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ODDMENTS: A MISCELLANY OF ENGLISH ETYMOLOGIES (PART 1)¹

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Abstract

This three-part study continues an inquiry earlier initiated in these pages into words listed in *Oxford English dictionary* as still without satisfactory etymologies. Loans from a variety of source languages are reviewed, accompanied by commentary on earlier lexicographical praxis as it relates to various popular registers of English.

The word *oddmments* is first recorded from the 1720s and seems a whimsical formation on the adjective *odd* and the common English suffix *-ment* but in a formally unusual compound – unusual in that *-ment* is generally preceded by a verbal root and the resulting term more often designates an abstraction than a concrete entity. The *Oxford English dictionary* defines its early meaning as:

an odd article or piece; a remnant. Usually in *pl.*: odds and ends, miscellaneous items; *esp.* (in retailing) articles from broken or incomplete sets offered for sale at a reduced price. (*Oxford English dictionary online*, henceforth *OED*)²

¹ This is the first of three articles that will appear under the same title and continues an inquiry into previously unexplained English etymologies initiated in earlier numbers of this journal.

² This and other entries cited from this source were accessed 1 April, 2018. A secondary meaning of *oddmments* is ‘the parts of a book other than the main text, as the title page, preface, etc. Also: a printed sheet or section of a book with fewer pages than a normal signature, usually containing matter of this sort’. So a comment on etymology might stand in relation to the headword of an *OED* entry.

While there then seems nothing problematic about *oddmnts* other than the circumstances of its coinage – which can be said of many words – it suggested itself as an apt title for a gathering of comments on English words still without complete histories. Such lexemes amount to a rather surprising number, as the online search capabilities of the *OED* reveal. Well represented among these are words not part of a greater semantic cluster. Such isolated status may entail that no attested or reconstructed Old English form is seen as antecedent and none of the common sources of loans (for example and sequenced by date of possible influence, Old Norse, Norman French, Middle Dutch) offers comparable evidence. Without cognates in other languages and subject to the shaping influence of the sound system in the host language of English, putatively loaned isolates invite us to extra-linguistic paths of inquiry, such as the plausible geographical provenance or the special properties of the item designated thereby.

The words examined below, all without satisfactory etymologies according to the *OED*, have little beyond their obscure origins in common but may also be viewed as belonging, in various ways, to registers that have not always attracted the attention of lexicographers other than early collectors of popular language, slang, cant, and the like. Several are coloured in popular perception by long-standing but erroneous folk etymologies. In the course of suggesting plausible historical origins for these odd words, three rather arbitrary groupings are introduced with a view to easing the narrative advance of the study. The first of these gathers words and their referents from the margins of the community.

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Huckster and *hawker*, *haggle* and *higgle*: In an entry first published in 1899 and not yet fully updated, the *OED* (s.v. *huckster*, with a cross-reference to the verb *huck*) gives as primary signification of *huckster* ‘a retailer of small goods, in a petty shop or booth, or at a stall; a pedlar, a hawker’. The dictionary begins its etymological commentary as follows:

Although the series *huck*, *hucker*, *huckster*, corresponds formally with *bake*, *baker*, *baxter*, *brew*, *brewer*, *brewster*, etc., in which the verb is the starting-point, the late date of *huck* as compared with *huckster*, and the continental parallels of the latter, make difficulties.³

For present purposes, we might call the formation of such pairs of agent nouns, and other derivatives based on a verb, a ‘vector’. Another vector in English is based on

³ The entry continues with the continental parallels: “Middle Dutch had *hokester*, *hoekster*, early modern Dutch *heukster*, ‘huckster’ feminine; also Middle Dutch *hoeker*, early modern Dutch *heuker* (masculine) = Middle Low German *hoker*, modern German *höker*, ‘higgler, hawker, retailer, market-man, costermonger’; none of these, however, appear to be known as early as our *huckster*. The origin of the Dutch and German words themselves is unsettled; German, besides *höker*, has *höke*, *höcke*, Middle High German *hucke*, Middle Low German *hoke*, to be referred, according to Kluge probably to *hocken* to squat, sit on the ‘hunkers’; but Verwijs and Verdam state grounds for connecting Middle Dutch *hoeker*, *hoekster* rather with Dutch *hoek* a corner. The history is thus altogether obscure”.

vowel alternation or differentiation, as in *sing, sang, sung*. Here employed as a tense marker, such vowel variety is also found in both verbs and nouns as indicators of scale and degree of fineness, size, intensity, value, or merit, e.g., *jingle/jangle, pitter/patter*. Comparable phono-semantic effects are evoked in deprecatory reduplicative compounds of the type *flim-flam, shilly-shally* (see Sayers 2018a,b). Although the *OED* tends to characterize many such words as expressive, imitative, onomatopoeic, ideophonic, and so on, depending on the date that the entry was drafted, these formal elements on occasion combine with semi-distinct semantic units, so that the result satisfies both the need for formal word-play but is also linked to other vocabulary and carries a fairly narrow semantic charge, as in *sing-song* and *ship-shape*.

Thus, when one considers that one basic meaning, according to the *OED*, of the verb *huck* is ‘to higgie in trading; to haggle over a bargain’, one is tempted to see – invited by the *OED*’s very definition – a triad embodying a front, middle, and back vowel, in the dual forms of *hig, hag, hug/huck* and, with the reiterative suffix *-le*, *higgie, haggle, huggle/huckle*. Typical of problems in such sets is the scant evidence for the simplex *hig* and the *u-* variants that are followed by the voiceless *k* rather than voiced *g*. Deferring, momentarily, examination of historical evidence for these various forms, two not necessarily discreet developments may be imagined, the one analogical, in which an original *haggle* might have stimulated *higgie* and **huggle* in response to perceived lexical needs for a scale or spectrum; the other, three initially separate lines of descent from discrete roots, so that *hig, hag, and hug/huck* may lay claim to individual histories.

Since *huckster* and *hawker* prompted this inquiry, the further discussion returns to earlier attempts to explain the origin of the former. The present form exhibits the accretion of an original Old English feminine agent suffix (*-ster*), here generalized to both sexes. While glossary entries predate literary evidence, a telling reference, and this to a woman, is found in Middle English verse written in the town of Kildare in Ireland about 1300: “Hail be 3e hokesters dun bi þe lake... He is sori of his lif þat is fast to such a wif” (*Satire on the People of Kildare* xviii, in Furnivall 1862: 155). German and Dutch philologists of the last century sought an origin for continental cognates of *huck-* in assumed attributes of such sellers as sitting or squatting in a corner stall, or bowed under a load.⁴ Not previously adduced in this context is English *huck* as a shorter form of *huckaback*, ‘a stout linen fabric, with the weft threads thrown alternately up so as to form a rough surface, used for towelling and the like’ (*OED*).⁵ But *huck* and its expanded, more explicit form *huckbone* were also used of the hip or haunch, as was the term *huckle* (*OED*, s.v. *huck* n.2).⁶ Other

⁴ See footnote 3 for Germanic cognates.

⁵ *OED* calls the etymology unknown. Another description of this feature of the weave identifies ‘raised pairs of threads (floats) that are characteristically woven into the fabric’s surface in staggered rows that intersect the selvages at right angles’ (Bush 2016: 29). This accounts for the ‘humped’ effect of the cloth.

⁶ The etymological commentary follows that for *huckster* and also dates from 1899 but has greater specificity: “The origin of *huck* is obscure, and the chronological evidence leaves its historical relation to *huck-bone, huck-back, huckle, huckle-bone, huckle-back*, far from clear. For, while

revealing compounds are *huck-backed* (also *huckt-backt*) ‘hump-backed’ and *huck-shouldered* ‘crump-shouldered’. Along with the relevant Germanic forms, *huckster* and its congeners may be referred back to the Indo-European root **keuk-* ‘to bow, be bent’ (Köbler 2014, s.v. **keuk-*). The early semantics of *huck* and *huckster* then point more to a concave surface than to any entity such as a hump or pack. Of the augmented form *huckle*, as well as being a homonym for the hipbone, the verb seems to have had a brief period of use in the mid-seventeenth century as a term for bargaining, and also briefly in the mid-nineteenth century in English dialect but only in the sense ‘to bend the body, to stoop’.

As noted above, the *OED* takes no stand on the matter of the origin of *huckster* but tacitly invites the consideration of a loan from continental Germanic, perhaps as a result of small-scale international trade (a source in Anglo-French can be ruled out). However, writing about a century later and with greatly increased textual resources, the editors of the *Middle English dictionary* (Kurath 1952–2001), assessing the evidence of ME *hukken*, *hukker*, *huckstere*, and other related terms, posit an unrecorded Old English antecedent. Written evidence begins as early as about 1200 in glossaries, proof that the term was well known and could be adduced to aid in the learning of Latin.

The *OED* makes *hawk* a back formation from *hawker* (like *huck* from *huckster*) and judges it a loan from Middle Low German *hoker* or Dutch *heuker* ‘higgler, hawker, huckster, costermonger’ (*OED*, s.v. *hawk*). While English *hawk* is often associated with the crying of wares, it is best viewed, historically, as a vowel-alternative variant on *huck*.

The *OED* defines *higgle* as follows: ‘to cavil or dispute as to terms; to stickle; esp. to strive for petty advantages in bargaining; to chaffer’ (*OED*, s.v. *higgle*).⁷ The verb is attested from 1633: “Either he higgles with some hollow reservation, or lispeth with some faltring equivocation” (Adams 1633: 846). The presumptive base form *hig* is not found in standard English but in dialect as a variant of *higgle* in the sense of bargaining (Wright 1898–1905: 3.156–157, s.v. *hig*). Here again is the question of either completion of a simplex – etymology to be determined – by a reiterative suffix, or of an analogically derived form in *-le* with front vocalism that subsequently throws off an apparent simplex.

Haggle ‘to bargain’ is derived by the *OED* from *hag* in the sense of ‘hack’ but no convincing semantic transfer is outlined. At this point it may be useful to suggest that *huckstering* and *haggling* be viewed as two concentric circles, with the former

the compound *huck-bone* is found in 1440, *huck* itself is not cited till late in the 18th cent.; on the other hand, the apparent diminutive *huckle*, and its compound *huckle-bone*, are found soon after 1500. The two earliest examples, Middle English *hoke-bone* and Scots *huke-bane*, answer exactly in form to *hook-bone*; but identity of *huck* with *hook* n.1, though not impossible, is not greatly favoured by the sense or phonology of the group as a whole. It is possible that the origin is to be sought in the Germanic root *huk-*, *hūk-*, *hukk-*, to be bent, whence Middle Dutch *hukēn* and *hukken*, Middle Low German *hūken*, Old Norse *húka*, to crouch, sit bent, sit on the haunches. When the body is bent, the hip-joints play the chief part”.

⁷ The entry displays an early recognition of the function of vowel alternation: ‘apparently related to *haggle* n., with the vowel-modification which often expresses less noisy or lighter action’.

encompassing the latter. Huckstering has a single agent; haggling entails that the promotional effort has been succeeded by a discussion between seller and potential buyer about quality, and by negotiation over price. With a bit of imagination one could see haggling as two parties alternately “chopping” from their individual vantage points at the hypothetical value/price of the commodity or service in question. Still, the historical development of the semantics may be quite different, although the Indo-European origin seems beyond doubt (see Köbler 2014, s.v. **kāu-*).

In sum, little clarity is to be seen among elements of the triads *hig/hag/huck* and *higgle/haggle/huckle*. By way of a stroke at this Gordian knot of scaled vowels, voiced and voiceless consonants, and interdependent triads, it is proposed that the complex originated in two kinetic semantic fields in early Germanic: bowing and hacking (PIE roots **keuk-* and **kāu-*). *Hack/hag* generated *haggle*. The three-part vowel alternation paradigm was filled out by the analogically formed *higgle* (perhaps in turn generating the “simplex” *hig*) and by a loan from the other field, *huck/huckle*, initially ‘to bow/be bowed’ (with a load of goods for sale) and subsequently, in the new verbal environment, to dicker over price.⁸ Historically speaking, *huckster*, *hawker* and *haggle* have been the most durable members in this word cluster.

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Niggle, Naggle: *Niggle* was noted briefly above as a synonym of *higgle*. In view of the practice of analogical formation, it must be asked whether *niggle* has a discrete etymon or is a derivative generated to fill out a spectrum. To consider another possible member of a triad, the English verb *nag* is defined as ‘to gnaw, to nibble’ and is perhaps best known today for figurative uses: ‘to find fault, complain, scold, or urge, esp. annoyingly or persistently. ... to irritate; to demand attention or make one’s presence felt in a marginal but persistent manner’ (*OED*, s.v. *nag*). The word appears in English letters in the first third of the eighteenth century but is (apparently) credited with a long subterranean existence,⁹ since the proposed source is a loan from Old Norse (in either its Old Danish or Old Norwegian colorations): *nagga* ‘to rub, to grumble’, likely a reduced form of Old Norse *gnaga* ‘gnaw’. Although there is no cross-reference in the *OED* entry for *nag*, the dictionary also lists the verb *naggle* ‘to gnaw, bite; nag, quarrel, complain, etc., esp. in a petty manner’, most frequently found in regional English. First attested in 1869, *naggle* is parsed as a compound of the verbal root *nag* and the common suffix *-le*, which usually carries a frequentive sense (occasionally a diminutive one). Joseph Wright’s (1898–1905) *English Dialect dictionary* has full and rewarding entries for both *nag* and *naggle* and also has a comparison with *niggle* ‘to bother, annoy’. But neither Old Norse nor any of the Scandinavian languages has a verb on the model of *gn-/hn-/n-* + front vowel + *g(l)*. It is then proposed that *niggle* has its beginning as a smaller-scale *naggle*. The latter

⁸ *Haggle*, commonly ‘to bargain’, retained its tie with hacking, although the term is obsolete in this context (*OED*).

⁹ For the possibility of an earlier borrowing of the word into Middle English, see Smithers (1964).

was superseded by the more elemental *nag*, while *niggle* remained in mainstream English, at the expense of the narrowly focused slang term *nig* ‘to clip coins’ (gnaw or nibble), not a reduction in price but in worth.¹⁰ In the next note attention moves from market stands to other rudimentary architecture.

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Hovel: In an entry from 1899 not yet fully updated, the *OED* defines *hovel* as ‘an open shed; an outhouse used as a shelter for cattle, a receptacle for grain or tools; a shed used as a human habitation; a rude or miserable dwelling-place; a wretched cabin’ (*OED*, s.v. *hovel*, n.1). The etymology is stated as uncertain, although the earlier speculation of an association with Old English *hof* ‘court, dwelling’ plus the Romance suffix *-el* is called “etymologically and chronologically inadmissible”. The dictionary goes on venture a tie to an unattested Anglo-Norman **huvel* which might be thought to be reflected in the recorded Old French form *huvelet* ‘short projecting roof’ (Godefroy 1881–1902, s.v. *huvelet*).

Lexicographical resources for Gallo-Romance are now much richer than they were at the close of the nineteenth century. Prime among these is the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, although contemporary scholarship, on the basis of the size of the relevant textual corpus and other historical considerations, would now call the language Anglo-French. In Anglo-French, then, we find the form *hovel* (var. *huvele*) defined as ‘cowl, hooded garment (worn by monks)’ (Rothwell et al. 2005, s.v. *huvel*). Yet the single recorded instance in a chronicle of London is sufficiently late (mid-fourteenth century) that the term might be thought a loan from Middle English, which is the period to which the *OED* would date the appearance of the word *hovel* in English: “Il vint de la tur monté un povere hakeney en une cote de raye, et chaucé de blaunche chaucés, sa teste coverte de une houel” [He came from the tower mounted on a poor hackney, in a striped coat, wearing white hose, his head covered with a cowl] (Aungier 1844: 100; my translations throughout).¹¹ *Hovel* also appears to have been used of a woman’s headdress, apparently something comparable to a wimple: “Si vous poez estre sanz wimpel, seez od chaudes huueles qe l’en appele kappes et par desus celles noires veils” [If you can be without wimples, sit with warm *huvels* that are called *kappes* and over these, black veils] (Herbert 1944: 309.12).¹²

¹⁰ Of another *nig* (and *niggard*), the *OED* writes: “origin uncertain; probably < early Scandinavian (compare Old Icelandic *hnöggr* (Icelandic *hnöggur*), Norwegian (Nynorsk) *nøgg*, Swedish *njugg*, Swedish regional *nägg*, *nagg*, early modern Danish *nygger*, adjectives, in sense ‘parsimonious, stingy’, cognate with Old English *hnēaw* ‘stingy’)”.

¹¹ See, too, *MED* (= Kurath et al. 2001, s.v. *hovel*), for which the following meanings are given and illustrated: ‘(a) a penthouse, outbuilding, shed; a shed for pigs, etc.; (b) a little cottage, hut; (c) a housing for a sacred image; (d)? a roofed passage or roof-like hood for the escape of smoke’. On balance, the likely Romance source of the suffix *-el* argues against its combination in Middle English with a reflex of Old Norse *húfa*, although such may have occurred in Norman French.

¹² From the thirteenth century.

The initial aspirate *h-* of *huvel* suggests a non-Latin origin for the word. With this consideration, Old Norse becomes a plausible source for the Norman term. In Norse, *húfa* was used of a hood, cap, or bonnet (Cleasby et al. 1957, s.v. *húfa*).¹³ It is then advanced that Old Norse *húfa* entered Norman French or, less likely, the Anglo-Norse of the Danelaw, acquired a diminutive suffix, and was employed for a cowl. The meaning was figuratively extended to designate modest structures that similarly had three closed sides, an open front, and low-angled top or roof. Both literal and figurative meanings are apparent in the mid-fifteenth-century technical use of *hovel* as ‘a canopied niche for an image’ (*OED*): “I wil that the ymage of oure lady ... be set vp ageyn the peeler ... and a hovel with pleyn sydes comyng down to the baas” (Tymms 1850: 19).

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Bounder: In its first entry for the nominal form *bounder*, the *OED* offers this definition: ‘one who sets or marks out bounds or limits; one who occupies a district bounding another, a borderer; a limit, a boundary; a landmark’ (*OED*, s.v. *bounder*, n.1).¹⁴ The etymology is transparent: the verb *bound* ‘to set bounds, limits’ + the agent suffix *-er*. The second entry will be seen to be less straightforward. Here *bounder* has two principal significations: 1) ‘a four-wheeled cab or trap, so called from the bounding motion of the vehicle in passing over rough roads’ (obsolete slang); 2) ‘a person of objectionable manners or anti-social behaviour; a cad’. As the first definition makes evident, the source for the word is to be found in a different signification of the verb *bound*, in this case ‘to recoil, rebound’ (*OED*, s.v. *bounder*, n.2).¹⁵ But just how is the cad comparable to the cab?

Among its attestations of *bounder* as a derogatory term of social judgment, the dictionary lists a documented instance that will be seen to be at odds with the *OED*’s own definition and etymology, and thus qualify, from that perspective, as a folk etymology: “*Bounder* (university), a student whose manners are despised by the *soi-disant elite*, or who is beyond the boundary of good fellowship ... (society), a swell, a stylish fellow, but of a very vulgar type” (Barrère, Leland 1889–1890, s.v. *bounder*). The slang dictionary from which this entry is cited then judges the *bounder* a transgressor, one who oversteps social boundaries. This late nineteenth-century reading of the word is also reflected in other citations in the *OED*, e.g. ‘To speak of a man as a *bounder* is to allude to him as an outsider or cad’;¹⁶ and ‘That is an anti-social proceeding, the conduct of a “*bounder*”’ (Archer 1899: 48). “Outsider” and “anti-” refer to social differences and their clear delineation. Yet, both the folk etymology reflected in making the *bounder* one “beyond the boundary of good fellowship”

¹³ Cognates are Old High German *hûba*, German *haube*, Danish *hue*, Scots *how*. *Húfa* was also used as a synonym for *húfr*, otherwise ‘hull’, for a part of a timber church – not, as might be thought, any kind of portico, but apparently the nave, which name is also a nautical expression.

¹⁴ The entry has not been fully updated since first published in 1887.

¹⁵ From 1933.

¹⁶ *The Times* (London), 2 May, 1890, 13/5.

and the *OED*'s more learned assignment of *bounder* 'cad' to supposed movements of recoil – on whose part? that of the offended upper class? – are rather implausible.

These strained attempts at explanation can be safely set aside, if a source for *bounder* is sought in the very social class for some of whose members it is used as a designation. London's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century working class and underclass included immigrants, not least from Ireland. In Irish *bonnaire* (< *bonn* 'foot' + agent suffix *-aire*) designated a person on foot, either a footman, courier, or one without other means of transportation (not even a bounding cab!), thus a 'churl', to employ the equivalent of Father Dinneen's Irish-English dictionary (Dinneen 1927, 110, s.vv. *donn*, *donnaire*).¹⁷ The word is lightly exclusionary in Irish and retained this valence when adopted into English, first, we assume, in the speech of the lower classes and then by men-about-town, which accounts for the inclusion of *bounder* in the slang dictionaries compiled by rakish social anthropologists, themselves in the nature of boundary-oversteppers. With time, it would seem that the class distance between the judge and the object of his judgment lessened, so that the *bounder* was only a few rungs away on the social ladder, an upstart or one fallen from social status by virtue of being a cad (see below).

As *bounder* illustrates, etymology does not determine subsequent semantics. Words draw into associational fields and clusters, and assume colouring from their new peers. Asked to explain *bounder*, most English-speakers today would, like their amateur and professional lexicographical predecessors, likely refer to boundaries and perhaps their infraction by the upwardly mobile – in a single bound. We now turn to the *bounder*'s double, the cad.

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Cad: The *OED* has six entries for the noun form *cad*, among which may be noted (with dates for the earliest attestations) the obsolete *cad* meaning 'a familiar spirit' [1567]; 'an unbooked passenger whom the driver of a coach took up for his own profit on the way' [1791] and 'an assistant or confederate of a lower grade, as a bricklayer's labourer (*dial.*); a familiar, "chum"' [1836]; and 'a caddis or caddis worm' [1620]. *Cad* in the more widespread sense of someone ethically or morally deficient – the dictionary's dated definition 'fellow of low vulgar manners and behaviour' – belongs, according to the dictionary, with the unbooked passenger and is first met in 1838. The etymology is not established. The *OED* ventures:

apparently, an abbreviation of *cadee n.*, *caddie n.*, *cadet n.1 2* of *cadet n.1* and its popular form *cadee n.* The modern sense [hangers-on at Oxford colleges or townsmen] appears to have arisen at the universities (or at least at Oxford), as an application ... to any one whose manners or conduct were like those of the class in question.

One is not too surprised to read in a sidebar in the *OED*: "This entry has not yet been fully updated (first published 1888)" (*OED*, s.v. *cad*, n.2).

¹⁷ Intervocalic *-nn-* and *-nd-* are often interchangeable in Irish.

The original sense of *cadet* ‘a younger son or brother; a younger branch of a family; a member of a younger branch’ does not offer too good a fit with the *cad*s of nineteenth-century British literature. The term originates in Latin *caput* and the Gascon diminutive *capdet*, thought to lie behind French *cadet*, meant ‘little head (of the family)’, often a younger brother serving as an army captain (Imbs 1971–1994, s.v. *cadet*). *Cadet* then offers a perspective toward the top of the social ladder, while users of *cad* look down. It is proposed that the application lying closest to the earliest meaning of *cad* is that of an assistant or familiar (buddy, chum, pal).

In Old Irish *cáid* meant ‘holy, noble, pure’ (Quin 1913–1976, s.v. *cáid*). This seems at the origin of Scots Gaelic *càd* ‘holy, high, sacred, good’ and, now in secularized terms, of what Dwelly’s *Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary* would see as a near-homonym: *cad* ‘friend’ (cf. *cadach* ‘affinity, friendship’: Dwelly 2011, s.vv.). Both terms are now obsolete, but the second is likely to have originated in the first, in the way that terms of value often become terms of endearment (*sweetie, honey, love*). In modern Irish *cádharach* means both ‘venerable, reverend’ and ‘friendly, fond’ (Dinneen 1927: 145).

Just as *pal* was loaned into English from Anglo-Romani and originally meant ‘brother’, *cad* may well have been loaned from Scots. A rather similar evolution can be seen in Old Irish *gilla* ‘youth, servant, messenger’, which became Scots *gillie*, once ‘an attendant on a Highland chief’, later ‘one who attends a sportsman in hunting or fishing in the Scottish Highlands’. Here we should also situate *caddie*, a golfer’s attendant and initially also a Scottish term (*Dictionary of the Scots language*). If we imagine friends as points on a horizontal axis, masters and servants are on a vertical axis. *Cad* changes planes, from close colleague to assistant.

In a further twist, English *cad* came to be used not only of social inferiors (e.g. at Oxford colleges) but of one (always male) who had fallen from the ethical and moral standards of his social class. Thus, the point of reference returns to that of Old Irish *cáid*, virtue in the absolute sense. Of the other significations listed by the *OED* for *cad*, some belong together in historical terms; others do not. *Cad* as a variant of *cade* in the phrase *cade-lamb* (var. *keddie-lamb*) ‘a lamb raised on the bottle, pet lamb’ would seem to satisfy semantic criteria as an object of friendship but the presence of the word in Middle English, and in Shetland and Orkney Scots but not on the Scottish mainland, points to a Norse origin, not a Celtic one (*OED*, s.v. *cad*, n.3). *Cad* in the sense of a supernatural being, a familiar spirit or something like a brownie, might derive from Irish *cáid* in the sense of ‘supernatural’ and be in the nature of a euphemism (*OED*, s.v. *cad*, n.1). Finally, *cad* as the unbooked fare of a cabbie could be based on the collusion between driver and passenger to defraud the cab company but the term is also used of the driver (*OED*, s.v. *cad*, n.2).

If the *OED*’s derivation of *cad* from *cadet* is rejected, largely on grounds of implausible social dynamics and the absence of intermediary stages, and if the etymology proposed here for modern *cad* in the sense of disreputable male is accepted, Old Irish *cáid* would have been passed into Scots Gaelic, then Scots and English, and have experienced a fall in spiritual and social worth from holiness and veneration through familiarity and friendliness to subservience and, lastly, condemnation – a striking

incidence of pejoration (Cf. *silly*, originally ‘worthy, good, pious, holy’). Bounders and cads may co-operate. The next note examines collusion on the boundaries of business ethics.

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Cahoots: Of the Americanism *cahoot*, the *OED* writes: “used in the South and West to denote a company, or partnership’ ... Frequently in pl., esp. in phr. in cahoot(s) (with): in league or partnership (with)” (*OED*, s.v. *cahoot*).¹⁸ Earliest attestations are from the first third of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The etymology is in doubt: “probably < French *cahute* (see *cahute n.*): compare the uses of *cabin*, *cabinet*. But American dictionaries refer it to French *cohort*” (*OED*, s.v. *cahoot*). Of the latter, the *Dictionary of American regional English* ranges more widely but is no more conclusive:

Also cahoots, cohort(s) [Etym obscure: Fr *cahute* cabin, *cohort* company, group, and even Amer *cahot* pothole in a road, have been proposed though none is fully acceptable; co- “with” seems to be understood and is perh reinforced by intensive *ker-*; hoot remains unexplained]. ... usu in phr in cahoots with: Partnership, freq implying or involving collusion, secrecy, hence further, dishonesty. Widespread. (Cassidy 1985–2013, s.v. *cahoot*)

Slang is notoriously difficult to trace and folk etymologies abound in popular accounts of vocabulary. To judge by entries in the *OED*, first attestations are often in dictionaries of slang, underclass jargon, cant, etc. Even when plausible etymologies can be proposed on the basis of semantics and phonology, the intermediary steps between “root” and “written” are all but absent. *Cahoot(s)* is a case in point. Thus, without further apology, this note opens with a credible origin for the word *cahoot* and its use, and then must invoke license for subsequent speculation on the pathway forward to North American popular speech of the 1800s.

In Scots Gaelic, the lexical elements *còm-* ‘with; mutual, etc.’ and *cuid* ‘part’ are combined in such terms as *còmh-chuideachd* ‘association, partnership, community’, *còmh-chuideachdach* ‘associated’, and *còmh-chuideachadh* ‘joint assistance’, although the presumptive base form is not recorded and must be marked as hypothetical, thus, **còmh-chuid* (Dwelly 1993, s.vv.). Gaelic orthography signals lenited consonants, of which there are two instances here, with a following letter *h*. This may lead to ill-informed assumptions as to pronunciation. In this case *còmh-chuid* would, in a rough-and-ready phonetic transcription, have been pronounced [kawχudj]. With a devoicing of the final consonant, this in turn could have been rendered in Scots as *cahoot* with the meaning ‘partnership’. Given Lowland attitudes toward Highland speech, a loan from Gaelic into Scots may also have included a slight pejorative colouration, as still seen in *cahoots* in the sense of collusion, secrecy.

¹⁸ This entry has not yet been fully updated (first published 1888).

¹⁹ “I wouldn’t swar he wasn’t in cahoot with the devil” (Jones 1845, cited from Cassidy 1985–2013, s.v. *cahoots*). Another early example prescribes the phrase as uncultured: “Hese in cohort with me” (Kirkham 1831: 207).

With an etymology established, problems begin. There was never any substantial immigration of Scots Gaelic-speakers to North America until the Highland clearances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the establishment of Celtic-speaking communities on, for example, Cape Breton Island, Canada. There was, however, a substantial Ulster Scots immigration to Pennsylvania and Virginia in the eighteenth century, with subsequent expansion south- and west-ward. Early evidence for *cahoot* is claimed for Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and Mississippi (Kirkham 1831: 207). These settlers were descendants of Lowland Scottish emigrants who had gone to Ireland in the early seventeenth century seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity, so that any lexical loan from Gaelic would have had to have occurred before this population movement. The Scots in Ulster might, of course, have absorbed a native Irish term and, while such a word would have had a similar form as *comhchuid* above, it is not recorded in early modern Irish.²⁰ Since *cahoots* is listed in neither *Dictionary of the Scots language, The English dialect dictionary*, nor *From Ulster to America: The Scotch-Irish heritage of American English (Dictionary of the Scots language; Wright 1898–1905; Montgomery 2017)*, one must imagine in some “Scotch-Irish” community a North American coinage that caught on and was widely adopted, perhaps – even more speculation – in the situation of extensive settler-era land speculation and its myriad deals. In sum, the derivation of American *cahoots* from Scots Gaelic *còmhchuid*- seems self-referential in that the languages seem to have been in collusion but to have kept their historical secret well. More double-dealing follows.

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Hanky-panky: In an entry first published in 1898 and not yet been fully updated, the *OED* defines *hanky-panky* as ‘jugglery, legerdemain; trickery, double dealing, underhand dealing’ [earliest attestation 1841], with the extended meaning ‘sexual activity or dalliance, esp. of a surreptitious nature’ [first noted from 1939] (*OED*, s.v. *hanky-panky*).²¹ The register is identified as “slang” and the etymological commentary reads: “an arbitrary formation, probably related to *hocus pocus, hoky-poky*”. Other deprecatory reduplicative compounds on the same formal model, such as *shilly-shally, fiddle-faddle, helter-skelter, flim-flam*, have proven open to more intensive etymological probing, which suggests that the *OED*’s “arbitrary formation” may be too dismissive. Prior to a renewed inquiry, it should be noted that the history of recorded attestations suggests that the application to human sexual behaviour may be a later development but this is not assured.

Restricting our initial scan of evidence to the *OED*, neither *hank* nor *pank* has any ostensible association with deception and, indeed, the latter exists only as a verb

²⁰ The concept is, however, central to early Irish social organization and jurisprudence; see, for example, *cumthus* ‘legal companionship, partnership, mutual advantage, common property’ (Quin 1913–1976, s.v.).

²¹ In Shaw’s (1939: I.5) play *Geneva* we find: “*She*: ... No hanky panky. I am respectable; and I mean to keep respectable. *He*: I pledge you my word that my intentions are completely honorable”.

meaning ‘to pant, pound (of the heart)’. The *English dialect dictionary*, however, has richer offerings in this regard. Prime among these is the verb *to hankle* in the figurative sense of ‘entangle, inveigle, entice, decoy’ (the literal sense is limited to ‘entangle’; Wright 1898–1905: 3, 55–56). The verbal application seems based on *hank* as ‘a skein of yarn or thread’ (*-le* is a verbal suffix and not part of the stem). *Hank* is also employed in expressions meaning to have a hold over someone. The word appears to have been loaned into English from Old Norse (< *hǫnk* ‘hank, coil, skein, clasp’ or *hanki* ‘hasp or clasp of a chest’; Cleasby et al. 1957, s.vv.)

In the type of deprecatory reduplicative compound represented by *hanky-panky*, the second element is in formal contrast to the first, through the shift in either the initial consonant or the first vowel. The diminutive suffix represented by *-y* is common but not universal. As for semantics, there is no hard and fast rule for the function of the second element, which may appear complementary to the first or contrasting, while creating the overall playful, derogatory, and trivializing effect of the collocation. Just where *panky* fits in in this case is an open question, since the known range of meaning, as seen in the *OED*, is so thin. The *EDD* expands on the *OED* significations of ‘to pant, pound (of the heart)’ to include ‘beat’ in a transitive sense, e.g. *to pank* an apple tree to knock down fruit (cf. *panker* as a large marble, used in aggressive moves) (Wright 1898–1905: 4, 418).²² Speculatively, *panky* might be paired with *hanky* in the sense of an advantage taken after a deception. Or as deception and its exposure, legerdemain reversed (‘first you don’t see it, now you do’), the quiet aspirate *h-* followed by the plosive *p-*, were the discussion to venture into phono-semantics. The extension from general trickery and deception to the sexual sphere may have been marked by an intermediary phrase in which *hanky-panky* was used to designate artful seduction, not simply more or less consensual sex.

While the expression *hanky-panky* can be more thoroughly etymologized than the *OED* would have it, the influence of *hoky-poky* and *hocus-pocus* on the compound’s subsequent history, as suggested by the dictionary, cannot be excluded. Next, a more specific kind of deceptive transactional practice.

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Scathe and *scathing*: The *OED* has entries for *scathe* as both noun and verb. The former is defined as ‘one who works harm’ (archaic); ‘hurt, harm, damage’; ‘matter for sorrow or regret’ (*OED*, s.v. *scath*, n. & v.). Relevant idioms include ‘to work/take scathe’ and ‘it is scathe’, meaning ‘it is a pity’. Verbal use is well aligned with these instances but also includes ‘to injure or destroy by fire, lightning, or similar agency; to blast, scorch, sear’ (poet. and rhet.) and ‘to sear or wither with fierce invective or satire’. The dictionary speculates that this last, narrowly focused meaning stems from Milton’s use of the word in *Paradise lost* to describe Satan’s host of fallen angels: “As when Heavens Fire Hath scath’d the Forrest Oaks, ...

²² The etymology is not established but cf. Indo-European **pāg-* ‘to beat together’ (Köbler 2014, s.v.).

With singed top their stately growth though bare
Stands on the blasted Heath” (cited by the *OED* from Milton 1667: i. 613).²³ *Scathe* as both verb and noun is all but obsolete today, and the adjective *scathing* may well be judged the sole survivor into contemporary English.

Although these *OED* entries were drafted in 1910 and are said not to have been fully updated, the accompanying etymological commentaries are quite full. Lightly edited, that for *scathe* as verb reads:

< Old Norse *skaða* impers., it hurts (Swedish *skada*, Danish *skade* to hurt, injure); corresponding to Old English *sc(e)aðian* to injure, rob, Old Frisian *skathia* to injure, Old Saxon *scadon* (Essen Gloss.) to slander, Dutch *schaden* to injure, Old High German *skadôn* (Middle High German, modern German *schaden*) < Germanic **skapōjan*, < **skapōn*- *scathe* n.

Since none of the Germanic cognates that are cited displays an extended meaning ‘to scorch’, Milton’s figurative use may gain some measure of credibility as an explanation of *scathing* in its current sense.

Yet one small scrap of evidence points elsewhere. It is generally agreed that English words that have their source in Old Norse – that of the raiders, traders, or settlers to the British Isles – tend to retain an initial *sk*-. When they exist, Old English cognates generally develop *sh*-, if the word survives and is not overlaid by its northern cousin. Cleasby, Vigfússon, and Craigie’s *An Icelandic-English dictionary* has an entry for *skjáta* in the sense of ‘a piece of scorched skin’ (Cleasby et al. 1957, s.v. *skjáta*). The collocation *skinn-skjáta* is given but with no attestation in the medieval language. Such treatment generally points to post-medieval popular use. This said, a tentative origin may lie in Germanic reflexes of the Indo-European root **kāit*- ‘burn’, in a form with variant initial consonant, **skāit*- (Köbler 2014, s.v. **kāi*-).

Old Norse *skját*- then appears a more plausible source for *scathing* in the sense of scorching than *scathe*, as the antecedent of the latter developed from Old English under the influence of Norse. It is noteworthy that other early instances of *scathing* in this signification are found in Scottish and northern English writers such as Scott, Carlyle, and Thirlwall (as listed by the *OED*). Scotland and the north of England may have been the point of entry for this loan from Norse, and Milton’s use may, speculatively, be judged a northernism.

The *OED* calls the pairing of *scathe* with *scorn*, as in William Dunbar’s verse “And thus the scorne and the scaith scapit he nothir”, a typically Scottish dual phrasing.²⁴ Since *scathing* is used of invective and satire, which are, admittedly, intended to cause some psychological harm, it may well be the case that the sense of scorching, satirical comment had persisted into this collocation with *scorn*.

²³ One of the best remembered instances of *scathe* in its general sense in English literature is in the opening of a Chaucerian portrait in *The Canterbury tales*: “A good Wif was ther of biside Bathe / But she was somdel deaf and that was scathe” (“General prologue”, vv. 445–446, in Benson 1987).

²⁴ From 1507, *Tua Mariit Wemen*, in Bawcutt (1998: I. 50).

In conclusion, future revisions to the *OED* entry for *scathe* as a verb should include mention of the possibility of a discrete origin and partially distinct history for *scathing*. Separate entries would be justified only on the discovery of additional relevant evidence. In the first note of the next part of this study, harm to society calls in police resources.

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