomatic changes in a language from one age to another as the uses of prepositions. When Shakespeare says *I'll rent the fairest house in it after threepence a bay*, we should say *at*; in *Our fears in Banquo stick deep*, we should say *about*. The single preposition *of* shows how many changes in common idioms have come about since 1600: *One that I brought up of (from) a puppy; he came of (on) an errand to me; 'Tis pity of (about) him; your name.... I know not, nor by what wonder you do hit of (upon) mine; And not be seen to wink of (during) all the day; it was well done of (by) you; I wonder of (at) their being here together; I am provided of (with) a torch-bearer; I have no mind of (for) feasting forth tonight; I were better to be married of (by) him than of another; That did but show thee of (as) a fool*. Many more examples could be added. Although matters of idiom and usage generally claim less attention from students of the language than do sounds and inflections or additions to the vocabulary, no picture of Elizabethan English would be adequate that did not give them a fair measure of recognition.

185. *General Characteristics of the Period.*

As we survey the period of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—the period of early Modern English—we recognize certain general characteristics, some of which are exemplified in the foregoing discussion, while others concern the larger spirit of the age in linguistic matters. These may be stated in the form of a brief summary as a conclusion to the present chapter.

First, a conscious interest in the English language and an attention to its problems are now widely manifested. The fifteenth century had witnessed sporadic attempts by individual writers to embellish their style with “aureate terms.” These attempts show in a way a desire to improve the language, at least along certain limited lines. But in the sixteenth century we meet with a considerable body of literature—books and pamphlets, prefaces and incidental observations—defending the language against those who were disposed to compare it unfavorably to Latin or other modern tongues, patriotically recognizing its position as the national speech, and urging its fitness for learned and literary use. At the same time it is considered worthy of cultivation, and to be looked after in the education of the young. Whereas a century or two before, the upper classes seemed more interested in having their children acquire a correct French accent and sometimes sent them abroad for the purpose, we now find Elyot urging that noblemen’s sons should be brought up by those who “speke none englishe but that which is cleane, polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced, omitting no lettre or sillable,” and observing that he knew some children of noble birth who had “attained corrupte and foule pronunciation”⁵⁶ through the lack of such precautions. Numerous books attempt to describe the proper pronunciation of English, sometimes for foreigners but often presumably for those whose native dialect did not conform to the standard of London and the court. Along with this regard for English as an object of pride and cultivation went the desire to improve it in various ways—particularly to enlarge its vocabulary and to regulate its spelling. All of these efforts point clearly to a new attitude toward English, an attitude that makes it an object of conscious and in many ways fruitful consideration.

In the second place, we attain in this period to something in the nature of a standard, something moreover that is recognizably “modern.” The effect of the Great Vowel Shift was to bring the pronunciation within measurable distance of that which prevails today. The influence of the printing press and the efforts of spelling reformers had resulted in a form of written English that

⁵⁶ *The Governour*, chap. 5.

offers little difficulty to the modern reader. And the many new words added by the methods already discussed had given us a vocabulary that has on the whole survived. Moreover, in the writings of Spenser and Shakespeare, and their contemporaries generally, we are aware of the existence of a standard literary language free from the variations of local dialect. Although Sir Walter Raleigh might speak with a broad Devonshire pronunciation,⁵⁷ and for all we know Spenser and Shakespeare may have carried with them through life traces in their speech of their Lancashire and Warwickshire ancestry, yet when they wrote they wrote a common English without dialectal idiosyncrasies. This, as Puttenham (1589) reminds us, was to be the speech of London and the court. It is not without significance that he adds, “herein we are already ruled by th’ English Dictionaries and other bookes written by learned men, and therefore it needeth none other direction in that behalfe.” However subject to the variability characteristic of a language not yet completely settled, the written language in the latter part of the sixteenth century is fully entitled to be called Standard English. The regularization of spellings in this written standard can be seen as early as the mid-fifteenth century in the official documents of Chancery.⁵⁸

Thirdly, English in the Renaissance, at least as we see it in books, was much more plastic than now. People felt freer to mold it to their wills. Words had not always distributed themselves into rigid grammatical categories. Adjectives appear as adverbs or nouns or verbs, nouns appear as verbs—in fact, any part of speech as almost any other part. When Shakespeare wrote *stranger’d with an oath* he was fitting the language to his thought, rather than forcing his thought into the mold of conventional grammar. This was in keeping with the spirit of his age. It was in language, as in many other respects, an age with the characteristics of youth—vigor, a willingness to venture, and a disposition to attempt the untried. The spirit that animated Hawkins and Drake and Raleigh was not foreign to the language of their time.

Finally, we note that in spite of all the progress that had been made toward a uniform standard, a good many features of the language were still unsettled. There still existed a considerable variety of use—alternative forms in the grammar, experiments with new words, variations in pronunciation and spelling. A certain latitude was clearly permitted among speakers of education and social position, and the relation between the literary language and

⁵⁷ “Old Sir Thomas Malette, one of the judges of the King’s Bench, knew Sir Walter Raleigh, and sayd that, notwithstanding his great travells, conversation, learning, etc., yet he spake broad Devonshire to his dyeing day.” John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark (2 vols., Oxford, 1898), I, 354.

⁵⁸ See John H. Fisher, Malcolm Richardson, and Jane L. Fisher, *An Anthology of Chancery English* (Knoxville, TN, 1984), pp. 26–35.

good colloquial English was so close that this latitude appears also in the written language. Where one might say *have wrote* or *have written* with equal propriety,⁵⁹ as well as *housen* or *houses*, *shoon* or *shoes*, one must often have been in doubt over which to use. One heard *service* also pronounced *sarvice*, and the same variation occurred in a number of other words (*certain*—*sartin*, *concern*—*consarn*, *divert*—*divart*, *clerk*—*clark*, *smert*—*smart*, etc.). These and many other matters were still unsettled at the close of the period. Their settlement, as we shall see, was one of the chief concerns of the next age.

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⁵⁹ Gray's *Elegy* (1751) was originally published with the title *An Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard*.

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9

The Appeal to Authority, 1650–1800

186. *The Impact of the Seventeenth Century.*

The social, commercial, technological, and intellectual forces that were released in the Renaissance had profound effects on the English language, as the previous chapter has described. In the middle and latter part of the seventeenth century the evolution and interaction of these forces led to a culmination, a series of crises, and an eventual reaction. Both the crises and the responses to them were provoked by transmutations of forces that had energized the Renaissance, and these new trends became disruptively intense by the middle of the seventeenth century. The most obvious crisis was the English Civil War of the 1640s, followed by the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. The intellectual turbulence, which involved matters of language and language use, among many other concerns, is somewhat harder to trace than the political turbulence, and it has often been misread. While it is natural for us to take the rationality of scientific discourse as a kind of norm, the new scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century saw their world view challenged by an outpouring of fervent expression that was often driven by religious zeal and occult science, and which incorporated large measures of irrationality and obscurity, often accompanied by belief in astrology, alchemy, and witchcraft. Radical Nonconformists, Dissenters, and other perceived fanatics were lumped together under the pejorative label “Enthusiasts” by writers and scientists connected with the Royal Society, as well as by more conservative Anglicans. Supporters of rational science such as Henry More, Thomas Sprat, John Wilkins, and Robert Boyle were disturbed by the “ranting” language of the Enthusiasts. More conservative minds were concerned about the very fact of public expression and the sheer bulk of controversial publications.

Learned discourse was no longer confined to elite circles; it was now being extensively published, in English. The practitioners of natural science seemed to glory not only in condemning the Enthusiasts and the old authorities but also in open disputation. They regarded science as a cooperative enterprise which required disagreements. In the seventeenth century, however, it was still very difficult for people to conceive that open controversy was either safe or beneficial to society. As one conservative nobleman put it, “Controversye Is a Civill Warr with the Pen which pulls out the sorde soone afterwards.”¹ In the wake of the recent revolutionary turmoil (1640–1660), featuring civil war, the execution of a king, and a Cromwellian interregnum, his apprehensions were understandable. Thus, there arose during the latter seventeenth century a highly focused public consciousness as regards language. Yet, with few exceptions, though often for different reasons, educated English people recoiled from the solution Thomas Hobbes proposed—that all power, even over knowledge—must reside in a single political authority.