

History of the English Language: Its Influence on Spelling and Meaning

Presented at
Literacy Promises Conference

March 24 & 25, 2022

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Background for History of English in Four Acts

Before There Was an English Language 1

Before 43 AD: Celtic Dialects Predominate in Britain Before the Roman invasions most people in Britain speak Celtic (or a dialect).

43 to ~300 AD: The Romans Invade Britain and Rule, but the Celtic Language Survives

- Circa 55 BC, the Romans, under Julius Caesar unsuccessfully invade Britain.
- Circa 43 AD, the Romans, under Emperor Claudius, successfully invade Britain, but never penetrate beyond the mountains into Wales or Scotland.
- The Celts, usually warlike, become peaceful (at least the ones who live in towns), adopting Roman ways.
 - Latin is used in monasteries and the church, but not much by natives who still speak Celtic.

Before There Was an English Language (2)

~300 to ~410 AD: The Romans Withdraw from Britain

- Circa 300 AD, the Romans withdraw from Britain as the Germanic tribes start beating them in battle and the Romans have completed withdrawal by about 410 AD.

~450 AD: Four Major Germanic Tribes Invade Britain

- Circa 450 AD, Germanic tribes called the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians invade Britain.

Act I The First Layer of Our Language: Anglo-Saxon

Oldest Layer of the English Language

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Old English ~A.D. 700 -1100

- Anglo-Saxon – common words – mostly of Germanic origin
- Scandinavian (some)
- Latin (a few from Christian scholars)

Body Parts: finger, leg, head, arm, blood, bosom, chin, eye, hair, heart, knee

Animals: cow, sheep, hen, calf, bear, beaver, bee, chicken, hawk, ox, whale

Family: mother, father, son, daughter, child, husband, nephew, wife

Food: food, bake, barley, berry, butter, cook, wine,

Most Numbers: hundred, thousand, one, two, three four, five, etc..

Eating: chew, belch, gnaw

Basic Feelings: glad, hope, hunger, love, lust, sorrow

Tools: ax, awl, hammer, nail, adz,

Natural elements: brook, earth, flood, sun, moon, hill, island, sea, water, wind

Function words: what, where, before, for, if, the

Act II
The Second Layer of Our
Language:
French

Second Layer of the English Language

The Early Part of Middle English ~A.D. 1100-1350

- Added Norman French – upper crust words

Fancy: *mansion, flower, chivalry, vintage*, antique, boutique, bouquet, lingerie, armoire, debris, elite, entourage, liaison, panache, camaraderie, dossier, repertoire, espionage

Law: *justice, chamber, jury, judge, attorney, court, bailiff, defendant, statute, parole*

Government, Economics and Politics: *parliament, govern, treaty, money, duke, prince, mayor, sovereign, alliance, debt*, embassy, diplomacy, passport, protocol, finance, bureaucracy

Military: *marine, guard, officer, army, artillery, soldier*, camouflage, squadron, infantry

Food: *poultry, veal, mutton, beef, fruit, liquor*, soup, sauté, cuisine, dessert, casserole, sauce

Colors: *blue, orange, violet, scarlet, beige, ecru, turquoise*

Architecture: *aisle, arch, belfry, vault, buttress, façade, terrace, pavilion*

Arts: *music, dance, author, stage, paint, harmony, melody*, gallery, portrait, collage

Religion: *abbey, clergy, cloister, friar, parish, prayer, preacher, vicar, vestry*

* Italics indicates word's first known use is between 1100 and 1450

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Act III
The Third Layer of Our
Language:
Latin

Third Layer of the English Language

The later part of Middle English

- An interest in scholarly pursuits resulted from:

Renaissance (1300's – 1600's)

Printing press (1475 first book printed in English)

Added Latin - scholar's words

precipitation, adjacent, inferior, intelligent, audible, accept
incessant, recapitulate, predict, abdicate, efficacy, regress
legible, obliterate, emit, select, expedite, impede, retract

Act IV
The Fourth Layer of Our
Language:
Greek

Fourth Layer of the English Language

When Latin couldn't provide the word, Greek did:

Greek words are "brainy" and "expert"

Specialized words in math & science:

amphibious, biology, astrosphere, psychology, symbiosis,
pentagon, hexagon, mastectomy, pneumonia, ecological,
dinosaur, hippocampus

Literature, drama, music:

character, chorus, autobiography, choreograph, psalm,
amphitheater

Religion & mythology:

gnostic, theist, Christ, Nike, pantheism

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Effect of the Printing Press

- When the printing press was introduced into England in the late 1400's, it essentially standardized the words used in English, and slowed the influx of words into our language.
- The printing press was the primary force behind standardizing spelling.
- Unfortunately, spelling was standardized before the Great Vowel Shift had completed itself.
- Our spelling often represents Middle English or Old English pronunciation, not Modern or Contemporary pronunciation.

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Review

• Three Periods of English

- Old English
- Middle
- Modern

• Four Layers of English

- Anglo-Saxon (Old English)
- French (began entering during Early Middle English period)
- Latin (began entering primarily during Late Middle English period)
- Greek (began entering during Late Middle English period)

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Three Periods of the English Language

- **Old English** ~A.D. 700-1100
 - Anglo-Saxon – common words
 - Scandinavian (some), Latin (from Christian scholars)
- **Middle English** ~A.D. 1100-1500
(The era of the greatest change in our language.)
 - Added French-Norman – upper crust words
 - Added Latin, Greek – scholar's and expert's words
- **Modern and Contemporary English** ~A.D. 1500 – present
 - Old English layer
 - French layer
 - Latin layer
 - Greek layer
 - More French, Latin, and Greek words, and words imported directly from other languages

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How English Sounded Over the Years

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Three Periods of the English Language

Changes in English Over 1200 Years

- **Old English** ~A.D. 700 -1100
 - Beowulf
- **Middle English** ~A.D. 1100-1500
 - Chaucer
- **Modern and Contemporary English** ~A.D. 1500 – now
 - Shakespeare begins this period

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Old English Beowulf

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Middle English
The Canterbury Tales
by Geoffrey Chaucer

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The Beginning of Modern
English
Shakespeare

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Spelling and
Shades of Meaning

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Spelling Patterns & Nuance of Meaning

- Each of the four layers of English:
 - Has its own spelling patterns
 - Brings a nuance to meaning

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Old English / Anglo-Saxon

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Anglo Saxon (Old English) Words

- English's oldest words
- The ones we use the most
- Express common objects, feelings and ideas
- Use most in normal, everyday conversation
- Words of emotion
 - **You cause me to be consumed with abhorrence. (Latin)**
 - **I hate you. (Old English)**

Note: Technically, Old English includes some Norse words, which are similar to Anglo Saxon words.

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Famous First Lines in Novels

(words in blue are Latin or French-based from middle English)

- It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . .
– Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*.
- Happy **families** are all alike; every unhappy **family** is unhappy in its own way. – Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*
- It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. – George Orwell, *1984*
- All this happened, more or less. – Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*
- They shoot the white girl first. – Toni Morrison, *Paradise*
- He was an old man who fished alone in a **skiff** in the **Gulf Stream** and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. – Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

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Famous Beatles Lyrics

(words in blue are Latin- or French-based from middle English)

- All you need is love – *Song Title*
- For I don't care too much for **money**
For **money** can't buy me love – “*Can't Buy Me Love*”
- When I find myself in times of **trouble**
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be – “*Let It Be*”
- Eight days a week I love you – “*Eight Days a Week*”
- If there's anything that you want
If there's anything I can do
Just call on me
And I'll send it along with love from me to you – “*From Me to You*”

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Characteristics of Old English (Anglo Saxon) Words

common words: love, child, house, heart, be (often one syllable)	compound words: man kind black bird, rain bow
prepositions, articles, conjunctions: with, to, for, and, the, but...	silent letters: <u>k</u> nee, <u>n</u> ight, <u>c</u> omb, <u>w</u> rinkle, <u>c</u> ould, <u>th</u> ought
digraphs: wh , sh , ch , th , ng <u>wh</u> at, <u>sh</u> ip, <u>th</u> umb, <u>ch</u> in, <u>ng</u> ing	odd plurals: mouse-mice, foot-feet, child-children
vowel teams: teeth , foot , road r-controlled vowels: farm , star , storm , shirt	irregular verbs: think-thought, catch-caught, keep-kept, send-sent, give-gave

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Many Spellings that Don't Make Sense are from Old English

Spellings for /er/ firm, hurt, her, earth, word

- These spellings reflect the Old English or Middle English pronunciations.
- *Earth*, *beard*, and *heart* probably all rhymed in at least one dialect.
- *Word* probably rhymed with *ford*.

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Children Speak Old English

- The most commonly used words are Old English.
 - 98 words on the Dolch 100 list are Old English
 - ‘Just’ and ‘blue’ are from French (etymonline.com)
- Because the spelling often represents previous pronunciations, these words are often hardest to spell.
- Unfortunately, children have to learn to read and spell the words with difficult spellings first.

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Middle English / French

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French Layer

- 1066 - William the Conqueror invades England from French-speaking Normandy.
- Normans rule England for more than 200 years.
- Norman French is the language of the upper classes
 - leisure, duchess, royal, village*
 - bacon, pork, venison, sauce*
 - chivalry, blonde, villain, fatal*
- Peasants continue to speak Old English, gradually absorbing many of the French words.
- Old English becomes Middle English from about 1100 – 1500.
 - The infusion of French words ushers in the first part of Middle English.

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French Structure

French words are generally based in Latin, but they have their own spelling structure, and are often words of class rather than words of intelligence.

- **final é pronounced /ā/:** fiancé, sauté, risqué, attaché, café, cliché
- **et pronounced /ā/:** ballet, buffet, croquet, gourmet, beret
- **-ge /zh/:** barrage, genre, lingerie, beige
- **ch /sh/:** charade, chic, parachute, niche
- **que /k/:** antique, clique, unique, boutique
 - (opposed to words beginning with qu /kw/ as in quick)
- **final eau /ō/:** bureau, trousseau, nouveau, beau, plateau

See *English Isn't Crazy* by Diana Hanbury King, 2000

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Middle English / Latin

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Latin Layer

- Latin word parts (prefixes, suffixes, roots):
 - in more than half the vocabulary of our language
 - a large part of academic vocabulary
 - pervasive use begins in fourth grade science and social studies texts
- Latin words are words that show intelligence:
 - preamble** (foreword), **exit** (way out), **invade** (go to war),
 - disperse** (send out), **collide** (run into), **interrupt** (break into),
 - predict** (say before), **evaluate** (look into), **genuine** (real),
 - somnolent** (sleepy), **insomnia** (lack sleep)

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Latin Layer continued

- Educated persons in England historically attended grammar school to learn Latin grammar, thus our modern day “grammar school”
- A few Latin words crept into the language even before the Anglo-Saxon invasions, with the arrival of the Catholic church with the Romans in the middle of the first century.
- The Renaissance, beginning in the 1300's and ending in the 1500's, raised interest in Latin words, and thousands of words from Latin were added to English.

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Latin Word Structure

- Latin words follow a strict structure.
- Prefixes must be placed before the root and suffixes must follow the root: **in vis ible**
- Latin roots (**spect, dict, ject, rupt**) are unlikely to stand alone as an English word
- Many roots have short vowels
- The Latin root often receives the accent or stress:
 - e **ject'** contra **dic'** tion
- There is often a schwa: adapt = ə **dapt**

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Middle English / Greek

Greek Words

Content-Specific Greek Terms

Anatomy and Medical Terms

esophagus, thyroid, diagnosis, psoriasis, dyslexia

Social Studies and Sciences

biology, seismology, morphology, geochronometry

Animals and Plants

arachnid, amphibian, chlorophyll, dinosaur, nectar

Theatre and the Arts

charisma, drama, chorus, muse, symphony

GREEK SOUNDS and SPELLINGS

- ch for /k/: chorus, chtechnology, Christmas, anchor
- ps for /s/: pseudonym, psychology, psalm
- ph for /f/: graph, sphere, epitaph, phase
- th: theology, theater, thesis, sympathy
- y for /i/ and /i/: symphony, typhoid, rhythm
- x for /ks/: dyslexia, lexicon
 - x also represents /z/: xenophobe, xylophone
- long final e: epitome, hyperbole, psyche
- split vowels: chaos, create, miasma, myopia

Comparing Spelling Patterns

Teach the Various Spellings of /sh/ and the Nuance of Meaning

Old English sh	French ch	Latin ci, ti, si

Teach the Various Sounds of CH and the Nuance of Meaning

Anglo-Saxon /ch/	French /sh/	Greek /k/

Teach the Various Sounds for Final e and the Nuance of Meaning

Anglo-Saxon final silent e	French long a /ā/	Greek long e /ē/

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Impact from Teaching Greek Word Parts

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Greek Combining Forms Carry Meaning

Words from Greek often have combining forms where both parts of the word carry equal meaning.

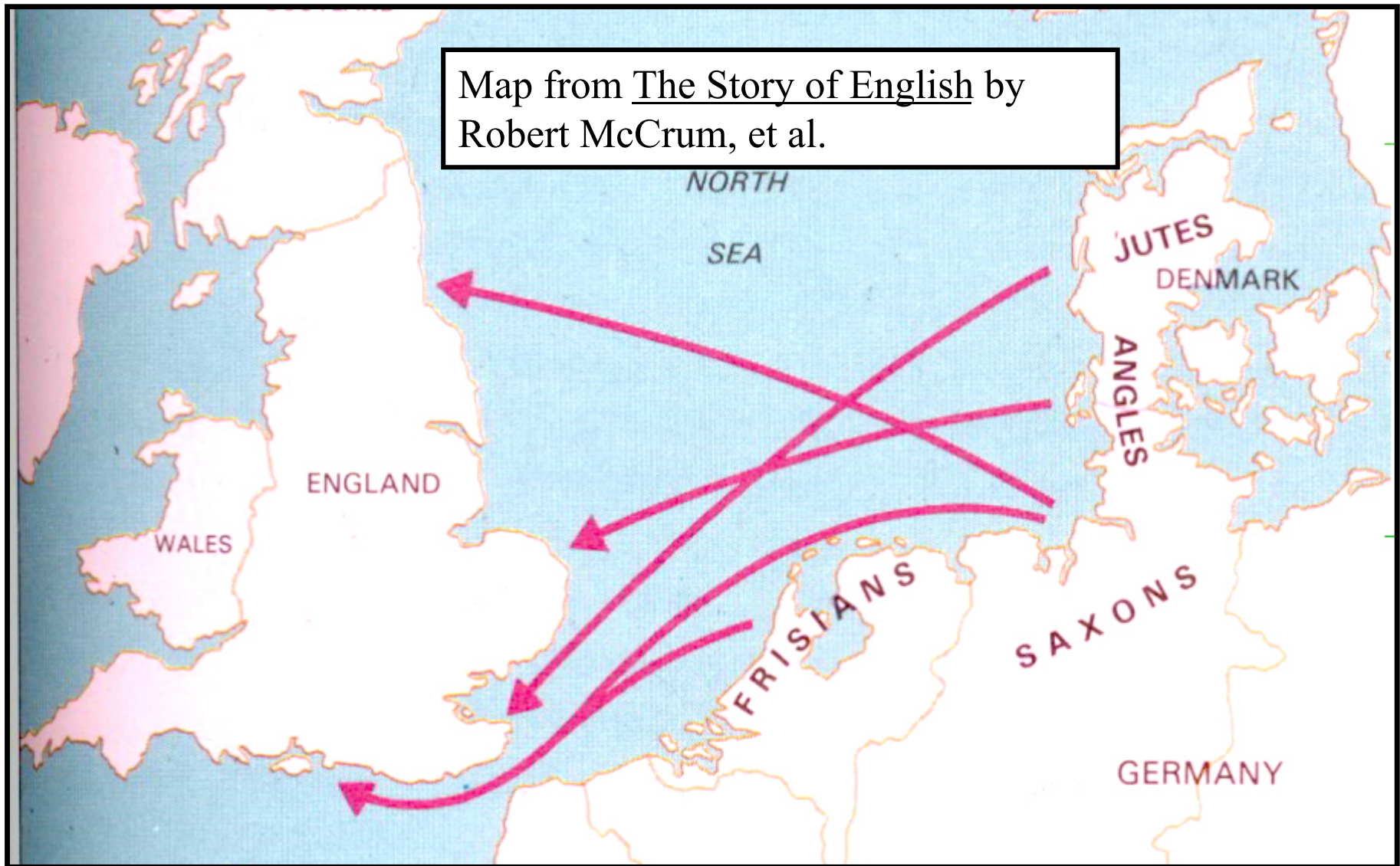
Combine as many words as you can from these word parts.

hydro	graph	theo
therm	scope	sphere
chron	crat	geo
morph	phobe	psych
logy	bio	neuro

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Invasion of Britain by Germanic Tribes





Excerpt from *Beowulf*

thought by some experts to be 9th Century AD

The monster Grendel approaches the hall of King Hrothgar:

In off the moors, down through the mist-bands
God-cursed Grendel came greedily loping.
The bane of the race of men roamed forth,
hunting for a prey in the high hall.
Under the cloud-murk he moved towards it
until it shone above him, a sheer keep
of fortified gold.

Spurned and joyless, he journeyed on ahead
and arrived at the bawn. The iron-braced door
turned on its hinge when his hands touched it.
Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open
the mouth of the building, maddening for blood,
pacing the length of the patterned floor
with his loathsome tread, while a baleful light,
flame more than light, flared from his eyes.

(Beowulf, trans. Heaney, p. 24)

Ða com of more under misthleopum
Grendel gongan, godes yrre bær;
mynte se manscaða manna cynnes
sumne besyrwan in sele þam hean.
Wod under wolcnum to þæs þe he winreced,
goldsele gumena, gearwost wisse,
fættum fahne.

Com þa to recede rinc siðian,
dreamum bedæled. Duru sona onarn,
fyrbendum fæst, syþðan he hire folmum æthran;
onbræd þa bealohydig, ða he gebolgen wæs,
recedes muþan. Raþe æfter þon
on fagne flor feond treddode,
eode yrremod; him of eagum stod
ligge gelicost leoht unfæger.

(Beowulf, ll. 710-716, 720-727, ed. Dobbie, pp. 23-24)

Canterbury Tales: Prologue, lines 1-18
1396

Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich (such) licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan zephirus (west wind that blows in spring) eek (also) with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne (has run),
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(so priketh hem (them) nature in hir corages (spirits, feelings));
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres (professional pilgrims) for to seken straunge strondes (shores),
To ferne halwes (distant shrines), kowthe in sondry londes (various countries);
And specially from every shires ende
Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful (blessed) martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen (helped) whan that they were seeke (sick)

Excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*

1396

Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioeresse,
That of hir smiling was ful simple and coy.
Hir gretteste ooth was but by sainte Loy!
And she was cleped Madame Eglantine.
Ful wel she soong the service divine,
Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford at the Bowe
For Frenssh of Paris was to hire unknowe.

From *The Story of English*

by Robert McCruam, William Cran and Robert McNeill

If you cannot understand my argument, and declare "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise - why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then - to give the devil his due - if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I was dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then - by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts - it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare.