

The Dump of Words

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Irish lexicographer, Diarmaid Ó Muirithe, was recently described as 'a scavenger in the dump of words.' This is not a particularly flattering description of one's occupation but it is precisely what I feel when find myself scrambling through any one of a number of national and regional dictionaries and books of slang¹ for the answers to questions asked of the New Zealand Dictionary Centre.

The Dictionary Centre was set up in 1997 as a joint venture between Victoria University of Wellington and Oxford University Press to carry on the work begun by Harry Orsman with his *Dictionary of New Zealand English*. Under Professor Graeme Kennedy of School of the Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, it was charged with maintaining and expanding the Orsman database, preparing and publishing dictionaries and related work, and carrying out further research on New Zealand English.

This year, two Fellowships have been established. These were awarded to Dianne Bardsley, whose interest is in rural words and slang (e.g. *sally-bush* for *matagouri*) and John Macalister who is interested in how Maori words are being used in English. (A good example is the use of *whakapapa* in this recent *Listener* quote: 'Antinori wines sit comfortably on the most salubrious wine lists in Europe and North America where they command prices in keeping with the Marchesi Piero Antinori's 600-year whakapapa in the wine business.')

There is no doubt that people are interested in words. That is shown by Max Cryer's Saturday morning time-slot on National Radio, Frank Haden's newspaper columns, the numerous nit-picking but sometimes erudite letters to the newspapers about the use of words, and the queries we get at the Dictionary Centre. These tend to be of two categories — 'Is this a new word?' or 'Why isn't this word in *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*?

The answer to the second question is simple. Either it is already in the Oxford Dictionary in precisely that sense — they haven't checked it out in the 20-volume edition — or it was missed by Harry Orsman and his team.

But new words do appear frequently and people find new meanings for old words and we want to keep recording these. After all, there will be a

¹ Some of the more important of these dictionaries, apart from the twenty-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* itself, are the *Australian National Dictionary*, the *Australian Macquarie Dictionary*, *South African English*, the *Scottish National Dictionary*, the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, the six-volume *English Dialect Dictionary*, and the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang* which is now in its second volume and up to the letter G.

revised Orsman in due course. Most of the 'revisions' will be either new or changed meanings for existing words but also more and more Maori words are being used in English writing and occasionally really new words are invented. Here are some recent words or phrases which have made us prick up our ears.

Here is a good example of a changed meaning. The word '*bolter*' originally meant a fugitive from justice (1699) or an animal that 'bolted away' — and was quickly adopted in Australia (1832) for escaped convicts. It later came to be attached to a woman who 'bolted' from marriage — the narrator's mother in Nancy Mitford's *The Pursuit of Love* left her husband

and subsequently ran away so often, and with so many different people, that she became known to her family and friends as the Bolter.

The sense of *bolting away* gave rise to the image of a competitor, not necessarily an outsider, bolting away, not to escape, but to win — athletes and racehorses *bolted in* when they cleared out from the field.

More recently it has been applied by New Zealand sports columnists to an unexpected selection, someone with only an outsider's chance who comes home.

There would be polite applause when the certainties — Colin Meads, Graham Mourie, Andy Haden — were named, and whistles and shouts when a bolter was chosen. [1999 *Listener* 5 June 21]

Arguably, she was more genuine in this because, unlike most of the MPs in the House today, there was not a bolter's chance of her making Parliament at the time she signed up for Mana Motuhake. [1999 *Listener* 12 June 15]

A quick but useful way of testing whether a word came from overseas — TV programmes or the commentary boxes at international sports events are likely sources — is whether it appears on the Internet. (The Google search machine seems particularly good for Antipodean words). If all of the *www* addresses using it include the component *nz*, one can be fairly sure it has a local provenance. If, however, other national sources are indicated, one is back scavenging through published sources to see where the word might have originated.

The recent introduction of the *varroa* bee mite (*Varroa jacobsoni*) prompted such a search. Bearing in mind the recent acceptance into the New Zealand vocabulary of the word *bonamia* for the oyster parasite, originally identified as *Bonamia ostreae*, *varroa* seemed a likely new recruit — the growing trend, when new and obscure and usually very small creatures hit the news, is to coin a popular name from the scientific name². *Bonamia*, from the oyster

² The media use of scientific names is particularly bad which is a pity because the scientific protocols governing their use are very clear and very simple. The binomial nomenclature which is used allows any plant or animal, including the minutest, to be precisely named by only two words, the generic name and the specific name — *Albus albus* to use the customary example. This is analogous to someone being called John Smith — the differences being that the surname — the generic name — comes first and there may be many John Smiths but science allows only one *Albus albus*.

parasite *Bonamia ostreae*, came into our vocabulary in 1986 and does not seem to have been used elsewhere before that date.

Since the quotas, and since the bonamia virus destroyed an estimated 700 million oysters, you'd be lucky now to get two or three feeds. [1999 *Listener* 20 Nov. 94]

The office is now being painted a creamy pink... Like the inside of a bonamia-ridden oyster. [1992 *Dominion* 1 May 8]

However, it quickly became obvious that the bee-mite is well-known as *varroa* in countries from Europe to North America, as well as New Zealand.

Varroa also represents a threat to New Zealand's clean, green image internationally... Inevitably the varroa scare has again raised questions about border control... Many beekeepers are blaming the arrival of verroa [sic] on lax border security. [2000 *Evening Post* 18 Apr. 4]

A totally New Zealand concept is Kelly Browne. Derived from the advertising campaign depicting a party getting out of hand, 'party at Kelly Browne's' is entering the vocabulary as a shorthand for just that concept.

There's a party at Kelly Browne's place, or at least that's what more than 400 young people who converged on a front lawn near Palmerston North on Saturday night thought. [2000 *Dominion* 15 March 9]

[Hdg] Kelly parties again. Police were dealing with up to 150 teenagers who had been turned away from a birthday party in Tawa last night. Porirua senior Sergeant Steve Whitehead described it as 'Kelly Brown syndrome'. [2000 *Dominion* 25 March 3]

[Hdg] 'Kelly Browne' party draws teens... Hundreds of teenagers turned up at a Tawa party last night after it was broadcast on a radio station, creating a 'Kelly Browne situation' police say. [2000 *Evening Post* 25 Mar. 3]

And finally, was the property ever used for a party thrown by Kelly Browne or anyone who ever had anything remotely to do with Kelly Browne. [2000 *Sunday Star-Times* 26 Mar. A8]

Some older concepts resurface when particular events reach anniversary status or some new event triggers their resurrection. *Gatekeeper* had some vogue for a Cabinet 'razor gang' or financial oversight committee only a few years back and has resurfaced as a parliamentary mentor or minder.

[He] said Miss Clark was right to suggest Ms Hobbs should hire a policy gatekeeper if she was concerned about the first-time minister's performance. [2000 *Dominion* 21 Apr. 1]

It has also turned up as a verb in another context.

Both names should be italicised, the generic or *first name* should be capitalised, and the *second* or specific name should be entirely lower case. The person who first formally described the species is entitled to name it and the name is latinised. It may be named after a distinctive character, (*Albus magnus*, the great *Albus*; *Albus naso*, the nosy *Albus*) or a place (*Albus haurakiensis*), or a colleague or the person who first found the species (*Albus smithi*) or was in some way connected with its finding. Or the scientist's wife or daughter or partner or whoever.

They continue to gatekeep (make it difficult for beneficiaries to see staff), [and] fail to inform people what their correct entitlements are. [2000 *Dominion* 17 June 3]

One concept which is popularly regarded as a totally New Zealand icon — to misuse another much misused word — is the *tall poppy syndrome*. Despite a prevailing idea that this is something only New Zealanders suffer from, there are phrases for the same phenomenon in other languages — for example, Japanese — and, horror upon horrors, whereas the earliest New Zealand reference we have so far is 1992, an Australian author was using as far back as 1902. Perhaps it is just that we believe that we are the world's best exponents. Whatever the reason, it has recently spawned a new set of words.

Maybe it's time for a kinder, gentler variety of tall poppydom. [1998 *Listener* 7 Nov. 58]

It is being used a verb

What this conference shows is you have a lot of interest in entrepreneurship. Don't tall poppy it, let them go, let them do their own thing. [2000 *Sunday Star-Times* 20 Feb. E1]

Orsman recorded *tall popped*

The Maori partners... are being 'tall popped' by other New Zealanders. [1991 *Evening Post* 21 Sep. 2]

and we now have *tall-poppyism*

The flip-side of tall-poppyism is a gracious good-sportiness that sees both winner and loser applauded as they depart and return. [2000 *Listener* 4 March 24]

and *tall poppiness*

He actually used his tall poppiness to commit his crimes, by telling his victims that because of his high status no one would believe them. [2000 *Sunday Star-Times* 25 June A10]

The use of Ngati as a sign of a collective noun is gaining prominence. The *Dictionary of NZ English* listed a number of these 'tribes' — the Ngati D.B., Ngati Drongo, Ngati Naughty, Ngati-One, Ngati Pakeha, and the dismissive Ngati Blow. New additions to the list include *Ngati Walkabout*, a WWII company of the Maori Battalion.

'There were four companies, A Company... B. Company.. C. Company, the Cowboys and D. Company the Ngati Walkabout.' [2000 *TV1 Waka Huia* 21 Apr.]

A few years back we had *Ngati Koru Club*; now we have *Ngati Cappucino* for Wellingtonians.

Wellington residents — the Ngati Cappucino — with their inner-city apartments and faux-European café society, claim to represent a burgeoning culture while slagging off the bogan enclave right next door in the Hutt Valley. [2000 *Dominion* 18 May 11]

Radio and television programme have provided another set of words. *Shortland Street* is referred to as *Shorters*, *Shortys*, or *Shortie Street* while Bruce

Mason's play, '*End of the Golden Weather*', is hauled in to help when people wish to involve nostalgia for the fifties — not a bad time, actually.

The first murder of a tourist in this country, it seemed to signal the real end of the golden weather — that long postwar period when people left doors unlocked and lone women hitchhikers trustingly accepted lifts from male strangers. [2000 *Listener* 15 January 10]

New Zealanders have a largely rosy view of the fifties, the Golden Weather nostalgic view. [2000 *Dominion* 17 June 28]

Roger Hall's *Gliding On* is acquiring similar status.

It wasn't so long ago that Wellington was the 'Gliding On' Capital, where grey-cardy-walk-shorts-wearing public servants took their lunch in a paper bag to work then travell [sic] home to the suburbs leaving the central city dead by 6 pm. [2000 *Evening Post* 24 June 11]

The 'o' ending on abbreviated words is increasing. For years we have had *journo* and *muso*, *dero* and *rego* and recently we have noted *droppo* (dropout), *hospo* (hospitality set), *ambo* (ambulance officer) and *berko* (berserk), which may all be Australian in origin, like their ending.

One celebrated afternoon question time, she literally wagged her finger at National's shadow minister Wyatt Creech and went berko. [2000 *Listener* 26 Feb. 15]

Cricket has produced some useful words for sports commentators. *One-dayers* are now played internationally, and *day-nighters* are becoming more common as more sports grounds upgrade their floodlighting.

That'll be the test of the stadium — that's a day-nighter. [2000 *Radio NZ Sports Commentary* 8 Jan.]

Probably, these came originally from Australia or England. A recent All Black defeat has acquainted us with the term *mongrel* which may have come from Australian Rugby League or from Australian Rules.

But hang on, you cry, we need a bit more mongrel at the top level... Fair call, but what the Hurricanes are doing isn't 'mongrel' rugby. Mongrel rugby is putting in big hits. Not taking a backward step. Sorting out opposition foul play the old-fashioned way, rather than bleating to an incompetent referee to do something. [2000 *Evening Post* Flair 2 May 28]

and this is already spreading from sport.

Respected creative writer Bill Manhire has put it another way. He suggests that New Zealand contains a touch of the mongrel; that contrary to Tourism Board advertising, we are not 100 per cent pure. [2000 *Evening Post* 13 Apr. 4]

And a lovely coinage, but probably a oncer, is the reference to New Zealand as *Lomuland*.

Nor is there exactly a powerful incentive for parent banks based in Sydney or London to make a big effort in li'l ol' Lomuland. [1999 *Listener* 4 Dec. 18]

From the business and political spheres we have a most awful word — incentivisation — redeemed for me only by a recent definition.

The new catchphrase was *incentivisation* — which, translated into plain English, meant something like: 'Give those arty types everything they ask for and let them spend it how they like? Get out of here. They can sweat for it.' [2000 *Listener* 26 Feb.36]

Contemporary claims recognises the claims made by Maori for rights which arise from later discoveries (such as radio spectra), as opposed to *historical claims* — e.g. hunting and fishing rights.

He says also that the Prime Minister has told him that Government needs to figure out how to deal with contemporary claims. [2000 *NZ Infotech Weekly* 22 May No. 442/4]

The Waitangi Tribunal also lists *conceptual claims*.

Claims fall into the following three broad categories: historical claims (e.g., past government actions); contemporary claims (e.g., current government policies or practices); and conceptual claims (e.g., the 'ownership' of natural resources). [2000 *Rural Bulletin: Waitangi Tribunal*, April]

Meanwhile, banks have introduced *honour fees*, a nice way to turn the idea of paying for services on its head.

One of the most initially shocking [fees] is the honour fee introduced by ANZ in June. The way it works, on certain accounts, is that for every day the account is improperly overdrawn — i.e. if you haven't previously arranged an overdraft facility — the first two transactions that day each attract a \$15 penalty. ... 'Fundamentally,' Shaw points out, 'there's no reason for a customer to incur an honour fee. An overdraft facility costs you less a year [\$28] than two honour fees.' [1999 *Listener* 4 Dec. 20]

Other terms noted include *worm farm*, an object lesson in how to sell worms at a profit — give them an expensive plastic home. A few years back, when fastPOST was introduced and e-mail was new, we had *snailmail* for ordinary letters. Now we have *granny mail* for letters posted by ordinary citizens, as opposed to business mail.

Viewers don't like to be thought of as timeslot aggregates, any more than posters of humble, non-business letters like to be thought of as 'granny mail' by NZ Post. [2000 *Listener* 18 March 21]

DIY (Do-It-Yourself) is not disappearing as fast as BYO (*Bring Your Own*) which was downgraded by changes in liquor legislation but *do-upper* persists in land-agents' advertisement for a house needing considerable loving care and attention. No doubt that will still be around when the *baby-bippers* reach maturity.

From an older age-group, who perhaps indulged in power-walking, until pregnancy intervened, we now have *power prammers* and *power pramming*.

[Hdg] Power Prammers Invade Battle Hill. Battle Hill and several other Wellington Regional walks are considered some of the top trails for Power Prammers... Power Pramming — *Walks in Wellington and the Wairarapa* details 35 walks around the greater Wellington region. [2000 *Elements* No.3 April-May 3]

Words from the playground and the teen-age population are more inventive than most. *Skanky*, *skody* (which Professor Laurie Bauer suggests is possibly a fusing of *scungy* and *grody*), and *tantie* were noted recently.

Hollywood, it has to be said, is fairly skanky. The tourist-trap shops are skanky, the museums are skanky, and The (skanky) Church of (skanky) Scientology owns some fairly large (and skanky) buildings down Hollywood Boulevard. [2000 *lemon* 3: 26]

Had it been presaged even two years ago, there would have been major tanties. [1999 *Listener* 18 Dec. 15]

And, not new, but worth noting, from our Polynesian citizens, we have *fob* (fresh off the boat) spawning such useful terms as *fobby*

Then with FOB shirt on and my lavalava wrapped, I headed with my crew to the Hawaiian night. [2000 *Salient* 1 May 24]

We were very fobby — fresh off the boat. [1998 *Radio NZ*]

My prize for the best coinage of the year so far, though, goes to the letter-writer who suggested that the new Honours List should be called the *Gonzo Awards*.

In comparison, the Government's Order of New Zealand (Gonzo) system is a little-fish, little-pond republican-backed set of awards based on near-zero heritage. [2000 *Independent Herald* 2 May 4]

The Centre invites questions about New Zealand words and is interested in any new words, new meanings or new slang. If you have queries or information to offer us, you can e-mail us at nzdc@vuw.ac.nz or write to us at The New Zealand Dictionary Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, P.O. Box 600, Wellington.