

## Notes on Early Modern English Spelling

The spelling in Thomas Wolfe's "quotes" by the one-eyed Spaniard may seem strange to you. They are modern words but the letters are arranged differently. Spelling of English words was somewhat informal for many centuries, as different cultures used different spellings for words. Formal spelling of words started to solidify in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the printing press to England, but it would not be until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century that English spelling was finally uniform. Therefore, during the 1500s when the one-eyed Spaniard of Wolfe's tale was plundering his way through North Carolina, the Spaniard was spelling words in a manner typical of other people of his era.

The list below compares old spellings of English words to today's spelling.

- "They did laugh and caper as if they had been madde." Madde = Mad (today).
- "This is a wild and barbarous kind of race, full of bloudie ways, it exists in such a base and vile sort of living that is worthier of wild beestes than men: they live in darkness and of the artes of living as we know them they are ignorant, one could think that God Himself has forgot them, they are so farre remote from any lighte."
  - Bloudie = Bloody (today)
  - Beestes = Beasts
  - Artes = Arts
  - Farre = Far (today)
  - Lighte = Light
- "Stinkeing fysshe..."
  - Stinkeing = Stinking
  - Fysshe = Fish
- "Kind of weede or plante..."
  - Weede = Weed
  - Plante = Plant
- "It giveth a fowle stinkeing smoake...the smoake cometh out again by their mouth and nostryls in such wyse that you mighte thinke them devils out of helle instead of mortyl men."
  - Fowle: Foul
  - Smoake: Smoke
  - Nostryls: Nostrils
  - Wyse: Ways
  - Mighte: Might
  - Thinke: Think
  - Helle: Hell
  - Mortyl: Mortal