Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia
vol. 18 Kraków 2013
DOI: 10.4467/20843836SE.13.001.0938

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ENGLISH GUIDES TO ETYMOLOGY FROM SKEAT TO DURKIN

Abstract. This paper examines six guides to the etymology of English, written for non-specialist readers between 1887 and 2009. Four are by etymological lexicographers (two by W. W. Skeat and one each by Anatoly Liberman and Philip Durkin) and two by philologists with strong etymological interests (A. S. C. Ross and W. B. Lockwood). The paper seeks to present their contents, to compare them with each other, and to contextualize them both in the internal history and in the social history of scholarship.
Keywords: etymology, non-specialist guide, English, history of linguistics.

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1. Introduction

The social history of the etymological study of English has never been written. This paper seeks to sketch one narrative thread in this unwritten history, by examining the series of non-specialist guides to English etymology which begins with W. W. Skeat's *Principles of English etymology* (1887-1891) and continues to the present day with Philip Durkin's *Oxford guide to etymology* (2009). They do not comprise a large set; after Skeat's major work and his shorter *Science of etymology* (1912) came A. S. C. Ross's *Etymology* (1958) and, after another long interval, W. B. Lockwood's *Informal introduction to English etymology* (1995); then in 2005, Anatoly Liberman's *Word origins ... and how we know them: Etymology for everyone*, and four years later, Durkin's *Oxford guide*.[1] This list could have been lengthened by including Alfred Bammesberger's *English etymology*, published by Carl Winter of Heidelberg in 1988, but this is very much an undergraduate text rather than an introduction for a larger public (there are also, of course, many other specialized books on aspects of English etymology for academic readers). It could also have been lengthened by including collections of word histories in which relatively little is said about

[1] The ellipsis in the title of Liberman's book is present in the original.

etymological principles, such as Ernest Weekley's *The romance of words* (1913); books about the etymology of languages other than English, notably John Peile's early *Introduction to Greek and Latin etymology* (1869); very elementary texts for schoolchildren, such as James Martin's little *Scholar's handbook of English etymology* (1877); or introductions to etymological dictionaries. It might have been supported interestingly with an account of guides to the etymologies of other languages (cf. Malkiel 1993: 38-39). But as it stands, it gives a sense of some of the themes and tensions in the study of English etymology as presented to non-specialists in England.

There were, of course, English etymological dictionaries and etymological speculation about English before Skeat (for the dictionaries, see Liberman 1998a: 24-42, 54-55). As early as Stephen Skinner's *Etymologicon linguae anglicanae* of 1671, English readers with moderate fluency in Latin could study 66 pages of "prolegomena etymologica," beginning with the demoralizing statement that "All the vowels in all languages are readily interchangeable … Nearly all the consonants sometimes substitute for each other in this language or that: but this latter case is much less common than the former."[2] In the next two centuries, works like James Parsons' *Remains of Japhet* (1767), Jacob Bryant's *Analysis of ancient mythology* (1774-1776) and Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley* (1786-1805) offered their readers a wealth of highly imaginative etymological argument.[3] But the work of this period has very little to do with that expressed in Skeat's *Principles* and its successors. A turning point in the social history of the etymology of English can in fact be located around the 1870s.

This period may seem rather late. As early as 1792, Sir William Jones had protested "against the licentiousness of etymologists" – he had Bryant particularly in mind – "in transposing and inserting letters, in substituting at pleasure any consonant for another of the same order, and in totally disregarding the vowels." He proceeded to make up an example:

> for such permutations few radical words would be more convenient than CUS or CUSH, since, dentals being changed for dentals, and palatials for palatials, it instantly becomes *coot*, *goose*, and by transposition, *duck*, all water-birds, and *evidently* symbolical; it next is the *goat* worshipped in *Egypt*, and, by a metathesis, the *dog* … (Jones 1792: 489)

[2] Skinner 1671: sig. D3r, "Vocales omnes in omnibus Linguis facile invicem commutantur … Consonantes fere omnes sibi in gac vel illa lingua aliquando cedunt, hae autem longe rarius quam illae." For Skinner, see Considine 2009a: 124-132, and for the *bon mot* which developed from statements like this about the places of the vowels and consonants in etymological research, see Considine 2009b.

[3] For Horne Tooke's, see Aarsleff 1967/1983: 54-76.

This invented example was not, as Hans Aarsleff has remarked (1967/1983: 130), "an extravagant specimen of eighteenth-century etymology" – nor would it have been out of place in much of the nineteenth century. In 1828, Noah Webster explicitly rejected Jones's argument in this passage (Micklethwait 2000: 164-166). The best English dictionary of the first half of the nineteenth century, that of Charles Richardson (serialized 1818-1845, and published in two volumes 1836-1837), was informed by Tookean etymological principles.[4] Schoolchildren in the 1850s were told that "In seeking the origin of words, we seek their source in nature" (*Handbook* 1854: 302). Some later writers show a retrogression from the positions of Webster and Richardson, let alone the more advanced position of Jones. Here is an etymology, comparable to Jones's facetious invention but seriously advanced, from A. Tuder's *My own philology*, published in 1866 by the perfectly reputable Trübner & Co.:

> The statue of Janus holds in his hand a key; we must not accept of any given meaning for this "sign" … we shall repeat that the key is held as "a sign," "le signe," "le cygne," "the swan," "Anas," "Je Anas," "J'anus." The key, therefore, appears to be a hieroglyph denoting the name of the holder. (Tuder 1866: 10)[5]

The title of Tuder's little tract does suggest that its author knew its argument to be idiosyncratic, but six years later, Trübner published an almost equally adventurous piece, *The Hebrew or Iberian race, including the Pelasgians, the Phenicians, the Jews, the British, and others*, which was advertised as being "based on a comprehensive view of a great number of connected and unquestionable facts," and forming "a master-key to theology, religion, ethnology, and philology."[6] Its author, Henry Kilgour, had written a pamphlet in the previous decade with the object of proving that nitrogen was not an element but a form of carbon dioxide; this claim had not been generally accepted, and he had turned to ancient history and etymology instead. Typical of his etymological arguments is the claim that

> The Br in Bretagne, like the Br in Bruttii or Brettioli in Italy, is, it is submitted, a contraction of Eber … It may be further observed as to Bretagne that the Veneti, who were a commercial race of obvious de-

[4] For Richardson and Tooke, see Aarsleff 1967/1983: 249-252; for the publication dates of Richardson's dictionary, see Considine 2010: XVII.

[5] Tuder's identity is obscure. With Frederick Tennyson, brother of the poet, he prepared a work of esoteric Masonic speculation, Henry Melville's *Veritas*, for its posthumous publication in 1872.

[6] *NQ* 5th ser., 4, 28 August 1875, verso of preliminary leaf.

> scent from the Phenicians, lived there in Caesar's time, showing that the Brets or Veneti were the same people, and clearly proving their common origin from the Hebrews or Phenicians. (Kilgour 1872: 13)

This, like Kilgour's arguments about physical chemistry, fell flat. The only reference to his book which I have found anywhere is in a Chilean publication of 1873, where a summary of its argument is followed by the remark "No me parece necesario refutar un idea tan estraña" (Philippi 1873: 434).

Expert opinion, then, was against arguments like those of Tuder and Kilgour by the 1860s and 1870s. But having said that, we should note that in those decades, expert opinion had its own divisions. The best recent English etymological dictionary of English available to Kilgour would have been that of Hensleigh Wedgwood, published – by Trübner again – in 1859-1865, with subsequent editions in 1872, 1878, and 1888.[7] This

> enjoyed considerable popularity in the pre-Skeat epoch, but the philologists found fault with it from the start, and for a good reason. Wedgwood, quite consciously, ignored sound laws and concentrated on sound symbolism and onomatopoeia. However, the success of comparative philology made recourse to such impressionistic theories of word origins obsolete. (Liberman 1998a: 37)

Wedgwood's clashes with Skeat are mentioned by Liberman, and not without sympathy: his *Contested etymologies in the dictionary of the Rev. W. W. Skeat* (1882), dismissed by a contemporary critic as appearing, unforgivably, to show "no notion of the phonetic laws of the Indo-Germanic languages" (Zupitza 1883: 253), is for Liberman "an insightful criticism" (1998a: 37; repeated idem 2005: 241). But it is not Wedgwood to whom I now wish to turn as a foil for Skeat, but Kilgour. Skeat's *Principles* were not written exclusively for members of the Philological Society, as he and Wedgwood were, but for a larger readership, the educated non-specialists of later Victorian England who read widely popular books like R. C. Trench's *On the study of words* (1851; 15th edition 1874) or Max Müller's *Lectures on the science of language* (1861; 7th edition 1875) or Wedgwood's dictionary, and, in Skeat's opinion, needed help in the direction of their real but ill-informed interest in etymology. Henry Kilgour was an articulate representative of that extensive class.

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[7] Of the first edition, Vol 1 (*A–D*) is dated 1859 and was available by 24 December 1859 (*NQ* 2nd ser. 8: 524); Vol 2 (*E–P*) is dated 1862 and was likewise released in December (Allibone 1859-1871, s.n.); Vol 3 part 1 (*Q–S*) is dated 1865, and part 2 (*T–Z*) is dated 1867.

2. Henry Kilgour and W. W. Skeat: the old and new schools of English etymology meet in 1875

Kilgour's encounter with Skeat took place in the pages of *Notes and Queries*. Since its foundation in 1849, contributors to this journal had used its pages to ask learned or antiquarian questions, to answer those which had been posed by others, or to put small items of useful information on record.[8] On 30 January 1875, the Irish antiquary and lexicographer of dialect William Patterson published a note on the word *fangled*, remarking that it is variously explained in dictionaries and glossaries, and that in the north of Ireland it is used to mean "caught up" (*NQ* 5th ser. 3: 85-86). On 13 February, Skeat published a short reply, explaining the relation of *fangled* to OE *fangen* "catch hold of" (cf. Ger. *fangen*), and the development of *new-fangled* "displeasingly novel" < *new-fangel* "apt to catch at new things" < *new* + *fangel* "apt to catch" < *fang-* + *-el*, a suffix forming deverbal adjectives which signify aptness to perform the action of the verb (*NQ* 5th ser. 3: 133). On 27 March, Henry Kilgour replied that the "asserted connexion" of *fangled* with the sense "to catch" was "not very apparent" and asked "Is 'fangle' and 'fangled' not, therefore, essentially the same as 'fashion' and 'fashioned'?" His point was that *new-fangled* contrasts with *old-fashioned* as *new-fashioned* does not, and that there is no form **old-fangled*, so that *fangled* would appear to be a variant of *fashioned* used only after the word *new*. He went on to add condescendingly that "What may be termed 'neat and ingenious' ideas are somewhat dangerous things in philology" (*NQ* 5th ser. 3: 258). This, understandably, irritated Skeat (who had, by the way, not used the form of words "neat and ingenious"). On 17 April, he replied with a longer note than his first. This began by reprising Kilgour's argument, and continued with steely politeness:

> I beg leave to assure MR. KILGOUR that I most heartily agree with him in his excellent suggestion that "neat and ingenious ideas should, in etymological questions, be sparingly indulged in." I would even go further, and say that etymologists have no business with ideas *of their own* at all … We do not want *ideas*, but *facts*. (*NQ* 5th ser. 3: 310)

Skeat then demolished Kilgour's point economically, pointing out the robustness of the evidence for his own etymology of 13 February, and adding that "I scrupulously avoided being influenced by 'ideas,' and contented myself with merely tracing the history of the formation of the word" (ibid. 310-311). His comments on the relationship of "ideas" and "facts" were surely directed to-

[8] An overview of the journal in its early years is given by Leary 1999.

wards the argument of the moment: by no means was Skeat a mindless empiricist, but in this particular polemic his target was Kilgour's taste for groundless speculation. "This brings me," he continued,

> to the great principle I wish to draw attention to, viz., that the publications of the Early English Text Society, the investigations of Mr. Ellis, the strictly scientific methods pursued at the present day in Greek and Latin etymology, and other similar aids, are fast tending to revolutionize, none too soon, the whole study of English etymology. (ibid. 311)

Skeat had some professional connection with all three of the aids to English etymology which he named (by *professional* I refer to his contributions to philology rather than the mathematical lectureship which he held until his election to the professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge in 1878). The Early English Text Society had since 1864 been publishing editions of Old English and Middle English texts, several of them edited by Skeat; the first four parts of A. J. Ellis's *On early English pronunciation* (co-published by the Early English Text Society) were now available; Skeat himself had published his *Hand-list of some cognate words in English, Latin, and Greek, with reference to the pages in Curtius's "Grundzüge"* in 1871. Contributing to English etymology, Skeat implied, was no longer the business of amateurs capable of noting a similarity between two forms: it was that of trained scholars, with access to and an understanding of an increasing body of published material in Old and Middle English, and with some understanding of phonetics, and with a fair acquaintance with continental European comparative philology as practiced by Georg Curtius and his peers.

3. W. W. Skeat's *Principles of English etymology* (1887-1891)

However, the revolution in English etymology which Skeat saw as under way in 1875 – in effect, its professionalization – was not meant to withhold an understanding of etymological work from the interested amateur as represented by Kilgour. Providing that understanding could hardly be done in a series of ad hoc exchanges; indeed, Skeat's remarks of 17 April 1875 did not crush Kilgour, who replied within a month that he was not convinced (*NQ* 5th ser. 3: 392). Skeat's great etymological dictionary was published in four parts between 1879 and 1882.[9] It was enriched with a number of prefatory notes and appendices in-

[9] Part 1, *A–Dor*, was reviewed by Henry Sweet in the *Academy* on 12 July 1879; part 2, *Dor–Lit*, had been published by 29 November 1879 (*NQ* 5th ser. 12: 439); part 3, *Lit–Red*, was newly available on 31 July 1880 (*NQ* 6th ser. 2: 100); part 4 was ad-

cluding two pages of "canons for etymology" (XXI-XXII). This liminary material (on which see Malkiel 1993: 31-32) suggested the editor's interest in going beyond the presentation of a basic wordlist, and led naturally to his compilation of a full-scale companion work, his *Principles of English etymology*, in two volumes, "The native element" (1887) and "The foreign element" (1891). Never before or since has the subject of English etymology been discussed with such a degree of personal authority, for Skeat was the first person to write a complete etymological dictionary of English which was founded upon good scientific principles, and therefore to have thought clearly about the etymology of almost every significant word in the language, and he was the last person to undertake such a dictionary without having a scientifically adequate predecessor to rely on.[10]

Just as Skeat's *Etymological dictionary* "was undertaken with the intention of furnishing students with materials for a more scientific study of English etymology than is commonly to be found" (Skeat 1882: V), so the preface to the first volume of the *Principles* began with the remark that "The present volume is intended to serve as a help to the student of English etymology" (Skeat 1887: V). That student was not defined further, but he need not have been *in statu pupillarii*: the word might refer to a person who studies at any level, and Skeat must have had students like Henry Kilgour in mind. (To be sure, etymologically inclined correspondents of *Notes and Queries* did not always read the *Principles* once they had been published: "I have explained all this in my 'Principles of English Etymology,'" Skeat wrote in a reply to a claim that *English* could not be connected with *Angle* in 1889, "but I suppose I must repeat some of the instances" [*NQ* 7th ser., 7: 190].)

The student who did read the *Principles* was introduced to the subject of English etymology by gradual steps. Native and borrowed words were discriminated in the first two chapters, and the third and fourth sketched the dialects of Middle English and Old English respectively: no subsequent guide would be as scrupulous in foregrounding the diversity of English at the outset (Skeat had used dialect material for the purposes of comparative philology as early as his *Hand-list of some cognate words* of 1871, and was the founder of the English

vertised as newly available in *The Times*, 6 May 1882, together with the dictionary as a whole, and also Skeat's *Concise etymological dictionary*. An appreciation is in Liberman 1998a: 42-45.

[10] The principles on which the first edition of the *Etymological dictionary* was founded were not, it may be added, perfectly developed. The American philologist Albert S. Cook, who had lately been a student of Sievers at Jena (see Cook 1885: VII), noted that at his worst, Skeat was "defiant of progressive and regular sound-change" and that he "shows too marked a leaning toward the onomatopoeic theory of which Wedgwood is one of the foremost expounders" (Cook 1880: 204, 206), and similar criticism is in Sweet 1879: 35. So, Malkiel 1993: 31, "taking into account whatever had in the meantime been accomplished on the European continent," is generous.

Dialect Society). The material on Old English dialects concluded with discussion of a passage from a late West Saxon gospel translation, which begins with the OE word *sóþlice* "truly" (cf. ModE *sooth*). The shift exemplified here from OE /oː/ to late modern /uː/ led Skeat into a fifth chapter on the OE long vowels and diphthongs and the medieval and modern English vowel systems; then a sixth on the Germanic languages and the Germanic origins of the OE vowel-system; and then a seventh on the wider Indo-European context of the Germanic languages, and on Grimm's Law. The eighth and ninth chapters continued the treatment of Grimm's Law and introduced Verner's Law; the tenth and eleventh turned to ablaut; the twelfth handled prefixes and suffixes of Germanic origin; and the thirteenth and fourteenth turned to suffixes for which fuller sets of Indo-European cognates could be traced. Having examined the Indo-European etymologies of derivational suffixes, Skeat proceeded in the fifteenth chapter to a quick sketch of the reconstruction of PIE roots, of which a list had been presented as an appendix to the *Etymological dictionary*; Malkiel (1993: 32) notes the inheritance of this feature by the late twentieth-century *American heritage dictionary*. A change of direction saw modern English spelling being treated in the sixteenth chapter, with remarks on etymology and spelling which were appreciated by reviewers (e.g. in *The Academy*, 24 December 1887, 427; *NQ* 7th ser., 4: 338-339). Phonetic alphabets, namely A. J. Ellis's "glossic" and Henry Sweet's "romic," were presented in the seventeenth chapter. The eighteenth treated the consonant system of English. The nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-fifth dealt largely with phonological change and its effects, and the twenty-first to the twenty-fourth with early loanwords from Latin, and with loanwords from Celtic, Scandinavian, and Low West Germanic languages.

The emphasis on phonological material was not idiosyncratic: we may compare Malkiel's observation (1993: 19) that in Curtius' *Grundzüge der griechischen Etymologie*, "the collocation of … etymological anecdotes has been so planned as to illustrate not the various patterns of lexical transmission … but the scheme of sound shifts." Skeat was providing his reader with a toolbox for the tracing and linking of forms, rather than with a full and balanced account of etymology in which semantic development would be proportionally represented, and he was reacting against would-be etymological associations of form and sense which could be shown to be impossible on etymological grounds. A similar sort of toolbox had been provided to a different set of students in the form of the *Introduction to Greek and Latin etymology* of Skeat's colleague at Christ's College, Cambridge, John Peile, whose help in the writing of the *Principles* Skeat acknowledged (1887: IX). But there is a difference between the two books. Peile's *Introduction* is lucidly arranged: after an introductory chapter on the principle of phonetic change, the concept of PIE is introduced; there is a chapter on "the Indo-European alphabet," i.e. PIE phonology; "dynamic

change," consisting of reduplication and ablaut, is distinguished from "phonetic change," and both are treated in that order, the long section on phonetic change being divided into treatments of the vowels and then of the consonants. By contrast, Skeat's ordering of chapters was, as we have just seen, associative rather than systematic.

Indeed, the whole first volume of the *Principles* had a relaxed and even genial quality. In it, and particularly in its footnotes, Skeat's voice is to be heard as if in a public lecture. He offers *obiter dicta*: "The true student of etymology expects to be able to explain all changes in a word's form by help either of *economy of effort* or of *mental association*" (350). He anticipates his students' reactions to what he says: the statement that Chaucerian spelling is "not *greatly*" different from that of the late nineteenth century "may seem a little startling at first" (307). He admits small mistakes and limitations of his own, acknowledging that in the PIE forms he cites from Fick's *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der indogermanischen Sprachen* "the vocalism, as there given, needs reform, and I do not know that I have always set it right" (126 n 2), remarking that although "a list of over 100" OE words beginning with *p* and at least possibly of native origin has been compiled, "I have lost the reference to this article" (118 n 1), and noting again as he cites *inmake* as an early variation of *inmate* that "I have unfortunately lost the reference for this form" (357 n 1).[11] He notes the mistakes of others with fairly good-humoured indignation: when "Webster's Dictionary" (i.e. the etymologies contributed to the edition of 1864 by C. A. F. Mahn) derives OE *fóda* < *fédan*, "how are we to trust an etymologist who does not even know this elementary lesson, that the A. S. [OE] *é* is a mutation of a preexistent *ó*, and who thus ignorantly reverses the true order of things?" (211). He excuses a mistake by the scholar who endowed his own professorship of Old English: "I owe so much to the bounty of Dr. Bosworth that I wish to clear him from blame in this matter" (47 n 1). The tone of these passages, combined with the great wealth of valuable material which Skeat sets out, suggests why the *Principles* should have been dear to readers – as it was to my father, the comparative philologist Patrick Considine, who said as he gave me his copy towards the end of his life that it had been one of his favourite books.

The second volume of the *Principles* is similar enough to the first in quality for us to treat it more briefly. Its first twelve chapters cover the French contributions to English, including a detailed and pioneering treatment of Anglo-

[11] The list of words beginning with *p* may have been Scott 1882, though this only marshals 15 native and Scandinavian-derived OE words beginning with *p* plus 48 of uncertain origin, which as Scott notes (l) "offer a tempting challenge tu [sic] the etymologist." Skeat had doubtless seen *inmake* in 1884, in *NQ* 6th ser. 9: 183, where it appears in an article immediately before one which takes issue with his etymology of *scullery*.

Norman: Skeat hoped that his work on this subject would "stand hereafter in the record of my few good deeds" (*NQ* 7th ser. 10: 98). They are followed by chapters on Latin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek, and by one on affixes from Latin and Greek, with brief references to their PIE antecedents; then come chapters on words from the Slavonic, Iranian and Indic, and Semitic languages, and from other languages of Eurasia and Oceania, the languages of Africa, and the languages of the Americas. A penultimate chapter "On some false etymologies" is followed by "Canons for etymology" which reprise those of the *Etymological dictionary*, ending with a strikingly heartfelt personal statement: in etymology, "we seek to give an account of the TRUE origin of a word," and

> you can only assist etymological research by carefully refraining from all suggestions of what is false. "Brilliant invention" is to be carefully eschewed; it is only another name for lying. But patient investigation, with a resolve to come at the truth, is a training that at once instructs and ennobles; and is in absolute harmony with the highest aim even of religion itself, which can offer mankind no greater reward than to guide us all, in due time, to a perfect knowledge of the whole, the living, and the eternal TRUTH. (1891: 462)

The reviewer of the first volume of the *Principles* in *The Academy* (24 December 1887, 427) – can this have been Henry Sweet, who had reviewed the second edition of Wedgwood's *Dictionary of English etymology* and the first instalment of Skeat's *Etymological dictionary* for that journal? – thought well of the book, but was critical of some of its treatment of sound-changes. Compared to their presentation in the dictionary, "the laws of vocalism have become far stricter," but they are still not always noted as clearly as they might be, and account is not taken of recent work by Brugmann (vol. 1 of the *Grundriss*) and Saussure (the *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles*). So, for instance, Skeat sees Lat. *grānum* as < **gar-num*, evidently (as in the *Etymological dictionary*) < √GAR, i.e. **gar-no-m* (cf. Curtius 1858-1862/1879: 176), rather than < **ĝr̥-no-m* (see Brugmann 1886: §533; Saussure 1879: 262-263). It is only fair to say that Skeat was first and foremost a student of medieval English literature, and not an Indo-Europeanist.[12] So, his *Principles* were designed to ensure that future statements about English etymology, whether made by the authors of learned publications or by contributors to semi-popular ones such as *Notes and Queries*, were consistent with the history of the English language – consistency with the best Indo-European comparative philology was really another matter. Almost the converse criticism to that printed in *The Academy* was made in a re-

[12] The best account of his life is in Brewer 1996: 91-112.

view of the second volume in *Notes and Queries*, whose author felt that Skeat's treatment of etymological conjecture was unduly harsh: "We are inclined to believe that to the etymologist, as to other scientific discoverers, a chastened but vivid imagination is a decided advantage" (*NQ* 7th ser. 11: 439).

Skeat's *Principles* and its offshoots remained the standard work in their field for more than half a century. A drastic abridgement of the first part was published as *A primer of English etymology* in 1892, selling at 1/6 in contrast to the 10/6 of each volume of the *Principles*.[13] Another very slim volume, *A primer of classical and English philology*, had some basic material on *Lautlehre*, and was used many years later by the lexicographer Eric Partridge, who will be mentioned again shortly, as a guide to the "general principles" and "problems" of etymology (Partridge 1963: 89): a strange choice. A new work, *The science of etymology*, appeared in 1912, the year of Skeat's death. It is directed at a less ambitious kind of student than the *Principles*: "My great object, in the present work, is to show how to make use of an English etymological dictionary" (1912: 35). So, rather than providing the reader with the information which is needed by an active etymologist, the *Science* uses select examples to establish basic principles in its first ninety pages, and to illustrate the relationship of English with other Indo-European languages in its longer second moiety. It makes reference to the successive editions of the *Etymological dictionary*, to the *Principles*, and even to the *Primer*, and makes no claim to originality of material: Skeat supposedly said of it that "he hoped there was not a single *new* statement in the book" (*NQ* 11th ser. 7: 39).[14] In contrast to the *Principles*, it ends abruptly: so much so as to suggest that Skeat may, at the end of a long life, and with his *Place-names of Suffolk* (posthumously published in 1913) to finish, not have found the time or energy to put the finishing touches to his last book on etymology.

4. A. S. C. Ross's *Etymology* (1958) and W. B. Lockwood's *Informal introduction to English etymology* (1995)

More than half a century passed before a successor to Skeat's *Principles* was attempted. This should not be surprising. There was only one realistic hope of writing an etymologicon which would surpass the fourth and final edition

[13] In the pre-1971 British currency, 1/6 was 0.075 British pounds and 10/6 × 2 was 1.05 British pounds. To put the sums in real terms, Roberts (1888) gives 1/6 as the price of three weeks' supply of tobacco, and 10/6 as the price of a pair of boots: a poor man could have bought the *Primer*, but not the *Principles*.

[14] *Dictionary*: Skeat 1912: 5-6, on the improvement of the etymology of *cark* between the first edition and the second; 9, citing the list of words of Latin origin as presented in the fourth edition; 10, citing the lists of words of French and Greek origin; etc. *Principles*: ibid. 1-2, 14, 20 n 1, 25, 36, etc. *Primer*: ibid. 19.

(1910) of Skeat's *Etymological dictionary*. This was to draw on the very fine etymologies of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Supplement* to which had been published in 1933. Just this project was undertaken by C. T. Onions, one of the two surviving editors of *OED*. In 1933, he expected to complete an etymological dictionary based on *OED* evidence in three years, or perhaps five. Over the next thirty-five years, the intermittent progress of Onions's work on what would finally be published in 1966 as the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* blocked any rival project (Brewer 2007: 8-60; cf. Partridge 1963: 93). Perhaps this explains what Malkiel calls "the failure of any British school of etymologists to arise" after Skeat (1993: 32). The etymologica which were produced in England between 1910 and 1966 – those of Ernest Weekley in 1921 and Eric Partridge in 1958 – were not major original works, and their makers did not proceed to writing guides to etymology, although both published popular historical studies of English words, and Partridge's slim *Adventuring among words* of 1961 was described by him (1963: 89) as "a tailpiece to my etymological dictionary."[15]

So it was that the publication in 1958 of Alan S. C. Ross's *Etymology, with especial reference to English* broke a long silence. This book was, its author understood (7), "primarily to be addressed to the Second Year student at the University"; nor was it "unsuitable for the non-academic public, a body of persons among whom I have long observed a very considerable interest in etymological questions." It falls into three sections: a general introduction of 55 pages, "an apparatus for English etymology" of 70, and a chapter of selected English etymologies of 25. It was, therefore, dramatically terser than the *Principles*.

The first section begins forbiddingly, "Etymology is an esoteric subject" (15). It then turns away from strictly etymological considerations for longer than one would expect in such a short book, providing an introduction to synchronic descriptive linguistics for a dozen pages (15-27). When comparative philology is introduced, it is said to comprise

> all consequences arising from a consideration of the following two Axioms.

[15] For Weekley's dictionary and his "collections of notes tastefully phrased and easily assimilable," see Malkiel 1993: 33, and for Weekley's and Partridge's dictionaries, see Liberman 1998a: 48-51. Weekley's is, according to Liberman, more scholarly, and this is what one would expect; he had studied under Kluge at Freiburg im Breisgau, whereas Partridge had had a literary training, and was, as far as etymology goes, an autodidact: it took him, he recalled (1963: 85), "some thirty years to transcend the stage of the purest amateurism."

> *Axiom I*. "Two languages are *related* if, and only if, they were once one language." Thus, French and Spanish are related because, and only because, they were both once Latin.
>
> *Axiom II*. "The word *congruence* in application to parts of two related languages is to be understood in precisely the sense in which the word *relationship* is applied as a consequence of Axiom I to the two languages themselves." Thus, English *stone* and German *stein* are congruent because, and only because, they were both one word in the language which English and German both once were – that is, they were primitive Germanic **stae^{i}na-*. (27-28)

The concept of the language family is then introduced, and kinds of linguistic change and relationship are considered. After a digression on the formal presentation of statements about linguistic relationship, to which we shall return below, Ross makes one striking point in passing: "it is, perhaps, rather a criticism of present-day Etymology that too little notice is taken of the meanings of words" (39). We shall return to this too. After some discouraging remarks on the expertise in sound-changes which will be necessary before the student can "attempt much in the way of constructing etymologies for himself" (42), Ross presents substantial etymological extracts, with terse commentary and, where it is needed, translation, from no fewer than 23 etymological dictionaries, starting with the *Oxford English Dictionary* (he calls it the *New English Dictionary*, as had been common earlier in the twentieth century) and ending with a Finnish etymologicon, Yrjö Toivonen's *Suomen kielen etymologinen sanakirja*. This last begins with forms from three dialects of Finnish and proceeds through material in Lüd (i.e. Ludian, a Karelian language variety), Veps, Vatya (i.e. Votic, perhaps an offshoot of Estonian, moribund in 1958 and now extinct), and six dialects of Sami: this material, certain to be highly exotic to the great majority of English readers, gives Ross a good opportunity to put such readers in their place, which he does in a three-part assault. First, he remarks that etymology "is not, in any sense, a subject for the amateur" (68). Second, he returns to the axioms quoted above, remarking if a popular belief about etymology "is deducible from the Axioms, it is not nonsense, but, if it is not so deducible, it is nonsense" (68).[16] In other words, all etymological statements worth making are statements about the descent of one language or word from another, or of two languages or

[16] I wonder if this passage is a conscious or unconscious echo of Ayer 1936/1990: 24, "We may accordingly define a metaphysical sentence as a sentence which purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis. And as tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of all significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical."

words from a common source, and such statements need have nothing to do with the formal similarity of languages or words which might be perceived by an inexpert person. Third, he concludes, "It will thus be seen that … an etymology cannot ever be matter for discussion between a philologist and a non-philologist" (69).

The second section of the book is much less argumentative: it introduces the IE language family, sets out a phonology of PIE, and discusses "the fate of the Indoeuropean phonemes" in some attested non-Germanic languages; in proto-Germanic, in some attested Germanic languages other than English, and in English. (Winfred Lehmann's review of the book in *Language* commented damningly on the weakness of the treatment of the PIE material.) "Some remarks upon the Morphology" occupy two pages at the end. The English etymologies in the third section are chosen for their interest. Some at least represent words on which Ross had worked, for instance *ginger*, on which he had published a monographic *tour de force*. A fairly short example, which had in fact previously been used by Skeat (1912: 173-174), is

> **DOUGH** < OE *dāg* = Gothic *daigs* Ic *deig* MnSw *deg* MnDanish *dej* OHG *teic* (> MHG *teic* > MnHG *teig*) MLG *dêch* MDutch *dêch* (> MnDutch *deeg*) < PrGmc **đaiʒa*- to IndE **dheiĝh*- 'to smear, knead, mould' as in Gothic *digan* Latin *fingo, figulus, figūra* Oscan ap. *feíhúss* 'wall' Greek *τείχος* Russian *dezha* Skt *deha*- (m. and n.) 'body' Av *pairi-daēza*- 'enclosure' "Tocharian A" *tseke* 'carving.' (145)

Footnotes point out the relations between Avestan *pairi-daēza*- and Eng *paradise*, between Proto-Germanic **đaiʒa* and the second element of OE *hlǽfdige* (> ModE *lady*), and between *dough* and the second element of ModE *(plum-)duff*. Clearly implicit in Ross's presentation of this material as the final section of his book is that although a "non-philologist" cannot hope to make etymologies, he or she can, by reading the book, hope to understand etymologies like this one, down to the "customary inverted commas" (72) which mark Ross's awareness that the languages called Tocharian were not actually spoken by the people whom Strabo calls *Τόχαροι*.

Ross's *Etymology* was published in the series "The Language Library," edited by Eric Partridge, which had been launched in 1952 with a clutch of semi-popular books: Wilfred Granville's *Dictionary of theatrical terms*, Partridge's own pseudonymous *Chamber of horrors: A glossary of official jargon*, Weekley's *The English language* (the first edition had appeared in 1928), and George Vallins's *Good English: How to write it*. Partridge was at the time try-

ing to raise the tone of the series.[17] He intended his next contribution to it to be called *Mediterranean: The basis of the Indo-European, Semitic and Hamitic languages*, and would have advanced a quasi-Nostratic comparativism in it (he noted the similarity with Nostratic himself, at Partridge 1960: 159), more ambitious if less useful than his work on English slang. He was, in the 1950s, commissioning work for the series by G. L. Brook, Professor of English at Manchester; by James Hulbert, co-editor of the *Dictionary of American English*, whose Language Library book *Dictionaries: British and American* is still worth consulting; and by Oswald Szemerényi, then lecturer in comparative philology at University College London, and identified in the front matter of *Etymology* as author of a forthcoming "Indo-European philology."[18] This helps to explain the self-conscious narrowness and technicality of Ross's book; Partridge wanted something more technical than his first titles.[19] Ross, for his part, can have had no wish to produce a good-natured middlebrow book like Partridge's or Vallins's. Nor can he have had much sympathy with the attitude to philology which would lead Partridge to pronounce confidently that

> Rather than entrust myself to the quicksands of fanatical phonetics or to the raging seas of parochial philology, I prefer, when I confront a difficulty insoluble by ordinary means, to enlist the aid of history or, if I'm desperate, to resort to imagination. (Partridge 1961: 33)

Ross's "bleak doctrine" (Burchfield 1960: 228) that philologists and non-philologists simply have nothing to say to each other about etymology was his way of asserting that he was not writing the book which Partridge would have written.

This accounts for two striking features of Ross's book which we noted above. The first is his use of mathematical formulae. One feature of Skeat's dictionary on which an early reviewer had remarked had been "the use of algebraic signs to indicate, on the one hand the direct or successive generation of forms, and on the other mere side relationship or remote cognation" (Cook 1880: 204).

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[17] In a sympathetic memorial essay, Randolph Quirk (1980: 23) noted of the Language Library that "some of the volumes have been of so low a standard as to risk damaging the series as a whole."

[18] No contribution by Szemerényi was to appear in the Language Library, though "Indo-European philology" was still being advertised in Partridge 1961; but work carried out in London found its way into his *Einführung in die vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft* (1970).

[19] Having said that, Ross had recently achieved wide public recognition for a non-technical work on class-markers in contemporary English (see Stanley 2004 for details): did Partridge hope for something a little more like this than *Etymology* turned out to be?

These signs – the now-familiar < for instance – may owe something to Skeat's mathematical background, and something to the influence of continental European conventions for notation such as August Schleicher's development of the asterisk for conjectural forms (Malkiel 1993: 17). Ross, who was a good mathematician, made much of the possibilities offered to etymology by mathematical notation: writing on the formal presentation of statements, he proposed that all etymological statements could be reduced to formulae of which the simplest (37) begins $A_0\ x_0$ ['z_0'] < A x (> $A_{i1}\ x_{i1}$ ['z_{i1}'] $A_{i2}\ x_{i2}$ ['z_{i2}'] … $A_{im}\ x_{im}$ ['z_{im}']). Lehmann (1959: 352) had no time for this, although it appealed to a few etymologists (see Kiss 1964/1975).[20] For the purposes of *Etymology*, such formulaic presentation was a statement of precision and esotericism against the easy-going vulgarizing tendency of the Language Library series and of popular etymological writing. Malkiel (1962/1975: 354-355) has described *Etymology* as a "telling instance" of the "attempts to press etymological research into the mould of mathematical formulae" under the influence of "that mathematical styling which has in recent years become a hallmark of the social sciences at their most ambitious," and has noted that such attempts "are periodically balanced by spells of completely reckless impressionism."[21]

The second feature to which we drew attention above was Ross's very limited expression of interest in meaning. "Lack of space," he said to excuse this, "would, indeed, render any other procedure impossible" (39-40): but would it? In the year of publication of Ross's *Etymology*, Kurt Baldinger pointed out at the Congrès de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises that since about 1900,

> La notion même d'étymologie est devenue ambiguë. Désormais il y aura deux sortes d'étymologies: d'une part l'étymologie au sens phonétique, traditionnel, au sens du XIX[e] siècle: *l'étymologie-origine*. D'autre part, l'étymologie au sens sémantique, moderne: *l'étymologie-histoire du mot*. … L'étymologie, au sens moderne, c'est donc la *biographie* du mot. (1959: 239)

Baldinger cited the words of a series of earlier etymologists who had made this point: Hugo Schuchardt in 1897, "Was wir eine Etymologie nennen, ist

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[20] Cf. the opening words of Anna Morpurgo Davies' obituary of Szemerényi (*The Independent*, 17 January 1997): "Oswald Szemerenyi once asked all participants in an international conference of Indo-Europeanists and historical linguists what they would have wanted to be if they had had a free choice; three-quarters of them replied 'a mathematician.' He commented wistfully that to a certain extent he shared that feeling."

[21] Malkiel calls *Etymology* a "booklet," but this should not mislead the reader: this was his usual word for short books (see Cosinka 2006: 90-92).

nichts als eine mehr oder weniger abgekürtzte Wortgeschichte"; Antoine Meillet in 1918, "Ce qui est essentiel dans un dictionnaire étymologique, c'est de déterminer *les voies qu'ont suivies les mots*"; Jules Gilliéron, in an undated piece of the early twentieth century, comparing the products of the former conception of etymology to a biography of Balzac consisting only of the words "Balzac, assis sur les genoux de sa nourrice, était vêtu d'une robe bleue, rayée de rouge. Il écrivit la *Comédie humaine*" (Baldinger 1959: 239-241). A couple of years later, Oswald Szemerényi made the same point, citing Baldinger: "Etymology in the modern sense is the biography of the word; its origin is merely a point of departure" (1962/1975: 290). Ross knew that the biographies of words are important. Every entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is the biography of a word, and Ross had learned his philology at Oxford in the years 1927-1929 from C. T. Onions, who was in those years reader in English philology as well as co-editor of the dictionary (Ross 1958: 7). He had also studied under J. R. R. Tolkien, formerly of the *OED* staff, and his wife had worked on the 1933 *Supplement*, which Ross had reviewed for *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* (Brewer 2007: 161). At the end of his short preface (1958: 8), Ross thanked Robert Burchfield "for all the care and hard work he has lavished upon this book" and E. G. Stanley and Mrs Ross "for advice upon the most diverse points": Burchfield had just been appointed as editor of a new supplement to *OED*, and Eric Stanley and Stefanyja Ross were important early contributors to this project.[22] Rather than being unaware of the importance of the biography of words, Ross was in 1958, as he had been since his undergraduate days, extremely well aware of it.

However, the example of *OED* may have narrowed his sense of etymology even though it gave him a broad sense of the importance of the history of words: *OED* etymologies were, and are, set off within square brackets before the main treatment of the sense-development of each lemma, and the etymologies in the first edition of the dictionary tended to be very largely devoted to tracing the ancestry of a given word and identifying relevant cognates. James Murray, the editor who established the form of published *OED* entries, referred to this part of each entry as "The Morphology or Form-History" (quoted and discussed in Durkin 1999: 2). One interpretation of the structure of a first-edition *OED* entry would, then, displace semantic considerations from the etymology to a separate category of word history. If that was Ross's interpretation, I doubt that it was Burchfield's, and I think that Burchfield's phrase "bleak doctrine" does suggest quite a fundamental difference in the two men's approach to etymology.

[22] For Mrs Ross, see Brewer, loc. cit.; for Eric Stanley, whose work for the dictionary continues to the present day (has any other person ever given more than fifty years of continuous support to *OED*?), see Burchfield 1989: 8.

The Language Library series continued for many years, and Ross's book, as a single-volume treatment of an important subject by a recognized authority, made available by a mainstream publisher, was widely disseminated (the library of my own university had at least six copies at one time). W. B. Lockwood's *Informal introduction to English etymology* has circulated less widely, at least partly because its publisher, the now-defunct Minerva Press, appears to have been a vanity press, which charged authors to have their books published and was not always assiduous in promoting them (see e.g. Jackson 1997). The book itself is indeed informal, but it deserved a better publisher: its author, latterly professor of Germanic and Indo-European Philology at the University of Reading, had previously published with Oxford University Press and respectable trade publishers such as Hutchinson. It will be treated briefly here.

According to its short preface, Lockwood's *Informal introduction* "is addressed to anyone and everyone who, at some time or other, has wondered about the origins of the words that make up the English language" and gives an account of etymology "which, it is hoped, will enable the reader to appreciate more fully, and in given cases to judge more critically, the pronouncements of the etymologists" (VII). This immediately suggests an intellectual world in which an etymology might be a subject for discussion between a philologist and a non-philologist – and this reflects a development in the social history of etymology which took place since 1958, the increasing availability of discursive non-specialist etymological dictionaries and other writings, such as the "sporadic attempts" identified by Malkiel (1993: 120) "made … by present-day weeklies and monthlies of wide appeal to reserve a page or two of each issue for exercises in 'neo-etymology,' couched in an easily assimilable, non-technical, but nevertheless tasteful style." This development was part of a wider extension of interest in language, for which the Language Library was, at least in the United Kingdom, partly responsible (Quirk 1980: 23).

After a quick sketch of the history and prehistory of English, the *Informal introduction* offers an etymological commentary on two ME versions and a late West Saxon version of the Lord's Prayer: Lockwood must surely have had Skeat's similar introductory use of a late West Saxon gospel translation in mind. Brief etymological remarks on Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit versions follow, and introduce notes on ablaut, umlaut, the First and Second Sound Shifts, and initial *s*-.[23] A third chapter covers early loanwords in OE from the Celtic languages and Latin, and a fourth, illustrated with some good examples, turns to Scandinavian loanwords. The next three cover French, Latin and Greek, and non-Indo-European languages, and are likewise heavily illustrated with examples, fuller

[23] The Sanskrit Lord's Prayer is from the Yates–Wenger translation of the New Testament into Sanskrit, made in the nineteenth century for converts or potential converts from Hinduism, for whom Sanskrit was a language of holy writings.

than Skeat's and better integrated into a chronological narrative than Ross's. The penultimate chapter ranges over "some items of special interest" – the apparent Neolithic origins of Eng. *hammer* "tool for driving in nails" and Norwegian *hammer* "rock"; the relationship between Eng. *hen* and Lat. *canere* (cf. Gk. *ἠικανός* "cock," lit. "dawn-singer"); the relationship between *clan* and *plant* (*clan* < OIr *cland* < OWelsh *plant* "children" < Lat. *planta* "seedling"); and so on, recalling in aim, though not in content, the "philological ramble" which is the antepenultimate chapter of Skeat's *Science of etymology*.[24]

Lockwood's final chapter presents a number of previously published etymologies of his own, under the heading "Discovery," offering the reader at least the encouraging hint that she or he might be sufficiently well-informed and fortunate to make independent etymological discoveries. So, for instance, he begins his claim that *rake* in *as thin as a rake* (first attested 1387 or later) is cognate with Norwegian *rak* "very lean animal" (ON *hrak*) with the words "Perhaps it was on a summer's day as we were raking together the cuttings on the lawn …" This is the familiar, attractive topos of the inspiration which comes in pleasant places: Archimedes in the bath, Newton in the orchard, the etymologist in the newly-mown garden. I am not personally convinced by this etymology, in fact: the simile "as thin as a very thin animal" strikes me as implausibly pedestrian, and although I am willing to follow Lockwood as far as seeing the vowel of a final element [rak] lengthened by folk-etymological analogy with *rake*, I would prefer to explain that element as *rack* "vertically barred frame for holding animal fodder" (first attested 1343-1344), the bars of which stand out like the ribs of a skeletally thin animal or person. But Lockwood's hypothesis has impressed readers of his book (Mugglestone 1998: 197; Durkin 2009a: 258-259), and it certainly inspires critical thought.

Lynda Mugglestone's review of the *Informal introduction* in the *Review of English Studies* identified a weakness in the book: although it can by no means be accused of wilful obscurity, it is still hard to follow. She sees it as "perhaps hampered by the very nature of its subject" (1998: 197), and observes that a slightly longer book would have given Lockwood room to explain some technicalities. This is true, and it is consistent with criticisms of Lockwood's much earlier *Indo-European philology* of 1969 (see Ford 1970). An additional problem is the high proportion of examples to framing argument, which makes the

[24] Two of the three examples given here are in fact mentioned by Skeat. He had been unsure about the etymology of *hammer* (*Etymological dictionary*, s.v.), and therefore did not use it as an example; he did comment on *hen* and *canere* (1887: 130; 1912: 63 and 98), though without mentioning the elegant Greek cognate, which is transmitted only in the *Lexicon* of Hesychius; he likewise commented briefly on *clan* and *plant* (1887: 449), which he knew from a passing reference in Rhys 1877: 373. A different perspective on *hammer* would be provided ten years later by Liberman (2005: 141).

Informal introduction a book to browse in rather than to work through. As such it is something of an outlier in the tradition which runs from Skeat via Ross to Durkin and Liberman.

5. Anatoly Liberman's *Word origins* (2005) and Philip Durkin's *Oxford guide to etymology* (2009)

By the time of the publication of Lockwood's *Informal introduction* in 1995, two extremely important developments in the study of English etymology were under way. In the United States, Anatoly Liberman, professor in the department of German, Scandinavian, and Dutch at the University of Minnesota, had since 1987 been gathering material for a new dictionary of English etymology (an early announcement is reported by Dor 1988: 91), which would take explicit account of everything which had ever been published on the etymology of every word it registered. By 1998 he was able to announce that the "field work" for this dictionary "is drawing to an end" (Liberman 1998b: 459). A specimen volume of the dictionary and the huge project bibliography (Liberman 2008, 2009) have since been published. In England, the conversion to machine-readable form of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, together with the four-volume *Supplement* edited by Burchfield, had resulted in the publication of an under-revised second edition in twenty paper volumes, but had more importantly made it possible for an editorial team to undertake a global revision of the dictionary by manipulating and adding to text in the form of a structured database. The revision of function words, etymology, and pronunciation was assigned to Edmund Weiner, co-editor of the second edition of *OED*, and two assistant editors appointed in 1995, Simon Hunt and myself. Neither of us remained in our positions for long, Simon leaving in 1996 to work for a charity and I in the same year to join the staff of the University of Alberta. Philip Durkin, who had been appointed as one of the assistant editors working on the revision of non-scientific entries, then began work on etymologies instead, to admirable effect. In July 1998, he submitted a paper on the revision of *OED* etymologies to the *Transactions of the Philological Society* (published as Durkin 1999): he and Liberman were, therefore, both writing early programmatic statements about their respective projects in etymological lexicography in the same year. Their guides to English etymology were both published by Oxford University Press in the following decade.

Liberman's appeared first, in 2005, under the title *Word origins ... and how we know them*, the subtitle *Etymology for everyone* being printed above the main title on the dust jacket but below it on the title page. "Part history, part how-to manual," reads the publisher's jacket copy, "*Word Origins* draws back

the curtain to show how etymologists perform amazing feats of word archaeology." Another part of the jacket copy, signed by Liberman, begins with the claim that "Millions of people want to know the origin of the words they use" and ends

> if someone explained to them that, compared to the drama of words, *Hamlet* is a light farce, they might develop a more informed attitude toward philological research and become students of historical linguistics rather than gullible consumers of journalists' pap.

The contrast with Ross's bleak words could not be more marked. The gap is no longer between philologists and non-philologists but between students and consumers: and everyone is urged to be a student.

Word origins begins, like Skeat's *Principles*, with an example, and like Lockwood's discussion of *thin as a rake*, with the etymologist in a pleasant place – in this case, reading a description of a dialect from the German province of Hessen by way of light relaxation after midnight.[25] The example is regional Ger. *Hette* "goat," which, Liberman recalls, set him thinking about Old Scandinavian *Heiðrun*, the name of a goat in a myth. Could these two forms be related? They are not, remarks Liberman in passing – but, he continues, thinking about them led him to consideration of *heifer* "young cow," sometimes seen as < OE *heahfore* "high-farer." Half a year later, he had collected "an insufficient bibliography of *heifer*" (3), and at that point, far from his initial burning of the midnight oil, Liberman leaves his reader. Later, his narrative returns to *heifer*, now citing a dialectal *heckfore*, and noting that its first element might be compared with OE *haga* "enclosure" (cognate with Eng. *hedge*), and its second with *-fare* in the bird name *fieldfare*, which may mean "occupant" (79-80). An endnote identifies Wedgwood as the first etymologist to suggest that the first element means "enclosure."[26] This is a philological ramble indeed, an even more associative progress than that of the *Principles*, and calculatedly so: Liberman is a brilliant conversationalist in person (and now converses online too, in his *Oxford Etymologist* blog), but *Word origins* is more than an artless exercise in raconteurship. Implicit in the structure of the treatment of *Hette* / *Heiðrun* / *heifer*, which is characteristic of the structures of *Word origins* as a whole, is a response to Skeat's distinction between "Brilliant invention," dismissed as "only another name for lying," and its ennobling opposite "patient investigation."

[25] Perhaps there is an echo here of the story of Karl Verner's famous reading of a soporific book, Bopp's *Vergleichende Grammatik*, which led him as he was falling asleep to formulate Verner's Law (Jespersen 1897/1933: 13-15).

[26] There is now a much fuller treatment in Liberman 2008, s.v., and a bibliography of 27 items in Liberman 2009: 625 (where *heifer* is accidentally glossed as "a pig").

The six months' patient work to put together an insufficient bibliography is part of the same story as the brilliant spark jumping from *Hette* to *Heiðrun* in the night. Moreover, the book closes with the invitation to re-read it: the first-time reader will be surprised that the story of *heifer* is apparently dropped in the first chapter, but the re-reader will remember that it reappears.

The basic macrostructure of *Word origins*, after the introductory chapter which introduces *Hette* and *Heiðrun* and sketches etymology as a field of inquiry, is not obscure. A second chapter, on "The thing and the sign," is followed by one on imitative words (the first example is *cuckoo*) and one on sound symbolism. Successive chapters from the fifth to the twelfth treat folk etymology, reduplication, infixation (e.g. the *dy* / *de* of *gobbledygook* and the rarer *slubberdegullion*), "disguised compounds" (*Sunday*, *holiday*, *breakfast*), affixation and blending, the relevance of proper names (Charles Macintosh and *macintosh*), coinages by known individuals (Van Helmont and *gas*), and loanwords. The apparent haphazardness of this order, and the disproportion which, for instance, makes infixation the nominal topic of a whole chapter, is again not artless: the implicit argument is that the etymologist is concerned with the whole field of the vocabulary of English, and that one part of the field can hardly be prioritized over another. "Mastering a language, even one's own, especially such a rich language as English, is a gallant deed" concludes Liberman at the end of the chapter on loanwords (156). Although there are important subtexts in this sentence – it follows from a discussion of the native and non-native members of the semantic field which includes *doughty* (< OE *dohtig*), *stout* (< AN *stout*, OF *estout* < a cognate of Ger. *stolz* "proud"), and *brave* (< Fr *brave*), and it will remind some readers that Liberman's mastery of English is that of a non-native speaker – its primary meaning is non-ironic: mastering a language really is an extraordinary achievement, all the more so if mastery implies some degree of etymological knowledge. The reader who has travelled over the etymological territory mapped in the first twelve chapters of the book is being praised for "a gallant deed," a word which evokes the knight-errant, and it is hardly fanciful to say that the winding path by which Liberman has led the reader is the winding path of romance.[27] Romance was evoked at the very beginning of the book by its frontispiece (and only illustration), an image of a unicorn from a Flemish tapestry, with the cryptic caption "This is not a squirrel" and a reference to a discussion of Ger. *Eichhorn* "squirrel," lit. "oak-horn" (< OHG *eihhurno*, in which *-hurno* is not *Horn* "horn" but an element originally meaning "squirrel," cognate with the reduplicated Farsi *varvarah*, Lith. *vaiverẽ* etc.).

The thirteenth chapter occupies a pivotal position between these discussions of individual word-formation processes and four chapters on wider topics,

[27] Cf. *The romance of words*, the title of a book on word histories by Ernest Weekley, to whom Liberman pays tribute in *Word origins* (106, 111).

and it offers "a few principles of etymological analysis" (164-166), presented as a bulleted series of paragraphs, without the numbering or the epigrammatic formality of Skeat's "canons." The opening words of the first of these, "Etymology does not depend on look-alikes" (164), would have met with the approval of Skeat and Ross – but it ends by evoking "the possibility that someone without any training in linguistics may know a story or a local custom of real value to an etymologist," as in the case of *chucks*, a kind of basketball shoe whose name is obscure until one learns that they were promoted by the celebrity salesman Chuck Taylor. Here again, the possibility that the non-philologist may have something to say to the philologist is of the essence. Likewise, there is an exciting suggestion latent in the last principle, "As a general rule, a good etymology is simple (only finding it is hard)" (166).

The four chapters on wider topics which follow it begin with one on phonetic change, which explains what regular sound laws are, interweaving apparent exceptions (e.g. Gk. *πλατύς* / Eng. *flat* / Ger. *platt*) into the exposition, then turns to ablaut and again considers apparent exceptions, before looking at further problems such as the puzzling apparent sporadic devoicing called for by the derivation of Eng. *hobble* < *hop* + frequentative *-le* and exhibited by the variant forms Eng. *nipple, neble, nible* and the even more puzzling relationship of Eng. *pig*, Dutch *big* "pig," Low Ger. *pogge* "toad, frog," Swedish *bagge* "ram, wether" etc. This last case leads Liberman to postulate "a sound complex *b–g* … meaning approximately 'puffed up'" (185). A chapter on semantic change follows, closing with Schuchardt's famous investigation of the relationship of Fr. *trouver* and Lat. *turbāre* and the phonological problems which deriving *trouver* from *turbāre* poses. An antepenultimate chapter surveys attempts such as those of N. Ia. Marr to investigate the ultimate roots of human language; in the penultimate, "The state of English etymology" is surveyed, with the conclusion that "The last edition of Skeat's dictionary (1910) marks a peak that English etymological lexicography never transcended" (246). In the conclusion of *Word origins*, Liberman remarks that "my aim has been to say as little as possible about the things that can be found in other popular books on English words. Therefore, I devoted minimal space to the Scandinavian and the Romance element in English" and, on the same page, expresses the somewhat inconsistent hope that "If this book stimulates someone to teach the history of English words, it may perhaps serve as the main text" (251).

"My main reservation," wrote one reviewer of *Word origins* (Coates 2007: 833), "is that key ideas lack adequate grounding." This is a fair point: no guide to English etymology is more brilliantly suggestive than Liberman's, but it is neither a systematic account of the methods of etymological research nor of the origins of English words. Some of the ideas which it throws out are disconcert-

ing: at the end of the second chapter, after a reference to the *Cratylus*, Liberman remarks that "the watchword of etymological research" is that

> original "names" were conventional (for other sounds could have expressed the same meaning) but not arbitrary (the speakers who chose those sounds had a reason to do so). The entire science of etymology is centered on finding that reason. (14)

This suggests an entire science of etymology directed towards establishing the remotest roots of attested forms, and only in Chapter Sixteen is it made clear that that is not what is meant here. Likewise, the status of sound complexes such as *b–g* is not made as clear as it might be, though Liberman is clearly open to considering such complexes as a way of establishing relationships between groups of words. This is part of a wider openness to speculation about the role of sound: he picks up with relish on Jespersen's suggestion (1922: 313-314) that Lat. *plumbum* "lead" was originally an onomatopoeic word for a plummet, and notes that in that case, Wedgwood's identification of *plunge* as an onomatopoeic form when it apparently derives from a late Lat. **plumbicare* (< *plumbum*) may be an "unpardonable shortcut" rather than, as Skeat argued, a mistake (Liberman 2005: 34-35). Liberman's sympathy with Wedgwood has been noted above: there is something in Wedgwood's undisciplined, even whimsical, brilliance which speaks to him. The powerful aversion to Wedgwood's thought expressed by A. S. C. Ross's colleague and memorialist Eric Stanley in his response to a paper of Liberman's at the 5th International Conference on Historical Lexicography and Lexicology in Oxford in 2010 suggests a significant faultline in the field in which Ross's *Etymology* and Liberman's *Word origins* are landmarks.

Philip Durkin's *Oxford guide to etymology* is, as Roger Lass puts it in a jacket blurb,

> unique in at least two ways. First, because it is the only dedicated textbook on the market as far as I know entirely devoted to etymology, and second because it is by an etymologist working on the *OED*, the best and fullest etymological dictionary of any language currently available.

The latter point is surely questionable in part – is *OED* really a fuller etymological dictionary than the *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*? – but Lass's points are both valuable in defining the intended readership of the book. The *Oxford guide* is certainly a textbook, capable of being used in university courses (as it has been, by Gabriele Knappe at Bamberg and by me at Alberta), and this accounts for the highly methodical structure at which we shall look

shortly.[28] However, it is "addressed most centrally to someone who has an interest in historical linguistics" (Durkin 2009a: IX), and this someone is not expected to have access to an academic library (X). The chapters are not followed by exercises as is usual in textbooks for the North American market, although Durkin has composed a set (I am grateful to him for sending me a copy), and these will be made available online, giving students helpful material without orienting the book explicitly towards students and away from a more general readership. One way to define the reader imagined by Durkin would be as someone who has read some of the revised etymologies in *OED* and wants to learn more; this dictionary is readily available online in public libraries in the United Kingdom, and its readers have never been confined to academic institutions.

Durkin begins by introducing the concept of etymology, giving two examples, one native and one borrowed (*friar* < OFr *frere*, and *sad*, cognate with Ger. *satt* "full" and more distantly with Lat. *satis* "enough," Lith. *sótus* "filling, full"), commenting on the regular sound changes to be seen when *sad* and its cognates are examined, and turning to the question "why study etymology?" and to an overview of "what an etymologist does." This last point leads to the "ultimate aim" of etymology, defined in a quotation from Walther von Wartburg:

> Today the task of etymology is no longer solely to look for the root of a word or group of words. It must follow the group in question throughout the whole period during which it belongs to the language, in all its ramifications and all its relations to other groups, constantly asking the questions appropriate to etymology in the strict sense of the word. (quoted Durkin 2009a: 33)[29]

This aim sets Durkin's *Oxford guide* apart from Ross's much narrower *Etymology* – it is, in fact, a considerably larger book than Ross's, and can afford greater breadth – but also from Liberman's *Word origins*, in so far as we are to take Liberman's statement about the origins-directed goal of the "entire science of etymology" seriously.

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[28] On the other hand, Roberge 2011: 187 states that it "does not have the theoretical grounding and precision that would make it suitable for use in a linguistics curriculum."

[29] Durkin gives the original in a footnote (he does not expect readers to know other languages than English): "Die Erforschung des Radix eines Wortes oder einer Wortgruppe ist heute nicht mehr die einzige Aufgabe der Etymologie. Sie hat die zu betrachtende Wortgruppe in ihrer Verästelung und mit all ihren Beziehungen zu anderen Gruppen während der ganzen Zeit, da sie einer Sprache angehört, zu verfolgen, ohne jemals die etymologisierende Fragestellung aufzugeben."

The second chapter asks the fundamental question "What are words?" with reference to English, points out that etymologists take an interest in multi-word lexical units, and sketches enough questions of word-formation and productivity to make sense of the question "Which words need etymologies?" This is, interestingly, not an *OED*-related question, since every entry in that dictionary has an etymology: it would be highly relevant to the planning of a new *Oxford dictionary of English etymology* to succeed that of Onions. A third chapter takes up the question of whether words are coherent entities, examining cases of homonymy and polysemy, merger and split. It opens with a case which might have been taken further, that of *poke* "bag, small sack," which has a set of forms with a short vowel, spelt *poc, pok, pokke* etc. How sharply can these forms be distinguished from *pock* "vesicle"? *OED* explains that there is an etymological distinction – ME *poke* < AN and OF *poke* or perhaps the unattested etymon of this word in Old Dutch, whereas *pock* is a native OE word cognate with Middle Dutch *pocke, poc* – but it seems reasonable to ask whether the short-vowel forms of *poke* imply a merger of *poke* and *pock* in the judgements of some speakers of ME, just like the merger of *corn* "grain" (native word, cognate with Lat. *grānum*) and *corn* "hard growth on the foot" (< MFr *corn* < Lat. *cornū*) in the judgements of some speakers of ModE.[30]

The next three chapters cover word formation (including a brief discussion of ablaut) and borrowing. The material on word formation is inevitably fairly straightforward for the most part. Most interestingly, the chapter ends with a guarded discussion of phonaesthesia and phonosymbolism, concluding that "this topic … is one that no etymologist can completely ignore" and that "it is important for etymologists … to be wary of setting too much store by arguments based on phonaesthesia or iconicity without investigating all other possibilities very carefully" (131). Here the tone is more explicitly that of a guide for etymologists than is usual in this book, and the conclusions are less open than Liberman's to the explanatory possibilities of sound symbolism. Indeed, Durkin has commented explicitly on the openness to sound symbolism in Liberman's dictionary: the argument that *fuck* is "part of a large group of loosely related verbs having the structure *f* + vowel + stop" (Liberman 2008: 78a; cf. idem 2005: 234), elaborated extensively in the entry for that word, is acknowledged as a "daring hypothesis," but evidently does not fully satisfy Durkin: "we are told very little about the mechanism by which these words are taken to be related" (2009b: 97). Borrowing is surveyed in two magisterial chapters, drawing heavily on the range of *OED* entries which had been revised as Durkin worked on the *Oxford guide* (by December 2008, *M–reamy* had been published, and this

[30] The latter case is discussed by Durkin (78); for evidence of the merger in ModE perceptions, cf. Google hits on the phrase "Called corns because of their frequently yellow coloring."

must correspond fairly closely with the range available to him): so it is that the first examples discussed in these two chapters are *prêt-à-porter*, *milord*, *panchway*, *mama-san*, *phase*, *pioneer*, and *plumber*.

The next two chapters deal with sound changes and semantic change respectively, with special attention, as in Liberman, to difficult cases. These are treated thoroughly, with ample ancillary data, and different tastes will be satisfied by Liberman's throwaway invitation (2005: 187) to "compare Engl. *pudding* with its French synonym *boudin*" in his discussion of words for swollen things which might belong to the *pig* family he identifies, and by Durkin's more sober analysis (2009: 213-214) of the difficulty of reconciling the initial consonant of ME *podding*, *poddyng* etc. (he lists 11 spellings) with that of AN *bodeyn*, *bodin*, a case which he compares not to *pig* but to the similar problem of deriving late OE *purs* from post-classical Lat. *bursa*. Similarly, Liberman's chapter on semantic change ends with a brief inspiring reference to the journal *Wörter und Sachen*, "a joy to read" (2005: 216), but gives us nothing like Durkin's analysis (2009: 261-264) of the puzzles presented by the etymology of *plough* and the possibility that technological progress might contribute to the solution of some of these. Of course, Liberman knows all about *plough*, which (as *plow*) has an ample entry in his *Bibliography* (2009: 733-734); the difference is between the style of *Word origins* and that of the *Oxford guide*. Durkin's final chapter turns to the topic of Liberman's tenth, words and names, and includes a discussion of the onomastical evidence for Eng. *big*, which is rather puzzling: if it is from an Old Norse word connected with regional Norwegian *bugge* "mighty man" and *bugga* "rich, mighty, powerful," then how is it that "From the first half of the eleventh century onwards we find a by-name or surname of the form *Bigga, Bigge*, earliest in southern counties, especially Kent" (278)?[31] Again, the contrast with Liberman's work is vivid: in *Word origins*, the problem presented by *big* is that it has a high front vowel but means "large," and "Engl. dialectal *bug* (big) (compare Norwegian dialectal *bugge* [a strong man]) and *bog* (boastful) set the record straight" (184; square brackets in original).

Skeat ended *Principles* by saying that etymology leads us to truth, and Ross concluded the first section of *Etymology* by saying that it was not the business of non-philologists. Lockwood's book has no conclusion, and Liberman's last sentence directs the reader back to the beginning of the book. Durkin concludes that

> Etymology is a crucial tool for investigating the language and thought of the past. It opens up a field of research where a very great

[31] Roberge (2011: 186-187) notes the evidence for an ON by-name *buggi* "fat man," which adds a new complication.

> deal remains to be discovered. And like all the best intellectual pursuits, once the bug is caught, it is likely to remain with one for life. (287)

The reader being addressed here is surely a recognizable figure, in the British Isles at least: educated, interested in the past, fond of intellectual pursuits for their own sake, with an appetite for problems: someone very like the Victorian readers of *Notes and Queries*.

6. Conclusion

A long paper calls for a short conclusion. The guides to etymology of Skeat, Ross, Lockwood, Liberman, and Durkin represent a wide range of approaches to the non-specialist reader interested in English etymologies: those of the first three might be grouped together as comparative-philological, and those of Liberman and Durkin seen as speculative and historical respectively. More striking than these contrasts, interesting as they are, is the fact that the class of reader with whom Skeat engaged combatively in *Notes and Queries* and genially in the *Principles of English etymology* and the *Science of etymology*, is still seeking and being offered guidance today. Etymology continues to be a matter of broad general interest, even after a period in the mid-twentieth century when etymological work on the English language seemed to be stagnating. In particular, the connections which it makes satisfy readers: all five authors offer case studies showing, for instance, how *puttee* "cloth wound round the lower leg" (< Hindi *paṭṭī* "bandage") is cognate with Eng. *fold* (Skeat 1912: 69), or how the cognates of Eng. *ginger* can be traced in a series of borrowings from east Asia across the whole of Eurasia (Ross 1958: 146-148), or how the synonymous Eng. *full* and Welsh *llawn* can be shown to be cognate (Lockwood 1995: 143-144), or what Assyrian word is relevant to the history of *cane*, *canyon*, and *channel* (Liberman 2005: 138-139), or how the present sense of Eng. *quaint* relates to the first recorded sense, "wise" (Durkin 2009: 229). Despite occasional claims to the contrary, all five authors appeal explicitly or implicitly to the imaginations of their readers. The title of Skeat's chapter "A philological ramble" is echoed by a reference of Lockwood's (1995: 146) to a "voyage of discovery" and by Liberman's to a chapter "in which the author meanders a little (as is his wont)" (2005: 217), and this verbal image is implicit in the photograph on the dustjacket of Durkin's book, which sums up the invitation to explore of the whole book and the whole tradition in which it stands. It shows a woodland, with dry leaves underfoot and growing leaves overhead, and the possibility of a way forward between the trees.

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