

Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 14: Degeneration and Elevation

- **DEGENERATION**: “the process by which a word comes to mean something more objectionable or contemptible than it did before,” e.g. intercourse (< “between + run/go”)
 - monster:
 - Lat. *monstrum* (“omen, marvel”)
 - > “a horrific thing, a cruel person”
 - rococo:
 - Fr. *roche, rocaille* (“rock, rock-work”)
 - > “florid and tasteless”

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 - demon:
 - Greek *daimon* (“god”), cf. Socrates’ “guiding spirit”
 - > “evil spirit”
 - innocuous:
 - “not/harmful” > “bland, insipid, boring”
 - cf. “square”: “upright” (as in “four-square”) > “tedious, conventional”

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- **DEGENERATION**: “the process by which a word comes to mean something more objectionable or contemptible than it did before,” e.g. intercourse (< “between + run/go”)
 - **precocious**:
 - Lat *praecox*, “ripening early” (prae- + COQU- “cook”)
 - cf. apricot: orig. “early-ripening (apple, sc. malum)”
 - > “young and cocky, obnoxious”

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- **ELEVATION**: “the process by which a word comes to mean something more pleasant or lofty than it did before”
 - eutopia: orig. utopia (“no-place”)
 - from Thomas Moore’s satire *Utopia*
 - > “an idyllic locale” (lit. “good-place”)
 - for u- prefix, cf. *uchronia* (“no-time”), a novel about an imaginary historical period, e.g. Hitler winning WWII
 - angel: orig. “messenger” (Greek *angelos*)
 - > “a heavenly herald, a savior”

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- ELEVATION: “the process by which a word comes to mean something more pleasant or lofty than it did before”
 - hidalgo: “a Spanish nobleman of a rank below grandee”
 - orig. *hijo de algo* (“son of someone”)
 - progress: orig. “walk forward”
 - > “do better”
 - cf. regress, “do worse”: degeneration