# ANGLICA

## An International Journal of English Studies | 24/2

UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

*Bernhard Diensberg*
University of Bonn (Professor emeritus)

# The Origin of *Aroint* and Other *-oint*-Words in English

**Abstract**

Regarding the word form AROINT, I am going to propose an etymological base for it in the group of French loanwords of the structure OIN + consonant. As far as verbal loans are concerned, the root *-oint* can either stand for the 3rd pers. sing. pres. ind. or for the past participle of Old French verbs of the type *poindre* 'to pierce, prick; to sting, bite' (AND[1]: *poindre*), *uindre, oindre* 'to anoint; to rub, smear' (AND[1]: *oindre*). Apart from a short Bibliography, the Appendix contains a selection of illustrative material.

The phonological reception of Old French *o/u* + palatalized *n* (also referred to as *n mouillé*) in loanwords from French has been discussed at length in my habilitationsschrift (Diensberg 1985, §2./90–125). The so-called *oint*-words go back to Latin *-unctus* p.ppl. of verbs ending in *-ungere*, i.e. *iungere* 'to join', *ungere* 'to anoint' and *pungere* 'to pierce', corresponding to the Old French infinitives *oindre* and *poindre* with their past participles *iunctus, unctus* and *punctus* which ultimately appear in the source language as (*an*)*oint* and *point* from which the loanverbs *join*, (*an*)*oint* and *point* are derived (Diensberg 1985, 108). There is an alternation between forms ending in a nasal consonant and derived from the present stem, e.g. OF *joindre*, present stem *joi(g)n-* yielding English *to join*, as opposed to the noun *joint*, derived from the Old French past participle. English *coin* v./n. and the variant *quoin* n. are of different origin and go back to Latin *cuneus* wedge (Diensberg 1985, 92f.).

In fact, both *-oint-* and *-oin*-words form a rather small subgroup consisting of *joint, anoint* and *point* and combinations to which *conjoint* adj. and *appoint* and *disappoint* should be added (Muthmann 2002, 276c-277a). The same is true of the *-oin*-words such as *coin* n., *join* v. and derived *subjoin* v. and *adjoin* v.; the noun *loin* and combinations such as *sirloin* n. and, last but not least, isolated *groin* n. (Muthmann 177a-177b).

The lexeme under scrutiny is of disputed origin as Professor Anatoly Liberman shows in a recent article conveniently entitled "Shakespeare's *aroint thee,*

*witch, for the Last Time?*" (Liberman 2014, 55–62). The word or rather the phrase is attested only twice and exclusively in Shakespeare's works in a context addressing witches using the phrase *aroint/aroynt thee, witch,* used as kind of an imprecation, usually glossed 'begone' (Liberman 2014, 55). The word occurs only in *Macbeth* (I.3; 5) and *King Lear* (III.4; 113). According to Liberman, "the greater part of the scholarly literature devoted to *aroint* predates the 1870s."

The author gives a critical overview of the relevant literature showing that no hypothesis by earlier scholars has found general acceptance (Liberman 2014, 55ff.). "An often repeated hypothesis connects *aroint* with *anoint* since witches are related to perform many supernatural acts by means of unguents," nor can *aroint* be regarded as a dissimilation of *anoint*. Eventually, Liberman makes a good case for the first element of the phrase *aroint/aroynt thee, witch* going back to the *rowan-tree* (Ger. *Eberesche*) which in popular belief is considered to offer protection against witches. However, this hypothesis is not without its problems.

I would like to tentatively propose an Old French etymon and start from *aroint/aroynt* and its alleged variants *arongt, aroune/arowne*, and *arunt* (Liberman 2014, 55ff.). To begin with, *arongt* is undoubtedly a spelling variant of *aroint* since <ong> may be used for <oñ>, phonetically /onj/ (type III), which in turn alternates with /oin/ (type I) (see Diensberg 1985, 32). As has been stated at the outset (see Abstract), the phonological reception of Old French *o/u* + palatalized *n* (also referred to as *n mouillé*) in loanwords from French has been discussed at length in my habilitationsschrift (Diensberg 1985, § 2./90–125). Consequently, I am going to connect the above forms with OF *roigner/roindre* to cut or lop trees (see OED[3]: *roin v.*[1]) or rather with prefixed *aroigner/aroindre* (see Diensberg 1985, 111, 113). There is OF *röoignier* 'to cut or lop trees' (T/L VIII: 1464), from L *\*rotundīre* (FEW:X: 517b). OF (*a*)*roindre* regularly has (*a*)*roint* 3rd pers. sing. pres. ind. and (*a*)*roint* functioning as the past participle of the French verb, an assumption which would justify an unattested loan-verb *\*(a)roint*; see *-point* 3rd pers. sing. pres. ind. and see *point* past participle of OF *poindre* (Diensberg 1985, 107) and see the etymological discussion under *point v.* (OED[3]).

Thus *arunt* features ME short *u* and *aroune* shows ME long *u*. The absence of the dental consonant in the last word is not infrequent and may be due to either assimilation or may have been modelled on strong participles in *-oun*, e.g. ME *fon, fun, foune* for *found* p.ppl. (see MED, s.v. *finden*). Starting from a root such as *\*roin-* in the above word family, an unetymological or excrescent *-t* after a final nasal consonant is anything but rare with loanwords from French (see Diensberg 2008, 42–47). As loanwords such as *join* (Diensberg 1985) as opposed to (*an*) *oint* and *point* (Diensberg 1985, 108) demonstrate, there is indeed an alternation of the type *-oin* (derived from the present stem of Old verbs on *-oindre* and *-oint*, derived from the past participle of that verb group.

As I have shown in my brief treatise, there is frequent variation between /oi, ui/ and long and short *u* in French loanwords ending in a nasal consonant (Diensberg 1985, 32, 90–125).

From a semantic point of view, the verb *aroint* rendered by *cut*, *lop*, etc., combined with *thee* (*witch*) could be easily interpreted as an injunction to disappear, corresponding to *begone*, or simply rendered by *beat it*!

## References

### (a) Dictionaries

Barnhart, Robert K., and Sol Steinmetz. 1988. *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* Bronxville/N.Y.: H. W. Wilson. (BDE)

Dubois, Jean, Henri Mitterand, and Albert Dauzat. 1998. *Dictionnaire étymologique et historique du français*. First published 1964. Reprinted as *Dictionnaire d'Étymologie*. Paris: Larousse, 2001. (DEHF)

Kurath, Hans, Sherman M. Kuhn, and Robert E. Lewis. 1952–2002. *Middle English Dictionary.* Ann Arbor/Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. (MED)

Liberman, Anatoly. 2010. *A Bibliography of English Etymology*. *Sources and Wordlist*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (BEE), reviewed by Bernhard Diensberg, in: *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* (IJGLSA) 16.2: Fall 2011, 255–277.

Onions, C. T. 1966. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (ODEE)

Simpson, John A., and E. S. C. Weiner. 1989. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edition, prepared from *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED[2]) being a corrected re-issue of a *New English Dictionary* (NED), edited by James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, William A. Craigie and Charles T. Onions. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1884–1928, combined with a *Supplement to the OED* (OEDS), edited by Robert W. Burchfield, 1972–1986 and reset with corrections, revisions and additional vocabulary, 20 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press. A third edition (OED[3]) is now in progress. (OED[2]), (OED[3])

Stone, L. W., Rothwell, William, and T. B. W. Reid. 1977–1992. *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (AND[1]), London: Publications of the Modern Humanities Research Association. A second edition of the AND by William Rothwell et al. is now underway. So far letters A–M have been revised which will be quoted as AND[2], while the unrevised letters N–Z will be quoted as AND[1].

Terasawa, Yoshio. 1997. *The Kenkyusha Dictionary of English Etymology*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha. (KDEE)

Tobler, Adolf, Erhard Lommatzsch, and Hans Helmut Christmann. 1925–2002. *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*. 11 vols. Berlin and Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner. (T/L).

## (b) Monographs and manuals

Diensberg, Bernhard. 1985. *Untersuchungen zur phonologischen Rezeption romanischen Lehnguts im Mittel- und Frühneuenglischen. Die Lehnwörter mit mittelenglisch oi/ui und ihre phonologische Rezeption*. Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik 268, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Fouché, Pierre. 1967. *Morphologie historique du français. Le Verbe* (2nd edition). Paris: Klincksieck.

Pope, M. K. 1934. *From Latin to Modern French with especial consideration of Anglo-Norman*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Reprinted 1952ff.

Muthmann, Gustav. 2002. *Reverse English Dictionary. Based on Phonological and Morphological Principles*. Berlin New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

## (c) Articles and review articles

Diensberg, Bernhard. 2008. "Minor Changes, Alternations, Irregularieties." *North-Western European Language Evolution* (NOWELE) 53: 29–64.

Diensberg, Bernhard. 2011. "Minor Problems in the Integration of Anglo-French loanwords." *North-Western European Language Evolution* (NOWELE), vol. 60/61: 109–145.

Diensberg, Bernhard. 2015. "ESCHEW and ASKEW ASKANCE and ASKANT." To appear in *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia* (SEC) 20 (2015)

Liberman, Anatoly. 2014. "Shakespeare's *aroint thee*, witch for the Last Time?" *Neuphilogische Mitteilungen* (NM) 115, 2014: 55–62.

Liberman, Anatoly (forthcoming). "A Few Samples from the *A*-Section of the Prospective *Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (*ache*, *akimbo*, *aloof*, and *askance*)." To appear in *Studia Etymologica Cracoviensia* (SEC) 19 (2014)

## Appendix

**anoint** *v.* (c1303, BDE)

ME *anointen, enointen* 'to smear, daub', adapted from *enoint, enuint* p.ppl. of AF *enoindre, enaindre, enhoindre, enuindre, enuingdre; enointer*; *inoindre* 'to bedaub; to grease; to smear (with ointment); to anoint; to soak in oil; to sprinkle with; (fig.) to beguile' (AND[2]: *enoindre*), from L *inunguere* 'to smear on'; cf. the latinism UNGUENT *n.*; see ModF *oindre* (DMD 2001: 521a); see MED, s.v. *enointen* v., also *anointen, anynten*, etc.; see Diensberg 1985: 104f., 107, 108; cf. also OINT *v.* and NOINT *v.*; (BDE: 37b; KDEE: 48b; ODEE: 39a)

NB: the lowering of AF/non-CF en-, em- > an-, am- in pretonic position is attested in numerous loanwords in (Early) Middle English manuscripts, e.g. MS Cleopatra of the *Ancrene Riwle* (c1225-30) – see E. J. Dobson, ed., 1972, XC – XCIII & footnotes. Under main stress Anglo-French/non-Central French dialects show the development of an-, am- (from this source) to aun-, aum- and eventually to on-, om- as relevant loanwords in (Early) Middle English manuscripts testify - see (Diensberg 1988, 51–63).

**oint** *v.* 'anoint' (c1375, BDE) (a1382, OED[3]: oint *v.*)
ME *ointe(n), ointe(n)*, adapted from AF *oint, uint* p.ppl. (derived from L *unctum* p.ppl. of *unguere*) of *uindre, oindre, hoyndre; oynder* 'to anoint; to rub, smear' (AND[1]: *uindre*), from L *unguere* 'to smear'. See ModF *oindre* 'to anoint' (DMD: 521a, 1120) and *oint* 'unction' (DMD: 521a, s.v. *oindre*, 15th c.); cf. the latinism UNGUENT *n.*; see Diensberg 1985: 104f., 107, 108; cf. also ANOINT *v.* & NOINT *v.* and OINTMENT *n.*; (BDE: 37b, s.v. *anoint*; KDEE: 48b; ODEE: 39a)

**point**[1] *v.* (c1300, BDE) (c1374-75, OED[3]: *point v.*[1])
ME *pointed* 'having a sharp end', also *pointe(n)* 'to insert the mark of punctuation' (a1376), also 'to prick, stab' (a1400), adapted from AF *pointer, ponter, punter* 'to sharpen; to embroider' (AND[1]: *pointer*[1]), derived from *point* p.ppl. of *poindre* 'to pierce', cognate with point *n.* (< L *punctum*); see POINT *n.*; cf. ModF *pointer* 'to pierce' (DMD: 594b, s.v. *point*, 1180) and ModF *poindre* 'to stab, pierce' (DMD: 594a, 11th c.). (BDE: 811b, s.v. *point* n.; KDEE: 1084b, s.v. *point* n.; ODEE: 692a, s.v. *point* n.)
Nota 1: the role of *peint* 3rd pers. sing. pres./ *point* 3rd pers. sing. pres., etc. for the verbal character (Fouché 1967: 67, 77, 133, s.v. *peindre* & 67, 77, 221, s.v. *poindre*)
Nota 2: OF *-aindre, -eindre, -oindre* inf., *-aint, -eint, -oint* p.ppl. will either be integrated as -AIN (*complain* v.), -OIN (*join* v.) if derived from the present stem *-ain(d)-re* and *-oin(d)-re* or as -AINT (*paint* v.), -OINT (*point* v.) if derived from the past participle *-aint(e), -einte* or *-ointe* respectively.
Nota 3: all verbs in this subgroup ult. reflect past participles of the type *-aint(e), -einte* (< L *-inctum*) of verbs in *-aindre, -eindre* (< L *-ingere*), although the source language had already formed verbs in *-ainter, -einter* (< L *-inctīre*), e.g. *depeinter, *peinter* (see above).
OED[3] *paint v.*: The word was prob. earliest adopted in Middle English as the past participle, leading to the adoption of the form in *-t* as the present stem form also, although the present stem is in fact first attested only very slightly later than the past participle, as are past participle forms in *-ed*; cf. also the Anglo-Norman variant *peinter* and Old French (rare) *peintier, pointier*. (Cf. also earlier PAINT-ING n. and discussion s.v.) For a somewhat similar development, see ATTAINT

v. For the stem form which would normally be expected, see COMPLAIN v., DISTRAIN v., etc.

**roin** *v.* (arch.) 'to prune trees' (not listed in OED³)
ME *roine(n)*, adapted from AF *roigner, rogner, roiner, roinner; reoigner; ronger, rounger*, *runger, runjer* 'to gnaw; to cut (hair); to clip (coinage); to ruminate on, ponder; (of animals) to chew the cud' (AND¹: *roigner*); see also OF *röoignier, rëoignier, röeignier, roignier* 'to trim, cut, lop' (T/L VIII: 1464), from L *\*retundīre* for *rotundīre* 'to round off', from *rotundus* 'round'. Cf. ModF *rogner* 'to cut down' (DEHF: 673a, *reoignier* 'to round off by cutting, shear' 1131; to cut 13ᵗʰc.). See related PRUNE³ *v.* 'to cut/prune trees; REFERENCE: (Diensberg 1985, 111, 113); MED: *roinen* (v.(1)) [OF *röoignier, roignier,* AF *roinner*.]
(a) To trim away (putrified matter from a sore); ?trim (the edges of a wound) c1350(a1333); (b) to pare away the edge of (a coin), clip a1475(?a1430)

**OED²: *aroint | aroynt,* v.**
Pronunciation: /əˈrɔɪnt/
Etymology: Origin unknown. Used by Shakespeare, whence by some modern writers.
The origin of Shakespeare's *aroynt* has been the subject of numerous conjectures, none of which can be said to have even a *prima facie* probability. (Compare also *arunt* v.) The following passages are usually cited as pointing to the same word: Ray *North C. Wds.* (1691) has: *Ryntye*, by your leave, stand handsomely. As '*Rynt you, witch*, quoth Bessie Locket to her mother'; Proverb. *Cheshire*. Thoresby *Lett. to Ray* 1703 (Yorkshire Words) has: '*Ryndta*, used to cows to make them give way, and stand in their stalls or booyses.'
In parts of Cheshire (and ? Lancashire) *ou* /aʊ/ is pronounced *ī, ȳ* /aɪ/ —i.e. /aʊ/ has been umlauted to /aʏ/ , and delabialized to /aɪ/ ; elsewhere it is reduced to /aə/ , /a(ə)/ , or /aː/ —so that *round* becomes *rȳnd*. *Rynd-ta!* is thus merely a local pronunciation of 'round thee, = move round, move about!' The local nature, the meaning, and form of the phrase, seem all opposed to its identity with Shakespeare's *aroynt*.

1.  In aroint thee! (? verb in the imperative, or interjection) meaning apparently: Avaunt! Begone!
    1608 Shakespeare King Lear xi. 113 He met the night mare..bid her, O light and her troth plight and arint [1623 aroynt] thee, witch arint thee.
    *a*1616 Shakespeare (1623) i. Iii. 5 Aroynt thee, Witch, the rumpefed Ronyon cryes.
    1816 Scott Antiquary I. vi. 117 Aroint thee, witch! wouldst thou poison my guests with thy infernal decoctions?

1831 P. Heidiger Didoniad ix. 248 Aroynt, thou lingering, long-drawn mortal Strife.

2.    Used by Robert and Elizabeth Browning as a vb.: To drive away with an execration.
1850 E. B. Browning To Flush xviii, Whiskered cats aroynted flee.
1878 R. Browning *Two Poets of Croisic* in La Saisiaz & Two Poets of Croisic 156 That Humbug, whom thy soul aroynts.
1880 R. Browning *Pietro* in Dramatic Idyls 22 Aroynt the churl who prophesies

**s.v. OED²: †aˈrunt, v.**

Etymology: Etymol. unknown.

*Obs.* To rail at, revile, scold, rate; or ? to drive away. (If the latter is the sense, cf. Shakespeare's aroynt v.)

1399 Rich. Redeless iii. 221 ? Arounted [MS. has Arountyd] ffor his ray [= array, *dress*] and rebuked ofte.

1496 Dives & Pauper (de Worde) vii. iv. 280 Make the plesaunt in speche to the congregacyon of poore folke..and yelde thy dette & answere peasable thynges & mekenesse, not to arunt them ne rebuke them ne chyde them.