Robert Browning in the Oxford English Dictionary: A New Approach

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HAT use are writers in dictionaries? What use are dictionaries in literary scholarship and criticism? Ever since Johnson founded his *Dictionary* on "examples from the best writers," we have turned to the great dictionaries not for philological information only, but for the whole world of learning out of which they were conceived and to which they give access. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), conceived on historical and scientific principles, was also intended from the start as a record of the linguistic usages, achievements, even shortcomings, of "great writers"—a purpose endorsed and carried forward by the editor of its new supplement.²

Readers and critics continue to consult the second edition (OED2)

¹ The OED Bibliography is sometimes incomplete or inconsistent; titles of poems and names of writers vary in form, and a poem may be cited from different editions. Except where otherwise stated, all quotations from Browning in this paper are from *The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), and from *The Ring and the Book*, ed. Richard D. Altick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Headwords in the OED are indicated by italics. For the layout and terminology of the OED, see Donna Lee Berg, A Guide to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

² The editor of the second Supplement argues that "the language of great writers, including poets, should be registered, even once-only uses, virtually in concordance form": Robert W. Burchfield, "The Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary: The End of the Alphabet," in Richard W. Bailey, ed., Dictionaries of English: Prospects for the Record of Our Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11–21, 18. On Johnson's use of literary quotations, see Robert DeMaria, Jr., Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) and Gwin J. and Ruth A. Kolb, "The Selection and Use of the Illustrative Quotations in Dr. Johnson's Dictionary", in Howard D. Weinbrot, ed., New Aspects of Lexicography: Literary Criticism, Intellectual History, and Social Change (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 61–72.

for definitions and histories of writers' words; as official or informal contributors they may even submit new items, corrections, or antedatings to the New Dictionary Project at Oxford which will one day give us OED3. Now, thanks to the CD-ROM and other electronic versions, we can reverse the process, looking up writers rather than words: instead of turning from a writer to the dictionary we can approach the dictionary first, selecting all the quotations from a chosen author and pondering his or her presence or absence as an exemplar of what has been and may be done with words.3 Robert Browning, for example, provided 2,958 quotations for the first OED; simultaneously, the dictionary's compilers, implicitly through their selections, and explicitly in their labels, definitions, and interpolations, offered an interpretative response to his poetry. By reading Browning in the dictionary and presenting a selection of my findings, I hope to suggest ways forward for those who are primarily interested in using the OED and its electronic versions in literary criticism. (Technical details of the searches and results are reserved for the Appendix.) I also hope, specifically, to contribute new materials and insights to the study of Browning: to his reception by his Victorian readers and to our own understanding of his linguistic imagination.4

THE IMPLICATIONS OF MACHINE-READABLE TEXT

The OED in printed form already offers an embryonic critical commentary on each word in the form of status symbols and labels (obs., arch., poet., etc.) and other usage labels (Naut., Theol., etc.), grammatical and etymological information, hierarchies of figurative and other ex-

³ Earlier studies of writers in the *OED* include W. S. Mackie, "Shakespeare's English: And How Far It Can Be Investigated with the Help of the *New English Dictionary,*" *MLR* 31 (1936): 1–10; and Jürgen Schäfer, *Documentation in the O.E.D.: Shakespeare and Nashe as Test Cases* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Since computerization, the following have appeared: Jack Gray, "Milton and the *OED* Electronic Database," *Milton Quarterly* 23 (1989): 66–73; James C. McKusick, "'Living Words': Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Genesis of the *OED*," *MP* 90 (1992): 1–45; Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and John Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴ On Browning's language see Bernard Groom, "On the Diction of Tennyson, Browning and Arnold," Society for Pure English, Tract no. 53 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 91–150; Stewart W. Holmes, "Browning: Semantic Stutterer," *PMLA* 60 (1945): 231–55; Josephine Miles, *The Primary Language of Poetry in the 1740's and 1840's*, University of California Publications in English, vol. 19, no. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950); William M. Ryan, "The Classifications of Browning's 'Difficult' Vocabulary," *SP* 60 (1963): 542–48; and Ian Jack, "The Words in *Sordello*," *Browning Institute Studies* 6 (1978): 63–85.

tended meanings, and notes on compoundings and other collocational behavior. Sometimes it expands more fully-under eximious, for instance, which prefaces the quotation from Browning's The Ring and the Book with "Now rare. . . . the few examples in 19th c. are humorously bombastic or pedantic." Once the OED was computerized, it became possible for the entire text to be browsed, searched, or cross-referenced and the results filed and sorted. Any reader with access to a personal computer should be able to make use of the search menu in the CD-ROM version (OED2/CD); readers with some computing experience will also be able to carry out more complex searches by writing programs in the query language. In this study I have worked mainly with the search menu and with some straightforward sorting operations within one results file. The search menu offers five basic searches: word, text, etymology, definition, and quotation. Within each of these are a number of additional choices: the word search, for instance, has a date filter and a part of speech filter, and the quotation search may be delimited by date, author, or title of work. We can therefore find the answer to such questions as these: How many quotations from Browning are there in the OED? How many are cited from a particular poem, or from a particular date or range of dates? Does the word "foam" occur in any of them? Were any of the words pronounced by Browning in an unusual way? What did the editors have to say about his odd usages? Using the query language we may ask, in addition: How many words are adverbs, or derive from French? How many of the words quoted from Browning are also quoted from Donne or Scott? Are any defined from Johnson's Dictionary? Finally, juxtaposing quotation and definition, we may explore the relationship of Browning's writing to the lexicographer's task of illustrating and explaining the meanings of words. Much suggestive information embedded in and dispersed throughout the printed dictionary can thus be made accessible from the machine-readable text.

BROWNING AND DICTIONARIES

For Browning himself, the English dictionary meant Johnson. According to his first biographer, "When the die was cast, and young Browning was definitely to adopt literature as his profession, he qualified himself for it by reading and digesting the whole of Johnson's Dictionary." 5 Unfortunately, his copy of Johnson does not seem to have

⁵ Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2 vols. (Boston, 1891), I.50.

survived. The library sold after his son Pen's death contains various Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, and Greek dictionaries alongside encyclopedic works such as Collier's *Dictionary*, but no dictionaries of the English language. Dictionaries, lexicons, and glossaries figure in his poems only as aids to foreign languages and literatures, as in his father's remembered advice to the young Robert to "thumb well the [Greek] Lexicon!" ("Development," l. 47). He tends to be skeptical about the value of commentary or exegesis which "leaves the text obscurer for the gloss" (Fifine at the Fair, l. 2058). Browning enjoyed browsing in Johnson, but it rarely occurred to him to defer to the authority of dictionary-makers or to look to them for support. When he did invoke Johnson, as in the case of the nonce-word gadge, queried by Elizabeth Barrett, he was sometimes wrong: the word, labeled by the OED"?pseudo-arch.," does not appear in Johnson's Dictionary.6

BROWNING AND THE OED

In his paper to the Philological Society in 1857, which marks the beginning of the history of the OED, Richard Chenevix Trench announced that 121 authors had already been "taken in hand." Browning appears to have been one of this first list of writers parceled out to members of the public who had responded to an appeal to read texts and compile citation "slips" for selected words. We know, for instance, that in the early years of the project a Miss M. E. Clerke (or Clarke) read Men and Women. Later readers include William Michael Rossetti, who tackled the three-volume Poetical Works of 1863, and Horace Moule, friend of Thomas Hardy and a long-serving member of the dictionary staff, who read a number of Browning texts. Perhaps because he felt the poem had been skimped, Furnivall himself, President of the Philological Society,

⁶ See Ian Jack, Rowena Fowler, and Margaret Smith, eds., The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 295.

⁷ On some Deficiencies in our English Dictionaries (London, 1857). The story of the OED has been told several times; a summary is provided in the first volume of OED2, xxxv-lxi. Some of the primary materials, for instance the original "Proposal" and "Appeals," have been reprinted: see "Materials for the History of the Oxford English Dictionary," Dictionaries 8 (1986): 176-235. For a good account of the early stages, see Hans Aarslef, "The Early History of the Oxford English Dictionary," Bulletin of the New York Public Library 66 (1962): 417-39; for the period of Murray's editorship, see K. M. Elisabeth Murray, Caught in the Web of Words: James A. H. Murray and the "Oxford English Dictionary" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); on OED2 see Charlotte Brewer, "The Second Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary," RES n.s. 44 (1993): 313-42.

subsequently reread and re-excerpted "Mr Sludge, 'The Medium,'" which was to provide five quotations for the published dictionary.8

The first inkling Browning had that he was being "read" was in 1870 when he received a letter (unfortunately no longer extant) from Mrs. Bathoe, one of the principal readers, listing 38 words from *The Ring and the Book* and asking him to fill in the "exact meaning" of each. Unlike Hardy, who enjoyed discussing his work with lexicographers, Browning was affronted; all the words, he insisted (wrongly), were in Johnson's *Dictionary*, and those Mrs. Bathoe considered "archaic" were common in Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible. Of the five of Mrs. Bathoe's words which Browning gives as examples (effraction, fleshliness, inexpugnable, imposthume, votarist—"and the like"), only the last two came to be illustrated by quotations from his poems in the OED. The irony, as Browning relayed it to a friend, was that Mrs. Bathoe had missed the "one or two" words in the poem "which are really of my coining for good reasons." ¹⁰

For a few years after this, the project fell into abeyance until James Murray was officially appointed editor in 1879. A second "Appeal to the English Speaking and English Reading Public" was then launched; again, "Browning, Robert, Later Poems" was one of the specific authors needing to be tackled. The list of readers and books read between 1879 and 1884 includes Katharine Bradley (one half of the poet "Michael Field"), who sent in 500 slips for Browning's Dramatic Idyls. Others were Furnivall (Aristophanes' Apology) and Murray's son Harold Murray (Red Cotton Night-Cap Country). It was not until 1883 that Browning was approached once again directly, this time by Alfred Erlebach, Murray's assistant, who was unsure about the meaning of apparitional

⁸ I gratefully acknowledge the help of the *OED* Archivist, Mrs. J. M. McMorris. Various lists of Browning texts and their readers are now in the OED Archives: see, for example, MSS MISC/149/2 and MISC/193. For individual readers, e.g. Katharine Bradley, see MISC/186 xxxvi. See also the printed lists of readers and books read in contemporary volumes of the Philological Society's *Transactions* and of readers only in the prefaces to individual letters of the alphabet in the published Dictionary. Ian Jack argues that the "importance of the role of F. J. Furnivall in the early history of *OED* may help to explain the care with which Browning's writings were studied" ("The Words in *Sordello*," 85).

⁹ See Taylor, Hardy's Literary Language, 115-22.

¹⁰ Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden, ed. Edward C. McAleer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951), 353. Which words did Browning consider his own coinings? The two in *The Ring and the Book* which are not in the *OED* are "caudatory" (a train-bearer, XI.735) and "malleolable" (capable of being hammered into shape, I.702). There are, in all, 411 quotations from the poem in the *OED*; three of the entries (ombrifuge, pollent, and porporate) are unique to Browning.

in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (III.1111). Browning replied with a genial enough postcard, though he later told Furnivall that he felt he had no particular authority in the matter. (Oddly enough, in view of his sometimes embattled relationships as keeper of his wife's memory, this spectral echo from her work seems not to have disturbed him.)

Six of the original fascicles of the *OED* were published in Browning's lifetime. Had he looked himself up in June 1888 when *Bra-Byzen* appeared (there is no evidence he did so), he would have found no entry deriving from his name, though *OED*² has since added *Browning-ite*, *Browningese*, and *Browningesque*, the last defined as "Of, pertaining to, or characteristic of Robert Browning or his style." Neither edition records the autonomastic "a Browning" as in the poet's joke on himself in *The Inn Album*:

That bard's a Browning; he neglects the form: But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense! (17-18)

Meeting Murray in Edinburgh in 1884, where they were both to receive honorary degrees, Browning pronounced the recently published first fascicle *A-Ant* "most delightful" and declared that he intended to read every word of the completed dictionary. Murray, for his part, was less impressed: "Browning constantly used words without regard to their proper meaning. He has added greatly to the difficulties of the Dictionary." Years later, in the final fascicle to see publication (*Wise-Wyzen*, in April 1928), the poet came close to having the unwitting last word since the penultimate quotation is Browning's *wyvern* in *Paracel-sus* (II.453): "Blaze like a wyvern flying round the sun."

BROWNING'S WORDS

A search in the OED quotation field on "author" finds 2,958 quotations from Browning, supporting 2,675 headwords; in OED2, 3,051 quotations support 2,746 headwords (see Appendix: Search 1). The number of quotations in the first OED is roughly commensurate with

¹¹ Browning's Trumpeter: The Correspondence of Robert Browning and Frederick J. Furnivall, 1872–1889, ed. William S. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Decatur House Press, 1979), 84–85. (Browning uses the word "apparitional" three times in his own poetry, but no quotation from him or Elizabeth Barrett Browning appeared for this entry in the published dictionary.)

¹² Murray, Caught in the Web of Words, 235.

Browning's importance at the end of the nineteenth century; it may be compared with the number from Tennyson (6,943), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1,433), Thomas Hardy (420), or Adelaide Anne Procter (6).13 As a proportion of Browning's total vocabulary of approximately 40,000 words, it is of course small; it is also in some ways unrepresentative. The examples were selected by late-Victorian readers. Some works were read for a particular letter of the alphabet, and although readers were supposed to note examples of all types of words, they tended to notice and record the more striking or outlandish examples. Choosing a quotation to illustrate ampullosity or angelot was always easier for the dictionary staff than pigeonholing am or an, but from a critical or interpretative, as from a lexicographic, point of view, "ordinary" words have as important a part to play as unusual vocabulary. The longest and most complex entry in the OED, that for the deceptively simple word set, cites Browning several times, including "Set Fair" (the weathercock in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country), "setting of the Pleiads" (Agamemnon), and "setters-forth of unexampled themes" (Sordello). We need to consider the words selected for the dictionary alongside a Browning concordance (the first, published in 1924, was hardly available to the compilers of the dictionary) and in conjunction with modern editions of the poems (the Penguin/Yale, the Oxford, and the Longman) which as standard practice note words or usages not recorded in the OED.

I scrutinized the list of headwords with Browning quotations in both OED and OED2; although it was tempting to concentrate on the plums and puzzles, I looked up all entries for the first quarter (abashless to fitly) and a sample of entries for the rest of the alphabet. I also devised a method, using a free text search, for finding a word, "foam" for example, which appears anywhere in the dictionary in a Browning quotation but is not the headword for the quotation (see Appendix: Search 2).

Of the headwords themselves, by far the greatest number of less familiar examples illustrated by Browning quotations turn out to be unusual, even unique, derivatives and combinations of otherwise common words. Prefixes and suffixes run riot: "bosom," for instance, burgeons into disbosom, disembosom, embosom, and re-embosom. "Altissimo" reduplicates to altaltissimo. Characteristic morphemes are over-, out-, arch-, -dom, -ry, -ship, and -hood: outbranch, noodledom, wizardry, clown-ship. Two headwords displayed early on in the alphabetical list illus-

¹³ For additional examples, see Willinsky, Empire of Words, especially Table 6.1 (Top Twenty Authors by Citation in OED1); and Taylor, Hardy's Literary Language, 124–27.

trate other ways new words may be derived from familiar forms: abashless (the opposite of "bashful"); and aboriginary (constructed by analogy with the Latin "aboriginarius"). There are twenty prefixes in a- (from a total of over a hundred in the Concordance) adding an active extra syllable in forms like a-tingle, a-wave or a-yelp. The more passive be- is cited only four times, in forms such as besprent and be-tinseled. Several unusual agent forms such as cager, dabster, and ferryer are recorded; the line "Wanters, abounders" from "Pisgah Sights. II" (37) is quoted in support of abounder, though "wanter" itself is not recorded as a word in the dictionary. Also in evidence are Browning's characteristically cumbersome comparatives, superlatives, and modifiers: busklier, beauteousest, falsish. Many derivatives flout the usual rules of euphony: griefful, disshroud. Most are comprehensible from their context if not immediately from their form: chanceful, fair-ful (a quantity sufficient to fill up a fair); branchage (a mass of branches, by analogy with "foliage"). Browning shows a liking for the weak verbal form which the OED describes as a "participial adjective" - aloed, appled, eyed, lilied, lozenged, mothed, earwigged, undervished (not having a dervish)-as well as for unusual participial usages such as the adjectival beheading—the "beheading axe" of A Soul's Tragedy (I.331). Any part of speech may be transformable into an adjective in -y: loathy, barky (like the bark of a tree), myrrhy, bulgy, sunshiny-or into an adverb: aurorally, centuply. A part-of-speech search (see Appendix: Search 2) showed that there are 116 adverbial forms altogether in the list of Browning quotations.

Besides derivatives, the other main examples of Browning's ways with familiar words are those recorded towards the end of an entry and labelled attrib., comb., or spec. comb. Browning's compoundings and combinations are at the heart of his most recognizable style, the "cumulative effects which are more energetic than euphonious." ¹⁴ Many alliterate (bee-bird, cork-crop), assonate (clot-poll), or rhyme (shagrag, club-drub). Characteristic collocations are the instrumental use of a substantive bound to a past participle (cleft-nursed, death-begirt) and the compounding of two substantives (heart-quake, death-trap). Other combinations compress physical attributes: billowy-bosomed (women), crop-headed, crush-nosed (men); or blend or contrast qualities: bitter-pungent, black-blue. Words are often brought together in new ways in Browning's images of color and the spectrum (facet-flash) and of that ungraspable moment when states such as solid and liquid meet and

¹⁴ Groom, "On the Diction of Tennyson, Browning and Arnold," 132.

merge (spume-flake). Different aspects of the writer's world are recorded by the OED in bard-craft, desk-drudge, and crow-quill holograph.

An interesting group of words are those specially marked out in the dictionary as foreign, obsolete, or wrongly used. A disappointment of the OED2/CD is that it is not possible to search on the three "status symbols": [†] = "obsolete," [||] = "not naturalized, alien," and [¶] = "catachrestic and erroneous uses." The latter, in particular, employed "with unabated sternness" in subsidiary sections throughout the dictionary, would have been particularly valuable in a study of a poet's language.15 (An alternative type of search is necessary, as I explain below.) The other two signs, which precede the headword, can be picked out fairly easily on the screen at the beginning of the line of text displayed alongside the alphabetical list of headwords. The "alien" symbol tends to cluster, as might be expected, in certain works: French words in Fifine at the Fair and Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, Greek in Aristophanes' Apology and Balaustion's Adventure, Italian and Latin in The Ring and the Book. The words may be direct transcriptions, even amis faux (exposition for "exhibition") or anglicizations (commissary for commissaire). Imports which are nowadays comparatively assimilated (chablis) are marked as foreign in the first OED or omitted altogether: "lasagne," for example, relished in "An Englishman in Italy" but unknown to members of the Browning Society, was one of the Browning words added in OED2. A broader category of words, to include those deriving from, say, French but no longer considered "foreign," may be retrieved by constructing an etymology search; there are in all 841 words from French in the Browning quotations (see Appendix: Search 4).

The symbol for "obsolete" appears less frequently in the list of Browning headwords, though it is used inconsistently in the OED and is sometimes accompanied by, sometimes replaced by, the label Obs. Again, the status label, which immediately follows the headword, homonym number, and part of speech and contains much compressed information and opinion, is, frustratingly, omitted from the fields searchable on the CD-ROM. It would have been convenient to be able to see at a glance which of the words with Browning quotations were arch., dial., or even vulg., and to note if and how the labeling changes between the two editions of the dictionary; as it is, entries have to be scanned by eye. (A color monitor is helpful here, as the label field

¹⁵ The phrase is from R. W. Burchfield, "The Treatment of Controversial Vocabulary in The Oxford English Dictionary," Transactions of the Philological Society (1973): 1–28, 12.

is distinguished by color.) Several headwords labeled "obsolete" cite Browning as a last use. The case is strongest when there is a gap of several centuries between the Browning citation and the one immediately preceding it. Thus bespete (to spit on), labeled arch., has a quotation from 1580 followed by Browning's "black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes" from "Childe Roland" (114) of 1855. Protoplast 2. (first creator) goes straight from Newton in 1676 to Browning's Fifine at the Fair (2165) in 1872, and bye-blow (illegitimate child) just from Tom Jones (1749) to The Ring and the Book, V.770 (1868-69). Some of the words in the list look familiar but are used in an obsolete sense: address meaning "get dressed," or candid meaning "pure." In his work on Hardy's archaisms, Dennis Taylor draws our attention to the way a word from Hardy labeled as "obsolete" in the OED may not be the last instance; in other words, Hardy has brought the word back into use.16 Browning, however, does not seem to have had this more broadly reviving effect on the language.

In order to trace Browning's catachrestic uses, it is necessary to search for "Browning" in the definition field rather than the quotation field; this brings together the words deriving from his own name as well as those the editors considered the poet to have misused in ways worth recording (see Appendix: Search 5). A famous example is Browning's embarrassingly innocent mistake in Pippa Passes over twat, labeled by the OED as Low, but also, thankfully, if prematurely, as Obs.17 Another erroneous use is Childe Roland's slug-horn (meaning "trumpet"), directly imitated, and duly cited, from Chatterton. Sometimes it is the pronunciation rather than the sense which is glossed. A search for a writer in the etymology field (see Appendix: Search 6) will display all the instances of explicit comment on pronunciation: the editors note Browning's unorthodox accentuation of aspectable, circumvallate, and impuissance, for instance, as suggested by the meter, and comment generally on the various pronunciations of champaign by a number of poets, Browning included. (Although Browning's own "champaign," the Campagna di Roma, is such a memorable presence in his poetry, Browning does not appear in this quotation field.) Where Browning is

¹⁶ Taylor, Hardy's Literary Language, 148-50.

¹⁷ Browning explained that a Civil War rhyme on "a Cardinal's hat / . . . an old nun's twat" gave him the idea the word denoted "a distinctive part of a nun's attire": see the note to Pippa Passes, IV.282, in Ian Jack and Rowena Fowler, eds., The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 90; also Zelda Boyd, "'The Grammarian's Funeral" and the Erotics of Grammar, "Browning Institute Studies 13 (1988): 1–14.

not mentioned by name it is not possible to carry out an automatic search, but sometimes the editors will implicitly indicate pronunciation by including rhyming words: the quotation from the "Epilogue" to Pacchiarotto illustrating bouse (booze, drink), is followed by "rimewds. caroused, drowsed."

The etymology field also, of course, yields information on the historical derivation of words. In attempting to categorize pash v. 5., the action of a horse's hooves striking water in "Up at a Villa—Down in the City" (28), the editors offer a Middle English dialect form for comparison but come to the conclusion that "Browning's use is prob. due to the exigency of rime." (There are five rhymes in the stanza.)

The words and senses treated by the *OED* as nonce or unique to Browning are surprisingly few, for such a confidently inventive writer: cog (an act of cheating), blotch (a shapeless object), egregious (of a sheep, in the sense of "wandering from the flock"), encolure (the mane of a horse), exenterate (a medical-sounding euphemism for "disembowelled"), gadge (an instrument of torture), over-toise ("to measure out in toises"), strepitant and unstridulosity (lacking a shrill voice—a formation which can only be defined by working back to stridulous by way of un- 1.12). Feloness in "The Flight of the Duchess" (794) is implicitly presented as coming into being through its rhyme on "yellowness" (thirty-three lines distant). Stomp (OED2 only) is used in place of stump or stamp, the editors surmise, "to obtain a rime"; what kind of a rhyme we can fill in for ourselves from the quotation as the "Englishman" of the poem observes the foreign spectacle:

And then will the flaxen-wigged Image
Be carried in pomp
Through the plain, while in gallant procession
The priests mean to stomp.

("The Englishman in Italy," 269-72)

The effective autonomastic term unMurrayed (not featuring in Murray's guidebook), coined for Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, is the only such form cited from Browning in the OED, though he often used words like "Liverpoolize" or "un-Darwinized" in his letters. A striking use of bleed, v. 8. fig.—"lips which bleed / Like a mountain berry"—cited from the first edition of Pauline (1833, 196: later altered to "bloom") is discussed in detail by the editors of the Longman edition.

There are few "new" words, with first or early recorded literary uses

¹⁸ Peterson, ed., Browning's Trumpeter, 81 and 34.

in Browning, though *calotype*, referring to a photographic process for which the patent was registered in 1841, is cited from "Mesmerism," written around 1853. *Match*, in the modern sense of a strikeable match with a chemical tip, invented around 1830, is cited from Browning's "Meeting at Night" (first published in 1845) where it features unforgettably: "the quick sharp scratch / And blue spurt of a lighted match." Other first uses include both *de nos jours* (*OED2* only) and *old-fangled*. One of the most arresting words first recorded in the *OED* from Browning poems is *artistry* (in the sense both of the occupation of an artist and of artistic ability).

BROWNING AND OTHER WRITERS

One of the purposes and pleasures of looking up a writer in the OED is to encounter the same word used in different ways by other writers. Under bladdery a 2., for instance, Browning's "bladdery waveworked yeast" ("Pan and Luna," 60), follows Coleridge's "bladdery sea-weed strewed" ("To a Lady," 7). The sexual connotations of Browning's "acorned hog" (the Catholic bishop in "Holy-Cross Day" as perceived by his Jewish victims) are brought to the fore in the juxtaposition with Shakespeare's Iachimo who "Like a full-acorn'd boar . . . Cried 'O!' and mounted" (Cymbeline, II.v.16-17). Such suggestive contexts can of course come to light in printed editions of the dictionary. But electronic searching makes possible the listing of any writers or texts in combination. For example, following up Browning's own acknowledgment of Johnson, we might wish to identify all 108 instances in which a word cited from Browning is defined in the OED by a direct quotation from Johnson's Dictionary (see Appendix: Search 7). It becomes clear that Browning is often closer to Johnson than to the usage of his own time (a point regularly noted by the editors of the Oxford edition). Browning even uses words which Johnson himself judges to be obsolete: exclaim as a substantive, described by Johnson as "Now disused," surfaces regardless in Sordello (I.344).

If we begin to notice that the Browning words we look up in the OED are also often cited from one other particular writer, the next step might be to carry out a search on the two writers in combination. Using Boolean operators, the query language will explore the co-presence of Browning and/or other authors within the dictionary entries (see Appendix: Search 8). Francis Quarles, a favorite of Browning and an acknowledged source of his poems, often seems to crop up in the same

entry: 143 times, in fact (see Appendix: Search 8a). What might seem a significant overlap is put in perspective, however, when judged alongside the coincidence of Browning quotations with those of another seventeenth-century poet, with a similar number of citations but no particular association with Browning: Andrew Marvell (see Appendix: Search 8b). The degree of overlap is almost identical. Turning to Browning's contemporaries, we might ask where his citations overlap with, say, Tennyson (chirr), Manning (acquiescingly), or Carlyle (detestability). Sometimes the quotations cluster around a particular moment: Browning, Mayhew, and Carlyle (the only three citations) all diagnose beasthood between 1837 and 1868. One special instance is the co-presence of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning (see Appendix: Search 8e). Among the 159 words the poets have in common in the OED we find an array of unanimity and difference. Both use monkey as a verb (1. trans. b.) and deathly in the sense of "pertaining to death." Both favor untenderly, vastitude, and wormy, and aspire to the condition of epos and epoist. Cue-owl is their own private word; the two quotations for this name for the Mediterranean Scops-owl (from its characteristic cry) are from Aurora Leigh (1856, VIII.32) and "Andrea del Sarto" (1855, 210): "The cue-owls speak the name we call them by." Yet mis-suit, v. trans. hints at a disparity of outlook beneath the shared meaning: "He will not . . . swagger in a tone / Missuiting a great man," writes Elizabeth Barrett Browning of her hero Napoleon III in 1860; in 1864 Robert Browning, unmasking another charlatan, replies "Each . . . / Is blind to what missuits him" ("Mr Sludge, 'The Medium,' " 1446-48).

INDIVIDUAL WORKS AND DATES

As well as searching for authors, the text search offers two further options: title of work and date. A work title search (see Appendix: Search 9) lists each work in alphabetical order, followed (again in alphabetical order) by the words cited from each work. Thus "Abt Vogler," the first poem listed, yields 12 citations. Under La Saisiaz (and its two misprinted forms, "Sasaiz" and "Saisias"!) we find 230 citations; 259 under Red Cotton Night-Cap Country. Such a search might conceivably be of interest to a scholar working on an individual text, though the significance in terms of the number of citations reflects little more than the importance accorded it at the time by the dictionary staff, the assiduity of the reader in submitting slips, and the needs of the subeditor in selecting them. Browning's later poetry was read more thor-

oughly than his earlier poetry because it was only after 1870 that he came to be considered a major poet and because the later work tended to be disproportionately valued and studied by his contemporaries. It is also noticeable that the distribution of words is uneven through the alphabet. There is, for instance, only one quotation from *Pippa Passes* between A and E, and 76 thereafter: 33 of these headwords begin just with the letter S, an indication that the readers for S combed Browning thoroughly either when the material was first collected during the 1880s or when it was reedited in the early years of the new century. A search for the title Men and Women, on the other hand, yields fifty or so quotations, almost all beginning with A, and none of them from "Childe Roland," a poem from that volume which we have already seen elsewhere figuring significantly in the OED. The explanation must be that the early readers worked from individual volumes as they were published while later readers used a collected volume in which the separate poems of Men and Women were rearranged and dispersed. Searching or sorting by date is also possible (see Appendix: Search 10). Searches may be run for a single year (1842, say) or for a range of years (1870-1889). Again, we see a concentration on the later poems; half of the Browning quotations are from the last two decades of his life, that is, from poems published after The Ring and the Book.

QUOTATION AS DEFINITION

In selecting quotations the editors intended ideally, as the preface to the first volume of the *OED* explains, that each word should "exhibit its own history and meaning" (vi). The quotations, plucked from their context and rarely more than two lines long, have not only to illustrate but, as far as possible, to establish, meaning. (Johnson's *Dictionary* could accommodate much longer literary excerpts.) The notion of a poet's language providing adequate or reliable definition is one that exercises lexicographers and intrigues literary critics: are poets credible "witnesses" of language, or are their ways with words just echoed back to us in endlessly circular fashion, turning the *OED*, as Taylor puts it, into "the greatest of all literary echo-chambers in our language"? Willinsky discusses nine different examples, drawn from one Shakespeare play, of ways in which quotation may relate to sig-

¹⁹ Taylor, Hardy's Literary Language, 6. On poets as "witnesses" of language, see Willinsky, Empire of Words, 59.

nification: by contrast, extension, elaboration, punning, and so on. My final suggestion for tracking Browning's presence in the OED would be to set quotation alongside definition, asking how the poet's meanings are created and recorded.

Immerd, defined as "To bury in or cover with ordure," is cited from two seventeenth-century authors, Quarles and Ames, and then from Browning's Aristophanes' Apology (1875):

> make a muckheap of a man, There . . . he remains, Immortally immerded.

> > (1168 - 70)

The euphemistic Latinate term is brilliantly glossed within the quotation by a combination of blunt Saxon synonym ("muckheap") and the ironical near-pun ("Immortally immerded") into which it is transformed. Other quotations provide a straightforward, self-explanatory context for the entry, as in the case of *slug-horn* or *by-blow*: "Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew" ("Childe Roland," 203–4); "a drab's brat / A beggar's bye[sic]-blow" (The Ring and the Book, IV.611–12). The entry for done 1b. is illustrated by a neat chiasmus from "The Last Ride Together": "contrast / The petty done, the undone vast" (52–53). We may compare this with the quotation for *uberous*:

Each feminine delight of florid lip, . . . Marmoreal neck and bosom uberous,— (The Ring and the Book, IX.51-53)

which depends on, rather than supports, the definition for sense 1.b: "of the breasts: supplying milk or nourishment in abundance." To appreciate the breasts as lactating rather than merely ornamental we would have to go back to the "young and comely peasant-nurse" of line 49 or forward to include the painting for which she is a model, the "Mother-Maid" (Virgin Mary) of line 55. The context of the quotation in the dictionary cannot accommodate the coy, gloating, mocklearned tone in which the word is used (by a slimy lawyer); nor can it indicate whether *uberous* is congruent with, or contrasted with, the other terms in the sequence—"florid" and "marmoreal." Another of this lawyer's words is left almost completely undefined by the OED: Thalassian in sense A., meaning "of or pertaining to the sea, marine; spec. applied to the marine tortoises and turtles." The single quotation to apply the term to a human being is her counsel's fantasy in which "Pompilia . . . / Springs to her feet, and stands Thalassian-pure." Only

in the fuller context can the train of thought be unraveled whereby the naked woman is conjured up through the association of unclouded moon/bare truth/naked/Venus-Andromeda:

> —Still, moon-like, penetrates the encroaching mist And bursts, all broad and bare, on night, ye know! Surprised, then, in the garb of truth, perhaps, Pompilia, thus opposed, breaks obstacle, Springs to her feet, and stands Thalassian-pure. (The Ring and the Book, IX.887-91)

It is only by returning to Browning's poem that the process of definition can be continued. Murray himself, in the preface to the first volume of the OED, encourages us to refer back to the text, where (he believed) the writer's "original meaning . . . may always be ascertained, and the full context recovered" (xxii). As we close the dictionary, however, we are conscious of the quotation slips accumulating towards OED3, and of a purpose and presence for Browning in the dictionaries of the future.

Appendix: CD-ROM Searches and Results

SEARCH 1: BROWNING QUOTATIONS IN OED2

OED2/CD Manual: pp. 61-63

Method: Search menu: quotation search. Author option: (Browning)

Results: 3,051. Saved to results file as browning.quo

Note: A search of the first OED on CD-ROM resulted in 2,958 quotations.

SEARCH 1A: ENTRIES (HEADWORDS) IN OED2 WITH BROWNING QUOTATIONS

Manual: p. 68

Method: Query language: (select entry (browning.quo) into (browning.ent))

Results: 2,746

Note: A search of the first OED on CD-ROM resulted in 2,675 headwords.

SEARCH 2: SPECIFIC WORDS OCCURRING IN BROWNING QUOTATIONS

Manual: pp. 39-40

Method: Search menu: text search. Text option: (Browning #20 foam*)

Results: 9

Note: A proximity search finds all instances of "Browning" and "foam" within 20 words of each other and so can be used to trace words other than headwords. The wildcard (*) finds any suffixed form, e.g. "foaming."

SEARCH 3: ADVERBS IN BROWNING QUOTATIONS

Manual: p. 68

Method: Query language: (select entry (browning.quo) and ps=(adv) into

(brownadv.ent))

Results: 116

SEARCH 4: FRENCH WORDS IN BROWNING QUOTATIONS

Manual: p. 68

Method: Query language: (select entry (browning.quo) and ln=(French) into

(brownfr.ent))

Results: 841

SEARCH 5: EDITORIAL COMMENT ON BROWNING'S MEANINGS

Manual: pp. 56-59

Method: Search menu: definition search. Text option: (Browning)

Results: 9 (aroint, fisc, encolure, gadge, stomp, twat, Browningesque × 3)

SEARCH 6: EDITORIAL COMMENT ON BROWNING'S PRONUNCIATIONS AND ETYMOLOGIES

Manual: pp. 52-55

Method: Search menu: etymology search. Etymology option: text. Text: (Browning Brownings Browning's)

Results: 7 (aspectable, champaign, circumvallate, contrariwise, contrite, impuissance, pash)

SEARCH 7: WORDS IN BROWNING QUOTATIONS WITH DEFINITIONS FROM JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY

Manual: pp. 77-78

Method: Query language: (def (browning.quo) and df=(J) into (rbj.def))

Results: 108

Notes: a) "J or J." in the OED indicates that a definition is quoted directly from Johnson's Dictionary; "Johnson" is used for editorial comments, e.g. "also in Johnson," "not in Johnson."

b) This search is computationally intensive.

SEARCH 8: QUOTATIONS FROM BROWNING AND OTHER WRITERS

Manual: pp. 75-77

Method: Query language: e.g. (select entry (browning.quo) and qa=(quarles) into (quarles.ent))

SEARCH 8A: BROWNING AND QUARLES

Results: 143 (Quarles has 1,338 quotations in all, referring to 1,221 entries)

SEARCH 8B: BROWNING AND MARVELL

Results: 127 (Marvell has 1,264 quotations in all, referring to 1,174 entries)

SEARCH 8C: BROWNING AND SHAKESPEARE

Results: 1,112 (Shakespeare has 33,304 quotations in all, referring to 14,053

entries)

SEARCH 8D: BROWNING AND CARLYLE

Results: 416 (Carlyle has 6,618 quotations in all, referring to 5,893 entries)

SEARCH 8E: ROBERT BROWNING AND ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Method: Because the query language does not deal correctly with honorifics, it is necessary to search for the text string "Mrs. Browning" in all entries with a "Browning" quotation: (select entry (browning.quo) and st=(Mrs. Browning) into (rbandebb.ent))

Results: 159 (EBB has 1,433 quotations in all, referring to 1,335 entries)

SEARCH 9: INDIVIDUAL WORKS BY TITLE

Manual: pp. 63-65

Method: Search menu: quotation search. Title option: (Pippa Passes)

Results: 77

Note: The title list window offers not just "Pippa Passes" but "Pippa passes,"

"Pippa," and "Pippa P."

SEARCH 10: QUOTATION BY DATE

Manual: pp. 68-69

Method: Query language: (quo (browning.quo) and qd=(1870-1889) into

(laterb.quo)) Results: 1471

SEARCH 10A: SORT QUOTATION BY DATE

Manual: pp. 60-61

Method: Sort Results file. File menu: sort. File to sort: browning.quo. Sort

option: quotation date

Results: Saved in date order, with poems in alphabetical order within each year

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