THE SECOND EDITION OF THE
OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY[1]

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IN 1989 Oxford University Press merged the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED1)*, published between 1884 and 1928, with the recent (1972–86) four-volume *Supplement*, to produce an extremely handsome and typographically seamless whole. The editors of *OED1* set out to give a full historical account of all the words (or as many as possible) ever used in the English language; the editor of the *Supplement*, R. W. Burchfield, aimed to update *OED* with comprehensive evidence on twentieth-century words and senses. So *OED2*, which combines these two dictionaries, makes an impressive claim to lexicographical authority. The second edition includes a further 5,000 words and meanings, which entered the lexicographers' files after the relevant volume of the *Supplement* went to press and bring the total of words defined to over half a million. The complete redesign of the dictionary also incorporates a change-over to the International Phonetic Alphabet for representing pronunciation.

The 1928 press release accompanying the publication of the final volume of *OED1* claimed the dictionary as 'the supreme authority, and without a rival', adding, 'what makes the Dictionary unique is its historical method; it is a Dictionary not of our English, but of all English: the English of Chaucer, of the Bible, and of Shakespeare is unfolded in it with the same wealth of illustration as is devoted to the most modern authors'. The 1989 press release for *OED2* made much the same points, quoting various authorities (Anthony Burgess, *The Financial Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, et al.) in testimonial support. A fair representation of the general tenor of their comments is: 'the gigantic total picture of the English language', 'must rank high among the wonders of the language of learning', 'no greater publishing event this century'. This praise was warmly echoed in the majority of reviews which subsequently appeared, and is quoted in the current advertisements for the dictionary which regularly appear in journals.

But the profusion of critical praise was not unmitigated by doubting voices. Geoffrey Hill, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, criticized *OED* for not accurately or adequately recording the usage of Gerard Manley Hopkins.[2] Various letters in the correspondence pages of the same publication expressed other complaints, perhaps the most notable being from the man who had bought the Compact Edition of *OED1*, and then the four successive volumes of the *Supplement*, on the assumption 'that the process of updating the dictionary would be incremental—that if one kept up with the supplements there would be no gaps'. The publication of *OED2* left him short of its additional 5,000 new words, with no other means of acquiring them than by buying the whole of the new dictionary for £1,500.[3] Eric Stanley, in *The Review of English Studies*,[4] was the only critic to address the heart of the new undertaking, viz. merging *OED1* and the recent *Supplement*, adding a comparatively small number of additional words (5,000 in all, i.e. 1 per cent of the original total) and calling the result a 'second edition'—with its inescapable implications of revision[5] —of *OED1*. The success of this enterprise depends on four different factors: the quality, respectively, of the three individual components —*OED1*, the *Supplement*, and the handling of the 5,000 extra words; and the skill and efficiency with which the three are merged.

Stanley says little about the *Supplement* and the new material, but provides a searching analysis of the way that *OED1*'s material was treated. He gives examples of *OED2*'s tampering with *OED1*'s nineteenth- or early twentieth-century witness to current—or some-times, idiosyncratic—views and scholarship on various matters of etymology and pronunciation, demonstrating that *OED*'s present lexicographers did not always replace Murray's views accurately or consistently, and suggesting that they were not given the opportunity to show if they had the necessary erudition for their task. He also makes the important point that, however mistaken, biased, or dated the information originally presented by *OED1* now appears, it is nevertheless an important historical record of the state of knowledge of the foremost lexicographers of the period $c.1880$ to $c.1930$, and as such deserves to be preserved intact. *OED2* many times blurs or distorts that record, and gives no indication to the unwary user of its various cuts and additions to *OED1*'s material.

    [2] *TLS*, 21–7 Apr. 1989, pp. 411–14.
    [3] *TLS*, ·19–25 May 1989, correspondence page.
    [4] E. Stanley, 'The Oxford English Dictionary and Supplement: The Integrated Edition of 1989', *RES* NS 41 (1990), 76–88.
    [5] See *OED1* s.v. *edition*, sense 3, together with editorial headnote (reproduced without change in *OED2*).

Such criticism points to the questionable lexicographical (as opposed to technological) skill with which the creation of *OED2* has been effected, and also highlights the variable authority of *OED1*. In this article I shall examine three of the four factors that have contributed to *OED2*. I shall look first at some of the further limitations of *OED1* (section I), and then move on (section II) to comment on the qualities of the *Supplement* which are again, in some respects, less than ideal. I shall finish (sections III and IV) with some further remarks, additional to Stanley's, on the overall success and usefulness of the product of the merger, *OED2*.

I. THE LIMITATIONS OF *OED1*

One of the problems of assessing a dictionary is that it is almost impossible to grasp its characteristics fully. It functions as an entity, a book with a finite number of words and pages, but to weigh that entity one has to grapple, it might seem, with each of the individual entries in turn—where *OED* is concerned, a virtually impossible task. What is frequently absent from reviews of dictionaries is a theoretical consideration of the appropriate way to assess a lexicographical enterprise. Guidelines or principles of some sort are needed, by which a representative sample of a dictionary's entries may be judged and the whole project evaluated.

One way to demonstrate this is with a familiar example of how *OED1*'s presentation of lexicographical data has been subjected to a systematic analysis and found wanting. *OED1* records Shakespeare as the first user of 1,904 words and senses. But it has been demonstrated[6] that the *OED* readers, on whose evidence the lexicographers relied for their information on usage, read Shakespeare with far more care and attention than they did many of their other sources of lexical evidence, and consequently were more likely to record material from his works than from less fashionable ones of the same or an earlier period. Thus fifty of Shakespeare's supposed first usages can be found in the writings of one other author alone, Thomas Nashe—despite the fact that, since Nashe's works are cited elsewhere in the dictionary, it is evident that they were read by the dictionary readers.

The moral of this story is straightforward: *OED*'s reliability can only reflect the quality of the scholarship that originally went into its compilation. To assess the dictionary, we need to know as much as possible about its editorial premises and methodology. This boils down to three separate factors, which are crucial to any lexicographical enterprise and can be regarded as the theoretical guidelines

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[6] By Jürgen Schäfer, in *Documentation in the O.E.D.* (Oxford, 1980).

by which to assess any individual dictionary: the nature of the sources which the readers consulted to supply evidence on usage, the thoroughness and accuracy with which these sources were read, and the use made by the lexicographers of the evidence which the source study provided.

How can we find out this information where the various components of *OED2* are concerned? Let us start with *OED1*. Since its inception, the availability of information on the processes of compilation of *OED1* has been variable. The *Transactions of the Philological Society*, under whose aegis the project was conceived, recorded discussions and decisions about what the dictionary should contain and how the material should be organized, and also printed fairly regular progress reports.[7] But as time went on, policy formulations were no longer publicly recorded. Once publication of the dictionary started, users could glean some hints about editorial policy from J. A. H. Murray's 'General Explanations', an essay on language and the way in which the *OED* had set out to record it, which was included in the first of the fascicles of the original dictionary (1884), and then in subsequent reprintings of the entire dictionary. Other hints could be found in the various Prefaces to each of the separate fascicles published between 1884 and 1928.[8] But it was not until 1933, when the dictionary was re-issued in a new format—twelve volumes rather than ten, with an additional volume comprising 'a Supplement of new words and meanings, the Additions and Emendations prefixed to the original volumes, corrected and amplified, a List of Spurious Words, and a List of Books quoted in the principal work'—that a full account of the dictionary's inception, progress, and completion was provided.[9] This was the 'Historical Introduction' written by C. T. Onions, reproduced in subsequent printings, and included as part of the Introductory material in *OED2*.

Onions paints a detailed and interesting picture of the progress of the great enterprise. The *Oxford English Dictionary* started life as the Dictionary of the Philological Society, London, which was in turn a response to recommendations made in a paper delivered to the Society

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[7] These appeared at intervals from 1857 onwards.

[8] Most of these were written by Murray. They are reprinted in Darrell R. Raymond, *Dispatches from the Front: The 'Prefaces' to the Oxford English Dictionary* (University of Waterloo Centre for the New Oxford Dictionary, Oct. 1987). He observes in his preface that 'The OED is largely silent about its own history, both in anecdotal material and in what can be inferred from the entries'.

[9] 'The *Oxford English Dictionary*, being a corrected re-issue with an Introduction, Supplement, and *Bibliography* of *A new English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, founded mainly on the materials collected by The Philological Society, and edited by James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, C. T. Onions, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1933'.

in 1857 by Richard Chevenix Trench.[10] The Society's Dictionary, as *OED* was first called, had two revolutionary aims, both characteristic of its age: to be as comprehensive as possible, and to observe 'historical principles'. The editors set out to chart the evolution through time (i.e. 1150 to the late nineteenth century) of all known words in the English language, illustrating the various nuances of meaning with appropriate quotations from all periods of our literature. Appeals were issued to members of the Philological Society, and subsequently, to the general public, for volunteer readers: these readers were asked to choose books from the reading lists compiled by the editorial team, and to record words they thought suitable for inclusion in the dictionary. Editorial policy fluctuated somewhat up to the appointment of James Murray in 1879, who among other things rationalized the procedures of communication with readers, particularly the collection and sorting of the information they had assembled.

Onions vividly sketches the processes of delay, protraction, and evolution of policy as both editors and publishers began to appreciate the vast magnitude of the task to which they had committed themselves. But he leaves us hungry for much more information than he supplies, especially on the three major lexicographical factors I have identified above: source material, reader proficiency, and the processing of the readers' evidence. How did the editors decide on which sources to read? Was there a policy of balancing literary with non-literary sources? One might expect (some) poets, for example, to use language in different ways from (some) botanists. Did the editors carry out any vetting process, or did they accept any volunteer who presented him- or herself as a reader? How efficient and accurate were the readers, and how was this tested? What sorts of implications did the change-over of editors have for editorial policy, and how does this affect the dictionary as we now have it?

No answers to any of these questions are forthcoming from editorial matter in any of the editions of the dictionary itself. More information is available in K. M. Elisabeth Murray's book *Caught in the Web of Words*.[11] Elisabeth Murray uses her grandfather's papers to paint a different picture from that conveyed in Onions's largely serene account, chronicling the halting and inconsistent progress of the dictionary's early years, and giving a graphic description of the state of the slips sent in by readers that Murray received in 1879 when he took

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[10] R. C. Trench, 'On Some Deficiencies in our English Dictionaries', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1856–7), 1–70.

[11] K. M. E. Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words: James Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary* (New Haven, 1977; Oxford, 1979). Quotations are from the Oxford edition.

over editorship of the dictionary from his predecessor, the notoriously insouciant Furnivall:[12]

Many of the sub-editors had clearly found difficulty in packing up hundredweights of slips. Some were sent in sacks in which they had long been stored, and when opened a dead rat was found in one and a live mouse and her family in another: one sub-editor's work was delivered in a baby's bassinet: there was a 'hamper of *I*'s' with the bottom broken, which had been left behind in an empty vicarage at Harrow. Many of the bundles had stood for so many years in unsuitable places that the slips were crumbling with damp and the writing had faded; others had been so illegibly scribbled in the first place that Dr Murray exclaimed in exasperation that Chinese would have been more useful, since for that he could have found a translator. (p. 174)

If this was the case, one wonders, how did Murray go about remedying the damage? Did he check on the representativeness of the slips? Did he organize rereading of the sources? Does the quality of the dictionary vary according to the varying treatment by sub-editors of these first batches of slips? It is impossible to find answers to these questions.

   Elisabeth Murray also details the next twenty-odd years' continual wrangling between Murray and Oxford University Press over the projected size and date of completion of the dictionary. As the work progressed, editorial policies evolved and changed, sub-editors came and went, and the Press put increasing pressure on Murray to complete the project, which they feared would become a white elephant of massively expensive proportions. Inevitably, these factors resulted in considerable unevenness between one volume and the next, causing Murray keen distress. Much of the final work on letters *A* and *E* had been done by Henry Bradley, the assistant editor forced on Murray by OUP in order to speed the project up.[13] Many years later, Murray wrote about this to his friend, Walter Skeat:

because the Delegates were in such a hurry to get Mr Bradley on, to show that he could (as they thought) work twice as fast as I . . . he neither had the practice, the knowledge of the weakness of the Philological Society slips, nor the resources of the Scriptorium [Murray's lexicographical workshop] to help him . . . *I have always said that the letter [E] ought to be done again* [my italics]. *A* is not so unsatisfactory because I had been working provisionally for a year when I began to print it, and had learned how much had to be done to supplement the slips . . . It *was* a pity to start Bradley so.[14]

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[12] For a biography of Furnivall, see William Benzie, *Dr. F. J. Furnivall* (Norman, Okla., 1983).
   [13] Bradley first came to Murray's notice with his authoritative review of the first fascicle of *OED1* in the *Academy* (Feb. and Mar. 1884); see the entry in *DNB*, 1922–30 (Oxford, 1937), 103–4, by W. A. Craigie; and Robert Bridges, *Henry Bradley: A Memoir* (Oxford, 1926).
   [14] Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words*, 263.

Such a statement, from the person most aware of the deficiencies in the dictionary's treatment of source material, is disquieting. Was Murray an unreasonable perfectionist, or are his reservations well grounded? Should we trust the evidence on words beginning with *A* and *E* as reliable, or not? *OED* itself gives us no help: no reference to these doubts of Murray's appears in any of the publicity or editorial matter accompanying any of the editions of *OED*, its abridgement the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (SOED)*, or the *Supplement*.

Elisabeth Murray further details the numerous, and inevitable, problems that arose from relying so heavily on voluntary, and therefore unskilled, labour, for example the 'most pernicious and deceptive practice' (Murray's words) by some readers of reading their books for particular letters only, or the difficulties in getting sufficient illustration of the usage of common words. (Murray was reduced to making up some of the examples himself, identified in the dictionary by the term *Mod*[ern]: for example, 'As fine a child as you will see', to illustrate *A adj.*[2] (sense 1c), and 'the new arrival is a little daughter', to illustrate *arrival* (sense 6).[15])

But Murray's granddaughter does not give us information on how the sources for readers were chosen, and nor do we have details of how editors were instructed to deal with slips, what the criteria were by which illustrative quotations were chosen for publication, whether books read by readers thought to be unsatisfactory were reread (and how this was done when the books concerned, sometimes black-letter, had been cut up by the readers for quotations), nor how Murray replaced or supplemented the unusable material inherited from Furnivall.

The official history of the Press, by Peter Sutcliffe,[16] gives us no help on these questions either: so what can the dictionary user do? There is, so far as I know, only one study of *OED* that makes any attempt to subject it to thorough-going methodological examination. This is the revelatory book by Jürgen Schäfer on *OED* documentation that supplies the information on Shakespeare citations given above. At the beginning of his study, Schäfer soberly remarks that

the increasing discrepancy between the methods used at that time [i.e. when *OED1* was compiled] and those used now for evaluation calls for a detailed analysis of the nature and reliability of the *O.E.D.* documentation itself. Instead of providing an unquestioned basis for further research, the *O.E.D.* has to become its object. If we are ignorant of the premises of the *O.E.D.* documentation, we cannot properly evaluate it; and it is indeed remarkable

[15] On both occasions, so his granddaughter tells us (pp. 200–1), he was correcting proofs while sitting at the bedside of his wife, who had just given birth to a daughter.
[16] P. Sutcliffe, *The Oxford University Press* (Oxford, 1978).

how little is known about the working methods of *O.E.D.* readers and editors and about the application of the principles set forth in the introduction to the dictionary. Selection and distribution of source texts, lemmatization policy, consistency of approach under various editors, to mention only a few of the major questions, have only recently begun to be studied in detail, despite the fact that all of these may have far-reaching consequences for the nature of the *O.E.D.* documentation and, of course, for any conclusions based upon it.[17]

Schäfer chooses to examine just one, restricted aspect of *OED* policy, viz. its treatment of so-called antedatings (i.e. examples of a word's use earlier than the date of the first illustrative quotation given by *OED*). Obviously, antedating *OED* evidence by a few years is not significant; Schäfer believes, however, that 'a considerable percentage, at least one third, of the potential first citations in any corpus examined for the *O.E.D.* was normally overlooked' (p. 40). Of these, 30 per cent would shift *OED* dates by over fifty years, 7 per cent by over one hundred years.[18] Well-loved authors such as Shakespeare furnish a disproportionate number of first citations in the *OED*: such writers, prominent in the literary canon, were read with more care and attention by *OED* staff and voluntary readers than their less fashionable contemporaries and predecessors.

This favouritism, presumably unconscious, seems certain to have extended beyond authors to periods. 'The chronological distribution of *O.E.D.* resources', says Schäfer, 'is extremely uneven' (p. 51). A well-combed period was the late sixteenth century, and Schäfer suggests that this may in part contribute to the belief, not necessarily erroneous, that the period was one of unparalleled lexical productivity.[19] He provides his readers with a fascinating graph, plotting *OED* sources against book production from 1480 to 1640. 'During the early decades from 1470 to 1520 the number [of sources read] is fairly constant at a level of 23 to 32 works per decade . . . From 1520 to 1590 there is a spectacular rise . . . In other words, in the Shakespearian period nearly twenty times as many works were examined as for the decades around 1500' (p. 51). Not surprisingly, more sources read per period result in more first citations for this period. This correlation may also be the correct explanation for the impression given by *OED* documentation that the eighteenth century produced relatively few

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[17] Schäfer, *Documentation*, 2–3.

[18] 'Translated into absolute numbers, this means that nearly 29,000 of *O.E.D.*'s 240,000 main lemmas can be antedated more than fifty years. Of these, some 16,000 can be antedated more than 100 years' (ibid. 40).

[19] Schäfer's posthumously published work, *Early Modern Lexicography* (Oxford, 1989), builds substantially on certain aspects of his previous study, and amply demonstrates the inconsistency with which *OED1* readers covered the late sixteenth century, despite its popularity.

new words and usages. Schäfer tells us that the *OED* reading from this period 'had originally been assigned to American readers, and because of a breakdown in organization the slips never reached Murray's scriptorium' (p. 53). The apparent eighteenth-century decline in lexical productivity, therefore, may have more to do with perceptions than with facts; the point being, once again, that *OED* evidence must be evaluated strictly in relation to the quality of the lexicography providing that evidence.

This is a gloomy picture indeed of *OED* reliability. Elsewhere, Schäfer talks of the 'astonishing divergencies in authorial reliability and in period coverage' (p. 69), which he believes the editors themselves were, in large part, simply unaware of. He also suggests some further reasons (other than literary taste and relative familiarity) why readers should have read their texts with such varying accuracy. Readers had originally been instructed to look out for unusual rather than usual words, and even when Murray's editorial policy corrected these instructions, there would be a natural tendency for the eye to slide over familiar words and pick up unfamiliar ones. Similarly, words of conspicuous morphology will stand out more than others, so that it might be very difficult, for example, to detect just when a familiar noun started to be used as a verb, with no corresponding morphological change to alert the eye (p. 58). (The verb *mirror* is used by Nashe, but *OED1*—and *OED2*—date its first occurrence 227 years later, in Keats's *Lamia*.[20])

Schäfer puts the damaging implications of his study in a positive perspective. He warns against the danger of 'a strong scepticism developing which regards all diachronic statements based on the *O.E.D.* and *S.O.E.D.* documentation as tenuous hypotheses at best' (p. 69); and he warmly sings *OED*'s praises: 'with its gallery of distinguished editors from Sir James Murray to Dr C. T. Onions, the *O.E.D.* is one of the proudest monuments of English scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (p. 1). No reference to Schäfer's research, and no indication of the extent of *OED1* fallibility, is to be found in the introductory or publicity material accompanying the new *OED*.

Schäfer's evidence on the unreliability of readers is reinforced by a further, more minor, source of information on the gathering of *OED* evidence, Marghanita Laski. Often referred to as an indefatigable

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[20] Cf. P. J. Wexler, 'Supplementing the Supplement', in *Linguistica computazionale*, vi, *Computational Lexicology and Lexicography* (Pisa, 1981, 1991): 'It is a commonplace that a dictionary often records long gaps between the appearance of a root-form and its derivative—say, between an adjective and an adverb; but is this a fact about language, or about lexicographers?' In the absence of any information about reader reliability from lexicographers themselves, it is impossible to answer this question.

contributor to the 1972–86 *Supplement*, and specially noted in *OED2* (p. ix) as 'a steadfast friend of the *OED* and its *Supplement* over some thirty years', she turned up some 250,000 quotations for the dictionary, furnished largely from her extensive reading in twentieth-century crimewriting and post-sixteenth-century household literature. Her observations on the varying quality of the source material passed on by the readers to the lexicographers are not very surprising: they simply make a predictable point about human nature:

As every dictionary-reader knows, two people can read the same book and record almost non-identical lists of words to be found in it. One reader can read a book twice and come up with a different list of words each time. In addition, and little as it becomes me to denigrate my predecessors, many of *OED*'s original readers were simply inept.[21]

She suggests that 'all the literature after, say, 1600, needs to be read again. The amount that has been missed in even the most famous works never ceases to astound.' This alarming comment may well be a disproportionate exaggeration. But in the absence of any formal recognition by Oxford lexicographers of the unreliability of readers, it is difficult to combat Laski's suspicions with concrete evidence.

Most of the information I have presented so far relates to the second and third of the three factors I identified as crucial in any appraisal of *OED*'s reliability: the efficiency and accuracy of the *OED* readers, and the use made by the lexicographers of the material they handed over. Laski makes an important observation on the first factor, the *selection* of source material for *OED*: 'anyone reading the *OED* would get the impression that it was the giants of literature who formed our language. Any reading in trivia shows this impression to be wrong . . . it is clear that extended reading in the trivia of past centuries could be as valuable to a revision of the *OED* as the reading of contemporary trivia has been to the new *Supplement*.'

Curiously enough, the lexicographical habit of turning to creative writers as sources to elucidate definitions of words has been little

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[21] *TLS*, 13 Oct. 1972, letter page. An engagingly candid account of the difficulties of reading fruitfully and accurately for *OED* is to be found in P. J. Wexler's article cited above. He records that he read *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, Madame d'Arblay*, ed. J. Hemlow *et al.* (Oxford, 1972–84) for the *OED* project 'in shameful ignorance of J. N. Waddell's "Additions to *O.E.D.* from the writings of Fanny Burney", *Notes & Queries* (1980) 27–32, which at that date was able to cover the first seven volumes. I find it highly instructive to note that only about 20% of the items were common to both lists. How could I possibly have failed to check the borrowings *bavardage, cuisinière, opera buffa, pas seul*, the derivatives *diminisher, inappeasable*, the ordinary-looking *follow-up, M.P.*? How did he miss the derivatives *correspondentially, curtainless*, the ordinary-looking *feel at home, brown paper parcel, two-bedded*? In both cases, 'etc.'—all too easily.'

remarked.[22] Such writers often go to notable lengths to use language in original, startling, and imaginative ways, and this is of course one of the main reasons why we value them. Consequently, however, it seems doubtful that we should expect Shakespeare to represent general usage (of however small a class) of the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, any more than we should expect Keats to represent that of the early nineteenth century, or James Joyce, Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, Anthony Burgess, Martin Amis (all *Supplement* authors) to represent the general usage of today. The opposite is true: we would expect the language of these writers to stand out in a contrasting way from current usage, although this will obviously vary from writer to writer, text to text, and even line to line and word to word. But so far as *OED* is concerned, this raises a major lexicographical problem. Any word selected at random from the pages of *OED* will frequently have the bulk of its illustrative quotations drawn from literary sources—often, favourite authors like Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Addison, Walter Scott, Tennyson. What sort of picture of the history of a word's usage will such evidence tend to represent?

It is worth labouring this point, since it is often unregarded by dictionary users and reviewers. Geoffrey Hill, for example, severely criticizes *OED1* (and consequently *2*) for its failure to take literary usages sufficiently into account (see n. 2 above). He suggests that the Hopkins' coinage *unchancelling* (in 'Thy unchancelling poising palms were weighing the worth', *Deutschland* st. 21) has a better right to be recorded (it is not) than *tofu*: 'Is the name of an easily analysable substance that has appeared on a million menus more real [*sic*] than a word, peculiarly resistant to analysis, which has lodged itself in a few thousands of minds?' (p. 414). Hill's strictures illustrate the problem faced by lexicographers in satisfying their readership: he gives no indication of appreciating the practicable impossibility of recording and adequately analysing every usage by significant writers—even supposing there could ever be any agreement about who those writers were. The problem that literary usage presents to lexicographers is also suggested by Murray's irritated comment on Robert Browning. When Part I of *OED* appeared in 1884, Browning told Murray 'that he found the Dictionary "most delightful" and intended to read every word of it'. But in response to his son Oswyn's praise of Browning some years later, Murray apparently complained that 'Browning constantly used words without regard to their proper meaning. He has

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[22] Though lexicographers occasionally indicate that they are well aware that 'literary' language will tend to be unusual language. See, for example, R. W. Burchfield (ed.), *Studies in Lexicography* (Oxford, 1987), 8, 138, and also Schäfer, *Documentation, passim, e.g.* p. 13.

added greatly to the difficulties of the Dictionary.'[23]

These caveats on the reliability of *OED* reflect deficiencies and inconsistencies in policy that were pretty well inevitable, considering the state of lexicographical and linguistic theory at the end of the nineteenth century, and the almost punitive conditions of financial constraint under which Murray operated. They certainly do not remove the fact that, as thousands of users testify, *OED1* is both a research tool of unparalleled value and a source of much pleasure. But its limitations are significant, and cannot be wished away or ignored. Reprinting *OED1* in *OED2*, with its material virtually unchanged, reproduces these limitations. For the dictionary to be truly useful, the student has constantly to exercise judgement, scepticism, and imagination, wherever possible consulting other research sources (for example, author concordances, editions of texts, and documents published since *OED1* or not cited in the dictionary, and most importantly of all, the lists of *OED1* antedatings published regularly in *Notes & Queries*). This is not in any way objectionable. What is troubling is that, search as one may through the publicity matter to *OED2*, the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, or the *Supplement*, one comes across no acknowledgement of *OED*'s fallibility. Nor do the dictionaries themselves offer any direction to the user as to how such fallibility may be identified, measured, or circumvented; indeed, one has to search hard to discover any editorial acknowledgement of the problem, although a single phrase at the beginning of the Introduction to *OED2*, and a few lines at its end, briefly allude to *OED1*'s limitations.[24] The comments of almost all the reviewers of the *Supplement* and *OED2* testify to untroubled faith in the *OED* enterprise: there is virtually no suspicion reported or doubts voiced about *OED*'s 'supreme authority'.

II. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE *SUPPLEMENT*

The process of updating *OED* began surprisingly early. Language does not wait on lexicographers, and during the forty-four years of *OED1*'s compilation many new words and senses had entered the language. OUP was well aware that the early volumes of *OED* were on their way to becoming obsolete by the time that the last volume was

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[23] Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words*, 235. James Murray records one such misuse by Browning s.v. *twat*. Browning came across the word in *Vanity of Vanities* (1660) ('They talk't of his having a Cardinalls Hat, They'd send him as soon an Old Nuns Twat') and erroneously assumed that 'it denoted some part of a nun's attire', in which sense he included it in *Pippa Passes* (IV. ii. 96). I am grateful to Eric Stanley for providing me with this reference. See also Thomas Pyles, 'Innocuous Linguistic Decorum: A Semantic Byway', *MLN* 64 (1949), 1–2.

[24] See p. xi, 'it is a matter of common knowledge that many elements of the original *OED* require revision', and pp. lv–lvi.

published in 1928. In order to keep up the value of their original investment, in terms of both scholarship and cash, they needed to publish a supplement listing recent vocabulary. They were able to produce this remarkably quickly, since the lexicographers had kept their files open to record new words and senses even though the relevant volume of *OED* had gone to press. The first *OED Supplement*, a single volume edited by C. T. Onions, appeared five years later in 1933, and was given away free to all original *OED* subscribers. But this was merely a stop-gap. The pressure for a further, more comprehensive *Supplement* came to a head during the early 1950s, and the Press began to cast around for a bright, energetic, optimistic and preferably young lexicographer to edit a more ambitious project. Finding the right person was a delicate task, and the Press's adviser Kenneth Sisam was careful to warn against the 'natural dilatoriness of lexicographers': 'the main worry . . . is to see that the Supplement is published before it is obsolete. . . . Have you ever found a reason why any sane man should start on one of these vast enterprises unless he is comfortably paid and housed? or why, if he is comfortably provided for, he should ever finish it?'[25] The Press eventually appointed R. W. Burchfield, one of whose claims to fame must be that he completed his mammoth task; albeit in twenty-nine years rather than the projected seven, and in four volumes rather than one.

There is often some misunderstanding over the intended function of the *Supplement*. The *Supplement* team's aims, together with their success in fulfilling them, are obviously crucial to assessment of *OED2*, since this new dictionary simply merges *OED1* and the *Supplement* together. Burchfield makes no bones about the fact that the *Supplement* was not designed to go back over original *OED* material. His brief was, in fact, comparatively limited: to bring the dictionary up to date by recording new words, and new senses of existing words, that had entered the language since *OED*. His four volumes, which subsume the 1933 *Supplement*, amount to 5,732 pages and contain approximately 69,000 entries.

Burchfield provides us with a good deal more information about his editorial procedure than is available for *OED*, both in articles in various journals and in the individual Prefaces to the four volumes of his *Supplement*. Unfortunately, though, he gives no account of the problem that evidently bedevilled *OED* and renders it so liable to suspicion: viz., reader reliability. The *Supplement* prints long lists of contributors to its pages, mostly generous and self-sacrificial volunteers, but gives no information on how these were trained or their work

[25] Quoted by R. W. Burchfield, in 'The End of an Innings but not the End of the Game', *The Incorporated Linguist*, 23 (1984), 114–19 (p. 115).

tested and assessed. Burchfield also fails to satisfy the curious on the two other major factors in lexicographical methodology—selection of source material and editorial processing of the evidence passed on by the readers.[26] Not least because of this lack of information, there are a number of problems with his dictionary, whether assessed independently of *OED* or in its role as supplement to the parent dictionary. It is regrettable that, as with *OED*, the failure by the editor to identify these problems means that they become apparent only after some extended use of the *Supplement*, and the casual user is given no guidance as to how to extract the maximum possible benefit from its pages.

Burchfield took up office under strict directions from Sisam to keep new material down to a minimum, for example by excluding undesirable American usages. He swiftly realized that such a policy was inadequate, and he determined to include as much non-English English as possible. He also broadened the range of sources to include technical, scientific, and popular works, notably journalism. A glance through any of his pages illustrates the consequences, for both words and quotations, of this more eclectic policy. At the same time, as he states several times in print, he tried hard to maintain the dictionary's literary strength:

From the time this circumstance [of the *OED*'s literary inclusiveness] became clear to me I embarked on a similarly ambitious programme for the inclusion of our greatest modern writers in the *Supplement to the OED*, among them T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh, W. H. Auden, and even Dylan Thomas and James Joyce (except for most of *Finnegans Wake*).[27]

(Unfortunately, Burchfield doesn't grapple with the problem I have sketched above of using literary sources as evidence for current twentieth-century usage. All he tells us is that the *hapax legomena* of famous writers do not 'upset the balance' of his four volumes.[28])

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[26] The introduction to Vol. I. of the *Supplement* contains a diagram of the 'editorial process' (p. xvi). But this pyramidal structure—with Burchfield at its apex, doing the 'editing' ('the bringing together and revision of all material by the Editor'), and his staff at the base, doing the 'sorting'—gives no significant detail as to the criteria by which editorial processing took place, and completely omits any mention of source selection. Pp. xii–xiii deal with source selection only in very general terms, telling us, with a handful of illustrative examples, that 'since 1957 our readers have extracted about a million and a half quotations from works of all kinds written in the period 1884 to the present day [1971]'.

[27] 'The Oxford English Dictionary', in Robert Ilson (ed.), *Lexicography: An Emerging International Profession* (Manchester, 1986), 24; cf. Preface to *Supplement* Vol. IV, p. 24: 'I concluded that if the Dictionary [i.e. *OED1*] had room for the word *thester* as adjective ("dark") and noun ("darkness"), and Orm's þeossterrleððc "darkness", it could, and must, admit the vocabulary of Edith Sitwell and Wystan Auden.'

[28] Burchfield, 'The Oxford English Dictionary', 24. Burchfield seems to have thought of his policy of including literary terms as something of a crusade against what he calls 'new linguistic

The *Supplement* contains vast quantities of valuable twentieth-century additions to the *OED* lexicon, and updatings of various existing words, but at the same time its very ambitiousness has resulted in a not insignificant failure in consistency and comprehensiveness. Reviewers have shown that certain areas of vocabulary are, apparently whimsically, treated far more fully than others (for example, those relating to hobbies and sports: virtually 100 per cent coverage for surfing terms compared with nearer 20 per cent for philately).[29] This suggests that both source selection and reader reliability were not all they should have been. More worrying is the failure by the *Supplement* to include many words from half a dozen recent American dictionaries, some of which are cited in its bibliography. This exposes the third factor, editorial processing of readers' evidence, to some considerable doubt. As the *Notes & Queries* reviewer who records a quickly garnered sample of such omissions remarks, 'it would be interesting to learn how Burchfield and his staff decided to exclude a word that had already been defined and

(and especially structuralist) attitudes', as the context of the remark quoted in the preceding note makes clear. See, e.g., his lament that the compilation of the *Supplement* coincided with the emergence of 'what I have elsewhere called "linguistic burial parties" . . . that is, scholars with shovels bent on burying the linguistic past and most of the literary past and present. I refer to those who believe that synchronic means "theoretically sound" and diachronic "theoretically suspect". It is theoretically sound, so the argument of the synchronicists runs, to construct contrastive sentences or other laboratory-invented examples which draw attention to this or that element of lexis, and to do *only* that. I profoundly believe that such procedures, leading descriptive scholars never to quote from the written language of even our greatest modern writers, leave one looking at a language with one's eyes partly blindfold.' John Simpson, senior editor of the *Supplement* before becoming co-compiler of *OED2*, recorded in an interview that Burchfield favoured literary sources 'to the extent of allowing a single literary cite to swing a term into the *Supplement*' (the normal rule was that five citations were required for inclusion); see John Willinsky, 'Cutting English on the Bias: Five Lexicographers in Pursuit of the New', *American Speech*, 63 (1988), 44–66 (p. 57). (The quotation is a paraphrase by Willinsky of Simpson's remark.)

[29] Some of the most penetrating reviews of the *Supplement* have appeared in *N&Q*; see vols. 219 (1974), 2–13; 222 (1977), 388–99 (both by Barbara Strang); 228 (1983), 483–7 (by M. H. Samuels); and 233 (1988), 148–53 (by Peter S Baker), covering *Supplement* Vols. I–IV respectively. The analysis of philately versus surfing vocabulary is provided by Baker. Burchfield himself has described how he made some of his decisions on the inclusion of 'controversial' vocabulary, in a way that partially explains the uneven results. He began with the intention of modelling his policy on that of *OED1*, but 'unfortunately, no detailed analysis of marginal word-classes in the *OED* exists. Consequently in Volume I of [his *Supplement*] I frequently had to base decisions about such vocabulary on *instinct and general experience and on the likelihood that such-and-such a policy had been adopted [in OED]*' ('The Treatment of Controversial Vocabulary in *The Oxford English Dictionary*', *Transactions of the Philological Society 1973* (1974), 1–28 (p. 2); my italics). Both this article and the successive *Supplement* Prefaces openly admit to the inconsistency of editorial practice from volume to volume. See e.g. 'Controversial Vocabulary', p. 11, on the use of the paragraph mark to designate *evitanda*; p. 13 on Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' words (*beamish, chortle,* and *galumph* were omitted from Vol. I, while the nonce words beginning with subsequent letters of the alphabet were included in subsequent volumes); and *Supplement*, Vol. II, pp. vii–viii and Vol. III, p. v.

illustrated in one of these books'.[30] Dean Trench pointed out in 1857 that trivial and (possibly) transient words (like many of those, omitted by Burchfield, from these recent American dictionaries such as *variomatic*, *shock-rock*, *workwear*, *wargasm*, *sexy* in the sense 'generally attractive or interesting') are nevertheless important as a record of a historical stage in our language.[31] If the *OED* passes them over, how will social and literary historians two hundred years hence make sense of many aspects of our popular culture?

Newspaper reviewers noted with approval and delight Burchfield's record of the eccentric and one-off usages of a different cultural stratum. He himself claims with pride to include

apatheia (a medical word used by Beckett), *athambia* (*hapax legomenon* in Beckett), *Babbitt* (the name of a literary 'hero'), *bandersnatch* (a 'Lewis Carroll' word), *bang*, *sb.*[1] (used allusively after T. S. Eliot's line), *barkle*, *v.* (dialectal use in D. H. Lawrence), *baw-ways* (dialectal use in James Joyce), *ectomorph* (anthropometric term adopted by R. Fuller, C. P. Snow, W. H. Auden, etc.), and *elf sb.* 6 (further illustrations in Walter de la Mare, J. R. R. Tolkien, etc., of obvious combinations).[32]

Questions immediately arise as to how such authors and usages should have been selected. Unfortunately, the small area I have investigated in this respect indicates that the *Supplement* here too is certainly not above reproach. I have done some research on source selection, reader reliability, and editorial processing in relation to the treatment of Auden (a fair example, I thought, since Burchfield several times[33] claims that the *Supplement* made a special point of recording his vocabulary). But my findings strongly suggest that treatment of all three factors was, in perhaps varying degrees, inadequate.

Auden was a voracious dictionary reader—in 1972 his copy of *OED* was so worn that he considered buying a new one[34]—and he peppers his poems with hundreds of archaic and eccentric usages. Given his constant use of and reference to *OED*, it seems likely that many of these usages result from his browsings through its pages. Possible examples are: *flosculent*, 'flowery', for which *OED* provides only two illustrative quotations, in 1646 and 1652; *semble*, 'similar, like', for which *OED* gives four quotations dated between 1449 and 1584; *ubity*, 'place, locality', two illustrative quotations, both from the same source in 1624; *videnda*, 'things worth seeing or which ought to be

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[30] Baker, *N&Q* 233 (1988), 151.   [31] Trench, 'Some Deficiencies', 5–8.

[32] Preface to *Supplement*, Vol. I, p. xiv.

[33] See, e.g., p. 326 and n. 27 above.

[34] According to his biographer Humphry Carpenter; see *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (London, 1981), 419.

seen', two quotations dated between 1760 and 1771. (Auden may have coined some of these words from their Latin root, or come across them in sources not read by *OED* readers, but occasionally it seems undeniable that *OED* was his inspiration: in 'A Bad Night: A Lexical Exercise', the word *hirple*, 'to move with a gait between walking and crawling', is to be found in one of *OED*'s citations for *hoast*, to cough, which occurs later in the poem.) Clearly, the *Supplement* could not have recorded *all* Auden's unusual vocabulary (though this is not, as it happens, a point made by Burchfield). I have looked up 150-odd unusual words from Auden's works, to find that the *Supplement* turns out to record them with remarkable inconsistency. Some poems are not cited at all, despite the fact that they appear in volumes listed in the *Supplement* bibliography, and contain many words and usages just as unusual and notable as ones which the *Supplement* does record. In any one poem, some of the unusual words will get into the dictionary and some will not (*flosculent* is not recorded, but *semble* is; they occur nine lines apart in 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat'; *ubity* is not recorded, but *videnda* is; they occur a page apart in the same work). When such words are cited by the *Supplement*, they are variously and (to my eyes) inconsistently labelled as *poet[ic]*, *arch[aic]*, *isolated later example*, *rare*, with no indication how these labels were assigned or what the distinction between them is.[35] And no hint is given to the dictionary user of the curious lexicographical loop involved in putting back into the *Supplement* words Auden may well have lifted from *OED* in the first place.[36]

All this suggests that the *Supplement* treatment here is, to put it at its most charitable, variable in quality. Indeed, it is comparable to the *OED* treatment of literary sources, and evidences the same weaknesses: variable reader reliability, and inconsistent editorial processing of the evidence provided by the readers. This unhappy impression is corroborated if we turn to another area of vocabulary, and look at the *Supplement*'s treatment of the delicate issue of prescriptivism (as in entries for such problem words and usages as *hopefully, parameter, flaunt/flout*). Most lexicographers these days—

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[35] Another inconsistency appears in the dates assigned to Auden's poems. 'Under Sirius', for example, was first published in the journal *Horizon* in 1949, and subsequently in the collection *Nones*, which appeared in New York in 1951 and in London in 1952. All three dates are variously, though inconsistently, assigned by the *Supplement* to vocabulary recorded from the poem.

[36] I have found only one acknowledgement of this loop, in relation to Joyce's use of *OED* rather than Auden's. The *Supplement* records two Joycean usages of the word *peccaminous* (for which *OED1* records only two quotations, 1656 and 1668), and comments, 'It is the kind of word that Joyce may have picked up from the *O.E.D.*'.

and certainly Burchfield[37]—tell you that their job is simply to describe usage, in much the spirit, if not the letter, of Dr Johnson two hundred years ago, who said his aim was 'not [to] form, but register the language; . . . not [to] teach men how they should think, but relate how they have hitherto expressed their thoughts'. Such a policy is not without risk, for many dictionary users look to the dictionary (and especially *OED*) for an authoritative statement on what usage should be; that is, they expect dictionaries to prescribe usage. The inevitable resulting clash can sometimes be resounding, as evidenced by the torrent of abuse that greeted the publication in 1960 of Philip Gove's determinedly descriptivist Webster's *Third International Dictionary*. This provoked the fear that we were well on the way to worldwide communism, since Webster's refused to 'condemn some usages as less equal than others'.[38] One of the problems with Webster's documentation of words such as *ain't*, *finalise*, and the like was that it gave no indication to an unwary user of the virulent execration such words could excite. The solution adopted by many dictionaries nowadays is to indicate in some way that usages like *hopefully* as an adverbial disjunct, or *disinterested* to mean the same as *uninterested*, are objectionable to some users: that is, to be descriptive about prescriptivism. Such a policy is followed to good effect by the best desk dictionaries presently available, such as the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language*, and Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*.

Burchfield does not seem to take this line, since the warning symbol he employs to alert the user, the paragraph mark (¶), is said to designate 'erroneous or catachrestic' usages.[39] To use the term *erroneous* begs the question. And once again, editorial policy on dealing with these words is inconsistent. The entry on *finalize* gives us no clue that this word was, thirty years ago, fiercely resisted in the States, yet such information could be vital to future understanding of the nuances of its use in (say) contemporaneous fiction.[40] On the other hand, we are told (though without explanation, comment, or paragraph mark) that the use of *hopefully* as a disjunct is 'avoided by many writers'. The quotation sources range from the *New York Times Book*

[37] See e.g. his article 'Dictionaries and Ethnic Sensibilities', in Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (edd.), *The State of the Language* (London, 1980), 15–23.

[38] For the reception of the Webster's *Third International*, see James Sledd and Wilma R. Ebitt, *Dictionaries and 'That' Dictionary* (Chicago, 1962).

[39] See Roy Harris's discussion of the same point in his review of Vol. III of the *Supplement* in *TLS* 17 Sept. 1982, pp. 935–6.

[40] The word is still unacceptable to 90 per cent of the usage panel of the *American Heritage Dictionary* ('a group of about 175 well-known [American] writers, scholars, broadcasters, and public figures'); see Geoffrey Nunberg, 'What the Usage Panel Thinks', in Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels (edd.), *The State of the Language*, 2nd edn. (London, 1990), 467–82 (p. 469).

Review in 1932 to the *Guardian* in 1971, puzzlingly suggesting that the word has been acceptable in otherwise upmarket publications. No similar warning accompanies the use of *parameter* to mean 'a boundary or limit'; I have known this sense to elicit strong opposition from conservative speakers. *refute* to mean 'deny', 'repudiate', is sharply ticked off as 'erroneous' and stigmatized with the paragraph mark; yet the quotations are drawn from such sources as the *Observer* and the *Daily Mail*—precisely those elsewhere used to substantiate acceptable usage. *protagonist* used to mean 'proponent, advocate, supporter' is allotted the paragraph mark, together with the comment that this sense arises from confusion with the implications of the prefix *pro*; the quotations, interestingly enough, are taken from some sources condemning such use (e.g. a 1972 copy of the *Observer*), some illustrating its use (the *TLS*, and the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*). *pristine* to mean 'unspoilt' or 'brand-new' is given different treatment again. The comment reads: 'these transferred uses, though now increasingly common, are regarded with disfavour by many educated speakers'; but no paragraph mark appears, and although ten quotations are cited, none indicate such disapproval. *infer* to mean 'imply' 'is widely considered to be incorrect', and examples of such use are given from, among others, the works of Walter Scott, Mervyn Peake, a Geological History of the British Isles, *Private Eye*, and the *Daily Telegraph*. But no examples are given to support its condemnation.

A number of questions arise from this swift survey, but I shall mention just two. The first is the wide variation in the range of editorial comment. Sometimes a paragraph mark is used, sometimes not; sometimes the comment appears in brackets, sometimes not, sometimes not at all. The very variety of the terms used to describe these usages suggests an inconsistency in their treatment: if Burchfield had properly formulated and executed an editorial policy, one would surely find some regularity in the descriptions. A second question is prompted by the apparently varying degree to which Burchfield relies on his (quoted) evidence. By what authority are some usages identified as erroneous, some as unacceptable or unaccepted but not erroneous, when the source of evidence is in each case a quality newspaper or journal like the *TLS* or *Daily Telegraph*—precisely the same sort of source used elsewhere to support unexceptionable usage? It is inconceivable that the judgement of the readers of this journal, for example, will not vary significantly on the degree of impropriety attributable to even the few usages I have instanced here. Would not Burchfield have been better off simply warning the user that such usage is controversial, and (preferably) citing quotations that illustrate the variety of views, rather than, as he occasionally does, intruding his

own judgement on the evidence to act as an arbiter of usage? Such anonymous editorial statements appear misleadingly imbued with lexicographical authority, even though this is not borne out by the cited quotations. Illustrative quotations condemning many usages are ubiquitously to hand in plenty of the popular books on the subject published today; to have quoted from these instead would have indicated the subjectivity of such condemnation—for subjective it certainly is. Burchfield might have remembered the words of the founders of the Philological Society's Dictionary:

the mere merit of a word in an artistic or aesthetic point of view is a consideration, which the Lexicographer cannot for a moment entertain . . . the literary merit or demerit of any particular writer, like the comparative elegance or inelegance of any given word, is a subject upon which the Lexicographer is bound to be almost indifferent.[41]

III. *OED1* PLUS *SUPPLEMENT*

So much for the *Supplement* portion of *OED2* considered on its own terms. How happily does it mesh with the original *OED* in this new, conjoint edition? As I have said, Burchfield set out, quite reasonably, to update *OED* in strictly limited ways. The *Supplement* makes no attempt to incorporate the vast amount of evidence on *OED* ante-datings and corrigenda published in academic journals and scholarly editions over the last hundred years, nor that contained in the post-*OED1* dictionaries of pre-Renaissance English material, the *Middle English Dictionary* and *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*.[42] But reasonable as this policy may have been for the *Supplement*, it is a surprising one to have been carried over, without overt comment, into the editing of *OED2*. Publication of a new edition of the *OED* should have provided the Oxford lexicographers, one might have thought, with the ideal opportunity of gathering together and sorting out the great mass of emendatory material now available. Clearly such a project would have taken several years longer to complete, but the disadvantages of delay might have been set against the expense of an intermediate edition (the most recent report on the Press's finances tells us that the *OED2* has done better than expected

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[41] Quoted in Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words*, 195.

[42] R. L. Venezky and A. diP. Healey (Toronto, 1980). The *Supplement*'s pages do carry a comparatively small number of pre- (late)nineteenth-century entries (such as *introsusception* (1786), *intuitivism* (1866), *intuition* (1796), *novel* (*sb*. 3b, 1639), *ricketiness* (1867), all of which antedate *OED1* citations, and also such as *maiden aunt*, a new entry altogether, with quotations dating from 1709 to 1938). But no statement appears on the criteria for inclusion, other than that of Vol. I: 'It was also decided to exclude, in the main, pre-1820 antedatings of *O.E.D.* words or senses from general English sources, since the systematic collection of such antedatings could not be undertaken at the present time' (p. xv).

financially, but has still lost money),[43] not to mention the incon-
venience to scholars, who are no better served, in many respects, by
OED2 than by *OED1*—and in significant respects, as Stanley has
made clear, are worse served.

Another feature of the *Supplement*'s limited aims was that
Burchfield did not attempt to provide modern examples for words and
senses which were recorded in *OED*, provided with at least one
nineteenth-century quotation there, and are still current in today's
usage. If he had provided such modern examples, the *Supplement*
would have had a new entry for virtually every word and sense listed
in *OED*—and would probably never have been finished. 'Our policy
depends', Burchfield tells the reader (in a paragraph tucked away
somewhat unobviously in the Introduction to the *Supplement*, Vol. I,
p. xv), 'upon the realization by users of the Dictionary that any word
or sense not marked "*obs.*" or "*arch.*" is still part of the current
language'. This limited policy of updating has, once again, a number
of significant implications for *OED2*.

Leafing through *OED2*, one comes across many words whose last
illustrative quotation is dated pre-1850—150-odd years before the date
of publication. Murray's original aim was to supply one quotation in
OED for every fifty years of a word's use. Soon, exigencies of time and
space forced him to settle for one quotation every 100 years; and this,
surely, is the lowest acceptable minimum. Is it desirable for the new
edition of the 'best dictionary of English in the world' to feature such
an enormous gap in documentation of recent usage? Eric Stanley did
not think so, and gave a number of examples from the first few pages
of Vol. VII where some of the most recent citations for such words or
usages dated as far back as the eighteenth century.[44] The sceptic may
further question whether it is likely that usage has remained so static.
And in many cases, it has not: the problem is sometimes that current
senses are not recorded in *OED2*, sometimes that this dictionary gives
a misleading indication of the current acceptability or frequency of
earlier senses. Two examples will illustrate the point. (1) The noun
greed is defined as 'inordinate or insatiate longing, esp. for wealth;
avaricious or covetous desire'; seven quotations, from 1609 to 1874,
illustrate various aspects of this sense. None of the quotations relate to
food—yet wouldn't most people regard food as one of the most obvious
objects of greed? Presumably the *Supplement* editor overlooked the

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[43] According to the *Annual Report of the Delegates of the University Press 1989–1990*. The
University *Gazette* of 25 Apr. 1991, on the other hand, reports that 'OUP have won a Queen's
Award for Export Achievement . . . [which] also reflects the recent success of the second edition
of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, published in 1989. The book has sold over 9,000 sets, more
than 80 per cent of them overseas.'

[44] Stanley, 'The *OED* and *Supplement*', 82–3.

word as requiring any sort of updating, in the belief that the sense or nuances would not have changed significantly in the period 1901 (the date of the relevant *G* volume) to 1972. The *OED2* team did not set out, evidently, to correct the witness of the *Supplement* except in a very few isolated instances;[45] hence the new dictionary is guilty of an absurd omission. (2) The adverb *darkling* (as in Keats's 'Darkling I listen; and, for many a time | I have been half in love with easeful Death') is defined as 'in the dark; in darkness *lit.* and *fig.*' and illustrated with quotations ranging from 1450 to 1859. No indication is given that the word is now (and also in the nineteenth century, presumably) totally restricted to poetic use.[46] How will this be useful to the dictionary user two hundred years hence, when all sense of what is and what is not late twentieth-century current usage will have disappeared? Similar sorts of points are illustrated by the treatment of the following, where *OED2* gives no indication that the senses designated are obsolete, obsolescent, or insufficiently exhaustive: *alimony* (sense 1, 'nourishment; supply of the means of living, maintenance', quotations ranging from 1656 to 1876); *extinguish* (*v.*, sense 2b, 'to "quench" or totally obscure by superior brilliancy; to "eclipse", put completely in the shade', quotations dated 1551, 1591, and 1863); *disbloom* (one quotation, dated 1884); *gloze* (*v.*, sense 2, 'to veil with specious comments, etc.', quotations ranging from 1390 to 1884; cf. also the verb's derivatives); *foremention* (*v.*; one citation only, dated 1660); *fosterable* (one citation only, dated 1869); *secretary*, where none of *OED2*'s definitions covers the most usual current sense, as supplied by the most recent edition (1990) of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*: 'a person employed by an individual or in an office etc. to assist with correspondence, keep records, make appointments, etc.'.[47] I turned up these examples in a few minutes spent leafing through *OED2*'s pages; I must assume that a full-length, thorough search, would bring to light hundreds, perhaps thousands, more.

Stanley gives several telling examples of two different ways in which the reproduction of *OED1* in *OED2* results in confusing and

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[45] No statement on such correction appears in the introductory matter to *OED2*; but see below, pp. 335–6.

[46] Miriam Allott notes that Keats's copy of Milton is marked at *Paradise Lost*, iii. 38–40 ('the wakeful Bird | Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid | Tunes her nocturnal Note'), which suggests that Keats may have borrowed the word for its Miltonic association with a nightingale (see *Poems of John Keats* (London, 1970), 529). This would strengthen the supposition that the word was not necessarily in current usage when 'Ode to a Nightingale' was composed (1819). John Carey and Alastair Fowler note that *darkling* was 'not yet a specially poetic word' in Milton's time (*Poems of John Milton* (London, 1968), 563).

[47] Contrast the definition of the preceding edition (1982), based on *OED1*: 'person employed by another to assist him in correspondence, literary work, getting information, and other confidential matters'.

unscholarly information being furnished by the latter. On the one hand, *OED1* editorial comments on etymology and pronunciation which occur at the beginning of an entry have often been reproduced wholesale in the new dictionary, so that a late nineteenth-century view—sometimes inaccurate or idiosyncratic—is represented in *OED2* as being that of 1989, despite the fact that it has now been overturned by intervening scholarship. On the other hand, *OED1* comments have elsewhere been tampered with, so that a mixed view, part nineteenth century and part modern, is represented as being that of 1989.[48] Consequently, all temporal adverbs appearing in *OED2*'s explanatory comments—'still', 'now', 'recently', 'formerly', etc.—have to be treated with great caution, and the user must look up the corresponding entry in both *OED1* and the 1972–86 *Supplement* to discover which of three possible time-frames is being referred to (that of *OED1*, the *Supplement*, or 1989).[49] To say the least, this is a grave inconvenience.

All this argues that time, patience, or learning must have been lacking when the *OED2* compilers were preparing editorial adjustments to the earlier dictionary. Other examples abound. One glaring oddity, striking the alert and suspicious reader on p. 4 of *OED2*, is the attribution of a series of quotations, without date, to '*Mod.*' (see e.g. *A adj.*[2] 1c, and in three other places on the same page). No clue appears in the explanatory matter of either *OED1* or *OED2* as to what *Mod.* might mean, other than 'modern'. In fact, as I have described above, this is how Murray attributed 'quotations' which he made up as examples of common usage for which he had not been able to find any bona fide contemporary instances. The *OED2* user will readily guess what *Mod.* stands for, but will not necessarily be aware that these examples are modern in terms of *OED1* rather than *OED2*. The computer program dealing with the modification of *OED1* material for *OED2* should have had no trouble in dealing with this anomaly.

A different category of problem raises more difficult questions.[50] *jury* has been redefined as 'a company of persons (orig. men) sworn to render a verdict . . .' (unfortunately we are not told precisely when women were first allowed to serve as jurors). The change, new to *OED2* rather than to the *Supplement*, suggests that the compilers were concerned about sexist definitions. A swift check of other definitions

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[48] Stanley, 'The *OED* and *Supplement*', 78 ff.

[49] So far as I can discover, the 1933 *Supplement* was not independently consulted for the preparation of *OED2*, since all its significant emendations and additions to *OED1* were regarded as being incorporated in Burchfield's *Supplement*. See Vol. I, p. xii, and Stanley, 'The *OED* and *Supplement*', 86–7.

[50] The following discussion of sexism in *OED2* formed part of an informal collection of tributes to Professor Eric Stanley on the occasion of his retirement.

which might be held to be sensitive on grounds of sexism has turned up a new (*OED2*) addition to sense 9 of *chair* (*sb.*): '. . . Now also used as alternative for "chairman" or "chairwoman", esp. deliberately so as not to imply a particular sex', and a note on *spokesperson* deriving from Burchfield's *Supplement*: 'A manufactured substitute for "spokesman" or "spokeswoman". One of numerous words used to avoid alleged sexual discrimination in terminology.' On the other hand, *housekeeper*, in the most common (I would imagine) current sense (*OED2* sense 4), is unembarrassedly gender-specific, and carried over without change from *OED1*: 'A woman engaged in housekeeping or domestic occupations; a woman who manages or superintends the affairs of a household; *esp.* the woman in control of the female servants of a household' (quotations range from 1607 to 1859). And *camera-man* is defined by the *Supplement*, and hence *OED2*, as 'a man who uses or operates a camera professionally' (sense 3d). I am expertly informed that this definition is in one sense strictly accurate in that *women* who operate cameras are now (and have been for some years) generally referred to as *camera-women*, and that where gender is not known or relevant, the term *camera-person* is used. But neither of these combinatory forms occurs in the dictionary.[51] The treatment of *alimony*, in what is now its sole current sense (2), turns up a different set of problems. *OED2* defines it as 'The allowance which a wife is entitled to from her husband's estate, for her maintenance . . .'. But in American English, I gather, this term has for many years also been used to denote the allowance given by wife to husband; while in this country lawyers have since 1976 used the term *maintenance* instead of *alimony*, to cover both the support of husband by wife and vice versa. Unfortunately, the appropriate entry on *maintenance* in *OED2* (sense 7b) allows the term to cover only the latter and not the former.[52] Notes on or definitions of *man, men, mankind*, all to denote women as well as men, or *girls* instead of *women* used in collocation with *men* in certain contexts, yield no further examples where feminist objections, now considered in many quarters standard, are acknowledged.[53] (In contrast, objections to terms on grounds of

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[51] The definition is inaccurate in that *camera-man* (*-woman* / *-person*) is a term used to describe someone who operates *moving* picture equipment (as opposed to one operating *still* picture equipment—such a person being called a *photographer*), and who is usually accompanied by other members of a crew. I am grateful to David Graham, founder of Diverse Production, for this information.

[52] The entry is taken over from *OED1* and Burchfield's *Supplement* combined, with no new material added in *OED2*; the last quotations are dated 1971 and 1973. I am grateful to John Dewar, of Hertford College, Oxford, for information on legal terminology.

[53] *OED2*'s definition of *man* II is as follows: 'A human being (irrespective of sex or age); = L. *homo* . . . b. In the surviving use, the sense "person" occurs only in general or indefinite application (e.g. with adjs. like *every*, *any*, *no*, and often in the plural, esp. with *all*, *any*, *some*,

racism tend to be well represented in *OED2*, presumably because Burchfield was highly sensitive to them and recorded them in the *Supplement*.[54])

The alteration to the definition of *jury* was presumably part and parcel of a policy of revision to eradicate the intrinsic sexism of *OED1*. How useful or productive such a policy has turned out to be is open to question. I can see two objections: first, that inconsistency in its execution will have produced confusing and possibly misleading results; and secondly, that the attitudes of the original editors will have been enshrined not only in their definitions and comments on words, but also in their choice of quotations (compare, for example, the choice of quotations under *man* and *woman* respectively).[55] This suggests that it would be impossible to make any real changes to the sexist balance of the dictionary without, in many instances, starting again from scratch; while it could certainly be argued that *OED1*'s choice of quotations, in common with its definitions, bears valuable witness to social attitudes of a particular period.

All this leads one to ask whether the merging together of *OED1* and the *Supplement* has turned out to be a worthwhile project. Between 1972 and 1989, *OED* users knew that they had to consult first the parent dictionary, and then its twentieth-century component; the physical separateness of the two publications made it impossible to overlook the different editorial principles embodied by each. *OED2* runs all the evidence together, so that one is not automatically made aware of where *OED* stops and Burchfield starts. As I have described, the *Supplement* only very partially updated *OED1*. Merging the two dictionaries together in *OED2* and calling the result a 'revised' edition of *OED1* is, to say the least, misleading, for *OED2* makes both implicit and explicit claims for a comprehensiveness that the two

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many, few, etc.); in modern apprehension *man* as thus used primarily denotes the male sex, although by implication referring also to women. The gradual development of the use of the unambiguous synonyms *body, person, one*, and (for the plural) *folk(s), people*, has greatly narrowed the currency of *man* in this sense; it is now literary and proverbial rather than colloquial.' (The comment is taken over without change from *OED1*, so that 'surviving', 'modern apprehension', 'gradual development . . . has', 'now' are all to be interpreted in relation to the time frame of 1906, the date of publication of the relevant *OED1* fascicle, rather than of 1989, as the user might be misled to suppose.) *mankind* (sense 1) is defined as 'The human species . . . Human beings in general'; with quotations ranging from *c*.1300–1902.

[54] See Burchfield, 'Dictionaries and Ethnic Sensibilities'.

[55] Even the quotations deriving from Burchfield's *Supplement* rather than *OED1* are arguably sexist, for the examples chosen were presumably selected from a range which included less sexist ones. Cf. one of the quotations s.v. *man sb.*[1] 4c: 'The Dry Martini . . . is a drink which certainly sorts out the men from the boys and the girls from their principles.' I am grateful to Ailsa Holland, now of the University of York, for drawing my attention to these examples.

separate dictionaries did not claim.[56] The new medium tends to gloss over the inevitable, but significantly different, limitations of the two separate enterprises. In a letter to the *TLS*, 9–15 June 1989, John Simpson (co-compiler of *OED2*) defends the omission of antedatings from the 'Second Edition' on the grounds that they were 'considered to be more appropriate material for the thoroughgoing revision being undertaken for the Third Edition'. But it is difficult to see what scholarly purpose the Second Edition has served, since the 5,000 new words could easily have been made available at far less expense, while the blend of *OED1* with the *Supplement* is in many respects misleading. It is also difficult to see why the publishers thought that the enormously expensive and laborious task of committing this stage of the *OED* project to print was worth the candle. Despite the fact that institutions and libraries all over the world have ordered copies, the enterprise has, apparently, still lost money. And what has the customer got in return? The bulk of purchasers, I imagine, already possessed copies of *OED1* and the *Supplement*, whether in full-sized format or compact form. In exchange for their considerable further investment, they received a very handsome object (or rather, twenty such objects), providing them with all the information already provided in their two earlier dictionaries, and supplying a further 5,000 words and senses—that is, as already pointed out, a further 1 per cent on their original total. The Introduction to *OED2* tells us that the dictionary's future will be largely in an electronic form, making it extremely easy to update, revise, correct, and supplement existing material. Would it not have been better for purchasers of *OED2* to have sat tight, and waited for the opportunity to buy the dictionary in this new medium?

IV. FURTHER LIMITATIONS OF *OED2*

One further infelicity in the production of *OED2* is noteworthy on account of the attitude of mind—or scholarship—that it suggests on the part of the compilers. The Introduction to the new work is followed by two long prose sections, one entitled 'General Explanations', and the other 'The History of the Oxford English Dictionary'. A footnote to the second (p. xxxv) tells us that the first section of the ensuing account 'is reproduced, with only minor modifications, from the "Historical Introduction" to the *OED* published in 1933'—i.e. it is a reprint of the article by Onions which originally appeared in

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[56] The differences between the 1933 (see note 9 above) and the original edition of *OED* are comparable to the differences between *OED1* and *OED2*, yet the editors decided to call the 1933 *OED* a 're-issue' rather than a 'Second Edition'. See also note 5 above.

the 1933 *Supplement*. No such note is appended to 'General Expla-
nations', although this too is taken over from previously published
material; in fact it is an almost verbatim reproduction of Murray's
essay on language printed in the introductory matter of the first
edition of *OED*. Several inconsistencies and difficulties result from
this unacknowledged reprinting. First, despite the occasional
intrusion of new material by the *OED2* compilers (notably around pp.
xxxii–xxxiii), much of Murray's essay has been left unaltered. His
diction and vocabulary sometimes come across as pedantic or obsol-
escent, appearing peculiarly in what is ostensibly an article written in
the late 1980s.[57] More seriously, the problem of time-frame arises
again. In the preceding Introduction, the *OED2* editors carefully
explain how they have translated Murray's phonetic transcription into
the IPA, and they make it clear that they have retained Murray's
pronunciation despite the fact that it is 'extremely "precise" [the
implication of their inverted commas is not clear to me], conservative,
and (in present-day terms) old-fashioned' (p. xx).[58] This makes
nonsense of Murray's own remarks, reprinted in *OED2*'s Introduc-
tion, which, conversely, insist on the importance of recording *current*
pronunciation, but are not signalled as deriving from a source and
time different from that of their surrounding context:

The pronunciation is the actual living form or forms of a word, that is, *the
word itself* [Murray's italics], of which the current spelling is only a
symbolization—generally, indeed, only the traditionally-preserved symboliz-
ation of an earlier form, sometimes imperfect to begin with, still oftener
corrupted in its passage to our time. This living form is the *latest fact*
[Murray's italics] in the form-history of the word, the starting-point of all
investigations into its previous history, the only fact in its form-history to
which the lexicographer can personally witness. For all his statements as to
its previous history are only reproductions of the evidence of former
witnesses, or deductions drawn from earlier modes of symbolizing the forms
of the word then current, checked and regulated by the ascertained laws and
principles of phonology. *To register the current pronunciation is therefore
essential* [my italics], in a dictionary which deals with the language on
historical principles. (p. xxxiii)[59]

I have reproduced so much of Murray's words in order to give a
flavour of his approach to language study. For perhaps the most

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[57] Examples are ubiquitous: e.g. 'exhibition', p. xxv, col. 1, 1. 16; 'citizenship in the
language', p. xxvi, col. 2, 1. 32; 'Here also is added', p. xxvii, col. 1, 1. 33, etc.

[58] They give three reasons for this retention: that the 'peculiar characteristics' of Murray's
transcription are 'systematic', that 'they constitute a useful record of one variety of English
pronunciation in a particular period', and that, 'for the general user, most of them are merely
small nuances for which one can make allowance'.

[59] As Eric Stanley points out, pronunciation and especially accentuation are not treated
historically by the *OED2* compilers even for the period 1875–1985.

remarkable thing about the unsignalled inclusion of his 'General Explanations', and the attitude towards language they illustrate, is the implication that the Oxford lexicographers of today are comfortable with the linguistic world view that was current in the late nineteenth century. The original *OED* set out to do something intrinsically nineteenth century:[60] to scan the whole of published English literature and set down a full account of every word that had ever been used. This implies the view that the English language, as both written and spoken, comprises observable, assimilable, organizable, and recordable data, which can be impartially and objectively set down, 'captured', as it were, for posterity, by the lexicographical methods Murray brought to a high pitch of perfection. But even at a relatively popular linguistic level, this view is now recognized as unrealizable. Compare, for example, the definition of the word *dictionary* given in *A Feminist Dictionary*: 'A dictionary is a collection of somebody's words in somebody's book. Whose words are collected and who collects them influence what kind of book a given dictionary turns out to be, and, in turn, whose purposes it can best serve.'[61] The relevance of this definition to *OED* is clearly illustrated by such features of *OED2* as Burchfield's varying use of the paragraph mark to designate 'erroneous or catachrestic' usage, or his desire to record the literary usages of a particular set of writers.

But Murray's views are not now tenable on other accounts too. The failure of lexicography to keep pace with linguistics (except in the field of language learning) is not often noted by the lexicographers, though to linguists it is obvious. Standard lexicographical techniques are unable to make the precise, if unobvious, distinctions between words that can be elicited by the application of synchronic techniques for analysing language, for instance the use of contrastive sentences.[62] Two minor examples will illustrate this point. Many dictionaries— *OED1* and *OED2* included—equate the adverb *utterly* with *completely*.[63] But a survey now over twenty years old found that when subjects were asked to complete sentences where a beginning was supplied like 'The man utterly – – – – –', 'the adverb was freely used to intensify verbs like *hate, disagree, detest, despise* but we were not

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[60] As Murray recognized in his Romanes lecture, 'The Evolution of English Lexicography' (Oxford, 1910): 'the scientific and historical spirit of the nineteenth century has at once called for and rendered possible the Oxford English Dictionary' (p. 51).

[61] Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler (edd.), *A Feminist Dictionary* (Boston, 1985), 119; quoted in Willinsky, 'Cutting English', 64.

[62] Cf. the scorn poured by Burchfield on such techniques in his article, '*The Oxford English Dictionary*'.

[63] *OED2* reproduces *OED1*'s definitions: *completely*, 'In a complete manner; fully, perfectly; entirely wholly, thoroughly'; *utterly*, s.v. *adv.* 2, 'In a complete or utter manner; to an absolute or extreme degree; altogether, entirely, absolutely; fully, thoroughly, out and out'.

offered verbs like *love, mend, restore*'. This suggests shades of meaning in these words that lexicography should, but does not, record; and which, unless its methodology changes in major ways, it will continue to be unable to record. Consider also the verbs *munch* and *chew* as possible fillers for the following pair of sentences:

He – – – – – the bacon
He – – – – – the bacon reluctantly

As Randolph Quirk points out, we will be lucky if we find a dictionary that attempts to make any distinction at all between the two verbs, yet we will unhesitatingly reject *munch* as a candidate for the second slot.[64] Again, *OED1* and *OED2* offer no help with the distinction in meaning uncovered by this synchronic technique.[65]

OED2's combination of late twentieth-century technology with nineteenth-century lexicographical methodology is in many ways remarkable, and elicits a response which is half-respectful, half-despairing. The projected Third Edition, due to be completed 'in some fifteen years' time',[66] will presumably work within the same theoretical structure as the First Edition. It will require an enormous amount of labour, not only to correct the infelicities and straight-forward blunders of the Second Edition, but also to remedy the deficiencies and shortcomings of the First Edition and of the 1972–86 *Supplement*. The *OED2* compilers' statement that 'This new edition represents the first, and almost certainly the most arduous, step towards that goal'—the New OED Project, 'of which the present work is the first printed product' (p. xi)—is disturbingly confident, for it suggests that they have not taken full measure of their task. Even on their own methodological terms, neither of the first two—and hence nor the third—of the dictionaries performs well under the test of the three criteria I suggested at the outset of this article. For both *OED1* and *Supplement*, source selection was unsystematic, and reader reliability patchy. About editorial processing we simply have too little information to be able to come to a fair judgement, although, in

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[64] The examples come from a comparatively popular article by Randolph Quirk, in part drawing on some of the findings of his Survey of English Usage, 'Linguistics, Usage, and the User', reprinted in his *Style and Communication* (London, 1972), 109–22 (pp. 109–10).

[65] *OED2* reproduces *OED1*'s definitions: *chew, v.* 'To crush, bruise, and grind to pulp, by the continued action of the molar teeth, with help of the tongue, cheeks, and saliva . . . *esp.* To perform this operation upon (food), in preparation for swallowing it; to masticate'; *munch, v.* 'To eat with continuous and noticeable action of the jaws. Said of persons audibly masticating food which offers resistance to the teeth, and of cattle chewing their fodder.' Another relatively popular (though eminently scholarly) account of how synchronic analysis sheds indispensable light on semantic shifts in language, in a way as yet unrecognized by traditional dictionaries, is to be found in Sylvia Adamson, 'The What of the Language?', in Ricks and Michaels, *The State of the Language* (2nd edn.), 503–14.

[66] See the *Annual Report of the Delegates of the University Press 1990–1991*, p. 6.

certain enumerable respects, procedures were clearly inconsistent.

The result is that we now have a Second Edition of *OED* which has added little of positive value to the First, beyond 5,000 extra words. This is not to detract from the extraordinary and heroic achievement of Murray, nor the tenacity of Burchfield. But it does seem a wasted opportunity.[67]

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[67] I am very grateful to Chris Goodall and Professor Eric Stanley for criticism and correction of this article.