

CHANGES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OLD ENGLISH

“Caedmon’s Hymn” is an alliterative poem in Old English. It was composed and first recited between 657 and 680 AD. English was essentially a Germanic language at that time. In 731, Bede wrote in his “Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation” about the hymn Caedmon created. This version appears in “Seven Old English Poems”, edited by John Pope. The translation/paraphrase is by Cindy Glaze.

“Caedmon’s Hymn:”

Nu sculon herian heofon-rices Weard,
Metodes meahta and his mod-gethanc,
weorc Wuldor-Faeder, swa he wundra gehwaes,
ece Dryhten, or astealda.
He aeres scop ielda bearnum
heofon to hrofe, halig Scieppend;
tha middan-geard mann-cynnes Weard,
ece Dryhten, aefter teode-
firum foldan Frea aelmihtig.

Caedmon’s Hymn:

Now we must praise the Guardian of the kingdom of heaven,
the strength of the measurer and the way of his thoughts,
the work of the Glorious Father as he made every wonder,
Everlasting Lord. He established the beginning,
creating first the children of men,
heaven to roof them, Holy Creator,
the Guardian of middle-earth and mankind,
Everlasting Lord, afterwards He prepared
the earth for men, God Almighty.

MIDDLE ENGLISH

“The Wife Of Bath”, from Chaucer’s Prologue, was written about 1380. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote his Canterbury Tales in a highly rhymed style. The translation/paraphrase is by Cindy and Peter Glaze.

“Wif of Bath”

A good Wif was ther of byside Bathe,
But sche was somdel deaf, and that was skathe.
Of cloth-making sche hadde such an haunt,
Sche passed hem of Ypris and of Gaunt.
In al the parisshe wyf ne was ther noon
That to the offryng byfor hire schulde goon,
And if ther dide, certeyn so wroth was sche,
That sche was thanne out of alle charite.
Hire keyerchefs weren ful fyne of grounde;
I durste swere they weyghede ten pounce
That on the Sondag were upon hire heed.
Hire hosen were of fyn scarlett reed,
Full streyte y-tyed, and schoos full moyste and newe.
Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.

The Wife from Bath

There was a good wife living near Bath,
But she was somewhat deaf, which was a shame.
She was so good at making cloth that
She surpassed those of Ypris and Gaunt*. [*famous cloth making cities]
Of all the wives in the parish* there were none [*county]
That should go to communion* before her, [*in Church]
And if they did, she was certain to be so angry
That she would be thoroughly unpleasant from then on.
Her scarves, which she wore on her head on Sundays,
Were of such a fine texture that
I would swear they weighed ten pounds.
Her stockings were a fine scarlet red,
Very neatly tied, and her shoes were supple and new.
Her face was bold, and pretty, and rosy colored.

TRANSITION BETWEEN MIDDLE AND MODERN ENGLISH

This recipe appeared in a cookbook that was first published between 1430 and 1450. It was reprinted in “A Fifteenth Century Cookry Boke”, compiled by John L. Anderson. The translation/paraphrase is by Beth McMillan.

“Cryspes”

Take white of eyren, milke, and fyne floure, and bete hit togidre, and drawe hit thorghe a streynour, so that hit be rennyng, and nocht to stiff; and caste there-to sugur and salt. And then take a chauffur ful of fresshe grece boyling; and then put thi honde in the batur and lete the bater ren thorghe thi fingers into the chauffur; and whan it is ren togidre in the chauffur, and is ynowe, take a strynour, and take hit oute of the chauffur, put out al the grece, and lete ren. Than putte hit in a faire disshe, cast sugur theron ynow, and serve it forth.

“Crisps (i.e. Fritters)

Take egg whites, milk, and finely sifted flour, and beat it together, and pour it through a strainer, so that it is runny and not too stiff. Add to that sugar and salt. Then take a deep frying pan full of fresh grease (oil) boiling, put your hand in the batter (take a handful) and let the batter run through you fingers into the frying pan. When it has all run into the frying pan, and is done cooking, take a strainer and take it out of the frying pan, pour off all the oil and let it drain. Then put it in a good dish, sprinkle it with some sugar, and serve it at once.

For an example of EARLY MODERN ENGLISH, read any of Shakespeare or Wyatt’s sonnets.