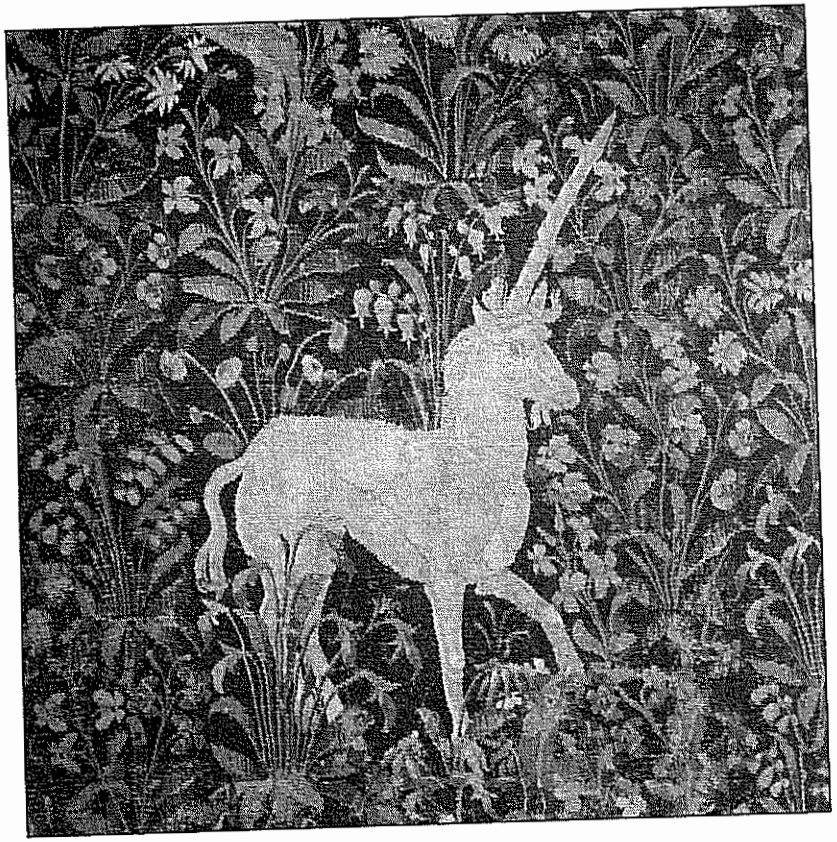

This is not a squirrel (see p. 44).
Detail from *Allegorical "Millefleurs" Tapestry with Animals*, c. 1530–45, Bruges, Belgium. *The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Gift of Mrs. C. J. Martin in Memory of Charles Jairus Martin.*

WORD ORIGINS

. . . *and How We Know Them*

Etymology for Everyone

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Lammas and *leman,* though only dictionaries will tell us what to do with *La-* and *le-*. Many words shrink beyond recognition. For example, both *lord* and *lady* once began with *hlāf* (bread), like *Lammas.* In Old English, they had the forms *hlāfweard* (bread keeper) (from *hlāf,* as in *loaf,* and *weard,* as in *ward*) and *hlǣfdige* (bread kneader) (the root *-dig* [knead] has survived in *dairy,* originally "a female servant," not "milkmaid," and its archaic synonym *daymaid,* or *deymaid,* in which *day- ~ dey-* are distinct from *day* in *daytime* and the like).

Barn was a disguised compound already a thousand years ago. It developed from *berern,* that is, from *bere* (barley) + *ern* (house). *Ern* has left only one more trace in Modern English (the historical word *saltern* [salt works]), but its cognate is *ran-* in the verb *ransack,* a borrowing from Scandinavian. Surprisingly, *-sack* has no relation to *sack* (plundering). The etymon of *ransack* is Scandinavian *rannsaka* (to attack a house) (hence "to rob"), whereas *sack* (plundering) is a borrowing of French *sac* in phrases like *mettre à sac* (to put to sack). The French took over those phrases from Italian: what was put into the sack became the plunderer's booty. Icelandic *saka* is akin to Engl. *seek,* not to *sack* (bag). *Bridal* was once a noun: *brȳdealu* (bride ale; ale drinking). With time, *-al* was mistaken for a suffix of an adjective (as in *tidal,* for instance). *Barley* moved in the opposite direction. *Bærlīc* was first an adjective ("like barley, pertaining to barley") but became a noun, though it still has an adjectival suffix, as in *comely* and *friendly.* Nightmares have no relation to horses. *Mare* (from Old Engl. *mære*) is a female incubus. French *cauchemar* (nightmare) contains the same second element. Peacocks neither consume peas nor have pea-like dots in their plumage; *pea-* goes back to Latin *pāvō,* which itself meant "peacock." *Garlic* (Old Engl. *gārlēac*) is literally "spear leek" (called this for its tall, sharp stalk; *gar-,* as in *garfish* [spearfish]), and for a long time the best etymologists believed that Old Engl. *bærlīc* (barley) also ended in *-lēac.* Only James A. H. Murray, the great first editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* explained it correctly; *bærlic* is not a disguised compound.

No revelations in this chapter have been particularly startling. The art of etymology consists in seeing through a word's disguise. Whether the mask is simple or compound is a matter of detail.[16]

Chapter Nine

which proves beyond reasonable doubt that disguise and treason are everywhere, or

Suffixes, Prefixes, Misdivision, and Blends

On maidenhood and boyhood.—On sloth, warmth, and coolth.—*Sizzle – fizzle – drizzle* and other frequentative verbs.—Intrusive *r*:—*Riddle – needle – beetle.—Fickle – mickle – brittle.*—The fugitive *s-mobile.*—On hneezing, neezing, fneezing, and sneezing.—How aphetic forms fend for themselves.—A balanced view of daffodils (without *-down-* in their middle).—My Nuncle Ned Thelme.—Tawdry but admirable.—*Brunch* survives the derision of highbrows.—More blends.

The previous chapter ended with an allusion to disguise in several forms. Not only compounds but also words with prefixes and suffixes tend to shrink. A compound in English is usually made up of two elements, each of which functions as a separate word. A few have a connecting vowel or consonant *hand-i-work, fist-i-cuffs, politic-o-economic, bond-s-man, land-s-man, state-s-man,* but most are like *bondman, handbook, footnote,* and *landlubber.*

A compound may behave like a phrase, and then the question is: Are we dealing with one word or two? Or the fusion of the elements may be such that all the traces of "compounding" are gone. The dilemma "one word or two" is brought home to every literate person by inconsistent hyphenation. *Half brother* needs no hyphen in American English, whereas *half-life* does. *Home base* is two words, *housewife* is one, and *home-brew* presumably a word and a half (note two hyphens in *half-and-half*). In some cases, initial stress is a marker of a compound: *'redcoat* is not the same as *'red 'coat.* But *'Green Peace*

has one stress, and so do innumerable groups like *'White House, 'welcome week* and *'birthday present,* without necessarily becoming compounds.

Etymologists are not interested in *half brother* and *housewife,* both of which proved to be immune to wear and tear. They volunteer their services when *halfpenny* becomes *ha'p'ny* and *housewife* becomes *huzzif* or *huzzy.* However, between full preservation *(housewife)* and a wreck *(huzzy),* several intermediate stages may occur. Words ending in *-man* are a case in point. The origin of *snowman* is not controversial, though *-man* is almost a suffix in it (like *-ful* in *beautiful, -most* in *uppermost,* and *-worthy* in *praiseworthy*). In *doorman, chairman, ragman,* and *gentleman* (the latter modeled on Old French *gentils hom;* Modern French *gentilhomme*), the suffix-like role of *-man* is probably felt more strongly than in *snowman.* In *leman* (lover) (from *lēofman*), *-man* is fully submerged (p. 84), and in *woman,* phonetic change has produced adverse results (speakers do not understand why *woman* should end in *-man*). In disguised compounds, we can sometimes isolate one element even when the other is opaque: *bilberry, linchpin,* and *lukewarm* are understood to end in *-berry, -pin,* and *-warm* despite the fact that *bil-, linch-,* and *luke-* carry no meaning in Modern English. Likewise, we identify *-ment,* the tail end in *segment, fragment,* and *ornament,* and are left with meaningless *seg-, frag-,* and *orna-.*

One can assume that, in the past, all suffixes were words, like *-man* in *chairman* and *-ful* in *beautiful.* A look at older forms sometimes confirms that assumption. For example, Old English had the noun *hād;* one of its meanings was "state, condition." The noun has been lost, but the suffix derived from it survived. *Hād* was already a suffix in Old English, as follows from *cildhād* (childhood), *prēosthād* (priesthood), and *mægdenhād* (maidenhood), to name a few. Later it appeared in *boyhood, neighborhood, falsehood,* and so forth. Another noun, used as the second element of *līflād* (the course of life), also edged into this suffix. In the sixteenth century, the would-be legitimate reflex of *līflād,* that is, **livelode,* gave way to *livelihood,* as though from *lively* + *hood,* and began to rhyme with *likelihood.* A form related to *-hood* was *-head,* now only in *maidenhead* (the hymen) and *godhead* (divinity). Words with Old Engl. *ā* today have a reflex of *ō* (as in *stone* from *stān*), so that *hād* could be expected to become *-hōde.* The present-day form is irregular. The suffixes *-hood* and *-head* are not cognate with the nouns *hood* and *head.*

The most "treacherous" words end in a suffix that has become almost inseparable from the root. The advantage of *-ment, -hood, -ling* (in *changeling* and *starveling*), and *-less* (in *fearless*) is that they are long and cannot be missed. In similar fashion, *-ster* is "detachable" not only in *gamester, trickster, teamster, rhymester, punster,* and *jokester* but also in *spinster* and *Webster* (in which the association with spinning and weaving webs is all but lost) and in *huckster,* though *huck-* is not a meaningful unit of English vocabulary. But who will guess that *bath* contains a relic of an old verb meaning "to warm up" and the suffix *-th?* That suffix is often hard to isolate in words more transparent than *bath.* In British English, *sloth* has the vowel of *slow,* so that the structure of the noun is clear, but in American English, *sloth* rhymes with *cloth,* and its original tie with the adjective is weak. Nobody will be surprised to learn that *width, breadth, length,* and *depth* are related to *wide, broad, long,* and *deep;* yet the difference in their vowels obscures the connection. In dealing with *health* and *wealth,* an effort is needed to realize that they are akin to *heal* and *weal,* partly because *weal,* as in *public weal,* occurs rarely. The vowel in *health* and *wealth* was shortened before two consonants; the same happened in *width, breadth, length,* and *depth.*

A noticeable suffix need not be productive. It is productive only if new words can be easily formed with its help. Consider *-er.* No matter whether the words *shouter* and *squeaker* have been attested: in certain circumstances they may arise, as did *speaker* and *crier* long ago. The same holds for *-less: computerless* and *e-mail-less* are potential words; their only drawback (or merit, depending on the situation) is that they have been coined on the spur of the moment. But *-th* disallows such experiments: although *warmth* and *truth* are well-established words of Modern English, **coldth, *hotth, *wrongth,* and **falsth* are moderately funny oddities. *Coolth,* as the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows, has been tried many times, for some reason, without success.

Birth and *mirth* are cognate with the verb *to bear* and the adjective *merry,* respectively. Here, too, the feeling of unity is lost: phonetic change and an unproductive suffix have disunited the families. *Berth* may be derived from the same verb as *birth,* but it is even less analyzable than *birth. Dearth* traces back to *dear* (scarce) (from "precious, costly" to "obtainable with difficulty"); we do not associate them, because *dear* is no longer synonymous with "wanting." The root of a simple word sometimes conveys no more than do *linch-, bil-,* and *luke-.* For example, *bir- ~ ber-* in *birth* and *berth* convey nothing. Such roots are stubs left after taking away the ending (if there is one) and the suffix. We vaguely detect a common feature present in *chuckle, cackle, jiggle, joggle, fizzle, sizzle, drizzle,* and *tootle.* All of them denote repeated actions or actions that last long, and they owe their meaning to *-le* (such verbs are therefore called frequentative or iterative). Subtracting *-le* usually leaves us with an identifiable base. For instance, *tootle* means "to keep on tooting." *Jiggle* and *joggle,* without their suffixes, yield *jig* and *jog. Chuckle* is from *chuck* (such a noun and a sound imitative verb existed in the fourteenth century; *chuckle* surfaced 200 years later), *dabble* is from *dab, dazzle* is from *daze* (with the usual shortening of the vowel before two consonants), *topple* is from *top,* and *sparkle* is from *spark. Fizzle* has been derived from its synonym *fizz,* an onomatopoeia, whereas *drizzle* may be akin to Old Engl. *drēosan* (to fall) (*drizzle* [to fall in small raindrops]). However, *sizzle* and *giggle* were modeled on the likes of *drizzle,* bypassing **sizz* and **gigg.* Inasmuch as **sizz* and **gigg* do not seem to have existed, a suffix is identifiable in them only thanks to what may be called "peer pressure."

Many frequentative verbs came to English from northern German and Dutch, where they are extremely common.[1] *Wriggle* is such a word, though a cognate of *wrig-* can be seen in Old Engl. *wrīgian* (to bend, turn, twist). One of its synonyms is *wiggle,* also of German or Dutch origin; another is *waggle,* from *wag.* In the Germanic languages, the root *weg-* (with variants) has always occurred in words designating rocking movement. Unlike *pad, pat,* and *tap, weg-* does not imitate any sound, but its origin need not concern us at the moment; we only observe that *wiggle ~ waggle,* like *wriggle,* which may have the same root, "extended" by *r* for emphasis, are frequentative verbs. ("Intrusive *r*" is not so rare. Shakespeare used *scamble* [to scramble]; dialects have preserved this form. The verb *fitter* preceded *fritter* in recorded texts. The infamous verb *frig* may be a variant of *fig,* as in dialectal *figgle,* that is, *fiddle* [to move back and forth]. Across language borders, the number of such examples increases. The best-known of them is Engl. *speak* versus German *sprechen.* The situation is the same in Romance.) *Hobble* (to move unsteadily) resembles *hop* but may also be of German origin. Words with short, inconspicuous suffixes *(bath, berth, dearth; drizzle, fizzle)* resemble disguised compounds.

Despite the derivational transparence of frequentative verbs, *-le* is unproductive in Modern English, though *tootle* must have been coined toward the middle of the nineteenth century (apparently, as a joke that refused to go away). Attempts to produce new verbs (**beggle* [to beg importunately], **rockle* [to swing, rock incessantly], **naggle* [to keep nagging at someone]) result in lifeless creations, though they are not worse than *prickle* or *figgle.* False leads abound everywhere in etymology, and suffixed words are not an exception. *Fondling* was derived from *fond* with the help of the suffix *-ling,* and then *fondling,* by back formation, yielded *fondle,* which now looks as though it is *fond + le. Suckle* may have had a similar fate (from *suckling*).

Unlike *-hood, -le* has always been a suffix in English: no noun, adjective, or verb stands behind it. At one time, it was longer. The verbs with *-le,* to the extent that they are traceable to Old English, ended in *-li-* followed by *-an,* a marker of the infinitive. Still earlier, *-li-* may have had the form **-lōi-,* not a meaningful word either. In *payment, sisterhood,* and *warmth,* the word's structure is obvious, but *-le* can be identified and isolated mainly because it occurs in several dozen frequentative verbs and adds the same shade of meaning to them. Without that it would have been fully "disguised" and *tootle* would not have been coined. *Get, cut, put, set, fit, bet, wet, whet,* and *let* also look similar, yet we do not ascribe any function to

their final *-t.* (Here the factor of "peer pressure" is felt only in grammar: under the influence of *set—let—put—cut, fit* and *wet* have lost their preterit *-ed* ending in American English.)[2]

The presence of *-le* unites *garble, warble, juggle, smuggle,* and *struggle* with *wriggle, giggle,* and the rest. *Warble* is akin to some verbs with *-le* that have been attested only in languages other than English. *Smuggle* may have the root *mug-* with *s-* appended to it (see what is said about *hugger-mugger* on p. 58), but its history is obscure; in any case, the adjective *smug* is not its etymon. Engl. **strug-,* the sought-for base of *struggle,* has not turned up (a similar Scandinavian word exists, however). *Garble* and *juggle* are verbs of Romance origin. The first is not related to *garb,* and the second has not been, in some fantastic way, derived from *jug*; flanked by *jaggle* and *joggle,* it has become their near synonym.

Not only verbs end in the suffix *-l(e).* In nouns, it most often characterizes the names of appliances and instruments. Sometimes it is disguised so well that it has become an inseparable element of the root. This is what happened in the words *tool* and *towel,* in which *-l* was added to the roots of the now extinct verbs meaning "to make" and "to wash" (though *towel* went from Germanic to French and came back to English slightly Frenchified). In present-day English, *tool* and *towel* have no suffix. Their case is similar to that of *bath.* The degrees of obscurity are the same in nouns as in verbs. *Sparkle* is transparent, *dazzle* (from *daze*) is less so owing to the short vowel, *drizzle* is opaque because the verb *drēosan* has dropped out of the language, and *wriggle* is, most likely, a borrowing. We can easily construct such a ladder for nouns, except that words like *handle, girdle* (from *hand* and *gird*), and *ladle* (perhaps less obviously from *lade*) will be in the minority here.

Beetle has the root of the verb *bite; weevil* and *weave* are similarly related. Few people will associate them today. *Needle* was derived from a verb meaning "to sew," and if *d* were lost in it, it would become as monolithic as *tool.* Icelandic *nál* (needle) is such a monolith. *Need-* in *needle* has no connection with seams or stitches, and we "hear" the suffix only against the background of the equally unanalyzable nouns *beadle, bridle, saddle,* and *label.* From the historical perspective, all of them are like *needle.* The lost verb from which *needle* was once derived is akin to Latin *nēre* (to spin), whence Latin *nervus* (sinew, bowstring); the adjective *neural* is from a Greek cognate of *nervus.* Only an etymological dictionary can restore the unity between Engl. *nerve* and *needle.*

Riddle is another old word with a suffix. Old English had the noun *rǣdels* (usually masculine, with the plural *rǣdelsas*) and the feminine noun *rǣdelse* (with the plural *rǣdelsan*). The verb *rǣdan* meant "to advise, counsel, persuade; consult; decide," and so forth; we know its continuation *read* (in *read a dream* and *read a riddle,* it has retained the ancient meaning "to discern, interpret"). German *raten* (to advise), a cognate of *read,* and especially *erraten* (to guess) have changed little since the Middle Ages. *Rǣdels(e)* had a spectrum of meanings corresponding to those of *rǣdan,* namely "consideration, discussion, imagination, conjecture, interpretation"; "riddle" was among them. Later, *-e* in *rǣdelse* was dropped and *s* understood as a marker of the plural of a noun with a suffix *-el,* rather than *-els.* Two phonetic processes turned *ǣ* into *i,* and the modern form *riddle* appeared (with plural *riddles*). Of all its meanings only "enigma" is extant. The verb *read,* the reflex of *rǣdan,* is still pronounced with a long vowel, but it has narrowed its meaning so drastically that nothing connects it with *riddle* any longer. The homonym of *riddle* (enigma) is *riddle* (a coarse-meshed sieve), from *hriddel.* Its suffix is the same as in *ladle* (the verb *hrīdrian* meant "to sift").

Here, as everywhere, phonetic processes separate words that would otherwise have sounded alike. *Thimble* is related to *thumb.* Speakers of Old English sensed their affinity; we usually don't. The reason is not only different vowels but also the changed relation of words to things: our thimbles are not meant for the thumb. *Bramble* is cognate with *broom,* and perhaps twelve centuries ago people realized this. (The consonant *b* is "parasitic" in *thumb, thimble,* and *bramble. Thumb* with *b* emerged toward the end of the thirteenth century. Presumably, *b* was pronounced at the time. *Numb* had a similar history, but in *dumb, b* has not always been mute.) Already in the remotest past, *riddle* was impenetrable. Modern linguists understand its derivation quite well, but *darnel* and *thistle* baffle them.

The ability of English to form verbs from nouns and nouns from verbs often makes it hard to decide which came first. The verb *handle* is a derivative of the corresponding noun, but did the noun *shuttle* precede the verb *shuttle* or are they parallel formations, both from *shoot:* one the name of an appliance, the other a frequentative verb? (Those who would trace *shuttle* to *shut* would be wrong but not dismally so, because *shut* and *shoot* are related.) *Shuffle, scuffle,* and *shovel* go back to *shove* or its cognates in German or Scandinavian. However, the verb *shovel* has been derived from the noun, whereas the nouns *shuffle* and *scuffle* were formed as partners of the verb. Since here we are trying only to "undisguise" suffixes, we need not go into the distant origin of each word.

Adjectives ending in *-le* are few: the best known of them are *fickle, mickle, little, idle, nimble,* and *brittle.* Unlike Romance *-al* in *beneficial, pivotal,* and *dialectal, -le* is native. Its descent did not contribute to its productivity, whereas *-al* enjoys some freedom and occasionally differentiates meanings: compare *analytic* and *analytical, classic* and *classical, historic* and *historical, poetic* and *poetical.* The origin of some adjectives in the *fickle—mickle* group is not devoid of interest. Old Engl. *ficol,* the etymon of *fickle,* meant "cunning, tricky," its underlying sense being "changeable, inconstant." The root *fic-* recurs in German *ficken,* a cognate and synonym of the English *F*-word. In dialects, *ficken* has other meanings, for example, "to flog lightly; scratch," in addition to the main one, all of which developed from "move back and forth" (compare *frig* and *fiddle,* above). A fickle person was ready to shift his or her loyalties, as follows from Old Engl. *gefic* (deceit) (German dialectal *Gefick* means "people running in different directions").

Brittle, first recorded in the fourteenth century, is akin to Old Engl. *(ge)bryttan* (to break to pieces). It shares an onomatopoeic beginning (*br-*) with *break* (from *brecan*), and it has always meant "fragile." Since *bryttan,* like *(ge)fic,* exists no longer, the derivatives of both are now mere "conventional signs"; no other words in the language support them. *Nimble* is less isolated, but its siblings have lost touch with it. The Old English for "take" was *niman,* a cognate of German *nehmen.* Scandinavian *taka* superseded it, and all that is left of the

root of *niman* are *nimble* (with "parasitic" *b,* as in *thimble* and *bramble*), whose ancient meaning must have been "receptive, quick at sizing," and *numb,* literally "taken." In the consciousness of modern speakers, *nimble* and *numb* are not even close. Dictionaries cite *nim* (to take; steal) (slang); it brings joy only to lexicographers and those who remember Shakespeare's Corporal Nym.

The roots of *little* and *idle* are unknown. *Mickle,* of which the standard form *much* is a phonetic variant, is related to Greek *mégas,*[3] as in *megaphone* and *megalomania,* and Latin *magnus* (great). A few adjectives that came to English from French, for instance, *supple* and *subtle,* align themselves with *fickle—mickle—brittle—nimble,* but a look at their etymons (Latin *supplex* [submissive] and *subtilis* [slender, delicate]) reveals the nature of the disguise. The same is true of *simple* and *double.*

A story resembling that of the verbs ending in *-le* can be told about the verbs with the suffix *-er.* A list containing them is long and includes *chatter, clatter, patter, stutter, bicker, flicker, flutter, blunder, bluster, shudder, jabber, swagger, scatter, shatter, shiver, quiver, quaver,* and *waver* among others. From the historical point of view, their most remarkable features are their late appearance and obscure origin; their sources are often German, Dutch, and Scandinavian. *Jabber* (not from *jab*) and *chatter* are probably onomatopoeic. *Flitter* and *flicker* are two of many sound symbolic words in which initial *fl-* denotes inconstant motion. Few have credible cognates, and only the frequentative suffix lends the group an illusion of unity, though it is appended to stems that seldom occur in English without *-er* (*clat-, scat-, blust-,* and so forth). *Chat* and *flit* are not the etymons of *chatter* and *flitter* but rather back formations from the longer verbs. However, *patter* (to tap) is *pat* + *er,* and *swagger* is perhaps *swag* (which in dialects means "to move unsteadily") + er. An ancient root or two can sometimes be excavated, for instance, **skud-* (to shake) for *shudder, *stut-* (to strike against) for *stutter,* and **wav-* (to move about) for *waver.* I suspect that *bicker* is akin to *bitch* (from Old Engl. *bicce*). Dictionaries do not confirm my guess, but they have little to say about this verb, so I may be right.

Another dead suffix is *-k* in *talk, smirk, stalk, walk,* and *lurk. Talk* and *smirk* are cognate with *tale* and *smile, stalk* is presumably related to *steal.* A comparison of *wal-k,* Old Icelandic *vel-ta* (to roll), and German *wal-zen* (the same meaning) shows that *k* and *t* ~ *z* are suffixes added to the root *wal* ~ *wel-,* though roots that have not been attested without suffixes look suspicious (see Chapter 16). From *walzen* we have the name of the dance *waltz* (German *Walzer*). *Lurk* is possibly akin to *lour* (to look threateningly). In Modern English, *talk, smirk,* and the other *k*-verbs are pure roots like *chalk, work,* and *murk.* The existence of a frequentative suffix in them is a fact of history.

Prefixes are less prominent in the history of English, but a few things should be said about them, too. Those who have had a chance to browse through the supplement to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,* which is a list of reconstructed roots and their modern English reflexes, will have noticed roots like "****spen-***, also ***pen***"; "****slagw-***, also ****lagw-***," and "***smer***, also ****mer-***." Hundreds of seemingly related words differ in that they appear with or without initial *s-*. One such word turned up above: *mug* (to waylay and rob), it was suggested, is cognate with *smug-* in *smuggle.* That enigmatic, elusive *s-* has been called *s-mobile* (movable *s*). Its productivity remained the same after the emergence of the earliest written documents. Observers of modern dialects register *sclash* for *clash, sclimb* for *climb,* and other similar formations.

The verb *sneeze* first turned up in the fifteenth century in the form *snese* and replaced *fnese,* from Old Engl. *fnesan;* its by-form was *nese* (modern dialectal *neeze*). *Nese* is believed to be a borrowing from Scandinavian (Old Icelandic had *hnjósa*), with *h-* lost. Likewise, German *niesen* and Dutch *niezen* must have had *h-*. *Fnese* and **(h)njósa* are onomatopoeias, whose most audible sounds echo those of the word *nose.* The *Oxford English Dictionary* says the following on the change from *neeze* to *sneeze:* "The adoption of *sneeze* was probably assisted by its phonetic appropriateness; it may have been felt as a strengthened form of *neeze.*" *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* suggests that *snese* ~ *sneeze* were substituted for *neeze* "as more expressive." The expressive nature of *s* (a voiceless, fricative consonant) is far from clear, and many researchers have

grappled with this prefix. Some trace it to hoary antiquity. Others refuse to believe that it was a regular prefix, because adding and subtracting initial consonants for etymological purposes is a dangerous procedure, but the number of words with alleged *s-mobile* is so great that one shies at ascribing it in all cases to chance.[4] Perhaps sclimbing and sneezing really presupposes a greater effort than climbing and neezing. If so, the power of *s-* has not diminished for millennia. (To return to *smile* and *smirk:* their probable Greek cognate is *meidiáō*[5] [to smile], without *s-*).

Unstressed prefixes tend to disappear. Words with lost prefixes (so-called aphetic forms—a term coined by James A. H. Murray) may coexist with full forms, and their affinity is then felt. For example, *lone* and *squire* are aphetic doublets of *alone* and *esquire.* (*Alone* comes from *al one* [all by oneself], so that *a-* is not a prefix here, but it was interpreted as such: *a-lone* from *al-one.*) Sometimes the related words, one of which is aphetic, are no longer synonyms: compare *mend* and *amend, fend* (in *to fend for oneself*) and *defend,* and especially *maze* and *amaze. Plot* "conspiracy" is believed to be a shortening of French *complot,* but French etymologists doubt the connection. Despite the simplicity of the situation, jumping to conclusions should be avoided: *fend* is indeed a prefixless variant of *defend,* whereas *cry* is not the stub of *decry* and *rear* resembles but probably is not an aphetic form of *arrear. Atone* rhymes with *alone* for a reason: it goes back to *at one* (in harmony). In contrast to *lone,* it has kept both syllables intact and did not become **tone.* This, however, could have happened, as the history of *twit* shows. Old English had *æt-'wītan* (to reproach). Later the unstressed vowel was shed, and *twit,* with a shortened vowel, came into being. Nothing betrays its origin; it is now a homonym of *twit* (to understand). In the form known to us, *twit* was first recorded in 1530. In the same year *atwite* turned up for the last time in the database of the *Oxford English Dictionary*—an elegant coincidence. (This is perhaps the best place to mention *enough: e-* is a relic of an old prefix, as follows from Old Engl. *genōg,* and from its German synonym *genug,* that is, *ge-nug.* Although *-nug* is meaningless, *ge-* is a living prefix in German, whereas in English, only the archaism *yclept* [called] has *y-* allied to *ge-*.)

A note on a disguised prefix in a French word may be of some interest here. Latin had the phrase *lībra bilanx* (a balance having two scales) (*bilanx,* from *bis* [two] and *lanx* [scale]). Its Italian continuation *bilancia* goes back to a similar Vulgar (that is Late, Popular) Latin form. But in Spanish and French we find *balanza* and *balance,* respectively, perhaps under the influence of *ballāre* (to dance) (with reference to the "dancing" movement of weighing scales before they come to a standstill). English borrowed the French word in the thirteenth century with the meaning "uncertainty, doubt, risk"; "weighing scales" was recorded later. Since that time, stress, as usual in English, shifted to the first syllable, and the ancient prefix *bi-* is no longer possible to discern in *balance.* French borrowed Italian *bilancio* among many other banking terms at the end of the sixteenth century and turned it into *bilan* (balance), so that French speakers may realize what the etymon of their *balance* is, but English lacks the support of a corresponding Latin, Latinized, or Italian form.

Daffodil is not a French word: its "base" is *affodil* from Medieval Latin *affodilus* (Classical Late Latin *asphodelus*). The mysterious initial *d-* has been compared with the equally mysterious *t-* in *Ted* for *Edward* and with Dutch *de* (as though from *de affodil*), but it remains unexplained. Walter W. Skeat, in a supplement to the first edition of his *English Etymological Dictionary,* p. 787, quotes James A. H. Murray's article on the history of *daffodil.* Whatever the origin of *d-,* it is probably not a submerged prefix despite Skeat's later suggestion that Middle French *fleur d'affrodille* may have influenced the form of the English word.

Other than that, prefixes are never disguised in Modern English the way they sometimes are in German. German *bleiben* and *glauben* are akin to and synonymous with Engl. *leave* and *believe* (though *bleiben* means "to stay, remain" rather than "to cause to remain"). Initial *b-* and *g-* are relics of the prefixes *be-* and *ge-.* English words like *belittle* do not turn into **blittle,* and, in looking for the origin of *blithe* or *bristle,* the question whether **belithe* or **beristle* are their etymons does not arise. The most common English prefixes are of Romance origin (*dis-, mis-, in-, re-, pre-,* and all the negative ones except *un-*). In *disqualify, misspell, influx, reread,* and *preshrunk,*

the first element is perfectly clear. Shakespeare used spellings like *i'th'paste (= in the paste)* and *'t* for *at;* they resemble *'sblood,* a familiar variant of *His blood,* and *'tis (= it is),* and are colloquial variants typical of everyday speech. They are like *bo's'n* and *fo'c's'le.* However, as pointed out, disguised prefixes do not occur in English, and we can leave them at this.

Disguise is rampant when a phrase like *mine uncle* yields *my nuncle* and the word *nuncle* begins to lead an independent existence. The change of *mine uncle* to *my nuncle* is of the same type as the change of *al-one* and *at-one* to *a-lone* and *a-tone,* the main difference being that in the second case the redistribution of boundaries occurs within the word, whereas in the first, two words are involved. As long as both *uncle* and *nuncle* are in use, the origin of the word that arose by misdivision (the technical term for it is metanalysis) poses no problems. But the parent form and the product of metanalysis may diverge. Old French *naperon* (table cloth) (Modern French *napperon*) has the same root as do *napery* and *napkin* (French *nappe* [linen cloth]). *A naperon* became *an aperon* (apron). To an English speaker *napkin* and *apron* are unrelated. In this instance, the noun lost *n-;* in *nuncle,* it gained an initial consonant. Likewise, *adder* (viper) was *nǣd(d)re* in Old English. Its German cognate is *Natter,* and compare Latin *natrix* (not a viper but a harmless water snake, from *natāre* [to swim]). Dutch *adder* (adder) shed its *n-* in the phrase *den nadder* (*den* is an article). The two languages arrived at identical forms by different processes. *An ewt* (to stay with aquatic animals for a while) was mistaken for *a newt.*

Auger is a disguised, misdivided compound. The second element of Old Engl. *nafogār* ended in *gār* (spear, piercer, borer) (Modern Engl. *gore* [a triangular piece of cloth]; see the history of *garlic* on p. 86, where *garfish* [spearfish] is mentioned). *Nafu* has come down to us as *nave* (in a wheel). The *nafogār* was originally a pointed tool for boring the naves of wheels. Here, too, Modern German *Näber* (a dialectal word) resembles its etymon *(nabagēr),* whereas Dutch *avegaar* is *n*-less. Engl. *an auger* is from *a nauger.* Old French *nomper* means "non-peer" (a third party called in to decide between two; *-mp-* from *-np-,* as in *impossible*). In English, it gradually changed to

umpire. Nickname is still a name, but *nick-* needs an explanation. Here the original form was *an ekename,* with *eke* as in *eke out one's salary (eke* [to augment], *eke out* [to supplement]); thus, "an additional name." *A nekename* from *an ekename* yielded the meaningless compound *nickname.* The expression *for the nonce* is a reshaping of something like **for then anes (anes* [once]). The most striking example of misdivision is *aitchbone,* earlier *nachebone* (Old French *nache,* ultimately from Latin *nates* [buttocks]). The loss of *n-* resulted in the spelling *Hbone.*

A few proper names owe their origin to misdivision. *Ned,* like *nuncle,* must have arisen from *mine Ed.* However, in *nanny* two words have merged. In *nanny goat, nanny* can be understood as *Anny* (with *n-* from *mine*), a pair to *Billy* in *billy goat,* but *nanny* (nursemaid) is a typical baby word: compare Russian *niania* (nursemaid), Welsh *nain* (grandmother), and Latin *nonna* (aunt) (the last continues as *nun* in English, from *nonna,* a title given to an elderly person; Italian *nonna* means "grandmother"). Charles P. G. Scott, the etymologist for *The Century Dictionary,* wrote what amounts to a book (three papers, about 250 pages, featuring approximately 350 words) on misdivision.[6] Most of his examples are "nonce words" that turned up in old texts (*nabbey* for *abbey,* and the like) and provincial (dialectal) words that occur in colloquial speech, like *nidget* (idiot), from *an idiot* (compare *did you* pronounced as *didju).* Scott's most interesting entries are *jackanapes* and *Cockney,*[7] and he had an original idea about people dressed up "to the nines" (*to the nines* [perfectly] is not restricted to dressing). The few dictionaries that venture an explanation of that idiom say that the allusion is to the Nine Muses. Scott suggested that the starting point is *to then īne* "to the eyes."[8]

Another consonant that shifts between words is *t. John atte Elme* became *John Telme,* as *John atten Elme* became *John Nelme.* (It is now easy to guess where the ancestors of Messers Nokes, Nash, Nalder, and Norchard once lived.) Many houses stood *atte welle* or *atte welles* (at the well or "near the spring"), whence the family name *Twells.*[9] *Saint* often let its final *t* go to the name that followed. *Stabbs* in Oxfordshire and *St. Tabbe,* the Prioress of Coldingham, are from *St. Abb* or *St. Ebb.*[10] Tooley Street in London is St. "Oley" Street

(Oley is St. Olave). It is "famous for its three 'tailors', who, we are told, once met, and signed a petition beginning 'We the people of England'. But it seems that one of the three tailors was a grocer, and that only one of the two remaining had a shop in Tooley Street."[11]

In the saint category, the most often cited case is *tawdry.* The word goes back to *Saint Audrey* (Ethelrēada):

> It implies, therefore, that the things so called had been bought at the fair of saint Audrey, where gay toys of all sorts were sold. This fair was held in the Isle of Ely (and probably at other places), on the day of the fair saint, which was the 17th of October. . . . An old English historian makes saint Audrey die of a swelling in her throat, which she considered as a particular judgment, for having been in her youth much addicted to wearing fine necklaces.[12]

This historian, Nicholas Harpsfield, Archdeacon of Canterbury (died 1588), adds in his *Historia Anglicana Ecclesiastica:* "Our women of England are wont to wear about the neck a certain necklace, perchance in memory of what we have told."[13] First, only the phrase *tawdry lace* was current, then *tawdry* came to mean "vulgarily showy, ostentatious but of inferior quality; flashy, gaudy."

The loss and addition of other consonants in the process of misdivision are of little importance. I will only reproduce an explanation Scott gives in the section on *r.* In tracing the origin of *hobby* and *hobbledehoy* (pp. 70 and 115), we observed that *Hob* is a by-form of *Rob.* The consonants *r* and *h* often form a union in the history of the Germanic languages. Scott conjectured that in phases like *our Rob, our Rick,* and *our Rodge,* pronounced *our 'Ob, 'Ick, 'Odge,* aspiration was added on the analogy of names like *Henry* and *Harry,* after which *Hob, Hick,* and *Hodge* appeared as the familiar names of *Robert, Richard,* and *Roger.*[14] This hypothesis, although not fully persuasive, is not worse than any other. Scott assumed that with two *r*'s in succession, one was lost and metanalysis followed. A parallel case would be *Riding,* historically the name of the three districts of Yorkshire. The phrase *North Thriding* (that is, the northern third part) became *North 'Riding.* Then *East Riding* and *West Riding* sprang up. Folk etymology granted legitimacy to the idea of riding all over Yorkshire.[15]

To a varying degree, metanalysis occurs in most, if not all, European languages. In French, the definite article often merges with its noun, as in *lierre* (ivy) from *l'ierre* (from Latin *hedera*). Of "misdivided" French words in English one example will suffice. Latin *lamella* is a diminutive of *lamina* (a thin plate of metal). It yielded French *lemelle,* and *la lemelle* was mistaken for *l'alemelle.* Emancipated *alemelle* acquired various forms, including another diminutive, *amelette,* with *-le-* and *-me* transposed. Later *amelette* became *omelette* (spelled in various ways), and in the seventeenth century, it reached English. At that time, one could say *aumelette d'œufs* (an omelette, or pancake made of eggs). The omelette was supposedly named from its thin flat shape. Old French *alemele* meant "the blade of a knife," and Modern French *alumelle* is glossed in English dictionaries as "sheathing of a ship." Folk etymology traces *omelette* to *œufs mélés* "mixed eggs." The story of this remarkable word shows that in etymology, as in other endeavors, to reach one's goal, one has to break a good number of eggs. *On ne fait pas d'omelette sans casser des œufs.*

Words disguise their past by shrinking, making productive affixes (that is, prefixes and suffixes) unproductive and dead, exchanging sounds with their neighbors, and in many other ways. Two words may also fuse, and the seamless grace of the resulting products (so-called blends) often deceives the shrewdest observer, who fails to notice the head of one "animal" joined to the tail of another. The most successful blends probably known to all English speakers are *smog* (= *s[moke]* + *[f]og*), *brunch* (= *br[eakfast]* + *[l]unch*), and *motel* (= *mo[tor]* + *[ho]tel*). (*Brunch,* initially university slang, was coined in 1895 in England and, like most such novelties, incurred the wrath of the purists. It is a pleasure to quote a passage written in 1901 and proving the futility of predictions about language: "A few years ago the word *five-o'clocker* seemed likely to be permanently adopted in Paris, as *ennui* has been here. But I cannot suppose that the mongrel word *brunch* for a meal combining breakfast and lunch, which has recently shown signs of temporary popularity, is likely to be accepted as true coin in either capital."[16] The capitals are London and Paris. Events on the other side of the ocean did not interest the

author.) Lewis Carroll, a great lover of blends, called them portmanteau words, because a portmanteau opens into two halves and two words can be packed into it. His comment, in the preface to his *Hunting of the Snark* (a snark is half-snake, half-shark), is as follows:

> For instance take the two words "fuming" and "furious". Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards "fuming", you will say "fuming-furious"; if they turn even by a hair's breadth toward "furious", you will say "furious-fuming"; but if you have that rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say frumious.[17]

Two of his coinages—*galumph* (*gallop* + *triumph*) and *chortle* (*chuckle* + *snort*)—have found their way into familiar usage.

Smog, brunch, motel, galumph, and *chortle* are an etymologist's dream: their origin is beyond dispute. But we cannot be present at the birth of every blend, as happened in the history of *gerrymander* (to manipulate election districts unfairly so as to secure disproportionate representation). The story of this verb has been told many times:

> The term, says Norton, is derived from the name of Governor Gerry, of Massachusetts, who in 1811 signed a bill readjusting the representative districts so to as favor the democrats and weaken the Federalists, although the last named party polled nearly two thirds of the votes cast. A fancied resemblance of a map of the districts thus treated led Stuart, the painter, to add a few lines with his pencil, and say to Mr. Russell, editor of the *Boston Sentinel,* 'That will do for a Salamander'. Russell glanced at it: "Salamander", said he, "call it Gerrymander!" The epithet took at once, and became a Federalist war cry, the caricature being published as a campaign document.[18]

According to another version, quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* Russell was the editor of the *Continent,* and Stuart added not "a few lines" but a head, wings, and claws. However, the punch line is the same. *The Century Dictionary* supplies an anticlimactic detail that the redistribution of the districts was only believed to be Gerry's idea; in fact, he was opposed to the measure. Be that as it may, we have here a "pretty etymological tale" from Massachusetts (the other one from the same state concerns *schooner:* p. 128).

"It is to be expected that whimsical or conscious or unconscious fusions of this sort that caught the popular fancy, and in the course of time established themselves, will prove difficult to trace."[19] Many blends originated in slang, and unless we have contemporary testimony about the elements of the coinage, we cannot be sure that we are dealing with amalgam words. The adjective *slender* appeared in a fourteenth-century poem in which it rhymes with *tender* and means "lean." A French and a Dutch etymon of *slender* have been proposed, but perhaps it is the sum of *slight* and *tender.* The verb *snooze* emerged in texts at the end of the eighteenth century. It must always have been a colloquialism reminiscent of *sneeze, snore,* and *doze.* Another blend? *Blotch* looks like a composite of *blot* and *botch.*

Here are a few putative blends. *Dumbfound = dumb + confound?* (Most likely.) *Scurry,* originally the second element of the rhyming jingle *hurry-scurry,* may be *scour + hurry,* probably part of a formation like *harum-scarum* that succeeded in prying itself loose from its "master." *Blurt = blow* (or *blare*) *+ spurt? Flounder = founder* (to stumble, go lame) *+ blunder? Squirm = squir* (to throw with a jerk) (dialectal) *+ worm? Binge = bung* (the orifice in the *bilge* of a cask, through which it is fitted)? *Doldrum = dull* or *dolt + tantrums? Flurry = flaw + hurry?* (Unlikely.) *Cantankerous = cankerous + contentious? Flaunt = fly + vaunt? Flush = flare + blush?* One can fill pages with similar questions.[20]

Jespersen insisted that blending plays a greater role in word formation than most people believe. The etymology of *slender* from *slight* or *slim + tender* is his. He suggested *scroll = scrow + roll; slash = slay* (or *sling,* or *slat*) *+ gash* or *dash; gruff = grim + rough; troll* (verb) *= trill* or *trundle + roll; twirl = twist + whirl; blot = blemish* or *black + spot, plot,* or *dot.*[21] We have no way of verifying such derivations; but most of them are plausible. Blends are especially popular in humorous place names (like *Oxbridge = Oxford + Cambridge*) and in brand names like *Texaco* (*Texas + Company*). Viable terms like *Amerind* (said about American Indian languages) have come from blends. Anyone can coin a blend: *Eurasia* (*Europe + Asia*), *Benelux* (*Belgium + Netherlands + Luxembourg*); *frenemies* (friends who act more like enemies); *fictionary* (a dictionary of fiction; this is my coinage, but, no doubt, I have predecessors); *gliberal* (a beautiful blend I found in a local newspaper); *Tolstoevsky* (*Tolstoy + Dostoevsky*), a joke of Russian scholars that has worn rather thin; *argle = argue + haggle; dispread = disperse + spread;* and so forth. At the risk of irritating all serious philologists I would like to propose an etymology of *doe* (the female of the fallow deer) from a blend. Engl. *roe* means not only "the milt or spawn of a fish" (from Old Engl. *rā,* with several ancient cognates) but also "a small species of deer," a different word. Cannot *doe,* a word of unknown origin, from Old Engl. *dā,* be a blend of *deer* (from *dēor*) and *roe?* The female of the deer is smaller than the male. Perhaps *dā* was the sum of *dēor* and *rā,* with the accent laid on the animal's size.

The elephant's child (if I can be allowed to return to Kipling's *Just So Stories* for the last time) was full of 'satiable curtiosity, and all his relatives spanked him for it. We are no less courteous and curious, and our reward is words, unhurriedly but with a good grace, revealing their secrets to us. *Bath, tool, walk, twit, nidget, balance, tawdry, omelette,* and *doldrums* emerged to us in their pristine simplicity, and this, as already suggested at the end of Chapter 2, is what etymology is for and about.