



Faux Shakespeare

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Phrases often misattributed to Shakespeare

In *Julius Caesar* (1599), the conspirator Casca admits that a speech of Cicero's "was Greek to me" (Act 1, scene 2). Twenty-four years later the play was published in the Shakespeare First Folio, whence it passed into edition after edition of the Bard's works and ultimately into the hands of today's pedagogues. In many a classroom, incredulous seventeen-year-olds are now shown that, not only did the Greatest Author in the English Language write all those tedious speeches full of tortuous locutions, but he also invented all kinds of cool phrases that regular people use all the time. "It's Greek to me," some smart-aleck student might respond when asked to explain to the class "If th' assassination could trammel up the consequence," those quoting Shakespeare in his own defense.

Meanwhile, mountains of dust rise on George Gascoigne's *Supposes* (1575), a play no high school student and very few pedagogues have ever read, though Shakespeare himself almost certainly did. Anyway, pull your copy of *Supposes* off the shelf, and look at Act 1, scene 1; round about line 92 the confused nurse admits that "This geare [business, plot] is Greeke to me"

After devoting most of a book to all the wonderful phrases that Shakespeare did in fact coin, I doubt it will detract from his glory to set the record straight as regards "faux Shakespeare" — lines commonly but mistakenly touted as Shakespeare originals. Just because the Bard was a regular phrase-coining machine doesn't mean he should hog the credit when the facts are against him. I admit that in most cases Shakespeare's usage is far better known than the original; but you will misrepresent the Bard, and risk making a fool of yourself, if you go around telling people that Shakespeare invented something that, in reality, the glover around the corner uttered once a week, without thinking anything of it.

Thus the following list of phrases sometimes laid at Shakespeare's door but which are (for better or for worse) someone else's responsibility. Not that I'm casting stones; it's quite possible that a number of the phrases featured in this book were proverbial, and that someone might someday document earlier occurrences in the surviving literature. I merely report the current state of knowledge about familiar phrases that can be definitively shown not to be of Shakespeare's invention.

- ["ALL THAT GLISTERS IS NOT GOLD"](#)
- ["AS SOUND AS A BELL"](#)
- ["BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE"](#)
- ["COLD COMFORT"](#)
- ["ELBOW ROOM"](#)
- ["ET TU, BRUTE?"](#)
- ["FOOL'S PARADISE"](#)
- ["HE WILL GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE"](#)
- ["I HAVE NOT SLEPT ONE WINK"](#)
- ["IN A PICKLE"](#)

Shakespeare Quotes: Faux Shakespeare

- “IT’S HIGH TIME”
- “KISS THE ROD”
- “LAUGHING STOCK”
- “MAKE A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY”
- “MINE OWN FLESH AND BLOOD”
- “NOTHING COMES AMISS, so money comes withal”
- “OUT OF THE QUESTION”
- “SET YOUR TEETH ON EDGE”
- “SITS THE WIND IN THAT CORNER”
- “SOMETHING IN THE WIND”
- “TELL TRUTH AND SHAME THE DEVIL”
- “THE DOG WILL HAVE HIS DAY”
- “THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT”
- “THE NAKED TRUTH”
- “THE TRUTH WILL COME TO LIGHT” and “THE TRUTH WILL OUT”
- “THE WEAKER VESSEL”
- “THE WEAKEST GOES TO THE WALL”
- “THEREBY HANGS A TALE”
- “TILL THE LAST GASP”
- “TO KNIT ONE’S BROW”
- “TO PLAY FAST AND LOOSE”

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