English *a* to *o* before a nasal in West Midland (hence *mon* in Gawain, *man* in Chaucer), Old English *ā* to *ō* in all dialects except Northern (hence *lord* and Scots *laird*, *ghost* and Scots *gast*, *home* and Scots *hame*), Old English *ea* to *ae* by the end of the Old English period (hence Old English *eald*, Middle English *eld*, Modern English *old*; Old English *weald*, Middle English *wald*, Modern English [Cots]*wolds*), Old English *eo* to *e* during the twelfth century (hence Old English *heord*, Middle English *herde*, Modern English *herd*; Old English *eorre*, Middle English *erre*, Modern English *err*; Old English *eorl*, Middle English *erl*, Modern English *earl*), Old English *ēa* to *æ* by the end of the Old English period (hence Old English *dēad*, Middle English *dēde*, Modern English *dead*; Old English *hēafod*, Middle English *hēved*, Modern English *head*)[5], Old English *ēo* to *ē* in the twelfth century (hence Old English *dēop*, Middle English *dēpe*, Modern English *deep*; Old English *hrēocan*, Middle English *rēke*, Modern English *reek*).

The foregoing are no more than a sampling of sound changes that pertain for Old English and Middle English, and that have survived in modern speech. The student of Germanic philology will recognize that for reasons not entirely clear this early stage of English shows a remarkable flexibility in certain vowel patterns. The Great Vowel Shift of the transition from Middle to Modern English is more dramatic, yet the signs of vowel change to come are already present in Germanic English.

[5] In early English phonology, intervocalic *f* becomes *v*, then drops out.

Noun History

The student addressing himself to a synthetic grammar like Latin or German for the first time generally finds the noun his chief problem. Granting the extreme formal complexity of the verb in a language like Latin (where the complete conjugation of a single verb may yield upwards of two hundred forms), it is the noun, with its aspects of case, number, and gender, that is the puzzle. The reason for this is simple. The Modern English verb, though its inflections are far fewer than those of the Latin verb, is still a complicated part of speech, what with the numerous auxiliary possibilities designating tense, mood, and voice, and with the adverbial appendages that condition or particularize meaning (*put up with, put down, put in* may very reasonably

be considered verb-ideas, rather than verbs with modifiers).

The Modern English noun, on the other hand, represents a vast simplification of formal, aspectual possibilities, compared with its equivalent in a synthetic grammar. For instance, Modern English *cottage* has only three formal possibilities: *cottage* (for subject or object function in the singular), *cottage's* (for possessive function in the singular or plural depending on the position of the apostrophe), *cottages* (for subject or object function in the plural).[1] In Latin the noun *casa* is a member of one of five separate declensions, each with its own formal conditions. The noun has seven formal possibilities: *casa* (subject function in the singular), *casae* (subject function in the plural, possessive and indirect object function in the singular), *casam* (direct object function in the singular), *casā* (instrumental function in the singular), *casārum* (possessive function in the plural), *casīs* (indirect object and instrumental function in the plural), and *casās* (direct object function in the plural). Nor do the formal complications end there. *Casa* is a member of the so-called "first" declension in Latin, wherein all the nouns show the same inflectional pattern, but where nearly all are grammatically "feminine"; that is, they are assigned gender which may or may not be natural to the concept in question. By our ordinary notions *cottage* is a neuter concept, the proof resting in our use of "it" as the appropriate pronoun here. So too with *silva* (forest), *porta* (gate), or *lingua* ((language), all feminines we would conceive as neuter. Modern English has all but done away with gram-

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[1] Actually, the "sounded" formal possibilities for this noun are only two, since the sign of possession is an eye-sign only.

matical gender in favor of natural or logical gender. When we refer to a ship as "she," we are touching on grammatical gender, but it is not a vital dimension of Modern English as it is with synthetic languages.

Latin actually compromises between logical and grammatical gender, in that obviously male and female designations are treated as masculine or feminine. The noun *nauta* (sailor), though a first declension noun, is regarded as masculine, as is *agricola* (farmer). The Germanic languages, on the other hand, may push grammatical gender to what we regard as absurd positions. Modern German *Mädchen* (young woman or maiden) is construed as neuter. And Old English at times is no better in this respect: *wīfmann* (woman) is masculine, as are *stān* (stone) and *mōna* (moon).

The noun, then, in synthetic grammars, presents complications unfamiliar to Modern English. The history of the noun in English language development is a history of simplification, in the three areas of case, number, and gender. To appreciate the nature of this simplification, we must examine some representative Old English nouns and their aspectual dimensions. Since Old English grammars, for better or worse, regularly use Latin terminology in discussing noun declension, it would be well at this point to clarify the following Latinisms.

Nominative refers to the subject function of a noun (or pronoun), and to the predicate noun (or adjective) function. Examples:

Wǣron þā ǣrest heora *lātēowas* and *heretogan twēgen* gebrōþra, *Hengest* and *Horsa*. Hī wǣron Wihtgylses *suna*.

(Two brothers, Hengest and Horsa, were their first pilots and leaders. They were the sons of Wihtgyls.)

<div align="right">Bede's *History*</div>

Swā bēop *þā fyrmestan ȳtemeste*, and *þā ȳtemestan fyrmeste*; sōþlīce *manige* sind *geclipode*, and *fēawe gecorene*. (Thus the first are last and the last first; truly, many are called and few chosen.)

<div align="right">*Anglo-Saxon Gospels*[2]</div>

Genitive refers to the possessive function. In the examples above, the nouns *gebroþra* and *Wihtgylses* and the pronoun *heora* are possessives, as are the italicized in the following:

God wolde þā fandian *Abrahāmes* gehīersumnesse. (God then wished to test the obedience of Abraham.)

<div align="right">Ælfric</div>

Ēalā, hū fela *hȳrlinga* on *mīnes fæder* hūse hlāf genōhne habbaþ . . . (Alas, how many workers in the house of my father have bread enough . . .)

<div align="right">*Anglo-Saxon Gospels*</div>

Accusative refers to the direct object function and to the case of certain prepositional objects. In the examples above, the nouns *gehīersumnesse* and *hlāf* and the adjective *genōhne* are accusatives, as are the italicized in the following:

Nese: þȳlǣs gē *þone hwǣte* āwyrtwalien, þonne gē *þone*

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[1] The variety of inflectional endings for nominative, genitive, accusative, and dative cases will be accounted for in the discussion that follows of the various types or classes of declension.

coccel gadriaþ. (No, lest you uproot the wheat, when you gather the tares.)

<div align="right">*Anglo-Saxon Gospels*</div>

Hēr Hengest and Æsc gefuhton wiþ *Wēalas*, and genāmon *unārīmedlicu hererēaf*, and þā Wēalas flugon þā *Engle* swā swā fȳr. (Here Hengest and Æsc fought against the Celts and took boundless booty, and the Celts fled from the English as if from fire.)

<div align="right">*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*</div>

Dative refers to the indirect object function, to the case of certain prepositional objects, and to the function of instrumentation or agency. In the examples above, the noun *hūse* is dative, as are the italicized in the following:

Hēr Hengest and Horsa fuhton wiþ *Wyrtgeorne þǣm cyninge* in þǣre stōwe þe is gecweden Ægles-þrep . . . (Here Hengest and Horsa fought against the king Vortigern in the place that is called Aylesford . . .)

<div align="right">*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*</div>

Gewordenre gecwidrǣdenne *þæm wyrhtum*, hē sealde *ælcum* ānne pening wiþ his dæges *weorce*. (An agreement having been made with the workers, he gave each one a penny for his day's work.)

<div align="right">*Anglo-Saxon Gospels*</div>

And þæt folc þe hider cōm ongan weaxan and myclian tō þan swīþe þæt hī wǣron on *myclum ege þām sylfan landbīgengan* þe hī ǣr hider laþedon and cȳgdon. (And that folk that came hither began to grow and increase so strongly that they were a great terror to the inhabitants themselves who earlier invited and summoned them.)

<div align="right">Bede's *History*</div>

As with Latin, Old English nouns are grouped in a number of declensions, according to the stem-ending of the noun in the primitive stage of the parent Germanic. It is possible to establish a broad division here between nouns with an original vocalic ending and those with a consonantal ending in the parent German, and convenient to label the vocalic group Class I and the consonantal group Class II. The following paradigms follow this classification.

Stān (stone) is a typical Class I masculine noun, which offers in its declension the basis for the regular remaining inflections of nearly all Modern English nouns:

Singular		*Plural*
stān	NOM.	stānas
stānes	GEN.	stāna
stāne	DAT.	stānum
stān	ACC.	stānas

It may be noted here that the genitive singular and the nominative and accusative plural forms are identical with the Modern English equivalents in their consonant structure (*ST-N-S*). The vowels are different: the stem-vowel *A* has become *O*, and the *A* before the *S* of the plural has become *E* (changes that take place in early and late Middle English),[3] but the noun forms for the Old English are essentially familiar ones.

When we recognize that Old English is far more reliably

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[3] The generally acknowledged chronology of English language history is Old English (450–1100), Middle English (1100–1500), Early Modern English (1500–1650). Like any consensus-chronology this one is arguable, but still quite useful for basic discussion.

spelled than Modern English, in that all spelled syllables are sounded, even the forms of the nominative and accusative singular, which lack the unsounded -e of the modern spelling, come home to us. The Old English dative singular, with its spelled final -e, looks but does not sound familiar. Only the genitive and dative plural forms here seem essentially outside the pattern of the modern spelling and sounding. The latter form, the dative, comes into line in Middle English, as the result of a twofold process of levelling which may be observed taking place even in late Old English (tenth and eleventh centuries). The short vowels *A-O-U* lose their separate identity in a common short *E* (ə) and the *M* nasal is no longer regularly distinguished from the *N*, which in turn drops away as an inflection in Middle English. Thus, *stānum* in late Old and early Middle English might variously figure as *stānem*, *stānen*, *stānun*, before becoming *stāne*, and then, by analogy with the nominative and accusative plural forms, *stānes*.[4] So, too, with *stāna*, *stāne*, *stānes*. By Chaucer's time, the various inflections of *stān* have simplified to *stāne* and *stānes* and we have the structure, if not the sound, of the modern noun.

The declension pattern of *stān* holds for a large number of Old English nouns, among them *cyning* (king), *dæg* (day), *engel* (angel), *dēofol* (devil), *fugol* (bird), *wealh* (foreigner),[5] *mearh* (horse), *heofon* (heaven), *eorl* (nobleman), *gielp*

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[4] For an excellent discussion of analogy as a linguistic phenomenon, see G. L. Brook, *A History of the English Language*. Briefly, as Brook puts it, "The result of the operation of linguistic analogy is to make more complete the partial resemblance between two words."

[5] *Welsh* originally meant "alien" or "foreign" and was applied by the Anglo-Saxons to the Celts in Britain.

(boasting), all of them grammatical masculines. There are in addition a group of masculines that very closely subscribe to the pattern, some (like *bæcere* [baker], *cyme* [arrival], *hyge* [mind], *mere* [lake], *mete* [food]) differing only in the -*e* ending of the nominative and accusative singular, others (mainly tribal names like *Dene* [Danes], *Engle* [English], *Myrce* [Mercians], *Seaxe* [Saxons]) in the -*e* ending of the nominative-accusative plural.

A second declension pattern for the Class I (vocalic) nouns in Old English is represented by the noun *scip* (ship), a grammatical neuter:

Singular		*Plural*
scip	NOM.	scipu
scipes	GEN.	scipa
scipe	DAT.	scipum
scip	ACC.	scipu

The noun resembles *stān* in all respects save the nominative and accusative plural. The -*u* inflection here would level to -*e*, and the modern -*s* inflection for the plural forms would again come about through analogy. (It might here be noted that about 45 percent of all nouns in Classes I and II in Old English are grammatical masculines; and the great majority of these masculines are in Class I. Thus, the frequency of the -*es* and -*as* inflections for the Old English noun is considerable and underscores the analogy operation.)

The third declension pattern for Class I nouns involves grammatical feminines and may be illustrated by *glōf* (glove):

Singular		*Plural*
glōf	NOM.	glōfa
glōfe	GEN.	glōfa
glōfe	DAT.	glōfum
glōfe	ACC.	glōfa

Here the pattern of inflection is at once simpler than that for *stān* and less familiar. When one appreciates that many feminines resembling *glōf* show -*e* instead of -*a* for the nominative and accusative plural forms, it is obvious that the feminine group of Class I nouns represents the lightest inflectional pattern in the earliest stage of English, limited to -*e*/-*a* and -*um*.

The nouns in Class II, which showed a consonantal ending in the parent Germanic, belong to all three grammatical genders. The following three illustrate masculine, neuter, and feminine, respectively:

Nama (name)

Singular		*Plural*
nama	NOM.	naman
naman	GEN.	namana
naman	DAT.	namum
naman	ACC.	naman

Eare (ear)

Singular		*Plural*
ēare	NOM.	ēaran
ēaran	GEN.	ēarena
ēaran	DAT.	ēarum
ēare	ACC.	ēaran

Eorþe (earth)

eorþe	NOM.	eorþan
eorþan	GEN.	eorþena
eorþan	DAT.	eorþum
eorþan	ACC.	eorþan

An is clearly the dominant inflection here, figuring in all four cases (nominative plural, genitive singular, dative singular, and accusative singular and plural). Considering that a substantial number of Old English nouns belonged to Class II, it is noteworthy that plurals like *oxen* are the only Modern English nouns that show the direct survival of this inflection. It is also noteworthy that Modern English *children* and *brethen* represent a fusion of two kinds of plural inflection: the *-en* taken over from Class II and appended to the *-ru* that was their original (irregular) plural inflection.

In addition to these two main classes, there are certain irregular declensions in Old English, the most interesting from the modern point of view being the so-called mutation declension. The masculine *fōt* (foot) and the feminine *gōs* (goose) will illustrate this:

Singular		Plural
fōt	NOM.	fēt
fōtes	GEN.	fōta
fēt	DAT.	fōtum
fōt	ACC.	fēt
gōs	NOM.	gēs
gōse	GEN.	gōsa
gēs	DAT.	gōsum
gōs	ACC.	gēs

These are clearly the antecedents of the modern *foot/feet, goose/geese,* but with a peculiar difference. The stem-vowel does not remain constant for singular or plural; that of the dative singular resembles the nominative and accusative plural, and that of the remaining singular forms resembles the genitive and dative plural. This holds true for the nouns within the Old English group, some of which—*bōc* (book), *frēond* (friend), *āc* (oak), *burg* (fortress)—have since passed over to the *stān* pattern.

The masculine declension pattern for Class I, illustrated by *stān,* is clearly the basis for what regular noun inflection still exists in English. If we look to the state of the noun in Middle English, taking the East Midland dialect derived from the Old English Mercian and the basis of Modern Standard English, we note that by Chaucer's time (fourteenth century) the noun is pretty well established in its modern sense. For the great majority of Chaucerian nouns *-s* or *-es* is the regular genitive singular and common plural inflection. Some few nouns retain the Old English dative singular *-e* (*on lyve, on fyre, with childe*), but the regular Old English dative plural *-um* has levelled successively as *-em, -en, -e* and finally lost its identity in the common plural *-s/-es.* In earlier Middle English (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), especially in the Southern dialect derived from the Old English West Saxon, there are numerous plurals in *-en,* survivors of the Old English Class II declension, e.g., *voan* (foes), *honden* (hands), *deoflen* (devils), *goddeden* (good deeds), *hennen* (hens), *sunnen* (sins), *freren* (friars), all of which later pass over to the Class I plural pattern.