Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 19: Folk Etymology

- **FOLK ETYMOLOGY**: “the process by which a word changes form through a mistaken assimilation of that word to another word or form which it resembles”
  - also called paronomasia ("mistaken word creation")
    - this is also the technical term for punning
  - folk etymology is the product of misunderstanding
    - i.e. basic human ignorance, especially of history
  - e.g. momento, for memento
    - a confusion of the Latin word *memento* ("remember!") with the word “moment” ("importance, turning point")
      - as in “the moment of truth” or “of great moment”; cf. momentous
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 19: Folk Etymology

• e.g. laxadaisical
  – from the expression “alack the day!” (Shakespeare)
  – lackaday! (17th c.) > lackadaisy
  – lackadaisy > lackadaisical (18th c.), “given to affected sentiment”
    • later, “vapid, listless, showing a lack of interest”
  – finally laxadaisical (by confusion with lax, relax)
Lesson 19: Folk Etymology

- **spitting image**: from “spirit and image”
  - spirit ("likeness") > spit (syncope)
- **chaise lounge**: from chaise longue
  - from French *longue* ("long") > lounge
  - lounge is from Lat. *longis* ("drowsy; lout, laggard")

- ultimately, from the Latin name Longinus, the name of the centurion who pierces the body of Christ in medieval passion plays and then falls asleep
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 19: Folk Etymology

• humble pie: from umble pie
  – umbles are the entrails of a deer which are often served in a pie to servants
  – Lat. *lumbulus* ("loin") > MedEng/OFr *nombles*
  – "a numble" is later misconstrued as "an/umble"
• metanalysis: a/norange > an/orange, an/ekename > a/nickname
• big cheese: from big chiz
  – Persian, and later Urdu (Indian language): chiz ("important thing")
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 19: Folk Etymology

SEE EXERCISE 1V, p.116
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 20: Clips

• **Clip**: “a word which has lost its initial or final part (or both) but retains the same general meaning,” e.g.
  – computer terminology
    • boot < “bootstrapping program” or “bootstrap loader”
      – a program which loads the rest of the operating system
      – n.b. a metaphor from skiing
  – medicine
    • prep < prepare (e.g. for surgery)
    • doc < doctor
    • premie < premature baby
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Lesson 20: Clips

– cars
  • gas < gasoline
  • lube < lubrication
  • semi < semi-trailer

– others
  • memo < memorandum
  • con < convict
  • pen < penitentiary
  • phone < telephone
  • dis < (show) disrespect
  • patter < pater noster (qui es in caelis sanctificetur nomen …)
Latin and Greek Elements in English

Please note that your definitions of words in context (Part 4 of Quiz 3; on the back page) are now worth TWO points: (1) one for the etymological definition and (2) one for the contextual definition

SEE THE DIATHESIS OF QUIZ 3

GO TO EXERCISE IV, p.119