

WILLIAM SAYERS
Cornell University, Ithaca
ws36@cornell.edu

ODDMENTS: A MISCELLANY OF ENGLISH ETYMOLOGIES (PART 2)¹

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Abstract

This multi-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.

Nark, narc, and narco: *Nark*: ‘a police officer’ (*OED Online*, henceforth *OED*, 2b, attested from 1891, s.v. *nark*); *narc* ‘short for a narcotics officer; a member of law enforcement that enforces drug laws (*Urban dictionary*, s.v. *nark*). These two definitions – one from the authoritative professional historical print record of largely British English, the other from the continuously revised amateur online reflection of contemporary American English – have a further semantic parallel in a secondary meaning: ‘a police informer’ (*OED*, 2a, 1859); ‘a person who is not a member of law enforcement but turns you into the police for doing or dealing drugs’ (*Urban dictionary*). Although the American term is ostensibly the abbreviation of *narcotics* (*agent*), and the British one without a fully convincing etymology but surely unconnected with illegal drugs, the neat parallelism invites further scrutiny. There is also a functional similarity between British and North American usage, albeit with a twist: in one instance, the police officer refers the law-breaker to the justice system according to accepted legal and social conventions; the informant, on the other

¹ This article continues a study initiated under the same title in volume 136 (2019), issue 1 of this journal.

hand, betrays a fellow-member of the community in violation of its ethical standards. Even more recent in American English is *narco*, the loan of Latin American Spanish *narcotraficante* ‘extra-legal producer and seller of drugs’. Here, too, the law is both active and contravened.

In an entry updated in 2003, the *OED* calls the etymology of *nark* ‘uncertain’ and continues:

Perhaps < Angloromani *nok nose* (1863 in B. C. Smart *Dial. Eng. Gypsies*; compare Welsh Romani *nakh*, European Romani *nak*); for the semantic development, compare the earlier use of *nose* in the sense ‘informer’ (see *nose* n. 4) and such uses as *to poke one’s nose into at nose* n. Phrases 1d(b). However, the rendering of the Romani short vowel (*o* or *a*) as *a(r)* in English is unusual. Also, the assumed development would require that the Romani word had an extended sense denoting a person, but this is not attested; if it did occur, it would most probably have been calqued on English *nose* ‘informer’, which would require that sense 2 should be the earlier sense.

Hesitancy before this etymological speculation is strengthened when the full range of significations for *nark* is considered. In addition to the above (policeman, police informer), these include ‘an annoying, unpleasant, obstructive, or quarrelsome person’; ‘an annoying or unpleasant thing or situation; a source of irritation’ (from 1846); and ‘a fit of anger or pique’ (1918). Compare the meanings of *nark* as a verb: ‘to watch, look at; to act as an informer; to inform *on*; to annoy, exasperate, infuriate; to complain, grumble, nag; to cease, desist, stop’. Yet, among the several points of interface among significations of *nark*, what is the possible connection between informer and grumbler, the one a violator of community ethics, the other a misanthropic complainer? This semantic diversity would represent a substantial and varied extension from an origin in the Anglo-Romani word for ‘nose’.

This problematic situation can be readily resolved, if the *OED* entry for *nark* is seen to incorporate at least two originally different words, words that were once semantically and phonologically distinct, *nark* and *knark*, then assumed phonological similarity as homonyms. The signification ‘annoying, unpleasant, obstructive, or quarrelsome person’ may be traced to a likely onomatopoeic Old Norse form (meaning a ‘croaker’, such as a wading bird), now reflected in Danish *knark*, Swedish and Norwegian *knarr* ‘old fogey, grumbler, curmudgeon’. Note, too, Scots *knark*, with a more original Norse colouring: ‘to make a grating noise, crack, creak, to crunch, as with the teeth, to squeak, as of boots’ (*Dictionary of the Scots language*, s.v. *knark*).² Although the original form *knark* has only a single attestation in the *OED*, it was once widespread in English dialect, where it is glossed ‘annoy, vex, irritate, exasperate’ but also, in the conjoining of significations, ‘to crack, creak, crunch’ (Wright 1898–1905, s.vv. *knark*, *nark*). From the grumbler, the affect of the term was extended to situations (‘sources of irritation’) that elicit comparable feelings (grumpiness, anger, pique) in their subject. With this *nark* disposed of as of Scandinavian derivation, the etymological inquiry returns to policemen and their informers.

² The Old English cognate is *gnyrran* ‘to make a strident sound’.

In the etymological commentary for *nark*, the *OED* continues the comments reproduced above as follows:

E. Partridge *Dict. Underworld* (1949) at cited word [*nark*] suggests that the word may be shortened < French *narquois* (adjective) mocking (1842), cunning, deceitful (1694; earlier in sense ‘slang’ 1653), (noun; now arch.) vagabond soldier (c1590), (obsolete) thief, crook (1620; also in sense ‘slang’ (1611)), of uncertain origin.

A more likely source than French *narquois* is the related form *narquin* ‘vagrant or thieving soldier’, the consideration of which will reveal the source of the former. *Narquin* originated in French *arc* ‘bow’; an **arquin* was a Bowman or archer. The indefinite article *un* became associated with the noun and the syllable and word boundary was lost, so that *un arquin* evolved as *un narquin* (cf. the reverse process in English: *a nadder* > *an adder*). This designation dates from the mid-sixteenth century (Imbs 1971–1994, s.v. *narquois*). To return to English *nark* (as the result of the loan of French *narquin*) in the sense of ‘informer’, the term is first found in print in 1859, but – noted in a dictionary of slang – is, along with other foreignisms, firmly in the popular register of the underclass and its admixture of policemen, lawyers, judges, and men about town: ‘*nard* [*leg. nark*], a person who obtains information under seal of confidence, and afterwards breaks faith’ (Ducange *Anglicus* 1857, s.v. *nard* [sic]). How to account for the semantic development in this loan from French, from military drifter and petty thief to informer? The class association remains the same but the Englishman has been enlisted by the police force, not the military. The service he now provides is not in fighting but in reconnoitering. The further development, from *copper’s nark* to *copper*, focuses on the policeman’s efforts to obtain information himself on suspected criminals. The usage is now that of the latter group. It cannot be excluded that Anglo-Romani *nak* ‘nose’ added some colour to this mix, although it should be stressed that, unlike English, Anglo-Romani did not employ this image for an informer.

In conclusion, three ‘*nark*-words’ entered Old, Renaissance, and modern English from three distinct sources, Old Norse, Middle French, and Latin American Spanish, at intervals of seven to three centuries. Their early histories have been obscured by several factors. The sequence of listed meanings in the *OED* is of necessity an interpretive editorial act, subject to review. Despite the implausibility of all the meanings listed for *nark* by the *OED* deriving from a single etymon (and this formerly in doubt, *pace*, Partridge), two distinct significations are examined under a single head word. A second factor is the largely dismissive attitude taken toward words in the popular register; a third, the difficulties of tracing slang terms, often originating in wordplay or figurative language, which tends to move upscale from the urban underclass to word buffs and compilers of slang dictionaries, then to men about town and even to the female authors of informal epistolary correspondence indulging in a playful bit of lexical slumming. Here, as elsewhere, etymologies must also be pursued into the language from which a term appears to be loaned, in order to win a fuller understanding of early semantics and register.

British *nark* seems to have crossed the Atlantic with the sense ‘informer, snoop’ (including representatives of police forces) but then assumed a specific sense in the North American drug community of dealers, users, and lawmen, where it was doubtless quickly perceived – in a folk etymologizing process – to reflect the word *narcotics*.³ The Spanish abbreviation *narco*, although designating rather different persons but still in the larger legal framework, later entered contemporary English with a semantic niche already carved out.

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Scam: It may be argued that the origins of words from popular speech – slang, jargon, cryptolects, cant, and the like – are among the most difficult to trace, since first attestations, the milestones of our lexicographical works, often turn out to be in dictionaries of slang composed at some time and social distance from their matrices by word-hunters never members of the insider groups where words and phrases were coined, meanings extended. *Scam* is an interesting case in point, although of fairly recent vintage, or so it would seem. The *OED* defines the noun as ‘a trick, a ruse; a swindle, a racket, a story; a rumour; information’ (*OED*, s.v. *scam*, n.).⁴ As to etymology, the dictionary states only ‘origin obscure’. One of the early written instances of *scam* does, however, provide a clue, although popular speech is particularly open to the fanciful conjectures of folk etymology and of individual word buffs. In an article from 1963, *Time* (28 June, 1963, 48/2) quotes a self-identified ‘carny huckster’ as saying of one of his practices: “It was a full scam”. Games of chance were naturally also open to manipulation: “A gambling house is a sitting duck to every con man or outlaw who comes through; he is invariably convinced that he has a scam that you have never seen before” (*Harper’s Magazine* 8–9 February, 1971: 89).

Scam does not appear to be an abbreviation of any word current in early modern and modern English. The possibility of a loan from another language, any of those best known for influence on English (French, Italian, Norse, Low and High German), is an equally discouraging avenue of research. Yet if we look to urban working- and under-class speech, other candidates emerge as contributors to popular English: criminal milieus, the Roma, and later immigrants such as (often barely) bilingual Irish. In Irish the verbal noun *scamhach* refers to acts of cutting and abrading of various kinds, both concrete and figurative: ‘peeling, stripping, grinding’, even dealing out a deck of cards and wasting one’s time (Dinneen 1927, s.vv. *scam*, *scamhach*).⁵ The related noun *scamh* refers to shavings, filings, etc. A homonym meaning ‘a cleft or chink’ was also used of vicious facial expressions and in such compounds as *scamhghlonn* ‘a dirty trick’. If we consider a person’s money as a quantity that may be depleted by another in malicious fashion, *scamh* and related would seem likely candidates for the source of the slang word *scam*. Underclass gaming houses in

³ *Nark* is unrepresented in *Dictionary of American regional English* (Cassidy 1985–2013).

⁴ The term is identified as originally North American but is not represented in Cassidy (1985–2013).

⁵ We should not, however, look for the vocabulary of confidence tricksters in Father Dinneen’s work.

urban centres such as London, with their cosmopolitan population, are known as fertile grounds both for coney-catching or playing confidence tricks, and for the genesis of slang and insider language. A substantial number of such English words can be traced to the Irish of the eighteenth centuries. The difficulty with this derivation is that the pronunciation of *scamh* would have been approximately [skav], as a consequence of the lenited final labial *-m*, as indicated by the spelling convention *mh*. Yet there was a closely related word that was used only of milking cattle dry: *scamadh* (with unlenited *m*). A simplex noun *scam* can be posited. It is suggested that cryptolalic tendencies in urban slang used the semantically narrow *scam* in place of the usual *scamh* with the sense of ‘milking’ an unsuspecting gambler, investor, young man on the town, etc. of his cash. Such sound substitution, along with the rearrangement of letters, addition of prefixes, suffixes, abbreviations, punning, figurative extensions are all characteristic of ingroup dialects, such as Shelta, the language of the Irish travelers (Macalister 1937). The perceived need for a ‘secret language’ (to use Macalister’s term) naturally increased its attractiveness to those who would be seen as in the know, even though the victims of scams were typically drawn from this same class of men about town.

If this etymology is judged plausible, we should still be lacking any evidence for the word’s transfer to North American gambling and entertainment venues. But what written evidence there is suggests that the scam and its terminology were well in place by the 1960s and doubtless well before. This first grouping of words for study concludes with two more terms expressive of social insecurity.

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Skittish and *skitter*: The *OED* states that the word *skittish* is ‘of obscure origin: perhaps < a Scandinavian base **skyt-* (see *skit* v.²) + *-ish* suffix’ (*OED*, s.v. *skittish*, adj.). The central early signification was ‘of disposition, etc.: characterized by levity, frivolity, or excessive liveliness’ and the first attestation is from the early fifteenth century: “Whan þat þou hast assayde boþe two, Sad age, I seye, after þi skittish youþe”.⁶ Extended meanings, as applied to horses and other animals, and then to people who were ‘fickle, inconstant, changeable; tricky, difficult to deal with or manage’ followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Recourse to a hypothetical Old Norse **skyt-* is, however, not required. ON had a cognate of Old English *sceótan*, *skjóta* ‘to shoot’, one of whose meanings in reflexive use was ‘to shoot, start, move, slip away’ (Cleasby et al. 1957, s.v. *skjóta*). In the Icelandic *Grettis saga* (*The Saga of Grettir*), the farmer Ásmundr aims a blow of his staff at his platitudinous, sarcastic young son, Grettir, “en hann skauzk undan” (‘but he shied away’) (Jónsson 1936, Ch. 14: 38). While the word appears in the Norse-inflected speech of medieval Normandy as *escoter* (vars. *escotter*, *escuter*; *eskoter*; *scotter*), it is only in the narrow sense of ‘to pay scot’ or ‘contribute’ (Rothwell et al. 2005, s.v. *escoter*). A more likely route into Old English was the Norse speech of the

⁶ From 1412, in Furnivall, Gollanz (1892–1925: 590).

Danelaw.⁷ While the change in vocalism from *skjót-* to *skitt-* might be ascribed to the fronting effect of the appended English suffix *-ish*, a close near-front rounded vowel appears in the Danish cognate *skyde* and, at an earlier stage, could have been one of the phonological features separating Old East Norse (the antecedent of Danish and Swedish) from Old West Norse (Icelandic/Norwegian). This front vowel would then have been part of the sound system of Old Danish as brought by ninth-century invaders to Britain.

In this context it is important to review the *OED*'s entry for the now regional verb *skite* 'to shoot or dart swiftly, esp. in an oblique direction; to run lightly and rapidly; to make off hastily' (*OED*, s.v. *skitter*, v.²). Curiously, there is no cross-reference to *skittish*, despite comparable semantics and possible origin. Here the *OED* invokes 'Old Norse *skýt-*, umlauted stem of *skjóta* to shoot'. But such a *skýt-* is unattested in Old Norse, with *skyti* and *skytja* 'shooter, marksman', with a short vowel, the most proximate forms. *Skite* and the derivative *skitter* ('apparently a frequentative < *skite* v.², *OED*) are then also to be traced to Old Danish *skyde*.

An intriguing feature of English vocabulary are loose synchronic word clusters in which roughly similar consonants sequences are accompanied by variations in the vowel, all words lying in the same general semantic field. Even though the ideophonic members of the cluster may have distinct origins and histories, they are perceived by speakers as associated, organized on a spectrum in which front or high vowels suggest, *inter alia*, fineness or small size, and back and low vowels, coarseness and large size. *Skitter* as a verb of motion can then be viewed as part of a set of terms of locomotion that includes *scat* (in which the *OED*, with unaccustomed inventiveness, would see "ss cat!" [i.e. a hiss followed by the word *cat*!]), *skedaddle* (?), *skeet* (now dialectal), *skite*, *scoot*, *shoot* (in some senses), *scud*, and *scuttle*.

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Camp: With the residual moralism that often marks its treatment of popular speech, slang, minority and insider jargon, the *OED* defines what it lists as a sixth lexical group associated with the adjectival form *camp* as 'ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual'. Of the corresponding noun, the dictionary writes: "camp" behaviour, mannerisms, etc. ... a man exhibiting such behaviour' (*OED*, s.v. *camp*, adj. and n.⁵).⁸ The earliest attestation from 1909 in a lexicographical work devoted to "heterodox English" bears witness to the term having already achieved widespread, although possibly insider, currency: '*Camp* (*Street*), actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis. Probably from the French. Used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character. "How very camp he is"' (Ware 1909: 61/2). Neither this dictionary nor the *OED* is proscriptive in these instances; judgment is reserved for social behaviour, rather than speech. The *OED* calls the etymology

⁷ None of the early examples suggests that the word entered mainstream English from Old Scots, where there is a substantial Norse-derived vocabulary.

⁸ A commentary states that the entry has not been fully updated since 1972.

“obscure”; the Victorian slang dictionary’s notion of a French source, on further scrutiny of French *argot* and the like, proves to be unfounded.⁹

The origins of insider language are resistant to the historical linguist, in part because both the cryptolect and fashionable urban vocabulary retain their social, as distinct from semantic, valence and cachet only when their currency is limited. This observation, however, should by rights follow the question of whether *camp* originated within the gay community or was applied to it from without (emic or etic?). Whether the term is primarily indicial, descriptive, or judgmental is a consequence of perspective.

Analogies are more a stimulant to further reflection than a buttress to proof but it is noteworthy that such a word as *dandy* would seem to have originated not among the fashionable young men of London but those of Edinburgh. A Scottish song from about 1790 has the lines: “I’ve heard my granny crack O’ sixty twa years back When there were sic a stock of Dandies O; Oh they gaed to Kirk and Fair, Wi’ their ribbons round their hair, And their stumplee drugget coats, quite the Dandy O” (Mount 1893: 81, citing an oral source dated to ca. 1790). Also found early in Scots is *camp*, explained by *The Scottish national dictionary* as ‘a romp’ (Grant 1931–1975, s.v. *camp*, adj., ‘brisk, active, spirited’),¹⁰ the verbal form of which the *OED* defines as ‘to play roughly or energetically (esp. of children and animals); to sport or frolic in a lively, light-hearted, or boisterous manner’ (*OED*, s.v. *romp*).¹¹ It is in the nature of slang to reassign or extend the signification of extant words or to employ them figuratively, ironically, etc., and we need not look for an exact semantic match between Scots *camp* and the term here under discussion. Just as *romp*, seen in the above definition, could also mean ‘to engage in sexual activity, esp. of an illicit nature’ (*OED*), so the lively acting out and playful and illusionary theatrics of mainstream Scots *camp* could have been used by a minority social group to reference the symbolism inherent in certain lightly transgressive styles of dress and behaviour. Another analogy may throw some additional light. *Flamenquismo* involved the adaptation by central and northern Spaniards of male and female Andalusian dress and behavioural styles, including what historians have called *el aire de taco*, lightly aggressive in-your-face-iveness. This was in the nature of a nationalist socio-political reaction to French ideologies and dandyism, *petimetrería* (< French *petit-maitre*).¹² This same affront to social convention accompanies *camp*, but is of course not its sole dynamic.

⁹ For example, as documented in *Dictionnaire de l’argot* (Colin 1990). *Camp* is used concretely in French, so that *un camp de gitanes* is a Roma encampment, not a bunch of gypsies, and *camp* cannot have been loaned into English for another self-selected social minority.

¹⁰ The term is related to English *champion*, German *Kampf* ‘struggle’, and this meaning is reflected in English dialect (Wright 1898–1905, s.vv. *camp*, *campersome* ‘lively, high-spirited’).

¹¹ Prompted by the reference to children’s activities, one might imagine *camp* to be an abbreviation of *scamp*, but such apocopation is uncharacteristic of standard English, although not unknown to cryptolects. *Scamp*, however, which originally meant a thief who ‘decamped’ with your goods, does illustrate how negative terms are often extended endearingly to mischievous children (perhaps originally as dysphemisms to ward off malevolent spirits), cf. *imp*, *little devil*, *scoundrel*. Transference of this kind may also lie behind the present use of *camp*.

¹² See Sayers (2007).

Urban Scots is a plausible source for *camp* in the specific reference here examined. Yet, analogies aside, proof is scant, and the proposed etymology is admittedly highly speculative. *Camp* is not the only word in English for which a dictionary of slang has the first written instance, striking proof, if any be needed, that vogue words (whose origins often seem willfully hidden) have a vigorous underground life well before they come to the attention of fashionable men-about-town and slumming lexicographers. As concerns fashionable urbanites, the next group of words for study is related to apparel.

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Duds: The *OED* states as the original meaning of Middle English *dudde* ‘a cloak or mantle, perhaps esp. one made of coarse cloth’ (*OED*, s.v. *dud*, n.1). From this late medieval designation, a wide range of significations subsequently develops for early modern and modern English *dud*: ‘a rag, a scrap of cloth; a ragged or shabby item of clothing’; in *pl.* ‘general or personal effects; a person dressed in ragged clothing. Hence: a feeble, spiritless, or indolent person’; ‘a counterfeit, a forgery’; ‘a thing which fails to function in the way that it is designed to do; a thing which is in poor condition’; ‘an ineffectual or inept person’; ‘an event or performance that fails to live up to expectations or is otherwise disappointing’ (*OED*). These meanings are individually numbered and further divided but the tacit judgment is that a single etymology lies behind them all, rather than that words of distinct origin fell together, over time, phonetically and orthographically. It may then be surprising that the single explanation of this single form and its manifold meanings is ‘origin unknown’.

The *OED* entry for *dud* is from ‘*OED* Third Edition, June 2016’ and the first attestation is from 1355 and the accounts of a guildhall (Thomas 1926, I: 244). The *Middle English dictionary*, however, completed in 2001, lists instances of *dudde* from somewhat earlier, albeit as a vernacular word in a Latin context. From 1303: “In ... xxvj duddis emptis ad pauperes” (‘In ... 26 duds purchased for the poor’) (Greenwell, 1852: xxxvii). The *MED* also indicates possible routes to explore in establishing a satisfactory etymology (abbreviations expanded): ‘Probably Old English; cp. Old Icelandic *dúði*, Low German *dudel*; ...? also cp. Old English *Dudda* pers. name’ (Kurath et al. 1952–2001, s.v. *dudde*).

In Old Norse-Icelandic *dúða* meant ‘to swaddle’ and *dúði* were ‘swaddling clothes’. Middle Low German *dudel* is not the term associated with the bagpipe (German *Dudelsäck*) and strident tootling but rather a term for hair twisted together on the crown or back of the human head (Carstens 1904). The Norse and Low German forms may be traced to the reconstructed Indo-European root **d^heu-* meaning (*inter alia*) ‘to whirl’. From this Norse and German evidence of wrapping and winding it may be suggested that the Middle English *dudde* was not a fitted garment but rather a length of cloth, doubtless straight from the loom, used in the manner of a Scottish plaid, that is, draped over and wrapped around the body and possibly fixed in place with a simple pin. Although the example is at considerable distance from the historical origins of *dud*, this notion seems supported by the lines from a Jacobite song of 1715:

“The cluds O’clans frae woods in tartan duds Wha glaum’d at kingdoms three, man” (Macquoid 1887: 96, *Sherrifmuir*).

The basic, unfinished rectangular shape of the dud or plaid, distinct from a cowl or cloak with its minimal fitting, might have left the designation open to the pejoration evident in the use of *dud* as a synonym for ‘a rag, a scrap of cloth; a ragged or shabby item of clothing’ (*OED*). The lack of any finishing to the length of cloth may also lie at the origin of *dud* as someone or something that fails to live up to expectations.

Yet the hypothetical Indo-European root **d^heu-*, to which *dud* is traced, was prolific and in Germanic it was also at the origin of words for qualities of impairment and ineffectiveness such as Old Friesian *dud* ‘deaf’. We should perhaps speak of homonyms in the instances of *dud* as item of clothing and failed undertaking, despite the appeal to a distant and still highly speculative common origin.

Duds as a jocular term for clothes of assuredly better than rag quality is well established by the mid-nineteenth century and citations assembled by the *OED* suggest a Scottish and Northern as well as military origin for the slang term. From military regulations issued in 1816: “Should he ... have been caught straggling and stripped of his duds ... why we shall furnish him out of the best of our kits” (*Military*... 1816, 7 Feb.: 178). And in Trollope’s *Marion Fay* we read: “To see them [sc. her children] washed and put in and out of their duds was perhaps the greatest pleasure of her life” (Trollope 1882, I. iii: 39).

We should be cautious in seeing or seeking metaphor and poetry in lexical collocations where they may never have been intended but as ever-new readers we are perhaps all guilty of this and it seems then appropriate to close this note by citing a now rare rural word that brings so many meanings of *dud* together. This is *dudman* ‘a scarecrow’ or as Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* defined the term in 1670: ‘Dudman, a Maulkin or effigies set up to fright birds from Corn or grain sowed’ (Blount 1670, s.v. *dudman*).¹³

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Brand-new: The English expression *brand-new* is not self-referential, not itself a neologism, but dates from the 1570s. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 5: 17 (“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”), John Foxe (1965, *Serm. 2 Corinthians*, v. 63) writes in a sermon: “New bodies, new minds ... and all thinges new, brande-newe”.¹⁴ In an entry first published in 1888 and not yet fully updated, the *OED* defines *brand-new* as ‘as if fresh and glowing from the furnace; compare Shakespeare’s *fire-new*’ and offers as derivation ‘< brand n. + new adj. and n.’ (*OED*, s.v. *brand-new*, adj.).

This is *brand* in the sense of ‘burning, conflagration, destruction by fire’ (*OED*) as further exemplified in *fire-brand*. Various compounds might appear to support

¹³ Wright (1898–1905, s.v. *dud*) has extensive examples from recorded popular speech and fictional works with country characters that illustrate the wide application of *dud* and *duddies*.

¹⁴ Foxe is cited and the *OED* etymology tacitly confirmed in *More word histories*... (2006: 34–35).

such an etymology: *brand-fire-new*, *bran-span-new*, *bran-spander-new*. In addition to *brand-new* are to be found the spellings *bran-new*, and in Scotland, *brank-* and *brent-new*. Yet the overall impression, *pace* in the *OED*, is that something more than fiery brands are in play here.

Middle and early Modern English knew another *bran*, ‘the husk of wheat, barley, oats, or other grain, separated from the flour after grinding’ (*OED*, s.v. *bran*, n.1). In a speculative note on the etymology, the *OED* offers the following:

[from] Old French *bren*, *bran*; compare Provençal *bren*, Spanish dialect *bren*, Italian dialect *brenno*, *brinnu*, *bren*, *bran*. A Celtic etymology is usually alleged, but the words quoted, Breton *brenn*, Welsh *bràn*, Gaelic *bran*, appear to be adopted < French and English.

The *Trésor de la langue française* notes a first use of Old French *brent* in the early thirteenth century. Citing *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, *TLF* calls attention to the Vulgar Latin loan word **brennus* ‘bran’ and advances an otherwise unspecified Gaulish or other pre-Roman origin for the term (Imbs 1971–1994, s.v. *bran*; von Wartburg et al. 1922–2002: 1.517; Lehmann et al. 1959: 21; see, too, Baldinger et al. 1971-, s.v. *bren*). If, as seems likely, the words for bran in the modern Celtic languages are loaned from French and English, previous speculation on a possible Gaulish word with this meaning had only this Vulgar Latin loan as a basis. However, the rapid expansion of the recovered Gaulish vocabulary that postdates the composition of present entries in the *OED*, *Trésor de la langue française*, and *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* offers a new avenue to explore the early history of words for bran.

Place name evidence from some Celtic regions of Antiquity (Britain, France, northern Spain) authorizes the reconstruction of a Gaulish **brauon-* ‘hand mill, quern’, cognates of which in other Celtic languages are Old Irish *brao*, *bró*, Welsh *breuan*, Old Cornish *broa*, Breton *breo*, all meaning ‘hand-mill’. Old Norse *kvern* (whence English *quern*) is another kindred form, while additional cognates are found in Sanskrit, Armenian, Lithuanian, and Tocharian B. The reconstructed Indo-European form is **g^w̥r̥uon-*, the derivative of an adjective meaning ‘heavy’ – weighty as the upper stone of a hand-mill (Delamarre 2003: 86, s.v. *brauon-*). While the formal development of a reconstructed Gaulish **brauon-* into Old French *bran/bren* and related early Romance forms would be unexceptional, the concurrent semantic evolution would call for more detailed comment, which risks slipping into special pleading. Analogies may illuminate but they cannot convince. We assume that Gaulish died a gradual death in Roman Gaul, lasting longest in remote rural areas, as the modern evidence of language death suggests. Toponyms and some vocabulary for the natural world and agriculture were assumed into early Gallo-Romance. But Gaulish rapidly ceased to be a valued language in Roman Gaul and in this resembles the bran separated from the milled flour. The quern occupies a comparable slot in the technology of milling and was replaced in the early Middle Ages by water-mills. Could the archaic (pre-Latin) term for the hand-mill, *brauon*, have

been transferred from an obsolete language and technology as a depreciatory term for the nearly valueless by-product of milling – bran?

To return to English, the form *bran* had meanings or applications in the early language in addition to those already noted. As the *OED* observes in a separate, but not cross-referenced, entry, a now obsolete *bran* also meant ‘sort, class, quality’. The term had only a brief span of currency and the four recorded instances are all drawn from seventeenth-century anti-Catholic polemic, e.g. “Their Popes supremacy, infallibility ... and a thousand other of this branne” (Hall 1610: 59). In 1673 Andrew Marvell wrote: “Magnified and esteemed ... by those of your Bran and Leaven” (Marvell 1673, repr. in Arber 1903–1906: II.327). Under “Etymology” in *OED* we find: ‘Probably special use of bran n.1, suggested by the Latin phrase *ejusdem farinae*; influence < BRAND n. would seem probable, but that word does not appear to have had the required sense so early’. *Ejusdem farinae* ‘of the same flour’ was a metaphorical expression for ‘of the same kind’, often used in derogatory reference, which the *OED* does not explicitly signal. The English adaptation makes the derogatory comparison more evident through the reference to bran rather than to flour. We might compare the popular (but historically slightly inaccurate) use of the phrase ‘of that ilk’. There was also another development, this of a semantic and classifying nature: from the common, unmilled properties of a single lot of grist and the resulting flour and bran (one instantiation of the milling process) to the idea of category or kind (not batch but class). The continuing pejorative connotation of the original Latin *eiusdem farinae* is retained in the limited number of early modern English examples.

Brand-new then had its origins as *bran-new*, an expression for something new to its specific category or kind. This seems to have occurred as part of a process of melioration, in which *bran* lost its association with the low-value husks of milling. But when the milling reference was also lost to later generations, a variety of inventive spellings and phrasings developed (*brand-fire-new*, *bran-span-new*, *bran-spander-new*), most on the assumption of an association with *brand* as ‘fire’. It then seems likely that *brand-new*, whatever its present association in the minds of some with recently launched commercial brands of consumer goods and its earlier association with forged tools straight from the fire, originally meant novel in kind or quality, and before that, and minus the *-d* and *new*, of known but dubious quality.

The adjective *new-fangled* has a historical depth as great as *brand-new*, with a first attestation from the close of the fifteenth century: “Boyes of fyfty yere of age are as newe fangled as ony yonge men be” (Alcock 1498, sig. biiij.). The *OED* definition is ‘Very (esp. excessively or immoderately) fond of novelty or new things; keen to take up new fashions or ideas; easily carried away by whatever is new’ (*OED*, s.v. *new-fangled*). As for an origin of the expression, the etymological commentary refers to the entry for *new-fangle*, which reads: ‘< new adj. + an otherwise unattested adjective (probably with the sense ‘inclined to take’) < the base of fang v.1 + -le suffix’. *Fang*, a now obsolete verb meaning ‘to grasp, lay hold of, hold’, in turn is traced to:

Common Germanic: Old English *fón*, redupl. strong verb corresponding to Old Frisian *fâ*, Old Saxon *fâhan*, Old High German *fâhan* (Middle High German *vâhen*, modern German (poet) *fahen*), Old Norse *fá* (Danish *faae*, Swedish *få*), Gothic *fâhan* < Old Germanic **fanhan*, preterite *fefang-*, past participle *fangano-*. About 1200 the stem *fang-* of the past participle appears as a present-stem (infinitive *fangen*), and gradually supersedes the older form ... (*OED*, s.v. *fang*).

Where exception may be taken to the *OED* treatment is in the explanation of the form of *fang* ‘probably with the sense “inclined to take”’. I propose that this reflects a misapprehension between subject and object, between the agent and the person acted on. The newfangled person is not one who is inclined to take up the new but rather one who has been seized by it (cf. *hag-ridden*). This understanding throws more light on the depreciatory colouration of the term, as evident in the examples quoted in the *OED*.

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Corduroy: In an entry that has ‘not yet been fully updated (first published 1893)’, the *OED* defines *corduroy* as ‘a kind of coarse, thick-ribbed cotton stuff, worn chiefly by labourers or persons engaged in rough work’ (*OED*, s.v. *corduroy*, n. and adj.). Blue jeans have largely supplanted corduroy in this usage and the latter has moved to other social strata. The dictionary’s accompanying etymological note also gives the impression of differing dates of composition, indicated by typography.

Etymology: A name apparently of English invention: either originally intended, or soon after assumed, to represent a supposed French **corde du roi* ‘the king’s cord’; it being a kind of ‘cord’ or corded fustian.

No such name has ever been used in French: on the contrary, among a list of articles manufactured at Sens in 1807, Millin de Grandmaison *Voyage d. Départ. du Midi* I. 144¹⁵ enumerates ‘étoffes de coton, futaines, kings-cordes’, evidently from English. Wolstenholme’s Patent of 1776 mentions nearly every thing of the fustian kind except corduroy, which yet was well known by 1790. *Duroy* occurs with *serge* and *drugget* as a coarse woollen fabric manufactured in Somersetshire in the 18th cent., but it has no apparent connection with *corduroy*. A possible source has been pointed out in the English surname *Corderoy*.

The earliest attestation of *corduroy* – in English, since it is unknown in French – is from the late eighteenth century: “Cotton corderoys, cotton and linen corderoys” (Chadwick, No. 1093, *British Patent* 1774, cited from the *OED*, s.v. *corduroy*). Some three decades later, an encyclopedia entry for “fustian” reads in part: ‘The manufacture comprehends the various cotton stuffs known by the names of corduroy, velverett, velveteen, thicksett, etc.’ (Rees 1802–1820, s.v. *fustian*).

In light of the putative French connection, quite unsubstantiated from our modern perspective, it is useful to consult Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie, ou*

¹⁵ Millin de Grandmaison (1807–1811, I: 144).

dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers for possibly relevant terminology. Diderot's entry for *corde* reads:

Corde, (*Manuf. d' étoffes.*) se dit en général du tissu de toute étoffe, lorsqu'il est dépouillé du velouté qui fait sa beauté, & auquel on reconnoît qu'il est neuf; mais surtout des étoffes de laine, lorsque le lainage en est entierement perdu. (Diderot, d'Alembert 1751–1772: 4.211)

No other entry featuring the word *corde* in its application to textiles has anything suggestive of *corde-du-roy*. But striped cloth was popular at this time, and here the French qualifier is *rayé* 'with rays, stripes, ribbing, furrows, etc.', as exemplified in the entry for *linon*, a very fine linen (later also cotton) cloth:

Linon, s. m. (*Comm.*) espece de toile de lin blanchi, claire, déliée & très-fine, qui se manufacture en Flandres; il y a du *linon* uni, rayé & moucheté. L'un a 3/4 de large & quatorze aunes à la piece, ou 2/3 de large & douze à treize aunes à la piece. Le rayé & le moucheté est de 3/4 de large sur quatorze aunes à la piece. (Diderot, d'Alembert 1751–1772: 15.839)¹⁶

Despite its inclusion in the *Encyclopédie*, *corde* as the designation of a type of textile does not figure in the fifth (1798) or any earlier edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* but gets a mention in the subsequent edition (1835), by which time one may assume that the fabric was widely known: 'CORDE se dit aussi Des fils dont le drap est tissu' (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* 1835).

It is proposed that by the mid-eighteenth century, a heavily ribbed and furrowed (but not otherwise striped) coarse cotton cloth was imported to Britain from France under the trade name *corde rayée*. This term was either misunderstood in a sort of reverse folk etymology effect, or, more likely, intentionally recast in a *faux français*/mock French for promotional purposes as **corde-du-roy*, effected through a shift in syllable boundaries and a stutter effect. French *rayé* may also have prompted thoughts of English *regal* and *royal*. It was subsequently "rationalized" (suppression of the dittoism) to *corduroy*. Since the diphthong of French *roi/roy* would have been pronounced approximately [oe] at this time (but [wa] according to the literary standard), the English pronunciation of *-roy* in *corduroy* would seem to reflect the written language and not speech. The first attestation of *corduroy* (from 1774 seen above) supports this line of reasoning. The term figures in a patent that was granted a certain Mr. Chadwick in that year, and it is conceivable that he saw the potential of a new fabric on the English market and sought to patent a weaving technique for its production.

The transfer of the term *corduroy/corderoy* to a road laid transversally with logs dates from the early nineteenth century and the USA: "From this town ... along a rough road with many log-bridges; but some of my fellow passengers, from the state of Kentucky, called them corderoy" (Woods 1822: 219.).

¹⁶ The *Encyclopédie* also mentions *taffetas rayé* (Diderot, d'Alembert 1751–1772: 15.828).

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