“Historical Background of the Middle English Period”

**Plan.**

1. The problem of periodization. The role of the Middle English Period in the history of English language.
2. The influence of the Scandinavian invasions.
3. The Norman Conquest.
4. Early Middle English dialects. Neighborhood of three languages in England.
5. Written records of the M. E. P.
6. Late M. E. P.
7. Development of English dialects and the rise of London dialect.

The historical development of a language is a continuous, uninterrupted process without sudden breaks or rapid transformations. Therefore any periodisation imposed on language history by linguists, with precise dates, might appear artificial. There are some periodizations of the history of English language. The author of the first scientific historical phonetic and grammar of En. Language. H. Sweet suggested the periodization that corresponds to the morphological structure of different centures. He called the Old English Period – ‘The period of full endings ‘, the M. E. P. – ‘The period of reduced endings’ , the New En. P. – ‘The period of lost endings.’ But this periodization is not full because it is not quite right to devide the logical features, but phonological or syntactical ones (they were not mentioned in the periodization.) So, thus I consider that any periodization is based on some principles, but can’t touch all the sides of the language.

One of the prominent and well-known English scientists Henry Sweet worked out several periodisations of the history of English language. He suggested to single out the period of transition and to subdivide the transitional stage between the Old and the Middle English Periods cover 1100-1200. H. Sweet reckoned 1200 to be the limning of the Middle English based on morphological phenomena the Middle English Period is considered to le the Period of Levelled English.

Another periodization is extralinguistical. It’s based on the historical events, which influenced on the English language. I must notice that this one is the most traditional. The commonly accepted traditional periodization divides English language history into three periods: Old English, Middle English and New English with boundaries attached to definite dates and historical effects affecting the language. Old English is connected with the German settle in Britain (5th century) and with the beginning of writing (7th century) and ends with the Norman Conquest (1066). Middle English begins with Norman Conquest end ends on the introduction of printing (1475). The Middle English period itself may be also divided into two smaller ones – Early Middle English and Late Middle English.

Early Middle English covers the main events of the 14th century. It is the stage of greatest dialectal divergence caused by the feudal system and by foreign influences-Scandinavian and French. The dialectal division of present-day English owes its origin to this period of history. Great changes of the language took place at all the levels, especially in lexis and grammar.

Later 14th till the end of the 15th century is a time known as Late or Classical Middle English. This period umbra’s the age of Chaucer, the greatest English medieval writer and forerunner of the English Renaissanu, and is characterized by restoration of English to the position of the state and literary language and by literary flourishing, which has a stabilizing effect on language, so that the rate of linguistic changes was slowed down. At the same time the written forms of the language developed and improved.

The Old English period in the history of the language corresponds to the position of the state and literary language corresponds to the transitional stage from the slave-owning and tribal system to the feudal system in the history of Britain. In the 11th century feudalism was already well established. According to a survey made in the late 11th c. slaves and freemen were declining classes. The majority of the agricultural population (and also of the total population, which amounted to about 2.000.000 people) was bound to their lord and land. Under natural economy, characteristre of feudalism, most of the things needed for the life of the lord and the villain were produced on the estate. Feudal manors were separated from their neighbors by tells, local feuds, and various restrictions concerning settlement, traveling and employment. These historical conditions produced a certain influence on the development of the language.

In Early M.E. the differences between the regional dialects grew. Never in history, before or after, was the historical background more favorable for dialectal differentiation. The main is the dialectal division in England, which survived in later ages with some slight modification of the feudal stage of British history.

In the age poor communication dialect boundaries often coincided with geographical barriers such as rivers, mashes, forests, and mountains, as these barriers would hinder the diffusion of linguistic features.

In addition to economic, geographical and social conditions, dialectal differences in Early M.E. were accentuated by some historical events, namely the Scandinavian invasions and the Norman Conquest.

Though the Scandinavian invasions of England are dated in the Old English period, there effect on the language is particularly apparent in M.E. Eventually the Scandinavians were absorbed into the local population both ethnically and linguistically, because new settlers and the English intermarried and intermixed; they lived close together and didn’t differ either in social rank or in the level of culture and customs; they intermingled the more easily as there was no linguistic barrier between them.

The increased regional differences of English in the Scandinavian influence in the areas of the heaviest settlement the Scandinavians outnumbered the Anglo-Saxon population, which is attested by geographical names. In Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Cumberland-up to 75 per cent of the place-names is Danish or Norwegian. Altogether more than 1.400 English villages and towns bear names of Scandinavian origin (with the element “thorp” meaning “village”, e.g. Woodthorp, Linthorp; “toft”, “a piece of land”, e. g. “Brimtoft”, “Lowestoft”). Probably, in many districts people became bilingual, with either Old Norse or English prevailing. Besides due to the contacts and mixture with O Seand, the Northern dialects (chiefly North Umbrian and East Mercian) had acquired lasting and something indelible Scandinavian features. We find a large admixture of Scandinavian words in Early M.E. records coming from the North East whereas contemporary text from other regions are practically devoid of Scandinavian borrowings.

In later ages the Scandinavian element passed into other regions. The incorporation of the Scandinavian element in the London dialect and Standard English was brought about by the changing linguistic situation in England: the mixture if the dialects and the grooving linguistic unification.

Soon after Canute’s death (1042) and the collapse of his empire the old Anglo-Saxon line was restored but their reign was short-lived. The new English king, Edward the Confessor (1942-1066), who had been reared in France, brought over many Norman advisors and favorites; he distributed among them English lands and wealth to the considerable resentment of the Anglo-Saxon nobility and church hierarchy. He not only spoke French himself but insisted on it being spoken by the nobles at his court. William, Duke of Normandy, visited his court and it was rumored that Edward appointed him his successor. In many respites Edward paved the for Norman infiltration long before the Norman Conquest. However, the government of the country was still in the hands of Anglo-Saxon feudal lords, headed by the powerful Earl Godwin of Wessex.

In 1066, upon Edward’s death, the Elders of England proclaimed Harold Godwin king of the English. As soon as the news reached William of Normandy, he mustered a big army by promise of land and plunder (one third of his soldiers were Normans, other, mercenaries from all over Europe) and, with the support of the Pope, landed in Britain.

In the battle of Hastings, fought in October 1066, Harold was killed and the English were defeated. This date is commonly known as the date of the Norman Conquest, though the military occupation of the country was not completed until a few years later. After the victory of Hastings, William by passed London cutting it off from the North and made the William of London and the bishops at Westminster Abbey crown him king. William his barons laid waster many lands in England, burning down villages and estates. They conducted a relentless campaign of subjugation, devastated and almost depopulated Northumbria and Mercia, which tried to rise against the conquerors. Huge stone Norman castles if earthen forts and wooden stockades, built during the campaign, soon replaced scores. Most of the lands of the Anglo-Saxon lords passed into the hands of the Norman barons, William’s own possession comprising about one third of the country. The Normans occupied all the important ports in the church, in thee government and in the army.

Following the conquest hundreds of people from France crossed the Channel to make their home in Britain were also dukes of Normandy and, about a hundred years later, took possession of the whole western half of France, thus bringing England into still closer contact with the continent. French monks, tradesmen and craftsmen flooded the southwestern towns, so that not only the higher nobility but also much of the middle class was French.

The Norman Conquest was not only a great event in British political history but also the greatest single event in the history of the English language. Its earliest effect was a drastre change in the linguistic situation.

The Norman Conquerors of England had originally come from Scandinavia. About one hundred and fifty years before they scized the valley of the Scine and settled in what was henceworth known as Normandy. They were swiftly assimilated by the French and in the 11th century came to Britain as French speakers and bearers of French culture. They spoke the Northern dialect if French, which differed in some points from Central, Parisian French. Their tongue in Britain is often reffered to as ‘Anglo-French’ or ‘Anglo-Norman’, but may just as well be called French, since we are less concerned here with the distinction of French dialects than with the continuous French influence upon English, both in the Norman period of history and a long while after the Anglo-Norman language had ceased to exist.

In the early 13th c., as a result of lengthy and inefficient wars with France John Lackland lost the French provinces, including the dukedom of Normandy. Among other consequences the loss of the lands in France cut off the Normans in Britain from France, which speeded up the Anglo-France, which speeded up the decline of the Anglo-French language.

The most immediate consequence of the Norman domination in Britain is to be seen in the wide use of the French language in many spheres of life. For almost free hundred years French was the official language of administration: it was the language of the king’s court, the law courts, the church, the army and the castle. It was also every day language of many nobles, of the higher clergy and of many townspeople in the South. The intellectual life, literature and education were in the hands of French-speaking people; French, alongside Latin, was the language of writing. Teaching was largely conducted in French and boys at school were taught to translate their Latin into French instead of English.

For all that, England never stopped being an English-speaking country. The bulk of the population held fast to their own tongue: the lower classes in the towns, and especially in the country-side, those who lived in the Midlands and up north, continued to speak English and looked upon French as foreign and hostile. Since most of the people were illiterate, the English language was almost exclusively used for spoken communication.

At first the two languages existed side by side without mingling. Then, slowly and quickly, they began to permeate each other. The Norman barons and the French town-dwellers had to pick up English words to make themselves understood while the English began to use French words in current speech. A good knowledge of French would mark a person of higher standing giving him a certain social prestige probably many people become bilingual and had a fair command of both languages.

These peculiar linguistic conditions could not remain static. The struggle between French and English was bound to end ion the complete victory of English, for English was the living language of the entire people, while French was restricted to certain social spheres and to writing. Yet the final victory as still a long way off. In the 13th c. only a few steps were made in that direction. The earliest sign of the official recognition of English by the Norman hinges was the famous Proclamation issued by Henry 3 in 1258 to the councilors in Parliament. It was written in three languages: French, Latin and English.

The three hundreds years of the domination of French affected English more than any other foreign influence before or after. The early French borrowings reflect accurately the spheres of Norman influence upon English life; later borrowings can by attributed to the continued cultural, economic and political contacts between the countries. The French influence added new features to the regional and social differentiation of the language. New words, coming from French, could not be adopted simultaneously by all the speakers if English; they were first used in some varieties of the language, namely in the regional dialects of Southern England and in the speech if the upper classes, but were unknown in the other varieties of the language.

The use of a foreign tongue as the state language, the diversity of the dialects and the decline of the written form of English created a situation extremely favorable for increased variation and for more intensive linguistic change.

The regional M.E. dialects had developed from respective OE dialects. A precise map of all the dialects will probably never be made, for available sources are scare and unreliable: localized and their approximate boundaries have been determined largely by inference; for later ME the difficulty lies in the growing dialect mixture.

With these reservation the following dialect groups can be distinguished in Early M.E.

The Southern group included the Kentish and the South-Western dialects. Kentish was a direct descendant of the O.E. Saxon dialects, - not only West Saxon, but also East Saxon. The East Saxon dialect was not prominent in OE but became more important in Early M.E., since it made the basis of the dialect of London in the 12th and 13th c. Among the dialects of this group the Gloucestes dialect and the London dialect may be mentioned.

The group of Midland (‘Central’) dialect – corresponding to the OE Mercian dialect – is divided into West Midland and East Midland as two main areas, with further subdivisions within: South-East midland and North-East Midland, South-west Midland and North-West Midland. In M.E. the Midland area became more diversified linguistically than the OE Mercian kingdom occupying approximately the same territory: from the Thames in the South to the Welsh-speaking area in the West and up north to the river Humber.

The Northern dialect had developed from OE Northumbrian. In Early M.E. the Northern dialects included several provincial dialects, e.g. the Yorkshire and the Lancashire dialects, and also what later became known as Scottish.

In the course Early M.E. the area if the English language in the British Isles grew. Fallowing the Norman Conquest the former Celtic kingdoms fell under Norman recluse. Wales was subjugated in the late 12th c. the English made their first attempts to conquest Ireland. The invaders settled among the Irish and were soon assimilated, a large proportion of the invaders being Welshmen. Though part of Ireland was ruled from England, the country remained divided and had little contact with England. The English language was used there alongside Celtic languages-Irish and Welsh – and was influenced by Celtic.

The E.M.E. dialectal division was preserved in the succeeding centuries, though even in Late M.E. the linguistic situation changed. In Early M.E. while the state language and the main language of literature was French, the local dialects were relatively equal. In Late M.E., when English had been reestablished as the main language of administration and writing, one of the regional dialects, the London dialect, prevailed over the others.

For a long time after the Norman Conquest there were two written languages in England, both of them foreign: Latin and French. English was held in disdain as a tongue used only by common illiterate people and not fit for writing. In some dialects the gap in the written tradition spanned almost two hundred years.

The earliest samples of Early M.E. prose are the new entries made in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles from the year 1122 to the year 1154, known as the Peterborough Chronicle.

The works in the vernacular, which began to appear towards the end of the 12th c., were mostly of a religions nature. The great mass of these works are homilies, sermons in prose and verse, paraphrases from the Bible, psalms and prayers. The earliest of these religious works, the Poema Morala (‘Moral Ode’) represent the Kentish dialect of the late 12th or the early 13th.

Of particular interest for the history of the language is ‘Ormulum’, a poem composed by the monk Orm in about 1200 in the North-East Midland dialect (Lineolnshire). It consist of unrhymed metrical paraphrases of the Gospels. The text abounds in Scandinavianists and lacs French borrowings. Its most outstanding feature is the spelling system devised by the author. He doubled the consonants after short vowels in closed syllables and used special semicircular marks over short vowels in open syllables. Here are some lines from the poem where the author recommends that these rules should be followed I copying the poem.

Among other works of religious nature we can mention ‘Ancrene Riwle’ (‘The Rule of Anchorites’), a prose treatise in the Northern dialect: ‘Cursor Mundi’, an amplified version of the Gospels, and ‘the Pricke of Conscience’, a translation attributed to Richard Rolle of Hampole.

Alongside these religious works there sprang up a new kind of secular literature inspired by the French romances of chivalry. Romances were long composition in verse or prose, describing the life and adventures of knights. The great majority of romances fell into groups or cycles concerned with a limited number of matters. Those relating to the ‘matter of Britain’ were probably the most popular and original works of English poets, though many of them were paraphrased from French.

One of the earliest poems of this type was ‘Brut’ composed by Layamon in the early 13th c. It is a free rendering of the 12th c., which tells the story of the legendary foundation of Britain by Brutus, the alleged great grandson of Aeneas of Troy; the last third of the poem is devoted to Brut’s most famous descendant, the mythical British King Arthur and his ‘Knights of the Round Table’, Who became the favourite subject of English knightly romances. The poem is written in alliterative verse with a considerable number of rhymes. It is noteworthy that the West Midland dialect of Brut, thought nearly a century and a half after the Norman Conquest, contains very few French words; evidently the West Midlands were as yet little affected by French influence.

Some romances deal with more resemnt events and distinctly English themes: episodes of the Crusades of Scandinavian invasions. ‘Havelock the Dane (East Midland dialect of the later 13th c.) narrates the adventures of a Danish prince who was saved by a fisherman, Grim (the founder of Grimsby). Another poem in the same dialect and century, ‘King Horn’, is more of a love story. Doth poems make use of characters and plots found in French sources but are nevertheless original English productions.

Among the Early M. E. texts in the South-Western dialects we should mention ‘ The London Proclamation’ of the year 1258 and the political poems of the early 14th c. which voiced the complaint of the poor against their oppressors. In the poem ‘Evil Times of Edward2’ the unknown author described the vices of the clergy and the nobility as the causes of the wretched condition of the people. Those were the earliest M.E. texts in the London dialect.

Early M.E. written records represent different local dialects, which were relatively equal as forms of the written language, beneath the twofold oppression of Anglo-Norman and Latin writing. They retained a certain literary authority until it was overshadowed in the 14th c. by the prestige of the London written language.

The domination of the French language in England came to an end in the source of the 14th c. The victory of English was predetermined and prepared for by previous events and historical conditions. Little by little the Normans and English drew together and intermingled. In the 14th c. Anglo-Norman was a dead language; it appeared as corrupt French to those who had access to the French of Paris through books, education or direct contacts. The number of people who Knew French had fallen; Anglo-Norman and French literary compositions had lost their audience and had to be translated into English.

Towards the end of the 14th c. the English language had taken the place of French as the language of literature and administration. English was once more the dominant speech of all social classes in all regions. It had ousted French since it had always remained the mother tongue and the only spoken language of the bulk of the population.

It may be interesting to mention some facts showing how the transition came about. In 1362 Edward 3 gave his consent to an act of Parliament ordaining that English be used in the law courts, sine ‘French has become much unknown in the realm’. This reform, however, was not carried out for years to come: French, as well as Latin, continued to be used by lawyers alongside English until the 16th c. Yet many legal documents which have survived from the late 14th and 15th c. are written in English: wills, municipal acts, petitions. In 1363, for the first tome in history, Parliament was opened by the King’s chancellor with an address in English. In 1399 King Henry 4 used English in his official speech when accepting the throne. In 1404 English diplomats refused to conduct negotiations with France in French, claiming that the language was unknown to them. All these events testify to the recognition of English as the state language.

Howly and inevitably English regained supremey in the field of education. As early as 1349 it was ruled that English should be used at school in teaching Latin, but it was not until 1385 that the practice became general, and even the universities began to conduct their curricula in English. By the 15th c. the ability to speak French had come to be regarded as a special accomplishment, and French like Latin, was learnt as a foreign language. At the end of the 15th c. William Caxton, the first English printer, observed: ‘the most quantity of the people understand not Latin nor French here in this noble realm of England’.

One might have expected that the triumph of English would lead to weakening of the French influence upon English. In reality, however, the impact of French became more apparent. As seen from the surviving written texts, French loan-words multiplied at the very time when English became a medium of general communication. The large-scale influx of French loads can be attributed to several causes. It is probably that many French words had been in current use for quite a long time before they were first recorded. As it was aforementioned records in Early M.E. were scare and came mostly from the Northern and Western regions, which were least affected by French influence. Later M.N. texts were produced in London and in the neighboring areas, with a mixed and largely bilingual population. In numerous translation from French – which became necessary when the French language was going out of use-many loan-words were employed for the sake of greater precision, for want of a suitable native equivalent or due to the translator’s inefficiency. It is also important that in the course of the 14th c. the local dialects were brought into closer contact; they intermixed and influenced one another: therefore the infiltration of French borrowings into all the local and social varieties of English progressed more rapidly.

As with other foreign influences, the impact of French is to be found, first and foremost, in the vocabulary. The layers and the semantic spheres of the French borrowings reflect the relations between the Norman rulers and the English population, the dominance of the French language in literature and the contacts with French culture. The prevalence of French as the language of writing led to numerous changes in English spelling.

The dialect division which evolved in Early M.E. was on the whole preserved in later periods. In the 14th and 15th c. the same grouping of dialects was present: the Southern group. Including Kentish and the South-Western dialects, the Midland group with its minute subdivision and the Northern group. And yet the relations among them were changing. The extension of trade beyond the conjines of local boundaries, the growth of towns with a mixed population favored the intermixture and amalgamation of the regional dialects. More intensive inter-influence of the dialects, among other facts is attested by the penetration of Scandinavian loan-words into the West-Midland and Southern dialects from the North and by the spread of French borrowings in the reverse direction. The most important went in changing linguistic situation was the rise of the London dialect as the prevalent written form of language.

The history of the London dialect reveals the sources of the literary language in Late M.E. and also the main source and basis of the Literary Standard, both in its written and spoken forms.

The Early M.E. records made in London-beginning with the Proclamation of 1258 – show that the dialect of London was fundamentally East Saxon; in terms of the M.E. division, it belonged to the South-Western dialect group. Later records indicate that the speech of London was becoming more mixed, with East Midland features gradually prevailing over the Southern features. The most likely explanation for the change if the dialect type and for the mixed character of London English lies in the history of the London population.

In the 12th and 13th c. the inhabitants of London came from the south-western district. In the middle of the 14th c. London was practically depopulated during the ‘Black Death’ (1348) and later outbreaks of bubonic plague. It has bun estimated that about one third of the population of Britain died in the epidemies, the highest proportion of deaths occurring in London. The depopulation was speedily made good and in 1377 London had over 35.000 inhabitants.

Most of the new arrivals came from the East Midlands: Norfolk, Suffolk, and other populous and wealthy counties of Malieval England, although not bordering immediately on the capital. As a result the speech of Londoners was brought much closer to the East Midland dialect. The official and literary papers produced in London in the late 14th c. display obvious East Midland in features. The London dialect became more Anglian than Saxon in character.

This mixed dialect of London, which had extended to the two universities (in Oxford and Cambridge) ousted French from official spheres and from the sphere of writing.

The flourishing of literature, which marks the seconds half of the 14th c., apart from its cultural significance, testifies, to the complete rustablishment of English as the language of writing. Some authors wrote in their local dialect from outside London, but most of them used the London dialect or forms of the language combining London and provincial traits. Towards the end of the century the London dialect had become the principal type of language used in literature a sort of literary ‘pattern’ to be imitated by provincial authors.

The literary text of the late 14th c. preserved in numerous manuscripts, belong to a variety of genres. Translation continued, but original composition were produced in abundance; party was more prolific than prose. This period of literary florescence is known as the ‘age of Chaucer’; the greatest name in English literature before Shakespeare other writers are referred to as ‘Chaucer’s contemporaries’).

One of the prominent authors of the time was John de Trevisa of Cornwall. In 1387 he completed the translation of seven books on world history - ‘Polychronicon’ by R. Higden – from Latin into the South-Western dialect of English. Among other information it contains some curious remarks about languages used in English: ‘ Trevisa:…gentle men have now left to teach (i.e. ‘stopped teaching’) their children French. …Higden: It sums a great wonder how Englishmen and their own language and tongue is so diverse in sound in this one island and the language of Normandy coming from another land has one manner of sound among all men that speak it right in England…men of the East with men of the West, as it were under the same pared of heaven, award more in the sound of their speech than men if the North with men of the South.

Of Greatest linguistic consequence was the activity of John Wyclif (1324-1384), the forerunner of the English Reformation. His most important contribution to English prose was his (and his pupils’) translation of the Bible completed in 1384. He also wrote pamphlet protesting against the corruption of the Church. Wyelif’s Bible was copied in manuscript and read by many people all over the country. Written in the London dialect, it played an important role in spreading this form of English.

The chief poets of the time, besides Chaucer, were John Gower, William Langland and, probably, the unknown author of ‘Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight’).

The remarkable poem of William Langland ‘The Vision Coneerning Piers the Plowman’ was written in a dialect combining West Midland and London features; it has survived in three versions, from 1362 to 1390; it is an allegory and a satire attacking the vises and weaknesses of various social classes and sympathizing with the wretchedness of the poor. It is presented as a series of visions appearing to the poet in his dreams. He susdiverse people and personifications of vices and virtues and explains the way to salvation, which is to serve Truth by work and love. The poem is written in the old alliterative verse and shows no touch of Anglo-Norman influence.

John Gover, Chaucer’s friend and an outstanding poet of the time, was born in Kent, but there are not many Kentisins in his London dialect. His first poems were written in Anglo-Norman and in Latin. His longest poem ‘Vox Clamantis’ (’the Voice of the Crying in the Wilderness’) is in Latin; it deals with Watiyler’s rebellion and condemns all roans of Society for the sins which brought about the terrible revolt. His last long poem I is in English: Confession Amantis (‘The Lover’s Confession), a composition of 40000 acto-syllabis . It contains a vast collection of stories drawn from various sources and arranged to illustrate the seven deadly sins. John Gower told his tales easily and vividly and for long was almost as popular as Chaucer.

There was one more poet whose name is unknown. Four poems found in a single manuscript of the 14th c. – ‘Peasl’, ‘Patience’, ‘Cleanness’, and ‘Sir Gawaineand the Green Knight’ – have been attributed to the same author. Incidentally, the latter poet belongs to the popular Arthurian cycle of Knightly romances, though the episodes narrated as well as the form are entirely original. The poems are a blending of collaborate alliteration, in line with the OE tradition, and new rhymed verse, with a variety of difficult rhyme schemes.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) was by far the most outstanding figure of the time. A hundred years later William Caxon, the first English printer, called him ‘the worshipful father and fist founder and embellisher of ornate eloquence in our language. ‘In many books on the history of English literature and the history of English Chaucer is described as the founder of the literary language.

His carried works more of less imitative if other authors – Latin, French or Italian – though they bear abundant evidence of his skill. He never wrote in any other language than English. The culmination of Chaucer ‘s work as a poet ; his great unfinished collection of stories ‘The Canterbury Tales’.

Chaucer wrote in a dialect which in the main coincided with that used in documents produced in London shortly before his time and for a long time after. Although he did not really create the literary language, as a poet of outstanding talent he made better use if it than contemporaries and set up 2 pattern to be followed in the 15th c. His poems were copied so many times that over sixty manuscripts of ‘The Cantervary Tales’ have survived to this day. No books were among the first to be printed, a hundred years after their Compositon.

Chauser’s literary language, based in the mixed (lavgely East Midland) London dialect is known as classical M.E. In the 15th and 16th c. it became the basis of the national literary English language.

The 15th c. could produce nothing worthy to rank with Chaucer. The two prominent poets, Thomas Hoccleve and John Lydgate, were chicfly translators and imitators. The style of Caucer’s successors is believed to have drawn farther away from everyday speech; it was highly effected in character, abounding in abstact words and strongly influenced by Latin rhetoric (it is termed ‘aureate language’).

Whereas in English literature the decline after Chaucer is apparent, the literature of Scotland forms a Northern dialect of English flourished from the 13th until the 16th c. ‘The Bruce’ , written by John Barbour between 1373 and 1378 is a national epic, which describes the real history of Rolert Bruce a hero and military chief who defeated the army of Edward 2 at Bannockburn in 1314 and secured the independence of Scotland. This poem was followed by others, composed by prominent 15th c. poets: e.g. ‘Wallace’ attributed to Henry the Minstel; ‘ Kind’s Quhair’ (King’s Book’) by King James of Scotland.

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