SEMANTIC CHANGE IN NATIVE ENGLISH WORDS

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This study describes meaning changes that have occurred in the native word stock of English. Since no existing studies are devoted solely to investigating semantic change in Old English words, this study tries to illustrate word histories through examples of usage in the past and by a discussion of causes for change.

The main source for this thesis is the Oxford English Dictionary. Other etymological dictionaries and studies in word development have been consulted to add dimension. Books on the history of the language have also been used to gain a historical perspective. Whenever possible, quotations from Chaucer and Shakespeare are given to illustrate semantic change, because most students are familiar with these writers. In this way the paper may help illuminate passages in literature that might otherwise be obscured.

There is first a general discussion of types of semantic change, e.g., generalization, specialization, pejoration, elevation. This first chapter serves as groundwork for subsequent chapters, each of which examines the development of native words according to the subjects which they denoted in Old English. The second chapter deals with words originating in Anglo-Saxon home and communal life. Next is a
discussion of descriptive terms which have undergone meaning change since the Old English period. Then comes a chapter concerning religion and attitudes. Chapter V is a discussion of words relating to occupations. The sixth chapter deals with the development of words referring to animals, agriculture, and measurement. Finally, to conclude the study, there is a brief summation of foreign influence on English and of changes natural to the language.
SEMANTIC CHANGE IN NATIVE ENGLISH WORDS

THESIS

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PREFACE

The main source for this study has been the *Oxford English Dictionary*; other etymological dictionaries have been consulted for additional information on dates and word usage. Whenever possible, well-known works (e.g., *Ancrene Riwle, Plere Plowman*) and authors (e.g., Shakespeare, Chaucer) have been used to illustrate semantic change, but each illustrative passage has been chosen for the clarity with which it demonstrates a particular usage rather than for its familiarity. Quotations from less well-known works and authors most frequently appear when illustrations are needed for words in which radical meaning change has occurred.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There exist no studies devoted exclusively to semantic change in native English words. Most general language texts discuss either the Old English period or semantic change in the entire word stock. Thus a more thorough analysis tracing sense variations in and additions to the native vocabulary may be of use to anyone interested in language, but especially to the English teacher, who in teaching meaning change has wearied of hussy, companion, nice, et al.--the usual examples which show up in general studies of semantic change. Moreover, since language mirrors culture, the two interacting, a study of native words affords reconstruction of the past for students of anthropology and sociology, as well as for those of English and history.

Since shifts in meaning and the survival of certain words frequently indicate cultural values in a state of flux, this study attempts to group by subject those native words in which semantic drift has occurred, rather than to assign a word to a single class of meaning change, i.e., specialization, generalization, degeneration, or elevation. A brief discussion of semantic change is necessary, however, in order to understand the variety of sense modifications and expansions a word can undergo.
In addition, consideration of English native vocabulary reveals the enduring and fundamental aspects of the word stock. Modern English words which trace their origins to the Anglo-Saxons make up the major part of the vocabulary of a child before he starts reading. These words name something basic and concrete (5, p. 21). Conversely, English has lost many native words for attitudes and moral ideas, a reminder of the Norman subjugation of a people who had many abstract words. In fact, the displacement of native abstract words by foreign ones is the major difference between Old English and Middle English, for such words as ʒoʊ-myndə, "forgetfulness"; ʃəd-swɪtʃ, "resolute"; əfər-hvəd, "contempt"; əfər-sprɛk, "loquacity" did not survive from the Anglo-Saxon period (5, p. 23).

This loss of vocabulary coincided with meaning changes in Old English words. When an Old English word and a Norman French word were used for the same meaning, one of them usually took on a slightly different connotation. Such differences are apparent today in word pairs like doom and judgment, house and mansion, and ask and demand (2, p. 71). Other more subtle differences exist in some native and French synonyms. Jespersen has said that

The former is always nearer the nation's heart than the latter, it has the strongest associations with everything primitive, fundamental, popular, while the French word is often more formal, more polite, more refined and has a less strong hold on the emotional side of life (6, p. 102).
Thus amity does not have the same connotation as friendship; aid is less basic than help; and hearty is more sincere than cordial (6, p. 103).

Perhaps because of these nuances in meaning, many Anglo-Saxon words were used in the Authorized Version of the Bible in 1611, when foreign equivalents were available in current usage. These native words may have been employed in order to preserve traditional use; that they had appeared in translations of the Bible since Anglo-Saxon times reflects the enduring permanence of Old English vocabulary. A cursory look at the choices for translation shows the loftiness of the Old English word: a great man is more impressive than a large man; child implies an innocence that boy does not; and smite carries strength not found in hit (5, p. 29). However, because the message of the Bible is considered sacred, it is quite possible that whatever words are used for presenting revered material become esteemed and venerable; and there may be a tendency to associate the traditional word with the sanctity of the text.

Another important consequence of the use of predominantly native words in the King James Version of the Bible is the survival in late Modern English of many obsolete words and of words in which meaning changes have occurred. Such phrases as fowls of the air, the quick and the dead, wax old as doth a garment, and they were sore afraid point to a time when the meanings of the native words were not the same as they are today (8, p. 98).
Because of the impact of the Norman Conquest, change through external influence, as distinguished from internal or natural semantic change within the language, made English the colloquial speech of a conquered people. Thus literary, administrative, and religious terms became French or Latin because of French domination in all positions of influence. Norman contempt for Anglo-Saxons was mirrored in the specialization of some native words to a pejorative meaning. For example, OE stōl meant any kind of chair, but with the advent of the use of the French word chair, a stool was relegated to the kitchen, shop or cowshed (1, p. 41). Under French influence, OE ceorl, meaning "freeman," degenerated into "serf" or "bondman," reflecting in language the position of most churls after the Norman Conquest. Later the word was to degenerate further from "rustic" to "base fellow" or "villain" (9).

This external or historical kind of semantic change is not as apparent throughout the language as are other changes inherent in English itself, however. For example, the kind of specialization of meaning previously mentioned in connection with native and French synonyms could occur also when a native word was used to refer to a group or category or to a general or vague concept. Thus in Modern English a word may be used to refer to only one part of the group which it formerly designated, or it may be assigned to describe the specific rather than the general (4, p. 248). Thus the OE word dēor
meant any animal, but Modern English *deer* has specialized to refer to a particular species (9). Moreover, the plural of the Old English *heofon*, "sky," *heofenas*, was designated as a special place for Christians after death, but comes with the latter meaning into Modern English as *heaven* in the singular form (8, p. 90).

An additional example of specialization is the omission of a qualifying adjective or modifier. Thus the word *undertaker* had the more general meaning of "one who undertakes to do something," but with the omission of the qualifier, *funeral* in *funeral undertaker*, the word *undertaker* took on a new meaning associated with the omitted *funeral*. Hence today this is the most frequent use of the word (4, pp. 252-253).

Sometimes a word takes the name of the material of which it is made. For example, the Old English word *brōm*, a "shrub," gave its name to the implement for sweeping, *broom*, while it retains less frequently its original meaning of "shrub" (9).

Another type of specialization is found in the transfer from concrete to figurative meaning. The OE *adela*, "liquid filth," is used by Shakespeare in *addle egg*, "a rotten or putrid egg." "He esteemes her no more than I esteeme an addle egge" (*Troilus and Cressida* I.11.145) (9). The word *addle* comes into Modern English with the figurative meaning of "muddled, confused." Fielding connects the concrete and transferred meanings: "My muddy brain is addled like an
egg" (9). The Modern English addle is most often used as a past participle of the verb addle, but the earlier addle was an adjective, just as in "addle egg."

The reverse of specialization is generalization or broadening of meaning. Frequently the two processes occur side by side. For example, the general term for "throw" in Old English was the verb weorpan. Weorpan was superseded by Scandinavian cast, which became the term for "throw" about 1300. In turn, weorpan (Modern English warp) was changed in meaning from "throw" in the general sense to a special kind of "throwing," i.e., "to bend, twist aside; to distort, or contort (the body or face)." Later cast specialized also, becoming a term of transferred and technical applications such as "to hurl, mold, frame." Then the Old English verb drawan, which had previously meant "to twist, to turn, to writhe," was generalized to fill the gap left by the specialization of other words formerly meaning "throw" (4, p. 243).

Another type of broadening or generalization is the extension of a word by a figure of speech. Medieval philosophers saw the universe as an orderly arrangement on a large scale (man corresponding on a small scale), and regarded the state as a similar system. Thus through analogy, the state was likened to the body, and the term body was applied to it. Body then extended to refer to any collection: "body of men," "body of facts," "body of law" (4, pp. 246, 247).
Another kind of semantic change, similar to specialization and generalization, is radiation, the process whereby one word retains a central meaning while at the same time it radiates outward to apply to any number of figurative denotations. From the word *head*, topmost part of the body, radiate meanings for the "top" of anything. This sense of "top" breaks down into things that are like the head in shape ("head of a pin") or in position ("head of the table"). Further radiation includes the figurative meaning such as "head of the family." All the uses of the word can be traced directly to the original anatomical denotation (4, p. 265).

Sometimes a word goes through the process of specialization and generalization to such an extent that logical connections, such as those seen in the process of radiation, are difficult to find between present and former meaning. During the Viking invasions of England in the Old English period, a group of Danes had to cross the River Wye. Evidently the sight of Danish soldiers fording the stream made a significant impression on the nearby inhabitants, who referred to the place of the action as the *hereford*, the "army crossing." Later this word came to include not only the site at the river but the entire surrounding area, a shire which became famous for its rich pasture land. Eventually the name was given to a special breed of cattle raised in Herefordshire. Today Texas
Herefords have come a long way from their place of origin, and the etymology of their name is seldom noted (3, p. 21).

Semantic change may develop through one word's surviving in two forms called doublets. The Old English word die, "a trench," appears in Middle English as dik, dyk, (Modern English dike) and dich, the latter a palatalized pronunciation which comes into Modern English as ditch. Similarly OE deyl appears in Middle English as deel, del \[dəl\] which becomes Modern English deal. A variant Old English spelling, dæl, comes into Middle English as dole \[dəl\], Modern English dole. The differences in the words result from two pronunciations in Old English (10, pp. 154, 166).

An equally important source of semantic change is transference of meaning and functional shift. With removal of action from subject to object comes meaning change. In the phrase "shame kept him silent," the emotions of the person involved are indicated by shame. But in "don't shame him," the point of view is shifted to the act itself. Moreover, there is a shift from noun to verb (4, p. 273). This movement from one part of speech to another is an important source of new words and extensions of new meanings in the English language. The word crop(p), for example, referred in Old English to "the rounded head or top of a plant." The verb to crop came from the noun. Then a new noun, crop, was formed from the verb to refer to "the act of cropping or
cutting off the head of the plant." At the same time, the word *crop* was developing an extended meaning of "the produce of the field" (9).

Another instance of transference is the expression *farewell*, which originally was said only to the person leaving. The literal sense is "may you go (travel) well." Today both the traveler and those who remain use *farewell* without any thought of the individual words which make up the compound (7, p. 176).

Degeneration is a process of semantic change whereby a word gradually takes on a pejorative meaning. *Wench* (OE *wencel*) once referred to a young child of either sex; it had no connotations of immorality. The OE verb *stincan* meant "to emit an odor," not just a disagreeable one, as modern *stink* implies (10, p. 598).

Conversely, many words have risen in stature through the process known as amelioration or elevation. Old English *cnīht* meant "boy," then "young male servant," and then "servant." Later the term *knight* was applied to a military servant, and it then steadily rose to become the rank directly below that of a baronet (9).

Close akin to both degeneration and elevation is euphemism, calling unpleasant things by pleasing names. Such subjects as death, profanity, body functions, and morality are frequently clothed in euphemism. At one time it was believed that the viscera was the origin of man's emotions.
The internal organs were called **pluck** (possibly connected with the idea of a butcher's "plucking" out animal organs, from OE *pluccian*): a courageous man was said to be "plucky." Gradually the term **pluck**, originally a pleasant word, fell into disgrace, and the term **guts** was substituted for the figurative expression of courage. Now **guts** and **gutsy** are unfavorable in their connotations. Usually any euphemism connected with the body meets with eventual disfavor (3, pp. 263, 264).

Semantic change of any sort is a gradual process. Indeed, a word may have had simultaneously several meanings in different contexts. Consequently, a word for which meaning has specialized and degenerated may have been used concurrently in multiple ways by earlier people, reflecting past usage and pointing to future usage of the word. Thus for Chaucer the word **lewd** had several meanings. In the general prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer uses **lewd** to mean "lay," i.e., "not of a priestly occupation": "For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste. No wonder is a lewed man to ruste." Again, in "The Merchant's Tale" he uses the word **lewd** to mean "foolish, unskillful, bungling, ill-mannered": "Ye men shul been as lewed as gees." In "The Manioiple's Tale" **lewd** describes vile actions: "The lewedeste wolf fat she may fynde or leest of reputation." In addition to the above meanings, the current sense of the word, "lascivious,
unchaste," is found in the prologue to "The Miller's Tale":
"Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye" (9).

Other semantic changes have affected the Old English word stock, but these major classifications—generalization, specialization, radiation, pejoration, and amelioration—touch at least tangentially on most sense changes. It is, in fact, nearly impossible to assign a given word to one category of semantic change, as specialization and pejoration may occur at the same time, for example; hence, many words need to be considered individually to understand their developments. Even study in depth, however, will of necessity omit the myriad levels of usage and sense changes that may occur with each speaker. Thus a study of semantic change in the Old English word stock is limited to written language, which may not always include all the connotations which words could have had in earlier periods of the language. It is clearly inaccurate to discuss "the original meaning" of most words because words change in both denotation and connotation, and almost all the words discussed in the following chapters were in use long before they were recorded in writing. Thus comments on "the origin of a word" must of necessity be based on the first written records of the word's use or on meaning conjectured through comparison with cognates in related languages.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

FAMILY AND COMMUNAL LIFE

Modern English still retains many words from Anglo-Saxon domestic and communal life. The former meanings of these words often reveal a life quite different from that indicated by the modern usage. Indeed, many words have so changed that today they are not associated with home or community.

Often the physical appearance of the Anglo-Saxon community itself and the design of the houses within it are revealed by the original uses of some native words. Modern English town, for example, first applied to an enclosure. When estate walls were abandoned for city walls, this term began to be applied to the group of houses within the enclosed area. Subsequently, with the idea of the enclosure omitted, tun described a disorganized cluster of dwellings or buildings and was used as a translation for Latin villa, i.e., "a country home or farm." After the Norman Conquest, the word acquired its modern sense of "a settlement, larger than a village, with an independent government" (8).

The original tun, an agricultural settlement, usually had many small dwellings and one large roofed building, the heall. The latter structure served as the "meeting place,
sleeping quarters, and feasting room for the lord's retainers." Later hall was applied to any large room for entertaining. Today it is also used to denote a small passageway between rooms (10, p. 310).

In addition to its hall, the tun might have a small building for women, children and provisions, called in Old English a būr (Modern English bower) (4, p. 218). The word might also designate a lady's bedroom, but today this meaning is merely poetic. This word was later used by Shakespeare to refer to an idealized home: "Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower" (Sonnet cxxvii. 7). The usual sense of Modern English bower is "a shady enclosed place with enveloping branches overhead" (8).

Within the buildings of the tun, there might also be a small chamber or closet called the cofa. This word was also used figuratively in compounds such as bān-cofa, "bone-chamber," i.e. "body"; and gāst-cofa, "spirit-chamber" or "breast." Today cofa survives as cove, "a nook, small creek, or bay," denoting enclosures far different from the earlier "chamber" (8).

On the other hand, OE rūm (Modern English room) has narrowed from a broader sense of "space, dimension" to take on the more specific meaning of "chamber." Denotations extended in Old English to include "sufficient space or accommodation," as seen in Luke IV.7, "Hī nēðfondon rūm on cumena huse" (They had no room in the inn). Later the
word took on the additional present-day meaning, "a small area separated by walls."

Within the small community of the tun lived individual families. Possibly because kinship was the foundation of Anglo-Saxon society, many words describing the family and community relations survive in Modern English. Kin, for example, can be traced to OE syn(n), which translates as "family, race, or blood relations." The word could also mean "people, nations, or tribe," an indication of the close ties between family and social unit (8). Moreover, the modern noun kind, "species" or "type," developed from cynd, "birth or descent." In addition to meaning the same as the modern adjective kind, Old English cynde meant "natural, native" concurrently with "well-born, well-bred." The sense of "naturally well-disposed" is first recorded in the thirteenth century, and "showing benevolence" first appears in the next century (9, p. 506).

Anglo-Saxon duties of kinship were more complex and obligatory than modern family relationships. If a man murdered someone, his family might have to help pay the dead man's wergeld, or "man-payment," as compensation to the relatives of the victim. Conversely, if a kinsman were slain, a man was obligated to avenge his death, if compensation through regular procedures were not forthcoming. A less serious duty might be required by a man's appearing at a local moot to vouch or "to answer" for the honesty of
a relative (4, p. 212). English answer seems to have developed from this custom, for the OE andswarian means "to affirm or swear" as in "reply to a charge." Even during the Old English period, however, the word was extended to apply to any response (3).

Moreover, a man might have to go before the folk-moot "to prove or verify something as true" (OE scófan), a task similar to his vouching for his kinsman. During the sixteenth century the word came to mean "to declare a statement to be true" (whether it was or not). Thus in 1623, Massinger wrote: "Sooth me in all I say: There's a main end in it" (8). Further development was to incorporate the sense "confirm, encourage . . . by assent or approval," hence, "to blandish, cajole, or please (a person by agreement or assent)." Today the verb soothe denotes "the act of calming or quieting a person, animal, or feelings," a sense quite far removed from witnessing in the Anglo-Saxon folk-moot.

This term moot is used today to designate something controversial as in "a moot point." It can also be used as a verb meaning "to debate or discuss" (7, p. 352). Originally, the OE moot referred to a court or assembly. In these courts the guilt or innocence was determined. The modern word guilt descended from OE gyilt, which meant "the crime itself" or "failure of duty." Thus it is found in Matthew VI.12: "Forgyf us ure gyltas" (8). The original meaning of gyilt may have been "fine or payment," i.e.,
recompense for a crime, as was the custom. Later *gylt came to denote responsibility for the act rather than the actual deed. Hence in 1377, Langland wrote, "It is for men bennought worry To have the grace of god and no gylte of the pope" (8). From this sense came the current use of guilt—"the fact of having committed, or of being guilty of, some specified or implied offence" (8).

In assigning responsibility for a crime or ascertaining guilt, the folk-moot might require the accused to undergo an ordeal, OE *ordal. Such a test might involve such dangerous physical tasks as plunging the hands into boiling water, carrying hot iron, or walking barefoot and blindfold between red-hot plough-shares (8). Punishment or absolution was determined for the person three days after the ordeal, according to the condition and seriousness of his injuries. Carried out by the church with great attention to each detail, the ordeal and its results were regarded as God's sign of innocence or guilt in the accused (6, p. 260). By 1219, the ordeal as trial had been abolished in England. The word has come into Modern English with a considerably weakened sense of "to undergo a severe test or trial," and can be used to describe anything from a painful surgical operation to a hard day at the office.

Other native terms in Modern English which have altered their original senses are words referring to the immediate family and its members, as opposed to the broader sense of
tribal "kin." OE team once referred to "the family, race, line, or offspring" as well as to "a pair or group of animals harnessed to draw together." The latter meaning survives in Modern English as team. The term used in Old English for "male" and for "husband" (as contrasted to "wife") was ceorl. This usage is illustrated in John IV.17 (c. 1000), "Wel fy cwæde þet þu næst ceorl, witodlice þu hæfð(e)st fif ceorlas." (Well you said that you have no husband, truly you have five husbands.) This sense of "husband" was dropped later in Middle English. In Old English legal use, ceorl applied to the lowest rank of freeman. In Middle English the word meant "serf" or "bondman." Then it rose to denote a "rustic" or "farmer," hence as a term of contempt: "base fellow, villain." This latter sense survives in Modern English along with the infrequent connotation of "miser." The application of churl to a greedy person in the Bible (Coverdale, 1535), directed its further denigration (Isaiah XXXII.5): "Then shall the nygarde be no more called gentle, ner the churle lyberall" (9).

Destined for a less radical change than ceorl, wif, the corresponding OE word for a married woman, also referred to "woman" in a general sense. Subsequently wif was narrowed in this latter sense to name a woman of the lower class, especially one involved in trade. "Then came I by a wife that did costerd apples sell" (1563, Jack Juggler). Today this sense is obsolete but survives in such archaic expressions as "old wives'
tale," recalling the earlier more general sense of wife; and fishwife, employing the later restriction of wife.

A compound form of wif, OE hūswif, first meant "the mistress of a household" and often indicated "a thrifty woman." Then the form came into Middle English, frequently an e was added between the two words, hus(e)wif, but in some places it was not, and the u sound was shortened first to [ui] and then to [i:]. In addition, some dialects dropped the [w] and [f], so that the resulting forms huzzif, hussive, and huzzy became distinctly different in sound from the original; but for a while the old meaning of "household manager" was retained. The compound with long vowels, [hauswif], continued and kept the sense of "a woman who manages a house," while adding the designation of "a married woman" (8). Frequent association, meanwhile, of the variant from hussy with degrading adjectives, such as "light," "saucy," and "impudent" brought these connotations to the noun. Furthermore, when hussy began to apply not only to household managers, but also to milkmaids and female servants as well, the noun assumed its full pejorative sense (8). By the seventeenth century the word usually meant "a woman of low morale," the sense which survives today.

While churl and hussy have fallen from their former positions of respect in the Anglo-Saxon home, Modern English husband has not met with such a dire fate. In Old English a hūsbonda was "the male head of the house," or "household
manager," a term corresponding to hūswīf. Subsequently husband broadened to mean the "manager of anything." Thus in 1719, Defoe wrote in Robinson Crusoe, "I had been so good a husband of my rum that I had a great deal left" (8). From the noun came the verb to husband ("to manage") still current in Modern English, though the noun's earlier meaning is obsolete. Very early husband was applied to "a tiller of the soil," perhaps as an extension of "the management of household duties." Modern English husbandry, the cultivation of plants or animals, grows out of this older sense (8). Husband, "a married man," the most frequent modern-day use of the word, first appeared in Early Middle English (9, p. 454).

Somewhat analogous to hūsbonda, but having a more exalted status in Old English usage, was hlāford, "master of the servants" or "head of the household." In John XV.15 (c. 1000): "Se ʃeowa nat hwæt se hlafor(d) deʃt." (The servant knows not what the lord does.) In using this contraction of hlǣfweard, literally "breadkeeper," a sense lost before the Old English literary period, the Anglo-Saxons did not consciously associate the original meaning of the two words, even as speakers today do not think of the literal meaning of each word in the compound breakfast (8). The term hlāford was applied to a person in an exalted position to whom obedience or service was due in return for protection and land. Moreover, because of similarities between the manorial hlāford and the heavenly Deity, Latin Dominus was translated lord for titles of God
and Jesus in the Old English service books. This special application of the word accounts to some extent for its elevation and longevity in the language. Another reason for the rise in status of lord was the introduction of the French synonym master in Middle English, which took on the sense of "head of the household," originally held by lord. Thus today lord is used as a name for the Deity or as a reference to a person holding a high and worthy position (1, p. 137).

The Old English hlaford, Modern English lady, was originally the feminine counterpart to hlāford. As in hlāford, the literal meaning of hlaford, "loaf-kneader," was not current by c. 600, but rather the sense of "mistress of the house." The term elevated in Old English when it was adopted as a title for the Virgin Mary in translations of the Bible. Its use extended to name a woman of high rank, and later specialized as a specific title. At the same time, the application of the term broadened and by the nineteenth century meant "any woman of refinement" (9, p. 511). With extension of this meaning came the modern adoption of the word to express courtesy to any woman by ascribing to her the qualities of gentility associated with the former meaning. In this way the word has leveled to such an extent that lady in its usual sense is the feminine counterpart of gentleman, not lord (8). Thus in an attempt to ameliorate "woman"—or perhaps to make every woman refined—lady has deteriorated.
Like hussy and lady, wench, from Old English wencel, a name for "child," has undergone pejoration. In the thirteenth century Ormulum, wencel refers to Christ in the story of the Nativity. "Forr þuw ias borern nu today Hælende off þure sinness. An wenchell þatt ias Jesu Crist" (3). The original meaning of wencel was "an infant of either sex," but because the term also implied weakness, it was later used only for girls (11, p. 703). Subsequently it denoted "working girls" or "country girls." Hence, as etymology seems to mirror the social stigma attached to working women, who apparently either had low morals or were imputed to have them, wench came to mean "prostitute" or "woman of low class" (2, p. 261).

Still another word which has undergone the denigrating connotations associated with working women is spinster. This word was derived from the OE verb spinnan and at first was affixed to any woman who earned a living by spinning. After the sixteenth century, however, the word pertained to any woman past the usual age for marriage. The word may also have been affected by spin-house, the name given to a seventeenth-century prison for unmarried women (2, p. 260). Thus for a while the word gained a slightly immoral tone as well as the rather derisive and intolerant social connotations which remain today. These connotations dominate the use of spinster today even though the spin in it recalls the work of the woman in past ages.
An Anglo-Saxon family might have included a *steophild,* Modern English "step-child," a word which has not been degraded. Originally this word meant "orphan." Then the prefix *steop* was added to other words to show relationships resulting from the remarriage of a parent, i.e., *steopfæder,* "stepfather"; *steopmodor,* "step-mother"; *steopsunu,* "stepson" (8).

In the Anglo-Saxon family the adjective *freo* was used describing those members of the household who were blood relations of the head of the house, as opposed to slaves. The original sense seems to have been "dear." *Freo* was also used as a legal term denoting rank. King Alfred ordered that all sons of free men, *freora manna,* be taught to read (5, p. 114). Later in Middle English, *free* came to be a complimentary adjective describing nobility, generosity, honor, or manners. In the thirteenth century a man described as *fre and curteys* was a "polite and courteous" man. The current use of *free* could have developed from the sense "unrestrained" or from "generous" (5, p. 115, 116).

In addition to slaves, a wealthy Anglo-Saxon household might have had a *stizweard* (*stig,* "house," and *weard,* "guardian"), Modern English steward, who directed household affairs. Later the title was given to an officer in the royal household. In 1741, John Wesley adopted the name to apply to a special officer of the Methodist Church who handled finances. This specialized use of *steward* was
transferred to other organizations, and today's use of the word frequently denotes an administrator of some kind (3, pp. 54, 55).

Along with native words for individuals in a household, Modern English also derives from Old English terms that were used in marriage festivities. The OE verb weddan meant in its broadest sense "to pledge or covenant." Another concurrent meaning was "to marry," as wed originally meant "to make (a woman) one's wife by giving a pledge." This specialized form of pledge-giving later referred to men also, and in this narrower sense, i.e., "to marry" (a man or woman), modern wed is used (8).

On the other hand, the word bridal, OE bryd-ealo, literally "bride-ale," has broadened its application through analogy with the adjective ending -al, as in nuptial. Thus rather than the wedding banquet or celebration itself, as it denoted in Old English, bridal, both noun and adjective, today describes almost anything connected with a wedding (8).

In like manner, Modern English gift comes from Old English gift, recorded in the singular only once with the meaning "payment for a wife" (the Laws of Ine number 31), and gyfta in the plural with the sense of "wedding" (8). Possibly the current use of the word and its association with weddings can be traced to the custom of the "morning-gift," a present which the husband gave his wife the day after consumation of their marriage (12, p. 151).
Some semantic changes have occurred in ordinary words pertaining to food in the Anglo-Saxon home. Indeed, the word meal itself first applied to a "fixed time" measured by the position of the sun when the farmer ate his biggest repast. Later this OE meal was extended to refer to any regular occasion for eating (3, p. 174). Into the seventeenth century the word retained some of its sense of "measure" with reference to the amount of milk given by a cow at one milking. Thus in 1613, Browne wrote, "Each shephard's daughter with her cleanly peale Was come afield to milke the morning's meale" (8).

In the twelfth century, OE bord, "board," became a common name for the table to eat meals on, a term coined from the material of which the table was made. An early transferred application referred to meals taken at an inn, where a landlord might simply put food on the board and let everyone help himself. Consequently board came to mean "meals taken at an establishment by paying a flat rate." In 1386, Chaucer uses this sense: "Sche wolde suffre him no thing for to pay For bord ne clothing" (8). Later board was applied metaphorically to refer to a meeting held around a table. Then the word radiated semantically to name "the group" at the meeting. Thus today board in "board meeting" refers to the people meeting rather than to the table (8).
Some semantic changes have occurred in the food eaten at the Anglo-Saxon table. *Mete*, Modern English *meat*, once meant any kind of food rather than animal flesh alone (8). Moreover the OÆ word *hlæf*, Modern English *loaf*, was the general name for bread. In 950 part of "The Lord's Prayer" was translated as "hlæf userne ðæter wistlic sel us todæf." (Give us today our bread for eating) (8). Old English *bread*, on the other hand, denoted fragments of bread. By 1200, however, *bread* replaced *loaf* as the name for the substance, and *loaf* assumed the modern sense of "a baked mass of bread" (8).

In addition to modifications in terms naming food, changes in the meaning of household items have come about. Originally the word *distaff* (OE *distæf*) named the staff on which flax or wool was wound before it was spun. Since the task was a common one of Anglo-Saxon women, the term was associated with women and their work. Then with the advancement of the cloth-making industry, the distaff came to be less important in the life of a woman; but the term was transferred to a figurative meaning, "women and their domain." Thus the "distaff side" refers to the women of the family (2, p. 262).

Another word connected with sewing was Old English *céwien*, which meant "a ball of thread." During the Middle English period, the story of Theseus from Greek mythology was introduced into England. In this story Theseus managed to kill the minotaur and find his way out of the confusing labyrinth by means of a ball of thread or *clew* given to him by Ariadne,
the king's daughter. This story became so popular that the term *olewe* began to be applied figuratively to any aid in solving a problem. Now this figurative meaning of *clue* is the usual one, and the literal meaning is completely obscured (3, p. 317).

Unlike *clue* which no longer has any connection with sewing, Modern English *loom*, "a weaving device," has specialized from a broader sense in Old English. *Gelōma* denoted "any kind of tool or instrument." Thus its use by Langland in 1393: "The lomes pat ic laboure with lyflobe deseure ys pater-noster and my prymer" (8). In the thirteenth century *loom* acquired the meaning "bucket, tub."
The name used in the fourteenth century for "weaving device" was *weblome*, but this word shortened in the next century to *loom*. Hence today *loom* appears only in this narrowed sense and no longer denotes "any tool or implement" (9, p. 536).

In like manner, two terms for articles of clothing in Old English have specialized in meaning. *Wæd* named a garment of any kind. It might also mean in certain contexts "military attire," as it was used early in the thirteenth century: "be king mid his weden leop on his stede." Later because of frequent linking with adjectives such as "mourning" and "widow," it narrowed to denote the garment worn by a widow (8). Similarly *OE scrūd* (Modern English *shroud*) has come to be a garment of the dead although it once was used as a more general term for
clothing. By Shakespeare's time, however, shroud had specialized to refer to burial dress. Many verbs and nouns which might be grouped with Anglo-Saxon home activities have undergone considerable change. For example, OE secjan described liquids boiling. Our Modern English seethe carries only a figurative meaning of "boil," and is usually said of a person who is in a state of anger, fever, or turmoil (8).

Likewise OE willan has narrowed from a general use of "to clean with water" to a pejorative association with pigs; hence, gluttons and drunkards are said "to will" or to drink "swill." As late as 1842, however, will was employed in the older, more general meaning in Fraser's Magazine: "Ducking and Diving into the basinstand, and swilling his face and neck with oceans of water" (8).

Another word pertaining to the home, which comes into Modern English as breath, OE brēþ, meant "odor, scent, or exhalation from burning." From this latter meaning probably arose the present sense of "exhalation of air from the lungs" (8). More closely related to breath in Old English than in Modern English is the verb reek. Rēocan meant "to emit smoke" in Old English. Later it broadened to "to emit vapor, odor, or smoke." Thus Shakespeare wrote in 1588, "I heard your guilty Rimes . . . Saw sighes reeke from you." Today reek has degenerated to apply almost exclusively to the emission of unpleasant odors (8).
Similarly Modern English drench has undergone various degrees of specialization. At first Old English drencan meant "to make to drink" or "to give drink to." This sense is restricted in Modern English: "to administer a draught of medicine forcibly to an animal." Another meaning which became current in Middle English was "to submerge in water, to drown." This latter sense appears in 1621, in J. Sandys' translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "And in the strangling waters drench his child" (8). During the sixteenth century the present meaning, "to wet through and through with water," was first recorded (8).

Finally, a transfer of sense has occurred in the OE verb wēnan, which meant "to accustom to" or "to train." A particular application of the word referred to a child becoming "accustomed to" solid food. Then a transfer was made to describe the child's becoming "disaccustomed to" mother's milk. Another transference to a figurative meaning came later to describe the process of "breaking a habit." Thus, wean today carries a meaning almost completely opposite from Old English wēnan (8).

These words which once applied to the home or community reflect cultural as well as semantic change. As agriculture and domestic life changed, so did the words associated with them. Most of these terms tended to narrow in denotation, and others, especially names denoting relationships, have
been subjected to extreme meaning change. In summary, most words concerning the Anglo-Saxon home and community have specialized to name a particular concrete object, or broadened in a figurative sense. There are few instances of generalization among these particular words.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

Perhaps no one group of words has suffered more extreme semantic change than adjectives, especially those describing people. Just as those terms naming people and denoting relationships, such as wench, churl, husband, and wife, have altered radically from their former uses, so have words characterizing and portraying individuals shifted in meaning. Possibly this remarkable number of changes in signification can be explained. One reason for semantic change is the application of an existing word to a situation or experience in order to express a novel or subtle distinction (1, p. 113). Thus a speaker would likely employ an adjective in a unique manner to enable him to describe something in an original way. Not all new applications would survive, of course, but widespread need for new meanings could cause some to endure. An adjective might, of course, keep its old senses at the same time it envelops new ones, or it might drop the old ones or transfer them to figurative meanings. While these kinds of meaning changes might occur in any part of speech, they are particularly applicable to adjectives because modifiers adapt well to new uses.
For example, the predominant sense of OE *cine* was "bold, brave," though it could also mean "wise, clever." It applied only to people, as shown in a later quotation (c. 1605) in poetry by Montgomerie: "Love make a couard kene" (6). Then in the thirteenth century the word began to describe the sword of a brave man. The sense of "sharp, cutting," soon developed. Later the original signification "bold and brave" was lost. Today *keen* also means "clever, wise" as it did in Old English, but this is a metaphorical extension developed from the reference to the sharp edge of a blade (l, p. 122).

Similarly, *tall* has had a diversified semantic history. Old English *getʒal* meant "quick, prompt, ready, active." Later it took on the sense of "meet, becoming, proper, fair, handsome." Another sense developed to signify "good at arms, strong in combat." This meaning was used by J. Dickenson in 1598: "With her tongue she was as tall a warriouress as any of hir sexe" (6). The phrase "tall of (his) hand(s)" meant "ready, active, skilful," as shown in a quotation from Holland's *Livy* in 1600: "Agrippa being a tall man of his handes and young withall, . . . caught the ensign from his ensigne-bearers, advanced them forward his own self." The present sense of *tall*, "high in stature," developed in Early Modern English and was used concurrently with these other senses, but it has outlived them (6).
Similarly, handsome is like tall in some of the latter's obsolete senses. Known only since the fifteenth century but formed from OE hond ("hand") and the suffix -sum, handsome originally projected the idea of "easy to handle," and it referred to a tool or implement. This was its usage in a translation of More's Utopia in 1551: "Both easy to be carried and handsome to be moved" (6). This formation was analogous to the obsolete toothsome, an adjective meaning "pleasing to the teeth," hence, "good for food or drink." Handsome was later extended to mean "handy, suitable." In 1810 Pike wrote, "On the west shore, there is a very handsome situation for a garrison" (6). Then handsome was transferred to name the person, usually a man, who was skilful with a tool or animal. A handsome horseman was a good equestrian. During the sixteenth century, the current sense of "having a pleasing face or figure" came into use along with the sense of "generous, sizable," as in "a handsome amount" (3, pp. 331, 332). Today the former sense of "manageable" is completely lost, so that "a handsome tool" means a "beautiful implement" rather than a "handy device."

Stalwart, on the other hand, has retained one of its original senses, "sturdy, brave," but today it applies primarily to people. OE stælwæt could apply also to things; it meant "serviceable." In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the word is applied to ships. Skeat suggests that the original meaning of stalwart, as it described men, was "good at
stealing," then "stout, brave." Moreover, he points out that two spellings stalewurJe and stealewurJe may indicate a relation to OE stalu, "theft." This was the meaning of stip often used in compounds, i.e. stēlig gast, "a thievish guest or stranger" (8, p. 90). Today stalwart has the additional meaning "one who is resolute and uncompromising" (5, p. 1256).

Another adjective which retains its original sense today developed an extensional meaning in Middle English. OE wearm meant "moderately hot" as warm does now, but in the fourteenth century another meaning grew from this sense and became current. Jonson used the word in 1610 to mean "comfortable, settled, securely established": "A Gentleman, newly warme in his land." Warm could also mean "comfortably well off, well-to-do, rich, affluent." With this sense it is employed in a book of sermons by B. M. Smith in 1624: "All things seem to fall out alike to the one and to the other: nay, the wicked seeme to be the warmer, and to have the greater portion in this life" (6). Perhaps because new senses of the word appeared in the fifteenth century such as "affectionate, cordial," and in the next century "lively, heated, excited," the sense of warm as "comfortable" or "comfortably wealthy" became obsolete (6).

Unlike warm, which kept its original sense, neither of the doublets deft and daft retained its former Old English meaning, "mild, gentle, meek." The two different
forms appeared in the thirteenth century with the same meaning. The difference in form was caused by the e in OE *geøtʃe* (for *geøtʃe*) where ò appeared for umlauted ò. Possibly through association with the noun *daft*, which meant "simpleton, fool," the ME adjective *daft* developed the sense of "stupid." In 1535 it is used in this way by Lyndessay in *Satyre*: "Thou art the daftest full that ever I saw." Still later the sense of "mad, insane" was added. Thus in 1880, R. J. White wrote in *Every Day English*: "We have preserved our common sense, and have not gone clean daft." ME *defe*, on the other hand, took on the meaning of "skillful, apt," in the fifteenth century. It was also extended to mean "neat, tidy, trim," a sense which, like *handsome*, shows transference from description of action to description of person.

This latter usage is illustrated in 1622 by Rowlands in *Good Newes*: "She came to London very neat and deft, To seeke preferment." This sense did not survive, however, and today *deft* means "skillful" (6).

*Silly* has undergone a similar change in meaning. Old English *æflik* (*geæflik*, a synonymous form) meant "happy, fortunate, lucky." Hence Chaucer's use of the word: "For aely is that deeth, . . . That ofte y-cleped, cometh and endeth peyne" (6). A concurrent meaning was "blessed," or "enjoying the blessing of." Thus it was translated from Latin church ritual in 1400: "Cely [Latin *felix*, 'happy']
art thou, hooli virgiyne marie, and worthiest al maner preisyng" (6). During Chaucer's time the later senses of "innocent" and also of "foolish" were germinating, as he used silly in both ways: "O sely woman, full of innocence" and again, "Oh god, quod she, so worldly selinesse, which clerkes cæll felicite, Ymeddled is with many bitternesse" (10, p. 228). During the fifteenth century silly developed the additional meaning of "helpless, deserving of pity." It is used this way in 1470 by Henry in Wallace: "Sely Scotland, that of helpe has gret neide." "Foolish," the current meaning, seems to be the last sense developed for silly (6). Richard Trench suggests a reason for the development of silly and similar words which once signified "good" and now mean "foolish." Because men fear that evil men will outsmart them if they are not familiar with evil themselves, they see those who are innocent or harmless as eventual victims of the wicked; hence the unwary become foolish dupes. Therefore, for a time, senses of "good" are mingled with those of "foolish," but it is the latter meaning which survives (10, p. 228).

Unlike silly, stunt (OE stunt) originally meant "foolish, dull, or stupid." The senses of "short" and "stubborn" developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively. The verb, meaning "to irritate or provoke" was formed in the sixteenth century. In the next century the current sense of "to check the growth of" arose (7, p. 878).
Two other OE words *dysig* (Modern English *dizzy*) and *giddig* (Modern English *giddy*) meant "foolish, stupid."

Around 950 *dysig* is used in Matthew VII.26 thus: "Gelic bis were dysig e setimbre hus ofer sonde." (He shall be like the foolish man who built his house on sand.) After the thirteenth century the French synonym *fol* (Modern English *fool*) replaced both *dysig* and *giddig* in their primary sense. Interestingly enough, these words which were synonyms in Old English have specialized in the same direction and are still synonymous today (1, p. 139).

Still another adjective which has specialized is OE *prettig* coming into Modern English as *pretty*. At first *pretty* meant "cunning, wily, artful, astute." Then beginning about the fifteenth century it applied to "clever" people or "well-made" articles. Arbuthnot illustrated this use in 1712 in *John Bull*: "There goes the prettiest fellow in the world ... for managing a jury." During the latter part of the fifteenth century, the meaning leveled to be a term like *nice* and *fine*, applicable to almost anyone or anything admirable, especially in connection with brave men, e.g., "pretty soldiers." Moreover, the term "pretty fellow," now archaic, in the eighteenth century denoted "fop." With this meaning intended, Richardson wrote in 1781: "By his outward appearance he may pass for one of your pretty fellows for he dresses very gaily" (6). *Pretty* in its present sense was used
concurrently with the aforesaid meanings to mean "somewhat beautiful." Oddly enough pretty is unrecorded after the Old English period but appears often in the fifteenth century in these various uses (6).

Naughty has had an even more erratic history than pretty. Developing from the OE noun nāwuht ("nothing, nought"), the adjective naughty first appeared in the fourteenth century meaning "needy, possessing nothing." In 1377 Langland wrote, "Alle maner of men. That nedy ben and naugty, helpe hem with thi godis" [sic] (6). Perhaps there was a tendency then, as there sometimes is today, to censure the poor for being needy—hence the downward path from "needy" to "immoral." At any rate, naughty deteriorated drastically. In 1677 Barrow wrote, "A most vile flagitious man, a sorry and naughty governor as could be" (6). Thus the term extended to refer to "morally bad" and survives in this sense in a much weakened form. Today naughty is applicable to unruly behavior in children. In this case, naughty degenerated from "needy" to "immoral" and then ameliorated to a milder term for "disobedient" (6). Coinciding with these various uses was the sense of "bad, inferior" or "of bad quality." When the term was used in seventeenth century America to describe "naughty canoes," it meant "worthless." Here naughty incorporated a sense similar to the OE noun nāwuht. Today this sense is obsolete (2, p. 104).
Wanton (OE wan, "un" and togen, "trained") is now much more pejorative in connotation than naughty. It first appeared in the thirteenth century with the meaning "undisciplined." In the next century it occurred in the sense of "lascivious, lewd," and applied only to women. Then it came to mean "sportive, unrestrained, merry" as well. In the sixteenth century it took on the idea of "merciless, insolent in triumph" together with "luxuriant, overabundant" (6). Gustaf Stern maintains that wanton with its original meaning of "undisciplined" became a euphemism for "lascivious and lewd" and thereby assimilated this sense, which remains the most frequent meaning today (9, p. 400).

In contrast to wanton, the semantic changes occurring in buxom carried it away from its original use in describing behavior. Although the word did not appear in Old English, it was formed from the OE stem buh (from bugan "to bow, bend") and the suffix -sum (8, p. 86). Hence buhsum emerges in the twelfth century meaning "obedient, compliant." "Beo buhsum toward gode" (c. 1175) (6). As applied to objects, buhsum meant "flexibly pliant." Later the word changed to mean "jolly, well-favored, blithe." Shakespeare used it in this way in Henry V: "Souldier firme and sound of heart, and of buxome valour" (6). About this same time association of the sound of bosom with buxom effected a meaning change
buxom took on its present meaning, "healthy, plump," the current sense of the word, which today describes women (7, p. 131).

Another interesting change in adjectives occurred in chary (OE ceari) and careful (OE carful), both adjectives formed from the OE noun cearu, caru (8, p. 104). Ceari, first used to mean "causing sorrow, grievous," came to mean "feeling sorrow, mournful." Then in the fourteenth century it altered to "dear, precious, cherished." The historian Holland wrote in 1610, "Things of charie price" (6). The present sense of "careful, frugal" arose in the sixteenth century (7, p. 165).

With few exceptions, careful followed a parallel development. Around 1485 careful was used like chary to mean "mournful": "A careful widow wringing her hands and making great sorrow" (6). Then in the sixteenth century it passed into the sense of "troubled, anxious," as Steele used it in 1714: "The King arose and beat his careful breast" (6). From this use, the present meaning "cautious, circumspect, prudent" arose (5, p. 203).

While several forms of OE cearu survive in Modern English, only forloren, the past participle of OE forleosan ("to lose or destroy"), remains today in Modern English forlorn. This word formerly meant "lost, not to be found," along with the transferred sense "morally lost, abandoned, depraved." This latter sense was recorded in the Old English
Chronicle in 1137: "Hi [the lawless barons in Stephen's time] weren forcursgd, and forsworen, and forloren" (6).

Then in the fourteenth century appeared the sense of "ruined, doomed." Now forlorn denotes "forsaken, deserted, wretched," meanings which developed in the sixteenth century (6).

Contrary to forlorn, which no longer carries the pejorative connotation "morally lost," fulsome has suffered degradation, as it once carried the favorable sense of "abundant, plentiful." Formed from OE ful ("full") and -sum, the adjective was first recorded in the thirteenth century. In the next one hundred years, however, it began to be used as "well-grown"; hence, the idea of "overgrown, overfed." Then fulsome came to describe the thing which surfeits or cloys. In 1614 it was used thus: "A little honie is sweet; much, fulsome" (6). Later fulsome came to be used figuratively to describe behavior "offensive to good taste." Today the word means primarily "obsequious" or "overly affectionate" (6).

Rather than a pejorative change as in fulsome, quick has undergone a transference in meaning. OE cwicu meant "characterized by life." Shelley used the word in this way as late as 1820: "Where the quick heart of the great world doth pant." Quick also described a pregnant woman. At first the term denoted the pregnancy from the time the foetus began to move until the birth of the infant. Then it became a more general term as a synonym for "pregnant." Shakespeare used
it this way in Love's Labour's Lost: "Then shall Hector be whipt for Iaquenetta that is quicke by him" (V.i.i.687). From the original idea of "alive" arose the notion of "lively, rapid, swift" in the fourteenth century. Although the earlier sense is now obsolete, traces of this meaning were retained in Early Modern English. The King James Version of the Bible refers to "the quick and the dead." Today, of course, quick can refer to the sensitive part of the fingernail. Moreover the compound quicksand, "wet live sand," endures in Modern English as a reminder of the obsolete sense (6).

Other adjectives concerning the body and its state of health have changed along with quick. OE hāl meant "in good condition, uninjured" and was used as a greeting in both Old English and Middle English. This word, coming into Modern English as whole, at the same time meant "sane of mind." Whole meaning "complete" as it is used today appeared in the fourteenth century (6). Along with whole, the northern variation of OE hāl came into Modern English as hale. Today this form is used mainly in literary language. It usually describes old people who are "robust, vigorous" (6).

Other forms of OE hāl, hāl wēs þu and the plural wēseþ hāle, meaning "hail" and "farewell," were used in salutations. Whereas these phrases were used in Old English and Old Norse as greetings, no record of their occurring as drinking idioms appears in either language. These phrases may have first
been used as drinking formulas by the Danish inhabitants in England and later incorporated into the common language. In any case by the twelfth century *wassell* (the salutation used when drinking the health of a person) and *drinoseil* (the reply, "drink-hail") appeared in widespread use. Around 1180 Wace wrote that the night before the battle of Hastings cries of *weissel* and *drincheil* came from drinking parties in the English camp. After the fourteenth century *wassail* as a drinking idiom became obsolete except in dialects (6). Today *wassail* names "a beverage, usually spiced ale or wine, served at a festivity," or sometimes "the drinking party" itself (5, p. 1446).

Another adjective originally describing the body as well as inanimate objects was OE *sæld* (Modern English *sad*), which meant "satiated, weary, tired of something." In Psalm LXXVIII.30 appeared "Swiþ ðætan, and sadde wurdan." Cloverdale later translated this as "So they did eat and were well-filled" (4, p. 77). Thus, as in the case of *fulsome*, the fine line between being "well-fed" and "stuffed" seems to have been obliterated. In *The Owl and the Nightingale* the bird said she did not sing all year as she did not want her hearers to become "to sad" (4, p. 78). Next *sad* took on the sense of "heavy," growing from the idea that a full man is heavier than an empty one. With this association came the attendant sense of "solid, firm, serious, sound." When Chaucer used the adverb *sadly* ("The
messenger drank sadly ale and wyn"), it meant "drank solidly."
By analogy with this sense the word sad acquired the meaning "grievous" (4, pp. 31, 82).

Shakespeare used sadness as "seriousness" and sadly as "seriously" revealing both functional shift and a transitional stage of sense development.

Benvolio: Tell me in sadness who she is you love?
Romeo: What, shall I groan, and tell you?
Benvolio: Groan, why, no; But sadly tell me who?
(Romeo and Juliet, I.11.205-208)

Thus Romeo anticipates the present use of sad, "mournful," while Benvolio persists in using the older sense "serious," as does Antonio in the first line of The Merchant of Venice: "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad." Sad for "serious" is now obsolete (10, pp. 218, 219).

In addition to its meaning of "gory, bloody," OE dreorix (Modern English dreary) meant "sorrowful, sad." The former sense is used in Beowulf, however, "wæter stod dreori and edrëfed." (The water rose up bloody and turbulent.) Later dreary came to mean "full of sadness, melancholy." Chaucer used this sense in "The Clerk's Tale": "Al drery was his cheere and his looking" (6). From the obsolete senses of "dire, horrid, grievous," meanings also prevalent in Old English and Middle English, present-day dreary signifies "dismal, gloomy, uninteresting, dull."
Almost opposite to OE *drear* semantically was OE *clēn*, meaning "clear, pure," as well as "free from dirt," its modern sense. This adjective sometimes meant "free from anything that dulls lustre or transparency." Hence its use in 1670: "A Diamond . . . reputed one of the finest and cleanest for its size in France" (6). In Modern English *clean* the sense of "morally pure" survives.

*Wann*, on the other hand, retains none of its former Old English meaning. Indeed, the adjective has almost reversed its meaning. At first Old English *wann* meant "dark, gloomy, black." When this adjective was applied to heavenly bodies which were obscured, it probably began to be extended to apply to other pale objects. Also its use for descriptions of the human face in a diseased or unnatural state may have effected a sense change from "dark, black" to "pale, sickly." Today the word means "unnaturally pale, as from physical or emotional distress."

Obviously adjectives are particularly adaptable to sense changes in contexts that are ambiguous. Therefore precise sense change is often difficult to ascertain in any given period of the language. Hence a certain ambiguity may result, as in the case of OE *sēriċ*, which originally meant "pained at heart" but which in the thirteenth century took on the sense of "worthless, poor." Consequently the phrase "a sorry man" in the thirteenth century might
have meant "one who is miserable" or "one who is unsatisfactory or vile." (4, pp. 83, 84). This last meaning survives in Modern English.

Furthermore, the transference of adjectives from literal sense to figurative sense accounts for a great many semantic changes. Hence from OE smeort, "acutely painful" came Modern English smart, "characterized by sharp, quick thought" (6). And again OE sør, "causing or involving pain," extended figuratively as an intensifier to mean "very great or serious," a sense now obsolete. In the King James' Version of the Bible the latter meaning is intended in an account of the Nativity, when shepherds were "sore afraid."

These, then, are some of the ways native adjectives have been affected. Most of the changes discussed have been internal, resulting from the nature of the language itself. Other changes, however, have come about through external or historical forces such as religion and cultural attitudes, all of which frequently have had a profound and direct influence on word development.
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CHAPTER IV

RELIGION AND ATTITUDES

Many native words reflect in their semantic histories cultural change concomitant with meaning change. These shifts are especially apparent in words pertaining to religion, intelligence, and attitudes. Perhaps nowhere is the fact that words mirror culture more evident than in English words formed in the pre-Christian period. In fact, some of what little information there is about heathen religion in Anglo-Saxon England comes from word study. Many common words in modern usage originated in the struggle for survival of religion and learning during the Old English period.

For example, the names Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday came into use in early Christian England. These words (Old English Tiwesæð, Wodnesæð, Dūnesæð, and Frīzedæg) replaced the names for four days of the week which had named the corresponding Roman deities, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus. Blair indicates that there was no custom related to the naming of a Teutonic god for a particular day; that is, no particular day was sacred to any god. The choice of names for the days of the week was determined by the Roman counterpart (1, pp. 122,123).
Whitelock, on the other hand, states that as late as the seventh century the Church was trying to suppress worship of Thunor on the fifth day of the week (15, p. 22). Of course, it is possible that the day became sacred to Thunor only after it was named for him.

Evidence concerning early Anglo-Saxon gods has been gleaned from brief accounts by early Christian writers, from analogies with Scandinavian gods, from later Anglo-Saxon literature, and from place names in England. Because early Christian writers were interested in suppressing heathenism, they had little interest in writing about it. Consequently, few details remain of pagan rituals. One account, however, does give some idea of heathen practices. Pope Gregory in 601 sent a letter to Augustine requesting him to destroy only the idols in a heathen temple, to leave the building to be converted to a Christian church. In this way, Gregory wisely realized, the transition from heathenism to Christianity would not be so abrupt. Moreover, the pagan rites of sacrificing animals did not need to be abandoned, but directed toward Christian celebrations. Hence the populace would be more likely to accept the new religion (1, p. 120).

Since these Christian writings are the only recorded source of information about Anglo-Saxon heathenism, some historians have drawn material from Scandinavian accounts to describe pre-Christian England. As Stenton points out, however, it is dangerous to equate Scandinavian gods with
English ones; the two began to develop independently long before the Angles and the Saxons left the Continent. Moreover, Anglo-Saxon literature often comes from Scandinavian sources; it is probable that the gods, as well as the heroes, are Scandinavian (12, p. 96). Perhaps place names honoring gods, then, are some of the most important sources for studying heathen religion. In addition to the third day of the week, Tiw, the main war god of Germanic people, gave his name to the village of Tuesley in Surrey and Tysoe in Warwickshire. This latter name means "Tiw's hill-spur" and has been known since the seventeenth century as "the Vale of the Red Horse" because of a nearby cliff on which, Stenton speculates, there might have been in prehistoric times the figure of a horse carved as a symbol of the war god (12, p. 99).

Even more evidence of the worship of Thunor exists. Many place names in Kent testify to his popularity, and the Saxons honored him most of all gods. Although none are found in Anglican territory, place names like Thursley, Thunderfield, Thunderley, Thundersley bear witness to the widespread worship of Thunor, the thunder god (12, p. 99).

Place names for Woden, worshipped by all the Anglo-Saxon tribes who came to England, exist throughout England. Kings traced their ancestry to him, and common men worshipped him in the countryside. Such names as Wednesbury (Woden's fortress), Wednesfield (Woden's open country), and Wensley
(Woden's grove) show his frequent association with nature. Furthermore, Woden was the only god with a nickname—Grim. As the god of supernatural works, Woden was the name given to strange natural formations, and in southern England his nickname survives in the earthworks called Grimesdyke (Grimes die) (12, p. 100).

Remnants of Anglo-Saxon heathenism identify centers of worship even when no gods' names were attached to place names. The heathen word for "temple," ealh, is preserved in Alkham; and hearth, which means "hill sanctuary," is retained in the name Harrowden, found in three shires. Moreover, weoh ("idol, shrine," or "sacred precinct"), the most prevalent and widespread of all existing heathen terms, survives in such names as Wye, Wheely Down, Wyville, Weeford, and Weeoland. Combinations with words like dūn, "hill," and lēah, "grove," in Weedon and Weoley support the theory that many places of worship were in the woods or on hills. Through the study of place names, then, many details concerning the extent and nature of heathen worship have been illuminated (12, pp. 101, 102).

Of even more interest than place names are words from the heathen Anglo-Saxon religion which have entered the English vocabulary. For example, the name of Eostre, a goddess for whom the fourth month of the year was named, Eosturmonath, survives in the Christian Easter. The name seems to have been given to the Christian observance
because it coincided with heathen festivals held for Eostre. Hence, in accordance with Augustine's attempts to assimilate into Christian practices as much as possible of the heathen religion, insofar as it did not actually conflict, the name associated with the heathen sacrificial festival in spring was given to the most important of Christian holy days, Easter. In addition, Giuli, which had previously named both the last and first months of the year in the heathen Anglo-Saxon calendar, came to refer to Christmastide. Thus OE geol evolved into Modern English Yule (1, p. 123).

Yet another term recalling heathen Anglo-Saxon religion, Modern English weird named the pre-eminent Wyrd, the Fate who ruled both men and the gods themselves (8, p. 243). When this word was used in the Christian period in Old English it named "the power by which events are predetermined." Beowulf uses it so: "Gefæ ðæ a wyrd swa hio scel." (Fate goes ever as it must) (10). While this word appeared frequently in Old English it was not recorded in Middle English until 1300, and then it was found mainly in northern writing. However, Langland, Gower, and Chaucer also used it; the latter wrote: "the wyrdes that we clepen destine" (14, pp. 110, 111, 112). The word dropped out of Early Modern English except for its use in Scotland. Shakespeare adopted weird for use in Macbeth because of its appearance in the northern source for his play, Hector Boece's Historia Scotorum translated by John Bellenden: "Macbeth and Banquo
met be ye sait thre women clothet in elrage and uncouth weid. (dress, widow's weeds). They were jugit be the pepill to be weird sisters." Undoubtedly this Scottish word was unfamiliar to the Elizabethan English, for in early editions of Macbeth weird was printed weyard or weyardward and was even replaced by wizard in later Folios (14, p. 113). From Shakespeare's use weird sisters to mean "fate sisters," the word developed much later its use as an adjective "suggestive of the supernatural," hence to describe "strange" or "strange in any way." Thus Shelley wrote in 1815, "In lone and silent hours, when night make a weird sound of its only stillness" (10). Today weird has lost its mystical import to such a degree that no longer is anyone aware of its association with the god of destiny.

For generations after the introduction of Christianity to England, the Church fought to annihilate the influence of heathen gods and to discourage superstition. Christian prayers for protection against the evil spirits of the world were substituted for earlier practices (15, p. 25). Hence the word spell, OE spel, which originally meant "story," or "history," specialized to name "words or formulas which possess magical power" and distinguished such heathen practices from Christian prayers and stories. Chaucer still used it in its former sense, however: "Now hold your mouth . . . And herkneth to my spelle (story)" (10).

Another familiar word sometimes used in connection with religion was OE tacen. Modern English token once
meant "symbol, sign, mark, or portent." It was used in this last sense by Shakespeare in Richard III: "The weary Sunne . . . by the bright Tract of his Fiery Carre, Gives token of a goodly day" (10). Now the word means "coin" or "sign" (of affection, etc.), but none of the mystical connotations remain.

Conversely, Christianity sometimes added religious or supernatural significance to words. For instance, Skeat suggests that heathen (OE hæðen), which meant "unbeliever" or "pagan" then as it does now, originally denoted "one who lives on the heath." Those people who lived far from villages were the last to accept the new religion, hence its development to the present sense (11, p. 259). Later the term became more firmly rooted in pejorative connotations when it was specifically applied to the Viking invaders, who devastated the land and tore down its churches (3, p. 166).

Similar religious effects on vocabulary are apparent in the semantic history of fiend. Formed from the Old English verb fēon, "to hate," fēond formerly meant "hated one, enemy." But in early Middle English, fēond was replaced by the French synonym, enemy. Following this displacement, the word specialized to refer to "the enemy of men's souls," i.e. "the devil." Curiously, fiend does not appear in the Bible and is consequently rarely used in sermons. Primarily its application is restricted to "an extremely evil person," a villain whose deeds approximate those of the devil (2, pp. 138, 139).
Likewise, warlock altered its meaning because of religious reference. Literally wær-loga first meant "oath-breaker," hence "traitor, deceiver"; but during the Old English period it began to be applied specifically to the Devil. Then because of references in the Bible to the Devil's assuming various shapes, the word became associated with monsters. Later warlock named "sorcerers" who as followers of the Devil could work magic. Today the word means "male witch" or "sorcerer." In Old English, however, wicca was the form for "male witch" and wiccé, "female witch." Today witch applies only to females (10).

The history of bless and bliss are perhaps the clearest examples of the semantic effects of religious influence. Old English blîtsian (later bletsian) etymologically meant "to mark with blood, to sacrifice or consecrate." As the Oxford English Dictionary explains, this pre-Christian rite was probably similar to the act in Exodus XII.23 of marking doorposts with blood so that the Death Angel would pass over them. In heathen practice, then, this might have involved marking something with blood to protect people from evil men, gods, or demons. In any case, the word bîtsian translated Latin bendicere during the English conversion. After this, OE bliss ("joy, happiness") and bless began to affect each other semantically through frequent confusion of the two. Bliss originally designated "physical, earthly joy, gladness, enjoyment." This is its use in Chaucer's
"Man of Law's Tale": "This glade folk to dyner they hem sette; in ioye and blisse at mete I lete him dwelle."

At the same time bless meant "to confer well-being upon, to make happy, to prosper." Formerly only God could bless; later it was applied to God's working through men and things to give a blessing. Then it came to mean "to make happy, as with a gift." Here the connection with bliss becomes apparent. While bless generalized from associations with "the bestowing of divine favor" to include "the conferring of earthly prosperity," bliss specialized from "earthly joy" to "spiritual joy." In early examples it is difficult to distinguish variation in meaning. In 1764, Goldsmith wrote: "May gather bliss, to see my fellows blest." Moreover, bliss was sometimes synonymous with heaven: "The path to bliss abounds with many a snare." Hence the meanings of both bless and bliss have deviated from their earlier designations (10).

In like manner lust was influenced by translation of the Bible, but unlike bliss, the change has been pejorative. Whereas OE lust, "pleasure, enjoyment," held no unfavorable connotations, the term was corrupted when it was used to translate Latin concupiscencia carnis as "lusts of the flesh." An interesting parallel development occurred in lusty, but its sense development has passed lust, as the adjective no longer means "full of lust or sexual desire," but rather "full of health, vigorous" (10).
Unlike *lust* and *lusty*, the specialization of OE *gāst* has retained one sense of its original meaning in the form *Holy Ghost*, i.e., "holy spirit." Originally *ghost* named "the soul or spirit of life." In 1388 Wyclif used it in this way: "Jhesus eftsoone criede with a greet voyce and yaf vp the goost." Further, *ghost* might mean "a good or evil spirit." The French synonym *spirit* replaced these general senses, resulting in the restriction of *ghost* in the fourteenth century to mean "disembodied spirit" (2, p. 136).

Still another example of narrowing as a result of religious influence is the noun *worship*. In Old English *weorþescip* designated "the condition (in a person) of deserving or being held in esteem or repute; honor." In 1386 Chaucer wrote: "To seke in Armes worshipe and honour." Then nearly one hundred years later Caxton recorded: "There was a clerk moche renomed at rome whiche could not come to the worship he desyred." About the same time the word meant "respect or honor paid to a person." "He salutyd his moder with gret worchepe." (Political, Religious, and Love Poems c. 1420) Along with this sense developed the present meaning "reverence or veneration paid to a being or power regarded as supernatural or divine." The verb *to worship* was derived from the noun during Middle English. Today a specialized form of the noun survives in the term "Your worship," applicable to a magistrate (10).
Gossip, on the other hand, retains nothing of its original association with religion. Old English godsibb meant "sponsor at a baptism," and this meaning remained the predominant one in Early Modern English. In 1649 Evelyn wrote: "The parents being so poor that they provided no gossips." About this time, however, the term began to apply to "familiar acquaintances" and then to "idle talkers." The semantic history is explained by the sponsors—later, friends in general—talking at a baptism (4, p. 110).

Similarly, bead retains no clue as to its earlier meaning, "prayer," as Bede used it: "Dæt he sceolde ʒa bedu anescian." (That he should diminish (weaken) his prayers) (10). Then in the fourteenth century bead came to designate "the round balls on a string used for keeping count of the number of prayers said." Pope wrote in 1732: "Beads and prayerbooks are the toys of age" (10). This sense was then extended to refer to "any ornament on which round balls are strung." Also transfers of bead have been used to apply to "anything having the qualities of beads," as in "beads of sweat." Today, beads does not retain enough of its former religious meaning to recall its sense of "prayer."

Anthem (OE antefne), another word connected with religious liturgy, first meant "two voices or two choirs singing or chanting alternately." Later when this word broadened to include "any sacred music," the Greek antiphon was introduced to provide for the earlier meaning (5, p. 15).
Unlike the development of *anthem*, Modern English *Lent* (OE *lencten*), the religious observance of forty days prior to Easter, has narrowed by religious application from the more general term for spring, when days began to "lengthen." In 1387 this use of "spring" is meant: "pe evenes of pe day and of pe nyht is one in pe Lente, efte in hervest." The word *Lent* began to designate the religious season in the thirteenth century (10).

When Christians first used the word *holiday*, they might apply it to any day in the Lenten period, for originally this term meant "holy day." The meaning of OE *haligdæg* was used by Caxton in 1481: "Goo to chirche, faste and kepe your halydayes" (10). The word also referred to "a day when ordinary work was suspended." From this sense the present meaning of "a day of celebration" grew. Today in British usage the word means also "vacation."

Still another word which has lost its religious associations is *tawdry*. This word's origins are in the name *Ætheldry*, the saint who founded *Ely* Cathedral. Legend says that this pious woman of the seventh century died of a throat disease which she believed to be the punishment for her youthful love of wearing necklaces. Later *Ætheldry* was canonized as "St. Audrey." Near the site of her cathedral an annual fair was held in her honor where "St. Audrey's lace," later "tawdry lace" (in the form of a scarf) was sold. At first this was an attractive accessory, as indicated by
Shakespeare in *Winter's Tale* (IV. iv. 252, 253): "Come, you promised me a tawdry lace and a pair of sweet gloves" (13, p. 245). Later, however, the quality of the lace became poor and *tawdry* took on its present meaning and its use as an adjective: "Caudy or showy" (6, p. 48). Now nothing but a *t* is left of the "raint" in *tawdry*, nor does it have any religious associations.

In early use, OE *wæccan* (watch), a doublet of *wæccian* (wake), meant "to remain awake for religious purposes," but like *tawdry*, it has lost its religious sense. Its former use is illustrated in 971 in *Bickling Homilies*: "Heo wæccende dæges ond nihtenes." Moreover, *wæccan* also was used in a more general sense as "wake," i.e., "to be or remain awake." In the thirteenth century, however, the word began to broaden from the special sense of *wæccan* "to keep vigil for religious purpose" to "to be on guard, alert (for any purpose)" (10).

In addition to semantic change revealing religious history, words indicate cultural change as well. As civilization advances sometimes old words are applied to new achievements. Many of these words relate to intelligence and attitudes. For example, OE *rædan* originally meant "to take or give counsel, to take care or charge of a thing, to exercise control over something." Also, the word might mean "to have an idea," "to think about," or "to guess." Hence this latter sense is used in a riddle ca. 1000:
"Rōd, hwæt ic mæne!" (Guess what I mean!) reæddan then was also applied to "to understand and interpret written words." This is the current sense of to read (10).

Similarly tell had a different denotation in Old English, i.e., "to mention or name (a series) one after another." Thus tellan is used in 1250: "Ic wile riȝt tellen, if ic can, Adam, Seth, Enos, Caynan, Malaleel, Iareth, Enoch" (10). Today tell is used in a more general way, "to recount, to say."

In addition, the Old English word beċc ("charter") was a specialized use of the word for "beech tree" as the first books were written on beechen boards (11, p. 70). The plural form beċc meant "tablets, written sheets." This plural sense was later given to the singular form beċ. An interesting use of book appeared in Early Modern English, when the term sometimes was synonymous with "benefit of clergy." In order to be exempt from trial or punishment except by church court, members of the clergy had to prove their literacy by reading a book, a feat which would confirm their rights as churchmen. Even as late as 1635, Bacon could write: "Some prisoners have their bookes, and be burned in the hand and so delivered . . . . This having their bookes is called their clergy" (10). This usage, of course, is now obsolete, but it serves as a reminder of the close connection between learning and the Church and of the extent of illiteracy even as late as the Renaissance.
Specialization has occurred, moreover, in the Old English word *wit*, which originally denoted "a faculty of the mind: intelligence, memory, thinking, reasoning." Later during Middle English and Early Modern English it meant "learning, knowledge." Hence in 1297 Robert of Gloucester wrote, "he bissopes him ansered ... Al wiȝ grete reysons and wit of hor boc" (10). Then in the sixteenth century *wit* took on the meaning of "the apt association of thought and expression, calculated to delight by its unexpectedness." During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this special sense became the theme of many plays which were characterized by artificial repartee designed to be amusing. As Pope wrote to Wycherley in 1704, "True Wit, I believe, may be defined a justness of thought, and a facility of expression." From this particular use, *wit* came to apply to "a person who has the faculty of saying smart or brilliant things." Today it can also mean "the smart and brilliant talk" of a clever person (10).

Another word that has digressed from its native antecedent is *craft*, which in Old English meant "strength, power, might." Thus its use ca. 1250: "Dur godes bode and godes craf(t)." (Through God's command and God's might) *Craft* also referred to "intellectual power, human skill—"deceit" as well as "art." In the twelfth century the word was used for "structure, work," which was extended
in the seventeenth century to "boat." The pejorative connotation that craft holds today (cf. crafty) probably grew out of Middle English when craft as "art, skill" specialized to mean "skill in evasion" or "cunning." Currently, however, craft denotes "special skill in handwork" or "a trade" (10). The broader senses of craft found in Old English are obsolete.

In like manner, mood has narrowed in Modern English. Old English mód meant "mind," but it was sometimes used to express attitudes and emotions--"anger, grief, courage, pride, spirit." The latter meaning is used in Beowulf: "He hæftde mod nicel." (He had great fighting spirit.) Later the word meant "frame of mind," as when Shakespeare wrote in Julius Caesar: "Fortune is merry, And in this mood will give us any thing." This narrower meaning has survived (10).

On the other hand, OE dréam originally described an emotion, "joy, mirth, delight, gladness," rather than a "vision." It also meant "music, minstrelsy." The word was not recorded in Old English literature with the meaning "vision," but this sense may have been employed in conversation. In any case the OE form dréam took on this sense in Middle English by association with ON draumr and Danish dróm. Consequently Modern English dream is Old English in form, but Scandinavian in signification (9, p. 71).
In contrast to dream, several words reveal in their semantic histories the hostile attitude of Anglo-Saxons toward strangers. Contact with people of other communities was confined for the most part to encounters with bandits. Understandably then, Anglo-Saxons feared strangers, as shown in an early law found in the codes of both Kent and Wessex: "If a man from far or a stranger quits the road, and neither shouts nor blows a horn, he shall be assumed to be a thief [and as such] may be either slain or put to ransome" (8, p. 231). Curiously enough, the word guest (OE gieæt) originally meant "stranger," for the Anglo-Saxons had no other word to apply to "one who visited." Thus its use in Matthew XXV.36: "Jest io wæls and ãe somnadon meh." (I was a stranger and you took me in) (10).

Because of this suspicion and fear of strangers engendered by past experiences with violence, the Anglo-Saxons believed it important that every person belong to a community. Modern English wretch, which today means "one who is miserable" and by transference, "one who causes others to be miserable," evolved from OE wræcca, a term that named specifically an "outcast" or "exiled person," as well as a "miserable creature."

An interesting extension of this antagonism toward strangers is shown in the evolution of OE utlendisc, which meant "foreign (cf. German ausländer). Because anything foreign is sometimes subject to ridicule, the word was
used by Fielding in *Tom Jones* to describe a woman "dressed in an outlandish garment," i.e., "a strange, comical dress, which might be worn by a foreigner." The sense of "bizarre, exaggerated" grew from this use of *outlandish*, so that the word no longer means "foreign" (7, pp. 93, 94).

In like manner, *uncouth* has taken on a pejorative connotation. OE *uncūþ* originally meant "unknown" or "uncertain." In 1650 it is used in this way by R. Gell: "A kind of attestation not uncouth among Poets" (10). Later the sense of "unknown" and "strange" took on an unfavorable meaning brought about by judging as "clumsy, awkward, crude" something that was "strange or unfamiliar." Obviously prejudice against foreigners and the unfamiliar did not end with the Anglo-Saxon period (10).

These words, then reveal cultural attitudes in their semantic change, giving insight into judgments on the part of the speaker who first employed them in a unique way. Consequently, although the speaker may not even have been aware that he expressed an attitude by using a term in an original way, the word assumed a new signification if it continued to be used as a judgment.
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CHAPTER V

OCCUPATIONS

Just as work itself has changed in the past one thousand years, so have the words describing various occupations of the Anglo-Saxons, in many of which sense changes have occurred along with modification in the nature of the work. Moreover, meaning change frequently indicates a shift of concentration or emphasis from one area of business or labor to another. Therefore, of those which have changed, many extant words parallel cultural and economic progress. The extent of these changes can be seen by considering the various occupations with which they were first used.

Most important for the sustenance of life in Anglo-Saxon England was the farmer. The churl, the ordinary freeman over most of England, frequently worked land under the open-field system in which alternating strips of land were divided among the farmers. Each strip included the amount of land involved in one day's labor. Every year these strips rotated, and some of the land lay fallow. This method yielded only a meagre existence for the churl and others who farmed (10, p. 102). Extremely insecure, the churl's position during the latter part of the Anglo-Saxon period deteriorated to the extent that by the time
of the Norman invasion thousands of Englishmen of his status were bound to the soil. This drift toward bondage was brought about not only by the devastating Viking raids, but also by earlier internal strife. Besides the destruction of land by warfare, the farmer had to contend with bad crops and poor soil. Consequently, in order to survive, the churl often sold his freedom to a manorial lord in return for protection and security (8, p. 464).

In addition to raising wheat and barley, the staple crops, the Anglo-Saxon farmer might have livestock. Each churl had rights to a common pasture or woodland where swine might graze and bear young (10, p. 102). OE *fearth, "little pig," comes into Modern English as a verb, *farrow, to produce a litter of pigs" (7, p. 204).

Several other words originally applied to farming have changed. The word *till meaning "to cultivate the soil" began to specialize toward this meaning during the Old English period. Formerly OE *tillian meant "to strive, acquire, labor," whence comes its application in 1225, in the Ancren Riwle: "Ure Louerd ... tiled efter hore luue" (5). Moreover, OE *gōwen, "to grow," applied only to plant life, its germination and development. This use shows the connection of the verb with *gēn from the same root. Today, *grow means "to increase or decrease in size" and may be said of people, plants, animals, or inanimate objects (5). OE *weaxan was the more general term for
"to grow" applied to plants and animals. Today, however, wax, along with wane, is used mainly in connection with the phases of the moon. It can also mean "to become gradually larger or stronger," or simply "to grow or become," as in "The seas wax calm" (4, p. 1450).

Another term which might have been used in farming as well as in a more general way was OE ecan, "to increase or augment." Thus its use by Chaucer: "these fools that her sorrows eche" (7, p. 186), and by Smollett in 1803: "Without eking or curtailing God's precious truth" (5). Modern English eke has narrowed within the last one hundred years to mean "to supplement with great effort; strain to fill out," as in "He could still eke out a living" (4, p. 419).

Imp has also been entirely dissociated from Anglo-Saxon farming, where it meant "a young shoot of a plant or tree." Chaucer used the older meaning in "The Monk's Prologue": "Of fieble trees ther comen wrecched ympes" (5). About this time, the word began to apply to "offspring, children (usually male)." Thus its use by Scott in 1808: "My imps, . . . hardy bold, and wild, As best befits a mountain child" (5). In the sixteenth century, however, imp started to be used as "child of the Devil." Later any indication of parentage was dropped, and imp came to designate "a little demon or devil." Today the term has elevated somewhat to mean "mischievous child" (5).
Another agricultural word changing radically is *aftermath*. While not found in Old English, it was formed from OE *after* and *meot*, the compound form first appearing in the sixteenth century meaning "the grass which springs up after mowing in early summer." Hence its use by Holland in 1601: "The grasse will be so high growne, that a man may cut it down and have a plentiful aftermath for hay" (5). Usually, however, a tenant could not take advantage of this stubble which as a result of his work grew after mowing, because the landlord let his cattle graze on it. Hence *aftermath* took on the figurative sense of "consequence" such as "the result of a catastrophe" (2, p. 226).

A local figure important to both the farmer and the military lord in Anglo-Saxon life was the smith. Forging farm implements and weapons, the smith, although a necessary member of the community, did not have as high a status as the craftsmen, despite frequent reference in poetry to weapons created through the smith's skill. Perhaps the absence of a large scale cavalry in pre-feudal England explains this workman's social inferiority to other skilled laborers (3, pp. 104, 105). One of the main tools for his work was the *blæst belig*, "the blowing bag." In the eleventh century this shortened to *belyg*, *bylg*, *bylig*, "bag." From these forms developed ME *bell*, *belin*, *buly*. In the fourteenth century Chaucer used singular *bely* to mean "bellows," but after 1400, it meant "belly." The plural *belies*, *bellies* for
"bellows" appeared dialectically until late in the sixteenth century. Wycliff used the forms belu, belw for "bellows." Then in the fifteenth century from singular belowe was formed belwea, belowes, bellows ("bellows") which became the standard word. Thereafter, bellies referred only to the plural of "belly," although the singular bellig had not appeared in Old English with the sense of "belly." The Old English word for "belly" was wamb (Modern English womb), which narrowed to mean "uterus" (5). Thus these changes in form and usage in bellig have far exceeded the original limited sense of the blëst belig used by the smith.

Frequently smiths worked in market centers because of the demand there for their services. Not only was there trading among the Anglo-Saxons themselves, but also there was some exportation of goods such as wool and cloth from these centers. Kings tried to regulate trade by confining it to towns or having witnesses oversee purchases, in order to try to prevent the sale of stolen goods. Moreover, certain exports were forbidden, and prices were set on others. In the late seventh century coins were minted in England which might have been exchanged for merchandise in the market, although some bartering probably continued (10, pp. 120-122).

Possibly in no other occupation have so many native words changed as in business and commerce. For example, the OE noun ðæap originally meant "barter, exchange of
commodities," hence with coining of money "buying and selling."
The word also applied to the "place of buying," a meaning evidenced by its retention in place names like Cheapside and Eastcheap. In Old English the term also meant "the price or value." In Middle English cheap was used to designate "the state of the market from the buyer's point of view." Cheap was employed with qualifying adjectives. "Good cheap" meant "low price." During the sixteenth century the adjective qualifying cheap was dropped and cheap became an adjective itself describing a bargain (5).

OE cēapmann, from cēap and mann, has undergone a somewhat different change. The word formerly designated "a merchant, trader, or dealer," as it is used in a Bible passage in 1200: "Ut off Godes temmple he draf chappmen." Then in the thirteenth century it came to mean "customer, purchaser" (5). The abbreviated chap appeared in the late sixteenth century, and today it is informally applied to "a man or boy" (4, p. 225). A similar Modern English word, fellow, also had its origins in Anglo-Saxon business. Fēolaga, a word borrowed from ON felagí late in the Old English period, meant "one who lays down money in a joint undertaking." Then in the thirteenth century the meaning of "peer, mate" appeared. Thus fellow might mean "consort, spouse, husband, or wife," as it was used by Shakespeare: "I am your wife, if you will marry me . . . to be your fellow, you may denie me; but I'll be your servuant." (The
Tempest III.1.84) (5). The modern informal use of **fellow** to mean "boyfriend" may have developed from this obsolete sense. In the fifteenth century, however, **fellow** took on a somewhat pejorative connotation as a condescending or contemptuous word for "man" (6, p. 350). Today this derogatory meaning is only one of several broadened applications of **fellow**. Although the earlier sense of "partner in business or an undertaking" is obsolete, the meaning of "peer" remains as well as "comrade" (4, p. 483).

In like manner OE **gem-e,ne**, which appears in Modern English as **mean**, first designated "common to two or more persons or things." In **mean** meant "in common." Hence its use by Maundev in 1400: "I haial a lawe in meen betwene vs and pe Grekez" (5). In Middle English, however, **mean** developed the present sense of "ordinary, not exceptionally good, inferior." This pejoration was influenced by the French word of the same form **meien, meen**, "middle, middling," frequently used with unfavorable connotations (5).

Another instance of pejoration in commercial terms is found in the word **monger**, from OE **mangere**, which meant "dealer, trader." But since the sixteenth century the term has referred to "one who carries on a petty or disreputable traffic" (cf. **gossipmonger**) (5). Sometimes it is used today in compounds such as **ironmonger** or **cheesemonger** without this degrading sense attached (4, p. 847).
Unusual changes have occurred in the verbs describing transactions in trade and business. OE āgan, Modern English owe, meant "to have, possess, own," as written in 1000 in Matthew XIII.44: "se man . . . ge ācean and syl eall þæt he ah, and þe bíþ þone æcer." (The man . . . goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.) By 1175, however, āgan meant "to owe (money)" and "to be under an obligation to do something." The original past participle of āgan became a postdeterminer showing possession, Modern English own. Today the verb owe means "to be under obligation to pay or repay" (5). These new senses of āgan displaced OE sculan, which took on a milder tone of obligation. Then, having lost all connotation of obligation, shall came to express future tense (5).

In like manner own has changed. In Old English āgnian meant "to make (a thing) one's own, seize, win, gain." Thus it appeared in 950 in Matthew V.4: "Bædie bid on a milde forlán ða æmgan eorðo." (Blessed be the meek for they shall gain the earth.) Also current in Old English was the sense "to possess." But after 1300, the verb was infrequently used until the seventeenth century. At this time it reentered the language as a back-formation from owner, a noun which had originated in the fourteenth century from the verb. Own then acquired the meaning "to acknowledge as one's own" along with the older sense "to possess," the two current meanings (5).
Yet another verb that came to be associated with trade was formed from the OE noun for(e)steall, "ambush, interception." In the fourteenth century, forestallen meant "to obstruct" as well as "to buy up goods before they reach the market" (6, p. 370). The idea implied by this latter meaning was to buy up merchandise before it was displayed at the market and then sell it at a higher price (7, p. 216). In the sixteenth century, the current meaning for forestall arose: "to hinder by anticipation, anticipate in action" (6, p. 370).

Additionally, OE sciftan, "to appoint, ordain, arrange, assign" might have been used in commerce. In Middle English the senses "to divide" along with "to alter the position of" came in use, the latter sense surviving in Modern English (5). Similarly OE framian, "to profit, be of service" lost its connection with the business world, becoming frame in Modern English. Its early use is illustrated in 1330 by Brunne: "To nemne hem here, litel hit framea." (To take them here profits little) (5). In the fourteenth century the verb meant "to prepare timber for building," hence "to shape, construct, contrive," these senses developing into the current use: "to frame a building" or "to frame someone"; the latter is the sense of "to contrive against" (5).

Several other words in Modern English were once associated with occupations. Leech (Modern English leech),
for example, meant "physician" in Old English as well as "blood sucking worm." Thus in Luke IV.23, c. 950, appeared: "La lece leona fec seolfne." (Lo, physician, heal thyself) (5). This meaning was also intended by Shakespeare in Timon of Athens (V.iv.83, 84):

Make war breed peace, make peace stint
war, make each
Prescribe to other as each other's leech.

In addition, Nathaniel Hawthorne used leech in the title of two of the chapters in The Scarlet Letter, i.e., "The Leech" and "The Leech and His Patient."

Another word for an earlier occupation, Modern English henchman, has a pejorative connotation not found in the Middle English hengestman. Formed from OE hengeat ("horse") and man, the word appeared in the fourteenth century with the meaning "squire or page of honor." In 1565 Queen Elizabeth dissolved the corps of "royal henchman," and following this, the word fell into disuse (9, pp. 48, 49, 50). In the eighteenth century Scott reintroduced the word in Waverley, applying it to "a personal attendant of a Highland chief" (6, p. 436). During the next century the word came to mean "a loyal follower or subordinate." Usually, however, it now bears the more prevalent unfavorable connotation "a person who supports a political figure chiefly out of self-seeking interests" or "strong-armed flunky" (4, p. 615).
Like henchman, stickler is far removed from its origins. Formed from the OE verb stihtan, "to set in order, arrange," the noun stickler first appears in the sixteenth century meaning "a moderator or umpire at a tournament or fencing match," hence "one who intervenes as a mediator in disputes." This is its use in 1897 by Philpotts: "You 'm like the stickler at a wras'len match . . . you sees fair play betwiet God and man." In the eighteenth century the word referred to "one who fights or contends against; an opponent; one who makes difficulties" (5). The present use of the word is "a person who insists on or contends for something unyieldingly: 'a stickler for neatness!'" (4, p. 1265).

Also from Anglo-Saxon occupations is starboard (OE steorpbord, a structure used by sailors). The word meant "paddle or rudder board" and referred to steering a boat with a paddle on the right side (5). Hence today the word identifies the "right side" of a ship not because of "stars," but because of the position of paddles in early Germanic boats (1, p. 13).

An interesting tale surrounds the beginning of Modern English gangway, a term originally used by heralds. When an important person rode through crowds, he sent a servant ahead to clear a path for him. The herald called out "gangwey! gangwey!" (i.e., a command for "moving space") as he went before his master (2, pp. 203, 204). Whether or not this was the actual origin of the word, a closely
related meaning appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:
"a road, thoroughfare, or passage of any kind, rarely a 'lane' opened through a crowd" (5). By the seventeenth century the present meaning, "passageway," came into use (6, p. 389).

Some epithets which the Anglo-Saxons used have weakened considerably, obscuring past meanings. OE *bana*, for instance, meant "murderer, that person or thing which causes death or destroys life, especially with poison." The latter sense was used as late as 1713 by Addison in *Cato*: "My bane and antidote are both for me" (5). The word gradually came to its present meaning: "that which causes ruin or is pernicious to well-being" (5).

Like the noun *bana* many verbs which once carried destructive or violent meanings in Old English have attenuated their force. Indeed, the number of Old English verbs that describe actions of vandalism and mayhem suggests the ever-present insecurity and havoc of war and looting in the Anglo-Saxon period. Furthermore, the very continuance of these words indicates that they have been frequently used to describe action in battles and raids. That so many of them changed their meanings between 1100 and 1400 may not be solely attributable to less warfare during the Middle English Period, although this might have been a factor. Also, French synonyms may have displaced some verbs of warfare causing them to specialize or weaken in meaning.
OE *reblindfellian*, for example, meant "to strike blind."
The current meaning of *blindfold* ("to cover the eyes of, with a bandage") began in the thirteenth century (5).
Similarly, the Modern English verb *to mar* (OE *merran*) named the action of "spoiling, wasting" and, with a material object, "to impair fatally, ruin" (5). In the thirteenth century the word weakened to mean "to harm, injure, ruin," the current meaning, indicating less violence than the Old English word (6, p. 554).

Likewise OE *stingan*, again surely a war term in origin, meant "to pierce with a sharp pointed weapon" and "to pierce or wound with a darting point as wasps or scorpions do." Today only this latter weakened meaning survives (5).
Similar to *stingan* was OE *byrlian*, "to pierce, to run through or into (a body) with a sharp pointed instrument."
A figurative meaning existed alongside this literal sense.
The physical use was illustrated in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*: "Namely oon That with a speare was thirled his brest boon" (5). In the seventeenth century the sense of "affect, be affected by, emotionally" developed. During the eighteenth century the now obsolete sense "hurl (a piercing weapon)" arose (6, p. 920). Today Modern English *nostril* is perhaps more suggestive of the literal sense of the OE verb, as it was formed from the OE noun *nosbyrli*, a compound of OE *nosu* (nose) and *byr(e)l* (hole) (6, p. 615).
In any case, current use of *thrill* bears no resemblance to the Old English literal meaning.

Similarly OE *hentan* comes into Modern English with little retention of its original relation to war. First meaning "to pursue, attack, appropriate, seize," the verb gave rise to the noun *hint*, which began in the seventeenth century to mean "something that may be seized or taken advantage of." Thus Shakespeare wrote in *Othello*: "Wherein of Antars vast, and Desarts idle . . . It was my hint to speak" (I.iii.142). In this context *hint* means "occasion, opportunity." The present meaning of *hint*, "a slight indication, a suggestion or implication conveyed in an indirect or covert manner," grew from this sense (5). Indeed, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish in seventeenth century contexts between "an opportunity" and "a subtle suggestion."

A verb once similar in denotation to *hentan*, OE *cépan* (Modern English *keep*), meant "to seize, lay hold of, snatch" and by transfer, "to take in with the eyes, ears, mind; to observe." This latter meaning was used about 1000 to translate Latin *observāre* (to watch, keep an eye upon, take note of), and the later developments of *keep* have been affected by these senses (5). In any case, the forcible, physical senses of the Old English verb became obsolete. In the twelfth century the meaning "take care of, guard" arose. Then in the fourteenth century "preserve, maintain; reserve,"
withhold, restrain" came into use along with "reside, dwell (in)" (6, p. 502). Most of these meanings are current, as well as many other senses extending from them.

Moreover, Modern English quell indicates less violence than its OE source, ewellan, "to kill, slay, put to death, destroy." In the fourteenth century, the sense "to suppress, extinguish" came into use. Later "to crush, subdue" gained currency in the sixteenth century (6, p. 731). Today quell carries this sense along with the less formidable one, "to pacify, quiet" (4, p. 1070).

Similarly Modern English spill has weakened in intensity of meaning. OE spillan meant "to put to death, destroy, ruin, waste, squander" (6, p. 853). This latter sense was used by Langland in 1377: "I . . . spilte falt my te be spared and spended on somne hungrie" (5). In the twelfth century the meaning "to shed (blood)" developed. Then the verb broadened in the fourteenth century "to allow or cause (liquid) to fall or pour" (6, p. 853).

OE swingan (Modern English swing), a verb that has had a meaning change influenced by its application to sword fighting in warfare, meant "scourge, flog, move something impetuously." From these senses swing developed in the fourteenth century the denotation, "flourish, brandish (a weapon, etc.)." Then "move backwards and forwards," the current sense of the word, arose in the sixteenth century (6, p. 394).
Like *swing*, Modern English *worry* evolved from a sense associated with violence to a term later used in warfare. OE *wyrzan* meant "to strangle." Hence its use in 1456 by Haye: "The fende weryt him in his bed" (5). The transitive meaning "to choke (a person or animal) with a mouthful of food," and the intransitive use, "to devour greedily," began in the thirteenth century. In 535 Stewart wrote: "How Godowyn worreit himself to Deid in Prescence of King Edward" (5). Then in the sixteenth century *worry* meant "harass, assail." Thus Warwick illustrated the word in 1675: "Cromwell . . . marched forward into Scotland, and left Lambert to worry Hamilton in England" (5). The present figurative meaning "afflict mentally" grew up in the nineteenth century (6, p. 1013).

These, then, are Old English words from business, labor, and military categories which have undergone meaning changes. That many of these changes developed in Middle English gives further evidence of the upheavals and alterations taking place in the language after the Norman Conquest. Furthermore, the changes in the words noted here frequently reflect a flux in the emphasis of culture. Changes in words concerning trade, for example, were particularly subject to specialization and pejoration, indicating perhaps something about unfortunate dealings with medieval tradesmen and once more revealing the effects of culture on semantic change.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER VI

ANIMALS, AGRICULTURE, AND MEASUREMENT

Many native words which have undergone meaning changes are difficult to categorize; their uses depended on the subject. Some of these words are classified here under the topics of animals, agriculture, and measurement. The people of Anglo-Saxon England lived close to nature, for their survival depended upon successful farming and good health since they had little preparation for or defense against famine and disease. That nature engaged their thoughts and directed the course of their lives is evidenced in some of the words that remain today, words which earlier named animals and plants or described measurement. For the first measuring standards derived from natural comparisons, such as parts of the body with whatever was being measured. Such analogies were convenient, though inaccurate because people vary in size. Sometimes modern native words do not reflect their anatomical origins.

Many words naming animals and plants, on the other hand, still retain some of their former meaning. OE hund, for example, was the common word for dog. It is used in this way by Wycliff in Luke XVI.21: "Hundis oamen and luckiden his bylis" (2). A century earlier, however,
hound began to specialize to mean "dog kept for the chase" (3, p. 449). Similarly OE *wyrm* (Modern English *worm*) specialized in the thirteenth century to mean "earthworm." Formerly, the term named reptiles, serpents, and dragons as well (3, p. 1012). This latter meaning was used in Beowulf (2287): "fa se wyrm onwoc" (then the dragon awoke).

Likewise *fowl* specialized during the sixteenth century to denote "a domestic cock or hen" (3, p. 374). OE *fugol* (Middle English *foul*) was the common term for "bird." Hence it was used in Matthew VIII.20 (c. 1000): "Foxas habbaþ holu and heofenan fuglas" (2).

Conversely, OE *brild* was the special term for "the young of birds," but later Modern English *bird* superseded *fowl* as the general term for "feathered creatures." Moreover, *byrd* sometimes referred to "the young of any animal," as Trevisa wrote in 1398: "In temperat yeres ben fewe brydes of beene" (2).

Another term which originated in the animal world is *shrew*, "a scolding woman." OE *screawa* named a particular kind of "mouse" which was believed to be harmful. In 1545 Elyot recorded in his Dictionary under *Muse Araneus*: "a kynde of myse called a shrew, whyche if it goo over a beastes backe, he shall be lame in the chyne." From this superstition arose a figurative application of *shrew* to
people, and in the thirteenth century appeared the meaning "a wicked, evil-disposed, or malignant man; a mischievous or vexatious person; a rascal." Thus it is used in 1400 in St. Alexius: "For that tyme were be folk of Rome be mest shrewen of cristendome" (2). Then during the next century arose the sense of "a person given to scolding." Later it specialized to "a woman given to scolding," and this remains the current sense of the word (3, p. 823).

Likewise the adjective shrewd, probably formed from the noun shrew, has changed. From its original fourteenth-century meaning of "wicked, hurtful, dangerous, serious," shrewd came to mean "cunning, artful, astute, sagacious" in the sixteenth century. These are the senses of the word today (3, p. 823).

A word which once named the "beak, nose, or face of a person or animal" was OE nebb (Modern English neb). As a translation of Latin Ostende mihi faciem, the Ancren Riwle in the early thirteenth century rendered "scheau thi neb to me" (show me thy face) (4, p. 389). By the sixteenth century, however, the sense of "nib, peak, tip" developed, which along with "beak" is the current use.

Similarly OE mægæ meaning "stomach" has specialized so that today maw refers to "the stomach, mouth, or gullet of a voracious animal" (1, p. 808). Its former use was illustrated in Piers Plowman in 1393: "The man that muche
honey eet his mawe engleymeth" (The man that eats much 
honey cloys his stomach) (2). In the seventeenth century 
Milton extended the word to a figurative sense in Paradise 
Lost: "Death Shall . . . With us Be forc'd to satisfie 
his Ravrous Maw" (2). Today this transferred application 
is still used to mean "an opening that gapes as if with 
voracious appetite" (1, p. 808).

Besides changing to a figurative meaning, sometimes an 
Old English word which named a part of the animal or human 
body came to apply to something entirely different. OE 
sweard, for example, meant "rind of pork, human skin," 
the former meaning surviving today in dialects. The sense 
"upper layer of the earth" developed in the fifteenth cen-
tury. Then sward acquired its present meaning, "land 
covered with grassy turf; a lawn or meadow" (1, p. 1298).

Along with modifications in terms concerning animals, 
Old English words which once named plants have changed. 
OE stocc originally meant "a trunk, stem." From this origi-
nal meaning, which is now obsolete, many senses radiate. 
In the fourteenth century the term was applied to "line 
of descent," "a supporting structure," "a hollow receptacle," 
and, more remote, "the massive portion of an instrument." 
During the next century the sense of "fund, store (of 
money)" arose (3, p. 870, 871). The term livestock may 
have developed from this use, or it may have been influenced
by the "line of descent" meaning of stock. Moreover the present-day use of stock as "trader's capital" may have come from the senses of "hollow box, receptacle (money box)" or "fund, store (of money)" (2). In any case, these multiple meanings can ultimately be traced to the original stock meaning "tree trunk."

Similarly, OE bēam (Modern English beam) has extended its sense of "tree" to "plank, ray of light." All three meanings were used in Old English. Indeed it is not certain whether "tree" or "plank" was the original sense. "Ray of light" was expressed in byrnende bēam and in compounds such as leohtbēamed ("having bright rays") and sunnebēam ("sun-beam") (3, p. 82). Although the sense of "tree" is obsolete, "plank" and "ray of light" are still current in today's use of beam.

Another term used in describing plants, OE blæd (Modern English blade), originally designated "a leaf of a plant or herb." It also meant "the broad flattened part of an implement." In the fourteenth century the current sense "thin cutting edge, sword" arose. Probably as an extension of this latter meaning, blade came to mean later "wielder of a sword," then "a brave fellow or gallant" (3, p. 98). This was its meaning in the London Magazine in 1760: "Gentlemen of the town, as a sort of Blades may be well y'clep'd." Blade meaning "a gallant" survives
today, but the most prevalent sense is "the flat-edged cutting part of a sharpened tool or weapon," although it is also used to apply to "a leaf of grass or similar plant" (1, p. 138).

Apple, on the other hand, no longer retains the general sense of "fruit" which it held in Old English. It is not certain whether the general or specialized sense of "fruit" was earlier as OE ḫppel was used for both meanings. The general sense "fruit" was particularly applied to any fruit resembling the apple. This meaning was also employed broadly, however, when Trevisa wrote in 1398: "Al manere apples that ben closyd in an harde skynne, rynde, other shale ben callyd nuces" (2).

Similarly OE ḫcern (Modern English acorn) has specialized from meaning "fruit of the unenclosed land," or "natural produce of the forest," to "fruit of the oak tree." Thus Chaucer wrote: "Let him begone, beguiled of trust that he had to his corne, to Achornes of Okes." The last two words of this sentence necessarily designate acorns as fruit of the oak tree (2).

Closely related to OE ḫcern was ḫcer (Modern English acre), which originally denoted "unoccupied country." Then with increased interest in agriculture the term meant "land that can be cultivated." By the time of the Norman Conquest acre designated the amount of land that could be plowed in one day. This term denoted more definite measurements
of land as set by statues in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Today acre is land measuring 160 square rods. Acre in the plural form retains some of the former Old English meaning of "wide expanse of land" (2).

Other standards of measure began in like manner. OE furlang meant "the length of a furrow in a field of ten acres." By the ninth century furlang had been standardized to measure 220 yards in length, the current length of Modern English furlongs (2).

Similarly OE fathom (Modern English fathom) measured "the distance between the outstretched arms from the tips of each of the longest fingers." This term now names the measure of six feet. The noun also denoted "embrace" in Old English, while the verb fathom meant "to encircle, embrace." In the seventeenth century this verb took on the sense "to take sounding (of), get to the bottom of," senses current in Modern English (3, p. 347).

Another word originating in an Old English measure is elbow (OE elnbona), "bend of the arm" (1, p. 419). The ell measured "the distance between the crook of the arm [shoulder] and the end of the fingers." This standard once used in measuring cloth was later set at forty-five inches (2).

Similarly OE span(n) named "a unit of measure equal to the length of the fully extended hand from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger, generally considered
as nine inches" (1, p. 1237). Chaucer used the word in this way in "The General Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales: "Sche hadde a fair forheed. It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe." In the fourteenth century span generalized to mean "small piece or space." Then the sense of "short space of time" grew up in the sixteenth century, followed by "space between supports in an arch, etc." in the eighteenth century. These later semantic developments are current, but as the Old English measure, span is rarely used (3, p. 849).

In like manner, many measurements of time have changed. Tide, for example, in Old English denoted "a portion of time, season, age; hour; definite time of day or of the year; church anniversary or festival." These two latter senses survive in expressions such as eventide, Yuletide, and Christmastide. Although OE time and tid both meant "time," tid specialized in the fourteenth century to mean "the swelling of the sea, of its alternate rising and falling" (3, p. 923). OE tidung, a cognate form, was influenced by a similar Scandinavian word, and came to mean "event, news." This meaning survives in Modern English tidings.

Tidy, from Middle English tid, also referred to time, meaning "timely, seasonable, opportune." This was its use when F. Brooke wrote in 1660: "Hearing of this tydie accident, he was cautious to appear." About the same time the sense of "in good condition, or of good appearance; fair,
well-favored; fat, plump, healthy" developed. The latter of these senses was used in 1607 by Topsell: "When a Sow is very fat she hath alway but little milk, and therefore is not apt to make any good tidy Pigs" (2). In the eighteenth century the current sense "of neat habits or appearance" arose. Then the meaning "pretty good, pretty big" as in "a tidy sum" appeared in the next century (3, p. 923).

Another word denoting time in Old English was serr, cier, which meant "turn, occasion, time." Thus it is used about 1000, in Genesis XXXVIII.18: "Æt þam cyrrere heo wean mid cilde." (At that time she was with child) (2). In the fourteenth century chare specialized to mean "turn of work, odd job, especially of household work" (3, p. 163). American chore and British chare are variants of the char in charwoman (1, p. 226).

A word with a meaning similar to char is Modern English spell, from OE spelian, "to take the place of." This earlier sense was used in Ælfric's Homilies, "scr's þæh Isaac ofslogen, ac se ramm hine spelode." (Isaac, however, was not slain himself, but the ram spelled him [i.e., took his place]) (4, p. 579). While not found in Middle English, the verb spell re-appeared in the sixteenth century with the meaning "relieve (someone) at work." At this time the noun was formed meaning "relief gang." Then in the next century spell denoted "turn of work taken in relief of another." Today the word has broadened to name "a continuous course
of time" (3, p. 852). As a verb spell retains much of its Old English sense in Modern English, e.g.: "Let me spell you at the bridge table" means "Let me sit in for you."

Other semantic changes in native words for time include adverbial expressions. Seemingly, it is a characteristic of human nature to procrastinate, because several words which once meant "immediately" have extended their denotations of future time to "in a while," or "after a while." Perhaps this change can be explained by the fact that the very need to use a word denoting "immediately" might imply that there will be some delay or some delay may be expected. OE sôna, for example, meant "at once, immediately," and could not be compared. In Middle English, however, the word began to be compared, and the sense became "early, before the time specified." Today soon designates "in the near future, shortly" (2).

Anon is a similar expression which in Early Modern English meant "at another time; again," but in OE on an denoted "at once, straightway." This is its use by Langland in 1393: "A-non vndo be ñates!" During Middle English the immediacy of the word weakened so that Shakespeare used it in The Tempest to express "soon, in a short time": "Thou do'st me yet but little hurt; thou wilt anon" (2). Today it is used as an archaism.

The expression by-and-by (from OE bi) appeared in the fourteenth century with the meaning "one by one, in
succession, on and on," but in the next century it developed the sense "straightway." In the King James Bible this meaning is intended in Mark VI.25: "Give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist." And again in Luke XXI.9: "These things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by." Today by-and-by expresses a time in the rather remote future (5, p. 33).

Another term denoting time is Modern English fortnight, a contraction of OE feowetynge niht ("fourteen nights"). This word reveals the ancient Germanic method of counting by nights rather than days (2). Similarly another indication of the rather somber Anglo-Saxon culture is the accounting of years by the plural of OE winter, wintru. The singular form, winter, named the fourth season while the plural was synonymous with "years." Hence its use about 1000 in John II.20: "his tempel wæs ætimbrod on six ond fewerti on wintron." (This temple was built in forty-six years.) After the Old English period, winter was used to designate "year" only in a poetic or figurative sense meaning "difficult year," as in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey": "Five summers with the length of five long winters!" (2).

In like manner, OE hærvest named the third of the four seasons of the year. Harvest is used in this way as late as 1774 by Mackenzee: "Toward the End of Harvest, when the Days are turning short." The word also denoted
the "time for gathering crops." Not unexpectedly, these two senses were often indistinguishable before the fourteenth century. Then in the sixteenth century fall displaced harvest as the name for "autumn" and harvest came to designate "the gathering of the crops" whether in autumn or not. Then the term gained another of its present senses, "the crop gathered." At first this applied only to grain, but later it extended to any crop. Tyndale used harvest figuratively in 1526 for translating the book of Matthew: "Praye the harvest Lorde to sende forthe laborers into hye harvest" (2).

These are some of the native words used in describing animals, agriculture and measurement. Most of these terms narrowed in meaning. Denotations of measurement were standardized, replacing more primitive criteria such as the length of an arm or the amount of land that could be plowed in a day with a more uniform system of measurement. Moreover, many words describing time specialized to name a particular period, while others lengthened the immediacy they originally intended. Few of the words in these categories generalized, although some extended their meanings to figurative senses.


As the preceding chapters have shown, there can be no "true" or "real" meaning for any word; the only "right" meaning is that which is accepted and understood by those who are communicating with each other at a given moment in history. Hence the purpose of a study such as this is not to try to establish "true" meanings by ascertaining word origins in order to apply old meanings to new contexts. Far too many words have deviated from their original denotations. The intention of such a study is rather to show the immense variety of semantic change and the concomitant reflections of history in it by tracing the path of Old English words and trying to determine, where possible, historical reasons for change.

During the Christianization of England, many new concepts came to the Anglo-Saxons. While many Latin words were introduced into the language, Old English showed versatility and flexibility by using its resources to denote new ideas by changing word significations to express Christian thought. It has been shown, for example, that the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess Ēostre came to be used to denote the Christian festival celebrated in the spring.
After the coming of Augustine and Christianity to England in the sixth century, the next great impact on native word stock began during the latter part of the ninth century when Scandinavian peoples started to settle in England. The Anglo-Saxons had fought bitterly against the Viking invaders, but the two groups were related racially and linguistically, similarities which effected the eventual peaceful assimilation of the Scandinavians into English culture. Many of the same words were used by both groups, so that they had relatively little difficulty communicating (2, p. 26, 27). It is, in fact, often difficult to ascertain whether a word is Scandinavian or English in origin. Sometimes a native Old English word was reinforced by its Scandinavian cognate (the preposition till, for example), but often in late Old English or Middle English the native word took on the meaning of its Scandinavian cognate, e.g., dream (1, p. 68).

After the Scandinavian inhabitants effected a change in the vocabulary, the next important influence on the native word stock was the Norman Conquest, the impact of which has already been mentioned. During the period 1250 to 1400 many native words were displaced, and those which remained often degraded (e.g., churl, stool) or shifted to other denotations (e.g., dizzy, giddy, lord) when new French words (e.g., foolish, master) were introduced.
These foreign language influences have had a profound effect on native English word stock. Today Anglo-Saxon words name basic, concrete objects, having relegated the more abstract denotations to foreign word derivations. In addition to these current meanings, however, many of the former senses of Old English words survive in literature. Sometimes it is difficult to ascertain when a word changed its meaning; several senses may have been in use concurrently as is the case of Early Modern English *sad*, which meant both "serious" and "mournful."

Another consideration in the study of semantic change in native words is functional shift. Sometimes an OE noun, such as *crop*, formed a verb in Middle English while it kept its function as a noun. Then from this verb a new noun was derived. The ease of functional shift in Modern English is attributable in part to the versatility of Old English, which through functional shift allowed a word to broaden its scope of denotation.

These, then, are some of the major factors affecting the development and change of native word stock. The historical or outer influence on the vocabulary is no less important than the natural linguistic processes of semantic change. Both reveal something about the culture of the people who used the words. Consequently, both history and natural linguistic change determine the meaning of a word at a particular time in its development.
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