


Letter	SHORT		LONG	
	Value	Example	Value	Example
<i> <y>	ɪ	<i>bin</i> 'bin' <i>synn(e)</i> 'sin'	iː	<i>rid(en)</i> 'to ride' <i>fyr(e)</i> 'fire'
<e>	ɛ	<i>sett(en)</i> 'to set'	eː ɛː	<i>swet(e)</i> 'sweet' <i>del(e)</i> 'deal'
<æ> <a>	æ/a ɑ	<i>bæð/bað</i> 'bath' <i>fall(en)</i> 'fall'	æː/ɛː ɑː/ɔː	<i>ræd(en)</i> 'read' <i>bat, bot(e)</i> 'boat'
<o>	ɔ ʊ	(<i>i</i>) <i>bor(e)n</i> 'born' <i>son(e)</i> 'son'	oː ɔː	<i>mon(e)</i> 'moon' <i>bot(e)</i> 'boat'
<u> (<v>)	ʊ y	<i>drunken</i> 'drunk' <i>vnder</i> 'under'	uː yː	<i>hus(e)</i> 'house' <i>vt(e)</i> 'out'
		<i>furst</i> 'time'		<i>duk(e)</i> 'duke'

Figure 7.2 Letter-to-stressed-vowel correspondences in ME (single letters)

archaizing modern spellings of <the> as <y^e> or, more frequently, <ye> as in *Ye Olde King's Head*.  On the shape-shifting of <y> ~ <þ> see Laing and Lass (2009), who describe the paleographic basis of the confusion and define the importance of the different scribal practices with respect to <y> ~ <þ> in establishing the regional provenance of texts. The runic *þ* fell into disuse in the fourteenth century though the use of <y> instead of <th> continued in hand-writing into the nineteenth century.

The letter <e> was the most common letter for unstressed vowels, and it was also used for at least three contrasting stressed mid vowels in ME: the front upper mid [eː], the front lower mid short [ɛ] and long [ɛː]. In the fifteenth century and after, historical [eː] and [ɛː] began to be differentiated in spelling, using <ee> for [eː] as in *flee, see, sweet*, and <ea> for [ɛː] as in *flea, sea, seat*. The reliability of the <ea>-<ee> spelling as an indicator of etymological [eː] and [ɛː] respectively is much lower if the vowel is followed by /-r/ (see 8.3.2).

The ligature *ash*, <æ>, is preserved only in the earliest documents; by the end of the thirteenth century the scribes were no longer using it. It was replaced by either <a> or <e>. The letter <o> represented three contrasting stressed mid vowels in ME: the back upper mid [oː], the back lower mid short [ɔ] and the corresponding long [ɔː]. As with [eː] and [ɛː], the upper mid [oː] and the lower mid [ɔː] began to be