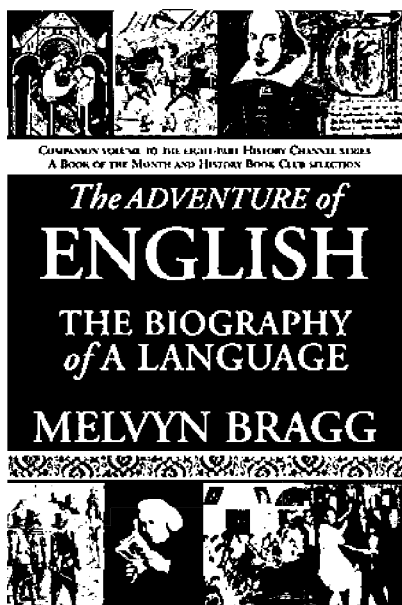


THE ADVENTURES OF ENGLISH THE BIOGRAPHY OF A LANGUAGE, BY MELVYN BRAGG¹

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The Adventures of English, *The Biography of a Language* is an interesting review of the English language history. It is a story of the language development through centuries. The author gives us complete history of the modern English language from the very beginning to modern times. Through interesting way of telling the story, Bragg introduces us to first years of the tribal fights and invades, giving us the examples of the ancient words which can still in some alternated forms recognized in modern English. It is interesting that Bragg tells us story from his perspective giving the material one more direct, personal point. Through different examples, the author tells the story on the language development and changes throughout time.

He addresses language almost as a human being telling us a story of its birth, life, development, ups and downs. It is said that modern English is developed from a few tribal and local Germanic dialects spoken by a hundred fifty thousand people (Bragg, 2004). It came in the fifth century with Germanic warrior tribes from across the sea. It is impressive and fascinating

1 *The Adventures of English, the Biography of a Language*, by Melvyn BRAGG, Arcade Publishing Inc., 2004

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that one of the most frequently spoken languages of the modern world has developed out of such moderate number of original speakers. In the proceeding of the work Bragg introduce us to the world of tribal fights and conquerers. Every invader bared their language, dialects, rules and vocabulary. English language always was the language which easily adopted new words and adjusted it to commonly spoken accent or dialect. British islands were very isolated part of the world once. Perhaps that is why it developed so many different dialects and accents on the Island itself. At the early period of the formation of the language there were twelve kingdoms on the island. Every kingdom had its own dialects. They differed significantly and developed an abundance of different, yet often similar words for specific terms. The language itself developed accordingly the development of the people who spoke it.

Accordingly, when it was spoken by the warrior tribes it developed a vocabulary that consisted many words describing armory and weapon; on the other hand, when it was spoken by the tribes who were agricultural tribes and depended on land it developed vocabulary filled with words and terms describing land cultivation, herbs, plants, fruit and tools for land work. Similar situation is even today. New words are introduced according the new situations and inventions.

Bragg further discuss language development, mentioning Celtic heritage, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, the first history of the English nation as a nation, *Beowulf*, Alfred the Great, William the conquer and French influence, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, The Owl and the Nightingale, French speaking court and English speaking common people. Although French influence was enormous, and almost absorbed the entire language, Old English succeed to survive thanks to the common people. The author gives us numerous examples of different words from various languages, such as Old Norse, Latin, French, Arabic and many other languages that settled in Old English and survived until nowadays. This makes this reading very interesting and amusing. Bragg continues his description on the Chaucer's example. Chaucer was the first writer who wrote *The Canterbury Tales* almost completely in new (Middle) English. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* followed this trend and these works of art bring us to Shakespeare and his incredible corpus. The author gives us interesting examples of Middle English through the art of previously mentioned writers, as well as almost all the examples of the French influence. In the fourteenth century English language was under great influence of the Church. Thus, Latin influence is obvious, since almost all religious literature and sermons were written in Latin. Special progress can be seen in Shakespeare language.

English, as any other language changes almost every day. Language is an active entity. It responds to the changes in society. It reflects the way of life, standpoints and understandings of the people who speak the language. Bragg gives us one interesting overview of the English language development on the basis of many examples and interesting side stories that all tell us one amazing story of the language development and its people.