

THE CAMBRIDGE  
HISTORY OF THE  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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VOLUME III 1476–1776

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EDITED BY

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# I INTRODUCTION

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*Roger Lass*

## 1.1 The setting

This volume treats the history of English from the late fifteenth to the late eighteenth century; the dates are at least partly symbolic, framing the establishment of Caxton's first press in England and the American Declaration of Independence, the notional birth of the first (non-insular) extraterritorial English. The preceding volume covered a slightly longer time-span (four centuries as opposed to three), but in our period the changes in the cultural ambience in which English existed and which its speakers expressed were arguably more profound, perhaps greater even than those from the murky 'beginnings' of volume I to the Norman Conquest; even perhaps than those in the millennium from the fifth to the fifteenth century.

Taking conventional period names as a rough index of change, the three centuries covered here include 'the waning of the Middle Ages' (Huizinga 1927), the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the beginnings of the Romantic period. The transformation of the European world-picture in this time is enormous. Fifteenth-century Europe was still essentially medieval, living in a geocentric and finite cosmos, the fixed stars bounding the universe beyond the crystalline planetary spheres. No celestial objects invisible to the naked eye were known, nor, at the other extreme, any organisms or structures smaller than the naked eye could see. In the natural world, maggots generated spontaneously from rotten meat, the heart was the seat of the emotions, and the arteries carried air.

Less than two centuries on, much of this had become what C. S. Lewis (1964) aptly called 'the discarded image'. The new universe was infinite: Pascal in the seventeenth century felt himself lost 'entre les deux abîmes de l'infini et du néant', terrified of 'les espaces infinis'. It was also heliocentric;

earth (and man) had been displaced from the centre. The sensory horizons were broadened in both directions: Galileo had seen the moons of Jupiter, and Leeuwenhoek had seen spermatozoa. Concepts of nature were being altered in other ways: by the seventeenth century Francesco Redi had showed that maggots come from flies' eggs, and William Harvey had demonstrated the circulation of the blood.

Other cultural and political changes were as massive. The fifteenth century presents a monolithically Catholic Europe (if with stirrings of dissent among the Wycliffites and Hussites); vernacular bibles are a rarity, the liturgy is in Latin, and the Pope is head of a universal church. By 1600 Luther, Zwingli and Calvin are history, and Europe is (roughly) split between a Catholic South and a Protestant North. England is a Protestant nation with a vernacular bible and liturgy, with the sovereign as head of a national church.

In painting, our period encompasses Dürer, the van Eycks and Holbein at one end, Titian, Rubens and Rembrandt in the middle, and Watteau, Gainsborough and Reynolds at the other end. In music we range from the Burgundian polyphonists through Palestrina, Monteverdi, Purcell, the Bachs, Mozart and Haydn; at the end of our three centuries Beethoven is a child of six.

Becoming more parochial, English poets who flourished in these centuries include Skelton, Wyatt, Spenser, Donne, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gray and Collins; prose-writers include Sir Thomas More, Sidney, Bacon, Browne, Burton, Bunyan, Swift, Addison and Johnson, dramatists Shakespeare, Kyd, Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve and Sheridan. When Caxton's first printed books appeared in the late 1470s, Shakespeare's birth was nearly ninety years in the future; at the close of the period Blake was in his twenties, Wordsworth was six and Scott and Coleridge were respectively five and four.

In the final century, we truly enter the modern age, symbolically signalled in a way by the founding of the Royal Society in 1660, and the publication of Newton's *Principia* (1686). This is the age of the great rationalist philosophers like Descartes and Leibniz, and the empiricists like Bacon and Locke, whose work prompted the beginnings of the modern experimental science that paved the way for the Industrial Revolution. After the *Principia* the physical universe was (as indeed it has largely remained at the macrophysical level) a vast mathematical machine. Comets, once harbingers of disaster, became an elegant proof of the orderliness of the cosmos through Sir Edmund Halley's prediction in 1704 of cometary periodicity. Phlogiston ceded to oxygen, Jenner introduced vaccination for smallpox.

Politically, England in the 1470s was a late medieval Catholic monarchy, with a weak parliament and monarchs with theoretically absolute power (if in fact under strong political and financial constraints). By the eighteenth century the nation had been through a religious reformation, a regicide, a commonwealth, the flight of the hereditary monarch, and the accession of a foreign king who signed away much of his power. By the mid-seventeenth century the main structures of modern parliamentary democracy (if not in its later populist form) were established in principle; the monarchy, while not ‘constitutional’ in the modern sense, was still unlike anything known in earlier Europe except perhaps in Iceland.

In the fifteenth century England was an island nation, if with two independent kingdoms, Wales and Scotland, sharing its territory; or, counting imperfectly conquered Ireland, a two-island nation; English, far from being a world language, probably had fewer than seven million speakers, and was virtually unknown outside of its island confines. By the 1770s there was an empire, with Anglophone enclaves as far west as the Americas and as far east as India. A little over a decade later, English was spoken as far south as Australia and the Cape of Good Hope. The scene is set, by the 1770s, for the expansion of the ‘New Englishes’: extraterritorial mother-tongue varieties (American, Australasian, South African), second-language varieties and English-based pidgins and creoles.

England was never again seriously invaded, let alone colonised, after 1066. Indeed, a significant and linguistically important part of its later history involves the English invading and colonising other places: Ireland, the Americas, Asia, Oceania, Africa. Even if the primary effect, as suggested above, was the creation of a host of new Englishes, the influence went the other way as well: there was extensive lexical feedback into mainland English, in the shape of borrowings from the native languages of the colonised regions, and from other European languages with which English came into renewed contact. To give a tiny sample, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Dravidian languages gave us *calico*, *copra*, *curry*, Hindi *bandana*, *cheetah*, *jungle*, Arabic *magazine*, *hashish*, *henna*, Malay *rattan*, *amok*, *orang-utan*, Bantu languages *zebra*, and *baobab* (probably via Portuguese); these all reflect the ‘exotic’ experiences of foreign parts. On the other hand, renewed contact with Europe in this period of expansion brought in *rowan*, *troll*, *keg* from North Germanic, *yacht*, *landscape*, *easel* from Dutch, *frigate*, *cartoon*, *opera* from Italian, and so on.

But there was another kind of demographic movement that also had linguistic effects: an internal ‘invasion’ of London and the Southeast, especially from the North and East Anglia, which from late Middle English

times onward left in the emerging standard and related varieties a number of items which are clearly not native to these areas. One particularly important example is the diffusion into London of the present 3 sing. verb ending in *-s* (replacing earlier *-th*), which is a northern form of Old English date (see Lass this volume).

## 1.2 Social and linguistic change

One might expect such enormous social, political and cultural change to correlate with great linguistic change. And it does – though whether the two are related is another matter. I deliberately avoided detailed attention to language (except for lexis) in the last section, because the often heard claim that massive cultural change *per se* ‘causes’ linguistic change is, except at this level, dubious. It is a trivial fact that new objects and concepts require new names; and only slightly less trivial – with respect to major structural change – that contact with other languages leads to borrowing, the greater the contact the greater the borrowing. But *structural* change precipitated by contact occurs only where there is large-scale, persistent bilingualism, and the opportunity for massive code-switching or even ‘creolisation’. This was probably never the case at any point in the history of English (though some have argued that it was: Bailey & Maroldt 1977, Poussa 1982). In any case, the last episode that could even remotely be construed this way is the immediate post-Conquest period. From the thirteenth century on England was for all practical purposes a monolingual nation: though there were of course significant contacts with other languages, which left impresses on the lexicon and provided some materials for new kinds of stylistic distinction in English writing: perhaps the most important of these contacts is the continuing one with Latin (Görlach this volume, Nevalainen this volume, Adamson this volume).

Now to say that social change itself does not (and indeed cannot) directly cause linguistic change is not to say that language is insulated from the rest of culture: only that we need to make certain important distinctions, in terms of the levels on which ‘causal’ factors operate, and the detailed relations between cultural facts and the properties of linguistic systems. Linguistic change for instance may be accelerated in periods of massive social change, through increased contact between previously isolated sectors of society, weakening of old ties and development of new ones, etc.; but these are enabling or encouraging conditions, not direct causes.

Similarly, and more relevant to this volume’s concerns, certain types of social change (e.g. development of a more ‘centripetal’ society, with prestige

focussed on particular areas) can lead to language standardisation (Görlach this volume; Salmon this volume; Lass this volume). In such situations the dialect chosen as the base for the incipient standard will be one with particular prestige, associated with centres of economic, political and cultural power. But there is no inherent structural property of the chosen dialect that fits it particularly to become the base for a standard; and there is nothing about either the process of standard-formation itself or the functional requirements of a standard that conduces to or favours particular structures. The choice of a standard is a selection of properties belonging to speakers and their social aggregates, not to linguistic systems. These conceptually distinct domains must be kept separate in linguistic historiography.

So we can say quite properly that the structural history of a language ('linguistic history' in the strict sense) is quite independent in principle of its social history. The story of a language 'itself' must be carefully distinguished from the story of its changing uses, users and social context – just as the changes themselves (as results) must be distinguished from the mechanisms by which they came about (e.g. lexical and social diffusion). The two are related in subtle and complex ways, but the relation is never 'causal' in any philosophically respectable sense. Perhaps an example of both independence and social implication will clarify this.

All languages appear to show patterns of variation that can be coopted as social markers. And variation within a given speech community will often fall into patterns that clearly reflect (and in use, help to sustain) social stratification or other kinds of differentiation. So for instance it is a social fact that certain 'advanced' (or more neutrally, innovative) sixteenth-century London speakers had /i:/ in words like *read*, *meat* (ME /ɛ:/), while others, more conservative, still had the old value /ɛ:/. It is also a historical linguistic fact, since the 'advanced' group shows merger with the reflexes of ME /e:/ (*reed*, *meet*), while the conservatives keep the two categories separate. And it is a synchronic linguistic fact, insofar as the distribution of particular phonemes in particular lexical items, and the number and nature of available phonemic contrasts, are simply structural properties of a dialect. There is of course no way a particular variant can be – of its own nature – especially 'appropriate' for a given social group. Linguistic facts as such are socially neutral; it is only their *evaluation* by a social group as having a particular significance that makes them socially relevant.

So it came about (for whatever reasons – mainly ones associated with the types of people who displayed it) that in the early seventeenth century various authorities tended to stigmatise dialects with *meat/meet* merger. At this point the linguistic fact becomes a social fact. But by the middle of the

eighteenth century this merger had become the norm in the standard varieties, and lack of it was perceived as an Irish stereotype. Here the same linguistic fact, by virtue of a different interpretation, becomes a different social fact. In this sense it is a vulgar error to talk about ‘social causation’ of changes in linguistic structure; the chapters in this volume, while sensitive to the fact and importance of variation, and to standardisation, social attitudes, and the like, will generally avoid this kind of simplistic equation.

### 1.3 The sociolinguistic and historiographic context

The choice of Caxton’s establishment of a press in London as the opening date of a period is not just a matter of convenience or symbolism: printing plays a vital role in certain later developments. Until at least the later fifteenth century, there was no particular variety with so much more prestige than others that it could serve as a general exemplar of ‘the language’. (Though during the fifteenth century Chancery English had begun to be adopted by writers outside London, if often in a form modified by local dialects: Görlach this volume.) That is, there was no standard in the modern sense; written English (which is of course all we have records of, though the same must have been true of spoken varieties) was in general the English of the particular locality the user came from. The great literary productions of Middle English times were written in clearly identifiable regional varieties, from the North (*Cursor Mundi*) and north Midlands (the *Gawain* poet) to the southwest Midlands (*Piers Plowman*), Kent (The *Ayenbite of Inwit*) and London (Chaucer).

Equally important, before printing, the particular dialect a text happened to be originally written in did not necessarily determine the precise shape in which it would appear to particular readers. Even if English had had a standard (as it did in a sense in the Winchester-based Old English *Schriftsprache*), it could not have been promulgated in the same way as later ones were: simply because the exigencies of manuscript transmission did not guarantee identical replicas of a given exemplar, or allow the mass distribution of identical copies that became possible after the advent of printing. Before printing, there was no way of ensuring that any linguistic form in a text would be replicated: the next scribe might just change things in accordance with his own usage. This means that even if there was an incipient feel for a ‘standard’ or ‘best’ English (see below), there was no way that such a perception could be reliably propagated; no ‘mass media’ as it were.

Certainly some sense of linguistic superiority was already apparent in

southern attitudes toward the North in ME times: in 1382 John of Trevisa (writing in the West Country) remarks, with not atypical xenophobia as well as acute social comment, that

Al þe longage of þe Norþhumbres, and specialych at 3ork, ys so scharp, slytting and frotyng, and unschape, þat we Souperon men may þat longage unneþe undurstonde. Y trowe þat þat ys because þat a buþ ny3 to strange men and aliens þat spekeþ strangelych, and also bycause þat þe kynges of Engelond woneþ alwey fer fram þat contray: For a buþ more y-turnd to the souþ . . .

[The language of the Northumbrians, especially at York, is so sharp, piercing, grinding and misshapen that we Southern men can scarcely understand it. I believe that is because they are near strange men and aliens that speak strangely, and also because the kings of England always live far from that country. For they are more turned to the south . . .]

Chaucer shows similar attitudes: his two (somewhat satirised) northern clerks come from a town ‘fer in the noorth; I kan nat telle where’ (Reeve’s Tale, *Canterbury Tales* A4015); and the Parson, who doesn’t seem to like poetry very much, nonetheless considers the (southern) rhyming tradition better than the northern alliterative one: ‘I am a Southren man;/ I can nat geeste “rum, ram, ruf;” by lettere’ (Parson’s Prologue, *Canterbury Tales* X.42–3). There were of course corresponding anti-southern attitudes in the North: for a Northerner to ‘speak southern’ was a form of putting on airs. When the sheep-thief Mak in the Towneley *Second Shepherd’s Play* (Yorkshire, late fourteenth century) claims to be a yeoman of the King, and uses southern forms like *ich* for *I*, etc., his colleagues tell him to ‘take outt that sothren tothe/And sett in a torde’.

This geopolitical chauvinism increases steadily, but the southern variety (due to the importance of London and the Southeast) becomes culturally dominant. John Hart (*Orthographie*, 1569) says that educated London is ‘that speach which euery reasonable English man, will the nearest he can, frame his tongue therevnto’, and twenty years later Puttenham in his *Arte of Poesie* remarks that the best English is ‘the vsual speech of the court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx miles’; a century on, Christopher Cooper (*Grammatica linguae anglicanae*, 1685) notes that in the South ‘purissima & emendata loquendi consuetudo est’ [the purest and most cultivated speech is the custom]. Whether these perceived varieties are indeed ‘unified’ in any reasonable way is actually not at issue: the perception that they are is important, and has an effect in bringing into being a still greater unification and high valuation. Ideological positions can help to generate the very situations they claim actually exist.

As early as the 1490s the question of what variety should be the one propagated in print had begun to be an issue: Caxton in his prologue to the *Eneydos* (1490) notes that ‘in these dayes euery man . . . wyll vtter his comynycacion . . . in suche maners & termes/that fewe shal vnderstonde theym’, and defines his base variety in terms of audience and type of English:

And for as moche as this present booke is not for a rude vplondysch man to labour therein/ne rede it/but onely for a clerke & a noble gentyman . . . Therefor in a meane bytwene bothe I haue reduced & translated this sayd booke in to our englysshe not ouer rude ne curious but in such termes as shall be vnderstonden by goddys grace accordynge to my cople.

This growing perception of standardness as a virtue (in Europe generally, not just England) is connected with a general late Renaissance and Enlightenment desire for linguistic ‘normalisation’ and ‘stabilisation’; this would give to the increasingly used local vernaculars an ‘authority’ and permanence like that of Latin (which being a dead language was no longer subject to the vagaries of usage: even if it was pronounced differently in different countries, and its vocabulary was increased, its grammatical structure remained relatively stable). In other countries academies were established to produce dictionaries and grammars (Italy in 1582, France in 1635); but the anarchic and independent English never got quite that far, despite the urging of writers like Dryden and Swift.

A normative grammatical tradition did however develop, and writers on language became increasingly restrictive in what they allowed as ‘good’ English. During the eighteenth century, orthoepists, grammarians and lexicographers began to see their role as doing something about the ‘perplexity’, ‘confusion’, ‘boundless variety’ and ‘adulteration’ that English seemed to exhibit (these terms are all from the preface to Johnson’s *Dictionary*, 1755), and the later eighteenth century saw the birth of the prescriptive grammatical tradition that still haunts our educational systems.

By the end of the eighteenth century there existed something more than ever before like an institutionalised standard: from a rather inchoate cluster of quasi-standards with a London and Home-Counties base, we begin to see the emergence of a cluster of similar varieties close to a ‘received’ English. Though this (in the sense of RP as a phonological model, with its associated grammatical features) is a development of the nineteenth century (see Finegan CHEL IV).

From the mid-sixteenth century there is a new historiographical dimension: we now have access to writers on (rather than merely in) the language.

Our evidential base for Early Modern English is different from anything available for earlier periods. (Indeed, not since classical times has there been such a wealth of writing on language.) For the first time in the history of English there is extensive metalinguistic discourse: grammarians and orthoepists comment not only on sociolinguistic matters, but on linguistic structure itself. There is a new tradition of phonetic description, explicit grammatical analysis, and a wealth of judgement on the status of particular pronunciations, forms and constructions (cf. Salmon this volume; Lass this volume; Görlach this volume). Running parallel to (and in some cases, interestingly, conflicting with) our textual data we now have both comment and description, and some of this is extremely important: e.g. the first reliable phonetic descriptions of English allow us to know things about the language from the 1550s in a way that is impossible for any earlier period.

#### 1.4 The language itself

The distinguishing features of the ‘named’ periods in the history of English (Old, Middle, etc.) are not always clear; those qualified by ‘early’ and ‘late’ are usually even less so. There is consensus about what we might call ‘prototypical’ texts for some periods, even qualified ones. *Beowulf* is solidly ‘Old English’, *Ancrene Wisse* is ‘early Middle English’, Chaucer ‘late(ish) Middle English’, Spenser and Shakespeare ‘Early Modern’. Texts from the interfaces between clear periods however are trickier: is the *Peterborough Chronicle* ‘late Old English’ or ‘early Middle English’? Are the Pastons and Caxton ‘late Middle’ or ‘early Early Modern’? Is Dryden ‘late Early Modern’ or ‘early Modern’? The phrasing suggests that I don’t take these distinctions very seriously; while cover-names for large and well-defined periods are useful, it is an essentialist mistake to attribute too much importance to them, and take the categories themselves as ‘real’. The best terminological guideline is probably Juliet’s question: ‘What’s in a name?’

Still, there is broad agreement, linked to certain large-scale linguistic features, and dates of a sort: by around 1500 we are out of Middle and into Early Modern; by around 1700 we are into Modern English, i.e. ‘our own language’ – if in a rather different form from any now written or spoken. To use a crude but telling criterion, Spenser and Shakespeare need a lot of lexical glossing and syntactic explication for the non-specialist modern reader, but considerably less than Chaucer or Langland; Addison and Swift do only marginally, and Dr Johnson perhaps not at all, or no more than Jane Austen or Dickens.

But the fine details of periodisation are not as important as the general matter of just what was happening in the period. The individual chapters will give the details, but a few major points are worth noting in this introduction.

Perhaps the most easily visible change (see Salmon this volume) is in the features of written English. From the later sixteenth century on texts come to look more ‘familiar’, partly because of the stabilisation of the kind of punctuation we now use (cf. the passage from Caxton quoted in the previous section), and partly through the regularisation of orthography. In particular, the emergence of the ‘one word: one spelling’ principle (a relatively recent phenomenon in any European vernacular). For a long time ‘public’ writing was much more bound by these developing conventions than private writing (see Osselton 1984), but they gradually penetrated the private sphere as well. We can really date the emergence of modern spelling (except for minor details) from the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century; a comparison of passages from prints of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590), Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1674) and Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (1714) will illustrate the changes, and some of the differences from later usage that still remained.

- (1) And as she lay vpon the durtie ground,  
     Her huge long taile her den all ouerspred,  
     Yet was in knots and many boughtes vpwound,  
     Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred  
     A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,  
     Sucking vpon her poisonous duges . . .
- (2) There stood a Hill not far whose griesly top  
     Belch’d fire and rowling smoak; the rest entire  
     Shon with a glossie scurff, undoubted sign  
     That in his womb was hid metallic Ore,  
     The work of Sulphur . . .
- (3) And now, unveil’d, the *Toilet* stands display’d,  
     Each Silver Vase in mystic Order laid.  
     First, rob’d in White, the Nymph intent adores  
     With Head uncover’d, the *Cosmetic* Pow’rs.  
     A heav’nly Image in the Glass appears,  
     To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears.

Aside from minor changes in some conventions (e.g. capitalisation of nouns, the apostrophe in weak past tense forms), there have been more basic ones: in particular, the use of <u> and <v> is normalised in the

modern way: rather than <v> initially and <u> medially regardless of whether a consonant or vowel is meant (Spenser's *upon, ouerspred*), the modern usage is firm by the mid-seventeenth century. (Dictionaries however continue for a long time to alphabetise <u/v> together: Johnson 1755 has an entry only for <v>, and the lemma *vizier* is followed immediately by *ulcer, unzoned* is followed by *vocabulary*.)

By the eighteenth century, the previously rather capricious use of double consonant graphs (either to indicate short vowels or simply as typographical decorations) has been stabilised (Spenser has *mortall*, Milton still *scurff*), as has the use of final <-e> (cf. Spenser's *taile*, Milton's *smoak*). By Pope's time most of modern orthography is in place, and only minor matters like <-c> rather than <-ck> (*musicke, publicke*) remain to be sorted out.

In terms of the language proper, rather than its written representation, our period is marked by a series of major transformations that define the transition to 'modern' English. In phonology the most important perhaps is the Great Vowel Shift, in which the entire Middle English long-vowel system was altered (e.g. the old /e:, o:/ in *beet, boot* were raised to /i:, u:/, and the old /i:, u:/ in *bite, out* ended up as diphthongs approaching their modern values). In addition ME short /a/ (*cat*) raised to [æ] and then lengthened before certain consonants (e.g. in *pass, bath*), leading to a split in the category (short vowel in *cat*, long vowel, often of different quality, in *pass, bath*); and ME /u/ split, giving different vowels in *put* and *cut*. Postvocalic /r/ began to drop in syllable codas from the early eighteenth century, leading to the modern non-rhotic type of English (no /r/ in *part*, none in *far* unless the next word begins with a vowel).

In morphology, most of the remnants of the old inflectional system vanish: the *-(e)n* marker of verb plurals and infinitives goes, as does the singular/plural distinction in the second person pronoun (*thou* versus *ye/you*), along with its verb concords (*thou goest* versus *ye/you go*). The *you* versus *thou* distinction is first pragmaticised, the old singulars attracted toward more intimate and familiar uses, and the plurals polite or honorific; by the eighteenth century only invariable *you* remains except in special registers like verse or religious discourse (and in certain regional vernaculars, especially in the North, where they are still used, if vanishing). The 3 sing. present indicative marker is at first mainly *-(e)th*, though *-(e)s* begins to appear in the fifteenth century, and takes over by the seventeenth, except as in the *you/thou* case, in 'high' registers. (On the preceding matters see Lass this volume.)

In syntax we observe among other things the rise of *do*-support (use of 'dummy' *do* in questions and negations: 'what do you read?' instead of

‘what read you?’, ‘I do not read’ instead of ‘I read not’); and the full development and spread to all environments of the progressive (*be* + *V-ing*) form (obligatory ‘I am reading’ for non-habitual uses: see Rissanen this volume).

The phonological changes in particular allow a kind of historical contextualisation for speakers of different current varieties of English. Thus American and Scottish readers who do not have distinct vowels in *cat* and *pass* and pronounce /r/ in *far*, northerners who distinguish neither the vowels of *cat*, *pass*, nor *put*, *cut*, Irish speakers with postvocalic /r/ and only a marginal *put/cut* contrast, can all see themselves as ‘archaic’ or ‘conservative’ with respect to major changes that were going on in the Southeast of England during this period.

The period covered here then sees the emergence of what would be generally recognised now as ‘English’, without the need for special period adjectives; and in particular, from the later seventeenth century on, the development of an early version of what was to become the southern British ‘received’ English of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The early versions of this proto-standard, before the *cat/pass* split and the loss of postvocalic /r/, as well as contemporary vernaculars, southern and non-southern, formed the basis of the older extraterritorial Englishes (Irish, North American); the later version, with these changes complete, was the basis of the first Southern Hemisphere Englishes (Australian, and later New Zealand), and the first layer of the complex input that later became South African English. We might say then that the varieties of English that arose in the last seventy-five years or so of our period became the basis of all (non-Scots) standard varieties now spoken, and all the standard and vernacular extraterritorial Englishes.

All these changes (and many others) unfold against the background of a complex, fluid, multi-dialectal society, with coexisting varieties vying for the status of ‘standard’, and individual speakers often switching from one variety to another under certain conditions. The story told in this volume will be a distillation from an immensely complicated picture of ongoing change and variation – more a treatment of ‘landmarks’ than a ‘full history’ (as if that could even be written). But it is still, as far as I can see, the fullest treatment of the language of the period available in one place to date.