

sexual abduction of Cephalos by Eos; another, one of the most tantalizing objects in Etruscan art, depicts two naked winged males, one of whom holds what is apparently a dildo, flanking a naked frontal youth.

The largest collection of Etruscan art adorns the Villa Giulia in Rome, a museum entirely devoted to artefacts of this ancient people. The monograph of Otto G. Brendel discusses the major surviving objects.

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## ETYMOLOGY

The discipline of etymology seeks to explain the origin of words, whether they are inherited from a reconstructed parent language, borrowed from a known foreign tongue, or simply invented in historic time. The etymologist examines the earliest attestations of a word, variations in its form, explanatory glosses or comments in early texts, parallels in other languages, and terms derived from the same root or related in meaning to ascertain what was the source of the word. A secondary matter is the history of a word or word family, the changes in meaning or frequency of use over centuries or even millennia, and the role which a particular term may play in the political or cultural life of the speech community to which it belongs, or in the case of international terms, even of the entire world.

The word *lesbian*, for example, serves in all the modern languages of Europe to designate a woman erotically attracted to her own sex; it is derived from the Greek island of Lesbos, where the poetess Sappho lived in the sixth century before our era. *Sodomite*, the term used in medieval Europe for the sinner guilty of unnatural vice, comes from the city of Sodom, which according to Genesis 19 was destroyed by a rain of brimstone and

fire on account of the depravity of its inhabitants. *Bugger*, a word attested in English beginning with the law of Henry VIII in 1533, stems from the Old French *bougre*, "heretic", then "sodomite" and even "usurer," which in turn came from Medieval Latin *Bulgarus*—the name of the Slavic people who called themselves *bŭlgarinŭ*—because their land was a center of the Bogomil heresy akin to the Catharism of Southern France. *Tribade*, the older word for "lesbian" in European languages, came from the Classical Greek *tribein* "to rub," hence tribades were women who obtained erotic satisfaction by friction against each other's bodies. *Homosexual*, by contrast, is a modern term invented by the German-Hungarian translator and bibliographer Károly Mária Kertbeny in 1869 from the Greek *homo*, "same," and Medieval Latin *sexualis*, "sexual," on the model of French *unisexual* and *bisexual* which had been introduced as terms of botany in the 1790s. *Pederast*, a word whose meaning differs from language to language in modern times, is the Classical Greek *paidēastes* which unambiguously denoted "boy-lover."

An ancient doctrine, now discarded, maintained that similarities in the form of words are not accidental, but offer a key to understanding. Thus Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) referred the Latin name of the kite, *milvus*, to *mollis*, "soft, effeminate," attesting to the supposed homosexual proclivities of the bird. The search for such links probably stems from a quasi-magical world view, in which knowledge of the true meanings of words gives the privileged knower control over things.

Such associative techniques, resting on foundations as old as Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, are not unlike folk etymologies, which stem from the effort of naive and uneducated speakers to explain unfamiliar terms by relating them to the lexical core of a language. At times these folk etymologies can lead to the deformation of a word in popular speech which ultimately

finds its way into the literary language. A good example of this in Modern English is *faggot* for "effeminate male homosexual." The folk etymology of this word is that it derives from the male sodomites who were used as *faggots* (bundles of firewood) when witches were burned at the stake. Little does it matter to the folk mind that the word is attested in its homosexual meaning only in American English in 1914, that it comes from the dialectal use of *faggot* (and *fadge*) in the sense of "fat, slovenly woman," and that the penalty for buggery in English law was hanging, not burning at the stake, which was the punishment of heretics until the homosexual monarch James I put an end to the practice. The speaker who knows *faggot* only in its primary meaning (and does not consult such a source as Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*) can accept such an explanation because it matches his imperfect command of the range of senses of the word with his hazy recollection that "in the Middle Ages people were burned at the stake for various crimes that offended the church."

The origin of *dyke* in the sense of "lesbian" (with the variant *bulldyke*) has inspired several folk etymologies, because the exact source of the term is unknown. One of the more fanciful interpretations is that the word is a deformation of Boadicca, the name of the British queen who fought against the Roman invaders. A more recent interpretation of the second syllable of *bulldyke* is that it comes from the American slang expression "to be diked out," presumably in male attire. A possible etymology is that the second element is the word *tyke* in the meaning "bitch," attested in English and other Germanic languages; a *bulldyke* would then be "a bitch who behaves like a bull" (the male animal par excellence). In American English *tyke* has gone its own way to become an endearing expression for a child, hence the organization of lesbian mothers Dykes 'n Tykes.

The English language may lend itself to etymological curiosity and speculation more than others because so much of its vocabulary is foreign, hence the perennial question "What does it mean?," while the native vocabulary is often opaque to the specialist because its origins are lost in the obscure centuries of Middle and Old English. Also, in the sexual realm there has been a long battle between the vulgar terms banned from literature and public life and the learned euphemisms that were created or borrowed so that certain topics could be discussed at all. It is commonly believed that the little "four-letter words" that cannot be used in polite conversation are of Anglo-Saxon origin, when in fact most of them are not attested in the Old English period, and Anglo-Saxon had its own sexual vocabulary, now lost even in the British dialects.

The etymon of a word was supposedly its "true" meaning, but to the professional linguist it is only an earlier meaning or form. In the case of the modern languages most words can be traced to sources attested in medieval and ancient writing, and recent coinages can often be assigned to a particular author who first used them in speech or print. For the general public, literature on "word origins" can be an entertaining set of anecdotes, while for the specialist the discipline of etymology is a clue to problems in cultural history, as words can preserve customs and beliefs of bygone eras even when their primary meaning is lost in the mists of time.

See also *Language and Linguistics*.

Warren Johansson

### EUGENE, PRINCE OF SAVOY (1663–1736)

Austrian general and statesman.

Born the son of Eugène Maurice count of Soissons and Olympia Mancini, a niece of Cardinal Mazarin, Eugene was destined for the clerical profession by Louis XIV,