



QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Well-timed silence hath more eloquence than speech.”
—Martin Farquhar Tupper

“No words suffice the secret soul to show,
For truth denies all eloquence to woe.”
—Lord Byron, *The Corsair*

“The truest eloquence is that which holds us too mute for applause.”
—Edward Bulwer-Lytton

“They always talk who never think, and who have the least to say.”
—Matthew Prior

“Talking and eloquence are not the same. To speak and to speak well are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks.”
—Ben Jonson

“Nature has given us two ears, two eyes, and but one tongue, to the end that we should hear and see more than we speak.”
—Socrates

“A man that speaks too much, and museth but little, wasteth his mind in words, and is counted a fool among men.”
—Martin Fraquhar Tupper

“He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.”
—Shakespeare, *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, V.i.6

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

SEPTEMBER 28, 1066: William the Conqueror invades England, initiating the Norman Invasion that quickly settled the dispute over who would succeed the childless Edward the Confessor as the next king of England.

William was born in Falaise (now in modern France), the illegitimate son of Robert the Magnificent, Duke of Normandy. Robert died without sons but made William his heir, so William succeeded him as Duke at the age of seven. By the time he was 19, William was a knight, had the backing of Henry I of France, and had successfully controlled his rebellious duchy. In 1051, William paid his cousin king Edward a visit. According to Norman historians, Edward promised to make William his heir, but seemed to forget this promise when he was on his deathbed 15 years later. Instead, the king gave his blessing to (*continued on page 2*)

5 WORDS

This week’s theme: big words that describe people who use big words.

grandiloquent

(gran-DIL-o-kwent) *adjective*

1. pompously eloquent
2. making a show of knowledge by using large words

Ex. He was so grandiloquent I could barely understand him.

magniloquent

(mag-NIL-o-kwent) *adjective*

1. extravagance in speech
2. bombastic in style or manner

Ex. same as above

lexiphanicism

(lex-i-FAN-i-ciz-em) *noun*

1. the use of pretentious words or language

Ex. The style of many 19th-century poets suggests they all took a university-level course in lexiphanicism.

sententious (sen-TEN-chus) *adj.*

1. using pompous language

Ex. There goes a sententious fellow; so vain with his knowledge of the language that he can hardly speak it.

sesquipedalian

(ses-kwi-pi-DALE-yen) *adj.*

1. having many syllables
2. tending to use long words

Ex. I prefer the more sesquipedalian Wall Street Journal to the local papers.

ETYMOLOGY 101

The origin of: abracadabra

The word *abracadabra* is commonly used as an amateurish magical incantation to summon bunnies from hats, but its origins indicate that the word was once a powerful countercurse for warding off fevers. The number of explanations for this word's origin are boggling, but I will present two of the most interesting.

First: the word was first mentioned in the 2nd century by Serenus Sammonicus, a physician to the Roman emperor Caracalla. In his poem *Præcepta de Medicina*, he gave instructions for arranging the letters of the word in a triangle. The letters were to be written on paper, folded into a cross, and worn for nine days suspended from the neck. Before sunrise on the ninth day, the cross was to be cast behind the wearer into an eastward running stream.

The word may come from the Aramaic *Avrah KaDabra*, which means "I will create as I speak." It has also been said that the word is derived from the Hebrew phrase *abreq ad habra*, meaning "hurl your thunderbolt even unto death."

Second: the word may be a derivation of the Gnostic word for God, Abraxas. Supposedly, the Greek letters for Abraxas add up to 365 when using numerology (the study of numbers and their mystical relationship with physical things). "Gnostic" is a catch-all phrase for mystical religious sects that were around in the few centuries after Christ, so you get the idea that this word had a lot to do with esoteric, numinous things. The amulet, when written as shown below, pushes ill fortune away; when inverted, it draws good fortune to the wearer.

A B R A C A D A B R A
A B R A C A D A B R
A B R A C A D A B
A B R A C A D A
A B R A C A D
A B R A C A
A B R A C
A B R A
A B R
A B
A

The origin of: hocus pocus

The etymology of this phrase is much more straightforward and less open to endless interpretation. Most sources agree the word was born in the mid 17th century, when a traveling juggler used the incantation *Hocus pocus, tontus tabantus, vade celeriter jubeo* before doing a trick, so that his audience would be distracted by the words and less likely to observe any sleight of hand. The words "hocus pocus" are likely a corruption of the Latin *hoc est enim corpus meum* (for this is my body), or the shorter *hoc est corpus*. This phrase was uttered by priests before Communion, when a wafer of bread and cup of wine were transformed into the body and blood of Christ by transubstantiation.

Sources: wikipedia.org, straightdope.com, ccg.org.



*William I (detail)
by George Vertue*

(continued from page 1) Harold Godwinson (or Godwine), head of the most powerful noble family in England. Harold's succession was approved by the *Witenagemot*—an assembly of England's most important and powerful people—and he became Harold II of England on January 5, 1066.

Naturally, William disputed this succession, and decided to settle the matter with an invasion. Harold II already had his hands full with a rival claimant from Norway, Harald III, who joined forces with Harold's brother Tostig. Harald landed a force of some 5,000 men in Northern England, forcing Harold to leave the English Channel unprotected. Harold led an army north in record speed to defeat Harald and Tostig at the Battle of Stamford Bridge (a decisive defeat for the Scandinavian army that effectively ended Viking raids into England). Three days later, William landed in Pevensy. The Norman Invasion had begun.

F *Witenagemot* is Old English for "meeting of the wise," from

witan, “wise man” + *gemot*, “assembly.” After William’s conquest, it lost influence and was replaced by the *curia regis*, or “king’s court,” a sort of court of justice whose functions varied considerably with time. In *Harry Potter*, the high court of wizarding law is called the *Wizengamot*. It appears Ms. Rowling is familiar with her history.

F For more information on Edward the Confessor, see “A Brief History of Westminster Abbey” in Quotidian 1.10.

WELL I’LL BE! THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS YOU NEVER ASKED

Why is the legal profession referred to as “the bar”?

This peculiar nomenclature comes from 13th century England, when the study of law was done largely through clerking for a judge or training at one of several “Inns of Chancery.” These inns taught students legal fundamentals but not the theory or finer points of the law. Thus, when the system grew more and more complex, there arose a need for a more thorough form of education. The “Inns of Court” filled this gap by providing extensive training and practical experience through the use of such things as mock trials. These trials were presided over by judges and practicing lawyers, who were separated from the rest of the hall by a railing or barrier known as the *bar*. As students gained experience and advanced within their class, they were “called within the bar” and allowed to preside over the mock trials. The students became known as *barristers*, an appellation still in use by the English courts to this day.

Source: *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*.

Why is the Middle East so named?

The term Middle East does not refer to a specific geographic region with static borders, but to a general area between the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. It includes Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, among other nations. The term is Eurocentric in origin, and dates from before World War I. At that time, western Europe (England in particular, since it had a spectacular amount of global control) used the term *Near East* to refer to the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, and Serbia) and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). The region further east was the *Middle East*, and the region beyond that was the *Far East*. The latter included China, Japan, Korea, and Siam (Thailand). After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the term Near East fell out of use, but the others remained.

In 1884, a convocation of 25 nations met in Washington, D.C. to establish an international meridian line. It was decided this line should pass through Greenwich, England, and so it was natural that everything to the right of it on the map should be east, and everything to the left should be west (if we are looking at the popular Mercator projection, with North America on the left hand side). Hence the modern notion that

anything “western” is related to Europe or America, and anything “eastern” is related to Asia or elsewhere.

Source: www.wikipedia.org.

PLAIN ENGLISH

Today’s Lesson: hither, thither, and wither, inter alia

This may be a straightforward lesson for some, but some of those archaic, polysyllabic words can become difficult to follow, right? Just keep in mind the following:

1. An “h” means “here.”
2. A “t” means “there.”
3. A “w” means “where.”

Thus, *hither* means “to *here*—to *this* place.”

Thither means “to *there*—to *that* place.”

Wither means “to *where*—to *what* place.”

Thus, *henceforth* means “from *here*—from *this* time forward.”

Thenceforth means “from *there*—from *that* time forward.”

Whenceforth, if it were a word, would mean “from *where*—from *what* time forward.”

As I recently learned, *whence* means “from where,” so it should never be written as “from whence,” since that would be saying “from from where.”



LITERARY GENIUS

There was never a better playwright in all of history than William Shakespeare, and for his contributions to the English language we can never fully repay him. Of all his plays, *Hamlet* stands out as one of the finest, not least because it includes the bard's most well-known soliloquy. Accompanying the original text is a synopsis of what Hamlet is saying, as I understand it. After reading both, feel free to use your newfound mastery of Shakespearian prose to astonish your friends and supplicants at your next cocktail party.

FROM THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK
by William Shakespeare

Act 3, Scene 1

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.-- Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.

* a reference to Claudius
† a reference to Ophelia

To live or to die, that is the question.
65 Is it nobler to suffer
the pains of outrageous misfortune (to live miserably) or to end one's sorrows with a single stroke (to commit suicide)? To die is to sleep, and no more. And by sleeping we would end the heartaches and countless pains that are an inescapable part of living. It is an end devoutly to be wished for. To die, to sleep; and perhaps to dream: ah, and there's the difficulty: because we do not know what may come after death (mortal coil = body), we must pause and consider: it is this uncertainty that makes us endure the troubles of life for so long. For who would bear the hardships of time, the wrongs of others*, the insults of proud men**, the heartaches of unrequited love†, the tardiness of the law, the insolence of those in office, and the scorn of those he has treated with unmerited patience, when he could cause his own death with a mere knife? Who would bear these
80 burdens, and grunt and sweat under a weary life, if there were no fear of the unknown after death, the undiscovered country from whose frontier no one returns, which paralyzes the will and makes us tolerate the difficulties we have instead of flying to others we know nothing about? Our knowledge of this uncertainty makes us all cowards, and the thought of death grows paler (less appealing) with thought. And endeavors of great importance lose their appeal if thought of too much; doubts arise and the desire to take action is lost. But wait!
85 The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in your prayers may my sins be remembered‡.

** a reference to Polonius
‡ i.e., may you pray for me