



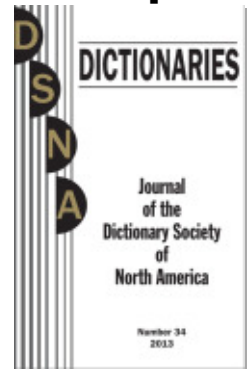
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OED Online Re-launched: Distinguishing Old Scholarship from New

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***OED Online* Re-launched: Distinguishing Old Scholarship from New**

Charlotte Brewer

Abstract

In December 2010 Oxford University Press re-launched the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) website and instituted far-reaching changes to the online version of the dictionary, which has been undergoing revision (as opposed to successive supplementation) for the first time in its history. Alphabetically sequential revision was abandoned, lists of revised entries ceased to be updated, and the independent version of *OED2* was deleted. These changes, apparently aimed at a general audience, have made it impossible to track the progress of the revision or see the different stages and characteristics of *OED*'s history. Over half the entries in the website version of *OED* are still unrevised from the first edition (completed 1928) and are the product of technology, scholarship and cultural assumptions now out of date. To interpret *OED*'s evidence correctly (particularly when making electronic searches), readers need to be able to distinguish between old scholarship and new, and understand the varying historical provenance of the entries they consult. Little or no guidance on these matters is currently provided by the website. In demonstrating the problems this causes for lexical researchers (including via the links supplied with the *Historical Thesaurus of the OED*) this article examines terms for homosexuality, showing that partially re-written entries confuse the historical record preserved in successive versions of *OED*.

Introduction

The *OED* has embraced the electronic medium with notable appetite for what might seem such a traditional dictionary. Its publishers, Oxford University Press (OUP), invested heavily in digitalizing the second edition in the late 1980s, and in 2000 began online publi-

cation of an entirely fresh project, the first ever revision of the dictionary since its original publication in 1884-1928.

Since then, the publishers have gradually acknowledged that the dictionary may never be published in paper form again.¹ The online medium has therefore become crucially important. Not only has it reconfigured almost every feature of the two editions (and two twentieth-century supplements) that preceded it, but it is the only way in which readers can get at the revised entries—perhaps two fifths or so of the entire work—that have appeared in the *OED* since 2000. OUP has regularly upgraded the website, introducing search features which probe and analyse the dictionary's contents in ways that could only be dreamt of when digitalization began. In turn, the expectations and demands of those using the dictionary have risen as they adjust to new forms of presenting lexicographical information and become intolerant of the limited possibilities of old-style access via the printed page. And new generations of users are coming to the *OED*, not only academics and students but also a more general audience ("word lovers", to use OUP's own phrase) attracted by its greater accessibility.² OUP is encouraging this wider audience both in its web design and its language—its links to a twitter feed, for example, and the front-page strapline claiming the dictionary, rather loosely, as "the definitive record of the English language."

This article explores the radical re-configuration of the *OED Online* website in December 2010, one of the most sweeping changes to have taken place in the dictionary's complicated history. It begins by explaining how *OED's* past—at every stage reflecting current technology, scholarship and culture—inescapably informs its present, and moves on to examine specific features of the re-launched website: its new dating policy, re-wording of selected definitions, search tools, and incorporation of the *Historical Thesaurus of the OED*. One of the greatest challenges now facing *OED Online* is to identify, for the reader, the varying historical provenance of the elements in its own text. In negotiating its duties to scholarship on the one hand and the interests of non-specialist "word lovers" on the other, it is argued here, *OED* needs at every stage to preserve the scholarly standards on which its value rests. These standards are currently at risk.

¹ According to a widely reported statement by OUP's chief executive Nigel Portwood in August 2010; see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/7970391/Oxford-English-dictionary-will-not-be-printed-again.html>.

² Quotation from private correspondence, 8 March 2012.

***OED's* dependence on changing features of technology, scholarship and culture**

Any discussion of *OED* present has to look back to *OED* past: this great work is not only a dictionary charting the history of the English language, but is itself an artefact produced over time, whose present has been indelibly marked by the various stages of its previous existence. This is particularly true of *OED* in its present form, since the online version combines different stages of the dictionary into one continuous whole. The *OED* remains utterly distinctive on account of its historical method and its ideal of comprehensiveness, setting out to record (almost) all words used in the English language from 1150 to the present day, from first to latest occurrence, and basing itself on a vast stock of quotations of usage drawn from a wide array of sources. But the technological, scholarly and cultural conditions under which the dictionary has been produced have all changed radically since publication began in 1884, and these changes have shaped *OED* itself on the one hand, and its record of the language (what it has recorded, and how) on the other.

Technology—the means available to read textual sources, to store and analyse them, and then to reproduce the fruits of the lexicographical process for public consumption—has always been a determining feature of the dictionary. Given the length of time over which the first edition of the dictionary was edited and published, there could only be limited consistency in methods of reading, recording and collecting material and in methods of editing. As a result, entries in the printed work vary considerably between one part of the dictionary and another in such things as usage and provenance labeling, quotation numbers and frequency, character and remit of definitions, content and quality of etymologies, and so on; it was of course impossible, given publication in hard copy, for editors to change previous parts of the dictionary to conform with practice in later parts. By the time of its next print incarnation in the second edition of 1989, the *OED's* storage and filing methods had improved considerably but inconsistencies remained, partly inherited from the first edition and partly introduced by the second edition's merging of new entries with old, the latter process only made possible through digitalizing both the first edition and the main twentieth-century Supplement and splicing the two together.³ Self-evidently, the

³ See the critical reviews of this first stage in the mongrelization of the *OED* by Stanley 1990, Algeo 1990, and Brewer 1993. *OED2* made no virtually no changes to existing material in the *OED* but added a further 5,000 words and senses.

electronic revolution since then has transformed the harvesting and editing of material for *OED*, just as it has transformed our access to the dictionary. But the new medium has not eradicated inconsistency. On the contrary, because so much of *OED* present derives from *OED* past, the electronic searches we can all make have brought the inevitable imperfections and eccentricities of previous editions cruelly to light (not just unevennesses in writing entries, but also in quoting sources; for discussion of these, see the online project “Examining the *OED*” *passim*, Brewer 2005-). Counter-intuitively, the electronic medium has also licensed what one might call serial inconsistency in today’s editing, especially since the re-launch of the *OED* website in December 2010. All sorts of changes are now made to the dictionary without notice to the user, so that the entry one consults one day may be quite different the next (more, or fewer, or re-dated quotations, definitions re-written, and so forth). In particular, OUP’s decision to present the new and revised entries in *OED Online* in identical format to the old is confusing to readers. Since over half the entries are still unrevised from the first edition, many of them have been unchanged, other than in cosmetic or otherwise minor ways (see further below), from their original appearance in the first edition of *OED* over a hundred years ago, and are characterized therefore by the inevitable inconsistencies and imperfections of the previous editing processes. The technological varnish such entries acquire through their presentation in a format identical with new entries can mislead users to think that the content, as well as the medium, is the product of up-to-date scholarship and technology, and that *OED* really is “the definitive record of the language,” despite many common-sense indications that this cannot be so—words in current usage which have no post-nineteenth century quotations, for example, or which are supplied with anachronistic definitions (e.g. ‘Vile, abominable, barbarous’ for the term *bawdy* as applied to language). This is one important way in which the past dictionary continues to live on in the present.

Scholarly conditions of dictionary production have also changed over the time that the dictionary has been worked on and published, often abetted by technological change. One reason those first-edition entries are so out of date is that thousands of historical texts have been (re) edited and printed since quotation collection for that stage of the dictionary was largely completed (around 1905), while historical databases of such material are now commonplace. Aided by these developments, knowledge and understanding of historical lexis has greatly increased over the last hundred years, so that hundreds of words originally first identified in one text (often a canonical favorite) have been discovered in others written decades or even centuries earlier. Anybody looking to

understand the place in the language of Shakespeare's vocabulary, for example, should be aware that between a third and a half of the words attributed to him as first user in *OED* can now be antedated (Brewer 2013a).⁴ *OED* readers need to recognize that if an entry has not yet been revised, then its record of dates, etymology and other features (including definitions) may actively mislead—but the uniform presentation of entries just described means that the website is a pit for the unwary.

Just as influential on dictionary content are the cultural changes which continue to take place as the dictionary is edited and re-edited. As is well known, the first edition drew heavily on literary sources and under-represented non-literary, colloquial and lower register sources; it under-quoted the eighteenth century; it preferred male over female-authored sources. Inevitably, it reproduced the cultural biases of its day both in its choice of which words to include and how to define them once included, and these biases can be found in entries relating to politics, science, race, sex and the body, and so forth.⁵

A small sub-category of sexual terms serves as a representative example here. The first edition tended to use euphemistic periphrasis for non-normative sexual acts, in a number of cases applying the coded term 'unnatural'—a word on which *OED* itself offers little help, but which has a long history in legal and biblical commentary deriving most directly from the denouncement of homosexual acts by the apostle Paul in Romans 1.26-27 and stretching back to Plato (Pickett 2011). Thus sense 3 of *bestiality* (first published 1887) was defined as 'unnatural connexion with a beast', sense 2 of *spintry* (first published 1914) as 'A place used for unnatural purposes' (the nature of these purposes is indicated by the definition of sense 1, 'A species of male prostitute'), and the term *catamite* (first published 1889) as 'A boy kept for unnatural purposes'. Where female homosexuality was concerned, the editors were slightly more explicit and condemnatory, defining *Sapphism* (in 1909) as 'unnatural sexual relations between women', referring to this practice (in the etymology) as a 'vice', and defining *tribade* (in 1914) as 'a woman who practises unnatural vice with other women'. By contrast, the 1933 Supplement defined the newly included term *homosexual* in neutral, relatively clear language: 'pertaining to or characterized by propensity for one's own sex' - though this is a definition you could misread if you didn't already know it referred to sexual relationships. Simultaneously, however, this Supplement omitted the sexual

⁴ Long ago predicted by Schäfer 1980.

⁵ For further discussion see Mugglestone 2007, Brewer 2010a, Brewer 2012.

sense of *lesbian* altogether, despite the fact that this usage was well attested in contemporary sources.⁶ This last decision was demonstrably on cultural not lexicographical grounds, as indicated by correspondence surviving in the *OED* archives. One of the Supplement editors, C. T. Onions, wrote of the other, W. A. Craigie:

A lexicographical conscience is not so easily stifled, and when I find out that Lesbian and Lesbianism have been deliberately excluded by Craigie, I wonder what else is going to happen. Lesbianism is no doubt a very disagreeable thing, but the word is in regular use, & no serious Supplement to our work should omit it.

Onions was overruled, and *lesbian* and *lesbianism* were left out.⁷

Such variations in inclusion and definition in the *OED* are valuable evidence of changing social mores as well as changing lexicographical policy and practice, and they marked the second Supplement, edited by R. W. Burchfield and published in four volumes between 1972 and 1986, just as much as they did its predecessors. The job of this Supplement (which subsumed its 1933 predecessor) was to update the *OED* with all the new words, and new senses of existing words, that had entered the language since the relevant instalment of the first edition had been published—i.e. as far back, in the case of the early part of the alphabet, as 1884. Reflecting the temper of the time, Burchfield made great changes to the dictionary, introducing many more entries for slang and colloquialisms, World English, scientific and technical language, while also maintaining and extending *OED*'s role as a “literary instrument.” He was also, on occasion, inconsistent, and he passed over many entries from the first edition which were in need of updating at the time his Supplement was published and are even more in need of it now.⁸ Sexual vocabulary remains a good example. Burchfield took a special interest in this area, publishing an essay on “Four Letter Words” in the *Times Literary Supplement* to coincide with publication of the first volume of his Supplement,

⁶ Voluminous newspaper coverage of the notorious Billing trial had ensured that the term *lesbian* had been widely aired over ten years previously; see e.g. ‘Acquittal Of Mr. Billing’, *The Times* (London, England), 5 June 1918, p. 4.

⁷ See further Brewer 2007, 49-50. Since female homosexuality has never been subject to legal penalties in the UK, while until the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 male homosexuality could be punished with jail sentences, the 1933 omission of the sexual sense of *lesbian(ism)* is particularly notable.

⁸ On all these matters, including Burchfield’s inconsistencies, see Brewer 2007, chapters 6-7. On his treatment of World Englishes I disagree with the views expressed in Ogilvie 2012 (see further Brewer 2013c).

in October 1972, which drew attention to his new inclusion of words such as *cunt* and *fuck* (Burchfield 1972). He was also the first *OED* editor to include the sexual sense of *lesbian*, and he carefully rewrote the entry for *homosexual* (adj.), re-phrasing the definition, supplying further quotations, and adding definitions and quotations for the nouns *homosexual* and *homosexualist*. Nevertheless, he let stand *OEDI*'s existing definitions of *Sapphism* and *tribade*, while adding examples of *sapphist* and *sapphistically* (defined 'in the manner of a Sapphist') to the dictionary along with accompanying twentieth-century quotations. He also passed over other uses of the term 'unnatural' in entries relating to male homosexuality. Indeed, he himself used the term *catamite* in some of the definitions he added to the Supplement (e.g. for *jocker*, 'a tramp who is accompanied by a youth who begs for him or who acts as his catamite'), but he left the *OEDI* entry for this word as it was, neither re-writing the definition ('a boy kept for unnatural purposes') nor adding post-eighteenth-century quotations of its use (*OEDI*'s last quotation was then dated 1795), despite its currency at the time he wrote.⁹ Similarly, he left *OEDI*'s definition of *ingle* ('A boy-favourite (in bad sense)') as it was, though he certainly considered the entry since he added two quotations to it—from T. E. Lawrence (1926) and Harold Nicolson (1962).

These editorial decisions tell us both about lexicography and about the culture of the time; they indicate that homosexuality, whether male or female, continued to be problematic, in varying ways, into the 1970s and 1980s, even after the enormous cultural changes in British society following the Wolfenden Report in 1957 (which paved the way for the decriminalizing of male homosexuality a decade later in the Sexual Offences Act) and the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial in 1960 (which made it possible for publishers to print four-letter and other words without fear of prosecution for obscenity). Like the original *OEDI* definitions, Burchfield's treatment of sexual terms constitutes lexicographical evidence for these attitudes.

The same is true of their treatment in the next version of the dictionary. When merging *OEDI* and the second Supplement to create the second edition of *OED* in 1989, the new editors made a tiny number of changes to existing definitions, including rewriting the definitions for *Sapphism* and *tribade* and dropping the terms 'unnatural' and 'vice' (though the latter term lived on, unnoticed, in the etymology of *Sap-*

⁹ The contemporary currency of *catamite* can be seen by searching Google Books.

phism earlier referred to, not disappearing after December 2011).¹⁰ At the same time, however—and this looks remarkable to us now—they passed over the use of *unnatural* in a number of other definitions of sexual terms (see below), a term then still on the statute books as a way of referring (so it appears) to anal sex.¹¹ The inconsistent tolerance of ‘unnatural’ may be evidence of lexicographical oversight or of lexicographical ambiguity, but one way or another it is evidence, of use therefore to all those who turn to *OED* for cultural and lexical information—whether cultural historians researching changing attitudes towards sexuality, lexical historians researching definitional practices in the *OED*, or literary historians or critics attempting to establish the connotations of *unnatural* in novels, plays or poems published in the second half of the twentieth century.

As this quick sketch of the treatment of sexual vocabulary shows, successive editings of the *OED* are influenced by cultural changes just as much as technological and scholarly ones. Definitions, usage labels, etymologies and quotations tell us much more than what words mean (or meant): they preserve an invaluable record of precisely dated lexicographical and societal evaluations of cultural, political, commercial, aesthetic, scientific, technological and many other types of human endeavor. It is therefore a matter of concern that, in its most recent re-casting of the dictionary, OUP has taken down the electronically searchable version of *OED2* which gave us access to the first edition.¹² It is also troubling that the lexicographical record is being eradicated in a series of untraceable

¹⁰ As pointed out below, it is generally impossible to tell at what point editorial change has been introduced into unrevised or partially revised entries after 1989. In this case, however, the present writer made a screen print of the entry on 16 December 2011 which contains the mention of *vice*, indicating that the word was removed at some stage after this.

¹¹ So far as I have been able to discover, the term ‘unnatural’ was last used of sexual practices in UK legislation in the Sexual Offences Act of 1993, whose first clause stated ‘The presumption of criminal law that a boy under the age of fourteen is incapable of sexual intercourse (whether natural or unnatural) is hereby abolished’ (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/30/pdfs/ukpga_19930030_en.pdf); this formulation repeated the terms of the Sexual Offences Act, 1956, which listed ‘Unnatural Offences’ in paragraphs 12-13 and specified ‘sexual intercourse (whether natural or unnatural)’ in paragraph 44 (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1956/69/pdfs/ukpga_19560069_en.pdf). Parliamentary debate in 1993 recognized the homophobic implications of ‘unnatural’ but the term remained in the legislation nonetheless (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199293/cmhansrd/1993-04-30/Debate-1.html>).

¹² The CD Roms of *OED* are no substitute for the website version of *OED2*: post-2000 CDs include revised *OED3* entries, while pre-2000 ones cannot be played on today’s computers. OUP kindly makes an electronic version of *OED2* available to individual researchers on request, though since its functionality is limited, it is not possible to search its text systematically in comparison with that of *OED Online*.

changes to *OED* entries, notably for vocabulary which is deemed politically sensitive by today's standards.

***OED Online* and the 2010 makeover**

Work on the third edition of *OED*—the first to revise past entries—started in the early 1990s and began to issue in online publication in March 2000. Alongside its first tranche of revised entries, the website offered a version of *OED2* as an entirely separate entity, though subject to the same search tools. This meant that the two parallel forms of *OED*—that of *OED2* and of *OED3*—could be examined side by side by dictionary readers and researchers wanting to identify and observe the characteristics of the revised entries. Using identical search tools in each case, one could compare the treatment of different authors, sources, periods etc. in past and present versions of the *OED*, and begin to see how new scholarship was reformulating the dictionary's record of the language.

The original *OED Online* website carried clear information on which entries had been revised when. The lexicographers started with the letter *M* and worked their way through the alphabet to *R*, releasing new batches of entries every quarter, while at the same time publishing entries for completely new words as they became available (i.e., beginning with any letter of the alphabet). Between March 2008 and December 2010, the lexicographers also worked outside the letter-range *M-R*, revising short sequences of entries from across the alphabet. All these stages were listed in a separate series of pages on the website. Editorial transparency was thus one of the most attractive features of the new work.

In December 2010 the website was re-launched in a radically new form. Alphabetically sequential revision was abandoned, lists of revised entries ceased to be updated, and the independent version of *OED2* was deleted.¹³ These changes have made it virtually impossible to track the progress of the revision or analyse the different stages and characteristics

¹³ The lists of revised entries up to June 2010, routinely published with every quarterly update, were initially taken down in the December 2010 re-launch and have recently been reinstated (at the request of the present writer and no doubt others: see <http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/recent-updates-to-the-oed/>). In March 2012 *OED3* completed revision of the letter-range *M-R* and announced "this instalment to the end of *R* marks the last in the old series of revisions. In future the diet will be more alphabetically varied" (<http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/recent-updates-to-the-oed/previous-updates/march-2011-update/>). Reports on quarterly updates since then have not specified which entries over the remainder of the alphabet have been revised, and it seems impossible for users to identify these in any systematic way.

of *OED*'s history. They have also exposed users to some confusion over the status of the entry they consult—supposing those users have prior knowledge that the dictionary comprises a mixture of, roughly, two fifths revised with three-fifths unrevised entries, the latter in many cases decades out of date.¹⁴ Nothing on the front page of the website alerts one to the historic variability of the material within, or to the consequently uneven results turned up by the various attractively displayed search tools. It is also difficult to find such warnings anywhere on the website in its current form (February 2013).

All the new material produced by the lexicographers, uploaded to the site in successive batches every quarter as before, is now merged seamlessly into an updated version of the 1989 *OED2*, the new and revised entries slotting into alphabetical sequence with the old, unrevised entries. So the single version of the dictionary that is now the only one available at *OED* is a mixture of revised and unrevised material, with entries of entirely different provenance (*OED1*, the Supplement of 1989, *OED2*, and the revised *OED3*) distributed throughout the alphabet. Air-brushed away, *OED*'s complicated history and heterogeneous make-up have ceased to be apparent to the casual viewer. Conceivably, this may make the dictionary more attractive to non-specialist users. But merging new with old material repeatedly undermines the dictionary's value for the researchers who are its primary audience, as now examined in more detail.

Date and content of entries in re-launched *OED Online*

Dating of entries and bibliographical citations Many of the unrevised entries in the dictionary have been altered in some respects—those respects varying from one entry to another—while remaining unchanged in others. Specialist users may easily find themselves wrong-footed here. Bibliographical changes sound tedious but are a useful place to start, since they explain some of the problems encountered by researchers. The December 2010 re-launch updated bibliographical details for all entries in the dictionary, including those not yet revised. This means that unrevised entries now cite sources in the same form (usually) as do the revised entries, even though those forms may not be bibliographically

¹⁴ See <http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/recent-updates-to-the-oed/previous-updates/december-2011/100000-entries-published-and-counting/> for what appears to be the most recent information given on the website.

consistent with the original ones: for example, dates assigned to authors have been changed, and sometimes the actual editions too. Why? The logic would seem to be as follows. As explained above, most of the original *OED*'s bibliographical references and sources, along with its quotations, cited editions and scholarship which (though authoritative in the Victorian and Edwardian periods in which the dictionary was compiled) have long been out-of-date. In many instances they had also been cited inconsistently throughout the work (by different abbreviations, for example, or from different publications). Since *OED* was first published, authoritative new editions have appeared of many of its quotation sources, and it is these that *OED3* has (rightly) quoted from in its new entries. The publishers have decided to follow suit in the unrevised entries too, in order to achieve bibliographical consistency across *OED Online*'s new single version of *OED*. The result is that unrevised entries will often contain up-to-date bibliographical citations on the one hand, and dated definitions and dated evidence of historical usage on the other.

This pervasive re-dating has rearranged quotation evidence in otherwise unrevised entries, often tweaking the record of first use. So in previous versions of *OED*, the figurative use of *ambitious* ('erecting itself, as if aspiring to rise; rising, swelling, towering') is recorded as first used in 1601 by Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar* (i.iii.7): "I haue seene Th'ambitious Ocean swell," followed by Ben Jonson in 1605 (*Volpone*). In *OED3*'s as yet unrevised entry, the same quotation evidence is listed, but with the order reversed: Jonson is now given the first user with Shakespeare second—the reason being that the re-launched *OED3* has uniformly re-dated all *Julius Caesar* quotations to a1616, the date of Shakespeare's death. In the case of *Julius Caesar* the dating of *OED*'s quoted text to a1616 is particularly problematic: the play was in performance as early as 1599, but no text of it survives dated earlier than 1623, when it was published in the First Folio.

Some of the confusion resulting from such bibliographical alteration has now been rectified by a new labeling policy introduced in September 2012. All revised entries are distinguished by a blue rubric appearing in a central panel on the screen panel bearing the words "This entry has been updated (*OED* Third Edition)" and specifying the month and year of revision. All other entries sport a red rubric instead, reading "This entry has not yet been fully updated (first published xxxx)" with the year of first publication specified. Those requiring elucidation of this label need to know they can click a link called "publication history," which tells one when this particular entry (i.e. in its original form) was first published, and supplies the following general information:

Revision of the *OED* is a long-term project. Entries which have not been updated since the first edition (1884-1928) may incorporate:

- corrections and revisions to definitions, pronunciation, etymology, forms, date or style of citation, or quotation text
- new senses or phrases which have been added in
 - the Supplements to the *OED* (1933, 1972-86)
 - the *OED* Additions Series (1993, 1997)
 - subsequent online updates.

Such acknowledgement, on the part of *OED* itself, of the historical stages through which dictionary entries may have passed is very welcome indeed.¹⁵ However, it licenses a good deal of silent change to red rubric entries before they reach the point of qualifying for blue rubric, ranging from no change at all to significant re-shaping. Why should we worry about this, one might ask? The answer is that *OED* in its present form is obliterating the lexicographical record in ways which strike at the heart of its historical function.

Definitions re-worded As noted above, successive versions of the *OED* constitute an invaluable historical record of cultural attitudes at different stages of the dictionary's composition. Dictionary definitions in particular reveal how attitudes have changed in significant ways between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries, and they constitute important evidence for those changes. Religion, race and sexuality are obvious candidates for changes in definitional language as well as vocabulary itself, and it is in these areas that the re-launched *OED* has silently rewritten a number of definitions in otherwise unrevised entries. Searching for instances of "unnatural" in *OED2* definitional text in early 2010—a search now no longer possible, since electronic *OED2* has disappeared from the website—I came across the following sexual terms: *bestiality*, *buggery*, *sodomy*, *catamite*, *ingle*, *pederasty*, *sodomy*, *spintry*.

Looking these all up in *OED* as of today (February 2013), it turns out only *pederasty* has so far been revised *in toto*. But all the others, at some unspecified stage since December 2010, have had the term "unnatural" removed, although in other respects the entry is the same as when first

¹⁵ Dictionary users can also click on a link placed further down on the central panel reading 'previous version', taking them to a new tab on their browser displaying the unaltered text of the print version of *OED2* (1989) for the entry they are consulting. These pages of *OED2* cannot be cumulatively searched, however, and in my experience (anecdotally gathered from three terms teaching Oxford undergraduates and postgraduates using the post-September 2012 version of the website) only those already alert to the significance of the different stages in *OED*'s history will make use of this check against a current 'red rubric' entry in *OED3*.

published and there is nothing to draw readers' attention to this isolated change in definition.

bestiality (sense 3): 'Unnatural connexion with a beast' (first published 1887) is now defined as 'Sexual intercourse between a person and an animal.'

buggery (sense b): 'Unnatural intercourse of a human being with a beast, or of men with one another, sodomy. Also used of unnatural intercourse of a man and a woman' (first published 1888) is now defined as 'Anal intercourse.'

catamite: 'A boy kept for unnatural purposes' (first published 1889) is now defined as 'A boy kept for homosexual practices; the passive partner in anal intercourse.'

sodomy (sense 1), 'An unnatural form of sexual intercourse, esp. that of one male with another' (first published 1913) is now defined as 'Originally: any form of sexual intercourse considered to be unnatural. Now chiefly: anal intercourse.'

spintr: (sense 2), 'A place used for unnatural practices' (first published 1914) is now defined as 'A place habitually used by male prostitutes.'

What is the problem here, a non-specialist user might ask? The substituted definitions are in all cases manifestly superior to those they replace: they are written in clearer, more descriptive language, and they do not connote value judgements of any sort. The problem, as any historian or linguist will answer, is two-fold. First, the date at which lexicographers make changes to documentary evidence is significant evidence both lexically and culturally. As such, it is a record which should be carefully preserved, not obscured or expunged. Where these particular entries are concerned, it is a matter of historical importance that it was not until December 2010, or some unspecified point thereafter, that *OED* lexicographers felt that the use of "unnatural" in such definitions could not be allowed to continue. But given the lability of electronic publishing, with one version succeeding another without trace, all we can now know, from publically verifiable evidence, is that the change was made some time between the print edition of 1989 and the date at which we happen to consult the online dictionary, i.e. (currently) over a period of at least 24 years. Many websites record changes to their texts and data (e.g. Wikipedia), and such records are vital for scholarly purposes. Without them, the switch from print to electronic medium leads to the loss of

stable reference points recording the date at which changes are made to authoritative texts. It is a minimum scholarly requirement that one should be able to know the date of the text one is reading or citing and *OED* really must supply this.

The second problem about these piecemeal changes is that the thus-altered definitions create a hodge-podge of old and new, both within entries and in the dictionary as a whole. So sense 2a of *bestiality* continues to be defined as ‘Indulgence in the instincts of a beast; brutal lust; *concr.* a disgusting vice, a beastly practice’, with quotations apparently referring to sexual acts, and sense 2b is still said to be ‘Filthy language, obscenity’. Sense 1 of *buggery* is still anachronistically defined as ‘Abominable heresy’—a phrasing which sits next door to the startlingly modern-looking reference to ‘Anal intercourse’, while further afield the definition for *ingle* (sense 1) remains as it was first phrased in 1900, viz. ‘A boy-favourite (in bad sense)’, exhibiting the same homophobic sensibility characterizing the definitions elsewhere erased.¹⁶

This policy of part-rewriting of definitions seems to be new to the 2010 re-launch and is being applied to an undiscoverable number of entries (I have noticed comparable alterations to racially sensitive words such as *half-blood*, *half-breed*, etc.). It is presumably motivated by anxiety that the dictionary’s outdated content will give offence to users who do not understand its historical provenance. A better remedy than this would be to update the entire entry, as has occasionally been done in the past. For example, when deleting the definition of *enlightenment* sense 2, which read ‘Sometimes used...to designate the spirit and aims of the French philosophers of the 18th c., or of others whom it is intended to associate with them in the implied charge of shallow and pretentious intellectualism, unreasonable contempt for tradition and authority, etc.’, the revisers re-researched and re-wrote not just this entry but the surrounding ones too (starting with the verb *enlight*), in each case supplying the date of the revision. But an altogether superior remedy would be to

¹⁶ *OED3* is continuing to use the term “unnatural” in its definitions but is careful to include a modifying phrase: for example, sense 4 of the verb *abuse* is defined ‘To inflict a sexual act regarded as illicit or unnatural (such as fornication, incest, sodomy, etc.) on (a person)’ (entry revised December 2011), while the phrase ‘to go after or follow strange flesh’ is explained (s.v. *flesh*, n., sense 1h) as ‘a Biblical expression referring to sexual behaviour regarded as unnatural’; the latter is another example of an undated re-writing of a definition, replacing *OED1*’s and *OED2*’s ‘a Biblical expression referring to unnatural crime’. The entry for *unnatural* itself remains unchanged, however, with no account of how, when applied to sexual practice, the adjective elides notions of biologically normative conduct with connotations of moral condemnation and disgust (I thank Mimi Goodall and David-Antoine Williams respectively for identifying these examples).

revert to the practice of the previous website and present the old material entirely separately from the new. This would remove any possibility of confusion, for either specialist or non-specialist readers, between revised and unrevised entries.

Search tools

The new search mechanisms on the re-launched *OED* offer many different routes into the wealth of information within, opening up exploration of vocabulary by region, by origin, by usage label, by date of entry into the language, and so on—a solid indication of the Press's eagerness to marry technology fruitfully with lexical research. As should now be clear, however, searches draw on an amalgam of different versions of *OED*, and thus turn up a combination of old and new scholarship. Moreover, the data searched is not stable: every quarter, the identical search will produce a different set of results, as the lexicographers upload a new batch of revised entries to the dictionary and remove the corresponding unrevised ones. As before, the website is silent on these drawbacks. Some of the associated problems with the new tools can be illustrated by looking at two of the search mechanisms mentioned above, "Timelines" and "Sources."

If we accept the website's front-page invitation to "discover when words entered the English language" and click on "Timelines," we see a graph which merges the (currently) 60% or so uncorrected datings of *OED2* with the 40% corrected datings of *OED3*. The user has no means of working out which is which, and no means therefore of making any sensible judgement about what the graph tells us: it represents an undistinguishable mixture of old with new scholarship. For example, we know from other sources that the original *OED* under-quoted the eighteenth century and over-quoted the sixteenth, and that the new *OED*, in its revision of entries, is seeking to remedy these sorts of unevennesses. But the material under "Timelines" makes no mention of this, and gives us no information either about the original dictionary's biases or about how and to what extent *OED3*'s revisions are bumping up the eighteenth-century deficiency (and perhaps correcting the sixteenth-century over-supply). The same problem applies to all the sub-categories under which one can search the new *OED* using the "Timelines" resource, whether by subject, region, or language of origin: the search is applied to a database which mixes old scholarship with new. The results, rich with significance as they appear, can only be interpreted if one has access to information (on which data are new and which old) which *OED* at present does not supply.

As it happens, some indication of the direction of travel being taken by the revision where period coverage is concerned was recorded in 2005, when the ‘Examining the *OED*’ project searched the online *OED2* and *OED3* and compared the number of new with old quotations for the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see graphs and discussion on *OED3*’s treatment of 1500-1899 at <http://OED.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/62/149/index.html>). Since this research was conducted, however, *OED3* has probably doubled the number of revised entries. And now that *OED2* has been taken down from the website, it is impossible for anyone to repeat these searches and see what further changes *OED3* has made to the chronological record over the last six years.

Similar issues arise when one looks at the results of searches for individual authors or texts. The fascinating material lodged under *OED*’s “Sources” button (‘Explore the top 1,000 authors and works quoted in the *OED*’) leads one to suppose that one may easily generate a list of words and/or senses first used by Shakespeare (and by Chaucer, Milton, Walter Scott, and so on). Again, nothing on the site warns us that these lists merge the search results from unrevised *OED2* with revised *OED3*, producing a hybrid of old and new. Ironically, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that *OED3*’s admirable new research on sources has in some cases completely overhauled the out-dated scholarship represented on *OED2* (deriving from the Victorian period). Shakespeare is a good example: his plays have been re-dated, his texts re-scrutinized, entries quoting his works have been re-configured (words previously treated in the body of one entry have been pulled out and assigned new independent entries), new words have been identified (e.g. compounds like *new snow* or *Life-in-Death*), authorship newly attributed (*Two Noble Kinsmen* is now identified as part of Shakespeare’s oeuvre)—and as mentioned above, a sizeable number of words originally credited to Shakespeare as first user have now been antedated and ascribed to other, earlier sources. But the new electronic searches run together the Shakespeare first citations as recorded in *OED3* with those recorded in *OED2*, giving us data that is neither fish nor fowl, virtually impossible to work with in any way that produces meaningful analysis either of *OED*’s original account of Shakespeare or of the new edition’s vastly changed one. Once again, the removal of *OED2* from the website as an independently searchable entity has deprived users of any means of differentiating between new and old material in search results.

It has thus prevented us from being able to appreciate the quality and consequences of *OED3*’s new scholarship. So far as one can see, by looking at entries one by one, *OED3*’s lexicography is outstanding.

It is only by systematic examination of a broad range of revised entries, however, and by comparing them with their unrevised predecessors, that one can discern both the general features and the specific details of the revision, now well into its second decade. In other words, it is impossible to identify *OED3*'s richly various reconfiguration of lexical history, including the contribution made to the language by individual writers, without electronic search tools which distinguish between the new and the old entries.

One of the pages in the "About" section of *OED Online*, "Rewriting the *OED*," promises "exciting discoveries on the way" as the dictionary is revised (<http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/rewriting-the-oed/>). 'Did Shakespeare and Chaucer really invent as many words as they are given credit for?' the page asks, commenting "These are just some of the questions readers can research as the revision proceeds." In fact, these are exactly the questions which are now beyond the reach of researchers, since the re-launched website has made it impossible to compare *OED2* with *OED3* in any sustained and organized way. This is a real blow to lexical scholarship.¹⁷

HTOED

One of the striking innovations of the re-launched site is its linking to other digital resources. A border down the side of most entries enables one to click through to a "quick current definition in Oxford Dictionaries *Online*"—a helpful resource when the *OED* entry is out of date—and also, where relevant, to the *Middle English Dictionary*. The former device addresses everybody's needs, while the latter is useful for those researching historical lexis (not least because it bypasses the *MED*'s own headword look-up facility, often hard to use, and takes you straight to the relevant entry without having to guess how the headword should be spelt). These new facilities demonstrate OUP's admirable willingness to use technology to push past the print-based boundaries which have so long restricted, or at least slowed down, scholarship and inquiry. Most notable of all these linkings is the use the new site makes of the Press's own *Historical Thesaurus of the OED*. As readers of this journal will know, *HTOED* represents the fruit of a major lexicographical project conceived by M. H. Samuels in the 1960s, whose Glasgow-based team worked with extraordinary dedication over nearly 50 years, publishing the results in

¹⁷ See further Brewer 2013a, 2013b.

2009.¹⁸ The idea behind *HTOED* was to “turn the dictionary inside out”: to re-organize the word-stock of the *OED* by meaning rather than by alphabetical order, enabling a completely different type of access to the dates and definitions locked away in the dictionary itself. Classifying and arranging words and senses according to their respective definitions creates what the *HTOED* editors call “conceptual maps,” which can then be studied to tell us both about language and about the referents of language. It is self-evident that the potential uses for these “maps” are far-reaching, and that the creation of *HTOED* is of great lexical and cultural significance.

HTOED rearranges *OED*'s vocabulary under three main headings: the external world, the mind, and society, with every word and sense allotted its slot in a nested series of sub-categories which extends many layers downwards. In this way, the thesaurus allows us to see, grouped together, words relating to a comprehensive range of cultural phenomena, with dates of first usage and evidence of currency over specific periods. The two-volume printed form of the *HTOED* was unwieldy and difficult to use, and electronic linking between the *OED* and the *HTOED* is therefore a boon: a few clicks now replace much tedious and time-consuming labor.

Searching *HTOED* like this can yield fascinating lexical and cultural information, with an abundance of possible uses and applications. As with all the searches discussed in this article, however, one must qualify that statement by pointing out that they can only access the mixed database that is currently available on *OED*. The thesaurus as originally compiled was based almost entirely on *OED2*, so it reproduces the biases and imperfections of that edition. Most obviously, dates of first usage are insecure for unrevised *OED* entries. Both the strengths and the limitations of *HTOED* as filtered through *OED Online* can be seen by looking at a subset of homosexual vocabulary, that relating to female same-sex desire.

Words for female homosexual(ism) were under-recorded in the original *OED*. As we've seen, Burchfield was the first to insert both *lesbian* and *lesbianism*, and he also added a number of related terms (e.g. *bull-dike*, *butch*, *dike*). All were automatically included in *OED2* in 1989, when the second Supplement was incorporated into the first edition of *OED*. In the course of revising existing entries and adding new words altogether, *OED3* has since added more such terms, e.g. *girl-on-girl*, *lady-love*, *Margery*. If one clicks on the thesaurus links for *lesbian*-related terms

¹⁸ See Brewer 2010b, Mugglestone 2010.

when consulting *OED Online* today, in search of a “cultural map” of the phenomenon, one is taken to successive lists of synonyms. Organizing these by part of speech and then by date of first usage, one can come up with a master-list of terms (Appendix A), of interest in itself, which also suggests a number of productive lines of investigation—into register and degree of offensiveness (as indicated by *OED*’s usage labels), or frequency (perhaps by checking the terms in databases of appropriately dated texts), or treatment by other dictionaries (e.g. successive editions of *Webster*). The most striking feature of these terms, however, is date of first usage. Out of a total of 29, 22 are twentieth-century. One alone is pre-nineteenth-century (*tribade*, first recorded in 1601 and supplied with only two quotations) and one early nineteenth-century (*tribadism*, 1811–19), while five (*Sapphism*, *tribady*, *lesbian* (adj), *lesbianism and lesbic*) are all dated between 1870 and 1890.

This would appear to tell one that terms for lesbian(ism) began to be used in the nineteenth century, proliferated in the twentieth century, and scarcely existed before then—certainly not over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The inference looks obvious: that same-sex attraction between women was not articulated in the language until very recently, and that this fact may well bear some identifiable relation to the social history of the phenomenon itself. (Of course, the absence of evidence for the term does not indicate that women did not engage in sexual activity with each other, rather it may point to the taboo status of such activity—and as historians of sexuality routinely remind us, we cannot straightforwardly map today’s notions of sexuality onto those of a previous age).

But this inference would be wrong—not altogether wrong, but wrong enough to mislead. A number of terms relating to female same-sex desire were in use from the Early Modern English period onwards, as abundantly documented in Andreadis 2001, Borris 2003, Donoghue 1993, Robinson 2006, Traub 2003, and Wahl 1999 (see Appendix B). Some of these would almost certainly have been known to the first-edition lexicographers. However, as the 1933 Supplement’s deliberate exclusion of the sexual sense of *lesbian* itself would suggest, the *OED* has in the past been notably reluctant to name and specify this phenomenon, so that until *OED3* has completed its revision the record will not be complete. Since *HTOED* is derived from *OED*, it follows that the “cultural map” the thesaurus offers of this phenomenon reproduces the omissions (whether due to bias or to dated scholarship) of its source.

It is entirely understandable why this should be so. If the editors of *HTOED* had waited till *OED3* was complete, we would have been without this resource for decades to come. To use it properly, however, we need

to know its limitations as well as its strengths. That requires full information, clearly presented to dictionary readers, about the mixed content of *OED Online*: its amalgam of different stages of compilation and revision of the dictionary and in particular the fact that over half its entries have yet to be revised.

Conclusion

Where *HTOED* is concerned, it is clear that the function of the *OED Online* site is to provide information about the history of words and their uses which has a direct application to the history of culture and society: this is what the *HTOED* editors mean when they talk about “conceptual maps.” As I have tried to show, *OED Online* is presently falling short in performing this function as well as it might. In the case of the *OED* itself, however, is it unjust to do as this article has done, namely criticize the dictionary for its elision of different stages of its history, thus obscuring shifts in social history, in the interests of proceeding as fast as it can with its revision? After all, it could be argued, *OED*’s function is (or should be) to chart the history of words, not the history of social attitudes - and certainly not its own history. This may seem a strong argument but I believe it is a mistaken one. First of all, many of the problems I have identified, due to the website failure to distinguish between what is new and what is old, lead researchers and other users to think the results of their electronic searches deliver consistently reliable, up-to-date evidence on the history of words and their uses (including spelling variants, etymology, semantic analysis and definitions, dates and examples of usage, editorial labels and comments, and so on)—a core part of *OED*’s “mission.” Unfortunately, they do not. This could be instantly remedied by publishing *OED3* as a separate entity from *OED2*—as indeed was the case up until December 2004.¹⁹ Secondly, the cultural aspect of *OED*’s role and function was understood from its very first publication onwards and is central to its identity and reputation, as recognized not just by its lexicographers but also by the Press and especially, throughout its existence, by its marketing team. In its issue of 15 February 1928 (p. 25), published to celebrate the completion of *OED1*, OUP’s in-house *The Periodical* quoted *The Times* as saying “It is not so much a Dictionary as a History of English speech and thought from its infancy to the present day.” This view remains at the heart of *OED3* and the way it is presented to the public, as its current editor explains in his

¹⁹ See <http://public.oed.com/history-of-the-oed/dictionary-milestones/reverse/>.

preface: “Far more than a convenient place to look up words and their origins, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is an irreplaceable part of English culture. It not only provides an important record of the evolution of our language, but also documents the continuing development of our society. It is certain to continue in this role as we enter the new century (<http://public.oed.com/history-of-the-oed/>).” The merging together of *OED3* with *OED2*, particularly the silent rewriting of earlier definitions in otherwise unrevised entries, hinders rather than helps it perform this role.

The first edition of *OED*, a heroic feat of scholarship, took around seventy years from inception to completion. Its successor, the magnificent work of revision currently underway in Oxford, need feel no shame in consuming a comparable (hopefully slightly shorter) period of years in the course of re-researching, re-writing and adding to the parent work. As OUP opens its greatest dictionary up, so commendably, to new forms of display and consultation aimed at the general public as well as the research community, it is paramount that it maintains its scholarly standards intact. In today’s world of electronic mutability, this requires editorial clarity about the provenance of *OED*’s own text, so that users of the dictionary can be confident of the date and source of the material they cite and others can verify it in a stable and authoritative record. In particular, old scholarship must be distinguished from new.

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Appendix A

List of terms for lesbian(ism) derived from OED 'Thesaurus' links for *lesbian* (n), *lesbian* (adj.), and *lesbianism*

Date and edition of first record in *OED* is supplied in square brackets.

(1) *lesbian* (n)

1. *tribade* (1601) 'A woman who engages in sexual activity with other women; a Lesbian. Also attrib.' [First included in *OED1* in 1914

and defined 'a woman who practises unnatural vice with other women'; definition re-written in *OED2*, 1989]

2. *Sapphist* (1923) "one addicted to Sapphism" (Webster's Suppl. 1902). [Unchanged since inclusion in *OEDI* in 1909]
3. *Lesbian* (1925) 'A female homosexual.' [First included in Supplement in 1976]
4. *bull-dike* 1926 'A lesbian with masculine tendencies.' [First included in Supplement in 1972]
5. *Les* (1929) 'Colloq. abbrev. of *Lesbian*.' [First included in Supplement in 1976]
6. *muff-diver* (1930) (a) a person who performs cunnilingus; (b) a lesbian. [Entry new to *OED3*]
7. *Margery* (1936) 'A lesbian who takes the role of a passive or submissive partner in a relationship.' [Entry new to *OED3*]
8. *mantee* (1937) 'A lesbian having a masculine manner; a butch (butch n.).' [Entry new to *OED3*]
9. *lesbo* (1940) 'Colloq. abbrev. of *Lesbian* n. Similarly *Lesbie*.' [Entry new to *OED3*]
10. *butch* (1941; NB entry bunches several senses together and first clear example is dated 1965) 'A tough youth or man; a lesbian of masculine appearance or behaviour.' [First included in Supplement in 1972]
11. *dike* (1942) 'A lesbian; a masculine woman.' [First included in Supplement in 1972]
12. *Lizzie* (1949) 'A lesbian. Also, an effeminate young man; also *lizzie boy*.' [First included in Supplement in 1976]
13. *Marge* (1957) 'A lesbian who takes the role of a passive or submissive partner in a relationship (cf. *femme* n. 1).' [Entry new to *OED3*]
14. *mom* (1957) 'U.S. slang. A passive partner in a lesbian relationship. Also: a lesbian who dresses and behaves in a notably feminine way.' [Sense new to *OED3*]

15. *femme* (1958) 'orig. U.S. (a) An effeminate male homosexual; (b) a lesbian who adopts a traditionally feminine identity or appearance (opposed to *butch*).' [First included in Supplement in 1972]
16. *rug muncher* (1981) 'A lesbian. Also (occas.): a man who performs cunnilingus.' [Entry new to *OED3*]
17. *lipstick lesbian* (1984) *colloq.* (orig. U.S. and sometimes *derogatory*) 'a lesbian of glamorous or manifestly feminine appearance and behaviour.' [First included in Draft Additions August 2001]
18. *carpet muncher* (1992) 'A lesbian.' [Entry new to *OED3*]

(2) *lesbian* (adj.)

Lesbian (1890) '(Freq. with lower-case initial.) Of a woman: homosexual, characterized by a sexual interest in other women. Also, of or pertaining to homosexual relations between women.' ' [First included in Supplement in 1976]

lesbic (1892) '= *Lesbian adj.* 2.' [First included in Supplement in 1976]

dikey (1964) 'Having the appearance or characteristics of a lesbian.' [First included in Supplement in 1972]

girl-on-girl (1984) 'Designating or relating to an encounter, esp. a sexual liaison, between two or more women. Freq. in **girl-on-girl action**.' [Entry new to *OED3*]

(3) *lesbianism*

tribadism (1811-19) '(a) the activity of a tribade; (b) *spec.* in modern use (see quot. 1965).' [Sense (a) first included in *OED1* in 1914; sense (b) added in Supplement in 1976]²⁰

²⁰ The 1965 quotation, from the *New Statesman*, reads 'The first [technique of lesbian intercourse], known as "tribadism", consists in one woman lying on top of the other and simulating the movements of heterosexual intercourse in such a way as to stimulate the clitoris of each'. Cf. the definition of *tribadism* in *Websters Third International Dictionary* (1961): 'a homosexual practice among women which attempts to simulate heterosexual intercourse'. Both definitions appear, by today's standards, to be implicitly homophobic, since they assume a heterosexual norm and describe homosexual practice as an attempt to imitate this.

Lesbianism (1870) ‘female homosexuality.’

tribady (1882) ‘= *tribadism n.* (a).’ [First included *OED1* in 1914]

Sapphism (1890) ‘Homosexual relations between women.’ [First included in *OED1* in 1909 and defined ‘unnatural sexual relations between women’; definition re-written in *OED2*, 1989]

lipstick lesbianism (1993) ‘ [First included in Draft Additions August 2001]

girl-on-girl (1995) ‘Lesbian sexual activity, esp. in the context of pornography.’ [Entry new to *OED3*]

lady-love (2003) ‘Love for a lady or ladies; (in later use also) love between women, lesbian love. *rare.*’ [Sense new to *OED3*]

APPENDIX B: Earlier terms for lesbian(ism) unrecorded in *HTOED*

Pre-nineteenth-century terms denoting lesbians or lesbianism include the word *lesbian* itself, used with clear sexual meaning in William King’s “The Toast” (Dublin 1732 e.g. p. 16); cf. Donoghue 1993: 258-61. Other examples, all discussed or referred to by the books listed on p. 00 above, are

1. *flats*

Not in *OED*. Green 2010 defines as ‘lesbian sexual intercourse’ and supplies with ten quotations dated between 1655 and 1749.

2. *fricatrice*

Included in *OED1* and there defined as ‘a lewd woman’, a euphemistic formulation which seems to indicate ‘prostitute’. The entire entry is reproduced without change (including the definition) in the current version of *OED*. Quotations are as follows:

1607 B. Jonson, *Volpone* iv.ii.55: ‘The Patron, or Saint George To a lewd harlot, a base fricatrice’

1708 P.A. Motteux, *Wks F. Rabelais* v.v.165: ‘Ingles, Fricatrices and He-Whores’

1871 R. Ellis, tr. *Catullus Poems* xciv.10: ‘Like slaver abhorr’d breath’d from a foul fricatrice’

‘Prostitute’ is a defensible definition for the last cited example of use, from Robinson Ellis’s translation of Catullus (as one can see by checking the original Latin) but not, probably, for the first quotation at least,

which appears to refer specifically to (a prostitute who is) lesbian (see discussion in Wahl 1999: 51). This interpretation is strengthened by the etymology of the word, from Latin *fricare*, to rub (cf. *rubster* below)

3. *rubster*

This term, defined as ‘a woman who engages in sexual activity involving genital contact with other women’, has recently (March 2011) been included in *OED3*, with two quotations dated 1657 and 1663 and one of 2004 (from Borris 2003). For some reason this word does not turn up in the current *HTOED* list of terms for *lesbian* (noun).

4. *tommy*

Not in *OED*. Recorded in Green 2010 where it is defined as ‘a lesbian’ and supplied with three quotations dated 1773, 1781, and 1813. The first of these is taken from an anonymous text quoted in Donoghue 1993: 5, and in full the quotation reads

Woman with Woman act the Manly Part
 And kiss and press each other to the heart.
 Unnat’ral Crimes like these my Satire vex;
 I know a thousand Tommies ’mongst the Sex:
 And if they don’t relinquish such a Crime,
 I’ll give their Names to be the scoff of Time
 (Anon, *The Adulteress*, S. Bladon, 1773, pp. 25-6)

Drawing on the 1984 edition of Partridge’s *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, s.v. *Tom*, Donoghue 1993: 5 notes a number of uses of the related word *tom* to mean ‘a masculine woman of the town’, or ‘a woman who does not care for the society of others than those of her own sex’, commenting “‘Tom(my)’ is just one example of how an unbroken slang tradition can go unrecorded by the *OED*’. Green 2010, with its uniquely full collection of quotations from a vast array of texts, is a most fruitful source of further evidence on terms for *lesbian* as for many other types of slang.