

Historical Linguistics WS 2017–2018 / Kauhanen
Homework for the reading week

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) is generally considered the greatest Middle English poet; his most important work is *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of 24 stories, most of them set in verse (rhyming couplets in iambic pentametre).

On the reverse side, you will find the first 18 lines of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, the first section of the book, along with an interlineal translation to Modern English. To hear how Chaucer's English may have sounded (based on comparative and internal reconstruction), go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5lCjzLXRTE> for a recitation.

Your task is the following:

1. Provide a transcription of the 18 lines of Middle English, based on the YouTube recording and using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Include primary word stress and vowel length in your transcription. (Example transcription of the ME word *melodye*: /mɛlɔ'di:ə/.)
2. Based on your transcription, answer the following questions:
 - a. What are the Middle English phonemes corresponding to the following Modern English phonemes: /ʌ/, /u/, /ɜ/, /ɑʊ/, /aɪ/, /əʊ/?
 - b. Point out a homophone pair in the poem extract which is no longer homophonous in Modern English.
 - c. Point out one Middle English sound that is no longer found in Modern English.
3. Point out one *syntactic* difference between Middle English and Modern English based on the 18 lines of poetry.
4. Is the Middle English word *folk* singular or plural? Why?

You can either type your transcription and answers up using a computer (see e.g. <http://ipa.typeit.org/full/> for a way to type IPA symbols, or google “how to type IPA on” followed by your operating system), or simply turn in a hand-written version.

1 **Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote**
When April with its sweet showers
2 **The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,**
Has pierced the drought of March to the root,
3 **And bathed every veyne in swich licour**
And bathed every vein in such liquid
4 **Of which vertu engendred is the flour;**
By whose power the flower is created;
5 **Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth**
When the West Wind [=Zephyrus] also with its sweet breath,
6 **Inspired hath in every holt and heeth**
In every wood and heath has breathed life into
7 **The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne**
The tender crops, and the young sun
8 **Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,**
Has run half its course in Aries [=Ram],
9 **And smale foweles maken melodye,**
And small birds [=fowls] make melody,
10 **That slepen al the nyght with open ye**
That sleep all the night with open eye
11 **(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),**
(So Nature incites them in their hearts),
12 **Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,**
Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,
13 **And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,**
And pilgrims to seek unfamiliar strands,
14 **To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;**
To [seek] distant shrines, known in sundry lands;
15 **And specially from every shires ende**
And especially from every shire's end
16 **Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,**
Of England to Canterbury they travel,
17 **The hooly blisful martir for to seke,**
To seek the holy blessed martyr,
18 **That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.**
That helped them when they were sick.

(adapted from <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/gp-par.htm>)