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The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s treatment of female-authored sources of the eighteenth century¹

1. Introduction

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) is widely recognised as the most comprehensive authority that exists on the history of English from 1150 to the present day. Originally published between 1884 and 1928, and supplemented in 1933 and in 1972–1986, it broke new ground in English lexicography by basing its definitions on quotations of real usage, gathering these from a much wider range and larger number of sources than any dictionary had done in the past. Since its earliest days it has been routinely consulted by those working in literature and language, who regard it, justly, as an unrivalled store of information and scholarship on the history and development of English.

Any collection of evidence on so large a scale, however, will have been subject to restrictions and qualifications of one sort or another, and the *OED*'s was no exception. The printed evidence to which the dictionary's first lexicographers had access between the late 1850s and the early 1900s (when most of the quotation-gathering was carried out)² was necessarily limited, while some types of vocabulary

1 Since this paper was written, the project has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust, to which the author extends grateful acknowledgement.

2 Studies of the historical documents recording the collection of quotations, and of the chronological distribution of quotations from the 1880s to the early decades of the twentieth century, confirm that the first edition of the *OED* did little intensive collecting of quotations of contemporary usage after the turn of the century. See discussions and graphs at <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/>

– from the works of great writers, for example – tended to be favoured over others, reflecting then prevailing literary, linguistic and cultural assumptions. Moreover, it was impossible, over so many years of composition, by different editors and under often difficult conditions, to maintain consistent scholarly standards. The imperfections of the *OED* were well understood by the lexicographers themselves: as C.T. Onions wrote in 1951, this greatest of dictionaries has “hosts of wrong definitions, wrong datings [...] The problem is gigantic”.³

The occasional partiality and unreliability of the *OED* has nevertheless escaped many who cite it as an authority, a misunderstanding due perhaps to the dictionary’s publication history. The *OED*’s second edition of 1989 (the only current print version) did not revise or change the first, but spliced it with a much smaller supplement of twentieth-century vocabulary (originally published in four volumes between 1972 and 1986, and edited by R.W. Burchfield).⁴ It was this largely elderly version of the dictionary that was digitalised in the 1980s, thus enabling its use by present-day linguists as a database of historical English.

However, as the description above makes clear, *OED2* is a composite dictionary. Notwithstanding its publication date, this second edition of *OED* was unable to incorporate, or even take notice of, the vast quantity of lexical scholarship on historical English that

content/view/336/358/> and <http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/main/content/view/90/234/#quotations_bank>.

- 3 C.T. Onions to D.M. Davin, *OED* archives, SOED/1951/14/3, 22 March 1951. Accounts of the compilation of the first edition of *OED* can be found in Murray (1977), Mugglestone (2000 and 2005) and Brewer (2007b: 14–36); the biases in its use of sources are investigated at Brewer (2005–).
- 4 Burchfield incorporated most, but not all, of the material of the first Supplement of 1933 (eds. Craigie and Onions) into the second Supplement. His brief was very clear: to update the *OED* with twentieth-century words and senses, not to revise the original *OED* (a much more formidable task). Nevertheless he did add some pre-1900 quotations to *OED*’s original record, e.g. from the writings of Dorothy Wordsworth (70 quotations, 68 taken from the 1941 edition of her journals and two from her letters), the works of Emily Dickinson (59 quotations), and other scattered items. These were in turn incorporated into *OED2*. See further Brewer (2007b: 131–212) on Burchfield’s Supplement, and Brewer (2007b: 222–229) on *OED2*.

had been published since the first edition was completed (i.e. the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). Naturally, Oxford University Press and its lexicographers were well aware of *OED2*'s deficiencies in this respect. The publication of the second edition was in fact the first stage of an ambitious project to revise the *OED* in its entirety and enable the production of a genuinely new edition, *OED3*. Work on this third edition began in the 1990s, and since 2000 the results have been gradually (every three months) released online. To date (spring 2008), *OED3* has covered the alphabet range *M* to near the end of *Q*, and completion of the entire dictionary is some decades away.

Both the second edition of *OED*, and the revised material that has so far appeared as part of the third edition, are accessible at *OED Online*.⁵ This invaluable resource allows users to search the dictionary electronically for specific prefixes, suffixes, spelling forms, etymologies and other word characteristics, along with information about when and how they were used between 1150 and the late nineteenth century (or, if the entry was updated by Burchfield, the mid to late twentieth century). The resulting evidence on the history and development of the English language can in turn be used as a tool to illuminate the language of specific authors or periods, and many scholars have taken advantage of this. All such evidence, however, must be interpreted in relation to the data on which the *OED*'s analysis was based: its quotations. This is an important qualification that is sometimes insufficiently remembered by those drawing conclusions from *OED*'s extraordinarily rich and various data.

The centrality of its quotations to the dictionary-making process is made clear by the *OED* lexicographers in a number of surviving accounts. Readers for the dictionary worked through thousands of texts, excerpted extracts from them illustrating how words had been used in varying senses, and then sent them to the dictionary offices where they were filed. Editors and sub-editors studied these quotations intensively so as to arrive at an analysis of their historical and

5 *OED Online* <<http://www.oed.com/>> is freely available at a number of public institutions in the UK, and has been subscribed to by many universities and academic institutions worldwide.

semantic relationship, consulting dictionaries and concordances where available (concordances existed for the Bible and for canonical great authors: e.g. Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Pope, Cowper, Walter Scott, Tennyson).⁶ From these “numerous examples of actual use”, they would then deduce the various different senses that a word could bear throughout its history.⁷

The accuracy and completeness of the information before the lexicographers was therefore paramount. New evidence, in the form of additional quotations, might well upset an established hypothesis on what, exactly, a word meant, or on how its senses related to each other. Murray memorably described the effect of such disturbance in an address to the Philological Society in 1887: “You sort your quotations into bundles on your big table, and think you are getting the word’s pedigree right, when a new sense, or three or four new senses, start up, which upset all your scheme, and you are obliged to begin afresh, often three or four times” (Murray 1885–1887: 10). Oxford’s present-day lexicographers continue to use this method of divining meaning from examples of real usage, and continue therefore to be crucially reliant on quotations for identifying and tracing meanings and their inter-relationships: as explained by the then-director of the current *OED* project in 2000, “in practice it is almost invariably in the quotations that the historical lexicographer initially seeks and discerns fine sense-division and new senses” (Silva 2000: 89). Thus *OED*’s quotations are constitutive, not merely illustrative, of the definitions for which they furnish evidence: in Murray’s own words, they are “the essence of the work” (see § 5).

But the electronic searches we can now make of the *OED* reveal that there were wide variations, both between different periods and between types of source, in the quotations used by the lexicographers to substantiate their definitions and to exemplify the history and devel-

6 For a list, see Brewer (2007b: 285, n. 101). Pope and Cowper are notable as eighteenth-century authors who are quoted in large numbers in *OED* (both of them just under 6,000 times); in general, as stated below, this century is under-quoted in *OED*.

7 The fullest account is probably Onions (1928). See also Gilliver (2004), Brewer (2007b: 122–129).

opment of a word or sense. Initial studies of this subject are reported on the website “Examining the *OED*” (Brewer 2005–); they show, for example, that the lexicographers’ most quoted authors were those of the late-nineteenth-century literary canon (Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, Dryden, Sir Walter Scott, Tennyson and others, to many of whose works, as we have seen, concordances were available), that the lexicographers often seem to have preferred poetic sources to prose, that female authors were quoted in far smaller numbers than male, and that the eighteenth century is under-quoted in comparison with the seventeenth century on the one hand and the nineteenth on the other. As we contemplate these variations, we are bound to ask what they signify. Do such discrepancies and unevennesses reflect the nature of the English language, which the *OED* sets out to describe? Or are they instead due to the lexicographers’ own assumptions about language – and to the prevailing conditions and the inevitable vicissitudes of the dictionary-making process over the time the *OED* was compiled?

2. Present project

It is the last two of the characteristics of *OED* documentation listed above – the low number of female authors quoted in the *OED*, and the low representation of eighteenth-century sources – that are considered in this paper, which reports the initial stages of a research project designed to illuminate the *OED*’s treatment of the eighteenth century. In both cases, cultural and historical circumstances readily explain why the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century lexicographers should have under-valued quotations from such sources: the eighteenth century was then thought to be undistinguished in the literature it produced (apart from the work of a few great writers like Pope); fewer female authors were published at this time (as in all periods up to the present, and perhaps the present too) and they were generally judged inferior to male. Moreover, as illustrated by Figure 1, it seems that – for one reason or another – the lexicographers and readers had

simply accumulated fewer quotations from this period than for others.⁸ If, however, the editors had drawn on more quotations from eighteenth-century texts and more texts written by women, would their results have been substantially different? Does *OED*'s apparently skewed choice of sources result in a misrepresentation (and if so, to what degree) of the history of the English language?

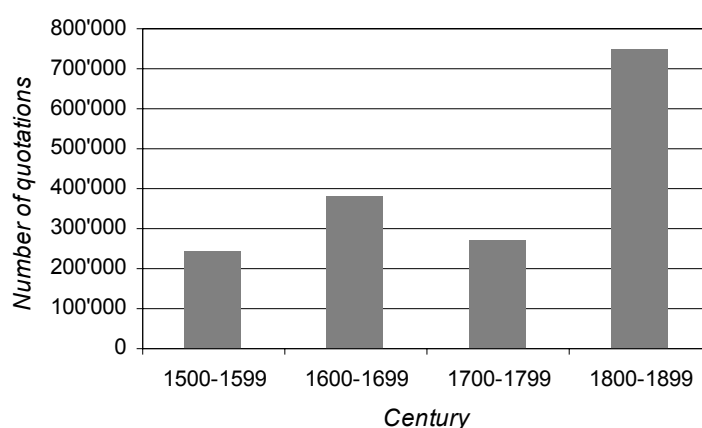


Figure 1. Relative number of quotations in the *OED* for 16c, 17c, 18c, 19c.⁹

Investigating these questions is immeasurably easier now than it would have been even a couple of decades ago (though that is not to say that it is straightforward), given the extensive scholarship that has been conducted on writing and publishing in this period. In particular, electronic and bibliographical aids such as *Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)*, online editions of texts, and of course the digitalisation of *OED* itself, make it possible to identify quotation sources in the eighteenth century that the *OED* has covered less than it

⁸ The evidence for this is discussed in Brewer (2007a), and recapitulated at <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/93/237/>>.

⁹ This data is derived from electronic searches of *OED2*; see <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/49/130/>>. For a description of searching procedures, see pages at <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/category/11/43/161/>>.

might, and to carry out some sort of systematic investigation of a small sample of them in order to see whether it turns up information that the *OED* might or should have used.

The recent revision of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (i.e. the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; *ODNB*) has been especially helpful for the first of these exercises. One of the aims of the revision was to correct the gender imbalance of the first edition, and the *ODNB* now records the biographies and publications of a large number of female writers of the eighteenth century, who were relatively prolific and who were recognised during their lifetimes as significant authors (see further Baigent, Brewer and Larminie 2005). A list of just under 400 female writers, active between 1700 and 1800, can be identified by electronic searching of this resource.¹⁰

The next step is to look up each of these writers in the *OED* and see whether and to what extent their work is quoted – or, if this turns out to be too complex and too time-consuming, to determine the rationale for selecting a sample of authors for close study. Preliminary investigation of the names on the *ODNB* list indicates that their treatment by *OED* varies widely. Four authors, Frances Burney (1752–1840), Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849), Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) and (to a lesser extent) Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (bap. 1689, d. 1762), were given a good deal of attention – for women, that is – by the first-edition lexicographers: Burney's works are cited just under 2,000 times, Edgeworth's around 1,130, Radcliffe's 1,100, and Montagu's 675 times.¹¹ I have been unable to identify any other

10 Searching *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>> in February 2008 for "people", using the following filters: "subjects: field of interest: Literature, journalism, and publishing – women – active between 1700 and 1800", yielded 394 results. Some of these are for authors whose principal published output was outside the period 1700–1800 (e.g. Jane Austen), and they have been therefore excluded from the present study. Austen was one of the few female authors to be intensively read and recorded for the first edition of the dictionary, and she is quoted around 1,040 times in *OED2* – though over 100 of these quotations, from the editions of her letters by R.W. Chapman, were added by Burchfield in his 1972–1986 Supplement.

11 About 160 of Edgeworth's quotations are from editions of her letters published in 1936, 1971 and 1979, all added by Burchfield in his 1972–1986 Supplement.

comparably quoted eighteenth-century females, and by contrast many other equally eligible candidates, prolific and highly regarded in their day, are far less generously handled. Charlotte Smith (1749–1806), widely influential in literary circles both as a poet and a novelist, and commercially successful (i.e. popular and therefore widely read) over much of her career, is quoted 324 times, though this is half as much again as the 204 quotations allotted to the much-published Hannah More (1745–1833), a household name when her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* appeared in 1799.¹² The sentimental novelist and moralist Sarah Fielding, rated by Richardson superior to her brother Henry, and in addition the creator of the first children’s novel and a self-taught classicist (part of her translation from the Greek, *Xenophon’s Memoirs of Socrates, with the Defence of Socrates before his Judges*, remained in print until well into the twentieth century), is quoted 84 times; while Mary Wollstonecraft, perhaps the single most famous eighteenth-century female writer today, whose works fill seven volumes in their modern edition, is quoted 78 times (mostly from *The Rights of Women*). Others fare worse still. Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743–1825), whose 1773 collection of *Poems* went through five editions by 1777 and six by 1792, and who was praised to the skies by the *Monthly Review* (1773) for having “a justness of thought, and vigour of imagination, inferior only to the works of Milton and Shakespeare”, achieves a mere 32 quotations in *OED*; the celebrated (or notorious) historian and political polemicist Catharine Macaulay (1731–1791), author of the eight-volume *History of England*, is cited just twice.¹³ Other writers on the *ODNB* list do not figure at all in the first edition of the *OED*, e.g. the fertile novelist and translator Penelope Aubin (1679?–1731?), the poet Anne Bannerman (1765–1829), who was admired by Walter Scott, and no doubt many others.

Quotation totals like these may seem to tell us rather little out of context – that is, in the absence of detailed analysis of the quotations themselves, the use to which the *OED* puts them, and *OED*’s rationale more generally for selecting quotations. They appear more striking

12 More’s *Strictures* was quoted 40 times in all in *OED*.

13 For the *Monthly Review* judgement of Barbauld, see Woodfall (1773).

when one compares them with quotation totals for prominent male authors of the period, who are cited in far greater numbers, e.g. Pope and Cowper, each cited just under 6,000 times, or Johnson, Swift, Defoe, Addison, who are all cited between 4,000 and 5,000 times, or Burke (c. 3,500), Richardson (c. 2,800), Burns (c. 2,600) and many others.¹⁴ Why does the *OED* quote from male authors so very intensively more than from female ones? Is it because the male authors were felt to be more culturally significant, that their works were more easily available to the lexicographers and their readers, that they yielded, for *OED*'s purposes, better quality lexical information, or some combination of these three factors?

Such questions lead to a third step: reading through the works of authors on our list, whether neglected or not by *OED*, to see if they contain words or usages left untreated by this great dictionary. This is a substantial task; how exactly it is to be carried out – given that we will have to proceed according to some carefully defined system of sampling – has yet to be established. Initial probings, however, are yielding rich and varied results.

A representative example may be the Edinburgh poet Anne Bannerman already mentioned. When a collection of her work was published in 1800, the *Critical Review* wrote that “Anne Bannerman’s Odes may be quoted as an irrefragable proof that the ardour, whatever be its gender, which gives birth to lofty thought and bold expression, may glow within a female *breast*”.¹⁵ If we turn to the first lines of one of her poems, “The Dark Ladie”, first published in the *Edinburgh Magazine* in 1800, we can straightaway see why Walter Scott – a devotee of Percy’s *Reliques* and of historical ballads generally – should have found them so attractive.¹⁶

14 See tables at <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/50/130/>> and <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/56/140/>>.

15 See Bannerman (1800); the *Critical Review* comment, cited in Craciun (2004a), is in vol. 31 [new series] (1801), 435–438 (435).

16 For Scott and Percy see e.g. Johnston (1964: 177, n. 1); Sutherland (1995: 75, 80–81). Scott’s co-editor of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–1803), John Leyden, was an old friend of Bannerman; see further Craciun (2004a), and the more detailed biography by the same author at <<http://www.alexanderstreet2.com/SWRPlive/bios/S7019-D001.html>>.

The knights return'd from Holy Land,
 Sir Guyon led the armed train;
 And to his castle, on the sea,
 He welcom'd them again.

He welcom'd them with soldier glee,
 And sought to charm away their toil;
 But none, on Guyon's clouded face,
 Had ever seen a smile!

Bannerman's formulation "soldier glee" (line 5) antedates *OED*'s first cited example of this usage of *soldier* (i.e. as an attributive noun) by ten years, a fact which is interesting in itself.¹⁷ Even more interesting is that both *OED*'s first and second quotations come from Walter Scott, both of them from poems that are thematically, stylistically and metrically similar to that of Bannerman:

1810 SCOTT *Lady of L.* VI. ii, At dawn the towers of Stirling rang With
 soldier-step and weapon-clang
 1814 SCOTT *Ld. of Isles* III. v, Then do me but the soldier grace, This glove
 upon thy helm to place

We cannot, on this evidence alone, say that Bannerman directly influenced Scott. But the linguistic correspondence beckons us to further study in the hope of illuminating the language choices of both Bannerman and Scott and of other writers in the same genre – and, more generally, of *OED*'s treatment of the history of the language.

17 Reservations must immediately be expressed about the value and significance of such antedating. We can never be sure that we have found the earliest instance of a word or sense, and it may well be the case that the Bannerman example could in turn be antedated. We should also bear in mind that Scott was a favourite source for the first edition of the *OED*, making it particularly likely that the dictionary would have given him as the first user of a form that had in fact been current during previous decades – not least since eighteenth-century sources were, we have seen, in general under-cited in *OED*. For Scott as the second most-cited author in the *OED*, see <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/48/123/>>, and on *OED* antedatings more generally, see Schäfer (1980).

Bannerman herself points to a connection between her poem and one by Coleridge, directing her readers in a footnote to Coleridge's "Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie", published a month earlier in the same periodical.¹⁸ Coleridge's narrator recounts how he "sang an old rude song", of male madness and a beautiful female "fiend", to woo his "own dear Genevieve", and Bannerman responds to this with a tale of female revenge and domination, an account of the "cruel wrong [that] Befel the dark Ladie" that Coleridge's poem gestures at. She thus participates in a complex network of relationships between literary participants in romanticism and gothic, or medievalist, writing – as further indicated by the handwritten inscription, presumably Bannerman's own, on the title-page of the Bodleian Library copy (shelf-mark 280 f. 2251) of the volume in which "The Dark Ladie" was later published: "For The Bishop of Dromore [i.e. Thomas Percy] from The Author".¹⁹ Such literary and social networks will, of course, have their linguistic counterparts, and female writers play as significant a role in such networks as men.²⁰ It is important, therefore, that the *OED* should pay attention to the lexis of female, and not just of male, writers.

3. Pilot-study: Anna Letitia Barbauld

The female author on whom I have conducted a more protracted pilot study is Anna Letitia Barbauld, chosen partly because she was considered a highly significant personage during her lifetime, and partly because of the variety of her writing and its widespread influence in

18 *Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 15 [new series] (1800), 218–220 and 141–142 respectively. Coleridge's "Introduction" had been previously published in *The Morning Post* (21 December 1799); he later re-wrote the poem, re-entitled it "Love", and included it in the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. See further Coleridge and Mays (2001: vol. 16, parts I and II, no. 253).

19 Bannerman (1802); "The Dark Ladie" is the first item in the collection (3–16). On Bannerman's literary relationships see Craciun (2003: chapter 5).

20 See further Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2006: 267–269).

different fields. Born in 1743, Barbauld began writing in the 1760s on topics ranging from the political to the domestic (e.g. a poem on Corsican independence, and a mock-heroic address to a tankard). To match her varied subject matter, her work displayed an impressive range of stylistic registers, including burlesque, devotional, sublime, pedagogic and conversational. As we have seen, her poetry appeared in a highly regarded and popular edition in 1773, but her most influential compositions were educative ones: *Lessons for Children*, published in four volumes in 1778–1779 and originally intended to teach her adopted son to read, and *Hymns in Prose for Children*, published in 1781, which was aimed at the youngest pupils of Barbauld’s own school. Both works were reprinted in England and America throughout the nineteenth century and were translated into other languages; the *ODNB* tells us that “they profoundly affected reading pedagogy among the middle classes”, so that “the name Mrs Barbauld became virtually synonymous with infant instruction”.

Barbauld’s reputation dropped like a stone during the nineteenth century, and she was vilified by figures as diverse as S.T. Coleridge and (some decades later) Edith Nesbit.²¹ When the time came to gather together material for the dictionary that was to become the *OED*, from the late 1850s to the early 1900s, she was almost entirely neglected. Reading through a small sample of her works and checking this against the *OED* turns up an impressively large number of usages which have been missed by the *OED*, a selection of which is offered here; they comprise not new words but usages which plug the often-characteristic gap in *OED* documentation of the eighteenth century (§ 3.1), usages altogether unrecorded in *OED* (§ 3.2) and usages which antedate or postdate *OED* documentation (§ 3.3).

21 Barbauld has lately received a good deal of critical attention from eighteenth-century literary and social historians; see e.g. Newlyn (2000), Craciun (2004b), Mee (2003), Pascoe (2004: chapter 4). My account draws on McCarthy (2004).

3.1. Usages which plug the gap in OED documentation of the eighteenth century

In about 1795, Barbauld wrote a poem "To a Little Invisible Being who is Expected Soon to Become Visible", in which she set the expected birth in the context of spring more generally:

And see, the genial season's warmth to share,
Fresh younglings shoot, and opening roses glow!
Swarms of new life exulting fill the air,—
Haste, infant bud of being, haste to blow!²²

OED's relevant definition of the verb *to blow* is "To burst into flower; to blossom, bloom" (s.v. vb 2, sense 1, intr.). It illustrates this sense with quotations from c. 1000 to 1855, of which the last four are dated 1590 (Shakespeare), 1667 (Milton), 1697 (Dryden) and 1855 (Tennyson). As we can see, Barbauld's usage in line 4 above fills some of the gap between the Dryden and the Tennyson examples.

"To Mrs. Priestley, With Some Drawings of Birds and Insects" (in Barbauld 1773: 41) describes migrating birds as "The congregated nations" which "wing their way / In dusky columns o'er the trackless sea" (lines 65–66). It is not entirely clear that this use of *congregated* (ppl. a.) is covered in *OED*'s analysis, which offers sense 1, "Assembled or collected in a body or mass", or sense 2, identified as specifically botanical (in keeping therefore with Barbauld's context), "Clustered in a dense mass; aggregated", and illustrated with two quotations only, both from the same botanical source of 1776. Either way, Barbauld's example of *congregated* is a useful addition to *OED*, providing an intermediate quotation between *OED*'s existing quotations of 1718 (Prior) and 1878 (Robert Browning) for sense 1, or additional and figurative evidence for sense 2.

In her "Epistle to William Wilberforce", written in 1791 on the rejection of the bill he had proposed to Parliament to abolish the slave

22 Quoted from Barbauld and Aikin (1825: vol. 1, 199, lines 1–4). This and all subsequent references are to the earliest published source as available.

trade, Barbauld wrote with sympathy to say that expectations which had been roused were now dashed: “The Muse, too soon awaked, with ready tongue / At Mercy’s shrine applausive peans rung” (Barbauld 1792: 146, lines 12–13). The adjective *applausive* is recorded in *OED* with seventeenth and nineteenth-century examples but no eighteenth-century ones. Two applicable senses of the general definition “Characterized by applause” are distinguished, the first of which is “Loudly expressive of approbation”, with quotations from 1609, 1823 (Scott) and 1843 (Tennyson); the second “Expressive of approval; approbative”, with quotations from 1660, 1628 and 1866. Whatever the grounds for distinguishing between these senses, Barbauld’s usage would have been an excellent eighteenth-century example of either.

In her poem “Corsica”, written in 1769 for a subscription in aid of Corsican independence, Barbauld describes General Pasquale Paoli’s striving for victory against the French invasion of the island, comparing his efforts to the moon “In dubious battle with the gathering clouds” (Barbauld 1773: 12, line 190). This sense of *dubious* is clearly that defined at *OED* s.v. 1b, “of uncertain issue or result”, for which the dictionary has no quotation between 1667 (*Paradise Lost*) and 1875. Barbauld’s example goes some way to filling the two-hundred year gap.

3.2. Usages unrecorded in *OED*

Barbauld is fond of using adjectives as adverbs, a feature of English poetic style which *OED* often records. Unnoted, though, are her examples of *auspicious* (as in “Haste, precious pledge of happy love, to go / Auspicious borne through life’s mysterious gate”, line 4 of “To an Invisible Being”), and *impetuous* (as in “Thy numerous streams, that bursting from the cliffs / Down the steep channel’d rock impetuous pour / With grateful murmur”, “Corsica”, p. 4, l. 44). (*OED* contains no eighteenth-century quotation for simple adjectival use of *impetuous*, either: a quotation of 1664 is followed by one of 1834; while Barbauld’s use of *incessant* as an adverb, a few lines earlier in “Corsica” – “the chasing deep / Incessant foaming”, lines 36–37 –

would valuably supplement *OED*'s existing quotations of 1553, 1701 and 1871 for this usage.)

Barbauld's use of the prepositional verb *sear ... to*, as in the quotation below, meaning something like "impress upon by burning", is unrecorded, although it seems related to the figurative sense distinguished s.v. *OED* 3b: "Chiefly after 1 Tim. iv. 2, to render (the conscience) incapable of feeling":

The whirlwind wakes of uncontroul'd desire,
Sears the young heart to images of woe,
And blasts the buds of Virtue as they blow
(“Epistle to Wilberforce”, lines 54–56).

(this quotation supplies another eighteenth-century example of the verb *blow*, “blossom”).

The same source, line 90, furnishes an instance of *thronged* used as an adjectival past participle which must mean something like “surrounded by a throng of attendants”: “Hence throng'd Augusta builds her rosy bowers”. No such definition is recorded in *OED*, which specifies three senses, none of them applicable to a single person: “1. Closely packed, as a multitude of people or things; crowded [...] 2. a. Of a place, etc.: Closely packed with people or things; crowded [...] 2. b. Of time: Full of work or business; busily occupied; busy. Chiefly *dial.*”

3.3. Usages which antedate or postdate *OED*'s record

In her witty “Washing Day”, first published in the *Monthly Magazine* in 1797 (vol. 4, 452), Barbauld uses the phrase “slipshod measure” (line 4) to refer to poetry: “Come then, domestic Muse, / In slipshod measure loosely prattling on / Of farm or orchard”. This figurative example of *slipshod* antedates all the *OED* quotations, including those for the sense (2a) relating to “style or language”, which start with an example from Leigh Hunt of 1815.

Barbauld's Hymn VIII, “Lo Where a Crowd of Pilgrims Toil” (Barbauld and Aikin 1825: vol. 1, 336), declares that “while we die to

earth and sense, / Our heaven is begun” (lines 35–36). This one would imagine to be a common formulation, meaning something like “when we die in respect to (or become insensible to) earthly things and the senses, we begin to participate in heavenly things”; it smacks of biblical phrases such as “dead to sin(s)”, “dead to the law”, as gestured at in *OED*’s definition of sense 6: “*to die unto*: to cease to be under the power or influence of; to become dead unto: cf. Rom. vi. 2”. But this sense is furnished with only one quotation, dated 1648: “*Westm. Assembly’s Shorter Catech.* Q. 35 Sanctification..whereby we ... are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness”. Barbauld’s usage is valuable evidence of the idiom’s continued existence 150 years later.

Dusky, to mean “dark-skinned”, is a usage that turns up, unsurprisingly, in Barbauld’s “Epistle to Wilberforce”: “angry eyes thro’ dusky features glare” (line 83). This sense of *dusky* was missed by the first edition of the *OED* and also by Burchfield’s twentieth-century Supplement; it first entered the *OED* in the *Additions Series* of 1993 (three volumes of new words published by the *OED* lexicographers between the completion of *OED2* in 1986 and the release of *OED3* in 2000). Here it was defined as: “Of persons, their complexion, etc.: ethnically dark-skinned, *esp.* Black or Aboriginal”; an editorial note adds, “In the 19th c. (often in *dusky race, tribe*) a poetic if somewhat depreciatory commonplace, now chiefly *arch.*”. The first quotation is 1827, easily antedated by Barbauld’s example of 1769.

4. Provisional conclusions

Judging from spot-checks on other works written by female authors on the *ODNB* list, Barbauld is not unrepresentative: many of these works contain usages which are not adequately treated in *OED*. What exactly one will be able to conclude from this is less clear, however, especially at this early stage. While it is tempting to assume that the research will turn up some interesting characteristics of female as

opposed to male language usage, it is just as likely that at least some, perhaps most, of these will be found in a comparable sample of eighteenth-century male authors neglected by the *OED*. We cannot be sure of gender differences until we check our results against a wider body of texts.

A single example will illustrate the point. One of the writers on our *ODNB* list is Sarah Chapone (1699–1764), author of *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (London, 1735). Her use of the word *educate* – “If we are naturally unqualified to educate our Children, or to chuse proper Persons to assist us in it, then has Nature imprest maternal Affection in vain” (1735: 21) – supplies an eighteenth-century instance of an important verb that is unrecorded in *OED* between 1618 and 1818, a gap of two hundred years, which is striking. But is it really plausible that no one else used this verb over that period, or that if they did they were female? Of course not. *ECCO* (searched March 2008) gives access to 7,438 other examples of *educate* in texts published 1700–1799 – and we can be sure that many, almost certainly most, of these examples occur in texts written by men (e.g. *A Short Account and Character of Spain: In a Letter from an English Gentleman Now Residing at Madrid, to His Friend in London*, London, 1701: 11: “the Fathers take no more care to Educate their Children, than the Children do to Honour their Fathers”). If we extend our search back to the seventeenth century by using *Early English Books Online* (*EEBO*, also searched March 2008) we can easily find further instances – 419 in all – of the verb *educate* in texts published between *OED*'s last cited seventeenth-century date, 1618, and 1699. Almost all of these occur in texts written by men. So our initial investigation of Chapone's usage reveals simply that the *OED* is deficient. It cannot, on the basis of *OED* evidence alone, tell us anything about the specific features either of Chapone's language, or of female as opposed to male usage. The same applies, evidently, to all the Barbauld examples given above, many of which it is possible to antedate or supplement with evidence from male-authored works turned up by searches of *ECCO*.

Nevertheless, these eighteenth-century female-authored texts yield significant information about eighteenth-century usage which is at present unrecorded in *OED*. Even if subjecting them to closer

lexical study does not tell us, initially, anything specific about female language use over this period, it will supplement and enhance, perhaps to a significant degree, *OED*'s picture of language during the eighteenth century. In particular, it will go some way to correcting the remarkable bias in *OED*'s choice of quotation sources. Anyone looking at an *OED* entry will form the view that language is formed, used and influenced primarily by male authors, reminding one irresistibly of the characterisation of the English language delivered by Otto Jespersen in 1906, in his seminal *Growth and Structure of the English Language*: "There is one expression that continually comes to mind when I think of the English language and compare it to others: it seems positively and expressly *masculine*, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish or feminine about it" (Jespersen's work was heavily dependent on the *OED*, as he acknowledged with gratitude on the first page of his preface).²³

The resistance to using quotations from female-authored sources was on occasion articulated by those involved with the first edition of the *OED*, as when H.H. Gibbs (Lord Aldenham), a major contributor, wrote to Murray to complain that "[F. J.] Furnivall has a fancy that it is good to quote women, because the writings of women are a characteristic of the Age". Gibbs himself felt that the dictionary was "not meant to be a record of the progress of the Emancipation of women but of the birth and life and death of words".²⁴ But women speakers, whether emancipated or not, must always have contributed to "the birth and life and death of words", and the eighteenth century saw a striking expansion in literate and literary activity across the board. Bibliographical studies since 1988 have confirmed "the steady emergence of women writers early in the eighteenth century, followed by their explosive increase in its final three decades" – so that in 2000 Raven and Forster were able to show that women produced at least a third of the novels published in the late eighteenth century.²⁵ It seems

23 Here quoted from the second revised edition, Jespersen (1912: 2).

24 Gibbs to J.A.H. Murray, 3 May 1883, quoted in Mugglestone (2000: 14). Furnivall played a major part in the conception and execution of the first edition of the *OED*, cf. Murray (1977).

25 Quotation is from Stanton (1988: 253); see Raven, Garside *et al.* (2000: vol. 1, 46–47, Table 6) and accompanying discussion.

prima facie likely that language use, too, will have expanded and proliferated over this period, not contracted, despite the evidence of the first edition (and therefore the second edition) of *OED*. Both men and women will have played a part in this process, and it is therefore important to document both types of sources when constructing a picture of the history and development of the English language.

5. *OED3*

As mentioned at the start of this paper, *OED* is now, for the first time in its history, undergoing revision. This formidable project is taking each entry in the original *OED*, whether or not added to by Burchfield's Supplement of 1972–1986, and reviewing and rewriting every one of its constituent elements – pronunciation, etymology, variant spellings, definition and usage labels, date of first recorded use and quotations of subsequent usage.²⁶ The revision began by replicating the chronological distribution of sources between the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thus reproducing the eighteenth-century dip shown in Figure 1. From 2003–2004 onwards, however, the revisers started to redress the balance, and since then have increased quite sharply their quotation of sources dated 1700–1799.²⁷ Figure 2 below shows the quotation distribution by century as at the beginning of March 2008:

26 For an account of the history of *OED3* and an initial assessment of the revision, see Brewer (2007b: 213–257). The *OED* team have published a number of accounts of their activities: see e.g. the online Preface to the new edition at <<http://www.oed.com/>>, Simpson (2004), and for an extensive bibliography, Weiner (2008).

27 For an analysis of treatment over the alphabet range *M-philandering*, see <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/62/149/>>.

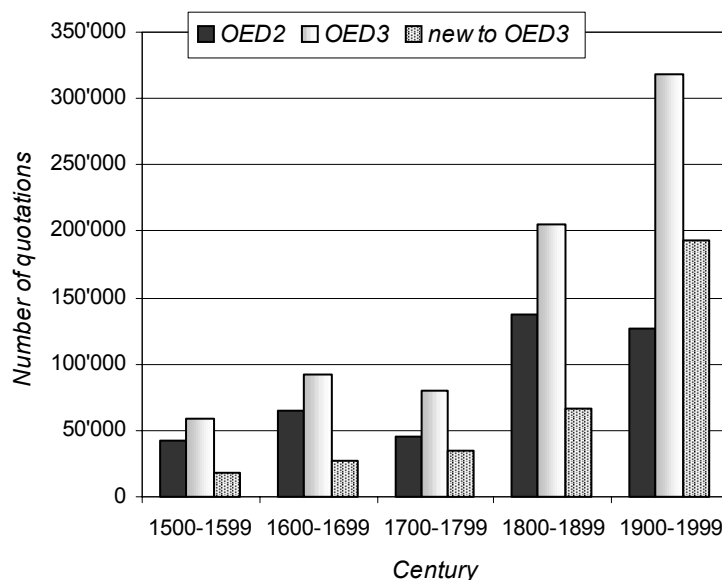


Figure 2. *OED2* and *OED3* quotations by century, over the revised alphabet range *M-quit shilling* (data collected 3–5 March 2008).

Here we can see that the quantities of quotations new to *OED3* (in black dots) go steadily up per century, but that the revisers' intensified quarrying of eighteenth-century sources is still failing to compensate for the first edition's shortfall of quotations from this period (in black).²⁸ So the new dictionary, whose totals are shown in white, continues to have fewer eighteenth-century quotations than it does quotations from the centuries on either side: the eighteenth-century dip remains in place. By contrast, *OED3* has excelled in the collection of quotations from the twentieth century, and here it has entirely compensated for the first edition's decline in quotation gathering for this period – a decline that Burchfield's Supplement had not been able to reverse (see note 2 above). (The relative proportions of quotations per century raise many interesting questions about the chronological distribution of quotations in all three editions of *OED*, some of which are

28 As explained in section 1, *OED2* undertook no new searches of historical sources.

discussed in the pages on period coverage in Brewer (2005–).²⁹ Do the variations reflect relative lexical productivity, or the lexicographers' preferences for one period over another? Would an analysis of first-cited usages per century be more revealing – or would it simply follow the same pattern as quotations generally, in accordance with Jürgen Schäfer's observation that "More sources per period result in more first citations for this period" (1980: 53)?

Additionally, although *OED3* is broadening its range of quotation sources for all periods of the language (see below), female authors remain far less quoted – so it appears to this intensive user – than do male. It is impossible to search *OED* quotations by gender of author so as to substantiate this observation. The digitalisation of the first edition and Burchfield's Supplement (which produced *OED2*) did not tag quotations by gender, and *OED3* has not so far introduced such tagging. This means that investigators of the new *OED* must rely on trial and error: making searches of individual authors who seem deserving (for one reason or another) as quotation sources for the dictionary, and randomly scanning of banks of quotations to see whether newly quoted female authors can be identified.

If we take the female authors mentioned in section 2 above, we can use the electronic search tools available on *OED Online* to discover how they are faring in the *OED3* revision. To get a clear picture, we need to confine our comparison to the alphabet-range treated by *OED3* at the time of writing this paper i.e. *M-quit shilling*; the results are given in Table 1 below.

In all cases, the number of quotations from these female writers has risen, ranging from significant increases (in terms of absolute numbers, if not percentages) for Burney, Edgeworth, Radcliffe and Wollstonecraft, down to a few tens of quotations or less for the other writers. Even Bannerman has now been given a toehold in the dictionary – if for one quotation only.³⁰ At first sight, this looks to be a cheering development in the *OED*'s treatment of female-authored

29 <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/category/12/52/197/>>.

30 Bannerman is quoted for *mining* used as a participial adjective: "1800 *Poems* 77 The watch-man sits ... As burst the thunders on his rocking tower, And at its foot the mining ocean raves".

sources, although the differential rate of quotation is perplexing. One assumes that Burney, Edgeworth, Radcliffe and Wollstonecraft were identified as sources of special importance – but why go to the trouble of reading Macaulay, Aubin and Bannerman and not quote from them more intensively, given that female-authored quotations are so few anyway? This seems an inefficient use of lexical research. And is the difference in treatment due to the linguistic characteristics of these texts or the perceived cultural (or literary) importance of the authors?

Author	Total <i>OED2</i> quotations	<i>OED2</i> quotations over <i>M-quit</i> <i>shilling</i>	<i>OED3</i> quotations over <i>M-quit</i> <i>shilling</i>	Increase in <i>OED3</i> quotations	% increase
Burney	1947	335	565	230	69
Edgeworth	1129	235	349	114	49
Radcliffe	1103	162	277	115	71
W. Montagu	675	131	143	12	9
C. Smith	324	90	152	62	69
More	202	43	72	29	67
S. Fielding	84	18	44	26	144
Wollstonecraft	78	17	142	125	735
Barbauld	18	1	23	22	2200
C. Macaulay	2	1	4	3	300
Aubin	0	0	21	21	N/A
Bannerman	0	0	1	1	N/A
TOTAL	5562	1033	1793	760	74

Table 1. *OED3*'s treatment of some female sources over the alphabet range *M-quit shilling* (data gathered 2–6 March 2008).

Comparing *OED3*'s treatment of a handful of male-authored sources of the eighteenth century, as presented in Table 2, puts the data in Table 1 in a different perspective, especially given that all these male writers are already heavily quoted in *OED*.

Author	Total <i>OED2</i> quotations	<i>OED2</i> quotations over <i>M-quit</i> <i>shilling</i>	<i>OED3</i> quotations over <i>M-quit</i> <i>shilling</i>	Increase in <i>OED3</i> quotations	% increase
Pope	5804	824	867	43	5
Cowper	5813	808	870	62	8
Swift	4624	797	996	199	25
Defoe	4288	689	1126	437	63
Addison	4201	702	773	71	10
H. Fielding	1926	340	806	466	137
Gay	916	173	237	64	37
TOTAL	27572	4333	5675	1342	31

Table 2. *OED3*'s treatment of some male sources over the alphabet range *M-quit shilling* (data gathered 2–6 March 2008).

The discrepancy between the numbers of quotations from male and from female authors is very nearly as striking in *OED3* as in *OED2*. This is mainly because *OED3* is carrying over the first edition's vast quantities of male-authored quotations into the new edition, so that – given that none of the female sources are being as intensively mined for the third edition as male sources were for the first – the existing male-to-female proportions are being preserved. Additionally, however, it looks as if the *OED* lexicographers are continuing to give some male-authored sources quite significantly preferential treatment over female-authored ones: for example, both Fielding and Defoe, already handsomely cited in the first edition of the dictionary, have been given far more attention by the revisers than any female authors of the period (though without a wider survey it is impossible to be sure of this).

Comparing the two sets of data in Tables 1 and 2, and contemplating the differences in quotation rate between different writers, it is hard to assume that linguistic considerations alone are at work here. Cultural and social values seem to be asserting themselves as well. The chief editor of *OED3*, John Simpson, has explained that the revisers' intention is to quote from a wider range of sources during the course of their revision, the implication being that *OED3* will correct

the first edition's biases in favour of male-authored over female-authored, and literary over non-literary sources, and against the eighteenth century:

In addition to the “traditional” canon of literary works, today's Reading Programme covers women's writing and non-literary texts which have been published in recent times, such as wills, probate inventories, account books, diaries, and letters. The programme also covers the eighteenth century, since studies have shown that the original *Oxford English Dictionary* reading in this period was less extensive than it was for the previous two centuries. (Simpson 2000)

Where both gender and literary bias are concerned, however, it is difficult to see how any such correction can be achieved unless the lexicographers prune, quite significantly, *OED*'s enormous banks of quotations from canonical male authors – and try to find new quotations from female rather than from male authors, especially the male authors already much quoted in the dictionary.

But throwing away good lexical evidence goes against the grain for any historical linguist. And it seems particularly perverse to do so now, given that online publication would appear to remove many of the practical and financial constraints which forced the first lexicographers to restrict their account of the history of the language in the first place (Murray complained piteously to the Philological Society in 1890 that the ruthless culling of quotations was “a sorrowful necessity”, required so as to keep the Dictionary's size in check; nevertheless, “as the quotations are the essence of the work, it is like shearing Samson's locks.”)³² Just as importantly, many of *OED*'s

32 Philological Society Ordinary Meeting Book, 24 January 1890 [held by Oxford University Press]; quoted in Murray (1977: 274; cf. also 285). Osselton (1993: 130) discusses a similar problem in relation to the blending of Burchfield's Supplement with *OED1* to make *OED2*, where the failure to “throw good material away” resulted in striking imbalances between quotation citations per century (Burchfield having been far more generous in providing quotations from the twentieth century than his predecessors had from preceding centuries). In its revision of *OED2* to date, *OED3* has culled a significant number of quotations added by Burchfield (s.v. *mantra*, *pizzazz*, *plonk* and dozens of other instances), but the imbalances still remain.

users are literary scholars who would be appalled if the *OED* reneged on its predecessor's function of "literary instrument", i.e. acting as a tool to explain and contextualise the vocabulary of major and minor literary writers.³³ Is the solution for the lexicographers to keep these quotations from Pope, Cowper and the like, as they appear to be doing, but greatly increase their quotations from other types of sources – from female-authored literary works and from non-literary works, whether by males or females, of a wide range of genres?

In some very small way, it appears that *OED* tried at an earlier stage in its history to correct the under-quotation of female sources. During the course of compiling his four-volume Supplement of twentieth-century updates to *OED*, published over 1972–1986, R.W. Burchfield slipped in a few hundreds of quotations from the letters and journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, despite the fact that their eighteenth and nineteenth-century origins would appear to have made them ineligible for inclusion at this stage.³⁴ Was he trying to redress an imbalance in the parent dictionary? If *OED3* were to extend Burchfield's policy (if this was what it was) and examine such female-authored sources – which are abundant – more widely and more exhaustively, it could at the same time move towards compensating entirely, rather than only partially, for the short-fall in eighteenth-century sources quoted in the first edition of *OED* and still perceptible in the third. This policy could most productively be extended to other periods in the dictionary, for example the nineteenth century, where *OED1/2* citations from Dickens (c. 8,200), Tennyson (c. 6,700), Carlyle (c. 6,250), Macaulay (c. 5,450) and others dwarf those from female writers, for example George Eliot (by far the highest quoted female author, with c. 3,100 citations), Harriet Martineau (c. 1,650), Mary Braddon (c. 1,500) or even Jane Austen (c. 1,050).³⁵

33 The term "literary instrument" is Burchfield's; see Brewer (2007b: 165).

34 See notes 4, 10 and 11 above.

35 See <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/50/130/>> and <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/56/140/>>. These writers are all receiving further attention in *OED3*, but the existing proportions of male to female quotations continue to prevail. Thus electronic searches of *OED3* reveal that the revision has, so it appears, added 551 quotations (net) from the work of Dickens, already one of the top sources for the dictionary. No increases for

Of course, the question of what the correct balance of quotation might be between male and female sources (as between different centuries) is a formidably knotted one and requires protracted research and analysis. Should it reflect the proportion of male to female speakers? Or writers? Or published writers? Or some other ratio? It seems unlikely, however, that *OED*'s present balance is just. As the front page of its website tells us, this great dictionary is the "definitive record of the language". Since it is necessarily based on written sources for much of the historical period it covers, it would seem appropriate to bring its proportions of male to female quotations up to those of the available source literature as an absolute minimum (and it could also be argued that *OED* ought to represent female-authored texts as much as possible over the earlier periods, given that the proportion of texts written by women is out of step with the gender proportions of the literate population as a whole). But whatever decision the *OED3* lexicographers arrive at, it is vital – in view of the fact that their dictionary furnishes the first port of call for virtually all historical research on English – that they set out and explain the basis on which they select their quotation sources where gender, or indeed any other category of language, is concerned.

In the meantime, the present project, based on a sample of female authors of the eighteenth century, progresses (slowly), in the belief that any study that reminds us of the significant number of women active in writing and publishing over 1700–1799 is a helpful supplement to the magnificent body of evidence to be found in the *OED*.³⁶ We may hope that the dictionary will consider searching these sources more extensively in the future.

female authors appear to match this figure – and even the highest I have so far found, 430 new quotations for Austen and 300 for George Eliot, only bring their respective totals to 580 and 823 for the revised stretch of the alphabet in *OED3*, compared with Dickens's 1,815. Other female authors have had far fewer extra quotations added, e.g. E.B. Browning (28), Gaskell (157), Yonge (55), while Braddon has lost 34 and Martineau 7 quotations.

36 Initial searches of *OED Online* for quotations per century and for citations of individual authors were carried out for the "Examining the *OED*" project (Brewer 2005–) over 2005–2006 by Christopher Whalen, Sarah McLoughlin and Daniel Calvert, to all of whom I express my warm thanks.

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