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clown, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /klaʊn/, U.S. /klaʊn/

Forms: Also 15 **cloune**, **cloine**, **cloyne**.

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: Appears in English in second half of 16th cent. as *cloyne* or *cloine*, and *clowne*. The phonetic relation between these is difficult to understand; the former is especially obscure: possibly a dialect form. By Dunbar, the word (if indeed the same) is written *cloun*; but it rhymes with *tone*, *Joun*, meaning *tune*, *June*, both having in Scottish the sound /y/ or /ø/, which would imply /klyɲ/. Words identical or closely related appear in several of the cognate languages and dialects: e.g. North Frisian (Moringer dialect) **klönne* (or *klünne*) 'clumsy lout, lumpish fellow' (Bendsen) < Old Frisian type **klunda* weak masculine Compare North Frisian insular dialect Amrum *klünj* (plural *klünjar*) 'clod, clot, lump' = Sylt *klünd* 'clog, wooden mall' < Old Frisian type **klund* strong masculine Also modern Icelandic *klunni* < **klunþi* 'clumsy boorish fellow' (Vigfusson), 'en klods, ubehændig person' (Jonson), compared with Swedish dialect *klunn*, *kluns* (Rietz) 'clump, clog, log', and Danish dialect *klunds* = *klods* 'block, log, stump', also 'clown'. In Dutch also, Sewell (1766) has *kleun* (feminine) (marked as a 'low word') 'a hoidon or lusty bouncing girl', *kloen*, noun with same sense; and he explains English *clown* as 'een plompe boer, kinkel, *kloen*'. *Bilderdijk Verklarende Geslachtlijst* (1832) says that *kloen* applied to a man signifies *een lompert*, 'clown' in English, and so is it with *klont*, *kluit*, and *kluts* or *klots*, all meaning primarily 'clod, clot, lump'. So far as concerns the sense-development, then, it is clear that we have here a word meaning originally 'clod, clot, lump', which like these words themselves (see CLOD *n.* 5, CLOT *n.* 4), has been applied in various languages to a clumsy boor, a lout. Of an Old English type, corresponding to the Frisian, or to the Dutch words, we have no trace, no more than of the occurrence in English of the primitive sense 'clod'; and it is probable that in English the word is of later introduction from some Low German source.

1.

a. A countryman, rustic, or peasant.

- 1563 W. BALDWIN et al. *Myrrour for Magistrates* (new ed.) Rivers xlv The cloyne contented can not be With any state.
- 1567 G. TURBERVILLE *Against Ielous Heads* in *Poems* (R.) To brag vpon his pipe the clowne begoon..And then to blow the rustick did assay.
- 1570 P. LEVENS *Manipulus Vocabulorum* sig. Si^v/1 A Cloune, *rusticus*.
- 1587 J. HIGGINS *Mirour for Magistrates* (new ed.) Madan xi The clowne that driues the mixen Cart.
- 1604 W. ALEXANDER *Aurora* sig. D3^v She [sc. a viper] kild the courteous Clowne by whom she liu'd.
- a1661 T. FULLER *Worthies* (1662) Mddx. 177 Clown from Colonus, one that plougheth the ground.
- 1785 W. COWPER *Task* IV. 623 The clown, the child of nature, without guile.
- 1849 MACAULAY *Hist. Eng.* I. 610 The Somersetshire clowns, with their scythes..faced the royal horse like old soldiers.

b. Implying ignorance, crassness, or rude manners: A mere rustic, a

peasant.

- 1565 A. GOLDING in tr. Ovid *Fyrst Fower Bks. Metamorphosis* To Rdr. sig. *iiij The wyse, the foole: the cuntry cloyne: the lerned, and the lout.
- 1646 F. HAWKINS tr. *Youths Behaviour* (ed. 4) 45 Put not thy meat in thy mouth, holding thy knife in thy hands, as doe the Cuntrey clounes.
- 1733 G. CHEYNE *Eng. Malady* III. (*adv.*) 262 A..clod-pated Clown.
- 1849 MACAULAY *Hist. Eng.* I. 320 Language..such as we should now expect to hear only from the most ignorant clowns.

2. transf. A man without refinement or culture; an ignorant, rude, uncouth, ill-bred man.

- 1583 A. GOLDING tr. J. Calvin *Serm. on Deuteronomie* lxxxvii. 538 Euen such as haue beene counted the simplest Cloynes.
- 1697 J. EVELYN *Numismata* viii. 288 Every rich Clown..who was able to be at the Charges of a Stamp.
- 1850 TENNYSON *In Memoriam* cix. 171 The churl in spirit..By blood a king, at heart a clown .
- 1881 W. BESANT & J. RICE *Chaplain of Fleet* I. iii. 41 How could a courtly gentleman..have a son who was so great a clown in his manner and his talk.

3.

a. A fool or jester, as a stage-character (? orig. representing a rustic buffoon), or (in Shakespeare) a retainer of a court or great house.

- 1600 S. ROWLANDS *Letting of Humors Blood* Sat. IV. 63 What meanes Singer then? And Pope the Clowne, to speake so Boorish, when They counterfaite the Clownes vpon the Stage?
- 1600 S. ROWLANDS *Letting of Humors Blood* (1874) Epigr. xxx. 36 When Tarlton clown'd it in a pleasant vaine Vpon the Stage, his merry humors shop, Clownes knew the Clowne, by his great clownish *slop*.
- 1603 SHAKESPEARE *Hamlet* II. ii. 325 The clowne shall make them laugh That are tickled in the lungs.
- 1604 T. WRIGHT *Pass.* in F. W. Fairholt *Costume* (1860) 217 Sometimes I have seen Tarlton play the clowne, and use no other breeches than such sloppes or slivings as now many gentlemen weare.
- a1616 SHAKESPEARE *As you like It* (1623) II. ii. 8 The roynish Clown, at whom so oft, Your Grace was wont to laugh.
- [1622 (†?a1513) W. DUNBAR *Poems* (Reidpeth) (1998) I. 175 Cuningar men man serve Sanct Cloun.]
- a1643 W. CARTWRIGHT *Poems in Comedies* (1651) sig. S3 Old fashion'd wit, which walk'd from Town to Town In turn'd Hose, which our Fathers call'd the Clown.
- 1822 R. NARES *Gloss.* (at cited word) The fool was indeed the inmate of every opulent house, but the rural jester, or clown, seems to have been peculiar to the country families.

b. in mod. use, one of the characters in a pantomime or harlequinade;

also a similar character in a circus.

- 1727 J. THURMOND *Miser Characters* Harlequin's servant, a clown.
- 1728 R. WEAVER & J. WEAVER *Perseus & Andromeda* Clown, the Squire's man.
- 1775 *London Mag.* Dec. He [Harlequin]..converts part of the paling of an ale-house yard into a pillory, wherein having inclosed Pantaloon and the clown, etc.
- 1780 T. DAVIES *Mem. Life David Garrick* I. 36 He was a most diverting clown in all the pantomimes of Mr. Rich.
- 1841 DICKENS *Old Curiosity Shop* II. xxxix. 11 The clown who ventured on such familiarities with the military man in boots.
- 1855 *Times* 3 Apr. Never did Clown and Pantaloon belabour each other more heartily.

COMPOUNDS

C1. General *attrib.*

clown part *n.*

C2. The possessive *clown's* forms part of certain plant-names.

clown's all-heal *n.* (also **clown-heal**) a name given by Gerarde to *Stachys palustris*.

- 1597 J. GERARD *Herball* II. 851 Clounes Alheale, or the husbandmans Woundwoort, hath long slender stalkes.
- a1678 A. MARVELL *Damon Mower* in *Misc. Poems* (1681) 44 With Shepherds-purse, and Clowns-all-heal, The Blood I stanch, and Wound I seal.

clown's lungwort *n.* (a) *Verbascum Thapsus*, (b) *Lathræa squamaria*.

clown's mustard *n.* *Iberis amara*.

- 1861 A. PRATT *Flowering Plants & Ferns Great Brit.* I. 95 *Iberis amara*..sometimes called Clown's Mustard.

clown's spikenard *n.* *Inula Conyza*.

- 1783 *Ainsworth's Thes. Linguæ Latinæ* (new ed.) ii *Bacchar*, a sweet herb, called by some our lady's gloves, by others, clown's spikenard.

clown's treacle *n.* *Allium sativum.*

clown's wound-wort *n.* = *clown's all-heal n.*

1825 W. HONE *Every-day Bk.* (1826) I. 877 Clown's-wound-wort, wake-robin, and..other simples.

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