WORDS IN TIME

A Social History of the English Vocabulary

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Words of Conquest and Status: The Semantic Legacy of the Middle Ages

> A Knight ther was, and that a worthy man,
> That fro the time that he first began
> To riden out, he loved chivalrye,
> Trouthe and honoure, fredom and curteisye.
>
> Chaucer

> The age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded.
>
> Burke

ONE of the 'givens' of the Middle Ages is that it was an Age of Faith. The great physical constructs, such as the cathedrals, and the no less impressive architecture of the mind, such as the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas and Dante's *Divina Commedia*, were all created within an explicit religious framework. Today man's great achievements are technical, secular and commercial: only one cathedral has been built in England in the last century (Liverpool), while in the past twenty years or so over a thousand churches have been demolished, reflecting the slow decline of several Christian denominations, notably the Anglican.[1] Ours is an age of doubt, scepticism, even cynicism. Religious authority figures do not excite their previous awe: kings, emperors and dictators are no longer meaningfully excommunicated or anathematized.

With the secularization of society, and the accompanying rise of individualism and materialism, there has been a reflective shift in key value-terms. The traditional canon of the Seven Deadly Sins has, for example, undergone a revealing alteration. (They are, or were: *Pride*, *Wrath*, *Envy*, *Lust*, *Gluttony*, *Avarice* and *Sloth*.) One is immediately struck by the interesting fact that expressions of popular culture such as pulp fiction,

television soap-operas and the majority of advertisements one encounters nowadays amount to endorsements, blatant or latent, of precisely these qualities, with the sole exception of *Wrath*.

Under the modern ethos of conspicuous consumption, a form of competitive materialism, these traditional vices are becoming desirable and respectable. As this happens, so the terms in question will develop more favourable connotations, undergoing **amelioration**. *Pride* obviously does not carry the same negative connotations that it used to: it has also become strongly politicized as an expression of individual and racial assertion. Its cousin *Vanity* is now entirely acceptable in the form of feminine accoutrements such as the *vanity bag*, *vanity case*, *vanity basin* and so on.

Though *Wrath*, or its modern equivalent *Anger*, will always be too disruptive to become respectable, it is no longer regarded as something absolutely vicious or opprobrious. The notion of justifiable anger, the right to lose one's temper under extreme provocation, is now accepted. And public spectacles of anger, such as those increasingly witnessed in the arenas of politics and sport, no longer receive total condemnation: indeed, they are often publicized and relished as exhibitions of *aggro*. It seems significant that an orgy of mafia vengeance in a work of fiction should have given us the modern sense of *godfather*.

With the growth of the ethos of conspicuous consumption, *Covetousness* or *Avarice* and *Envy* have become almost respectable as the driving forces of competitive materialism. 'Keeping up with – or ahead of – the neighbours' has become a full-time occupation in which consumers willingly participate in 'pecuniary emulation' (Veblen, 1970, p. 71).

Gluttony and *Lust*, in former times regarded as deadly to the soul, are increasingly assumed under the mode of 'the good life'. The ascetic imperative of medieval times has given way to the hedonistic imperative of our own. This takes the various forms of the blow-out, the carvery, the calorific challenge to 'Eat as much as you like for £$', or the sensual self-indulgence of sporting in the sauna, frolicking in the jacuzzi, having an affair or a fling (to add spice to one's marriage) or comparing orgasms with the columnists and 'researchers' of the women's magazines. The sex manual has replaced the spiritual manual, which advocated mortification of the flesh rather than its excitation. (Catalogues of firearms, it might be noted, are now called Gun *Bibles*.) Sexual therapy has, of course, made *Lust* into one of the mainsprings of the 'good sex life', and though the term has not shaken off all its negative connotations, it is fast doing so.

Finally, *Sloth*, *Idleness* (or *Accidie* in medieval times) has acquired the

curious high status accorded by the work-ethic to those who can afford to do nothing. This development is reflected in the enormous ramifications of the leisure industry, and by the ultimate ambition of those in the 'rat race' to retire early and become 'gentlemen (or ladies) of leisure'. The replacement of the old term *recreation* by *relaxation* is also revealing. *Fun* in Middle English related to stupidity.

The generally archaic tone of several of the Sins is, of course, a reflection of their increasing desuetude. The same is partly true of the Cardinal Virtues (*Faith*, *Hope*, *Charity*, *Prudence*, *Justice*, *Fortitude* and *Temperance*). Here one notes that *Justice* has become politicized, while *Temperance* has never recovered from the fanaticism of Prohibition to become a term of general morality. Other terms which have been largely displaced from their central spiritual significance are *soul* (now mainly associated with artistic temperament and music), *damanation*, *salvation*, *purgatory* and *hell*. *Sin* is most commonly encountered in the phrase *living in sin*. If the popular press is to be believed, one pursuit exclusive to the upwardly mobile is Satanism.

In undertaking an enterprise of the scope of this chapter, one needs at the outset a description, at once cogent, accurate and panoramic, of the major social developments of English society during the past millennium. Few accounts, I suggest, would be able to rival the almost nonchalant brilliance of de Tocqueville's summation of French social history in the opening pages of his classic of 1835–40, *Democracy in America*. Unlike many social theorists and historians (who tend to claim objectivity for their insights) de Tocqueville anticipated his own prejudices by making the illuminating distinction between historians writing in aristocratic ages, who are inclined to attribute all occurrences to individual influence, and those writing in democratic ages, who 'assign great general causes to all petty incidents' (1863, vol. II, p. 79). In terms of his own distinction, de Tocqueville's thesis is essentially that of a 'democratic' historian, his argument delineating a broad evolutionary social dynamic of liberation. Though it is primarily concerned with developments in France from feudal times onwards, de Tocqueville's description provides a suitable model for parallel changes in England. At the time of the Norman Conquest, de Tocqueville explains,

> the territory was divided among a small number of families, who were the owners of the soil and the rulers of the inhabitants . . . force was the only means that man could act on man; and landed property was the sole source of power.
>
> Soon, however, the political power of the clergy was founded, and

began to assert itself; the clergy opened its ranks to all classes, to the poor and the rich, the villein and the lord; equality penetrated into the government through the church, and the being who, as a serf, must have vegetated in perpetual bondage, took his place as priest in the midst of nobles, and not unfrequently above the heads of kings.

[In time] the want of civil laws was felt; and the order of legal functionaries soon arose from the obscurity of the tribunals and their dusty chambers, to appear at the court of the monarch, by the side of the feudal barons in their ermine and their mail.

While the kings were ruining themselves by their great enterprises, and the nobles exhausting their resources by private wars, the lower orders were enriching themselves by commerce. The influence of money began to be perceptible in state affairs. The transactions of business opened a new road to power, and the financier rose to a station of political influence in which he was at once flattered and despised.

Gradually the spread of mental acquirements, and the increasing taste for literature and art, opened chances of success to talent; science [knowledge] became the means of government, intelligence led to social power, and the man of letters took part in the affairs of state.

The value attached to the privileges of birth decreased in the exact proportion in which new paths were struck out to advancement. In the eleventh century [in France] nobility was beyond all price; in the thirteenth it might be purchased; it was conferred for the first time in 1270; and equality was thus introduced into the government by the aristocracy itself. . . .

As soon as the land was held on any other than feudal tenure, and personal property began in its turn to confer influence and power, every improvement which was introduced in commerce or manufacture was a fresh element of the equality of conditions. Henceforward every new discovery, every new want which it engendered, and every new desire which craved satisfaction, was a step toward the universal level. . . .

From the time when the exercise of the intellect became the source of strength and of wealth, it is impossible not to consider every addition to science, every fresh truth, and every new idea as a germe of power placed within the reach of the people. Poetry, eloquence, and memory, the grace of wit, the glow of imagination, the depth of thought, and all the gifts which are bestowed by Providence with an equal hand, turned to the advantage of democracy. . . .

In perusing the pages of our history, we shall scarcely meet with a single great event, in the lapse of seven hundred years, which has not turned to the advantage of equality.

The crusades and the wars of the English [*sic*] decimated the nobles, and divided their possessions; the erection of communes introduced an element of democratic liberty into the bosom of feudal monarchy; the invention of firearms equalised the villein and the noble on the field of

battle; printing opened the same resources to the minds of all classes; the post was organised so as to bring the same information to the door of the poor man's cottage and to the gate of the palace; and protestantism proclaimed that all men are alike able to find the road to heaven. The discovery of America offered a thousand new paths to fortune, and placed riches and power within the reach of the adventurous and the obscure....

Nor is this phenomenon at all peculiar to France. Whithersoever we turn our eyes, we shall discover the same continual revolution throughout the whole of Christendom.

(1863, vol. I, pp. 2–4)

The breadth, brilliance and acuteness of de Tocqueville's description are arresting. However, the 'providential' certainty of equality is now obviously questionable, in the light of the manifestations of despotic fascism in Germany and Italy during this century, and of post-colonial and post-revolutionary tyranny in Russia, China and Africa. In fairness to de Tocqueville, it must be conceded that the most potent modes of social control, such as broadcasting, were undeveloped when he was writing, and little was known about crowd psychology and propaganda.

The flaw in assuming, as de Tocqueville does, that 'the gradual development of the equality of conditions ... possesses all the characteristics of a divine decree' (1863, vol. I, p. 6), is that it presupposes genuine freedom and equality of opportunity, if not ability. Obviously, printing and firearms become egalitarian instruments only insofar as access to both is equal. The totalitarian regime, which achieves power largely by the monopoly of both, is not envisaged in de Tocqueville's description. And even in a capitalist democracy considerable finance is needed to reach the majority of the population for any persuasive purpose. It is notably ironic that de Tocqueville should argue that 'printing opened the same resources to the minds of all classes', naively assuming this to be an educative, liberating process, for this description, if given a cynical twist, would suit very well for propaganda or advertising imposed on the mass by an oligarchy.

It can certainly be shown, by way of corroboration of de Tocqueville's essential thesis, that the main semantic trend with which we shall be concerned is that of **generalization**. This reflects, in various ways, the broadening use of words which used to have specific meanings in the hierarchy of power. As we shall see, the trend is evidenced, variously, in the **moralization of status words** (such as *gentle* and *noble*); the **secularization of religious words** (such as *office* or *sanction*); the **democratization of status words** (such as *freedom* and *largesse*), and the **moralization of learning words** (evidenced in *lewd* and *brilliant*).

Generalization is also common in the **monetarization of transactional terms** (such as *fee* and *purchase*), which are the focus of the next chapter.

It must, however, be conceded that de Tocqueville's kind of thesis – of dynamic social evolution – though highly favoured today, does not hold the field alone. A noted American medievalist, D. W. Robertson, Jr., has been prominent in asserting that the medieval social order existed in 'quiet hierarchies' (Robertson, 1963, p. 51), and that it was only towards the close of the period (i.e., near the Renaissance) that those hierarchies started to break up. This traditional view, which sees the Middle Ages as basically static, has been questioned by progressively detailed studies which tend to support dynamic or evolutionary interpretations of the period, showing change in virtually every field, or rather, every furrow: social, political, literary, economic, agricultural, technological, demographic and even dietetic. Historians of recent years consider the potentially revolutionary effects of the stirrup, the horseshoe, the heavy plough and amino-acids.

Change has become ingrained in our thinking, as the semantic history of a word like *condition* shows. Though the *Human Condition* (recorded from *c.* 1814[S]) continues as a cliché resonating a vague, permanent pessimism, behaviourism has suggested, if not demonstrated, that people can be conditioned no less than air. The dominant early sense of the noun *condition*, 'mode or state of being', dates from *c.* 1340[O], but has slowly given way to less permanent notions of mental and psychological states. Previously, one *changed one's condition* primarily by getting married; now it is assumed that virtually any condition can be altered by *conditioning* or therapy. The verbal sense, dating from *c.* 1494[O], is mainly concerned in its earlier stages with making conditions in a political sense; the more drastic modern sense, 'to teach or accustom (a person or animal) to adopt certain habits' is recorded from *c.* 1909[S].

The violent upheavals of 1381, collectively known as the Peasants' Revolt, suggest that the notion of 'quiet hierarchies' is a projection itself, one sustained not so much by absence as by suppression of evidence. In these insurrections the traditional 'silent majority'[2] become vociferously angry and subversive. The evidence takes the form of the chronicles, which range from the clearly biased, such as that of Walsingham, to the occasionally deficient, such as that of Knighton,[3] and of a more substantial body of suggestive legal evidence in charters and statutes showing the growth of an acquisitive, competitive, profit-oriented ethos occasioned by the labour shortages brought about by the ravages of the Black Death (1348–9).

The most important of these documents is the Statute of Labourers

(1351), which aimed to keep wages down by forcing all able-bodied men to work at the wage-rates of 1346. The preamble speaks with overt hostility of 'the malice of servants who were idle and unwilling to serve after the pestilence without taking outrageous wages'. A Sumptuary Ordinance of 1363 sought to diminish unseemly displays of affluence by commoners through minute regulations for the apparel for all ranks. The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and especially of 1381, made necessary by the disastrous progress of the war with France, 'precipitated the riots (particularly in Essex) which led to a general revolt'.[4] 'Tax has tenet us alle' ('tax has destroyed us all'), wrote the unknown author of an English poem on the rising. A petition of 1354 against foreign merchants, and a notice of 1355 against armourers 'attempting to sell all kinds of armour . . . at too excessive a price . . .' (Hughes, 1918, p. 171) both indicate the profit motive starting to take hold.

Within the Church the spirit of reform is evidenced in the rise of Lollardy, certainly aided by a general animosity towards ecclesiastical sinecurism; the establishment accordingly united to institute acts against this splinter-group, 'seeing that the ship of the church was daily being endangered by the incessant force of these and innumerable other horrors and unspeakable opinions . . .' (Hughes, 1918, p. 201). Charles Muscatine summarizes the state of ecclesiastical confusion:

> The century begins with the captivity of the papacy at Avignon and ends with the Great Schism, in which Europe was treated to the spectacle of two popes excommunicating and making war on each other. The virtual destruction of the papacy as a spiritual force is only the symptom, however, of general decline in ecclesiastical prestige.
>
> (Muscatine, 1972, p. 20)

The payment of dues to Rome occasioned angry protests tinged with xenophobia. This complaint (of 1376) against the Pope and cardinals is typical in its sarcastic indignation: 'Be it considered that God has committed His sheep to our Holy Father to be fed, not to be shorn. . . .' John Ball, a Lollard preacher, questioned the whole economic and moral basis of tithes, and gave an old religious saw a strong political twist by asking one of his huge audiences:

> Whanne Adam dalfe and Eve span
> Who was thanne a gentil man?

In short, it becomes quite clear that in fourteenth-century England, at any rate, the 'quiet hierarchies' are experiencing some turmoil within themselves and are in obvious conflict with each other.

REGISTER AND CHARACTER IN CHAUCER

For the purposes of this study, the period is very much the 'Age of Chaucer and Langland', because without their verbal skill, social observation and moral sensitivity, it would be difficult to sustain even a limited thesis relating semantic change and social change in the Middle English period. One of the most remarkable achievements of this period is the linguistic subtlety of Chaucer's portraits in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Given the fact that there were no dictionaries at all, let alone those which concentrate on etymology or dialect, it is quite astonishing how Chaucer deploys the semantic strata of the language to create characters out of contrasting registers. The oafish Miller, for example, is created, not simply defined, in all his dense muscularity in a profusion of old, rude, unpolished, powerfully monosyllabic Saxon and Norse words 'as deep as England':[5]

> *The Millere was a* stout *carl for the nones,*
> *Ful big he was of* brawn *and eek of bones;*
> *That proved wel, for overal ther he cam,*
> *At wrastling he wolde have alwey the ram.*
> *He was short-sholdred, brood, a thicke knarre;*
> *Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre,*
> *Or breke it at a renning with his heed.*
>
> (ll. 545–51)

Even the French borrowings, *stout* and *brawn*, are lacking in refinement and harmonize perfectly in such knotted and gnarled native company. Against this portrait, which contains nearly 100 per cent 'native content', one could hardly imagine, but Chaucer did, a more extraordinary contrast than this, the absurdly affected pseudo-French Prioress:

> And sikerly she was of greet *desport,*
> And ful *plesaunt* and *amiable* of *port,*
> And *peyned* hir to *countrefete cheere*
> Of *court,* and to been *digne* of *reverence.*
> She was so *charitable* and so *pitous*
> She wolde wepe if that she saugh a mous
> Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
>
> (ll. 137–45)

Madame Eglentine is as ridiculously over-refined as the Miller is comically coarse, and so Chaucer has created her entirely in the language of Frenchified cliché, an idiom which is starting to sound rather passé in the 1390s when French, no longer the language of power, is starting to go

out of fashion. Bearing in mind the general statistic that Chaucer's language contains an average of 12 per cent French borrowing, the rise to near 40 per cent in parts of this portrait is very pointed. Chaucer is particularly adept at revealing the corruption or worldliness of the Church by studiedly placing religious terms in incongruous or absurd contexts. In this passage *reverence* is mistakenly thought to derive from a grand social manner (*estatliche of manere*), while *charitable* and *pitous* are applied, not to human suffering, but – absurdly – to the mouse caught in a trap. Without realizing it, the Prioress shows the worst failing known to those who aspire to be fashionable: she is out of date. The re-establishment of English in the fourteenth century is well documented, so that the cultivation of a parochial form of French (*after the scole of Stratford atte Bowe*) would be seen as a splendidly ridiculous affectation.[6]

In the context of these two portraits, that of Chaucer's ideal Knight gains added verbal and moral significance, for it is a balanced blend of Saxon solidity and French *courtoisie*, of what Anthony Burgess once memorably termed 'the North Sea and the Mediterranean':

> A Knight ther was, and that a worthy man,
> That from the time that he first began
> To riden out, he loved *chivalrie*,
> Trouthe and *honoure*, fredom and *curteisye*.
>
> .   .   .   .
>
> He was a *verray, parfit, gentil* knight
> (ll. 43–6; 72)

The balance is preserved in almost every line, but is synthesized most clearly in the qualities of chivalry:

> Trouthe and *honoure*, fredom and *curteisye*.

These three portraits are composed of different strata or vintages of the language. The words of the Miller's portrait have an ancient solidity and force; those of the Prioress's contain the jaded archaism of affectation, while those of the Knight suggest the nostalgic charm of traditional nobility, a fading medieval ideal.

THE LINGUISTIC LEGACY OF THE NORMAN CONQUEST

The Normans, while accommodating many Saxon words of status, largely defined themselves in their own terms. The medieval terminology of rank may be conveniently divided in the following fashion:

Anglo-Saxon	Norman-French
King	
Queen	
	Prince
	Duke
	Marquess
Earl	Countess
Lord	
Lady	
	Viscount
	Baron
Knight	
	Squire
	Franklin
Sheriff	
	Bailiff
Reve	
	Sergeant
Yeoman	
	Page
	Groom
Churl	Villein
	Serf

This layout confers a false clarity on an essentially fluid situation. Several of the terms – notably *baron* – are applied to a confusing variety of people. Some of the titles gain formal recognition only in the fourteenth century, when feudalism was in decline. The title of *duke*, for instance, appears in the English peerage for the first time during the reign of Edward III, and is first conferred upon the Black Prince in 1337. One reason for the confusion was the problem of translation. The *OED* records, in the entry under *duke*: 'From the Conquest till Edward III, *ealdormann* or *eorl* was rendered by *comes*, and *dux*, *duc*, *duk* was known only as a foreign title. Even William and Robert are known to the Old English Chronicle only as "earls" of Normandy.'

In his wonderfully punctilious essay on the Doomsday Book, F. W. Maitland faces almost immediately the problem of the lack of a 'settled and stable scheme of technical terms':

> often enough it is very difficult for us to give just the right meaning to some simple Latin word. If we translate *miles* by *soldier* or *warrior*, this

may be too indefinite; if we translate it by *knight*, this may be too definite, and yet leave open the question of whether we are comparing the *miles* of 1086 with the *cnicht* of unconquered England or with the *knight* of the thirteenth century.

(1965, pp. 30–1)

There is also a political aspect to the instability of terms. The creation of several of the titles must be seen as implying forced recognition after a power-struggle; they are not gratuities granted for services rendered in a stable situation, which is the basic modern convention of the award of titles, whereby civil servants, jockeys and footballers are raised to the peerage by an exercise in regal largesse. One notices that, in general, the lower the term, the less precise its denotation. As Dr Johnson commented, 'What precedence, sir, between a louse and a flea?' Consequently, *baron*, the lowest rank of nobility, was applied indiscriminately, partly as a result of overproduction of the title by Richard II. Likewise, *villeins* and *serfs*, originally quite different, were by the thirteenth century regarded as the same. Indeed, the whole history of the Feudal System is largely one of semantic shifts, complicated and enriched by ancient, regional terms which also obstruct understanding: 'England was already mapped out into **counties**, **hundreds** or **wapentakes** and **vills. Trithings** or **ridings** appear in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, **lathes** in Kent, **rapes** in Sussex, while **leets** appear, at least sporadically, in Norfolk' (Maitland, 1965, p. 32). However, as Maitland puts it, 'These provincial peculiarities we must pass by', since our aim is to relate the development of terms of power and status to social changes.

Even before the arrival of 'Earl' William, the main social developments have their semantic reflections. The decimation of the Celts is given sparse memorial in the dozen or so Celtic words which have managed to survive, excluding, that is, those which are place-names or describe geographical features, such as *avon* ('river'), *dee* ('holy'), *torr* ('hill'), *bryn* ('mountain') and *cumb* or *cwm* ('valley'). The subjection of the human survivors is simply traced in the word *wealh* (the root of *Wales* and the second element of *Cornwall*). In earlier Old English it meant a 'foreigner' or 'Celt', but later deteriorated to take on the sense of 'slave'.[7]

The Viking invasions resulted in some revealing penetrations into the core vocabulary, an enclave which would normally be thought of as unassailable. (King Alfred had attempted, by a futile species of *apartheid*, to confine the Vikings to the Danelaw, an area of England to the East and North of the Watling Street, the old Roman road from London to Chester.) A centrally important word, such as *die* (ON *deyja*) drives the

main native counterpart, *starve* (OE *steorfan*) into the specialization of 'to die of hunger', and *take* (ON *taka*) drives *nim* (OE *niman*) first into dishonest practices, and then into final obscurity.[8] Even more remarkable is the borrowing of the central pronouns *they*, *their* and *them*, which filter into Standard English from the Danelaw, displacing the natives *hie*, *hiera* and *hem*. The Scandinavian borrowings merge easily with the cognate Saxon word-stock, having the same blunt strength: *anger*, *wrong*, *ill*, *ugly*, *meek*, *cast*, *call*, *husband*, *fellow*, *rotten*, *steak*, *knife*, *sky*, *low*, *scream* and *want*. Their unrefined directness and generality place them naturally in the neutral or lower register.

At Hastings the archetypal fear of the Anglo-Saxons, harped upon in their poetry, the fear of being reduced to a *wræcca* or 'wretch', a lordless, destitute exile, became universal reality. 'By 1086 only about eight per cent of the land remained in the hands of the erstwhile Anglo-Saxon aristocracy' (Douglas and Greenaway, 1953, p. 22). Although some strong-minded prelates continued to preach in English, for 300 years the lingua franca ceased to be the language of the law, of court, of parliament, the obvious sources of power and prestige.

Whereas the Scandinavian borrowings are common, 'grass-roots' words, 'many of the French loan words reflect . . . cultural and political dominance' (Barber, 1964, p. 161). They are concerned with administration, law, war, ecclesiastical affairs, the chase, the arts, architecture and fashion. Even the small sample in the columns below attests to their blend of authority and refinement:

crown	*peace*	*religion*	*chase*	*colour*	*costume*	*arch*
court	*battle*	*service*	*scent*	*image*	*garment*	*tower*
power	*arms*	*saint*	*falcon*	*design*	*apparel*	*vault*
authority	*siege*	*miracle*	*quarry*	*beauty*	*dress*	*column*
parliament	*enemy*	*clergy*	*forest*	*music*	*train*	*transept*
government	*armour*	*sacrifice*	*retrieve*	*romance*	*petticoat*	*cloister*

The supremacy in the field of architecture is impressive, not only in the technical terms mentioned above but in those denoting large or aristocratic structures: *palace*, *mansion*, *chapel*, *manor* and *castle*. The dominance in sophisticated food terms, already alluded to in the 'cow/beef' distinction in chapter 1, is charmingly illustrated in this medieval recipe for *Oystres in gravey*:

Take *almondes*, and *blanche* hem, and grinde hem, and drawe hem thorgh a *streynour* with wyne, and with goode fressh broth into gode mylke, and

sette hit on the fire and lete *boyle*; and caste therto *Maces*, *clowes*, *Sugur*, *pouder* of *Ginger*, and faire *parboyled oynons mynced*; And then take faire *oystres*, and *parboyle* hem togidre in faire water; And then caste hem thereto; And lete hem *boyle* togidre til they ben ynowe; and *serve* hem forth for gode *potage*.[9]

The vocabulary of law is especially revealing. With the exceptions of the Norse borrowings *law*, *by-law*, and *thrall*, the Norman dominance is overwhelming: *justice*, *judge*, *jury*, *court*, *suit*, *sue*, *plaintiff*, *defendant*, *felony*, *crime*, *fee*, *assize*, *session*, *damage*, and the distinctively inverted phrases *real estate*, *fee simple*, *letter patent* and *attorney general*. The movement of these two classes of borrowings is traced in the following way by C. L. Barber (1964, p. 162): 'French words tended to penetrate *downwards* in society, whereas the Scandinavian words came in on the ground floor.'

As the scheme at the beginning of this section makes clear, the Normans 'borrowed' the titles of *king*, *queen*, *lord* and *lady*, but they imported almost the whole vocabulary of power, as has just been demonstrated. They thus defined themselves in their own terms, as is often the case in the semantics of colonialism. The strong cultural separation between conqueror and conquered is reflected in a fairly clear separation of registers. The Anglo-Saxon term *eorl* is virtually unique in that it received promotion with translation to *earl*, replacing French *count*. This might have been because the Normans recognized in the English term an echo of their Old Norse title *jarl*, a viceroy, or – more speculatively – because they wished to avoid the disparaging associations of *cunt*, first recorded in *c.* 1230[S] in the startlingly direct London name *Gropecuntlane*.[10]

THE MORALIZATION OF STATUS-WORDS

C. S. Lewis formulated this, a most conspicuous semantic development of the Middle English period, in that work of the last years of his life, *Studies in Words* (1960, p. 7). The phrase sums up the process whereby words such as *noble* and *villain* change from being terms denoting rank to terms which are evaluative of moral conduct. Together with *noble* (recorded from *c.* 1225[O]) are its familiar associates, *gentle* (also from *c.* 1225[O]), *frank* (*c.* 1300[O]), *free* (*c.* 900[O]) and *liberal* (*c.* 1375[O]). One notes that *gentle* and *noble* emphasize initially the positives of 'good standing' and 'good breeding', whereas *free* (the only Saxon term), *frank* and *liberal* are, initially, more negative in definition, meaning, respectively,

'not in bondage', 'not in serfdom' and 'of the arts and sciences, worthy of a free man, as opposed to servile or mechanical'[O].

Contrariwise, words which originally denoted inferior social status become terms of moral disapproval. These are more numerous and include *villain*, *knave*, *blackguard*, *wretch*, *slave*, *churl*, and the adjectives *lewd* and *uncouth*. The majority of these are Saxon terms, a fact which in itself would accelerate their post-Conquest deterioration. They now smack of literary archaism, or have an aristocratic flavour, whereas *gentle*, *frank*, etc., are still in general use.

Of the older terms, perhaps only *wretch* (A-S *wræcca*) originally carried very obvious moral implications, since the state of being an exile or outcast was probably the consequence of some heinous action. *Knave* (A-S *cnapa*, *cnafa*, 'a male child', from *c.* 900[O]) and *churl* (A-S *ceorl*, a general term of 'man' from *c.* 900[O], but capable in Old English of a great variety of meanings including 'hero' and 'prince'), both declined with the status of the Saxons. In fact, the aristocratic associations of *ceorl* did not prevent the word from becoming the invariable translation in the Anglo-Saxon laws of Latin *villanus* (one attached to a villa or farmhouse). Furthermore, the fact that the word echoed the aristocratic *eorl* meant that its antithetical associations were intensified in the rhyming formulas *eorl and ceorl*, *eorlisc and ceorlisc*, which are common in Old English. *Villain* and its variant form *villein* derive from OF *vilein*, ultimately Latin *villanus*, mentioned above. *Villain*, 'a low-born, base-minded rustic', as it is revealingly defined in the *OED*, is recorded from *c.* 1303, marginally earlier than *villein*, 'one of the serfs of the feudal system', recorded from *c.* 1325[O].

The breakdown of feudalism did not – as might have been expected – arrest the impulse to attribute bad moral quality to an individual on the basis of status. The trend toward deterioration is continued by *blackguard*: 'the lowest menials of a household' from *c.* 1535[O], followed by 'the vagabond loafing criminal class' from *c.* 1683[O]. *Lackey*, or *lacquey* (an Old French term for a footsoldier), takes the sense of 'a footman, a running footman' from *c.* 1529[O] but acquires its modern opprobrious sense, 'a servilely obsequious follower, a toady', from *c.* 1588[O]. In the case of *scullion*, recorded from *c.* 1483[O], the abusive and the denotative senses are not easily separated, though the abusive are fairly well established by the late sixteenth century. *Slave*, from Latin *Sclavus*, a *Slav*, is a denotative term from *c.* 1290[O], but acquires its contemptuous sense from *c.* 1521[O]. *Vassal*, fourteenth-century in origin, follows suit *c.* 1589[O]. Here we may quote the observations of Stephen Ullmann, an authority in the field of semantics, on the pejorative associations of captivity:

The semantic ramifications of Latin *captivus* may serve to illustrate this. Starting from the idea of captivity, this word has acquired unfavourable meanings in various languages though not in all: Spanish *cautivo* still means 'prisoner'. In French it has become *chétif* 'weak, sickly, poor, miserable'; the connecting link was the idea of a man dominated and weakened by his passions (Bloch-Wartburg). The same associations led to a different result in Italian where *cattivo* means 'bad'. Yet another line of development is found in English *caitiff*, of Anglo-Norman origin, which is now archaic and poetical. This has evolved through three stages: 1. 'a captive, a prisoner'; 2. 'one in a piteous case'; 3. 'a base, mean, despicable wretch, a villain'.   (Ullmann, 1962, pp. 231–2)

The semantic evidence reinforces the association between captivity and alleged immorality. A much earlier example, *wealh*, also shows this tendency.[11]

It emerges that the breakdown of feudalism intensified the process of deterioration in words applied to those of lower station. Service, being no longer an obligation, became a disgrace. The more thoroughly it was pursued, the more assiduously it was offered, the more it was despised. The process is continued in the deterioration of *servile* from *c.* 1526°, and of *obsequious* from *c.* 1602°. (Both words had previously had neutral senses of the kind Johnson recorded in his definition of *obsequious* as 'obedient; compliant; not resisting'.)

On the other side of the coin, the spirit of free-enterprise capitalism, which in large measure led to the breakdown of feudalism, contributed to the amelioration of *free*, *frank*, *liberal* and *generous* by stressing magnanimity in material terms as 'bounty' or 'munificence'. (*Free* has this sense of personal generosity recorded from *c.* 1300; *liberal* from *c.* 1387; *frank* from *c.* 1484 and *generous* from *c.* 1623°.)

That moral worth and social status are inextricably intertwined in the idiom of English should not come as a surprise to anyone who has reflected, even casually, on the numerous phrases involving *high*, *great*, *low* and *base*. But how is this important semantic development to be interpreted? Is the moralization of status-words reflected in fact? Is it a cynical reinforcement of class-distinction in altered terms? Is it a reflection of the breakdown of feudalism as a result of economic pressures from below?

The answers, if answers there be, are extremely complex. In such involved sociolinguistic developments, the catalysts of change are sometimes not explicit in their presence, which makes their subsequent detection the more difficult. The simplest explanation, that moralization was reflected in fact, is basically that advanced by Owen Barfield: 'That

the Feudal System had an educative value and played its part in creating modern ideals of conduct is suggested by such words as *honest*, *kind* and *gentle*, which at first meant simply "of good birth or position" and only later acquired during the Middle Ages their later and lovelier meanings' (1954, p. 51). To this argument one might reply, using the other side of the semantic evidence, that the Feudal System manifestly did *not* have an educative function (of a beneficent kind) since the *villeins*, the *ceorls*, the *lǽwed* and the *uncuþ* became, apparently, morally worse. Furthermore, the behaviour of magnates in the medieval period is reflected in the early semantic history of *danger*. Old French *dangier* is derived from Latin *dominium*, 'power', 'authority', which is the basic sense of ME *daunger*. The high-handed and lawless behaviour of those in power effected the shift to the modern sense of 'liability or exposure to harm or injury', first recorded in Caxton *c.* 1489°.[12] There is also the 'subversive' idiom *as drunk as a lord*.

C. S. Lewis takes the argument much further, in his characteristically acute and incisive fashion:

> It [moralization] will be diagnosed by many as a symptom of the inveterate snobbery of the human race; and certainly the implications of language are hardly ever egalitarian. But that is not the whole story. Two other factors come in. One is optimism; men's belief, or at least hope, that their social betters [*sic*] will be personally better as well. The other is far more important. A word like *nobility* begins to take on its social–ethical meaning when it refers not simply to a man's status but to the manners and character which are thought to be appropriate to that status. But the mind cannot long consider those manners and that character without being forced on the reflection that they are sometimes lacking in those who are noble by status and sometimes present in those who are not. Thus from the very first the social–ethical meaning, merely by existing, is bound to separate itself from the status-meaning.   (1960, p. 22)

This analysis obviously avoids the oversimplification of Barfield's so-called 'educative' position and takes us to the nub of the matter by prompting the related questions 'Where does this social–ethical meaning derive from?' and 'How can it take root in a word which refers only to status?'

One answer, I suggest, lies in a body of evidence which is usually ignored in these matters: the law. The Anglo-Saxon laws are largely concerned with punishment and show, through the highly developed concept of *wergild*, an equation between a person's status and material value, and a strong correlation between status and implied moral quality:

A twelve hundred man's oath stands for six *ceorl*'s oaths. If a *ceorl* is often accused, and if at last he is taken [in the act], his hand or foot is to be struck off.

If a man of Kent buys property in London, he is to have then two or three honest *ceorls*, or the king's town-reeve, as witness.[13]

It is thus manifestly obvious that although the words *ceorl* and *eorl* had no moral connotation, *eorls* and *ceorls* were not equal in the sight of the law, and that very damaging moral assumptions were made about you if you had the misfortune to be born a *ceorl*. But the corollary of manifest injustice is also present. The more the notion of 'churlish' behaviour is subsumed or written into the law, the more people are going to realize the injustice done to those 'two or three honest churls', and so the divergence between 'status meaning' and 'social–ethical meaning' will grow.

The potential for upward mobility would seem to be a decisive factor in the semantic process under discussion. Once it is possible for people to move from their inherited 'natural' or 'native' station in life, it becomes more reasonable to regard those still in lower stations as objects of criticism. This becomes equally evident in the opprobrium attaching to poverty in capitalist societies, and to illiteracy in literate societies.

All upward mobility amongst the Anglo-Saxons was, of course, cut short at Battle Hill in 1066. As a consequence of the Conquest, the associations of nobility attaching to such native terms as *ðegn* (later *thane*) and *eðel* (nobleman) were extinguished with the words themselves. A separation of registers on the bases of class and race took place, with the Norman terms rising and the Saxon sinking in status. *Villain*, *knave*, *blackguard*, etc., generally deteriorate in terms of conventional morality and though *churl* shows the same basic line of development, it never becomes as morally critical as the other words. *The Children's Book* of 1480 admonishes youth in the most endearingly familiar bourgeois terms: 'Pyke not þyne Eris ne þy nostrellis; if þu do, men wolle sey þou come of cherlis. ["Do not pick your ears or nose; if you do, people will say that you're common."]' Furthermore, the pecuniary gloss added to *free*, *frank* and *liberal* serves to focus the Renaissance development of *churl* on matters of the purse. In Deloney's *Jack of Newberie* (1598) we hear that 'John Winchcombe . . . would spend his money with the best, and was not at any time found a churl of his purse.' The growing power of money and its semantic effects are the theme of the next chapter. However, as has become clear already, the semantic correlatives of this new source of power are very pervasive, and reflect the increasing secularization of society as well as greater social mobility.

THE SECULARIZATION OF RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY

This trend is now so advanced that it seems almost pedantic to point out the religious origins of *sanction*, *sanctuary*, *rubric*, *doctrine*, *propaganda*, *novice*, *incumbent*, *conscientious*, *office*, *lobby*, *asylum*, *cell*, *anathema*, *pittance*, *lesson*, *passion*, *mercy* and many others. The enduring power-struggle between Church and State is shown in the movement of these words, and the process has been, in the past few centuries, largely a one-way trend as the State has taken over from its erstwhile rival establishment numerous terms of ecclesiastical authority and significance. (Secular *holidays*, for instance, now rival or outnumber religious *holy days* in many societies.)[14]

The politicization of religious terms is not solely a matter of secular borrowing (or theft), and must have been influenced by the political character and actions of the medieval church, as well as by the highly secular lives led by many of the clergy. The Papal Schism was political rather than doctrinal in nature, and many of the worldly corruptions within the clergy shown so vividly by Chaucer and Langland were not truly reformed before the Reformation.

It is noteworthy that several terms normally thought of as being exclusively religious are originally borrowings from the secular sphere. *Priest*, for example, is derived from Greek *presbuteros*, 'an elder'; *bishop* originates in Greek *episkopos*, meaning 'an overseer' (the first meaning given in Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* of 1604), and is applied to various civil offices; and the bishop's *diocese* derives from the term used in the Roman Empire for the area of a governor's jurisdiction. Similarly, *ecclesiastical* originates in *ekklesia*, a Greek word for any regularly convoked civil assembly, and *basilica* denotes in Greek a royal palace or hall of justice.

St Augustine and his fellow converters of the British were shrewd enough anthropologists to realize the efficacy of established pagan terms if they were given a new Christian gloss. The festival of *Easter* was accordingly adopted (or rather baptized) from the Spring festival of the pagan fertility goddess *Eastron* or *Eastre*.[15] (The fertility associations still hover round Easter bunnies and Easter eggs, in an admittedly commercialized form.) *Bless*, such a serene, beneficent word, derives – via Anglo-Saxon *bletsian* – from *blot*, 'a bloody sacrifice', for the word had the original sense of 'to mark or sprinkle with blood', a form of sympathetic magic whereby the power of the sacrificed beast was transferred to the faithful. In similar fashion, the archaic word for the Eucharist, *housel* (found centuries later in *Hamlet* I. v. 77) derives from the Anglo-

Saxon term *husl*, 'a sacrifice'. Even the word *god* is distantly rooted in the notion of sacrifice. The names of the days of the week remind us of the pagan roots of our culture: *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday* and *Friday* commemorate the Scandinavian deities Tiw, Woden, Thor and Freyja, respectively, while *Saturday*, *Sunday* and *Monday* recall the classical astronomical deities Saturn, the Sun and the Moon. The Lord's day has remained unconverted, in contradistinction to the style of the 'Catholic' European forms, *domenica*, *dimanche* and so on.

When one moves from the native terms which were converted along with the speakers to the borrowed words which were later secularized, it is often hard to separate the different shades of meaning. For instance, the *Cursor Mundi* (*c.*1300), uses *ransom* in all three major senses, viz., payment for release of a prisoner (in a military context), the figurative sense referring to Christ and his blood, and the action or means of freeing oneself from a penalty. Similarly, with *sanction*, *mystery* and *doctrine*, it is difficult to ascertain whether the secular sense preceded the religious or vice versa. In general, the borrowing of religious terminology by the other estates is a slow process, achieved only after an average of some two centuries of coaxing and encroachment, according to the admittedly simplified record of the dictionary.

The relevant data are set out in figure 2.1, which shows that the process of borrowing was a fairly consistent and steady business, with significant increments around 1400 and 1600. The interesting hiatus between 1650 and 1800, filled mainly by *conscientious* and *enthusiasm*, relates potentially to the growth of Puritanism and the growth of fanatical cults. The tide of borrowing is halted, and only those terms which can be used to reinforce the ethic of conscientious industry are converted. *Dogma* and *propaganda*, both late arrivals dating from the early seventeenth century, are natural candidates for generalization in the nineteenth century, owing to the emergence of the passionate creeds of nationalism and their dissemination.

These two terms remind us of a general trend of deterioration in religious terminology, a tendency which started with the stirrings of the Reformation and has increased ever since. Thus *heresy* was used in a broad critical sense from the fourteenth century, and as the Spanish Inquisition (initiated in 1478) became notorious for its severities in the sixteenth century, so *inquisition* itself became a dreaded word. *Sermon* acquired the sense of a tiresome or boring harangue from *c.*1596[0] (in *The Taming of the Shrew*), while *stigma* started to take on the sense of a mark of opprobrium from *c.*1619[0]. Impatience with religious fanaticism and inflexibility also gave rise to the critical sense of *dogma* (as in 'the grosse

FIGURE 2.1 The secularization of religious terminology

1100	clerk worship
1150	
1200	cell
1250	obedience temptation
1300	mercy faith gospel ransom beg pray reverence
1350	lesson prayer penance
1400	baptism heresy office passion pittance retreat doctrine mystery solemn miracle
1450	schism talent redeem
1500	
1550	devotion creed sanctuary inquisition
1600	adore bless confession rubric stigma tenet sermon
1650	conscientious asylum sanction
1700	enthusiasm cult
1750	recluse
1800	communion dogma hermit crusade
1850	propaganda
1900	
1950	

fanatick Dogmates [dogmas] of the Alcoran', from *c.*1638[0]), with *dogmatic* following suit around half a century later. (The King James Bible had previously warned readers against *dogmatizing*.) The eighteenth century saw *pittance* (originally a 'pious donation'), *crusade* and *cult* follow suit, while the following century added such quasi-religious words as *indoctrinate* (from *c.*1832[0]) and its contemporary *doctrinaire*.

Perhaps the most spectacular decline occurred in the sacred phrase *hoc est corpus*, used in the Eucharist. It emerged *c.*1624[0] in the corrupted form *hocus pocus*, a conjuring formula, explained acerbically by Archbishop Tillotson in 1694 as 'a ridiculous imitation of the priests of the Church of Rome, in their trick of Transubstantiation'[0]. The isolated form *hocus* had a considerable low currency meaning a conjuror or juggler, later becoming a verb for the same activity, and subsequently acquiring the sordid specialization of 'to stupefy with drugs, especially for some criminal purpose'. As the original form receded from recognition, so *hoax* came into being, recorded from *c.*1796[0].

URBANITY AND RUDENESS

'Our courtiers say all's savage but at court.' So says a character in *Cymbeline* (IV. ii. 33), articulating with clear irony a prevailing polarization between town and country, one which makes itself felt from late

medieval times onwards. The tide of popular preference for these contrasting locales has alternated through history. Dunbar wrote around 1500 of London, in almost stilted aureate terms, as 'Gemme of all joy, jasper of jocunditie'. Blake's poem *London* (1794) depicts a nightmarish den of alienation, exploitation and misery, the begetter of the *slum* (recorded from *c.* 1825[O]) and the *ghetto*, a more complex term in its racial shifts since its origins in Venice. The main demographic development of the medieval period is the rise of towns and this has produced – predictably – its semantic correlatives.

Originally 'the country' was unsafe, so that the *burg* or *burh* (later *borough*) related to A-S *beorgan*, 'to defend', was generally 'a stronghold', a place in which private safety was ensured by communal defence. (Today, the situation is largely reversed, with *vigilantes* and *neighbourhood watch* guarding against or avenging *muggings* and the multifarious forms of *inner city* crime in the *concrete jungle*.) A law of 1285, the Statute of Westminster, ordained that roads should be widened and cleared within a range of 200 feet on either side by the destruction of bushes and trees so that there should be no cover for robbers lying in ambush. It commanded that the gates of walled cities be closed all night, and gave a generally perilous picture of life at the time. The *curfew*, now invoked in special emergencies and states of martial law, was then *de rigueur*, meaning simply a precaution against fire, from the Norman etymology *couvre feu*. In time the *burgh* became a centre for commerce, and special privileges were often conferred by royal charter. This was the status of the *borough* by *c.* 1380. Xenophobia and economic competition led to restrictive legislation against 'foreign' traders and correspondingly protected *denizens*, i.e., those who lived 'in the city', derived from OF *deinz la cité*.

The polarization of civic urbanity and rustic rudeness is already established by the fourteenth century. Clear disparagement rings through Ranulf Higden's comment on the 'uppishness' of 'Vplondisshe men [Latin *rurales homines*] who wil likne himself to gentil men, and fonde wiþ gret besynesse for to speke Frensce, for to be [more] i-tolde of.' ('Country bumpkins, pretending to class, will make absurd efforts to speak French, in order to be more respected'), from John of Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Polychronicon* (1387, vol. II, p. 159). *Civil* gains in force and range through the sixteenth century, to be joined *c.* 1623[O] by *urbane* ('having the manners, refinement, polish, regarded as characteristic of a town'[O]). *Civilization* is a comparatively late formation from the Latin root *civis*, emerging in the late eighteenth century and excluded by Johnson from even the fourth edition of his *Dictionary*. The word's association with the city now seems ironic.

These semantic shifts are counterbalanced and reinforced by the deterioration of such original rural terms as *clown* (from *c.* 1565[O]), *lout* (from *c.* 1548[O]), *bumpkin* (from *c.* 1570[O]), *boor* (from *c.* 1598[O]) and *rustic* (from *c.* 1585[O]). The synchronous quality of these shifts is impressive. Johnson was to define *rustical*, for example, in a manner we should regard as hostile: 'rough; savage; boisterous; brutal; rude'. We know, however, that for a great many writers, previous and contemporary with him, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Marvell, Gray and Goldsmith, the countryside and its inhabitants had charms. These were with increasing commonness conveyed in the term *rural*, while *rustic* was increasingly reserved for 'the more primitive qualities or manners attaching to country life'[O]. Today a traveller through the countryside is less likely to be confronted by 'a company of buzzardly pezantes', as a writer of 1576[O] calls them, than he would in medieval times. And, largely owing to the influence of Wordsworth and the Romantic school who transformed the English sense of beauty, as well as attitudes towards the country, he would be less likely to see them in such terms.

THE MORALIZATION OF LEARNING

The status attaching to education has been a perennially obvious social fact, even in times when monarchs, magnates and other dignitaries have been illiterate. The semantic development of two traditionally antithetical social terms, *lered* and *lewed*, into *learned* and *lewd* is the most striking evidence of this status, as well as of accompanying moralization. The ancient distinction in Anglo-Saxon was between *gelæwede* and *gehadode*, the laity and the ordained. As the clergy were often not literate in those times, a distinction could not be made solely on the basis of education, but by early Middle English *lewed* has the chief sense of 'uneducated'. Wycliff writes (in *Deeds*, IV, 13) that 'Thei [Peter and John] weren men unlettrid, and *lewid* men.' As education has become a matter of will and choice, so the word has deteriorated to mean 'ignorant', 'stupid', 'foolish', 'useless', 'worthless', often with an implication of sloth. The sexual specialization of the term can be inferred from a passage in Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale', where the old lecher January uses 'olde lewed wordes', inviting his child-bride May to 'taken som disport' ('have some fun'), but this meaning is generally found later. One of the best examples is in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, where Buckingham, acting as Richard's publicity agent, extols the sobriety and sexual continence of his candidate, qualities which contrast him sharply with the incumbent (Edward IV):

He is not lolling on a *lewd* love-bed
But on his knees at meditation.
(III. vii. 71–2)

Mass-education, supposedly a democratizing force, has in fact intensified the awareness of individual differences, not just in education but also in ability. The moralization of literacy (evident in the status now attaching to *articulate*, *learned* and *educated*[16]) has been extended to terms of ability, such as *brilliant*, *intelligent*, *capable*, *able* and *genius*.[17] Just as these are increasingly arrogated to a status approximating to moral worth, so their antonymic counterparts imply worthlessness and moral inadequacy. *Idiot*, *moron*, *imbecile*, *cretin*, as well as *illiterate*, *uneducated*, *ignorant*, *inarticulate* reveal the trend. Several of these words are fairly recent: *moron* was coined by H. H. Goddard, the researcher into the measurement of intelligence, in 1910. The stress on the so-called Intelligence Quotient, and the purveying of education as an acquisitive, competitive, self-advancing process have naturally made people very self-conscious of *grades*, *degrees*, *graduations*, as well as of the stigma attached to being *backward*, or in a state of *arrested development*, or, worst of all, of being a *failure*.

As literacy and education became more widespread, so various shifts of value took place. For example, *clerk*, dating from *c.*1085[O], is now almost entirely debased to a low administrative function, but initially denoted a learned man, as clerics commonly were. The universality of literacy and basic education in the West has obviously played a part in the decline of the word by making the functionary more common. Cotgrave's definition (1611) is virtually a semantic history in itself: 'A scholler, or learned person; hence also a churchman (who should be learned); also a clarke in an office; a lawyers clark and generally any penman.' *Scrivener*, recorded from *c.*1375[O], has also been rendered obsolete by general literacy, as has *scribe*, which survives mainly as an artificial archaism in journalism. In similar fashion, *trivial*, which is recorded in its literal association with the *trivium* (Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric) from *c.*1432[O], has steadily lost its high medieval status to mean 'commonplace' or 'worthless', as in Thomas Nashe's remark, 'a few of our trivial translators' (1598)[O].

The prestige of the classics (which the *trivium* endorsed) is well established long before the Renaissance, but the history of *classic* is worthy of comment. It is interesting that the qualitative meaning 'a work of the first class', dating from *c.*1613[O], almost immediately attracts the association of the standard Greek and Latin authors. This is clearly because of

the dominance of classical culture at the time, particularly in the literary field. The term was extended to the other arts, particularly architecture, carrying the stylistic implication of purity, simplicity and harmonious elegance. From there developed the meaning of a 'standard of excellence' (which might be Romantic, Modern or even Medieval). Latterly, *classic* has generalized (some would say democratized) widely to include ballet, film and the performing arts, indeed even to horse racing. Nowadays it has lost its elitist connotations to mean 'a perfect instance', as in 'a classic instance of managerial blundering', 'a classic cover-drive', and so on. The term has gained currency in most egalitarian societies. In fact its broadened use seems to bear out the pregnant observation of de Tocqueville: 'Aristocratic nations are naturally too apt to narrow the scope of human perfectibility; democratic nations expand it beyond reason' (1863, part II, p. 34).

The related word *class* is in general a later term, being first recorded only in Blount's *Glossographia* (1656), where it is applied both to people and to school or university. (Political 'class-terms', as is pointed out in chapter 7, are a nineteenth-century introduction, since 'Higher and Lower Orders were formerly used'[O].) The sense of a 'division of candidates or competitors according to merit' dates from *c.*1807[O], though a quotation 'A conjuror of the highest class' is found in 1694[O]. The American convention of dating university graduates by the label, for example, 'class of 76' is recorded from *c.*1828. As opposed to emphasis on rank within that class (being *cum laude*, *summa cum laude*, *proxime accessit*, etc.), the concern with fraternities, and the 'rating' of the university in question as being 'Ivy League', 'redbrick' and so on, demonstrates the obvious truth that higher education has its own class system, much of which is not at all meritocratic.[18] It is also clear that *degree* and *class*, which were in earlier times terms implying high status (as was *price*), have now become far more generalized.

Hierarchies are traditionally conservative, and consequently the rise of parvenus through remarkable personal qualities tends to be viewed by the establishment with a mixture of admiration and suspicion. In this respect, *precocious* and *prodigy* have revealing semantic histories. *Prodigy* shows almost complete amelioration. Originally it had an ominous signification (the counterpart of OE *wundor*, 'wonder, strange, alarming happening') from *c.*1494[O]. The bad personal sense of a monster is memorably instanced in Clarendon's vituperative description of Cromwell in 1656: 'That prodigie of nature, that opprobrium of mankind ... who now calls himself our Protector'[O]. John Evelyn is accorded the first instance of the now-familiar concept of 'infant prodigy' in a touching

entry of 27 January 1658: 'Died my dear son Richard 5 years and 3 days old only, but at that tender age a prodigy for witt and understanding.'°

Precocious, on the other hand, has not achieved the same whole-hearted amelioration. The early association with botany has served to strengthen the association of 'unnatural'. The earliest recorded instance of *precocity* (1640°) relates to the fall of Satan through his 'precocity of Spirit'. Today, unlike *prodigy*, the nuances are not always favourable. Here one may observe that in a relatively class-conscious society, as is still found in Britain, terms such as *uppish*, *uppity* or being *above oneself* are still in use. In such a social context, a hostile nuance still attaches to the more competitive words for intelligence, such as *clever*, *smart* and even *shrewd*. In American society, which is more egalitarian and competitive, these words carry better associations than they do in Britain. So does *sharp* in the US. One observes in this respect the peculiarly English quality of such phrases as 'too clever by half' and 'clever-clever', as well as the greater hostility attaching to being 'forward' or 'presumptuous'. The difference between these usages is clearly a reflection of the sense of hierarchy and deference in the respective societies.

The general attitude towards education, its practitioners and its values requires consideration. Today both *intellectual* and *academic* (as nouns and adjectives) have an uneasy ambivalence of nuance. Both can be used critically to suggest an undue concern with the theoretical at the expense of the practical, a pejorative development which is surprisingly recent, given the perennial vulnerability of the academic enterprise to charges of impracticality. The critical senses were not even recorded in the original *OED*, but the *Supplement* gives an excellent first instance for *academic*, in this extract from *The Times* of 1886: 'This discussion partook of an academic character, for it was well understood that, whatever the result of the discussions might be, no practical step would be taken in the present Parliament.'

Intellectual, 'a person possessing or supposed to possess superior powers of intellect'°, has similarly in this past century and a half acquired a slightly critical tone quintessentially captured in this quotation from 1898: '. . . the so-called intellectuals of Constantinople, who were engaged in discussion while the Turks were taking possession of the city'. An instance from *The Times* (1974), 'Russian history has set a pattern of alienated intellectuals'^S, shows a recent shift in the politicization of the word, which is now often assumed to be the exclusive property of the Left.

The semantic history of the familiar antithesis between *academic* and *pragmatic* is one of switching polarization. Today *pragmatism*, *practical*

and their related synonyms are favourable terms, but in the more conservative, hierarchical ethos of three centuries ago they were invariably critical. They often carried the sense of dishonesty still apparent in *sharp practice*, evident in the first recorded instance (1494°): 'The towne of Seynt Denys . . . was goten by treson and practyse.' Even as late as 1863 the primary meanings of *pragmatism* were given as 'officiousness, pedantry'°. *Pragmatist* has the sense of 'a busybody' from *c.* 1640°; Johnson defines *pragmatick*, *pragmatickal* as 'impertinently busy; meddling; assuming business without leave or invitation'.

The recent amelioration of the 'pragmatic' field in relation to education has clearly been influenced by the increasing quest for utilitarian 'relevance'. (*Relevance* itself has now become a term of undefined general value, together with *awareness*, *concerned*, *consciousness* and *committed*, all of which seek to stress some 'relatedness' between social needs and academic discipline.) The relative status of the liberal arts and their servile or mechanical counterparts has changed radically as a result of the increasing importance and status accorded to science. The main semantic effects of this development are discussed in chapter 9, the Conclusion to this study.

The stereotypic antithetical clichés, *the ivory tower* and *the rat race*,[19] today synthesize the perennial opposition between what medievals termed 'the theoric' and 'the practick', between unreflective action and impractical contemplation, qualities which are, by themselves, inadequate. These clichés serve to intensify and exaggerate the opposition between these two world-views into a false antithesis, and to rigidify thinking about them. Veblen, who observed sardonically in his chapter on 'The Higher Learning' that learning was 'a by-product of the priestly vicarious leisure class' (1970, p. 367), also pointed out the irony that as the competition between educational establishments increased, so their leadership became filled with erstwhile 'captains of industry' (a phrase coined by Carlyle in 1843) who supplanted the 'priest' (p. 374).

The more education is made into a competitive activity, the more moralization will become associated with the extremes of the *gifted* and of the *failure*, a word which is comparatively new in our vocabulary. (It seems significant that one of the dominant senses of *failure* should now be educational, rather than spiritual or moral.) There is a pleasing irony in the first recorded use of the word: it is attributed to that most gifted of all prodigies, John Stuart Mill, in a quotation from 1865: 'If you elect me and I should turn out a failure. . . .'°

So far as the practitioners and purveyors of education are concerned, one notes that several of the terms have deteriorated. These include

pedant, *pedagogue* and *schoolmaster*. While Florio [1598] glosses 'pedante or schoolmaster', Johnson [1755] defines the dominant sense of *pedant* with brilliant conciseness as 'A man vain of low knowledge; a man awkwardly ostentatious of his literature.' Criticism of the practitioners is directed more at the lower orders of the hierarchy, as is the case in other fields. *Professor*, *lecturer* and *researcher* have all managed to keep prestige, or at least neutrality, even in the anti-authoritarian ambience which has made *lecture*, *sermon* and *preach* terms of impatient criticism. The accusations of pedantry and impracticality may arise from reductive philistinism, but can also derive from that essential intellectual censor, common sense. This commodity is naturally unsympathetic to extreme excursions in the pursuit of knowledge 'for its own sake'.

CHIVALRY AND STATUS: THE RISE OF THE HORSEMAN

In the earlier discussion of the contrasting registers selected for the character of Chaucer's Knight, it was observed that the portrait shows a harmonious balance between the doughty Anglo-Saxon and the courtly French elements. The ancient Saxon roots of such seminal words as *trouthe*, *fredom* and *worthynesse* lead us to question Denholm-Young's assertion, 'It is impossible to be chivalrous without a horse' (1948, p. 240), even allowing that the remark may have been made only for its etymological wit (*cheval* being the root of *chivalry*). The dragon-slaying hero of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (who is never seen on a horse) perhaps lacks the panache and charm of the subsequent hero of romance, Lancelot, but he certainly matches him in courage, service, courtesy, honour and simple piety. Furthermore, he is concerned chiefly with nations in distress, rather than with damsels in the same condition. And, unlike Lancelot, he does not make treacherous and adulterous love to his lord's wife. The Saxons in *The Battle of Maldon*, those of them that have horses, dismount to do battle, while the cowards unchivalrously remount only to flee. The horse, like the ship, is simply a means of transport, neither of which was very developed in Anglo-Saxon times as a means of battle. Hence the naval losses to the piratical Vikings and the disaster at Hastings, where *eorl* and *ceorl* were cut down 'at the place of the grey apple-tree'[20] by a new and devastating weapon: fully armed men on horseback. 'The Anglo-Saxons used the stirrup [AS *stig-rap*, 'rope for mounting'],' writes Lynn White, Jr., in his stimulating, though questioned, book *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, 'but they did not comprehend it: for this they paid a fearful price' (1962, p. 28).

The Norman practitioners of mounted shock combat, who were often

landless younger sons, became a new class, the knights. Their rise to power from *c.* 1100 is interestingly paralleled by the social elevation of the people who originally looked after the horses. Semantically, 'the boy who tends the mares', Old Teutonic *marhosskalkos*, Old French *mareschal*, becomes the *marshal*, rising to *Earl Marshal*, later *Field Marshal*. Likewise, 'the man who looks after the stable', Late Latin *comes stabuli*, becomes the *Constable*, principal officer to the Household of the early French kings. His rise to power is as dramatic as that of the Marshal, but – interestingly – he declines from the seventeenth century, possibly with the diminished use of cavalry or the obsolescence of literal 'horse-power'. A parallel rise and fall can be seen in *henchman*, of which the first element is related to A-S *hengest*, a horse. However, the word first appears *c.* 1360, and there are problems of interpretation. The generalized sense of 'right-hand man', 'trusty follower' is strong in Scotland from *c.* 1730[0], and the deteriorated political sense is recorded from *c.* 1839: 'A stout political supporter or partisan; esp. in U.S. "A mercenary adherent; a venal follower"'[0]. The uglier application to the bodyguards and thugs of the underworld is not, surprisingly, pursued in the *Supplement*. The armed man on the horse, the *knight*, represents a seemingly arbitrary promotion of Anglo-Saxon *cniht*, meaning 'boy' or 'servant', the specialization of which term has been achieved by *c.* 1100. (Contrariwise, the other Anglo-Saxon term for boy, *cnafa*, almost as arbitrarily goes down in the world from *c.* 1205[0], to become one of the knight's most common enemies, the *knave*.) Amidst all this social mobility the *groom* is left behind, still holding the horses. (*Bridegroom* is a misnomer, the second element deriving properly from A-S *guma*, a man.)

It would be naive to assume that the knights initially embodied the code of chivalry as it is now understood. As Douglas and Greenaway explain, 'the Norman knight was distinguished from his fellows not by wealth or birth or social position, but by proficiency in arms: he was a soldier trained to fight in a specialized manner, and possessed of the weapons for so doing' (1953, p. 25). Lynn White, Jr., has pointed out that horses and their upkeep were expensive, as was a suit of armour, which apparently took an armourer about one year to make. From these facts he infers that the knights must have been people of some substance initially. Be that as it may, this new fighting elite formed a weapon which could be turned against its master, particularly if it lacked the land-grant to sustain its life-style. Pointing out that 'landless knights are a constant feature of early Norman society', Douglas and Greenaway outline some of their unchivalrous behaviour: 'Such, for instance, were the armed and

mounted men who rioted outside Westminster Abbey during the Conqueror's coronation. . . . They were a dangerous class, and William in fact dismissed many from his own service in 1067' (1953, pp. 25–6). By this action he sought to reduce the tenure of power to a manageably small group of about four thousand trained soldiers, satisfying their territorial ambitions by supplying them with the lands of the Old English nobility and quashing any centrifugal, rebellious tendencies by requiring personal loyalty and service as a condition of such tenure.

The main semantic shift reflecting the slow break up of feudalism is the **democratization of status-words**, including terms to do with chivalry. This trend, which is an aspect of the **moralization of status-words**, concerns such terms as *courtesy*, *freedom*, *largesse*, *chivalry*, *honest* and *kind*. Today, it goes without saying, it is assumed that any person can attain a life-style characterized by these qualities, which were originally the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy. *Freedom* has changed, of course, from being a quality limited to the nobility to a democratic right. *Franchise*, originally an exclusive privilege (as it still is in its commercial sense) has likewise become the political guarantee of that right, in the form of the vote. The *OED* has an interesting note on the ulterior meaning of *free*: 'The primary sense of the adjective is "dear"; the Germanic and Celtic sense comes of its having been applied as the distinctive epithet of those members of the household who were connected by ties of kindred with the head, as opposed to the slaves.'

One of the central terms of medieval civilization, *courtesy* has, in the process of 'levelling down', become almost entirely debased, concerned only with outward forms, tokens, gestures, a ghost of its essentially dynamic, courtly former self. In its medieval forms, such as *courteisie*, it encapsulated the richly layered meanings of high medieval culture. These have been steadily diluted and eroded into the formal gestures which we now refer to (significantly) as *common courtesy*, also preserved in the *courtesy call* and *courtesy card*. This general modern sense is recorded from *c.* 1513° and seems to derive from the pragmatic Renaissance ethos of self-improvement, evidenced in the publication of numerous *courtesy-books*. In its most limited and stylized form of behaviour, it survives as the *curtsy*, recorded from *c.* 1545°.

Chivalry dates from *c.* 1300, some two centuries after the institution of knighthood. Its early meanings are strictly martial, including such senses as 'knights or horsemen equipped for battle' (a doublet of *cavalry*), 'bravery and prowess in war', or 'a feat of knightly valour', as exemplified in this quotation from Robert of Gloucester (1297): 'He smot of his heued as li3liche as it were a stouple [cork]; þat was his laste

chiualerye.' *Chivalrous*, which is also fourteenth-century in its recorded origins, has an interestingly complex history. The *OED* remarks:

> In its original use ('having the character of a knight') this word becomes obsolete before 1600, perhaps shortly after 1530 (Lord Berners), for in Shakespeare, Spenser and the dictionaries *c.* 1600 it was merely traditional. . . . The word was revived in the late eighteenth century in writers of the romance of chivalry.

Burke's eloquent and intuitive complaint 'But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded' (used as an epigraph to this chapter), was made at the time (1790) when chivalry, while largely defunct in fact, was about to be most vigorously recreated as a literary construct. This interesting juxtaposition gives some plausibility to the notion that idealized forms of literature are more likely to be compensations for 'real life' than imitations of it. On this moot point one may note the observation of Nietzsche: 'The appearance of pessimistic philosophies is not at all the sign of great and dreadful miseries' (1924, I, p. 48).

In the democratization of status-words and terms associated with chivalry, the basic criterion which emerges is that of action, rather than the privilege of birth. *Largesse*, *chivalry* and *courtesy* were naturally more centred in action from the beginning, but required a life-style unattainable by all. However, a developing sense of bourgeois pragmatism and competitiveness reduced *courtesy* to the polite form of manners necessary for self-advancement, and monetarized the notion of *largesse*, while insisting – not unreasonably – that it lay within the capacity of all men to be *honest* or *kind* or *noble* or *gentle*. In short, the terms which had been rooted in action became more concerned with acting, while those which had been rooted in birth became more concerned with behaviour. The notion of a moral democracy, which can be evidenced in Chaucer's poem on 'Gentilesse', is even older, as C. S. Lewis observes: 'Accordingly, from Boethius down, it becomes a commonplace of European literature that the true nobility is within, that *villanie*, not status, makes the villain, that there are "ungentle gentles" and that "gentle is as gentle does"' (1960, p. 22).

An essential aspect of loyal behaviour and chivalry concerns the notion of *truth*: even this undergoes a considerable change in the medieval period.

> Trouthe is the hyest thing that man may kepe,

says Arveragus, the worthy knight of Chaucer's 'Franklin's Tale' (l. 1479). The central and fascinating point in the semantic history of

truth is that it evolves from being a private commitment to a publicly assessed quality. The form of the word even changes, so that *troth*, the private form, can, by the proof of arms, be asserted above even the claims of evidence or testimony, if need arises. (This medievalized form of *truth* is, of course, virtually the opposite of the modern notion, which is factual, demonstrable and essentially impersonal.) This concept is paralleled by the development of the notions of *trial* and *proof*. The primitive ritual of *trial by ordeal* gives way to the vicissitudes of *trial of arms*, finally evolving into the more logical *trial of evidence*. Similarly, the medieval knight *proved* things *with his hands* or by his *prowess* (which now means little more than sexual potency). Today such matters are proved by public argument, evidence and data. *Troth*, which is now plighted mainly in the marriage service in peace, takes on a different significance in martial society. There the *boast* is a serious undertaking which in peace sounds foolish and hubristic. This is because the medieval hero is a magical person who can make his words 'come true' by physically changing the world, as can the wizard or witch. Of course, the man who does not keep his boast is despised in all societies, and Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry is full of gnomic warnings about not being *ȝielpes to ȝeorn*, 'too eager to boast'. The decline of A-S *ȝielpan*, 'to boast' to the pathetic sense 'to yelp' has been partly paralleled by the fourteenth-century words *boast* and *vaunt*. These words underscore the basic recognition that credibility is the *sine qua non* of authority, a fact which modern politicians have ignored to their cost.

It is noteworthy that at the opposite end of the scale from the specifically aristocratic behavioural terms, *courtesy*, *chivalry*, *gentillesse*, three central terms for what is unremarkable, namely *common*, *ordinary* and *banal*, should have converged from very diverse, specific, medieval meanings. *Common* originated as a class-term referring to the Third Estate; *ordinary* had originally almost the opposite of its present sense, namely a judge or priest validated in his own right, as opposed to one specially empowered; and *banal* meant liable to the *ban* or obligation to do compulsory feudal service. Though *common* and *vulgar* were for centuries terms of abuse and criticism, their currency in these senses has fallen off very rapidly in the last few decades.

CONCLUSION

The Peasants' Revolt (now often styled more democratically 'the English Rising') came – temporarily – close to being a genuine revolution. It marked a radical, though temporary, shift of power, ostensibly towards

genuine democracy, and more genuinely towards indi-vidual free enterprise by those peasants who sought to buy their way out of the labour obligations of the Feudal System.

While Chaucer mentions the main demographic catalyst, the Black Death, only twice, *en passant*, his subtle deployment of shifting value-terms among morally different characters in the Prologue shows his sharp awareness of the growth of an acquisitive, competitive, profit-oriented ethos. The central notion which is changing is that of *profit*. The traditional formula of *commune profit* (found in many a statute, ordinance and proclamation) is that of 'the well-being of the community', a sense upheld by his idealized Knight, Parson and Plowman in their lives of dedicated service. But *commune profit* is giving way to private profit, just as *common weal* was to give way to private wealth. Chaucer demonstrates this new mode of profiteering being achieved by violent competition (between Miller and Reeve for the profits of harvest, between Summoner and Friar for the lucrative market of 'pay as you sin'), by casual pre-emption of established privilege and cynical exploitation of the underprivileged laity by the corrupt clergy. In this process, a word such as *bisynesse* (previously meaning simply 'activity') starts to acquire its modern financial sense, while *winne*, previously a military term, acquires the sense of 'make money'. Chaucer pointedly applies these profiteering senses to the corrupt or venal ecclesiastics.

Another of the essential differences between relationships in medieval and modern times lies in the changed notion of *person*. For medievals, *person* denoted office, function, role, variously derived from the word's origin in Latin *persona*, a mask. For us it means the essential individual, conceived of as having a unique personality, physique and psyche. Shakespeare seems to have been one of the first to show the modern sense:

> For her own person,
> It beggar'd all description;
> (*Antony and Cleopatra*, II. ii. 205–6)

But he also uses the older sense:

> He comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moon-shine.
> (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, III. i. 62)

The phrase *in the person of* still preserves the older sense by formulaic fossilization. *Parson* (a doublet of *person*, originally sharing the same pronunciation) is a similar survival, since the *parson* was conceived of as being a representative of the divine. The same complex of meanings is

present in *vicar*, from Latin *vicarius*, a substitute, and its survival *vicarious*. It is clear that much of the ambivalence and moral irony of Chaucer and Langland is perceived and created out of the ambiguity of *person*. Masks, roles and hypocrisy are consistently revealed by ironic comment or by the conscious literary exploitation of semantic changes.

Three other central terms reveal radical shifts between their medieval origins and their modern application. *Train*, one harbinger of the mass transport of the Industrial Revolution, was originally a regal word, referring (as it still does) to the elongated part of a dignitary's robe. The sense of a number of followers attending upon a person of rank is a fifteenth-century development, while the modern railway *train* is recorded from 1824[4]. Similar in origin and parallel in development is *progress*, referring to a state journey by a royal or noble personage (now largely democratized into *walkabout*, recorded in relation to royalty from *c.* 1970[5]). The general sense of 'continuous improvement or advance' dates from the late sixteenth century; as the *OED* notes, its history since then has been complex: 'Common in England *c.* 1590–1670. In the eighteenth century obsolete in England but apparently retained (or formed anew) in America where it became very common *c.* 1790.' Since then it has become the ideological obsession of the West and for decades had the special status of a capital letter.

But of all the words which simultaneously join and separate us from the medieval world, few are as sharp and vivid in their semantic change as *passion*. The dominant medieval sense was, of course, religious, referring to the agony of Christ's Crucifixion, the central act of Man's redemption. From this developed two related senses, that of a narrative or musical setting describing the sufferings of Christ, as well as a similar act of human suffering accepted by a martyr. The sense of 'extreme or overpowering individual emotion' is found in Chaucer as the 'passion of ire' (for 'the frenzy of rage'). But it was only from the Elizabethan period that the sense which is now dominant – of amorous or sexual desire – arose. From the period of Romanticism onwards, *passion* has become private and physical, often unsocial and even anti-social, taking the extreme form of *egoisme à deux*, the defiant rejection of the world or society by a passionate pair. The most significant aspect of the change, however, lies in the fact that the word previously signified dedicated, altruistic suffering for a cause, but now centres on pleasurable fulfilment which is personal, intense and obsessive.

These and many other words reflect the breaking up of the medieval hierarchies. Chaucer's wonderfully outrageous creation, the Wife of Bath, who refers with blasphemous subversion to 'Seinte Venus', who

has distinct signs of proto-feminism in her determined pre-emption of *maistrie* (mastery) in the marriage contract, and who is sexually liberated enough to speak openly (and repeatedly) of the orgasm as a 'merye fit', is a fictional sign of future liberation. She is also a prosperous and aggressive self-made woman, with marketable skills and a capacity (when it suits her) for what may be called upward nubility. The rise of capital and of the individual profit motive are already visible in the fourteenth century. Their immensely important social and semantic effects are the theme of the following chapter.

NOTES

1 Between 1969 and 1986, 1108 churches were demolished. See Gavin Stamp (1986, p. 9).

2 Burke anticipated this cliché, without actually formulating it, in *Reflections* (1925, p. 93).

3 R. B. Dobson points out: 'Nearly everything written by their contemporaries about the rebels of 1381 was written by their enemies' (1970, p. 3).

4 Dobson comments (1970, p. 4): 'There is no serious doubt that the English government's desperate attempts to break out of a position of extreme financial insolvency precipitated the riots which led to a general revolt.'

5 From Ted Hughes's poem 'Pike'.

6 Froissart registered surprise at the currency of French in the English court in 1395. See May McKisack (1959, p. 524) and Baugh (1965, ch. 6) particularly the reference (on p. 167) to Walter Map's observation that provincial 'English' French was stigmatized as the 'French of Marlborough'.

7 The sense of 'Celt' is common in the earlier stages of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, e.g. *anno* 473: 'Hengest and Æsc gefuhton wiþ Walas' ('Hengest and Ash fought against the Celts'). In Ælfric, a later writer, the sense of 'slave' is usual: *min weal sprecþ* is glossed as *meum manicipium loquitur* ('my slave speaks').

8 *Nim* starts to be eclipsed by *take* around 1100, but 'after 1600 it reappears . . . as a slang or colloquial word in the sense of "to steal", and it is very common in this sense throughout the seventeenth century.'[10]

9 From a fifteenth-century cookery book, cited in Serjeantson (1935, p. 149); italics added.

10 Medieval street names seem to have been far less prudish than their subsequent counterparts. The number of streets indecorously termed *Pissing Alley* in London is legion.

11 Unfavourable extensions of A-S *wealh*, 'a Celt', are found in the use of the base-word to mean 'a shameless person', together with *wealh-word*, 'a wanton word' and the verb *wealian*, 'to be bold, wanton, impudent'.

12 For instance, during the reign of terror inflicted on the land by the nobles who built 'adulterine' castles (in defiance of King Stephen). See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, particularly *anno* 1137.

13 From the laws of Ine, 18 and the laws of Hlothere and Eadric, 16.

14 Fasting has also become an increasingly fashionable form of political protest, a form of blackmail far removed from the original religious motive of self-mortification.

15 Bede derived the word from *Eostre* (Northumbrian spelling *Eastre*), the name of the goddess whose festival was celebrated at the spring equinox. Her name is cognate with Sanskrit *usra*, 'dawn', and is thus related to Latin *Aurora*.

16 In *Keywords* (1976) Raymond Williams makes this bitter observation (under *educated*): 'There is a strong class sense in this use, and the level indicated by *educated* has been continually adjusted to leave the majority of people who have received an education below it.' Though Williams implies a conspiracy against the less educated, it is quite normal for terms of achievement to be raised or lowered in view of the general standards prevailing. Consequently *rich* has also been 'continually adjusted' to allow for inflation.

17 The literal sense of *brilliant* is first recorded in an edition of Blount's *Glossographia* (1681); the figurative emerges about a century later. Though the *Supplement* does not trace the subsequent development, the word is now used vaguely of virtually any achievement, without necessarily implying special skill or cleverness.

18 The Ivy League is in origin a football league, comprising the more prestigious Eastern colleges. The phrase seems to be first recorded in 1933[S]. *Redbrick*, appearing slightly later, from *c.* 1943[S], has a stronger class demarcation, as these quotations indicate: 'It may be natural enough for him to go on to Redbrick, but to . . . enter Oxbridge is something infinitely more exciting.'[S] 'Marriner took his professorship at that frightful redbrick university.'[S]

19 *Ivory tower* was cointed by Sainte-Beuve in 1837. He used it as a criticism of Alfred de Vigny's concern with an inspiration unmixed with practical matters. First used in English *c.* 1911[S], the phrase has steadily moved from contexts of art to those of education. *Rat-race*, originally pre-war American slang for a low grade dance, was first used in the general behaviourist sense *c.* 1939 and is now well established in English parlance.

20 *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, MS Cotton Tiberius B iv, AD 1066.

3
Moneyed Words:
The Growth of Capitalism

The old population, consisting of clergy, knights, and serfs, lived by the soil, the lower class working for the upper classes, who, from the economic point of view, were consumers who produced nothing. . . .

In this tiny, changeless world the arrival of the merchants suddenly disarranged all the habits of life, and produced, in every domain, a veritable revolution. To tell the truth, they were intruders, and the traditional order could find no place for them. In the midst of these people who lived by the soil . . . they seemed in some way scandalous, being as they were, without roots in the soil, and because of the strange and restless nature of their way of life. With them came not only the spirit of gain and of enterprise, but also the free labourer, the man of independent trade, detached alike from the soil and from the authority of the seigneur: and above all, the circulation of money.

Henri Pirenne

Blest paper-credit! last and best supply!
That lends Corruption lighter wings to fly!
Gold, imp'd by thee, can compass hardest things,
Can pocket States, can fetch and carry Kings.

Pope

Bad money drives out good.

Gresham's Law

OF THE huge agglomeration of words related to the capitalist mode of economic life, certain illuminating examples reveal in their semantic changes the major social developments of the past. It might clarify matters to look at some of these at the outset.

For centuries *purchase* meant something far more rapacious and disorderly than the present transactional sense denotes. The old senses of *purchase*, dating in ME from *c.* 1297[O], were derived from *chase* and