

Small Latin and Less Greek

A #WhanThatAprilleDay Pop-up Exhibit

In his eulogy to Shakespeare published in the 1623 First Folio, Ben Jonson praises Shakespeare's literary accomplishments despite his having "small Latine, and lesse Greeke." While Shakespeare puts his Latin and Greek to use in many of his plays and sonnets, he is better known for his innovative use of the English language. Shakespeare turned nouns into verbs (*grace, proverbbed, season, uncle*), created compounds (*canker-sorrow, faire-play, ore-look'd, pell-mell*), added prefixes and suffixes (*courtship, dauntless, disgraceful, employment, pedantical, revolting, uneducated, unrivaled, unsullied*), and his works were the first to record such words as 'laughable,' 'eventful,' 'accommodation' and 'lack-lustre'. Shakespeare's lexical inventions were a part of an early modern trend which led to 10,000-25,000 new words being introduced to the English language between 1500 and 1700.

During this same period, debate arose about the stature of the English language. Was English a suitable medium for literary and scholastic works? Could the lexicon express (re)discovered concepts in the arts and sciences were flooding into England as part of a Humanist education and the increased circulation of printed text? Would it be better to just borrow terms from Latin and Greek? Such debate became known as the Inkhorn Controversy, named after the inkhorn out of which borrowed words were metaphorically drawn.

"Inkhorn terms" or "Inkhornisms" were either borrowed words or those "englished" from Latin or Greek roots. These terms were long and polysyllabic with an extravagant flair; whereas, "Saxon" (i.e., English) words were shorter and monosyllabic with a simple style. Consider these examples: *aspectable/visible, contemplate/think, oppugnancy/hatred, splenditious/rich*. Those in favor of preserving the "Saxon" style suggested coining new words out of existing English words (such as Sir John Cheke's *biwordes* 'parables,' and *gainrising* 'resurrection') or reviving archaic words (such as Edmund Spenser's *accoy* 'appease' and *underfong* 'received'). These purists and archaizers were often bitterly opposed to those who favored borrowing (neologizers) foreign terms to enrich the English language.

Small Latin and Less Greek brings together many of the writers and texts involved in the Inkhorn Controversy, illustrating not only the various early modern opinions about the English language but also showcasing some of the inkiest words penned in early modern England.



Look, but do not touch. Because of their age and condition, the materials on display require special handling by staff only. Thank you!

Items Displayed:

Whan that Aprill with his shouris sote and the droughte of marche hath p[er]cid þe rote...

(The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer)

[Westminster]: [William Caxton], [1477]

Folger call number: STC 5082

The boke named the Gouvernour, deuised by s[ir] Thomas Elyot knight.

Londini: In edibus Tho. Bertheleti, An. d[omi]ni M.D.xxxi. [1531]

Folger call number: STC 7635

The arte of rhetoric: for the vse of all suche as are studious of eloquence, sette forth in English, by Thomas Wilson.

[[London]: Richardus Graftonus, typographus regius excudebat], Anno Domini. M. D. LIII. [1553]

Mense Ianuarij.

Folger call number: STC 25799

The arte of reason, rightly termed, witcraft: teaching a perfect way to argue and dispute. Made by Raphe Leuer. Seene and allowed according to the order appointed in the Queenes Maiesties iniunctions.

Imprinted at London: By H. Bynneman, dwelling in Knightrider streate, at the signe of the Mermayde.

Anno. 1573

Folger call number: STC 15541

Londinum feracissimi Angliae Regni metropolis [cartographic material]

[Cologne]: [Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg], [1574]

Folger call number: MAP L85b no.27

The first part of the elementarie: vvhich entreateth chefelie of the right writing of our English tung, set furth by Richard Mulcaster.

Imprinted at London: By Thomas Vautroullier dwelling in the blak-friers by Lud-gate, 1582

Folger call number: STC 18250 copy 2

The shepheardes calender: conteining twelue aeglogues proportionable to the twelue monethes.

Imprinted at London: By Iohn Wolfe for Iohn Harrison the yonger, dwelling in Pater noster Roe, at the signe of the Anker, 1586

Folger call number: STC 23901

The arte of English poesie. Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament.

At London: Printed by Richard Field, dwelling in the black-Friers, neere Ludgate, 1589

Folger call number: STC 20519 copy 1

A pleasant conceited comedie called, Loues labors lost. As it vvas presented before her Highnes this last Christmas. Newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespere.

Imprinted at London: By W[illiam] W[hite] for Cutbert Burby, 1598

Folger call number: STC 22294 copy 1

The vvorkes of our ancient and learned English poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly printed. To that which was done in the former impression, thus much is now added. 1 In the life of Chaucer many things inserted. 2 The whole worke by old copies reformed. 3 Sentences and prouerbes noted. 4 The signification of the old and obscure words prooued: also caracters shewing from what tongue or dialect they be deriued. 5 The Latine and French, not Englished by Chaucer, translated. 6 The treatise called Iacke Vpland, against friers: and Chaucers A.B.C. called La priere de nostre Dame, at this impression added.

London : Printed by Adam Islip, an. Dom. 1602

Folger call number: STC 5080 copy 3 (flat)

The English dictionarie: or, An interpreter of hard English vvords. Enabling as well ladies and gentlewomen, young schollers, clarkes, merchants, as also strangers of any nation, to the vnderstanding of the more difficult authors already printed in our language, and the more speedy attaining of an elegant perfection of the English tongue, both in reading, speaking and writing. Being a collection of the choisest words contained in the Table alphabeticall and English expositor, and of some thousands of words neuer published by any heretofore. By H.C. Gent.

London: Printed [by Eliot's Court Press] for Edmund Weauer, and are to be sold at his shop at the great north gate of Pauls Church, 1623

Folger call number: STC 5461.2

Glossographia: or A dictionary, interpreting all such hard vvords, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Teutonick, Belgick, British or Saxon; as are now used in our refined English tongue. Also the terms of divinity, law, physick, mathematicks, heraldry, anatomy, war, musick, architecture; and of several other arts and sciences explicated. With etymologies, definitions, and historical observations on the same. Very useful for all such as desire to understand what they read. By T.B. of the Inner-Temple, Barrester.

London: Printed by Tho. Newcomb, and are to be sold by Humphrey Moseley, at the Prince's Arms in St Pauls Church-yard, and George Sawbridge at the Bible in Ludgate-hil, 1656

Folger call number: B3334

The nevv vvorld of vvords. Or a general English dictionary. Containing the proper significations, and etymologies of all words derived from other languages, viz. Hebrew, Arabick, Syriack, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Brittish, Dutch, Saxon, &c. ... The fourth edition. Containing besides an addition of several thousand words in the above-mentioned terms, a brief view of the most eminent persons of the ancients, ... With an appendix of several words thought fit to be added &c. As also a collection of such affected or barbarous words as are advis'd to be cautiously or not at all us'd. ... Collected and published by E.P.

London: Printed by W.R. for Obadiah Blagrove at the Bear in St. Pauls Church-yard, near the little North door, 1678

Folger call number: P2072

Epigram by David Garrick on Johnson's English dictionary [manuscript], 1755.

Folger call number: Y.d.124, fol. 6

Words correctly spoken: short familiar talks with friends "Out West" by Elroy M. Avery, Ph.D.

Cleveland, Ohio: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1887

Folger call number: Sh.Misc. 530

Small Latin and Less Greek is a pop-up exhibition curated for the fifth annual #WhanThatAprilleDay—a Twitter holiday begun by Chaucer Doth Tweet (@LeVostreGC) to celebrate “oold, middel, ancient, and archaique” languages and remind “folk of the beautye and grete lovelinesse of studying the wordes of the past.” Thank you for joining us in this celebration!

**Don't forget to share your comments on social media using
#WhanThatAprilleDay19 and #FolgerFinds!**