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”
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”)
  - **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”
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”)
  - *precocious:*
    - Lat *praecox*, “ripening early” (prae- + COQU- “cook”)
      - cf. apricot: orig. “early-ripening (apple, sc. malum)”
    - > “young and cocky, obnoxious”
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 14: Degeneration and Elevation

• **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”
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 14: Degeneration and Elevation

• **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