

THE TEMPORARY MERGER OF OE *scitan* AND *scyttan*,
OR: A CASE OF HARMLESS HOMOPHONY*

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The starting point of the following brief observations is the view of homonymic clash discussed in Lass (1980: 75ff.). Here he spells out in detail the processes necessarily implied by Samuels' (1972: 142f.) position of the avoidance-of-homophones strategy exemplified by the reflexes of OE *scitan* 'shit' and *scyttan* 'shut'. Thus, the regular development of the short stem-vowel /y/ in OE *scyttan* should have been /y/ > /i/ > /ɪ/ (see table 1 column 2a). This regular change would have created a merger of SHUT with SHIT¹ under *shit*. Lass (1980: 76) remarks that such homophony would be "as 'pernicious' as any" and concludes that under these circumstances it should have been highly likely for a sporadic sound change to operate for therapeutic reasons instead of an expected regular one; the supposed aim being the avoidance of a case of harmful homophony (cf. Lass 1980: 75, 79). And true enough the incriminated regular development seems not to have taken place as the reflexes of OE *scyttan* and *scitan* are distinct in Modern English. Thus, we can evoke the minority development of OE /y/ > /u/ > /ʌ/ (hence *shut*). (See table 1 column 2b. This change is otherwise mostly attested in words from AGN such as *just*, *judge*. Cf. Lass 1980: 76.) And duly Samuels (1972: 143) gives undesirable homophony with a "taboo" word as the cause for avoiding the regular change in this case. In short, all the asterisked forms in the following table under column (2a) are outlawed as the initial sound-change is outlawed because it would eventually have led to an undesirable merger.

* My sincere thanks go to Corinna Weiss, whose comments helped increase both my data and my confidence.

¹ I use upper case letters to denote the underlying forms of the respective verbs in order to avoid the clumsy formulation: "reflexes of OE *scyttan* and *scitan*".

Table 1: Development of OE *scītan* and *scyttan*

	(1) OE <i>scītan</i> 'shit'	*(2a) OE <i>scyttan</i> 'shut'	(2b) OE <i>scyttan</i> 'shut'
Old English input	ʃi:t-	ʃytt-	ʃytt-
1. */y/ > /i/		*ʃitt-	ʃitt-
2. /y/ > /u/			ʃutt-
3. degemination /-tt-/ > /-t-/		*ʃit-	ʃut-
4. analogical levelling /i:/ > /i/	ʃit-		
5. /u/ > /ʌ/			ʃʌt
Modern English output	ʃit	*ʃit	ʃʌt

One point in Lass' (1980) (and by implication Samuels' 1972) scenario seems to be in need of a minor revision. Lass (following Samuels) expressly presents the avoidance of the merger as a matter of choosing between the two developments /y/ > /i/ vs. /y/ > /u/; the former producing the merger, the latter preventing it (cf. Lass 1980: 76, 79). This is, however, not entirely true as the incriminated change /y/ > /i/ could NOT immediately have caused homophony. Even after the regular unrounding we still have to posit two distinct stems, viz. /ʃitt-/ 'shut' and /ʃi:t-/ 'shit', which are distinguished by both vowel AND consonant length, so that they are not even minimal pairs (see table 1 columns 1 & 2a). By the same token it would be particularly absurd to apply the notion of avoiding /y/ > /i/ by prolepsis to this particular change because speakers at this point would have had to know that two additional sound changes were going to happen at a later date that would ultimately lead to homophony, viz. the degemination of medial double consonants in SHUT and the analogical levelling of /i:/ > /i/ in SHIT. This is quite a bit of foreknowledge, whose postulation should be hard to justify. Therefore, the issue in avoiding the merger can never really have been the choice between /y/ > /i/ vs. /y/ > /u/ in the first place as Lass (following Samuels) suggests. This brings us to the major point of these brief observations, viz. the discussion of two of Lass' five counter-arguments against the operation of therapeutic changes such as supposedly prevented the merger of SHIT and SHUT (cf. Lass 1980: 76-80).

One of Lass' arguments is that even if speakers felt a need to avoid homophones, they simply do not seem to have a plausible way of preventing them. He shows the impossibility of avoiding homophones by prolepsis (cf. Lass 1980: 79) and concludes that

the only mechanism left is for speakers actually to produce the offending articles, and then, having discovered what they've done, to remove them ('My God, I've just said "please shit the door"; better change it to shut'). But in this case, how does the speaker know that his /i/ is in fact a ME /i/ from OE /y/, and therefore that the etymologically appropriate vowel is /u/? (Lass 1980: 79).

In short, speakers have no means of avoiding mergers either ante hoc (by prolepsis) or post hoc, and therefore the non-appearance of homophones in ModE shit and shut cannot have been caused by the need to avoid the merger because there was no means of preventing it in the first place. McMahon (1994) has recently attempted to refute this argument by stating that Lass'

comment may ... follow from too much attention to the speaker and not enough to the speech community; we can assume a period of variation, during which some speakers would have said shut and others shit. Speakers hearing shit but not wishing to say it would be able to choose shut, the other current alternative (McMahon 1994: 333f.).

Such a position seems to be not implausible and we shall take this point up again at the end of our discussion, where we shall see, however, that McMahon runs into problems with this explanation as well.

Lass' second counter-argument against the operation of the change /y/ > /u/ being "DUE TO the need to avoid homophony with shit" is that "[t]here is at least one record ... in which this very merger seems to have occurred" (Lass 1980: 76; orig. emphasis). This record is an Elizabethan scriptural dictionary, viz. "William Patton's [sic] The Calendar of Scripture, 1575".² Lass (1980: 76) states that this argument is "weak but at least entertaining"; weak probably, because "[i]t COULD be a typographical error, of course" (Lass 1980: 76; orig. emphasis).³

If the fact of just a single record is the reason why he considers the argument weak, then it may become considerably stronger (and even more entertaining) by a look at the reflexes of OE *scyttan* 'shut' in the *OED* (s.vv. *shut* v.; *shutting* vbl. n.), *MED* (s.vv. *shitten* v.; *shitting* (e ger.), *English poetry. The English poetry full-text database (EP)* (under <shit*> & <shyt*> 'shut') and the *Helsinki corpus (HC)* (under the strings <shitte> & <shytt> 'shut').⁴ What strikes us immediately is that <i> and <y> spellings do in fact occur to an extent that makes them seem more than just chance appearances that could be explained away as typographical or spelling errors. There are after all 31 records in the *OED*, 59 in the *MED*, and

² Note that according to the *STC* (2, No.19476) this is Patten (sic), William.

³ A general caveat concerning Lass' tongue-in-cheek attitude is in order here. We shall see in the following that my position of the relatively wide proliferation of the merger in question rests on the evidence of the *OED*, *MED*, and *EP* (to a very minor extent also that of the *HC*). All these sources are easily available so that from the very start it seemed odd that Lass would not have been aware of this and had to depend on a certain Ken Miner for his one example of the merger. Given the emphasis in his quote that this instance of *shit* "COULD be a typographical error", I would not put it past Lass that he meant to present this argument on a silver platter to the 'avoidance of homonymic clash' school only to come forward with the massive evidence proving the merger when the avoidance argument had really been seriously taken up in order to discredit it all the more. That Lass would not consider the appearance of such arguments as improbable seems corroborated by his ironical foot-note: "it seems curious that the 'avoidance' principle fails to extend (to any massive degree) to 'harmful polysemy' as well: e.g. *prick*, *ball*, *snatch*, *screw*, *plough*, *lay*, *Dick*, *pussy* etc. OR IS IT THAT NO ONE HAS WORKED ON IT YET?" (Lass 1980: 77 fn.15; my emphasis).

⁴ The detailed results are given in the Appendix. Note, however, that only the relevant <i> and <y> spellings of SHUT recorded in the *OED* and *MED* are listed, while all other spellings of the stem-vowel are disregarded.

79 in *EP* (and an additional three in the *HC*), and their occurrence obviously extends from the early 14th century (earliest record *EP* 1315-30) to the beginning of the 17th century (last record *EP* 1615). This even post-dates the evidence given by Lass, viz. William Patten's dictionary dated 1575, which otherwise would have been the latest record, the *OED* giving Wyatt a1542 as the last evidence. Thus the temporal range of the incriminated <i/y> spellings extends from the beginning of the 14th to the early 17th century. In the following discussion we shall see, however, that the earliest record, viz. 1315-30 from *EP*, cannot be used for our purposes so that the relevant time span for the merger in question covers ?a1366 - 1615, i.e. roughly 250 years.

	first record	last record
<i>EP</i>	1315-30 Mannyng	1615 Goddard
<i>MED</i>	c1382 Wycliffe	—
<i>OED</i>	?a1366 Chaucer	a1542 Wyatt

However, we must first make sure whether all of these records of SHUT can indeed be interpreted as homophones of SHIT. The major spelling variants of SHUT that occur and which we have to account for are: <shit-, shitt-, shyt-, shytt->. We will therefore have to address the question of the phonetic realization of the <y> and the <tt> graphemes.

In the Early Modern English period homophony of these spelling variants of SHUT with SHIT cannot be doubted as geminated <tt> at that time cannot have possessed any phonetic reality other than /t/, and similarly, the vowel spelling <y> can only have denoted /i/ as the Early Modern English standard possessed no secondary cardinal vowel /y/ anymore. Thus homophony must be accepted as a matter of course from c1500 onwards. I.e. the 16.7% <i/y> spellings out of all the spellings of shut given for the period 1500 - 1575 in the *OED* (see table 2a) must needs represent a merger with SHIT and the same is true of the 49 instances in *EP* from the period 1500 - 1615 (see table 2c).

In regard to Middle English we basically have to address the same two points concerning SHUT, viz. (i) the underlying consonant quantity of <tt> spellings, and (ii) the vowel quality represented by the <y> grapheme, plus one additional point regarding SHIT, viz. (iii) from when onwards we can expect the appearance of a short stem vowel /i/ (cf. ModE /jit/) instead of the original long /i:/ of OE *scitan*, as this change is crucial for homophony as well.

(i) Degemination in SHUT: Lass (1994: 59) assumes that the "shortening or degemination [of medial consonants] began in the north ca 1200, and extended southwards over the next two centuries, probably completing in London around 1400", and according to Markus (1990: 62) double spellings ceased to denote genuine geminates by Chaucer's time.⁵ I.e. we would have to subtract the earliest record in *EP* from our calculations as this is dated 1315-30 (*shytting* Mannyng; see

⁵ Cf. Markus (1990: 62): "Es besteht weitgehend Übereinstimmung darüber, daß konsonantische Doppelschreibungen in der Chaucerzeit nicht mehr wirkliche Geminaten ... bezeichnen."

Appendix table 3), i.e. some 50 years before the time we can expect the degemination to be implemented.

(ii) Vowel quality in SHUT: Contrary to Early Modern English, <y> in Middle English could in fact indicate a rounded vowel /y/ in those areas where Old English unrounding to /i/ had not taken place. These were basically "South-West and South-West Midland dialects", which, however, "normally spelled u" (Lass 1980: 76) for /y/ and not <y> as in our records; still we might want to watch out for the appearance of those dialects in our evidence.

(iii) Vowel quantity in SHIT: We have to posit a shortened version of the stem vowel already in the late Middle English reflex of OE *scitan* if we want to assume homophony to be possible. Given the fact that ModE *shit* (v.) features short /ɪ/, we may conclude that the input before the first stage of the GVS must already have been short, otherwise the reflex would be ModE /ʃat/.⁶ We can therefore assume /ʃit-/ (< OE *scitan*) to have existed by 1400 at the latest. This view is corroborated by the *ODEE* (s.v. *shit*; orig. emphasis): "Short ĭ was generalized from the pp. *shi•ttEN*[...] XIV (Ch.)", i.e. in the course of the 14th century, Chaucer serving as the source.

Note that in this case a sporadic change (analogical levelling) conspires to produce homophony.⁷ If we take the functional explanation of the avoidance of homophones seriously, then this is a highly unlikely development. It is in fact the reverse of the traditional postulate in regard to regular /y/ > /i/ vs. sporadic /y/ > /u/, where the sporadic change is said to operate for functional reasons, overriding the regular change. In the case of analogical levelling of /i:/ > /i/, however, a sporadic change operates COUNTER the functional consideration of avoiding harmful homophones and instead creates them in the first place.⁸ This in itself should make one wary of the applicability of such functional explanations.

⁶ That some dialects did in fact retain long /i:/ up to the GVS is evidenced by the *OED* (s.v. *shit* v. & sb.), which gives the secondary form *shite* (SKit) for verb and noun.

⁷ Pinsker (1974: §164) mentions only eight verbs that form a new present on the basis of a secondary weak preterite/past participle or the original strong plural preterite/past participle stems, viz. *flit*, *slit*, *shit* (strong I); *run* (strong III); *schapen*, *stapen* (strong VI); and the originally contracted verbs *fangen*, *hangen* (< *fon*, *hon*; reduplicating). However, his account concerning *flit* is unnecessarily complicated, and that concerning *slit* and *shit* is even flawed. For these three verbs he posits analogical change on the basis of a weak preterite with a shortened stem vowel. (Pinsker 1974: §164.1: "Angleichung des Pr. an das sw.Pt: *flit*, *slit*, *shit*"; "Die schwachen Nebenformen von *fliten*, ... *sliten* ... haben Kürzung".) (i) Although it is true that ME strong *fliten* has an analogical weak preterite (cf. *flitteden*; *MED* s.v. *fliten* v.), it is unnecessary to assume that a new short /i/ in the present stem of the strong verb was due to the influence of the weak preterite. The basis of the analogy might just as well have been short /i/ of the 3rd/4th verb stems of the strong paradigm itself. (ii) The *MED* does not list a Middle English verb *sliten*; it only mentions that ME *sliten* is possibly derived from OE *slitan* and does indeed possess weak preterite and past participle forms (cf. *slitted*; *MED* s.v. *sliten* v.). (iii) Positing the influence of a weak variant in the case of *shit* (v.) cannot be upheld altogether, as a weak preterite is not on record before the 17th century (*OED* s.v. *shit* v., see also table 3; *MED* s.v. *shiten* v.), while levelled /i/ in the present stem occurs already in Chaucer (*ODEE* s.v. *shit*). Therefore this short /i/ can only derive from the strong plural preterite or past participle (though influence from the Middle English noun *shit* (*MED* s.v. *shit* sb.) is a possibility as well).

⁸ I am indebted to Professor Dieter Kastovsky for this observation.

Thus, in dialect areas other than the South-West and the South-West Midlands we can assume the merger in question to have existed in Chaucer's lifetime. None of the records from the *OED*, *MED*, and *EP* originates from the areas retaining OE /y/,⁹ and none is dated pre-Chaucer (except for the already subtracted Mannyng example from *EP*), so that all the records given in the Appendix can count as mergers of SHIT and SHUT. Taking into consideration all the spellings of SHUT in the *OED* from 1350 - 1575 (i.e. roughly the period from Chaucer's lifetime up to Lass's Elizabethan record) we can see that almost ONE THIRD of the spellings indicate the merger in question and the same is true of the *MED* evidence (see tables 2a & b). For *EP* only absolute figures are available so that we have 79 instances here (see table 2c) against 31 from the *OED*, and 59 *MED*.

Table 2a: Records from the *OED*
1350 - 1575

<i>shut</i> v. <i>shutting</i> vbl. sb.	<i/y>	other spellings	total
1350 - 1400	9 (34.6%)	17 (65.4%)	26
1400 - 1500	15 (42.9%)	20 (57.1%)	35
1500 - 1575	7 (16.7%)	35 (83.3%)	42
total	31 (30.1%)	72 (69.9%)	103

Table 2b: Records from the *MED* c1382 -

<i>shuten</i> v. <i>shuuing(e ger.)</i>	<i/y>	other spellings	total
c1382 -	59 (29.2%)	143 (70.8%)	202

NB.: All the records presented in tables 2a-d are instances of the lexeme SHUT.

One counter-argument might yet be raised, however, viz. that complete homophony only concerns the PRESENT VERB STEMS, while the word forms in the preterite and past participle might still have been distinguished due to the different verb morphology, as OE *scitan* was strong (class I) but *scyttan* weak (class 1).

(i) Preterite: Whenever the late Middle English and Early Modern English preterite forms of SHIT were derived from the plural preterite (OE *sciton*), homophony would occur (cf. *shyt*; table 3). Not so however, if the reflex of SHIT was from the singular preterite stem (OE *scāt*; thus ME *schoot* &c.; see table 3) or if the SHUT forms occurred with an additional dental suffix in <d> (hence *schittide* &c.; fig.3). Thus in the case of the preterite we may reckon with at least some instances of complete homophony.

(ii) Past participle: The stems of the past participles of SHIT and SHUT would be largely identical in late Middle English and Early Modern English, the major

⁹ Loanwords with French /y/ are a different matter altogether.

¹⁰ The bracketed notation (PRES) in the third column of the *OED*, *MED*, and *EP* records in the Appendix indicates word forms derived from the present stem. (Uncertain examples were not considered.)

point of deviance, however, is the presence of the strong past participle suffix *-en* in SHIT, which SHUT never possessed. Thus, complete identity of word forms cannot be postulated here (see table 3).

Table 3: Inflexional morphology of SHUT and SHIT

<i>OED</i> (s.v. <i>shut</i> v.) (only <i/y> forms up to 7)	<i>OED</i> (s.v. <i>shit</i> v.) (forms up to 7; my emphasis)
<i>Pres. stem</i>	<i>Pres. stem</i>
a. 1 <i>scyttan</i> , 4-5 <i>s(c)hitte</i> , 5-6 <i>shytt(e)</i> , <i>shyt</i> , <i>shit</i> , (5 <i>schytte</i>)	4 <i>schite</i> , <i>schete</i> , 5 <i>schyte</i> , <i>-yete</i> , 4-6 <i>shyte</i> , 6 <i>shyt</i> , 4- <i>shite</i> , 7- <i>shit</i>
<i>Pa. t.</i>	<i>Pa. t.</i>
a. 1 <i>-scytte</i> , 4-5 <i>s(c)hitte</i> , (6 <i>shytt</i> , 5 <i>shyt</i> , <i>s(c)hytte</i>), 4 <i>schittide</i> , 5 <i>shytted</i>	4 <i>schoot</i> , <i>schote</i> , <i>SHYT</i> , 5 <i>shote</i> , 7- <i>shit</i> , <i>shat</i> , <i>shitted</i>
<i>Pa. pple.</i>	<i>Pa. pple.</i>
a. 4-5 <i>shyt</i> , (4 <i>schit(t)</i> , <i>schytte</i> , 5 <i>shytte</i> , <i>shit(t)e</i> , 6 <i>shyt(t)</i> , <i>shitt</i>), 5-6 <i>shit</i>	1 <i>-sciten</i> , 4 <i>i-schete</i> , <i>schetun</i> , 4-8 <i>SHITTEN</i> [?]

A few points, however, should be considered in this respect. First, if we want to assume that mergers of this sort really represent an embarrassment to the speaker that has to be avoided, then mere distinction in inflexional morphology can hardly make that much of a difference. Secondly, even if we accept the point that only complete homophony of the whole word form is harmful, then these cases are still well over ten per cent of the records in the *OED* and *MED* for the relevant period (see table 2d), or 27 instances in *EP* (see table 2c). And thirdly, even this strict position does not alter the basic fact that the use of <i/y> spellings in whatever verb form indicates a merger for that specific writer in the present tense forms of SHIT/SHUT. I.e. for ALL the authors listed in the Appendix, the present tense forms would always have been homophones¹¹ that should supposedly have been an embarrassment to them. Let us therefore take a closer look at the writers to whom it was apparently all the same whether they were able to distinguish SHIT from SHUT or not. Among them are: Wycliffe, Trevisa, Chaucer,¹² Hoccleve, Lydgate, Caxton, Palsgrave, Tyndale, Skelton, Wyatt, Spenser and Margaret Roper. (For a complete list see Appendix.) Let us recapitulate then what our evidence is:

(i) There are 31 records of a merger of SHUT with the present stem of SHIT in the *OED*, 59 in the *MED*, and 79 in *EP*, i.e. 145 in all, not counting doublets. That is to say somewhat less than one third of the *OED* and *MED* records (for the relevant period) show this merger (see tables 2a, b).

¹¹ Authors for whom the present forms of SHIT and SHUT were identical might, of course, always have resorted to using a synonym like *close* in the present and SHUT only in the preterite and past participle.

¹² This goes at least for the writer/scribe of the *Romaunt of the rose* and the *Death of Blanche* (cf. Appendix tables 1 & 3). The other Chaucer texts/MSS quite consistently feature Kentish <e> for OE /y/ in SHUT (cf. Oizumi 1991, 10: s.v. <shet*>).

(ii) Slightly over ten per cent of the *OED* and *MED* records show forms of SHIT and SHUT that could not have been distinguished (see table 2d). In absolute numbers these are 11 (*OED*) and 26 (*MED*); in *EP* we find 27 such instances (see table 2c).

(iii) An impressive list of the most prolific and prestigious writers of the period is on record who to all intents and purposes could not have distinguished between SHIT and SHUT in present tense use (so that they would in fact have said “please *shit* the door”, to use Lass’ 1980: 79 example). These points should make it sufficiently clear that the incriminated merger was firmly established for 250 years without it causing any embarrassment.

Having thus established that variation between merged and unmerged variants apparently existed for quite some time, we are actually back to McMahon’s argument that

we can assume a period ..., during which some speakers would have said *shut* and others *shit*. Speakers hearing *shit* but not wishing to say it would be able to choose *shut*, the other current alternative (McMahon 1994: 333f.).

On the face of it this sounds like a plausible scenario: some people use the merger in speech, find the effect embarrassing and select another current variant as an immediately therapeutic reaction. If we restrict it to the spoken medium, this is a plausible albeit moot point to make as we can have no evidence whatsoever for this scenario.¹³ If we extend it to writing, however, (such as in our example) this immediately begs the question why people would “not wish ... to say” the homophone variant if it was codified in the arguably conservative form of writing anyway. This would at best be plausible if the written evidence of the merger were chance misspellings or typographical errors as Lass (with tongue in cheek) suggests. Given the evidence presented above this view is hardly tenable, however. So that the question why the homophone variants of SHIT/SHUT were given up after they do not seem to have caused any problems for 250 years is still open and definitely not to be answered by pointing to a supposed taboo, because this apparently had not deterred the greatest English medieval poet, two Bible translators and the daughter of a saint (to mention but a few) from using it without any qualms.

¹³ For whatever the argument is worth, let me add that there is one record of the merger that was definitely intended for the spoken medium, viz. the following quote from Skelton’s interlude *Magnyfy-cence* (ll.1219-22 my emphasis, orig. italics; quoted after *EP*):

Fol.

Gyue me my grote, for thou hast lost. *Here Foly maketh semblaunt to take money of Crafty Conueyaunce, saynge to hym,*

SHYT thy purse, dawe, and do no cost.

Instances of direct speech in closet drama include 2 examples from Jasper Heywood’s *Seneca* translations (cf. Appendix table 3).

APPENDIX

Table 1: *OED* (s.vv. shut v.; shutting vbl. n.) (#31)¹⁴

<i>shitting</i>	1366a?	Chaucer <i>Rom. Rose</i> 1596 (1./PRES)
<i>shyt</i>	1369c	Chaucer <i>De the Blaunch</i> 335 (3.)
<i>shitti</i>	1380c	Wyclif <i>Wks</i> (1880) (3.a/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1382	Wyclif 1 <i>Macc.</i> x.75 (17.a)
<i>schit</i>	1382	Wyclif <i>Acts</i> v.23 8.a
<i>shittide</i>	1388	Wyclif 1 <i>Macc.</i> x.75 (17.a)
<i>schitte</i>	1388	Wyclif <i>Isa.</i> xxii. 22 (3.a/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1388	Wyclif <i>Luke</i> iii.20 (9.a)
<i>shyttyth</i>	1398	Trevisa <i>Barth. De P. R.</i> v.xiv. (1495) 120 (15.b/PRES)
<i>schytte</i>	1400a	<i>Pilgr. Sowle</i> (Caxton) l.xxxi. (1859) (10.a /PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1412c	Hoccleve <i>De Reg. Princ.</i> 1094 (3.a)
<i>schite</i>	1412c	Hoccleve <i>De Reg. Princ.</i> 2567 (10.a/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1421-5	Hoccleve <i>Lerne to Die</i> 872 (4.a/PRES)
<i>shytte</i>	1425c	<i>Cursor M.</i> 17670 (Laud MS.) (15.a)
<i>shit</i>	1426	Lydg. <i>De Guil. Pilgr.</i> 17922 (19./PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1440c	<i>Gesta Rom.</i> xciii. 423 (Add. MS.) (7.)
<i>shytte</i>	1450c	<i>Cov.Myst.</i> (1841) 228 (7./PRES)
<i>shytted</i>	1471	Caxton <i>Recuyell</i> (Sommer) (8.a)
<i>shytte</i>	1471	Caxton <i>Recuyell</i> (Sommer) 163 (15.a)
<i>shytte</i>	1471	Caxton <i>Recuyell</i> (Sommer) 494 (9.a)
<i>schytte</i>	1483	Cely Papers (Camden) 141 (3.a)
<i>shytte</i>	1483	<i>Golden Leg., St. Barbara</i> (Kelmescott) 1050 (9.a)
<i>shitte</i>	1489c	Caxton <i>Sonnes of Aymon</i> xiii (19.)
<i>shit</i>	1489c	Caxton <i>Sonnes of Aymon</i> xiv.325 (5.a/PRES)
<i>schytt</i>	1518	Star Chamber Cases (Seldon Soc.) II.132 (3.b)
<i>shytte</i>	1530	Palsgr. 704/1 (15.a)
<i>shytte</i>	1530	Palsgr. 704/1 (17.b)
<i>shytte</i>	1530	Palsgr. 704/1 (19.)
<i>shitt</i>	1530	Tindale <i>Lev.</i> xiii.4 (19.c/PRES)
<i>shitt</i>	1539a	<i>Archæologia</i> XYVII.52 (3.a)
<i>shytt</i>	1542a	Wyatt <i>Poems</i> (9.b)

¹⁴ The dates given for the records of the *OED* and *MED* are those listed in the respective dictionaries with the only difference that characters other than numbers, such as “?”, “c”, “a” or brackets “()”, are put behind the dates instead of in front to enable automated ordering.

Table 2: *MED* (s.vv. shitten v.; shitting(e ger.) 'shut' (!) (#59)

<i>schit</i>	1382c()	<i>WBible(1)</i> Deeds 5.23 (2b)
<i>shittinge</i>	1384c()	<i>WBible(1)</i> Apoc.11.6 (ger.a/PRES)
<i>shytinge</i>	1400a (?a1325)	<i>Bonav.Medit.(1)</i> 756 (1f /PRES)
<i>schitte</i>	1410c (c1350)	<i>Gameyn</i> 286, 292 (2a/PRES)
<i>shit</i> [vr.]	1410c (c1350)	<i>Gameyn</i> 286, 292 (2a/PRES)
<i>shittith</i>	1412c	<i>Hoccl.RP</i> 2707 (4b/PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1415()	<i>Hoccl.Oldcastle</i> 151 (4b)
<i>schit</i>	1415a (c1395)	<i>WBible(2)</i> Luke 11.7 (1b)
<i>schittinge</i>	1420a()	<i>Lydg.TB</i> 2.632 (ger.d/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1422?c()	<i>Hoccl.ASM</i> 872 (1f/PRES)
<i>schitte</i>	1425?a	<i>Orch.Syon</i> 141/12 (1c)
<i>schit</i>	1425?a	<i>Orch.Syon</i> 408/34 (4b)
<i>schittide</i>	1425a	<i>WBible (2)</i> (CC) 1 Mac.10.75 (4a)
<i>shitte</i>	1425a	<i>WBible(1)</i> (CC) 1 Mac.10.75 (4a)
<i>shit</i>	1425a	<i>WBible(1)</i> (CC) 2 Mac.13.21 (3d)
<i>schitti</i>	1425a (?a1400)	<i>Dionysius HDivinity</i> 5/18 (4a/PRES)
<i>shittinge</i>	1425a (?a1400)	<i>RRose</i> (Htrn) 1598 (ger.a/PRES)
<i>shitteth</i>	1425a (?a1400)	<i>RRose</i> (Htrn) 4100 (4a)
<i>schitte</i>	1425a (c1395)	<i>WBible (2)</i> Is.22.22 (2a/PRES)
<i>schit</i>	1425a (c1395)	<i>WBible(2)</i> Lev.14.46 (2b)
<i>schit</i>	1425a (c1395)	<i>WBible(2)</i> Tob.8.18 (4b)
<i>shitte</i>	1430?a()	<i>Hoccl.BV(2)</i> 68 (3b/PRES)
<i>schitte</i>	1430?c (c1400)	<i>Wycl.Satan & P.272</i> (2c/PRES)
<i>shytinge</i>	1440()	<i>PParv.311</i> (ger.b/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1450a	* <i>Aelred Inst.(2)</i> 780 (3b)
<i>shytinge</i>	1450a	<i>CastlePersev.2551</i> (3c/PRES)
<i>schit</i>	1450a	<i>PNoster R.Hermit</i> 5/7 (1a/PRES)
<i>shyt</i>	1450a (c1410)	<i>Lovel.Grail</i> 31.368 (1h)
<i>shit</i>	1450a (c1412)	<i>Hoccl.RP</i> 1094 (1b)
<i>schitte</i>	1450a (c1412)	<i>Hoccl.RP</i> 2567 (4a)
<i>shitte</i>	1450c	<i>Pilgr.LM</i> 10 (1g/PRES)
<i>shitte</i> [vr.]	1450c (?a1422)	<i>Lydg.LOL</i> 6.67-9 (2b)
<i>shit</i> [vr.]	1450c (?a1422)	<i>Lydg.LOL</i> 6.67-9 (2b)
<i>schit</i>	1450c (1410)	<i>Walton Boeth.</i> p.50 (3b)
<i>shitte</i>	1450c (c1400)	[<i>Vices & V.(2)</i>] (2c)
<i>shit</i>	1450c (c1400)	<i>Sultan Bab.2963</i> (3d)
<i>shite</i>	1450c (c1400)	<i>Sultan Bab.344</i> (1d)
<i>schitt</i>	1450c (c1415)	<i>Roy.Serm.281/24</i> (1a/PRES)
<i>shytte</i>	1460c	<i>Cursor</i> (Ld) 17670 (3d)
<i>shytinge</i>	1461-2()	<i>Acc.St.Michael Bath</i> in <i>SANHS</i> 25 57 (ger.c/PRES)
<i>schitte</i>	1473	<i>Plea & Mem.R.Lond.Gildh.86</i> (1a/PRES)
<i>shytte</i>	1475?a	<i>Ludus C.215/163</i> (3e)
<i>shytinge</i>	1475?a	<i>PParv.(Win)</i> 417 (ger.d/PRES)
<i>shyt</i>	1475?a	<i>Guiscardo</i> 251 (1b)

<i>shitte</i>	1475a	<i>Godstow Reg.680/34</i> (4a)
<i>schittip</i>	1475c (1392)	* <i>MS Wel.564</i> 39a/a (1h)
<i>yshitt</i>	1500a	* <i>Sidrak & B.11502</i> (3b)
<i>shitting</i>	1500a	* <i>Sidrak & B.8579</i> (ger.e/PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1500a	<i>Let.Alex.84</i> (3c)
<i>shitte</i>	1500a	<i>Partenay</i> 4409 (3d)
<i>shitte</i>	1500a	<i>Partenay</i> 555 (3a/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1500a	<i>Partenay</i> 5791 (3b)
<i>shitteþ</i>	1500a	<i>Sidrak & B. in Centaurus</i> 12 29/5818 (1g/PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1500a (?a1450)	<i>GRom.(Add)</i> 423 (1d)
<i>shyt</i>	1500a (1465)	<i>Leversedge Vision</i> 23 (1a)
<i>shitt</i> [vr.]	1500a (1471)	* <i>Ripley CALch.678</i> (2a)
<i>shittinge</i>	1500a (a1396)	<i>Hilton SP</i> (Wor) 24 (ger.b/PRES)
<i>shittinge</i>	1500a (a1450)	<i>Ashmole SSecr.</i> 101/19 (1h)
<i>shit</i>	1605a (?a1430)	<i>Lydg.Pilgr.(Stw(2))</i> (3b/PRES)

Table 3: *EP* <shit*> & <shyt*> 'shut' (#79)¹⁵

[<i>shytinge</i>	1315-30	<i>Mannynge, R. Medytacyuns</i> 756 (PRES)]
<i>shitte</i>	14..	anon. <i>Alexander-Cassamus</i> 281
<i>shitte</i>	14..	anon. <i>Knyghthode</i> 2209
<i>shit</i>	1400†	Chaucer, G. <i>RRose</i> 2767
<i>shitteth</i>	1400†	Chaucer, G. <i>RRose</i> 4100 (PRES)
<i>shitting</i>	1400†	Chaucer, G. <i>RRose</i> 1598 (PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1400-25	anon. <i>Sowdone</i> 2963
<i>shite</i>	1400-25	anon. <i>Sowdone</i> 344
<i>shitte</i>	1400-25	anon. <i>Sowdone</i> 2054
<i>shytt</i>	1400c	anon. <i>Kyng Alisaunder</i> 5128
<i>shit</i>	1411-12	Hoccleve, T. <i>Regement</i> 1093
<i>shit</i>	1411-12	Hoccleve, T. <i>Regement</i> 4098
<i>shittith</i>	1411-12	Hoccleve, T. <i>Regement</i> 2707 (PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1426	<i>Lydgate, J. Pilgimage</i> 17922 (PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1426?†	Hoccleve, T. <i>Ars mori</i> 821
<i>shitte</i>	1426?†	Hoccleve, T. <i>Ars mori</i> 872 (PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1426?†	Hoccleve, T. <i>Henri</i> 151
<i>shitte</i>	1426?†	Hoccleve, T. <i>Virgine</i> 68 (PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1436	anon. <i>Flemings</i> 26
<i>shittinge</i>	1440-45	Banester, G. <i>Guiscardo</i> 266 (PRES)
<i>shyt</i>	1440-45	Banester, G. <i>Guiscardo</i> 251
<i>shytte</i>	1449†	<i>Lydgate, J. Gouvernance</i> 391
<i>shit</i>	1450c	Roos, R. <i>La belle dame</i> 671

¹⁵ The following policy was adopted in regard to the dating of the *EP* records: (i) If a MS/edition date is given in addition to the author's lifedates, then the former date is listed; (ii) If only an author's lifedates are given, then the death-year is listed as the point *ante quem* followed by "†"; (iii) If *EP* lists neither lifedates nor an exact MS/edition date, I resort to Wells' [1937] and Severs -- Hartung's (1967-89) dating in this order.

<i>shytt</i>	1450c-1500	anon. <i>Life of Christ</i> 7752
<i>shitte</i>	1450c-1500	anon. <i>Partonope</i> 9225
<i>shitte</i>	1450c-1500	anon. <i>Partonope</i> 10844
<i>shitte</i>	1450c-1500	anon. <i>Partonope</i> 11168
<i>shytt</i>	1483†	Burgh, B. <i>Parvus</i> 30 (PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1483†	Burgh, B. <i>Cato</i> 380 (PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1490†	Ripley, G. <i>Alchymie</i> 595
<i>shit</i>	1490†	Ripley, G. <i>Alchymie</i> 678
<i>shit</i>	15..	anon. <i>Court Love</i> 792
<i>shit</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 4966
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 555 (PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 3295
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 3952
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 4409
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 4412
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 5607
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 5707
<i>shitte</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 5791
<i>shittyng</i>	1500-20	anon. <i>Partenay</i> 4478 (PRES)
<i>shyt</i>	1505	Barclay, A. <i>Castell of laboure</i> 2251
<i>shyt</i>	1505c	anon. <i>Adam Bell</i> 221
<i>shytte</i>	1507	Hawes, <i>Comforte</i> 565
<i>shyt</i>	1507	Hawes, S. <i>Passetyme</i> 1120 (PRES)
<i>shytte</i>	1507	Hawes, S. <i>Passetyme</i> 1355
<i>shyt</i>	1509	anon. <i>Ioyes of maryage</i> 2685 (PRES)
<i>shytte</i>	1509	anon. <i>Ioyes of maryage</i> 115 (PRES)
<i>shytte</i>	1509	anon. <i>Ioyes of maryage</i> 315
<i>shytte</i>	1509	anon. <i>Ioyes of maryage</i> 2485
<i>shit</i>	1520	anon. <i>Terence Andria</i> 31
<i>shyt</i>	1523	Barclay, A. <i>Maners</i> 849
<i>shyt</i>	1523	Barclay, A. <i>St George</i> 751
<i>shyt</i>	1523	Barclay, A. <i>St George</i> 761
<i>shyt</i>	1529†	Skelton, J. <i>Courte</i> 236
<i>shyt</i>	1529†	Skelton, J. <i>Magnyfycence</i> 236 (PRES)
<i>shyt</i>	1532†	Walter, W. <i>Guystarde</i> 211
<i>shitt</i>	1542†	Wyatt, T. <i>Caesar</i> 5
<i>shytt</i>	1542†	Wyatt, T. <i>Knott</i> 39
<i>shit</i>	1542	Smith, T. <i>Psalm 30</i> 19 (PRES)
<i>shitt</i>	1547†	Howard, H. <i>Psalm 88</i> 28
<i>shyt</i>	1548	anon. <i>St George's mother</i> 364
<i>shit</i>	1552†	Barclay, A. <i>Amintas</i> 783
<i>shit</i>	1552†	Barclay, A. <i>Court</i> 202 (PRES)
<i>shytt</i>	1556†	Parker, H. <i>Tryumphed Loue</i> 252
<i>shit</i>	1566	Drant, T. <i>Hieremie</i> 123 (PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1567	Drant, T. <i>Horace</i> 6
<i>shit</i>	1567	Golding, A. <i>Ovid Metam</i> 710 (PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1568	Drant, T. <i>Temptation</i> 1 (PRES)

<i>shit</i>	1581	Heywood, J. <i>Seneca Troas</i> 115
<i>shit</i>	1581	Heywood, J. <i>Seneca Herc</i> 156
<i>shit</i>	1581	Hall, A. <i>Homer Iliad</i> 24 (PRES)
<i>shit</i>	1599†	Spenser, E. <i>Colin Clovts</i> 709
<i>shit</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PR ES)
<i>shit</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PRES)
<i>shitt</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PRES)
<i>shitt</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PRES)
<i>shitt</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PRES)
<i>shitt</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PRES)
<i>shitte</i>	1615	Goddard, W. <i>Page</i> (PRES)

Table 4: HC 'shut' (#3)

(i) <shitte>:

and þe ouer-pluys shuld be SHITTE in hucches to be deled to poure folke, as I saide before.

(Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum* a1450; my emphasis)

(ii) <shytt>:

& y^e Lorde SHYTT the dore vppō him And the floud came .XL. dayes & .XL. nyghtes vppon the erth, ...

(The Old Testament. William Tyndale's Five Books of Moses 1530; my emphasis)

(iii) <shitte> (PRES):

Father, what moued them to SHITTE you vp againe, we can nothing heare.

(Roper, Margaret *The correspondence of Sir Thomas More* 1534; my emphasis)

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