



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S51. The Language of Late Mediæval Scribes and Early Modern Printers

Saturday 2 September: 9.30-11.30am

Convenor: Jacob Thaisen (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Email: thaisen@ifa.amu.edu.pl

Much mediaeval and early modern literature survives only through the agency of scribes and printers and so their copies have evidential value to students of those periods' language and literature alike. Spatial constraints influenced not only what layout for them to adopt but also what orthographic representation of lexical items and morphosyntactic units—with implications for our assessment of their copies and, in turn, of the scribes and printers themselves as linguistic informants for their time. This seminar stresses the interface between language and literature in seeking papers which discuss those constraining factors, of which space is but one.

English Words and Compositorial Practice in Turner's *Libellus De Re Herbaria Nouus*, 1538

Roderick W. McConchie (University of Helsinki)

William Turner's first herbal, a Latin work published by John Byddell, contains a large number of English plant names, many of them compounds. How exactly these were to be rendered in the printed text cannot have been entirely clear either to publisher or author, and a solution was needed. The final result was a typographical convention which, while visually convincing and perhaps original, especially by comparison with similar works of that period, is seemingly at odds with some other conventions. This paper explains what the compositor actually did to distinguish English words in a Latin text and how particular typographical features can elucidate whether a given collocation is actually a compound or not.

Fifteenth-century Scribes and Printers Struggling with Final -E in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*

Luisella Caon (University of Leiden)

While final *-e* loss in Middle English has been the object of several studies, little interest has been shown for the repercussions that this loss had on the spelling system of Middle English scribes. Scholars tend to believe that even though final *-e* was no longer pronounced, scribes often preserved it in their orthography but they used it haphazardly. This paper presents a study of all fifteenth-century witnesses of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, which reveals that final *-e* was not always used at random, at least by some scribes and one printer. Besides showing that the ending was not always used haphazardly, this study gives some insight into the spelling habits of some medieval scribes and printers.

Some Observations on the Spelling of *Canterbury Tales* Scribes

Jacob Thaisen (De Montfort University)

This paper presents examples of scribes of some fifteenth-century *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts regulating their spelling practices according to desired level of formality and demands of time and space. Other examples are given in which the transfer of features from exemplar to copy involves the substitution of one grapheme for another without their being any phonological significance. This in turn leads to a discussion of what “identity” between spelling forms means and of some related taxonomical issues since this “translation” between graphemic systems can be seen as a separate process from that of “translation” at the phonological and/or lexical levels.