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## TWELVE ENGLISH ETYMOLOGIES FROM THE SOCIAL MARGINS (PART 2)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Etymologies are proposed for twelve previously unexplained English words from working-class or underclass English vocabulary. Treated in Part 2 of this study are *aloof/aluff*, *boondoggle*, and *welch/jew/gyp*. Common features are isolation, extended use, pejoration, and treatment by lexicographers with varying degrees of proscriptiveness and by word buffs with enthusiastic amateur etymologizing.

*Boondoggle*: The *OED* identifies *boondoggle* as an Americanism and defines it as ‘a trivial, useless, or unnecessary undertaking; wasteful expenditure’. As the entry has not been updated since its first publication in 1972, a revised commentary should expand the semantic field to include possible intentionality, political maneuvering, and illicit gain. The earliest attestations are from the 1930s and reveal specific applications on scales of importance and volume, e.g. “The cost of this boondoggle has been estimated at perhaps 50 million dollars” (*Chicago Tribune*, 8 June, 1947, i. 22/2).<sup>2</sup> More concretely: “Boon doggles” is simply a term applied back in the pioneer days to what we call gadgets today”.<sup>3</sup> Even narrower usage: “To the cowboy it meant the making of saddle trappings out of odds and ends of leather, and they boondoggled when there was nothing else to do on the ranch” (*Chicago Tribune*, 4 October, 1935).

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<sup>1</sup> This is the second part of a study begun in Sayers (2020).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “[In the 1936 American election] ... *boondoggling* became the current term for describing the waste assertedly evident in ... government agencies and bureaus” (Oliver 1937).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from the *OED*, which gives the reference: R. Marshall, *The New York Times*, 4 April, 1935, p. 2.

It is the last example that provides a clue as to the origin of the word, which the *OED* states as “unknown”.

The first element of what we are tempted to see as a compound, *boon-*, is unlikely to have any connection to *boon* in the sense of a favour asked. Rather, it may be associated with a term now judged obsolete save in dialect: *bun*, defined as ‘the stalk of flax or hemp after the fibre has been removed; the stalks of cow-parsnip and other umbelliferous plants’ (*OED*, *s.v.*). According to the *OED* the etymology of this word, too, is unknown and, despite the early fifteenth-century examples, the word appears to have no antecedents in Old English. Such a common agricultural term may well have entered English from Old British or Brythonic, the Celtic language met by the invading Angles and Saxons. Old Irish *bun* and Welsh *bon* offer neat parallels, since they mean, variously, ‘the thick end of anything, base, butt, foot; of trees etc. trunk, base’ (Quin 1913–1976; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* 2019). Evidence for Old British is sketchy but the sister language, Gaulish, has an apparently augmented form, *bonda* meaning the ‘ground or base’ (Delamarre 2018; cf. Latin *fundus*). Let us categorize English *bun* ‘stalks, butts’ as ‘organic refuse’.<sup>4</sup>

Another old English word for such less valuable byproducts of the harvest was *shaw* ‘the stalks and leaves of certain plants, esp. potatoes and turnips’ (*OED*, *s.v.*; Wright 1898–1905: 5.363). This, I have argued elsewhere, is the designator for the raw material employed in *scrimshaw*, the carving of useful and attractive small objects in whalebone by whalers in their leisure time (Sayers 2017) – not too different from the handiwork of cowpokes as concerns situation, material or, with allowances, technique with a pocket- or hand-knife.

Many of the leather objects fashioned by cattle-hands must have had practical uses and might be imagined as suspended from saddles and belts. This offers an avenue for explaining the second part of the compound under discussion, *doggle*. Since this form is unrepresented in English, it might be viewed as a variant of *togle*, which should be considered in light of its general meaning, as extended from presumed narrowly nautical use. The *OED* (*s.v.*) writes:

A cross-piece attached to the end of a line or chain (e.g. a watch-chain), or fixed in a belt or strap for attaching a weapon, etc. by a loop or ring; also, a cross-piece put through a loop to effect compression by twisting. Now frequently a short rod attached to one side of a garment to fasten it by being passed through a loop attached to the other side.

The *OED* offers no firm etymology but suggests a relation to *tuggle*. We might also invoke the children’s game of tag and the acting of tagging something, in which the notion of attachment has now been succeeded by that of identification.

An alternative explanation is also available. *Dog* was used in specialized senses such as logging with the sense ‘to fasten or secure by means of a dog or heavy clamp, grappling iron with a spike, etc. for clutching an object to be hoisted’ (*OED*, *s.v. dog*,

<sup>4</sup> It must be recognized that there is no attestation in American speech of *boon/bun* in this sense (Cassidy 1985–2013).

n.1, definitions 18, 19a).<sup>5</sup> \**Doggle* would represent a common means of augmenting verb forms: doubling a final occlusive consonant and adding the iterative suffix *-le*. Such verbs often form pairs or threesomes, e.g. *toggle/tuggle*. The idea of attachment is thus common to both *toggle* and \**doggle* (despite separate origins), and there may have been some interaction.<sup>6</sup>

We may imagine the cowboys' boondoggles as short plaited, braided, or twisted lines and laces to attach a tobacco pouch, knife and spoon sheath, canteen, etc., the latter tooled with decorative motifs and initials, as were the fancier saddles themselves. As with *scrimshaw*, *to boondoggle* reflects self- and community image. In the demanding environments of the sea and the plains, they are laconic, understated designations, self-deprecatory in reference to the speaker, perhaps with a stoic affect something like "just working up bits of bone / putting together scraps of leather".

The other quotation that opened this note calls *boondoggles* gadgets, and by this we should understand any small device, home-made or otherwise, that facilitates a common task. In the history of *boondoggle* the assessment of modest value attached to the artifact by the maker/owner gave way to an external judgment by others of something trivial and worthless, and finally to the notion of a deception in which expense still does not create usefulness or value. Scrimshaw and its artifacts were less narrowly personal, producing practical tools and instruments for use on board ship, e.g. blocks, and decorative gifts for loved ones ashore. This among other factors may have saved *scrimshaw*, despite its modest origins, from the pejoration that overtook *boondoggle*. Duping one's fellow is the topic of the next item as well.

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*Welch, jew, gyp*: In its primary signification, the *OED* defines the verb *to welsh* as 'to renege on payment of money owed to (a person) as winnings on a bet'. The earliest recorded examples date from the mid-nineteenth century and the context is invariably horse-racing. In what the dictionary calls extended use, the verb is associated with 'reneg[ing] on a promise or agreement with (a person); to cheat or dupe (someone)'. But what if this extended use should prove, in historical terms, to have been the basic and general meaning, and the avoidance of payment on racing debts the extended or specialized use?

The *OED* writes of the etymology of the word: "Origin uncertain; perhaps < Welsh adj., on account of alleged dishonesty of Welsh people". It cites a 1859 newspaper and a popular explanation: "The phrase 'Welshing book-maker' seems to owe its origin to a nursery rhyme, commencing with 'Taffy was a Welshman, [Taffy was a thief.] &c.', and, as we understand, means a dishonest betting man on the turf". Yet the jump from general distrust of the Welsh to the specifics of horse-racing

<sup>5</sup> "We can dog directly into the hardest knot in the heaviest timber and hold the log perfectly safe and true" (*Lumberman's Gazette*, 15 October, 1879).

<sup>6</sup> In the entry for *toggle* the *OED* calls attention to the verbs *tagle*, *taigle*, 'entangle' and *tangle* as possibly connected.

and a betting debt may be a hurdle not easily taken by the word buff. One might as readily assume that the term was coined in Ireland after events involving a racing fan, Mr. Welsh or Walsh, a successor to Captains Boycott and Lynch.

Before leaving this explanation, it should be noted that Old English *wealh*, whence *Welsh*, originally meant only 'foreigner' (and before that was the name of a Gaulish tribe) and, as is the case with its German and Norse cognates, might, for example, designate the French. The etymologizing fantasist could imagine the ninth-century Franks being characterized as *welshers* by the Vikings who demanded huge sums of money to leave cities and towns unscathed.

With no ready clues as to origin, a more pedestrian source for *welsh* (variant *welch*) may be sought in Old French and the Norman French carried to Britain, where it evolved as Anglo-French and served as a major vocabulary source for Middle English. It is the Norman idiom *faire la guenche* 'to cheat, deceive (behind someone's back)' that draws our attention. The verb at the source of this idiom is Anglo-Norman *guenchir*, which appears under a variety of spellings: *genchir*, *guench-er*, *guenchier*, *gueynchir*, *guinchier*; *gwencher*, *gwenchir*; *wenchir*, *winchir* (Rothwell et al. 2006). This orthographical plethora reflects the passage of Germanic *w-* into French as *gue-/gwe-* and at times back to *w-* again. The source is generally seen as a reconstructed Old Frankish *\*wenkjan* 'to waver, falter' (Von Wartburg et al. 1922–2002: 17,555–560). Meanings of *guenchir* are wide-ranging but with a clear nucleus: '(in combat) to avoid, dodge, elude; turn away; steer away; withdraw, leave, make avoiding moves'. For example, from the 1170s and the life of Thomas à Becket: "Poi i out des evesques quil volsist sustenir, Mais Rogiers de Wircestre ne li voleit guenchir" ('Few of the bishops wanted to support him but Roger of Worcester did not wish to avoid him' Walberg 1936: v. 1685). *Guenche* as seen above would be in the nature of a verbal noun, an act of turning, that evolved into turning a trick. However, Middle English had already a comparable form, *wenche* 'unmarried girl, serving girl', etc. An effort at dissimilation could account for the anomalous replacement of *-n-* by *-l-* in the adaptation as *welch/welsh*.<sup>7</sup> *Wenchir* may also have experienced metathesis, with the *-n-* and *-r-* changing places, so that the word appeared more like a Middle English verb *\*werchen*. This could have been followed by a shift in the laterals, *r > l*, with the end result *\*welchen*. Popular efforts at linguistic explanation – folk etymology – would surely have brought the term into the semantic sphere of Welsh and Welsh manners, and consolidated these phonological developments. Concurrently perhaps, the semantics would have evolved and narrowed from physical or figurative aversion to avoidance of payment due (which might well include physical avoidance). It is worth noting that the earliest example of *welsh* in its betting context is spelled *welch*, while the ethnonym *Welsh*, on the other hand, is almost invariably spelled with *-sh*, further, albeit slight, support for the derivation of the former from Anglo-French *wenchir*.

<sup>7</sup> In the French of this era, nasal consonants were still being fully pronounced, while also affecting the quality of the preceding vowel, e.g. *bon* /bōn/, modern French /bō/.

As concerns ethnonyms serving a double purpose (cf. the family names Lynch and Boycott above), compare *jew* in the sense of ‘to cheat or overreach, in the way attributed to Jewish traders or usurers. Also, to drive a hard bargain’ (*OED*, *s.v.*). Here, too, the *OED* would seem to have opted for the superficial explanation and the presumed etymology seems to have driven the definition. Most of the examples cited, from the 1820s onward, are, however, an element of the idiom *to jew down*. The Jewish merchant is unlikely to want to lower the price, save in the perhaps less common instances of purchases from Gentiles. A better explanation may be sought in the history of the word *jaw*. The present form is judged an amalgam of the reconstructed Old English *céowe* ‘jaw’ (cf. *céowan* ‘to chew’) and Old French *jo* ‘cheek’.<sup>8</sup> A recorded Middle English form is *jew* (Kurath et al. 1952–2001, *s.v.* *jou(e)*). *To jaw* is first recorded to describe voluble, incessant, and/or argumentative speech in the mid-eighteenth century. As noted above, English has a pattern of vowel variation among two to three forms of a word, often with high front vowels suggesting a smaller scale (size, importance, etc.) and back, low vowels, a greater one. Since *higgle* and *haggle* are both attested with the meaning ‘to negotiate price or value’, we may also posit a *jew/jaw* pair, with alternative back vowels, as associated with confrontational discourse.

The comparable verb *gyp* first appears in the United States and seems unlikely to originate in *Gypsy*, as the *OED* (*s.v.*) speculates.<sup>9</sup> The Roma arrived in England in the early sixteenth century and the first descriptor was *Gypcian* (< *Egyptian*). What has been called the first dictionary of English slang has an entry for “Gypsies” but those so designated seem to be mock-Roma from the English underclass engaged in lightly criminal activity (B.E. 1699, 2010: 82, *s.v.* *Gypsies*). No derivative verb figures in the dictionary. In the eighteenth century college servants at Cambridge and Durham were called *gyps* (the *OED* speculates on an abbreviation of *gypsy*) and this subaltern capacity may have been thought to provide opportunities for taking a cut on the provision of goods and services. English dialects of the North Sea coast do have a verb *gip* ‘to gut fish’ and this would make a striking, if somewhat overblown, figuration of duping a buyer on price or value (Wright 1895–1905: 2.619, *s.v.* *gip*).<sup>10</sup> Most attractive, however, is to see in *gyp* an abbreviation of *gypsum*. Also known as lime sulfate or sulfate of lime, gypsum was an innovative plant fertilizer in early nineteenth-century America. Mined in Hants County, Nova Scotia, it was sold illegally to American farmers of the New England states and smuggled into the country by sea. As in all smuggling and black market trade, disputes between buyers and sellers were bound to occur. *Gypped* may have meant short-changed on quantity or quality of the gypsum (and was also used of cattle who became sick on gypsum-laced water). These tenuous connections will not be further pursued.

<sup>8</sup> See the lengthy commentary in the *OED* (*s.v.* *jaw*, n).

<sup>9</sup> Anglo-French has the form *gyp* but this was used of the wooden beam that supported the share of a plow, and is an unlikely candidate for figurative use in a term for cheating on value and prices.

<sup>10</sup> A likely source is an unattested Old Norse verb \**geipa* or \**gipa* ‘to cause to gape’ < *gapa* ‘to gape’ (Cleasby et al. 1957).

The pattern that emerges here is the ascription of anti-social or immoral activity to a minority or outsider group, even though the form invested with such a combination of judgment and referentiality (cheating + Welshman = to welsh) may have had an origin quite distinct from the sphere of ethnonyms. The same chauvinistic impulse is seen in such formulations as “the French disease” / “la maladie anglaise”. More innocuous (and, historically quite distinct as concerns the history of the words in question) are to “french” beans or “scotch” a proposal.<sup>11</sup> As for prejudice among lexicographers, the *OED* shows little interest in any corrective commentary on the possible origins and early histories of the verbs *welsh*, *jew*, and *gyp*.

In conclusion, the argument for the source of *welch/welsh* in Anglo-French *wen chir* ‘avoid’ and congeners is strong as concerns semantics and credible in terms of phonology. Since the word is absent from the *English dialect dictionary*, one must assume a long underground existence other than in dialect, which would make more attractive race-track slang as the undocumented context of preservation than mainstream English and the general semantic field of cheating. But, given over four centuries without attestation in print, this must be judged a speculative explanation of the word’s early history. From the racetrack we turn to the vocational language of seamen.

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*Aluff, aloof, aloft*: In the *OED*, the first two principal meanings under the head word *aloof* (also spelled *aluff*) read as follows: ‘To the windward side; towards the direction from which the wind blows’ and ‘To or at a distance from something; far off; separately, apart’. In nautical use, the angular distance between the ship’s course and the head-wind is decreased; in more general parlance one person puts her- or himself at a greater (often figurative) distance from another. How are these two apparently opposite movements to be reconciled? The history of English offers examples of such radical shifts in meaning, e.g. Old English *salig* ‘holy’ evolving into *silly*, and *nice* (of persons) moving from “silly” to “pleasant”. Or do *aluff* and *aloof* have distinct histories and origins, unrecognized by the editors of the entry (despite its revision as recently as 2012)?

In *The Sailor’s word-book*, Admiral William H. Smyth, writing in 1867, listed some 50 nautical terms in which the initial element is *a-*. Of *aluffe* he notes: “Nearer to the wind. This is a very old form of *luff*; being noticed by Matthew Paris, and other writers, as a sea-term”. The vocalic *a-* sound at the beginning of an utterance often signalled an order, made explicit by the following element, e.g. *abaft*.<sup>12</sup> The ubiquity of such terms in the language of the sea means that the *a-* prefix remained an active linguistic element, capable of forming compounds with new referents, as needed. The historical origins of this *a-* prefix run deep. The *OED* (s.v. *a-*, prep.<sup>1</sup>) sees *a* as

<sup>11</sup> The verb *to scotch* is traced to Anglo-Norman *escocher*, *eschocher* ‘to pierce (skin)’ (Rothwell et al. 2006).

<sup>12</sup> *Avast!* ‘hold! stop! stay! cease!’ might be thought to belong here but derives from Spanish dialect *abastar* ‘to cease, break off’ (Sayers 2011).

a variant of the preposition *on*. Found in nominal and adverbial phrasing intended to express position within or situation, and the direction and objective of movement, *a-* was once popular with verbal nouns as seen in such turns as *a-going*, *a'woosing*. This valence of *a-* may then be judged to be common to both *aluff* and *aloof*.

*Luff* has a long history in the North Sea language zone, originating as a piece of ship's gear and evolving through such significations as the weather edge of the sail and, as a verb, to steer close to the wind. The *OED* (*s.v.*) has a lengthy but ultimately inconclusive discussion of etymology:

Early Middle English *lof*, *loof*, apparently < Old French *lof* ... The manner of their [various European reflexes of *luff*] development is obscure, and it is uncertain whether they originated in French, English, or (? most probably) Dutch. ... Certain other meanings which the word has had in Dutch and French need to be accounted for before any hypothesis as to the primitive meaning and sense-development can be regarded as satisfactory. In early modern Dutch *loef*, *loeve* is explained as 'thole-pin' ... In the 17th cent. the French *lof* or *loo* is stated to mean 'the distance from the mast to the place on the side to which the sheet is fastened when the vessel is close-hauled'. ... In the existing uncertainty as to the primary meaning, the ultimate etymology remains obscure; the current view that it represents a Germanic word cognate with Old Norse *lófe* palm, loof n.<sup>1</sup>, depends on the doubtful assumption that the 'lof' of sense 1 ... was a steering paddle.

It should be recalled that in the *OED* entry this same etymology is implicitly ascribed to *aloof*.

The Norse connection presented above is a sound one but the term's underlying imagery is not that of the palm of a hand nor was the *luff* originally a steering oar. The crews of modern replicas of early medieval Scandinavian ships have found a shorter form of a tacking spar to be a useful piece of sail-trimming gear. Under conditions when less thrust had to be conveyed than through a full-length spar crossing the deck from one side of the hull to the other in order to boom out the weather edge of the sail, a sail pin could be lashed to, or inserted in, the sheer strake (gunwale; cf. the Dutch 'thole pin', above), and the tack or forward, weather edge of the sail then fastened to it. Holes in the forward sheer strakes that might have served this purpose have been identified in recovered wrecks from the eleventh century. With aerodynamic effects similar to those of an aircraft wing, the oncoming wind moved around to the back of the sail and propelled the ship forward. However, Old Norse vocabulary offers no clear evidence for this simple but effective device.

It is proposed that the Old Norse word *úfr* is the ultimate source of *luff* and congeners.<sup>13</sup> The term was used of a splinter or shaving still attached to a larger piece of wood or of a thorn or prickle on a bush or plant, anything forming a small fork off an oblong wooden or woody object (Heggstad et al. 2008). The inserted sail-pin may be imagined as having the same relationship to the sheer strake as the thorn

<sup>13</sup> The following discussion is adapted from Sayers (2016).

to the stem. Adapted into the Gallo-Romance of Neustria, Norse *úfr* would have soon lost the final *-r*, the morphological marker for the masculine nominative singular case. As *\*of* it would have been used with the French masculine definite article *le* in conventional compressed fashion as *\*l'of*. But in early spoken French, word and morphological boundaries occasionally become obscured. *Le lof* became the eventual written form. This term is found to designate the tacking or sail pin in the description of King Arthur's fleet being readied for the invasion of Gaul in Wace's mid-twelfth century *Roman de Brut*. (Arnold, Pelan 1962: v. 2664).<sup>14</sup> The further semantic development of *lof* is no less interesting. Over the course of several centuries technological and terminological development may not always be in step. Thus the sail-pin, which may have been superseded as an actual piece of gear, gave its name first to the corner, then to the weather edge of the sail which is provisionally fastened to it, then to the weather side of the ship as a whole, eventually generating verbal forms, *to luff*, *luffing*, which encompassed the whole procedure of tacking or beating to windward, be it with the aid of a sail-pin or bumpkin or other equally effective sail-dressing procedure. All the foregoing points to a problem in directionality and the origin of *aloof* must be sought elsewhere.

I propose that the original formulation was *a(n) + the adverb off*. *\*A(n)off* would then be a situation of, or movement to, a greater distance between two entities. To return to the prefix *a-*, it is found in early examples in which the following word begins with a vowel, e.g. "Etan þanne twezzen sticcan fulle a æfen, twezen a morzen, and byþ sona hæł" ("They then eat two spoonfuls in the evening, two in the morning, and the sons become well" Löweneck 1896: 21). As the prefix became more closely linked to the following word, this would have presented difficulties to the phonetic conventions of early English. No glottal stop was available to bridge between the two elements; *a-* was perhaps long since dissociated from its origin in *on*, so that an original *an + vowel* was no longer available as a solution. It is then advanced that the difficulty of *\*a'off* was resolved by recourse to the superficially similar term *aloft* and the creation by analogy of the Middle English form *aloofe*. *Aloft*, too, has Norse antecedent (< *lopt* 'air, sky'). The phrasing *aloofe off* is also found, suggesting that the semantic value of an original *off* had been obscured and needed restating.<sup>15</sup> Since the three terms here under discussion belong to the same phono-semantic field, they may have influenced one another in their early development, just as they present commonalities today to the speakers of English (and editors of dictionaries). *Aloft* is first attested from about 1200, *aluff* and *aloof* both from somewhat later, 1535 and 1544, respectively. The figured, emotional descriptor *aloof* also dates from this period.

*Aluff* (toward the wind) and *aloof* (away from another person) are now provided with discrete and plausible etymologies, and one might wish that they would be

<sup>14</sup> The *lof* is mentioned along with the larger *betas* 'tacking spar' (< Old Norse *beitiáss* = *beita* 'to cause to bite' + *áss* 'beam'), that crossed the deck from sheer strake to sheer strake and performed the same function as the sail pin.

<sup>15</sup> "You desire with shotte to beat the enemie aloofe of" (Digges 1571: i.xxx. sig. liv, cited from *OED*).

given separate entries in the *OED*. Formations with *a-* (< *on*) are a rich field for detailed inquiry, since the original semantics of the base elements are often obscured or only sensed in the modern language, e.g. *aghost* in which the prefix has been added to the past participle of the only once attested Old English verb *gáestan* from an Old Germanic type \**gaistjan*, apparently cognate with Gothic *usgaisjan* ‘to terrify’, *usgeisnan* ‘to be terrified’ (*OED*, *s.v.* *aghost*).

## Conclusion

The choice of the words investigated above, from varied social margins as the title suggests, naturally reflects the author’s errant interests (rather than a set program), often furthered by serendipity, as when a previously unconsidered clue appears and can be profitably pursued. That these words have long gone unexplained may reflect their isolated status and lexicographers’ lightly proscriptive choices, e.g. disinterest in the origins of popular speech, although this is not broadly true of the *OED*. As an unintended consequence, words with discrete origins often fall together with fortuitous homophones in a single *OED* entry, only partially justified by popular perceptions that they “must somehow be the same word”. While these twelve words or word groups are unrelated, their histories display much in common. Extended or figurative meanings are frequent. Melioration and pejoration often attend the adoption into received English. Several of the terms reviewed here relate to social predation, its agents and victims, and thus take on a judgmental affect in the mouth of a third party. Slang has a raffish charm for many others, reflecting, perhaps, envy of insider status and the vicarious solidarity expressed in partial mastery of a cryptolect. As preferential knowledge, names confer power, as is well illustrated in the literary culture of early Europe. Knowledge of slang may take the edge off the threat posed by the Other, although it is seldom convincingly deployed by the adventuresome enthusiast. We may admire its frankness, inventiveness and metaphor, unaware that our own speech often relies on the same rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> Etymologizing occupies a comparable slot in the current consciousness: general interest is high, although practitioners are few. Folk etymologies and personal witnessing abound, as attested by the online *Urban dictionary*. Origins attract more interest than the dynamics of subsequent histories, and identity issues inform the discourse more than does impartial academic inquiry. Yet, as background resources for the pursuit of still unexplained English words, the availability of electronic resources, especially reference works dealing with other languages than English, has never been greater. One might say that possibilities for the publication and diffusion of new etymologies has also never been greater but one of the problems here is the creation of critical mass and maintenance of academic rigour. Etymologists, cousins to Dr. Johnson’s

<sup>16</sup> One phenomenon inviting further study is the easy movement of insider speech from one marginalized community to another, even as concerns such phatic features as apostrophe: *mano, ese, bro, man, nigga*.

lexicographical drudge, might hope that their efforts would come to the attention of the editors of the *Oxford English dictionary* and would be considered as its entries continue to be individually updated. Less a reference work than aimed at a general readership is John Ayto's (2005) *Word origins: The hidden histories of English words from A to Z*, now in its second edition.<sup>17</sup> Previously unexplained word origins are, however, not given pride of place. Otherwise, the only other specialized project currently under way is Anatoly Liberman's *An analytic dictionary of English etymology*, the Introduction to which appeared in 2008 (Liberman, Mitchell 2008).<sup>18</sup> Discussion here is more thorough than in the *OED*, as each lexeme is the subject of a mini-essay. We are in for a very long haul.

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<sup>17</sup> Despite his subtitle, the author has entries only for words with established etymologies. Of the twelve words examined in the present study, he includes only *aloof* (equated with *aluff*) and *natty* (< *neat*).

<sup>18</sup> Related works by this author are Liberman (2005), and Liberman et al. (2010, with Hoptman and Carlson).

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