

# What does it take to write a new English etymological dictionary today?

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English etymological lexicography had two peaks: the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Skeat's dictionary (Skeat 1910) and etymological comments in those fascicles of the *OED* that James A. H. Murray and Henry Bradley edited. Of the other authors, Ernest Weekley (1921) deserves a mention, though his forte was borrowings from Old French and putative reflexes of proper names. The rest is based on Skeat and the *OED*. Weekley's failure is typical: it is not particularly difficult to offer a new treatment of several hundred words, but a full-scale etymological dictionary requires a superhuman effort, for who can delve into and re-evaluate the history of the entire vocabulary of English? All the post-Weekley dictionaries are derivative: published only to be sold, they recycle the same hypotheses and add nothing to what can be found elsewhere. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* ([*ODEE*], 1965; numerous reprints) presents the material from the *OED* in a condensed form but shows almost no traces of original research. As a result, contemporary English etymological dictionaries are at the level reached a hundred years ago; they cannot even be compared with the best samples of Sanskrit, Classical Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, Gothic, German, Dutch, Old Icelandic, Lithuanian, and Slavic lexicography. Students of Ossetic and Sorbian [sic] are better off in this respect than those who study English, despite the fact that no other Indo-European language has been investigated so thoroughly, one may say with such excessive zeal.

Detailed comments on etymology also occur in our "thick" dictionaries, two of which are outstanding in this respect: *The Century Dictionary* and Wyld (1932). Charles P. G. Scott, the author of the etymologies in *The Century Dictionary*, summarized everything that had been known about the origin of English words and added the Germanic and the Indo-European perspective to his explanations. He relied on the third edition of Skeat (which was no more than a reprint of the first, 1882, edition; Skeat reflected the results of his later findings in several "concise" versions of his *opus magnum* and in the fourth edition) and the early fascicles of the *OED*. Wyld, an outstanding language historian, had many non-trivial ideas on the origin of

English words, but he, too, left his mark only in a handful of entries. The dilemma that Scott and Wyld faced is familiar: both were imaginative scholars, but they dealt with thousands of words about which they had nothing new to say; hence mistakes, gaps in the presentation, and absurdities, as Weekley, himself an inhabitant of a glass house, called them.

The time has come to stop producing commercial etymological dictionaries of English. Those who need some basic information on the origin of English words will find it in any of the "shorter" Oxford dictionaries, Webster, the *Heritage*, and *The Random House Dictionary*, to mention a few. Specialists will continue using the *OED*, Skeat, Wyld, the dictionaries of other languages (to the extent that, while examining cognates, they feature English vocabulary), and occasional publications. The main difference between the fourth edition of Skeat and the dictionaries of Sanskrit, Latin, etc, referred to in the opening paragraph of this essay is obvious: those discuss the scholarly literature on every word, whereas Skeat cited the opinions of his predecessors rarely, only when he saw fit. He was interested in promoting what he took to be the best solutions, rather than surveying the field. We do not know how closely he followed the philological journals published abroad (his German and Scandinavian colleagues constantly pointed to his lack of familiarity with their work) and whether in his old age he was as avid a reader of linguistic literature as in his youth. The editors of the *OED* made every effort to keep abreast of the times, but etymology constituted a small (though important) part of their work. Murray's policy was to say "origin unknown" when no reasonable etymology of a word existed. And quite naturally, "thick" dictionaries, with the sole exception of Wyld, never give references to the literature (Wyld's references are also sporadic and vague: "As Kluge suggests" and the like). By contrast, the authors of the Greek, Latin, Gothic, and other etymological dictionaries list numerous hypotheses and consider their merits and demerits. When *they* say "origin unknown," we understand why a certain word has defied the efforts of so many researchers and what data are missing for formulating even a first intelligent guess. In other cases

we are told that the word has attracted no one's attention (consequently, if we want to discover its history, we must begin the work from scratch). But, and this is an especially important point, we come away with a full bibliography of the question and can pick up where our predecessors left off. Such dictionaries can be called encyclopedic, or analytic, in contradistinction to the dogmatic format Skeat and his successors chose.

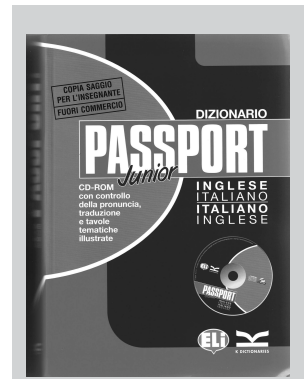
English etymological dictionaries have not always been dogmatic. 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century authors listed (and accepted or refuted) the ideas of their predecessors because what at that time passed for etymological research did not rely on strict procedures. Students of antiquities sought for look-alikes in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Old English, Irish, or Dutch, depending on their predilections, and derived English words from the words of those languages. Occasionally their derivations proved to be right, but in the absence of method everybody's suggestion seemed to be worthy of at least some respect. A modern user of our oldest etymological dictionaries (published roughly until 1850) finds invaluable surveys of the oldest views and forms an idea of how knowledge developed. For a historian of science, the way to the truth is no less interesting than the truth itself. Then comparative linguistics came into its own, and sound laws were discovered. Guesswork gave way to the science of etymology. The limitations of this science became clear much later, but the core of comparative linguistics withstood all attacks, even though nowadays it is more customary to refer to sound correspondences rather than sound laws. Polemic continued to rage in journals, while dictionaries included what was certain and left out the controversial parts.

The pendulum swung in the opposite direction only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By that time it had become hard to find the relevant literature. Even in Germany one could not be sure that a proposed etymology had not been offered earlier. Scholars realized a need for digests, and analytic dictionaries appeared. I can think of two reasons this trend had no influence on English studies. First, the *OED* was such an incomparable achievement that further work in etymology did not seem to be necessary. Oxford University Press launched several successful abridgments of the *OED* and became the capital of English lexicography, with a perennial classic as its cornerstone. Second, comparative philology did not flourish in the English speaking world as it did in Germany. A whole encyclopedia can

be filled with the names of distinguished German comparativists. In England and the United States, such names will not fill a page. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century etymology remained a German discipline. Later de Saussure and Meillet contributed to its glory, but Germanic was not at the center of their interests (a mere dialect within Indo-European). Benveniste continued the same tradition.

It is thus not fortuitous that the *ODEE* appeared only in 1965 and did not go beyond the partly outdated information amassed by its model. While English etymological lexicography remained dormant (popularization can be ignored), articles and books on the origin of English words kept appearing in a steady stream. Dictionary makers sometimes reproduced the latest proposals with undue deference (a classic case is the treatment of *boy* in the post-*OED* era: the word was said to be of French origin), but, as a rule, such proposals did not make a stir, for authorities of Skeat's and Murray's caliber were no longer in view. The golden age of etymology had receded into the past. At the same time historical linguistics lost its prestige. The epoch of structuralism set in, fewer and fewer students were trained in the old periods of the Germanic languages, and those who were soon realized that departments of English, let alone linguistics, did not vie for the honor of hiring them. The shrinking demand nearly killed the source of supply. Fortunately, the public knew nothing of those developments and kept asking where words come from. An army of well-meaning journalists catered to their curiosity, but they had neither the time nor the expertise for independent research. They, too, recycled the *OED*. Most "thick" dictionaries keep an etymologist on their staff or hire consultants. Their contribution to "revised and enlarged" editions cannot make up for the absence of a full-scale analytic dictionary of English etymology. However much the press may pay its consultants, they won't be able to explain the origin of *bird*, *Cockney*, *dwarf*, *god*, *man*, *wife*, etc. by the deadline. Whether they will be able to do so later is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

About twenty years ago, I embarked on writing an analytic etymological dictionary of English. At the moment, we do not have even the smallest clearing house of suggestions on the origin of English words. I will cite one example that deals with a relatively exotic borrowed word, namely, *osprey*. Here is what the *ODEE* says: "...sea-eagle, fish-hawk XV [that is, first recorded



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in the 15<sup>th</sup> century]; egret plume XIX. –O[ld] F[rench] *ospres*, repr[esenting]. obscurely L[atin] OSSIFRAGE. In modF *orfraie*, [obsolete] *offraie* (XVI), which is also unexplained.” This is a summary of the etymology in the *OED*. Skeat says the same, and so do all the old and current French and English dictionaries except one. In the *Heritage*, the entry *osprey* contains the following explanation: “Middle English *ospray*, probably from Old French *ospreit* (unattested), from Vulgar Latin *avispreda* (unattested), from Latin *avis praedae*, “bird of prey”: avis, bird, (see **awi** - in Appendix\*) + *praeda*, prey (see **ghend** - in Appendix\*). The Old French form and denotation are influenced by Old French *osfraie*, from Latin *ossifraga*, OSSIFRAGE.” As we can see, Latin *ossifraga*, although still present, has been demoted to an “influence.” It is a remarkable fact that in two authoritative dictionaries we find conflicting etymologies of the word, both stated dogmatically and without references. An analytic dictionary would have discussed the value of both reconstructions and said that both are debatable. The *Heritage* does not state that the traditional derivation of *osprey* is wrong (incidentally, I have not been able to discover the source of the *avis praedae* hypothesis), and the *ODEE* fails to inform us whether the etymology it gives is putative or certain. The phrase “representing obscurely” will puzzle even a seasoned linguist, and the statement that Modern French *orfraie* is also unexplained adds a note of despair to the rest of the entry. The plot thickens without a promise of a denouement.

Below I will give a brief account of what has been done toward the production of an analytic dictionary of English etymology. Over the years, I have been operating on a shoestring budget, but the money I have had allowed me to hire graduate and undergraduate assistants. Fortunately, many volunteers have offered their services. My team examined all the sets of all the philological journals in more than twenty languages, popular magazines like *Notes and Queries*, and endless rows of miscellaneous publications and Festschriften. The assistants were told to copy the articles and reviews that dealt with the origin of English words and their cognates. They read some works in English, German, and the continental Scandinavian languages, but I had no help for Icelandic, Faroese, Dutch, Frisian, Romance, Slavic, and Baltic and did all the screening in those languages myself. Bibliographies were of course useful, but, while looking through lists of titles, it is hard to judge whether an article contains any etymological

information, for interesting ideas on the origin of English words turn up in works on Latin numismatics, Old Indian demonology, Armenian syntax, Slavic morphology, and so on. The reasons for that are obvious. Language history and the history of culture are inseparable from etymology. Also, numerous English words have cognates in other Indo-European languages (a study of German *gleiten* or of Swedish *dverg* is as valuable for the etymology of *glide* and *dwarf* as a study of those English words). Titles like “The Origin of the Verb *glide*” are rare, and there was no substitute for opening one book after another. At present, Part 1 of my database contains slightly over 18,500 titles. Every article (paper, review, report) has been marked for the words whose origins are discussed there. Part 2 is a word list: next to each word (there are over 14,000 of them) the page numbers referring to the titles in Part 1 appear.

As Corneille said: “The tragedy is ready; I must now only write the verses.” With such a database at my disposal, all that remains is to sit down and write an analytic dictionary of English etymology. However, there are at least two handicaps. The main of them has been mentioned above: every language contains too many words! For this reason, I have divided the presumably native vocabulary of English into several groups: words without established cognates outside English, words with one or more established cognates only within Germanic, words with cognates in Germanic and elsewhere in Indo-European, borrowings from the Romance languages, and borrowings from other languages. This classification often breaks down, for a word believed not to have cognates anywhere may be shown to have some, a presumably native word may turn out to be a borrowing, and so forth, but in principle, it serves me well. My immediate aim is to write entries on the most common words of the first group (between five and six hundred), these worried bones of etymology, as a reviewer of Skeat’s dictionary once called them. I emphasize the phrase *the most common words* (*boy, girl, lad, lass*, and their likes) because volatile slang, dialectal words, and the rare words that are featured in dictionaries can wait. Germanic words without established Indo-European cognates (such as *dwarf, shilling*, and *wife*) will be the next group to deal with.

A second handicap is that writing an entry is not a mechanical process. I must first reread everything written in the articles that have made their way into the database and are now located in my

office, look up the words under discussion in about two hundred dictionaries and numerous books (they fill my carrel at the library), evaluate all the proposals (there may be as many as 21 of them: this happened to *yet*; however, the usual number fluctuates between three and six), defend the most reasonable one, advance my own, or concede defeat (“the origin is still unknown”). I have been able to offer many good solutions, but it would be rash to expect that I will break the spell laid on every intractable word. No analytic dictionary has done so. Emma Micawber, the wife of David Copperfield’s unforgettable friend, once declared: “Talent Mr. Micawber has, money Mr. Micawber has not.” This is a familiar problem. If I succeed in getting a renewable grant from NEH (the National Endowment for the Humanities, (<http://neh.gov>), I will hire assistants and with a bit of luck complete my project. Or perhaps some reader of this newsletter will realize what a wonderful enterprise my dictionary is and give me several hundred thousand dollars (my project did not die years ago only because of the interest in it by two philanthropists). By now I have written more than fifty entries (they range from two to fifteen single-spaced pages in two columns) and published most of them as articles. A volume of those entries, thoroughly reworked for the dictionary, along with the database, will be brought out by the University of Minnesota Press. I submitted both manuscripts in February 2005.

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The following is a sample entry from the new etymological dictionary by Anatoly Liberman.

## RAGAMUFFIN (1344)

Ragamuffin first appeared in texts as one of the medieval names of the Devil. It is a compound, and the origin of each of its parts is problematic. Etymologizing only rag- and dismissing -amuffin as a fanciful ending leaves this word without a reconstructed past. In all probability, ragamuffin has a connecting element (rag-a-muffin) and is thus an extended form like cockney from cock-e-nei. The most convincing hypothesis traces both rag- and -muffin to words for ‘devil,’ as in OF Rogomant (though in French it may have been a borrowing from Germanic), preserved in E Ragman and Ragman’s roll (> rigmarole), and Old Muffy, from AF maufe ‘ugly; the Evil One.’ Ragamuffin is then a semantic reduplication with an augment (-a-) in the middle, \*‘devil-a-devil.’ An association with rags is late and due to folk etymology.

The proposed derivation of ragamuffin finds partial confirmation in the history of hobbledehoy. Both ragamuffin and hobbledehoy were first names of the Devil. The meaning of both has changed to ‘ragged man’ (often ‘ragged urchin’) and ‘hobbling (awkward) youth’ respectively, and both are extended forms, though with different augments.

The sections are devoted to 1) rag- ‘devil,’ 2) -muffin as a reflex of one of the Devil’s names, 3) the role of -a- in ragamuffin and in similar words, and 4) a brief comparison of ragamuffin and hobbledehoy.

1. It has been known for a long time that in Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, 1393 (c, XXI:183, Skeat’s edition, 1886, vol 1) a devil called Ragamoffin is mentioned. OED quotes the relevant passage. According to MED, the name *Isabella Ragamoffyn* occurred in 1344. For two centuries *ragamuffin* (with any spelling) did not appear in written documents. Its uninterrupted history goes back to 1581. OED says the following about its origin: “[P]rob[ably] from RAG sb.<sup>1</sup> (cf. RAGGED 1c), with fanciful ending.” The second part of *ragabush* ‘worthless person’ (now chiefly dialectal) is also said to contain a fanciful ending added to *rag*. The concept of the fanciful ending does not make sense when applied to sound strings like -amuffin and -abush. Shipley (1945, *ragamuffin*) adds -mudgeon in *curmudgeon*, on which see MOOCH, and -scallion in *rapscallion* to the list of such misbegotten creations. Whatever the origin of *ragamuffin*, its present day sense was influenced by *rag*, but it does not follow that the first ragamuffin was ragged or wore rags.

The entry *Ragman* ‘devil’ in OED contains a passing remark: “cf. RAGAMUFFIN RAGGED, Sw[edish] *raggen* [‘devil’].” In the entry *ragged*, several examples make it clear that the Devil was often portrayed as having a ragged appearance. Sw *raggen* can be understood as ‘the shaggy (hairy) one,’ a tempting interpretation in light of the material from Middle English in OED, or as ‘the evil one’ (*rag* is also a metathesized form of Sw *arg* ‘evil, wicked’). Hellquist preferred the second alternative, while OED took the first one for granted. Spitzer (1947:91) derived *rageman* (this is Langland’s spelling) from French. The idea that *Ragemon* (*le bon*) and *Rogomant* were folk etymologized into *rageman* ~ *Rageman* carries more conviction than that *raggen* was borrowed from Swedish, because Sw *raggen* is a neologism, unrecorded in the other Scandinavian languages. On *Rageman* see also *rigmarole* in English etymological dictionaries.

The French origin of *ragman* and *ragamuffin* was suggested long ago (anonymous [1822b:618]), but neither Spitzer nor his predecessors succeeded in discovering the ultimate etymon of the French name, which may have been Germanic, especially if an old attempt to connect E *rag* and Ital *ragazzo* 'boy, youth' is not dismissed out of hand (then *ragazzo* would come out as 'little devil,' not 'person in rags'). Probably no other word of Italian has been discussed so often with such meager results.

The Germanic root \**rag-* 'fury' is probable: compare Du dial *raggen* 'run around in a state of wild excitement' (*loopen en raggen* has the same meaning), alternating with Du dial *rakken* (Weijnen [1939-40]: detailed discussion without a definitive etymology). Sw *rag(g)la* 'wobble,' and ModI *ragla* 'wander about' may belong with the Dutch verb, but the chances are not so good, because the meanings—'move in violent agitation' and 'wonder aimlessly, move unsteadily'—do not match. The nasalized forms (N *rangle*, and so forth), except for late MHG *ranzen* 'jump violently' (FT, *rangle* and *rage* III; A<sup>1</sup>BM, *ragla*; KS, *Range* and *ranzen*), are synonymous with *ragla*. If such a root existed, it need not have been identical with \**arg-* 'copulate' (said about animals), though their derivatives were partly synonymous in various languages and though one could develop from the other by metathesis, as happened in Old Norse. (Can E *rag* 'scold' be of similar origin and can G *regen* 'stir' be related to this \**ragen* rather than G *ragen* 'rise, tower, jut out'?) A pagan divinity called *Rageman*, someone like the Old English *Herla cyning* 'King Herla,' is not unthinkable (cf. *Woden* from \**woð-* 'fury,' as in G *Wut*). The same name of the Devil seems to have been known in the Baltic languages: Lithuanian *ra-gana* and Latvian *ragana* mean 'witch' (another much-discussed word; see, for example, Otkupshchikov [1977]).

2. Conjectures on the etymology of *-muffin* have been inconclusive: from Sp *mofar* 'mock' or Ital *muffo* 'musty' (W 1828 and in all the editions until 1864), from G dial *muffen* 'smell musty' (W 1864; the same until 1890), from Gael *maoidh* 'threaten' (Mackay [1877]; Mackay, who derived hundreds of words of European languages from Gaelic, combined Gael *ragair* 'thief, villain' with *maoidh*, so that *ragamuffin* turned out to be 'dangerous scoundrel'), and from E *muff* 'stupid, clumsy person' (thus UED, which only "compares" *-muffin* with *muff*).

John Ker traced numerous English words to nonexistent Dutch phrases, and his derivations are among the most amusing in the history of English etymology. He derived *ragamuffin* from *rag er moffin* 'poverty shews itself in that countenance.' "Literally, the *Westphalian* boor predominates in his person. *Mof* is the nickname of the *Westphalian* labourer.... The word *mof* is founded in the thema *mo-en*, in the import of, to cut, to mow; and the term means strictly, a mower.... *Moffin* is the female of this class.... And I have no doubts our term *muffin* is the ellipsis of *moffincoeck*, the pastry of the *muffin* who cries it, as that which she is employed to carry about to dispose of" (Ker 1837: I, 89). His gloss of *rag er moffin* 'may it show' goes back (as he says) to the Dutch or German verb *ragen* 'project' in the subjunctive and *er* 'there.' With Ker we are pushed to the edge of normalcy, but in a small way he was vindicated: the nickname *mof* turns up in Mueller<sup>2</sup> and UED (*ragamuffin*), and *rag-* may be akin to the verb *ragen*, though not the one he meant.

Richardson thought of *ragabash* and *raggabrash* as "a

corruption of *ragged* (or perhaps *rakell* ['profligate']) rubbish," but "of *ragamuffin*," he says, "the examples found have afforded no clue to the true origin." Mueller<sup>2</sup> cites G *muffen* 'smell musty, moldy' and E *muff* 'stupid fellow' (the same word as in Ker). He mentions *Ragamofin*, the name of a demon in some of the old mysteries, and of all English etymologists he seems to be the only one to suggest a tie between E *ragamuffin* and Ital *ragazzo* 'boy.' ID (1850) follows Webster (as always) but also offers a possible derivation from *rag* and obsolete *mof*, *muff* 'long sleeve.'

In Spitzer's opinion (1947:93), *ragamuffin* goes back to F \**Rogom-oufflle* or \**Ragam-oufflle*, which must be a blend of *Ragemon* 'devil,' and such words as OF *ruffien* of the fourteenth century ... or F *maroufle* ['scoundrel']; again, it could even be a coinage from the *ragemon* stem formed with the OF suffix *-ouffle*, like *maroufle* itself.... The idea of 'ragged' appears in *ragamuffin* only as late as 1440, and is consequently quite secondary." Spitzer adds that *ragamuffin* still means a (ragged) street urchin and that perhaps 'street urchin' was the original meaning, whence an association with 'devil, demon, imp, heathen.'

W (1890) leaves *ragamuffin* without any etymology and mentions only the name of Langland's demon. For a long time dictionaries have followed this example. Only Wyld (UED) risked a tentative comparison of *-muffin* with *muff*, which he may have found independently of his predecessors or in Mueller<sup>2</sup> (for no one read Ker). Skeat did not include *ragamuffin* in his dictionary, but in his edition of *Piers Plowman* (1886, II:257, note on line 283) he wrote: "Mr. Halliwell... remarks that *Ragamofin* is a name of a demon in some of the old mysteries. It has since passed into a sort of familiar slang term for any one poorly clad. The demons, it may be observed, took the comic parts in the old mysteries, and were therefore sometimes fitted with odd names." However, Stanley (1968:110) points out in his comment on Halliwell's statement that there is no existence for the use of *Ragamofin* in old medieval plays.

Against this background, the entry in AHD<sup>3,4</sup> is all the more surprising. It traces *-muffin* to MDu *moffel* ~ *muff* 'mitten' (is a bahuvrihi of the *Redcap* type meant: *Ragamuffin* = *ragmitten* or *ragged mitten*?). The entry has a supplementary word history in which we read that the discovery of the name *Isabella Ragamoffyn* disproves the current derivation of *ragamuffin* from a devil's name. But *ragamuffin* has always been understood as a vague continuation rather than a reflex of *ragamoffyn* in *Piers Plowman*. Apparently, the woman in question had the character that earned her the unusual soubriquet.

Some of the conjectures listed above can be ruled out by definition. **An English compound need not have an element straight from Spanish, Italian, German, Gaelic, or Middle Dutch.** One can look for English cognates of these words, but E *-muffin* has not been recorded (*muffin* 'cake' became known in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has always meant what it means now). Spitzer's etymology is learned but too speculative. E *muff*, which Mueller and Wyld cite, first occurs in Dickens in 1837, and this must have been the time it gained currency in the streets of London. It has no ancestors, except *muff* 'deprecatory term of a German or Swiss, sometimes loosely applied to other foreigners,' which does not occur in extant texts after 1697. Du *muff* 'lout' (< *mof*, originally the same meaning as in E *muff*) and G *Muffel* were recorded much later than *ragamuffin*. Even if their

history were less opaque, their late attestation and the absence of their cognates in Middle English make their connection with *ragamuffin* improbable. However, *muff* may have been an import from the continent.

**A seemingly correct etymology of -muffin can be deduced from the information in an article by Smythe Palmer.** He read Prevost (1905) and noted the phrase *Auld Muffy* used by the older dalesmen for the Devil. As he observes: "The expression is now but seldom heard, and in a few years, probably it will be as extinct as the dodo." Muffy is AF *maufe* 'ugly, ill-featured,' "which was once synonymous with the Evil One," a creature "notoriously hideous and deformed"; cf *Satan le maufe*' (Smythe Palmer [1910:54546-]; additional details on p 546). E dial *muffy* 'hermaphrodite' is an alteration of *morfrodite*, but if Old Muffy was known more widely in the past, the two words may have interacted. See the supplement to DWARF on hermaphrodites, and Prescott (1995) on *muffy*.

**Both components of *ragamuffin* seem to mean 'devil'.** Only the origin of final *-n* is not quite clear, but so many nouns ended in *-an*, *-en* (like *guardian*, *warden*, and formations of the *slabberdegullion* and *tatterdemal(l)ion* type) that *\*ragamauffi* could easily have become *\*ragamauffi(an)*. Note that the earliest spelling is *ragamoffyn* (with *o* for *F au*?) and that Shakespeare has *rag of Muffin* or *rag of Muffian* in *1Henry IV*, IV, iii:272.

3. Words with unetymological *-a-* are discussed in some detail at *COCKNEY*. In Middle and Modern English, intrusive *-a-* has more than one source. When the connecting schwa occurs in French words like *vis-à-vis* and *cap-à-pie*, it is a preposition. In the native vocabulary, *-a-* is a reduced form of *on* or *of*, as in *twice a day*, *cat-o'-nine-tails*, *man-o'-war*, *Tam o'Shanter*. But when a model establishes itself, new formations arise and neologisms begin to be cast in the same predictable mold. *Tam o'Shanter* was *Tam Shanter* in Burns's poems and acquired its *o'* on the analogy of *John o'Groat*s and so forth. *Fustianapes* is an allegro form of *fustian of Naples*, but *jackanapes* developed from *Jac(k) Napes*, not *\*Jack on* or *of Naples*, and *Jack-a-dandy* never was *\*Jack of* or *on dandy*. *Will with the wisp* forfeited its *with the* (*o'* substituted for them), and in a similar way the older form of *lack-a-day*, the basis of *lackadaisical*, was *alack the day* (see these words in OED and ODEE). The origin of many words with *-a-* will of necessity remain obscure, which does not mean that they should be given up as hopeless. ODEE states that *a* in *Blackamoor* < *black More* is unexplained. The comment in OED is longer: "Of the connecting *a* no satisfactory explanation has been offered. The suggestion that it was a retention of the final *-e* of ME *black-e* (obs[olete] in prose before 1400) is, in the present state of evidence, at variance with the phonetic history of the language, and the analogy of other *black-* compounds. Cf. *black-a-vised*." In the entry *black-a-vised* 'dark-complexioned' (first recorded in 1758, over two centuries later than *Black-a-moor*), we read: "... perh[aps] originally *black-a-vis* or *black o' vis*; but this is uncertain." *Black-a-top* 'black-headed' (a single 1773 citation) is left without an etymology.

ODEE says that the first element of *caterwaul* is perhaps related to or borrowed from LG / Du *kater* 'male cat,' unless *-er-* "is merely an arbitrary connective syll[able]"; we recognize here a paraphrase of "some kind of suffix or connective merely" (OED). Neither Murray nor Onions realized that *cat-er-waul* (= *cat-a-waul*?) is not an isolated example. It is unprofitable to

label insertions as merely arbitrary connective syllables or some kind of suffix. CD calls *-a-* in *black-a-moor* and *jackadandy* a meaningless syllable. This is true enough but not particularly illuminating.

*Cock-e-ney* is the earliest certain recorded extended form with schwa, and the 14<sup>th</sup> century must have been approximately the time when such words arose. Unstressed *i* was also drawn into the process of coining extended *-a-* forms. *Cock-a-leekie* has a doublet *cockie-leekie*, though *ie* in *cockie* is not a suffix. A similar case is *piggyback* 'carry on one's shoulders,' from *pickaback*. According to Skeat, *huckaback* 'coarse durable linen' (earlier *hugaback* and *hag-a-bag*) is the English pronunciation of LG *huckebak* 'pick-a-back': at one time, it presumably designated a pedlar's ware, but the evidence is lacking, and OED says "origin unknown." If Skeat guessed well, *huckaback* is a doublet of *pickaback* ~ *piggyback*. Kück's note on the Low German word (1905:1415-) supports Skeat's etymology.

**Assuming that the reconstruction given here is correct and *ragamuffin* (1344) is a tautological extended form with the initial meaning '\*devil-devil,' we will obtain a word of this type whose attestation slightly predates *cockney* < *cockeney* (1362). It will emerge as a coinage not unlike *muck-a-muck* 'person of distinction.'** Some confirmation of the proposed etymology comes from the history of *hobbledehoy*, arguably another extended form of similar structure and meaning.

**Although extended forms are not mentioned in standard books on word formation**, such as Koziol (1937) and Marchand (1969), **they played a noticeable role in the development of English vocabulary.** Modern ludic coinages like *edu-ma-cation*, the mispronunciation *rigamarole* for *rigmarole* (for which dialects provide numerous parallels), the popularity of nursery words like *peek-a-boo* and *rub-a-dub-dub*, and jocular words like *grizzle-de-mundy* make the hypothesis that *Hobert-dehoy* is derived from *\*Hobert le Hoy* under the influence of *Flibber-ti-gibbet* and its kin plausible.

4. **Both *ragamuffin* and *hobbledehoy* seem to have been coined as the names of fiends (devils, sprites). Their original meanings are now forgotten, but the negative connotations they once possessed have survived.** *Ragamuffin* is a word that can be applied to a person of any age, though perhaps more often to a youngster (see Spitzer's remarks above), as in the title of James Greenwood's novel *The True History of a Little Ragamuffin*. The definition in AHD runs as follows: '[a] dirty or unkempt child.' RHD says: "1. a ragged, disreputable person; tatterdemalion. 2. a child in ragged, ill-fitting, dirty clothes." OED found it necessary to gloss *ragamuffin* "a ragged, dirty, disreputable man or boy" (italics added). King Rag(e)man, Auld Maufi, and King Robert were full-grown devils, but the loss of status resulted in their loss of stature. In *boy*, a baby word for 'brother' and a word for 'devil' have merged; its case is reminiscent of both *ragamuffin* and *hobbledehoy*. In Middle English, *boy* may have meant 'executioner,' and *ragman* 'hangman's assistant' has also been recorded. The proper name *Boi(e)* was current several centuries before the common name turned up in texts for the first time (see the details at *BOY*), and this is what happened to *ragamuffin* and presumably to *hobbledehoy*. *Rag-a-muffin* and *hobble-de-hoy* have not only had a similar semantic history; both are extended forms, though with different augments.