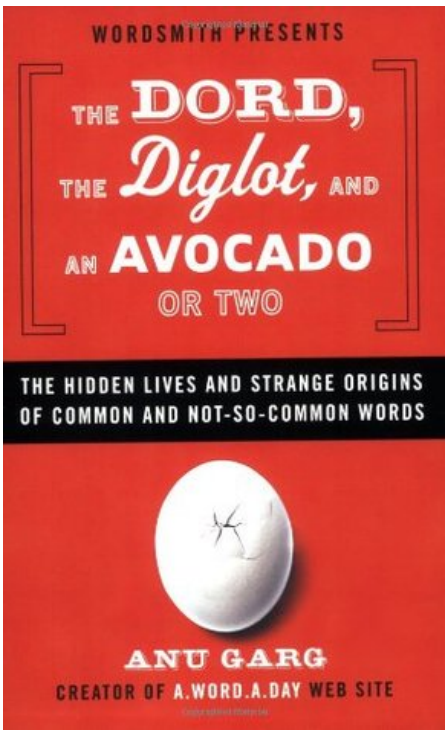

The Dord, the Diglot, and an Avocado or Two: The Hidden Lives and Strange Origins of Common and Not-So-Common Words

Anu Garg

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From the creator of the popular A.Word.A.Day e-mail newsletter

A collection of some of the most interesting stories and fascinating origins behind more than 300 words, names, and terms by the founder of WordSmith.org.

Did you know:
Thereâ€™s a word for the pleasant smell that accompanies the first rain after a dry spell? *Petrichor*, combining *petros* (Greek for *stone*) and *ichor* (the fluid that flows in the veins of Greek gods).

An *illeist* is one who refers to oneself in the third person.

Thereâ€™s a word for feigning lack of interest in something while actually desiring it: *accismus*.

For any aspiring *deipnosophist* (a good conversationalist at meals) or devoted *Philomath* (a lover of learning), this anthology of entertaining etymology is an ideal way to have fun while getting smarter.

The Dord, the Diglot, and an Avocado or Two: The Hidden Lives and Strange Origins of Common and Not-So-Common Words Details

Date	:	Published October 30th 2007 by Plume
ISBN	:	9780452288614
Author	:	Anu Garg
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From Reader Review The Dord, the Diglot, and an Avocado or Two: The Hidden Lives and Strange Origins of Common and Not-So-Common Words for online ebook

Kat says

An entertaining little book about the origin and family tree of various words or phrases. Some of them I was familiar with while others were completely unknown to me. However, the book does show it's age a bit by A) some of the words it chooses to explore I have never heard used in modern parlance and B) it does some not-subtle bashing of Bill Gates and George Bush, which seemed out of place. Fun, short read but not really good as a resource and not something I'd probably go back to reread.

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elstaffe says

2.5 rounds up to 3 stars for me. Came for the dord, stayed for the therblig.

Amy says

Quick & nerdy, just like I like 'em. I could have read another whole book's worth of Garg's tidbits on Sanskrit roots. That stuff thrills my dork centers.

Marigold says

A little book of words - some unusual, some not - and their definitions & origins. New words for me - clerihew and millihelen, and petrichor. "Dord" was one of my faves - the result of a mistake in the 1934 Webster's New International Dictionary! It isn't a word, at all! Not really a book that you want to read from front to back - it's more of a dip-into. A fun book to leave in a guest bedroom to confound your guests, or to refer to just before a rousing game of Balderdash! Could have done without the author's puns & editorial comments, many of which are not particularly funny. A bright, word-oriented 10-year-old might find them hilarious. (Sorry, Anu....)

Nuzhat says

Really enjoyed this quick read that I bought for a friend who I hope will love it. I got a bit bored with the words coming from people/ characters, but the chapter about geographical impact on words was really interesting to me as was the bit about spelling. I also liked the questions at the bottom of every pair of pages.

Matt Evans says

Brynn and Craig gave me this book for my birthday. (Props, peeps!)

You've really got to hand it to old Anu Garg: a non-English speaker (he's from India), he's authored three best-selling, English, books on the English language. Anyone who's ever learned a new language -- and enjoyed learning it -- can identify with Anu's enthusiasm and joy in re all aspects of English, his new language. This latest book, "Dord, Diglot, and Avocado" continues the fun. If nothing else, reading the book should get you to subscribe to Anu's website and daily email word prompt: www.wordsmith.org. Anu is something of a paronomasiciac, as am I, but I try to keep it in check. Anu, on the other hand, just revels in all manner of punning, anagramming, ambigramming, etc. (e.g., the phrase "my name is anu garg" anagrammatizes as "anagram genius"). Somehow, though, he never seems to cross the line into full-blown obnoxious. I can only admire that kind of equipoise.

The bonus of the book for me is that I learned a new adjective to apply to myself: diglot. I am a diglot -- and proud of it, too!

Anna says

I'm a self-confessed word nerd, and I often check the dictionary for where a word came from when it intrigues me. This book takes you on a journey with many words and their origins. Each word and chapter is in short pieces, so this will make a perfect toilet read, travel read, or a read when you have a short attention span or are between books.
Words are sure interesting.
Many of the words that came (to English) from French are oddly enough similar in Italian. Bain de Marie = bagnomaria etc. The ways the words have evolved is fascinating, sometimes the words have a completely opposite meaning a century after. Some words have a misspelling now as their standard form because they were so commonly misspelled (so perhaps a future dictionary with have words like your (covering you're), definitaly and other common misspellings. The history of written English isn't that long either; when Shakespeare wrote his works, it was phonetic English. So everything could have many ways to spell it - including how Shakespeare wrote his own name. The standardized spelling of English is younger than Gutenberg. Wild huh? Yet many words have so ancient origins, from proto-European (or eu-European) linguistic ancestor so now the words even in Swedish and Hindi share the same origins.
Dord is one of my favorite words now because of it's history (even if it's been removed from the dictionary a long ago). Diglot... Is the same as bilingual but formed from different root words.
So many interesting words.

Dinah says

I am normally all about dictionaries of obscure words. Sometimes I think it's best to skip the poetry or prose altogether and sink teeth right into the juicy stuff -- the stories *of* words, before we start meddling by crafting our own stories with them. Or perhaps it's that the best writing reveals all the facets and history of words we normally forget, and does so in an emotionally compelling way.

Either way, Garg's book doesn't make good on its promise. Over the course of almost two hundred pages I

learned at most three useful words; everything else was either already in common enough usage that this loser employs them on the daily (and have Latin roots obvious enough you could probably make a guess good enough for a GRE problem), or far more often, words that were actually obscure enough that they can't be used in contemporary conversation or writing. Not even interesting words that get at something specific that others lack, just long or Latinate words one would use to prove one could use them. (Those people are Sesquipedalians, by the way, and very much deserve their own term.)

Most irritating, I think, are Garg's self-satisfied introductions to chapters, in which he builds up the mystery of the English language and prepares for a big reveal... which never comes. This is probably a lesson I should take to heart myself: that relishing the words should be apparent in their usage, which will speak for itself, and not rhapsodized over at great lengths. Because nobody cares, really, we just want the thought (or in this case, the words).

Cindy says

Got this one from the library based on the title alone. I'm really enjoying it! Recommended for people who like books about words or trivia, like Schott's Original Miscellany, Never Throw a Molotov Cocktail, The Joy of Lex, and others like that. Lots of fun so far. I noticed that the author runs a website, wordsmith.org, which I also checked out. Fun for language lovers.

Lisa Houlihan says

This amusing little book groups its word histories into themes: eponyms, toponyms, charactonyms (with a whole chapter just for Dickens), words about food, words deliberately coined. This is a better method than alphabetical or by conversational happenstance.

Garg's origin of hazard (derives from an Arabic word for die, singular of dice) sounds plausible; of glamor, salary, travel and window I knew (so they continued to sound plausible) but his history of curfew I will have to double-check elsewhere (from French couvrir and feu, a call through town to cover (or bank or otherwise subdue) your fire so you wouldn't torch the place through carelessness). Chortle, gerrymander and grok are old hat but I didn't know scofflaw was similarly deliberately coined (during Prohibition, and meaning someone who flouts the 18th amendment).

I am delighted that clerihew was the name of someone who invented that form of comic verse: the word sounds so wordish, in contrast to the obvious name-iness of boycott, that I would never have guessed. What's most interesting about that eponym is that it was the fellow's middle name. Petrichor dates only to 1964, but it's so perfect (and Greek) that I assumed it was as old as spartan or laconic. Garg credits a pair of Australians with it, and good: the smell after a rain is often delicious but those from an arid climate appreciate it the most.

I learned two words whose meanings I will find useful: accismus and velleity. The former means to feign lack of interest in something while actually desiring it, as with Aesop's fox with the grapes; the latter is volition at its weakest, and Garg applies it to doing your taxes.

So I liked Garg's organizational method, but it didn't spare me his conversation. I allowed him to pun

occasionally and allowed how 'Turin:to ruin' didn't sound forced. But after explaining laconic from Laconia, he wonders how they found their talk-show hosts. What a witticism. In the very next section, logically enough about Sparta, he credits Sparta's spartanness on its lack of a television shopping channel. Gah. In the next, a pun using both a homograph and a homophone. Then he lays off for a while.

Every few pages is a wordish trivia question. Some were good: What is the only state whose name and capital share no letters? What is the only English word with three apostrophes? (South Dakota and Pierre, fo'c's'le). Some were chestnuts: What word(s) begins and ends with 'und'? Does any word have three double letters? (underground and bookkeeper). But some were outright stupid: What word becomes shorter when you add two letters to it? What abbreviation has more syllables than the full form? (shorter and WWW)

Then there was nark. Garg asserts that nark and pince-nez each derive from the Indo-European root nas- , meaning nose. This I did not buy. Narc meaning stool pigeon is a clipping of narcotics agent, isn't it? But my snark was ill-founded, because there is a British English word nark, distinct from Usan narc. Merriam-Webster isn't as certain of its etymology as Garg is, but I had to smooth out my sneer and that I did not like. Oh well. I can still complain about the forcedly jocular tone.

Erikka says

This book would have been better if it weren't for a few annoying things. First, the author kept making stupid jokes that weren't funny; maybe if I was in conversation with him I'd laugh, but his humor didn't translate to text. Second, the book was frenetic in its structure; there'd be some etymology, then all of a sudden a list of terms, then a random aside, then back to etymology. It was really hard to get into a rhythm when reading it. Finally, it didn't always teach me etymologies that were useful. I assume the book is British, which explains some of the manifold terms and idioms I've never heard here in the states, but others were archaic terms, or ones that only linguists would know the meaning or proper usage of. I would have liked to see more etymologies for more common English words. And not what he determined to be "common" words, which had etymologies that the average high schooler knows (if not younger people).

The last chapter, which explained how the root ProtoIndoEuropean language gave us so many disparate words that have the same common root, was extremely cool. There were other random selections scattered throughout that were interesting, but not enough to save my opinion of the work as a whole.

Rebekah says

I had such high expectations for this book by Anu Garg, who sends me A-Word-A-Day e-mails (and who's a vegan), but it was mostly fluff. The kind of people who are interested in this kind of book already know all the stuff of substance that's included, and the rest is random samplings of words organized by uninteresting and obvious categories (food, places, people). I haven't given up on him though; I just ordered his Word-A-Day book from 2003, so we'll see.

Kirsti says

Fun book about unusual words.

What do Miss Manners, Elmo, and baseball player Rickey Henderson have in common? They are *illeists*--people who refer to themselves in the third person. (Henderson left this message on his manager's voicemail: "Kevin, this is Rickey, calling on behalf of Rickey.") In contrast, using the "royal we" or the "editorial we" is *nosism.*

An incompetent critic is a *criticaster*.

A bilingual person is a *diglot.*

Having a sensitivity for what is correct language is *sprachgefuhl.*

Affected use of archaic language is *godwottery.*

And a *millihelen* is a facetious unit of measurement--the amount of beauty needed to launch one ship.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

The Word a Day eMail and newsletter are welcome deliveries into my inbox. The two previous Word a Day books are already on my bookshelf, and when I heard about this one, I had to have it as well.
This book is a delightful collection of some of the lives and origins of words. Why, I wonder, is the word ‘prepone’ in everyday use in India, but not elsewhere? Most of us have had meetings either preponed or postponed but few of us used preponed instead of ‘brought forward’.

My personal favourite word in this collection (today, anyway) is ‘resistentialism’. This is the theory that inanimate objects demonstrate hostile behaviour towards us. A theory? No, I think it is irrefutably true. As I browse through the book, I see some old favourites such as ‘oleaginous’. If I was a musician, I would undoubtedly be aware that a hemidemisemiquaver describes an eighth of a quaver.
There are some neat little puzzles in the book as well: What is the only state in the USA that has the whole USA in it?

If you enjoy the wonderful world of words, you may wish to make space for this book on your bookshelf.

Julia says

Want to know what the word “easel” and a Dutch donkey have in common? Or what to call the sweet smell after the first spring rain? Or why if you tell a Frenchman you’re “blessed,” he’ll probably run for some gauze?

Then this is the book for you, my word nerd friends. Written by the creator of the A.Word.A.Day e-newsletter*, this gleeful guide to all things etymological explores the “hidden lives” and “strange origins” of seemingly ordinary (and not-so-seemingly ordinary) words.

Thankfully, the book’s author keeps all that information--which could easily become as musty and dusty as an old book binding--fun and fresh by maintaining an upbeat tone and peppering his text with 77 questions

of wordplay and trivia. He also divides his information into themed chapters with cutesy headings such as:

• Dickensian Characters Who Became Words
• Streets That Became Metaphors
• Words to Describe People: Insults
• It’s All a Myth
• Lexicographer, There Is a Fly in My Language!

The end result? An etymology book that’s actually entertaining--or, at least, as entertaining as an etymology book can ever be. All-in-all, a pretty fun read.

* Who the hell is still doing e-newsletters? Seriously.
