A Guide to Old English

Eighth Edition

Bruce Mitchell
and Fred C. Robinson

WILEY-BLACKWELL

A GUIDE TO OLD ENGLISH

A GUIDE TO OLD ENGLISH

EIGHTH EDITION

Bruce Mitchell and
Fred C. Robinson

WILEY-BLACKWELL
A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This eighth edition first published 2012

Edition History:
Bruce Mitchell (1e, 1964 and 2e, 1968); Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson (3e, 1982; 4e, 1986; 5e, 1992; 6e, 2001; and 7e, 2007)

Wiley-Blackwell is an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, formed by the merger of Wiley's global Scientific, Technical and Medical business with Blackwell Publishing.

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Mitchell, Bruce, 1920-2010.
A guide to old English / Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson. — 8th ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-470-67107-8 (pbk.)
1. English language—Old English, ca. 450-1100—Grammar. 2. English language—Old English, ca. 450-1100—Readers. 3. English philology—Old English, ca. 450-1100—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Robinson, Fred C. II. Title.
PE131.M5 2011
429′.82421—dc23

2011026041

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is published in the following electronic formats: ePDFs 9781119950264; ePub 9781119950271; Mobi 9781119950288

Set in 10.5/12pt Ehrhardt by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

1 2012

In Memoriam

DONOVAN F. MITCHELL

AND

IRENE K. MITCHELL

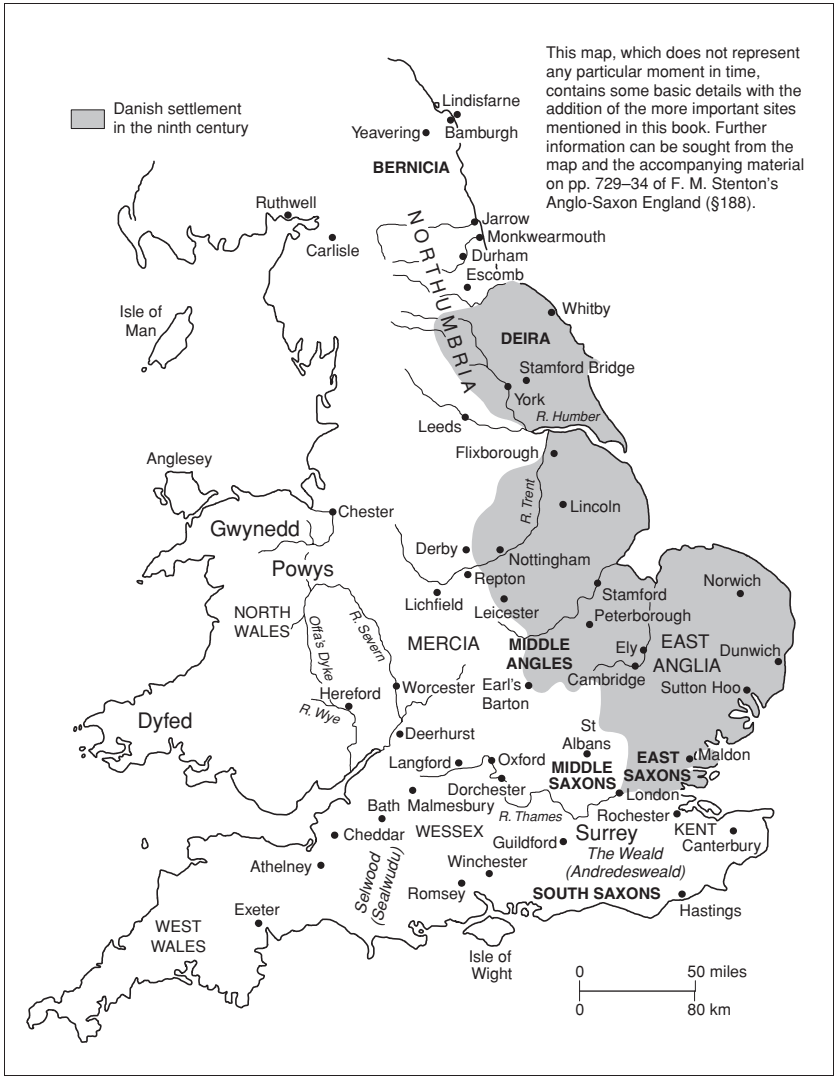
Foreword to the Eighth Edition

Sadly, this is the first edition of *The Guide* in which Bruce Mitchell, who died in January 2010, has had no part. After Mitchell's death Fred Robinson was invited by the editors of Blackwell Publishing to prepare an eighth revised edition.

In preparing this edition I have made a complete review of all parts of the book with an eye to clarifying and sharpening our phrasing and updating the contents in all discussions of both grammar and texts. In addition, two new features have been added: the first twenty-five lines of *Beowulf* have been introduced to the selections from that poem (text number 18), and these lines have been provided with an exceptionally detailed commentary dealing with the language, style, and content of the poem. This addition has been made in response to readers' request that *The Guide* provide students with a full and detailed introduction to the poem that in most colleges and universities is taken up in a course following the introductory course in Old English. A second addition is Appendix F, which provides a brief but fairly comprehensive account of the First Consonant Shift ('Grimm's and Verner's Laws') to which we make allusion in §§105–109 but without spelling out just what these consonant shifts were.

A special feature of *The Guide* ever since the First Edition has been the detailed explanation of OE syntax (§§139–214). Occasional reference is made elsewhere in *The Guide* to specific passages in the discussion of syntax, and these passages should be helpful to students. But most teachers do not assign the entire fifty-odd pages on syntax to beginning students, these pages being directed to the more advanced student of OE. To the more advanced student and to Old English scholars in general the discussion of syntax can be quite useful, and so I am retaining it in this edition.

In preparing this Eighth Edition I have received valuable advice and assistance from several colleagues, including Traugott Lawler, Roberta Frank, J. R. Hall, and Theodore Leinbaugh. I am most grateful for their help. Eight anonymous readers enlisted by the publisher have also provided very helpful insights and suggestions. And, as always, I am indebted to Alfred Bammesberger for his brilliant textual studies.



Anglo-Saxon England

Contents

Abbreviations and Symbols

LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

Gmc.	Germanic	nWS	non-West-Saxon
IE	Indo-European	OE	Old English
Lat.	Latin	OHG	Old High German
ME	Middle English	WS	West-Saxon
MnE	Modern English		

Before the name of a language or dialect
e = Early l = Late Pr = Primitive

GRAMMATICAL TERMS

acc.	accusative	pass.	passive
adj.	adjective	p.d.	see §100
adv.	adverb	pers.	person
compar.	comparative	pl.	plural
conj.	conjunction	poss.	possessive
cons.	consonant	prep.	preposition
dat.	dative	pres.	present
dem.	demonstrative	pret.	preterite
fem.	feminine	pret.-pres.	preterite-present
gen.	genitive	pron.	pronoun
imp.	imperative	ptc.	participle
ind.	indicative	s.	subject
inf.	infinitive	sg.	singular
infl.	inflected	st.	strong
inst.	instrumental	subj.	subjunctive
masc.	masculine	superl.	superlative
neut.	neuter	v.	verb
nom.	nominative	wk.	weak
o.	object		

's' may be added where appropriate to form a plural.

SYMBOLS

>	became
<	came from
*	this precedes a form which is not recorded. Usually it is a form which probably once existed and which scholars reconstruct to explain the stages in sound-changes; see §103.3. Sometimes it is a form which certainly never existed but which is invented to show that one sound-change preceded another. An example is *cierfan* in §100, note.
¯	over a letter denotes a long vowel or diphthong.
˘	over a letter denotes a short vowel or diphthong.
˘̄	means 'short and long', e.g. *ĕ̄* in §100.
¯ ˘	in §41 denote a long and short syllable respectively.
´ ` ×	denote respectively a syllable carrying full, secondary, or no, stress.
[ ]	enclose phonetic symbols.

How to Use this Guide

This section is particularly addressed to those of you who are working without a teacher.

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING AND PARSING

The ability to recognize forms in the texts you are reading and an awareness of the basic structure of Old English are far more important than a parrot knowledge of the paradigms. Hence, from the beginning, you must get into the habit of analysing and thoroughly understanding each form you meet in your texts.

Important in the reading of OE is 'parsing'—that is, identifying what part of speech each word in a sentence is (noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, and so on) and what particular form the word has in the sentence (accusative case, present tense, subjunctive mood, and so on). If you are uncertain about the meaning of the parts of speech listed below or of other terms such as 'article', 'infinitive', or 'participle', you are advised to consult Appendix D. For further details see A. J. Thomson and A. V. Martinet *A Practical English Grammar* (4th ed., Oxford, 1986) or David Crystal *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2nd ed., Basil Blackwell, 1985).

The information needed when parsing Old English words is:

Noun: Meaning, gender, number, case, and the reason for the case, e.g. accusative because it is object, genitive denoting possession, or dative of the indirect object.

Pronoun: Same as for noun. Here you need to know the noun to which the pronoun refers. (If it is a relative pronoun, see §162.)

Adjective: Same as for noun. Sometimes, of course, an adjective is used with a noun, sometimes it is used alone, either as a complement or where a noun is more usual, e.g. 'The good die young'.

Verb: If you have the infinitive, you merely need the meaning. Otherwise you need to work out the person, number, tense, and mood, and then deduce the infinitive. Unless you are familiar with the verb, you will have to do all this before you can find its meaning. For hints on how to do it, see §134.

A Guide to Old English, Eighth Edition. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson.

Adverbs and interjections (a name given to words like 'Oh!', 'Alas!', and 'Lo!') will give little trouble. It is important to notice the case of a word governed by a preposition, for a difference in case sometimes indicates a difference in meaning; see §§213–214. Conjunctions are a greater source of difficulty. Lists of them are given in §§168, 171, and 184, and references to discussions on them are set out in 'Understanding the Syntax' below.

Note
The importance of gender varies. Sometimes it is obvious, sometimes it is of no real importance. But at times it provides a vital clue. Thus in *Hē ġehīerþ þās word and þā wyrcð, þās* and *þā* could be acc. sg. fem. or acc. pl. Only the fact that *word* is neuter will tell us that we must translate 'He hears these words and carries them out'.

LENGTH MARKS

Long vowels have been marked (¯) throughout, with the exception noted below. A knowledge of the length of vowels (or 'quantity', as it is called) is essential for proficiency in reading, for accuracy in translation (compare *god* 'god' with *gōd* 'good'), for the understanding of OE metre, and for the serious study of phonology. Hence, when you learn the inflexions, you will need to remember both the form of the word and the length of its vowels. Long vowels are marked in the Texts and you should take advantage of this by noting carefully those which occur in both familiar and unfamiliar words.

But since the length-marks are not shown in the Old English manuscripts, many editions of prose and verse texts do not show them. Examples are the standard editions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and of the Homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan, the texts published by Methuen (in their Old English Library) and by the Early English Text Society, and *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (published by Columbia University Press), which contain virtually all the extant poetry. You will have to use one or more of these works fairly early in your career. In the hope that you will find the transition to such texts easier if you have already seen short passages in the form in which they appear in these works, we have not regularized the spelling (see §3) or marked vowel-length in the illustrative quotations in chapters 5 and 6. Most of the passages quoted are taken from texts which appear in Part Two. You can use these passages by writing them out, marking in the length-marks yourself, and then comparing them with the correct version. You can check individual words in the Glossary. But you will find it more interesting if you track down the context of the longer prose passages and those in verse with the help of the references in the Glossary. By so doing, you will improve your knowledge of vowel quantity and widen your acquaintance with OE literature.

LEARNING THE INFLEXIONS

Those who want to test their knowledge of the paradigms and to try their hand at translating into Old English (a very useful way of learning the language, especially important since no one speaks it today) will find A. S. Cook *Exercises in Old English* (Ginn, 1895) a useful book. There are second-hand copies about. Stephen Pollington's *Wordcraft, Wordhoard and Wordlists: Concise New English to Old English Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Anglo-Saxon Books, 1996) will give easy access to the Old English vocabulary.

We suggest that those coming to this book without any knowledge of Old English learn the inflexions in the order set out below. But remember that texts must be read and an understanding of the syntax acquired at the same time. Hints on how to do this are given later in this section.

1 Read §§1–4.

2 Now work through §§5–9. Make sure that you can recognize the new letters *æ*, *þ*, and *ð*, and practise reading aloud the Practice Sentences (Text 1), following generally the natural stress of MnE.

3 Now read §§10–12.

4 The next step is to learn the paradigms in A below, in the order in which they are set out there.

5 (*a*) When you have learnt the pronouns, nouns, and adjectives, in A, you can see whether §§77–81 help or hinder you. Experience on this point differs.

(*b*) When you have learnt the verbs in A, you should read §§131–134.

6 You can now turn to the paradigms referred to in B below. B contains what may be called the 'derived paradigms', i.e. those which can be derived from the paradigms set out in A when certain sound-changes are understood. The sound-changes are presented in the hope that they will make your work easier, not as an end in themselves. Thus, if you meet a word *hwatum* in your reading, you will not be able to find out its meaning unless you know that it comes from an adjective *hwæt* 'active, bold'. You will know this only if you have read §70.

7 The paradigms in C are important ones of fairly frequent occurrence which need not be learnt all at once. When you come across one of them in your reading, you can consult the relevant section. In this way, you will absorb them as need arises.

8 Because of the dialectal variations and inconsistencies in spelling noted in §§2–3, there are many ways of spelling even some of the most common words in the language; for examples, see the word *se* in the Glossary. If all the possible forms of this and other words were given in the paradigms in chapter 3, you would not see the wood for the trees. So

those less common variants which occur in the texts will be found as cross-references in the Glossary.

A Key Paradigms

These paradigms must be known thoroughly. At this stage, concentrate on them alone; disregard anything else in these sections.

1 The pronouns set out in §§15–21. Note particularly §19. (The dual forms in §21 may be passed over at first.)
2 *Nama* (§22) and, after reading §§63–64, *tila* (§65).
3 Now read §§26–32.
4 *Stān* (§33), *scip*/*word* (§34), and *ġiefu*/*lār* (§§47–48).
5 The strong declension of the adjectives (§§66–67).
6 Now read §§14, 87–89, and 115.
7 *Fremman* (§§116–117) and *lufian* (§§124–125).
8 *Habban* (§126), *bēon* (§127), and *weorþan* (Appendix A.3 (*b*)).
9 The principal parts of the strong verbs (§§90–95).
10 The conjugation of strong verbs (§§110–113).

B Derived Paradigms

The paradigms in this group may be derived from those in A as follows:

1 From *nama*, those in §§23–25.
2 From *stān*, *scip*, or *ġiefu*, those in §§35–44, 48–51, and 52–60. See now §13.
3 From *tila* and *til*, those in §§68–73.
4 From *fremman*, those in §§116–123.
5 From *lufian*, those in §§124–125.
6 From §§90–95, those in §§96–109.
7 From §§110–113, those in §114.

Note
Some nouns which often go like *stān*, *scip*, or *ġiefu*, once belonged to other declensions. As a result, they sometimes have unusual forms which may cause you difficulty in your reading. It might be just as well if you learnt to recognize these fairly early in your career. They include: *ċild* (§34), *hæleþ* and *mōnaþ* (§44), some nouns in *-e* (§§45–46), the feminine nouns discussed in §§49 and 51, the relationship nouns (§60), and the *u*-nouns (§§61–62).

C Other Paradigms

1 Other Strong Nouns (§§45–46 and 61–62).
2 Comparison of Adjectives (§§74–76).
3 Numerals (§§82–86).
4 Verbs
   (*a*) Class 3 weak verbs (§126).
   (*b*) *Dōn* and *gān* (§128).
   (*c*) *Willan* (§§129 and 211).
   (*d*) Preterite-present verbs (§§130 and 206–210).
5 Adverbs (§135).

LEARNING THE VOCABULARY

Many OE words are easily recognizable from their MnE counterparts, though sometimes the meaning may be different; see §4 and Part 2.1 below (i.e. the first OE text for practice reading) and look up the word 'lewd' in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Other words differ in spelling and pronunciation as a result of changes in ME and MnE. The short vowels *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, have remained relatively constant (see §7). But the long vowels and the diphthongs have sometimes changed considerably. Words with a long vowel in OE sometimes appear in MnE with the vowel doubled, e.g. *fēt* (masc. pl.) 'feet' and *dōm* (masc.) 'doom'. Sometimes, they have *-e* at the end, e.g. *līf* (neut.) 'life' and (with, in addition, one of the differences discussed below) *hām* (masc.) 'home' and *hūs* (neut.) 'house'.

Correspondences like the last two are more difficult to spot. Yet a knowledge of them is easily acquired and will save you much hard work. Thus, if you know that OE *ā* often appears in MnE as *oa*, you will not need to use the Glossary to discover that *bār* (masc.) means 'boar', *bāt* (fem. or masc.) 'boat', *brād* 'broad', and *hār* 'hoar(y)'. Words like *āc* (fem.) 'oak', *hlāf* (masc.) 'loaf', and *hlāfas* (masc. pl.) 'loaves', will not present much more difficulty.

The table which follows will help you to recognize more of these correspondences. But it is not complete and the correspondences do not always apply. Thus OE *hāt* is MnE 'hot' and you may find it interesting to look up in a glossary or dictionary the four OE words spelt *ār* and see what has happened to them.

OE spelling	*MnE spelling*	*Vowels*	*Consonants*
fæt (neut.)	vat	æ = a	f = v
rǣdan	read	ǣ = ea	
dǣd (fem.)	deed	ǣ = ee	
lang	long	an = on	
hāliġ	holy	ā = o	
hām (masc.)	home	ā = o.e	
āc (fem.)	oak	ā = oa	c = k
hlāf (masc.)	loaf		hl = l
ecg (fem.)	edge		cg = dge
dēman	deem	ē = ee	
frēosan	freeze	ēo = ee	s = z
ċild (neut.)	child		ċ = ch
miht (fem.)	might		h = gh
scip (neut.)	ship		sc = sh
līf (neut.)	life	ī = i.e	
ġiellan	yell	ie = e	ġ = y
ġiefan	give	ie = i	ġ = g
dōm (masc.)	doom	ō = oo	
mūs (fem.)	mouse	ū = ou.e	
nū	now	ū = ow	
synn (fem.)	sin	y = i	
mȳs (fem.)	mice	ȳ = i.e	

See §253 (Barney) for a book which may help you to learn the vocabulary.

The principles on which words were formed in OE are set out in §§136–138. Once you understand these, you will be able to deduce the meaning of some new words by their similarity to words you already know; see §136. For correspondences in endings, see §138.

UNDERSTANDING THE SYNTAX

The fundamental differences between the syntax of Old English and that of Modern English are set out in §§139–153. These, and §§182–183, should be studied as soon as you can read simple sentences with some degree of fluency and before you pass on to the connected passages of Old English recommended below. Other sections which should be read fairly soon are §§154–155, 157–158, and 160 (noun clauses and their conjunctions), §162 (relative pronouns), §§166–167 and §§169–170 (conjunctions introducing adverb clauses), §189 note, and §§195–199 (the uses of the tenses and the syntax of the resolved verb forms).

The remaining parts of the syntax should be used for reference when the need arises; note especially the topics mentioned in §§141–142 and the lists

of conjunctions in §§168, 171, and 184. When you begin to feel some confidence, you can try the exercise in §172.

If at first you find these sections too long and complicated, you are advised to use one of the books cited in §256.

TEXTS TO READ

Part Two of this book starts with a selection of prose texts for beginners, the texts being carefully coordinated with the explanations in the grammar sections. After you have worked your way through these, you will be ready for the poems, which are similarly annotated. This combination of texts should provide a foundation from which you can advance to *Beowulf* and to the prose and verse texts available in Methuen's Old English Library and the Manchester Series.

READING THE TEXTS

Before beginning to read the texts you should do two things: first, study carefully the introduction to the Glossary, and second, familiarize yourself with the function words and word-patterns listed in §§168 and 171. While reading the texts, you should make careful use not only of the Glossary, but also of the Index of Words and Appendix D.

WES ÞU HAL

It now remains for us to wish you success – and pleasure – in your studies. In 991, before the battle of Maldon, Byrhtnoth called across the cold waters of the river to his Danish foes:

> Nū ēow is gerȳmed; gāð ricene tō ūs,
> Guman tō gūþe; god āna wāt
> hwā þǣre wælstōwe wealdan nōte.
> (*The Battle of Maldon*, ll. 93–95)

This can be paraphrased

> 'Now the way is clear for you; O warriors,
> hasten to the battle; God alone knows
> how things will turn out'.

It is our hope and wish that *your* efforts will prosper – *Wel þe þæs geweorces!*

Part One

I

Preliminary Remarks on the Language

§1 Old English (OE) is the vernacular Germanic language of Great Britain as it is recorded in manuscripts and inscriptions dating from before about 1100. It is one of the Germanic group of the Indo-European family of languages. Those who are unfamiliar with this concept should read about it in one of the histories of the English language cited in the Bibliography.

§2 There are four dialects distinguishable in the extant monuments – Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish, West-Saxon. The differences are apparent in the spelling and vocabulary. After 900 West-Saxon was increasingly used as a standard written language. It is for this reason that, initially at any rate, you learn West-Saxon. But even here the spelling conventions were never as rigidly observed as they are in Great Britain or America today, where compositors, typists, and writers, in different parts of the country use the same spelling, no matter how different their pronunciations may be.

§3 Most OE primers therefore attempt to make things easier for the beginner by 'normalizing', i.e. regularizing, the spelling by eliminating all forms not belonging to the West-Saxon dialect. But difficulty arises because two stages can be distinguished – early West-Saxon (eWS), which is the language of the time of King Alfred (*c.* 900), and late West-Saxon (lWS), which is seen in the works of Ælfric (*c.* 1000). Norman Davis, in revising Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer*, followed Sweet and used eWS as his basis. Quirk and Wrenn's *Old English Grammar*, however, normalizes on the basis of Ælfric's lWS. For the beginner, the most important difference is that eWS *ie* and *īe* appear in lWS texts as *y* and *ȳ*; this accounts for such differences as Sweet *ieldra*, *hīeran*, but Q. & W. *yldra*, *hȳran*. Another is that *ea* and *ēa* may be spelt *e* and *ē* in lWS (and sometimes in eWS) texts, e.g. *seah* and *scēap*, but *seh* and *scēp*. Since the other differences will scarcely trouble you and since there are some disadvantages in the use of lWS, the paradigms are given here in their eWS forms and the sound laws are discussed with eWS as the basis. Any important variations likely to cause difficulty – apart from those mentioned here – will be noted. Full lists of all dialectal variants will be found in the appropriate section of Alistair Campbell's *Old English Grammar*.

In the sections on syntax, the spelling of a standard edition has generally been followed, though occasionally an unusual form has been silently

A Guide to Old English, Eighth Edition. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson.

regularized. This should ease the transition to non-normalized texts. Similarly, in the prose texts provided for reading, we have moved from totally normalized to non-normalized texts. We have not normalized the poems.

§4 As has been explained in the Foreword, this book, after a brief discussion of orthography and pronunciation, deals with accidence, word formation, and syntax (including word-order), and attempts simple explanations of those sound-changes which will help you to learn the inflexions. Other sound-changes and semantics are not discussed. On the metre of poetry see Appendix C. It is important, however, to remember that many common words have changed their meaning. *Sellan* means 'to give', not just 'to give in exchange for money, to sell'. *Eorl* cannot always be translated 'earl' and *dēor* and *fugol* mean, not 'deer' and 'fowl', but 'any (wild) animal' and 'any bird' respectively. It is also important to note that, while Old English literature was written and/or transmitted by Christians, the Christian poetry was largely written in an originally pagan vocabulary which embodied the values of the heroic code. However, it does not follow that the poetry is rich in pagan elements. You will find that words like *lof* in *The Seafarer* and *wyrd* in *The Wanderer* have acquired Christian connotations. On this point, see further §§218 and 236–246. The Bibliography contains references to useful introductory discussions on all the topics not discussed in this book.

2

Orthography and Pronunciation

I ORTHOGRAPHY

§5 As a glance at the facsimile of the OE manuscript on page 278 will show, the letters used by Anglo-Saxon scribes were sometimes very like and sometimes very unlike those used today, both in shape and function. Printers of Anglo-Saxon texts generally use the equivalent modern letter form. Hence the sounds [f] and [v] are both represented by *f*, and the sounds [s] and [z] by *s* because the distinctions were less significant in OE; on these and other differences in representing the consonants, see §9.

The following symbols are not in use today: *æ* (ash), which represents the vowel in MnE 'hat', *þ* (thorn) and *ð* (eth or, as the Anglo-Saxons appear to have called it, *ðæt*), both of which represent MnE *th* as in 'cloth' and in 'clothe'. Capital *ð* is written *Ð*. To make the learning of paradigms as simple as possible, *þ* has been used throughout chapter 3.

The early texts of the Methuen Old English Library used the runic 'wynn' *ƿ* instead of *w* and the OE letter *ȝ* for *g*. In the latest volumes, these have been discarded.

As is customary, the punctuation in quotations and selections from OE is modern. See the facsimiles on pages 278 and 293 and note the absence of modern punctuation.

II STRESS

§6 The stress usually falls on the first syllable, as in MnE, e.g. mórgen 'morning'. The prefix *ġe-* is always unaccented; hence *ġebídan* 'await, abide'. Two main difficulties occur:

1 Prepositional prefixes, e.g. *for-*, *ofer-*, can be either accented (usually in nouns or adjectives, e.g. *fórwyrd* 'ruin') or unaccented (usually in verbs, e.g. *forwíernan* 'refúse').

2 Compound words in which both elements retain their full meaning, e.g. *sæ-weall* 'sea-wall', have a secondary stress on the root syllable of the

A Guide to Old English, Eighth Edition. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson.