OLD ENGLISH
400 BCE – 1065 CE

Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing sceæpænæ ðreamum,
monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
feasceaf funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
weox under wolcnum, weorðomyndum þah,
oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymsittendra

Lo, praise of the prowess of people-kings of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won! Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore, awing the earls. Since erst he lay friendless, a foundling,
fate repaid him: for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve, till before him
the folk, both far and near, who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate, gave him gifts:
a good king he!

MIDDLE ENGLISH
1066-1525 CE

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour,
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours y-ronne
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open yê
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,

When sweet April showers pierce March’s drought to the root and bathe each vein with the power
needed to generate fresh and strong flowers; When Zephyr (the wind) also has, with his sweet
breath, inspired in every wood and heath, the tender shoots and buds; And when the young sun
has entered into the sign of the Ram, and many little birds make melodies, the people long to go
on pilgrimages.
MIDDLE ENGLISH: LONDON DIALECT
AROUND 1380

And as for me, thogh that I can but lyte,
On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
And to hem yeve I feyth and ful credence,
And in myn herte have hem in reverence
So hertely, that ther is game noon
That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
But hit be seldom, on the holyday;
Save, certeynly, whan that the month of May
Is comen, and that I here the foules singe,
And that the floures ginnen for to springe,
Farwel my book and my devocioun!

EARLY MODERN ENGLISH
1525-1800

SHAKESPEARE
1564-1613

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.