

## Activity 11.3- *Piers Plowman*

### Vocabulary from OE

<i> = short [i]

OE hit	hit
OE in	in
OE into	into
OE hlinode <i>fr</i> hlinian	lened
OE þingas <i>fr</i> þing	thynges
OE þes/þis	þis
OE wicce + -ed	wikked
OE winciende <i>fr</i> wincian	wynkyng
OE ic	Y

<i>= long [i:]

OE hwil	while
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<y> = short [y]

OE hyllas <i>fr</i> hyll	hulles
OE wyrrende <i>fr</i> wyrcan	worchyng

<e> = short [e]

OE menn <i>fr</i> mann	men
OE seldcup	selkouthe
OE sellic ( <i>adj</i> )	sellies
OE tellan	telle
OE se <i>etc</i>	the/þe
OE wel/wela + -th	welthe
OE wende <i>fr</i> wendan	wente
OE westweard	westward

<e> = long [e:]

OE feld	feld
OE hēran/hiēran	here
OE gelēfe <i>fr</i> gelēfan/gelyfan	leue
OE mē	me
OE slēp	slepte
OE wērigness	werynesse

<eo> = short [eə]

OE weorc ( <i>pl</i> )	werkes
OE weorold	world

<eo> = long [e:ɜ]

OE behēold <i>fr</i> behēaldan	beheld
OE befēoll <i>fr</i> befēallan	biful
OE betwēonum	bytwene
OE dēop	depe
OE trēowþ	treuthe

<æ> = short [æ]

OE æfter	aftir
OE dæl	dale
OE fæger	fair
OE læg <i>fr</i> licgan	lay
OE mæg <i>fr</i> magan	may
OE wæs	was

<æ> = long [æ:]

OE mæne	mene
OE gemætte <i>fr</i> gemætan	mette
OE slæpan/ slæpende	slepe/slepynge
OE þærinne	there-ynne
OE þær	þer
OE wære	were

<ea> = short [æə]

OE eall/all	al/alle
OE ealswa	as
OE (of)wealcen <i>fr</i> wealcen	of-walked
OE seah <i>fr</i> seon	say/seigh/sigh
OE sceal <i>fr</i> sculan	shal

<ea> = long [e:ɔ]

OE dēaþ	Deth
OE ēastweard	estward
OE scēap	shep

<a> = short [a]

OE ac	ac
OE land	launde
OE manig	many
OE wandriende <i>fr</i> wandrian	wandryng
OE hwanne	whan

<a>= long [ɑ:]

OE ān	a/an
OE āscap <i>fr</i> ascian	ascuth
OE fānd <i>fr</i> findan	fond
OE þā	tho
OE un + hālig	vnholly
OE wā	wo

<o> = short [o]

OE folc	folk
OE forþ	forth
OE morgen + -ing	mornyng
OE torr OF tur	tour

<o> = long [o:]

OE scōp <i>fr</i> scippan	shope
OE sōfte	softe

<u> = short [u]

OE full	ful
OE sumor	somur
OE sunne	sonne
OE wundor ( <i>pl</i> )	wondres
OE wunode <i>fr</i> wunian	woned
OE gewunan <i>fr</i> gewuna	wones

<u>= long [u:]

OE scrūdas <i>fr</i> scrud	shroudes
OE trūwode <i>fr</i> trūwian	trowed

## Vocabulary from OF and ON

There are relatively few words of French origin, and fewer still from Old Norse. The south and west of England had not been settled by Danes and Norwegians, so the scarcity of ON words is understandable. The proportion of French words in one short text cannot, of course, be used to come to any useful conclusions. We need a great deal more evidence to be able to comment, but the text does demonstrate the solid core of OE vocabulary which is the basis of our language.

OF abite	<b>abite</b>	OF merveillous		AF treisoun	<b>tresoun</b>
OF guile	<b>gyle</b>	+ -lic	<b>merueylousliche</b>	OF trecheor + -y	<b>tricherye</b>
OF hermite	<b>heremite</b>	OF povre/poure	<b>pore</b>	ONF wiatier	<b>waytede</b>
AF manere	<b>manere</b>	OF sesoun	<b>sesoun</b>		
OF mai	<b>May</b>	AF spirit	<b>spiritus</b>		
ON baðir	bothe				
ON vitrligr	witterliche				

## Spelling

The text shows the common ME conventions already observed:

- The interchangeable use of <i> or <y>, with <y> in frequent use and also used for the 1st person singular pronoun *I*.
- Word-initial letter <v> and word-medial letter <u> for both the vowel [u], eg *unholy*, *spiritus*, and the consonant [v] eg (examples not in this text) *neuelynge*, *vitales*.
- The digraph <wh> is used for former OE <hw>, *whan*, *while*.

The spelling of *ascuth*, *biful*, *somur*, *spiritus* rather than *asketh*, *bifel*, *somer*, *spirites* is similar to the irregular spelling of unstressed vowels in OE. Letter <u> is used rather than <e> for the unstressed vowel [ə], for which sound there is no available letter of the alphabet.

## Pronunciation

- The OE vowel [y] remains in this dialect but is spelt with letter <u> (*bulles* from OE *hyllas*). The spelling of *worchyng* (OE *wyrcende*) probably illustrates the alternative use of letter <o> for [u].
- The short OE diphthong <eo> has smoothed to either the first element, as in *werkes* (from *weorc*), or the second, as in *world* (from *weorold*); long OE <eo> has smoothed to [e:] (eg *depe* from *deop*).
- Long OE [æ:] has shifted to open [ɛ:] eg *mette* (OE *mætan*), *slepe* (OE *slæpan*).
- Short OE [æ] and diphthong [æə] have fallen together as short [a] (eg *aftir* from *æfter*, *shal* from *sceal*).
- Long OE [ɛ:ə] has smoothed to open [ɛ:] (eg *shep* from *sceap*).
- The shift and rounding of OE [ɑ:] to [ɔ:], as in *fond*, *unholy*, *wo* (OE *fand*, *unhalig*, *wa*) is evidence that this is not a Northern dialect.

## Word forms - pronouns

Only three personal pronouns occur in this text - *hit*, *me*, *y*, but elsewhere in this C-text version of the poem we find *she* and *here* for the feminine pronouns. *Thei*, *hem* and *here* are the plural pronouns, typical of a Midlands dialect which has adopted the Northern *thei* from Old Norse, but still uses the OE-derived *hem* and *here* for *them* and *their*.

The use of *a/an*, *the/þe* and *þis* as determiners can easily be overlooked when examining word forms, because they are the familiar forms of MnE.

## Word forms - inflections

The noun plurals in this text have the -es/-s inflection (eg *shroudes*), except for *men*. Elsewhere some -en/-n suffixes are used, (eg *shon* for *shoes*). Of the four present tense verb forms, *y may* and *y shal* are irregular, *y leue* shows the 1st p sg suffix <-e>, and *þis world ascuth* the 3rd p sg more usually written <-eþ/-eth>; past tense verbs include both strong forms (eg *beheld*, *biful*), with a change of stem vowel, and weak forms (eg *lened*, *woned*) with the <-ed> suffix. The only past participle *of-walked* has the regular weak <-ed> suffix, and all four present participle forms have the <-yng/-ing> suffix familiar in MnE. The OE <-an> infinitive has been reduced to <-e> (eg *slepe*). The only forms of the verb *be* in the text are the past *was* and *were*.

## Grammar and word order

The word-forms examined so far indicate a dialect which is in many respects similar to MnE, and the grammar also has few features which seem unfamiliar to us. There is some inversion of elements in the clause such as *y a shep were* (SCV), *wondres to here* (OV), *lened y* (VS), but as this is a poetic text, these inversions cannot necessarily be taken as part of normal speech.

The only structures which are not familiar in MnE are *me biful* and *me mette*. The pronoun *me* is the indirect object of the verb, which has no subject, and so is called an impersonal verb. In MnE (*it*) *befell (to) me* might be just about acceptable (?), but not (*it*) *dreamed (to) me*. Impersonal constructions are quite common in ME, and derive from OE.

The clause *y shope me into shroudes* (*I dressed myself in woollen clothes*) contains an example of a reflexive verb with the pronoun *me*, which would require *myself* in MnE.

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