David Crystal's Edinburgh Linguistry

Linguistry — an 18th-century word for the study of language — is brought out of retirement by David Crystal for the 2007 Book Festival

Author: Do authors become actors, when talking at a bookfest? If they do, they can claim linguistic justification. Author comes from Latin *auctor*, originally from a verb *augere* "to make grow, originate". Actor has the same origin. Both words arrived in the 14th century. Their similar spellings — auctor and actour — caused them often to be confused. This may be why an h was added to the former — we find aucthour, and then author — to help to distinguish them. Author then took off, and generated a whole family of derivatives. In the 16th century we find authorer (meaning an "originator" of something), authorage (we say authorship today), author-craft, authorical (for modern authorial), and authoridate ("to atttribute to an author"). It's a pity some of these have gone. What else are we celebrating at the Edinburgh bookfest but author-craft?

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Queue: When you're queuing for an event, spend a moment to reflect on the history of the word. It was originally a term from heraldry, referring to the tail of a beast. A "ramping Lion queue" is recorded in a 1592 armorial guide. The word came from French, and ultimately from Latin, where *cauda* was a "tail". In the 18th century, queue was applied to a type of hairstyle in which a long plait hangs down behind — a sort of pigtail. Surprisingly, the modern sense is recorded only from the 1830s, and the verb equivalent ("to queue up") only from the 1920s. You are doing a rather recent thing, it seems, when you're queuing. And even more recent is queue-jumping — known only from 1959. Evidently our ancestors were more orderly.

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Story: People tell stories about their stories, at bookfests. It's interesting how the meaning of this word has come full circle. Originally, in the 13th century, stories had to be true: the word was a synonym for "history" — indeed, it came from Latin, *historia*. But very soon it was applied to stories alleged to be true, and then (by the 16th century) to stories that were definitely not true. Today, the original meaning seems to be reasserting itself: I've lost track of the number of historical television programmes called "The story of something-or-other". Maybe it's time to resuscitate the verb use too. In the 16th century, there was a splendid usage: to story forth, meaning "to proclaim the story of". That, it seems to me, is what the Edinburgh Book Festival is all about.

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Literature: It is interesting how the original English meaning of this word is surfacing again. When it arrived in the language, in the 14th century, it had a general sense of "acquaintance with books" or "literary culture" — a sense which the *Oxford English Dictionary* glosses as "now rare and obsolescent". It was overtaken in the 18th century by the familiar modern use — for the written output of professional creative writers. But when we look at the range of Edinburgh bookfest authors, we surely have to conclude that the earliest sense is rare no longer.

PS: Beware the abbreviation lit — as in Eng Lit, lit crit, and chick lit — in earlier centuries. This usage didn't arise until the 1850s. So when we read in 1662 of a writer going into "a litt-hows", he wasn't thinking about books. Lit is also a medieval word for "hue" or "stain". He was going to get some cloth dyed.

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Edinburgh: We are talking about books in the middle of a fortification (or burgh) at a place called Eidyn. Din Eidyn, we read, in a Celtic source from around 600 AD. The name meant "fort of Eidyn". Who he? Possibly Clinog Eitin, a 6th-century king. Possibly not. A later tradition derives the name from the Northumbrian King Edwin, but he lived a century after the first reference. Nonetheless, his name influenced the spelling, for we find Edwinesburgensis in the 12th century, and there are several other variants — Eden, Edene, and Edyn — before the form settled down as Edin. Burgh became borough in later English. This remained the standard pronunciation even when the original spelling stayed, as in Edinburgh — much to the confusion of American visitors, some of whom, recalling Lewisburg and a host of other US "burgs" (not least the Edinburgh USA golf course in Minnesota), take a while to wean themselves away from a hard beefburger ending.