

in 'The Perfect Place'. This is especially apparent when the story is read in comparison with the other prose fictions in *My Weekly* issue 2498. The construction of her prose has appeal, even though she herself calls it 'my awful first ladies' magazine story—very stiff and amateurish.'

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THE *OED* AS 'LITERARY INSTRUMENT': ITS TREATMENT PAST AND PRESENT OF THE VOCABULARY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

VIRGINIA WOOLF's use of the term *scrolloping*, meticulously recorded in the *OED* Supplement of 1972–86, is antedated by a use in the letters of Edward FitzGerald (published in 1901, and conceivably read by Woolf) which can be turned up via Google. This note further discusses the treatment of Woolf's vocabulary in the *OED* Supplement, exploring whether and to what degree the particular characteristics of the *OED* dictionary evidence can be used to illuminate her choice of language. It also compares and contrasts her treatment in the ongoing revision of *OED*, i.e. the third edition (which since 2000 is being gradually published online at www.oed.com), to show that the wider range of sources now being consulted by the *OED* lexicographers recontextualizes her writing, revealing it to be both more unusual and more ordinary than the Supplement had previously indicated.

I. *scrolloping* and the *OED* Supplement

In 1978, Andrew McNeillie corresponded with the editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary Supplement*, R. W. Burchfield, about the inclusion in the *OED* of Virginia Woolf's word *scrolloping*. Burchfield had already assembled

evidence for this word, which occurs five times in three of Woolf's works of fiction—twice in the short story called 'The New Dress' (written when Woolf was working on *Mrs Dalloway*, and published in the May 1927 issue of the monthly New York magazine *Forum*), twice in *Orlando*, and once in *The Waves*. McNeillie was now able to supply Burchfield with a further instance, this time occurring in Woolf's diaries, which he was editing at the time with Olivier Bell. The second volume of this five-volume work, due to be published at the end of 1987, contained the following entry (p. 232), dated 7 February 1923, recording Woolf's opinion of the Honourable Mrs Birch of Firle: 'Like Vita she detests the scrolloping honours of the great, calls her family dull and stupid'.

McNeillie wrote,

It was a pleasure to hear that Virginia Woolf's coinage had scrolloped its way (and so thoroughly) into your hands and that it would find a place in the Dictionary...

The word seems to be intended to carry, variously, the weight of scroll, roll, and lollop. It appears to be used in the same sense in *The New Dress* and *The Waves*, one descriptive of rather overdone (perhaps Victorian) carving, but in more complex senses in the *Diary* and *Orlando*.

One can see in the *Diary* usage the roll of honour of the great, on a scroll (like the carving, overdone) and at the same time a lazy, lolloping nobility in Lowndes Square, at Ascot etc. As to the cucumbers [see below] there I something here of the manner in which the tendrils of the cucumber plant curl and wind their way but... [sic] The rest I leave to more experienced men of definition.¹

Burchfield replied on 30 August to say, 'That's grand. We shall have no difficulty now in compiling a pleasant little entry for *scrollop*.' The entry duly appeared five years later in

¹ This letter is quoted by permission of Andrew McNeillie, and its reply by permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press. McNeillie wrote up this exchange of letters in a short note, published the same year: A. McNeillie 'A Note on Scrolloping', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, x (1978), 6.

volume III of the Supplement, which treated words beginning *O–Scz*:

scrolloping, *ppl. a.*

[Fanciful portmanteau formation by Virginia Woolf, prob. combining *SCROLL sb.*, *LOLLOP v.*, etc.] Characterized by or possessing heavy, florid, ornament. Also *transf.* and as *pres. ppl.*, proceeding in involutions, rambling.

1923 *V. WOOLF Diary* 7 Feb. (1978) I. 232 Like Vita she detests the scrolloping honours of the great, calls her family dull and stupid. **1927** *New Dress in Forum* (N.Y.) May 706 Just for a second . . . , there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a gray-white . . . charming girl. *Ibid.* 707 The scrolloping looking-glass. **1928** *Orlando* ii. 96 He tore, in one rending, the scrolloping emblazoned scroll. *Ibid.* v. 208 Cucumbers ‘came scrolloping across the grass to his feet’. **1931** *Waves* 308 Then I scoff at the floridity and absurdity of some scrolloping tomb.²

Burchfield’s job, in compiling the *OED* Supplement (published in four volumes between 1972 and 1986) was to update the first edition of the *OED* (published in ten volumes between 1884 and 1928) with new words and senses which had appeared since the first edition was completed.³ It may be thought surprising that a word evidenced in the work of one author only would deserve such full and painstaking treatment, but Burchfield always made it clear that he regarded the *OED* as a ‘literary instrument’, i.e. a dictionary that sought to record the distinctive, including the unique, usage of ‘great writers’. In the preface to volume 4 of his Supplement he wrote, ‘OEDS [i.e. his Supplement], like its parent work [i.e. the first edition of *OED*], has been hospitable, almost from the

beginning, to the special vocabulary, including the once-only uses, of writers like T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and others’ (p. xi); and he mentions Woolf again in a later account of his dictionary work as one of ‘our greatest modern writers’—along with D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Evelyn Waugh, Dylan Thomas, and James Joyce—whose work he regarded as especially suitable for quotation in the Supplement.⁴

The reader assigned by Burchfield to Woolf’s writings was the *OED* volunteer Marghanita Laski, the single most prolific contributor of slips to this phase of the dictionary.⁵ But although Woolf herself once remarked that ‘Nowadays it is easy enough to invent new words—they spring to the lips whenever we see a new sight or feel a new sensation’, Laski found her works peculiarly unyielding of useful quotations.⁶ ‘I have, as you suggested, been treating V. Woolf as poetry, but still she supplies remarkably few words,’ she wrote to Burchfield in 1961. ‘I should have guessed her to be immensely rich in formations, wouldn’t you?’⁷ The result is that Woolf is cited in the second edition of *OED* (1989), into which Burchfield’s Supplement was merged, very much less often than any of the contemporary major writers with whom Burchfield several times mentioned her

⁴ R. W. Burchfield *Unlocking the English Language* (London, 1989), p. 173. For a discussion of some of the issues raised by *OED*’s liking for literary sources, see C. Brewer’s forthcoming ‘Literary Quotations in the *OED*’, *Review of English Studies*; for Burchfield’s term ‘literary instrument’, see Brewer, *Treasure-House of the Language*, p. 165.

⁵ Her total was estimated at over a quarter of a million, an enormous number but small in comparison with the totals amassed by individuals contributing to the first edition of *OED*. See Brewer, *Treasure-House of the Language*, pp. 160–3.

⁶ V. Woolf ‘Craftsmanship’, *The Listener* (1937), 868–9, at 869.

⁷ Quotation from the illuminating article by R. Fowler ‘Virginia Woolf: Lexicographer’, *English Language Notes*, xxxix (2002), 54–70, p. 57. Laski explains her methods of reading in ‘Reading for *OED*’, *Times Literary Supplement* (1968), 37–9, where she also comments (p. 38) on the scarcity of good *OED* material in Woolf. It seems that readers other than Laski also contributed examples from Woolf’s work to the *OED*; a number of the slips for her vocabulary that I have looked at in the *OED* archives are not in her handwriting (e.g. for *bumf*, *irreticent*, *irreticence*, *masculinist*, *orgulous*, etc.), while several are in Burchfield’s.

² Woolf critics have subsequently referred to this entry as the definitive account of the word: see e.g. G. Beer’s edition of *The Waves* (Oxford, 1992), 259.

³ In 1933 OUP re-issued the first edition of *OED* in twelve volumes, with an additional one-volume Supplement, the latter compiled by the two surviving main editors of *OED*, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions. Burchfield’s Supplement, published in four volumes (1972–86), subsumed the first Supplement; see further C. Brewer, *Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED* (New Haven and London, 2007), chs 1–2, 6–7.

and with whom she is commonly ranked: around 230 times altogether, compared with around 1,750 quotations from Joyce, 1,480 from D H Lawrence, 765 from Auden, and 610 from T. S. Eliot.⁸ Woolf is also cited for fewer once-off usages or *hapax legomena*: six, compared with over 60 from the writings of Joyce, over 35 from D. H. Lawrence, and over 10 from Auden. These six instances, with their treatment in the Supplement, are listed below:

irreticence: The condition of being irreticent. With *an* and *pl.*: an instance of this.

1919 *V. WOOLF* *Night & Day* xvi. 211 Rodney might begin to talk about his feelings, and irreticence is apt to be extremely painful.—**a1941** *Captain's Death Bed* (1950) 112 Those irreticences and hyperboles which the voice of the speaker corrects in talk.

man-womanly *a.*, having the characteristics of both sexes [derived from the term *man-woman*, labelled obsolete in the first edition of *OED* but for which Burchfield was able to furnish two twentieth-century quotations, of 1920 and 1975]

1929 *V. WOOLF* *Room of one's Own* 148 It would be well to test what one meant by man-womanly.

scrolloping (as above)

vagulate. [Fanciful formation f. *L. vagul(us)* nonce dim. of *vagus* wandering + *-ATE*³ +; perh. influenced by *UNDULATE* *v*] *rare. intr.* To wander in a vague manner; to waver. Only in the writings of Virginia Woolf.

1918 *V. WOOLF* *Diary* 3 Nov. (1977) I. 213 Emphie vagulates in & out of the room.

1921 *Ibid.* 6 Mar. (1978) II. 97 All is too soft & emotional. Now for writing or anything I believe you must be able to screw up into a ball & pelt straight in people's faces. They vagulate & dissipate. **1930** *Let.* 27 June

(1982) IV. 182 Poor dear Angus vagulating like some pale anemone in a cranny.

vagulous. nonce-wd. Wayward, vague, wavering.

1919 *V. WOOLF* *Diary* 12 July (1977) I. 291, I like Forster very much, though I find him whimsical & vagulous to an extent that frightens me with my own clumsiness and definiteness.

vanitously: **1939** *V. WOOLF* *Diary* 3 Mar. (1984) V. 207, I was pleased, vanitously, to find that Inez thinks me a poet-novelist.

[The Supplement lists this usage, without comment, as an adverb derivative from the adjective *vanitous* (= 'vain') which is labelled *rare*, and supplied with three twentieth-century quotations (dated 1900, 1905, and 1930).]

veneratingly. *rare*¹ In a reverential manner. **c1925** *V. WOOLF* in *Mrs Dalloway's Party* (1973) 68 She and Bertram sat down on deck chairs, she looked at the house veneratingly, enthusiastically.

As these excerpts show, Burchfield's treatment of Woolf's individualistic usages varied. *vagulate* and *scrolloping* are, in different ways, noted as locutions peculiar to Woolf, and the same seems to be implied of *vagulous*, which is characterized as a nonce-word, i.e. used 'for the nonce' (a term made up by the first main editor of *OED*, J. A. H. Murray). By contrast, *veneratingly* is marked by the special symbol (*rare*¹) indicating that only one instance of a word has been found—leaving open the inference that there may be more instances to be come across in the future. The absence of any label applied to *irreticence* leaves the reader unguided: is this the only example Burchfield chose to print in the Supplement, among several possible quotations supplied him by his readers, or is the word genuinely rare? Woolf is quoted also for *irreticent*, otherwise recorded only (by the first edition of *OED*) in 1864: 'We English have an ineradicable distaste to coarse, irreticent, rampant vulgarity, whether in action, writing, or speech'; but neither the original *OED* nor Burchfield's Supplement proffers any comment on this word either. Nor is any help offered on the term *man-womanly*,

⁸ These figures are derived from electronic searches of the second edition of *OED* (*OED2*) at www.oed.com, a composite dictionary which merges Burchfield's Supplement with the original *OED*; for a description of the techniques used for electronic searching, see section 'How to search *OED*' at C. Brewer (2005-) *Examining the OED* at (<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/category/11/43/161/>), accessed 15 February 2009.

although to any reader of Woolf the term appears compellingly significant, both for the characteristic preoccupations of her fiction and for her literary criticism. The same editorial silence, applied to *vanitously*, has a different value, since the parent adjective is already identified as 'rare'—although illustrated with three quotations: it can be more safely assumed that Woolf's example is the only one found (notwithstanding the absence of the *rare*¹ symbol). Such inconsistency is typical of the Supplement's labelling practice, which fluctuated considerably over the long period in which this dictionary was compiled, viz. 1957–86.⁹

Over most of this time, it was impossible for *OED* editors and volunteers to search for instances of vocabulary in any other than time-consuming ways, often imperfect: electronic databases were in their infancy, and their use by the *OED* only began around 1983, after the vast bulk of reading for the Supplement had been completed.¹⁰ Burchfield compiled reading lists and assigned readers to specific sources, but he was realistic about the limitations on his dictionary imposed by their reliance on volunteer readers: 'the pattern of admission was governed as much by the choice made by the readers as by any abstract principles adopted by the editors. If a reader made a slip for such an item it was likely to be included, with small regard for consistency in comparable words, or in words drawn from other writers, in other parts of the Dictionary. Conversely a word that was not

copied by a reader had little chance of inclusion since the editorial staff would almost certainly be unaware of its existence'.¹¹ In pre-computer days, Laski could only read through her material conventionally, if voraciously, and the lexicographers working at the Supplement supplemented such reading with similarly time-consuming, if more directed, investigations of glossaries and indexes of various sorts—as had their predecessors working on the first edition of *OED*, who had consulted concordances of the Bible, Shakespeare, Pope, and a number of other writers and works.¹² Given such necessarily imperfect tools and methods, it was not straightforward to work out whether a writer had truly made up a word, or was among the first (perhaps of several or many) people to use it, or had filched it magpie-fashion from a more obscure predecessor. Nevertheless, one way or another, the editors who constantly worked with words over many years developed a feel for the status of the words they sought to describe, and Burchfield's varying treatments of Woolf's singular vocabulary may reflect genuinely different judgements: *scrolloping*, *vagulate*, and *vagulous* were distinctive coinages, but *veneratingly* was a locution which could conceivably be used by other language speakers—although found by *OED* readers only in Woolf's work.

Editorial resources for creating the *OED* have changed radically since the compilation of the Supplement. Vast quantities of easily searchable text are now available in electronic databases, and the lexicographers can extend their researches further by using internet search tools such as Google. The results often illuminate and confirm the judgements of the editors made in pre-electronic days, but sometimes they uncover little-read sources that significantly enhance our understanding of individual writers' choices of vocabulary. Such is the case with *scrolloping*. Typing this word into Google yields, on the second page of

⁹ See C. Brewer 'Authority and Personality: Usage Labels in the *Oxford English Dictionary*', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, ciii (2005), 261–301. The first edition of *OED*, compiled between 1860 and 1928, was similarly inconsistent; Burchfield discusses various labels used both by the original *OED* and in the Supplement in 'The Treatment of Controversial Vocabulary in the *O.E.D.*', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1973), 1–28.

¹⁰ R. W. Burchfield, 'The Supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: The End of the Alphabet', in R. W. Bailey (ed.), *Dictionaries of English* (Cambridge, 1989), 11–21 at 19. See Y. Warburton 'Finding the Right Words: An Account of Research for the Supplements to the *Oxford English Dictionary*', *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America*, viii (1986), 94–111 on the techniques a skilled *OED* editor might employ to sniff out earlier examples of words and phrases.

¹¹ Burchfield, 'The Supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary*', 89.

¹² See C. T. Onions. 'How the Dictionary is Made', *The Periodical*, xiii, 143 (1928), 15–17.

hits, an instance at the beginning of a biography of Edward FitzGerald (1809–93) by A. C. Benson, published in 1903: “‘I somehow detest my own scrolloping surname,’ wrote our hero at the end of his life”.¹³ Benson introduces this information at the end of a paragraph explaining that FitzGerald’s father adopted his wife’s surname on the death of his wife’s father, ‘she being her [wealthy] father’s heiress’; further searches reveal that the remark was originally the postscript to an (unsigned) letter to Aldis Wright, FitzGerald’s long-term correspondent and friend, written on 5 April 1880.¹⁴

How likely is it that Woolf had read this remark by FitzGerald, either in Benson’s biography or in a separate edition of the letter itself? It is demonstrably the case that the Benson biography was known to the Bloomsbury circle: T. S. Eliot’s poem ‘Gerontion’, published in 1921, echoes a passage from it in the second line.¹⁵ No mention of Benson’s biographical work appears in Woolf’s essays, diaries, or letters, however, although she did review his autobiographical *Memories and Friends* in 1924, in a piece that gently skewered his ‘mild self-approbation’ and his ‘long, loitering journey among pleasant places and charming people’.¹⁶ (In a letter

written to her friend Molly MacCarthy in the same year she said, of his review of MacCarthy’s own memoirs, ‘I thought old Benson rather good, considering what a foggy dew the poor man’s mind is’).¹⁷ Benson’s biography of FitzGerald is not listed in the catalogue of volumes belonging to Leonard and Virginia Woolf, though this is no guarantee that Virginia Woolf did not own and had not read it—and the Woolfs did own the seven volumes of the *Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Fitzgerald* edited by W. Aldis Wright and published in 1902, for which it appears Virginia Woolf created a special book plate.¹⁸ FitzGerald’s letter was not included in this edition, however; instead it was published in a separate one-volume collection of his correspondence edited by Aldis Wright in 1901, 22 years before Woolf’s earliest use of the term in her diary.¹⁹ The letter is reproduced on p. 238, and later in the volume (pp. 275–82) appear a series of letters between FitzGerald and Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, on the poet Crabbe.

It is possible, therefore, that Woolf read this letter on its publication. But it is certain that she held FitzGerald’s letters in high regard, although she must originally have read them in an earlier collection, since her first reference to them comes in 1900, when she tells her cousin Emma Vaughan on 19 April that Vere Isham (Emma’s brother-in-law) ‘ought to write letters like Edward Fitzgerald—The Omar Khayyam man you know—who had much the same tastes and

¹³ A. C. Benson *Edward FitzGerald* (London, 1903), 3. This work was quoted from just once in the first edition of *OED*, for the word *what* (s.v. 5b); FitzGerald’s works (including his letters) were quoted a little over 260 times in all. So it is quite possible the first-edition editors encountered the word, but decided not to include it given the absence of any other citational evidence. On the pressures on the first edition to keep the size of the dictionary within a reasonable compass, see L. Mugglestone, *Lost for Words: The Hidden History of the Oxford English Dictionary* (New Haven and London, 2005).

¹⁴ I am grateful to John Simpson, chief editor of *OED*, for consulting the *OED* files kept by the lexicographers for use in future revisions of the dictionary, which record that the FitzGerald antedating for *scrolloping* was first noticed (though wrongly dated) by Christopher Hawtree in a letter to the *London Review of Books* of 17 October 1996.

¹⁵ As pointed out to me by Rowena Fowler and noted in standard editions of Eliot; see e.g. <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/777.html>, accessed 18 March 2009.

¹⁶ I have relied on the indexes to the following editions of Woolf’s writing: N. Nicolson and J. Trautmann, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols (London, 1975–1980); A. McNeillie and S. N. Clarke, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols (London, 1986); A. O. Bell, A. McNeillie, and Q. Bell, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols (London 1977–1984). Woolf’s review of Benson is in *Essays*, III, pp. 407–8.

¹⁷ V. Woolf, N. Nicolson, and Banks *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* (London, 1975), III, p. 135, 2 Oct. 1924. A. C. Benson (1862–1925) was Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge.

¹⁸ Now preserved in a collection of around 4,000 of the Woolfs’ books at Washington State University; see short-title catalogue at <http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/holland/masc/OnlineBooks/woolflibrary/woolflibraryonline.htm>, accessed 15 February 2009. Clearly this cannot be regarded as a definitive list of the books they actually owned. The book-plate can be viewed online at <http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/libwire/woolf10-02.html>, accessed 15 February 2009.

¹⁹ E. FitzGerald and W. A. Wright, *More letters of Edward Fitzgerald* (London, New York, 1901).

was a man of genius into the bargain.²⁰ In a review of an edition of Wordsworth's letters published in the *TLS* on 2 April 1908 she identifies Fitzgerald, along with Lamb and Mrs Carlyle, as 'the great letter-writers', who give one the impression (as Wordsworth does not) 'that the scene they have in their mind is precisely fit for a sheet of paper, and that it is a keen delight to smooth it out there'.²¹ She still has FitzGerald near the front of her mind in 1916, when she mentions that in Samuel Butler's 'isolation and idiosyncrasies he sometimes recalls Edward Fitzgerald'.²² In 1919, she wrote, 'now and then one comes across a critic who, with all his learning and discrimination, has yet never lost his youthful capacity for strong and direct emotion. Those are the qualities that make it impossible not to re-read the letters of Edward FitzGerald. How the love of good writing oozes and drips from every page! How fresh and green his pastures remain!'²³

Nearer the period of the *OED*'s first citation of *scrolloping*, Woolf may well have been looking at FitzGerald's letters again. Her diary entry for Saturday 18 February, 1922, discusses 'fame': 'I have made up my mind that I'm not going to be popular, & so genuinely that I look upon disregard or abuse as part of my bargain. I'm to write what I like; & they're to say what they like. My only interest as a writer lies, I begin to see, in some queer

individuality: not in strength, or passion, or anything startling; but then I say to myself, is not 'some queer individuality' precisely the quality I respect? Peacock, for example: Borrow; Donne; Douglas, in *Alone*, has a touch of it. Who else comes to mind immediately? FitzGerald's Letters. People with this gift go on sounding long after the melodious vigorous music is banal.'²⁴

What did FitzGerald mean by *scrolloping*? That the letters of his name scrolled and lolloped with the same florid absurdity as an inscription on a tomb, or the mahogany curves framing a Victorian mirror? Benson takes his remark out of the context of the original letter—where it appears a spontaneously droll gesture of little overt or covert significance—to suggest FitzGerald is embarrassed to bear a surname his father adopted only as a means to inherit wealth, thus strengthening the word's connotation of vulgarity linked with family lineage and display, connotations lingering in Woolf's subsequent usage. In combination with the echo of Benson in 'Gerontion', this encourages the entirely speculative hypothesis that Woolf may have encountered the word (supposing that it was not a coincidentally co-existing coinage of her own) via Benson's biography rather than Aldis Wright's edition of FitzGerald's letters.

It is much more difficult to find a connection between Woolf's eccentric diction and the other antedating forebear that Google throws up for her *OED* quotations Hilaire Belloc's use of *vagulous* in a book of travel essays published in 1906 entitled *Hills and the Sea*, describing a series of journeys through Europe. Here he apostrophizes his 'Little pen, little fountain pen, little vagulous, blandulous pen, companion and friend,' asking 'whither have you led me, and why cannot you learn the plodding of your trade?'²⁵ This use of *vagulous* seems simply to mean 'wandering', and like Woolf, Belloc presumably coined it from the Latin

²⁰ Earlier collections of the letters are E. FitzGerald, ed. W. A. Wright, *Letters and Literary Remains of Edward FitzGerald* (London, 1889) and FitzGerald, ed. Wright, *Letters of Edward FitzGerald to Fanny Kemble, 1871–1883* (London, 1895). For Woolf's reference to FitzGerald, see *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, I, p. 31. Two months later, in June 1900 (*ibid.*, p. 35), she reports that a guest at the Stephens' dinner table, Charles Eliot Norton (Professor of History of Art at Harvard University), who was 'over here now as Ruskin's executor', 'told me emphatically to read Edward Fitzgeralds [sic] translations of Sophocles.... Nothing else, he says, gives the spirit so splendidly'.

²¹ Reprinted in 'Wordsworth Letters', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, I, p. 184.

²² A review of a work on Butler published in the *TLS* on 20 July 1916, reprinted as 'A Man with a View' (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, II, p. 37).

²³ A review of *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (1919) by Edmund Gosse, published in the *TLS* of 2 Oct 1919; reprinted in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, III, p. 105. Elsewhere (*ibid.*, 144), in an essay on 'Reading' published in 1919, Woolf describes Horace Walpole, Jane Carlyle, and Edward FitzGerald as 'ghosts on the very outskirts of time'.

²⁴ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* II, p. 22.

²⁵ 'On "Mailles"', in J. H. P. Belloc, *Hills and the Sea* (London, 1906) pp. 15–18 at 18. The front matter to this edition (p. viii) notes that many of the essays have been reprinted with permission from a number of periodicals, so the original publication date may have been earlier than 1906. The work was evidently popular, reaching a nineteenth edition by 1930.

vagus, with the roaming connotations of *vagabond* not far from his mind (*blandulous* appears a less scholarly formulation, derived from *bland* but modelled on *vagulous*; the word is not recorded—as yet—in *OED*). Woolf knew Belloc—they lived not far apart, Woolf in Rodmell and Belloc in Horsham; according to the editors of Woolf's *Diary*, Belloc 'became a friend'.²⁶ But on the few occasions on which she mentions Belloc's work, she was scathing about it, criticizing him for writing too much too quickly—'He must give us a worn weekly halfpenny instead of a solid sovereign once a year'²⁷—and disparaging him in comparison with Beerbohm, both in print and in later conversation with Beerbohm himself at a dinner party. It seems unlikely therefore, that she borrowed the word from him. Nevertheless, Belloc's use of *vagulous* is, like FitzGerald's of *scrolloping*, a clear antedating of Woolf's own, and will be added to the *OED* record when the current revision of the dictionary (see further below) reaches the letter *V*.²⁸

What else does Google tell us? That notwithstanding the corrections now due on *scrolloping* and *vagulous*, Burchfield was almost certainly right about *veneratingly*. It is indeed a very rare word, yielding only 73 hits (searching Google on 9 February 2009), many of them

referring to Woolf. A few undistinguished recent usages confirm Burchfield's implication that the word might be replicated.²⁹ The paucity of results for *vanitously* (five) tells us he might with justice have identified it as a nonce-word, while those for *man-womanly* are dominated, as one might expect, by references to *A Room with a View*. Google also helps us supplement *OED*'s record from Woolf's own works. While Burchfield harvested all Woolf's uses of *scrolloping*, he missed a third example of *irreticence*, one that antedated his first quotation of 1919 (and hence should have trumped it, as the first recorded use) from an essay of 1916: 'Hours in the Library': 'We do not doubt that at the heart of this immense volubility, this flood and foam of language, this irreticence and vulgarity and triviality, there lies the heat of some great passion'.³⁰ Similarly, Google directs us to a further instance of *vagulous* used in *Mrs Dalloway*: 'up came that wandering will-o'-the-wisp, that vagulous phosphorescence, old Mrs Hilberry, stretching her hands to the blaze of his laughter'.

More interesting questions remain. For example, what did Burchfield mean by asking Laski to treat Woolf's work 'as poetry'? Was he seeking out, or expecting her to turn up, eccentric diction rather than straightforward illustrations of characteristic twentieth-century usage? Laski may have been disappointed in the lexical haul she dredged up from Woolf's work, but the quotations later printed in the Supplement, and hence subsequently incorporated into the electronically searchable second edition of *OED* (1989), provide a good deal of insight into Woolf's use of language (or at any rate they seem to do so: a qualification to be discussed later).

A small number of Woolf's usages appear innovative as well as distinctive. For example, she was the first writer that Burchfield was able to find, outside a dictionary, to use the word *bumf*. The 1933 *OED* Supplement had noted its record in Barrère and Leland's *Dictionary of Slang* of 1889 and Farmer's *Slang and its*

²⁶ Woolf *et al.*, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, II, p. 188, n.7.

²⁷ *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, IV, pp. 216–27 at p. 222: 'The Modern Essay', originally written for the *TLS*, 30 Nov 1922. Woolf's diary entry for Tues 18 Dec 1928 (p. 213) notes meeting Max Beerbohm at a dinner party and describes their conversation: 'Then I ran down—but he reads my essays and knows this—Belloc'. Beerbohm defended him by pointing out 'Belloc, one must remember, poured out ten books a year on history poetry &c.' Mrs Cosham, in *Night and Day*, also runs him down, this time in comparison with De Quincey, whom Woolf admired: 'You, in your generation, do not read De Quincey.... You have your Belloc, your Chesterton, your Bernard Shaw' (ch. 12).

²⁸ As will the post-dating use of *scrolloping*, by Woolf's biographer Julia Briggs, in an article in the *THES* of 2 Sept 2005 (p. 19): 'When I was six, my father gave me a volume of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales with illustrations by Rex Whistler—scrolloping rococo decorations utterly unlike the plain postwar utility design we were used to'.

²⁹ E.g. as *Letters to an Enthusiast*, by Mary Cowden Clarke (2007): 'They can best feel his merits, and can therefore most *veneratingly* and modestly treat the theme of his genius and greatness'.

³⁰ *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, II, p. 59, first published in the *TLS*, 30 Nov 1916. Another hit, from an article published in 1872 in the *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, appears to use the word in error for *reticence*.

Analogues of 1890, and explained that the word was short for *bum-fodder*, and so meant ‘toilet-paper; hence, paper (esp. with contemptuous implication), documents collectively’, but they were unable to supply an example of ‘real’ usage. Woolf wrote to Lytton Strachey on 16 November 1912, ‘Is this letter written upon Bumf? It looks like it’, and this is now the first non-dictionary quotation for the word in the *OED* (followed by Wyndham Lewis in 1930: ‘Low lid fodder or high-brow bump!’),³¹ Woolf also appears to be the only person in the UK to grasp hold of the noun *photomaton*, a short-lived proprietary name for a ‘self-service machine that takes portrait photographs automatically, typically in a photo booth’, and convert it to a verb: ‘I’ve got to be photomatoned tomorrow,’ she wrote in a letter of 19 February 1933 (Burchfield labelled this usage ‘rare’).³² Similarly, only she (in 1940) and a biographer of Oscar Browning (in 1927) seem to have used the word *obeophone*, ‘A mechanical musical instrument designed chiefly to imitate or supply the sound of the woodwind’; in her biography of Roger Fry, Woolf wrote that ‘The host himself [Oscar Browning, as reported by A. C. Benson’s brother E. F. Benson] pedalled away at the obeophone’ (*Roger Fry* ii. 49).³³

More individualistic is her figurative, as opposed to literal (i.e. geological) use of *laval*, ‘of or resembling lava’, of which Woolf is the only recorded user: ‘It is the speed, the hot molten effect, the laval flow of sentence into sentence that I need,’ as Bernard explained in

³¹ Both of the original slips, preserved in the *OED* archives, appear to be written by Burchfield himself; the second is from *Apes of God* (1932), V 161. ‘low lid’ is unexplained in the *OED*.

³² The only other quotation is from a US newspaper of 1927, the *Lima* (Ohio) *News*.

³³ A good deal of research by Supplement staff went into this word in order to ascertain whether it was ‘a pun on “The O.B.”, a nickname by which Oscar Browning was known’. The final view was that ‘the suggestion is plausible... but not supported by any evidence’ (quoted from Superfluous Supplement Slips Files, *OED* archives, s.v.).

³⁴ The image of volcanic *lava* had a special significance for Woolf; cf. her letter to Ethel Smyth of 22 June 1930 in which she wrote, ‘As an experience, madness is terrific I can assure you, and not to be sniffed at; and in its lava I still find most of the things I write about. It shoots out of one everything shaped, final, not in mere dribbles as sanity does’ (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, IV, p. 180).

The Waves in 1931 (p. 84).³⁴ Woolf also supplies one of the only two quotations for *tensify*: in 1869, a work entitled *Womens’ Suffrage: the Reform against Nature*, included (in a section arguing that women should be confined to domestic life) the phrase ‘Fibred, tensified and toned for action’, and in the second series of the *Common Reader* (1932), Woolf wrote, presumably entirely coincidentally, ‘That strain of... passion did... not tensify the quiet of the country morning (*Common Reader* 2nd Ser. 145). Coincidence again would seem to be behind Woolf’s use, in common with that of only Dryden before her, of the verb *similise*;³⁵ and of *tend* as a noun rather than a verb, following on from the otherwise unique usage of the Marquis of Worcester in 1655.³⁶

These usages exhibit standard features of spontaneous word-formation, such as are available to any user of the language, and such as we have already seen exhibited in *irreticent*, *irreticence*, and *veneratingly*. Other of Woolf’s *OED* recorded locutions, however, indicate a conscious or semi-conscious echo of wide, often historical, reading, as one might predict of someone T. S. Eliot once called the best-read woman in England. Her choice of the word *sluggardry* (‘The extremes of passion are not for the novelist;... he must tame his swiftness to sluggardry’, *Common Reader* (1925), 79) is preceded only by that of Gavin Douglas in his translation of the *Aeneid* in 1513,³⁷ and she is recorded as the only person since Florio, in his 1603 translation of Montaigne’s *Essays*, to use the word *dissemblable*, ‘unlike, dissimilar, various’, writing in *Orlando* (iv. 161) in 1928, ‘What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of

³⁵ ‘She similised... eternally; the sea became a meadow, the sailors shepherds, the mast a maypole’ (*Common Reader* 106); Burchfield found a later example in the *New York Times* of 1976: ‘Have a story or anecdote for every point you wish to make. Similize. Exaggerate, euphemize, elide’.

³⁶ ‘I’m very glad you saw that the tend of the book [*The Years*], its slope to one quarter of the compass and not another, was different from the tend in my other books’, letter of 30 April 1937 to Stephen Spender, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, VI, pp. 122–3.

³⁷ The word is evidently close to the more familiar (because used by Chaucer) *sluggardy*, for which *OED1* has quotations beginning with the *Canterbury Tales* ‘Knight’s Tale’ and extending up to 1606.

dissemblables!'. Burchfield's entry for *semblable*, on the other hand, grafted on to that of *OED1* (whose quotations terminated with Shakespeare), suggests more intimate literary relationships (Eliot quotes from Baudelaire's *Flours du Mal*):

... **1602** SHAKES. *Ham.* V. ii. 124 (1604 Qo.) To make true dixon of him, his semblable is his mirrou. **1607** *Timon* IV. iii. 22 His semblable, yea himselfe Timon disdaines. **1922** JOYCE *Ulysses* 377 It behoves every most just citizen to become the exhortator and admonisher of his semblables. [**1923** T. S. ELIOT *Waste Land* i. 8 You! hypocrite lecteur! mon semblable, mon frère!] **1941** V. WOOLF *Between Acts* 242 There was Dodge, the lip-reader, her semblable, her conspirator.

The same is true of the Supplement record both for *disparition*, 'disappearance', (for which Burchfield records only two post-eighteenth-century quotations, one from *Ulysses* and the other from Woolf's *Diary*), and for *orgulous*. Although the first edition of *OED* had illustrated this last word, as used by Shakespeare, up to 1890 (four quotations from the nineteenth century alone)—making it unnecessary to document it further in the Supplement, according to his normal rules³⁸—Burchfield added a string of recent examples both pre- and post-Woolf, irresistibly conjuring up, erroneously or not, an incestuous coterie of literary users:

1922 JOYCE *Ulysses* 383 Then spoke young Stephen orgulous of mother Church that would cast him out of her bosom. **1928** V. WOOLF *Orlando* i. 46 There was an orgulous credulity about him which was pleasant enough. *Ibid.* iv. 151 A covey of swans floated, orgulous, undulant, superb. **1929** WYNDHAM LEWIS *King Spider* (1930) iv. 227 Charles, baffled here, turns his eyes elsewhere, filled with orgulous dreams. His imagination and his early successes have turned his head. **1941** AUDEN *New Year Let.* 187 That the orgulous spirit may while

³⁸ The Introduction to the first volume of his Supplement explains that he did not add 'later examples to words and senses whose illustration ends in the [first edition of the] Dictionary with nineteenth-century examples' (p. xv).

it can Conform to its temporal focus with praise. **1946** E. LINKLATER *Dark of Summer* 60 Coloured prints... all were bright, fantastic, orgulous and serenely defiant of war and the cold Atlantic. **1976** M. SPARK *Takeover* x. 147 This confidence... frequently overrides with an orgulous scorn any small blatant contradictory facts.³⁹

The Supplement documentation of *wormish* goes further and implies a Bloomsbury code. The first edition of *OED* has the word last used in 1632, while the Supplement indicates that Woolf revived it in 1923, followed by Harold Nicholson, the husband of her lover Vita Sackville-West, both of them writing in letters:

1923 V. WOOLF *Let.* 1 Apr. (1977) III. 26 Murry wrote me a wormish letter, by the way, about the differences between us, and our memories and so on. **1925** H. NICOLSON *Let.* 23 July in J. Lees-Milne *Harold Nicolson* (1980) I. xi. 239 My wormishness to Elizabeth.

Burchfield labels this formation 'rare'.⁴⁰ Other Supplement citations look specifically Woolfian, for example *man-womanly*, noted above, or Woolf's description of Milton as 'the first of the masculinists', which Burchfield identifies as the first cited use of *masculinist* (in *Writer's Diary* 1918, 10 Sept. (1953) 6), or even (as Rowena Fowler notes) the enshrining in the dictionary of 'the most famous dinner party in modern literature' under *Boeuf en Daube* (*To the Lighthouse*, 125, 1927).⁴¹

II. Woolf in *OED3*: more evidence and evaluation

How reasonable is it, however, to draw conclusions like this—on the distinctiveness

³⁹ *OED3*, in a draft revision of this entry dated June 2008, has cut these back to Joyce and Auden only, and added a further quotation (dated 1992) from the periodical *Matrix*: the greatest loss here is that of the Spark quotation, which illustrates the meaning of the word better than those of her fellow-novelists/poets.

⁴⁰ Evidence from 1984 in the *OED* archives indicates that John Simpson (then a senior editor on the Supplement staff, now the *OED*'s chief editor) made a special search in the electronic database Nexis for *wormish* but could find no post-1920 examples.

⁴¹ Fowler, 'Virginia Woolf: Lexicographer', p. 65.

of Woolf's vocabulary, and on her literary relationships and reading—from the evidence to be found in *OED*? One cause for disquiet might be the part played by editorial selectiveness in assembling this evidence. For example, it is tempting to question Burchfield's disinterestedness in choosing to record *man-womanly*, while simultaneously ignoring the concomitant *woman-manly*, an equally Woolfian formulation with, one would have thought, near-identical lexical status: the quotation he prints for *man-womanly*, 'It would be well to test what one meant by man-womanly', continues in the original with the unquoted 'and conversely by woman-manly'.⁴² Comparable instances of selectiveness may easily be found.⁴³ By his own account (as we have seen), moreover, Burchfield especially favoured the writings of Woolf and appeared to be especially interested in her unusual diction. Might he have given undue prominence to her vocabulary? Or, to put it another way, had he spread his net more widely, would he have found more examples, in other writers and sources, of words and usages which he took, wrongly, to be singular to Woolf? These questions arise not least because the number of quotations in the *OED* from Woolf's work has greatly increased in the last few years, many of them for unremarkable uses of language, in ways that shed new light on Woolf's usage by further contextualizing it.

Since 2000, the Oxford lexicographers have been engaged upon a revision of their flagship dictionary, which has never been revised or corrected since the first edition of

1884–1928. The intervening Supplements—first Craigie and Onions' of 1933, and second Burchfield's of 1972–86, which absorbed the first Supplement—did not attempt to re-write or even add to the vast record of pre-twentieth-century English recorded in the parent work, as that would have been an impossibly lengthy and expensive task for the publishers to have backed at the time. Instead, as stated above, the two Supplements tried merely to update the existing *OED*—not by maintaining the record of usage in the twentieth-century of vocabulary already documented up to the 1880s or so, but by adding new words and senses untreated in the original *OED*, because they were not current at the time it was compiled. The second edition of *OED*, published in 1989, did very little more in terms of content: it simply merged into twenty consecutive volumes the separate components of the *OED* already published—i.e. first edition plus Burchfield's Supplement—and added a further 5,000 new words (less than 1 per cent of the previously existing total). Correction and revision of the first edition, much of it based on Victorian and Edwardian scholarship long since superseded, has thus been overdue for many years, and it is this substantial task upon which the editors of the third edition of *OED* are now embarked.

In describing the new series of reading programmes for this edition, the chief editor, John Simpson, has been at pains to emphasize that the revisers are reading far more widely than their predecessors in non-canonical and non-literary texts, for example newspapers, wills, probate inventories, account books, diaries, and letters.⁴⁴ A matter of great interest for literary users of the *OED*, therefore, is the extent to which the current lexicographers will maintain their interest in 'great writers'. In favour of continuing this policy is the fact that the *OED*'s documentation of such works is immensely helpful both to editors and readers, and that (so many might feel) the *OED* has performed this cultural function in the past

⁴² Burchfield might have defended himself by pointing out there was no record for the parent-term *woman-man*, as there is for *man-woman*, to which the reply would be: why not record this unique usage by Woolf as the Supplement recorded other unique usages?

⁴³ Omission of eligible examples from Woolf need not be ascribed to anything other than the difficulty of finding them: it is hard for even the most industrious readers to spot new or unusual usages when they are morphologically unremarkable. Thus Woolf's letter to Molly MacCarthy of 22 April 1931, describing 'the train... crowded with these exquisite French ladies—all unapproachable, elegant and composed, while I feel like a farmyard boy who has lately rolled in the gorse bush' (Woolf *et al.*, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, III, p. 30), supplies a twentieth-century example of *unapproachable*, unrecorded by the Supplement, which was certainly deserving of inclusion but unsurprisingly missed; the *OED*'s last quotation is from Blackstone in 1768.

⁴⁴ See <http://oed.com/about/oed3-preface/documentation.html#documentation>; <http://www.oed.com/about/reading.html>, accessed 15 February 2009. For more information on *OED3*, see J. Simpson, E. Weiner, and Durkin, 'The Oxford English Dictionary Today', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, cii (2004), 335–81.

and should continue to do so in the future. Against continuing it is the consideration that it has now become politically and culturally difficult to identify a literary canon, especially of contemporary or recent works, or to argue that the job of ‘the definitive record of the English language’, as the *OED* calls itself,⁴⁵ should be to pay attention to these works in preference to other types of text. It is also very hard today, just as it was in compiling the first edition or the Supplements, to treat different sources consistently—yet a dictionary that regularly favours male over female writers as quotation sources, or the vocabulary of some novelists or poets over that of others (as did the first edition of the *OED* in both these respects), has to explain and account for these choices. The reason for this, as the *OED* itself acknowledges, is that it is often taken as in some way representative of English-speaking language and culture: in the words of its chief editor, the *OED* ‘not only provides an important record of the evolution of our language, but also documents the continuing development of our society.’⁴⁶ That requires it to include vocabulary from the different types of sources that make up ‘our society’ (presumably, the English-speaking world, in some way or other centred on the British Isles) in some roughly representative way—though quite how *OED* is to do this, and be seen to do this, is a daunting question whose demands and complexity the dictionary’s grateful users would be rash to underestimate.

The third edition of *OED* is still in its infancy, with the letters *M* to part-way through *R* so far treated at the time of writing (February 2009), i.e. around a quarter of the alphabet, along with sporadic revision and new entries throughout, so it is early days to make any sort of assessment of its achievement and character. However, both the new portion of the dictionary and its previous incarnation, the composite second edition of *OED*, can be electronically searched, so it is easier to see the variations in coverage, whether of different

periods (e.g. the first edition’s under-treatment of the eighteenth century) or of different types of source (e.g. the first edition’s liking for quotations from a Victorian and Edwardian canon of English literature—Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, Pope and the like).⁴⁷ While these variations were entirely understandable in the past, they are less so in the present, as today’s lexicographers have resources unavailable to their predecessors—electronic means of scrutinizing data—which allow them to monitor their use of different sources. It would seem reasonable now, therefore, to expect such variations to tell us something significant about the language the *OED* is describing, rather than the previously inevitable vagaries of lexicographical method.

How has Virginia Woolf fared to date in *OED3*? Somewhat surprisingly, given the new editorial preferences for non-canonical and non-literary sources, quotations from her work have risen from around 230 to around 530. In other words, over this first revised quarter of the dictionary, her works are being quoted between nine and ten times more frequently in *OED3* than in *OED2* (i.e. the second edition)—and (again surprisingly) most of these new quotations are the result of more intensive linguistic trawling of her novels (principally *The Voyage Out*), not of her non-fiction (i.e. her diaries or letters or essays).⁴⁸ Despite this apparently literary bias, her work is, as before, being used, more often than not, to illustrate ordinary as opposed to distinctive vocabulary.

What is the explanation for this? In part, it is the consequence of an important difference between the remit of *OED3* and that of

⁴⁷ See further C. Brewer, ‘Reporting Eighteenth-Century Vocabulary in the *OED*’, in J. Considine and G. Iammartino (eds), *Words and Dictionaries from the British Isles in Historical Perspective* (Newcastle, 2007), Brewer, Examining the *OED*.

⁴⁸ Some comparative figures are as follows: *The Voyage Out*: 105 quotations in *OED3* vs 10 in *OED2*; *The Waves*: 66 vs 19; *Diaries/Journals*: 58 vs 33; *Letters*: 54 vs 25; *To the Lighthouse*: 44 vs 5; *Mrs Dalloway*: 42 vs 5; *Jacob’s Room*: 38 vs 10; *The Years*: 22 vs 14; *Orlando*: 10 vs 10 (i.e. almost no change: the quotations are not identical in each case. Burchfield’s quotation from *Orlando* for *orgulous* has been excised—see note 39 above—while *OED3* has added a new quotation from the same work for *obfusc*—see note 57 below).

⁴⁵ See front page of www.oed.com, last accessed 15 February 2009.

⁴⁶ <http://oed.com/about/history.html#future> last accessed 15 February 2009.

Burchfield's Supplement, one which is nothing directly to do with the choice of literary as opposed to non-literary sources. Burchfield could not have completed his job if he had attempted to supply contemporary quotations for words and senses which the first edition of *OED* had documented up to the 1880s or so—i.e. the bulk of the English vocabulary; the task would have been (or seemed) endless. Instead, he largely, though not wholly, confined himself to recording only new words and senses. The result is that the composite dictionary, *OED2*, has no twentieth-century quotations for many hundreds of words and senses previously established in the language, a major deficit which *OED3* is now busily engaged in remedying.⁴⁹ It is for such twentieth-century instances of pre-existing 'ordinary' vocabulary that Woolf is now being cited. Thus dozens and dozens of quotations, presumably the fruit of electronic searching of her texts, have been added for commonplace usages (so far as one can ever thus characterize Woolf's diction): *make* (nine new examples of the verb), *malarial*, *mass* (noun and verb), *massively*, *masterpiece*, *match* (verb), *matchboard*, *matted*, *matter* (two examples of the noun), *may* (three examples of the verb), *m'dear*, *mean* (adj.), *meaning*, *meaty*, and so on.

But *OED3* has also turned up distinctive uses by Woolf which the Supplement missed. These have a special interest and value, for we can now hope to be surer, as was never the case with the Supplement, that such usages really are distinctive. The reason for this is that *OED3*'s illustrative quotations are many of them now amassed, and all of them now contextualized, by trawling vast swathes of data from texts of all types, newly available for electronic searching. Its classification of vocabulary is therefore much more securely (i.e. evidentially) based than that of previous editions of *OED* could ever have been.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ For comparative data on *OED*'s representation, by quotation, of different periods in the language see the pages on 'Period coverage' at <http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/category/12/52/197/>, last accessed 15 February 2009.

⁵⁰ See Brewer, Examining the *OED*, section on 'OED3 online sources' (<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/157/148/>), last accessed 15 February 2009.

Thus it turns out that Woolf is the only person between 1867 and 1975 to use the word *baller* (newly recorded in *OED3*) to mean 'A player of a ball game', as in her diary entry for 2 June 1932: 'A little confabulation... about football. Sp[arrow] is a baller, a solid young man' (unlikely though it seems, she is describing the dilettante literary scholar John Sparrow, who had been elected to All Souls College in 1929 and was to become its Warden in 1952; in its original context her remark continues, 'just called to Chancery Bar who writes a life of Donne after dinner').⁵¹ Her fellow users are mostly sports writers: e.g. in the *Ball Players' Chronicle* of 1867, the Barbados *Nation* of 1975, and a 1996 edition of *USA Today*. This comes as a surprise. She is the only person the lexicographers have been able to discover who used the word *pilliwinks* ('An instrument of torture for squeezing the fingers, similar to a thumbscrew') in the twentieth century: 'When the pilliwinks were applied to her, she confessed'.⁵² Similarly, she supplies the only quotation, between 1851 and 2003, for the adverbial use of *pop-pop* (as applied to the firing of a gun or guns): 'A rabbit that passes across a shooting gallery, and one's friends go pop-pop' (1928 *Writer's Diary* 22 Mar. (1953) 124).⁵³ Only she and the crime writer Michael Dibdin are recorded, since 1891, as using the verb *pshaw*:

1927 V. WOOLF *To Lighthouse* III. iv. 243
He sat with his legs twisted, frowning and fidgeting, and pishing and pshawing and muttering things to himself. 1991 M. DIBDIN *Dirty Tricks* (1992) 192, I pshawed. You don't often get a chance to pshaw these days, and I made the most of it'

⁵¹ As his *ODNB* entry (by Robin Briggs) reports, Sparrow was indeed a talented footballer; he had published an edition of Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* in 1923 (when he was aged 17 and still a scholar of Winchester).

⁵² The quotation is taken from a notably abstruse source, a scholarly edition of unpublished papers by Woolf now in the Berg Collection in New York Public Library (B. R. Silver, "'Anon'" and "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Last Essays', edited with an Introduction and Commentary, *Twentieth-century Literature*, xxv (1979), 356–441 at p. 407.

⁵³ This quotation was also recorded in the Supplement.

and only she (in the same example) and the Australian *Herald* are recorded as using the verb *pish* intransitively since 1864 (1987 *Herald* (Austral.) (Nexis) 13 Oct., Lawyer's may pish and tush and cry 'never'; they used to in California.).

If we really can trust this documentation, we seem to learn that Woolf's ear was much more attuned to orally transmitted language than her extraordinary literary learnedness might have led us to expect. But *OED3*'s quotation evidence urges us to find fresh literary echoes too. She is the most recent user of the colloquial-sounding verb *niddle-noddle* ('The trembling figure of Christ's mother was borne niddle-noddling along the streets', *The Waves*, v) but the preceding quotation in *OED3* (draft entry September 2003) comes from Trollope ('We all know that terrible tower of silver which now stands niddle-noddling with its appendages of flags and spears on the modern wedding breakfast-table', *The Duke's Children* III. xxvi. 307, 1880); both quotations are new to *OED3*. More new quotations, for a freshly identified sense of the slang word *muzz*, 'A muddle, a state of confusion', link Woolf with Thackeray: her diary entry of 8 December 1934, 'Two days in London: a great distraction; leaving my mind in a torn state, which I record, being all of a muzz', is the second quotation after his letter of 3 May 1843: 'I am in such a muzz as hardly to know what to write about'. *OED3* has another new entry for the word *pettifogulizer*, identifying it as a nonce-word meaning 'quibbler', and here the quotations display a direct link:

1851 T. DE QUINCEY *Sketch from Childhood in Hogg's Instructor* 6 234/2, I showed so much scrupulosity about the exact value and position of his words, as finally to draw upon myself the vexatious reproach of being habitually a 'pettifoguliser'. 1932 V. WOOLF *Common Reader* 2nd Ser. 136 He [*sc.* De Quincey] is indeed... the prince of Pettifogulisers

Elsewhere, new quotations for 'ordinary words', given new status in *OED3* by being treated as main entries, join her to George Eliot (*moth-wing*) and Mrs Oliphant (*old-maidenly*).

Fresh examples of more learned or unusual diction are also in evidence. Her use of the classically educated 'loquiter', i.e. '[he or she] speaks', is now added to the record, where her quotation sits alongside one from Walter Bagehot and one from Ezra Pound;⁵⁴ and she is the only person since Ruskin, apart from the poet Thomas Kinsella (in 1989), to use the word *orbicular* ('spherical, globular; having a rounded or convex form or surface'), in a context which is not geological or anatomical or zoological (in a diary entry of 1 November 1938, of Max Beerbohm: 'Max like a Cheshire cat. Orbicular. Jowld. Blue eyed').

One of the most interesting features of *OED3*'s treatment of Joyce is its addition of new quotations from dialect and other sources, to show how vocabulary which previous editions of the dictionary presented as unique to (or first used by) this writer was on the contrary embedded in demotic and dialect usage: the number of *hapax legomena* in his work (as identified in electronic searches of *OED2*) is decreasing as *OED3* advances its revision of the alphabet.⁵⁵ Woolf's vocabulary is less unusual, and the small number of words—eleven in total—for which she is given as first cited user in *OED2* has only declined to seven in *OED3*, but even here *OED3* is able on occasion to do the same sort of job.⁵⁶ The new entry for *masculinist*, for example, instead of beginning with Woolf's quotation on Milton, is headed with one from Havelock Ellis which contextualizes Woolf's remark in terms of contemporary gender-politics: 'That is why Masculinists have no right to impede the play of Feminism, and Feminists no right to impede the play of Masculinism' (quoted from *Essays in War-time*, 1916). By rude contrast, the new entry for *rabbit ear* divorces Woolf from the coterie context implied by

⁵⁴ In fact this addition to *OED3* derives from M. Proffitt and J. Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary Additions Series* (Oxford, 1997).

⁵⁵ Brewer, 'Literary Quotations in the *OED*'.

⁵⁶ *OED2* lists Woolf as the first cited user of *irritence*, *masculinist*, *nibful*, *poop* ('a stupid or ineffectual person; a fool, a bore'), *poudreuse*, *rabbit's ear*, *scrolling*, *tweeze*, *vagulate*, *vagulous*, and *veneratingly*; *OED3* has to date (Feb 2009) antedated *masculinist*, *poop*, *poudreuse*, and *rabbit's ear*.

OED2's (i.e. Burchfield's) treatment. Originally, only she and Harold Nicolson were quoted as using this term (referring to a perennial herb), in letters that looked as if they were echoing each other round the gardens at Sissinghurst (all three, if one looks them up, addressed to Vita Sackville-West and referring to these gardens):

1928 V. WOOLF *Let.* 15 Oct. (1977) III. 545 Might I beg some Saviour's flannel or rabbit ear? *Ibid.* 22 Oct. 547A thousand thanks for the rabbits ears. 1949 H. NICOLSON *Let.* 15 June (1968) 171, I think of it [*sc.* a garden] as *cineraria* in masses, Rabbit's Ears in masses, . . . predominantly grey.

But the revised *OED3* entry (draft dated June 2008) has discarded the two second quotations and now displays the first as only the third in a much more divergent set of horticultural references, beginning with *Weeds of Canada* in 1906 and ending with the *National Trust Magazine* in 1999 (referring not to Sissinghurst but to Chartwell, the garden belonging to the Churchills).

All these changes and additions to the lexicographical record, in particular the new quotations from non-literary as well as from literary sources, mean that *OED* is in many respects a better 'literary instrument' in its new form than in its old. Certainly *OED3* is allowing us to make a far more nuanced and better informed assessment of Woolf's vocabulary than was previously possible, and for this it should be congratulated. Illuminating as all this dictionary investigation of Woolf may sometimes seem to be, however, one should bear in mind two caveats. The first is to do with the nature of *OED3*'s treatment. The *OED* is attempting to represent all of the English language (however defined) rather than do special justice to Woolf and to literary writers more generally, notwithstanding its continued quotation from such sources. It is bound to be selective—on whatever grounds—in its source coverage. So *Orlando*, for example, was quoted from ten times in the Supplement, and alone of Woolf's major works appears not to be being given renewed attention in the revised *OED*. It is hardly credible that this novel would not yield new material eligible for quotation, as has its

fellow-novels, but little will be recorded in the new *OED* as things presently stand.⁵⁷ Thus the window on Woolf's language which the *OED* so enchantingly offers us will never shed light, or shed light evenly, on all features of her vocabulary.

The second caveat is just as, if not more, important. As Rowena Fowler has shown, the systematic ordering of language and sense flies in the face of deep impulses in Woolf's own work and thinking: most obviously, her resistance to the masculine habit of categorization and control that she satirizes in Mr Ramsay's quest to reach Z.⁵⁸ Her meditation on the words 'Passing Russell Square' (experienced as one travels, apparently banally, on the London Underground), which explores the potentially infinite suggestiveness of the phrases, both oral and literary, is an attempt to trace, or point to, the way that words work in relation to the individual human beings who use them, something that it is virtually impossible for a dictionary to record or describe. Woolf wrote, 'Of course, you can catch them and sort them and place them in alphabetical order in dictionaries. But

⁵⁷ Unless individual volunteers offer their findings to *OED*. This is perhaps the explanation of the origin of the single new quotation from *Orlando* so far added to *OED3*, the adjective *obfusc*, 'dark or obscure'. Another excellent candidate from the same work, unincorporated by *OED3* in its revised entry (dated Sept 2008), is *outrigger*: 'Behold, meanwhile, the factory chimneys, and their smoke; behold the city clerks flashing by in their outrigger'. As noted by the novel's recent editor Rachel Bowlby, who regularly turns to *OED* to elucidate Woolf's vocabulary, her 'adaptation of the word to mean outdoor clothing is not attested by *OED*; it corresponds to 'outrigger' in the sense of 'that with which anything has been rigged out' (V. Woolf, ed. R. Bowlby, *Orlando: A Biography*. (Oxford, 2008 (1992)), see pp. 280, 388). The present writer has found a number of other distinctive usages in Woolf's writings, at present unrecorded in *OED*, and is submitting them, as may all members of the public, via its online contribution form at <http://www.oed.com/readers/>.

⁵⁸ See the discussion in Fowler, 'Virginia Woolf: Lexicographer', e.g. p. 55. As Fowler describes (p. 56), Woolf herself seems only to have used small dictionaries: 'a tiny, old (1869) edition of Walker and Webster, a cheap Everyman and copy of the 1918 impression of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the last well worn and faded, as if left out on a desk rather than shelved, and probably the work on hand for everyday reference'. Undoubtedly, as an educated literate person, she would have been familiar with the *OED*, as indicated by her reference to the half a million words recorded in 'the dictionary' in Woolf, 'Craftsmanship', p. 869); only *OED* had such a total at the time.

words do not live in dictionaries, they live in the mind. . . . All we can say about them, as we peer at them over the edge of that deep, dark, and only fitfully illuminated cavern in which they live—the mind. . . . is that they seem to like people to think and feel before they use them, but to think and feel not about them, but about something different.⁵⁹

This poses problems for a lexicographer. It gestures to a linguistic truth, that the meaning of any word and any phrase varies, it would seem almost infinitely, according to context—that is to say, its connotations will far exceed the denotations, however exhaustive, ascribed to it in a dictionary. Many of the examples discussed above will illustrate this. The snippet from *The Waves* for *moth-wing*, for example, ‘The silver-grey flickering moth-wing quiver of words’, is evocative enough in its immediate *OED* context, following as it does on George Eliot’s ‘The old . . . demon prompting him to give another good pinch at the moth-wings of poor Mr Casaubon’s glory’, given that both draw on connotations of the pathetic fragility of moths and the shortness of their lives, and relate this in some way (explicitly in Woolf’s quotation, implicitly in *Middlemarch*’s) to language and to aesthetic or scholarly ambition, and *OED3* does well, in its new entry for this word, to point to this in its explanatory comment on the definition: ‘Originally allusively with reference to something fragile or evanescent, or to someone drawn to temptation’. The most cursory acquaintance with Woolf’s work, however, will supply further contextual information necessary to decode the word more generously, whether from *The Waves* itself (originally titled *The Moths*) or from Woolf’s essay ‘The Death of the Moth’.

⁵⁹ Woolf, ‘Craftsmanship’, p. 869). Woolf originally delivered this essay as a talk for the BBC (in a series entitled ‘Words Fail Me’) broadcast on 29 April 1937, which is now the only surviving record of her voice. An excerpt, which includes some of the phrases quoted here, can be heard on the BBC News website at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7684225.stm>, last accessed 21 February 2009, and is reproduced on the British Library CD, ‘The Spoken Word: British Writers and American Writers’. Perhaps by contrast, T. S. Eliot, ‘The Writer as Artist’, *The Listener*, (1940), 773–4 at p. 773, also in a BBC radio broadcast, pronounced that ‘the dictionary is the most important, the most inexhaustible book to a writer.’

Capturing Woolf’s language in a dictionary, what she really meant (supposing anyone could really know what she meant), is manifestly, on many levels, impossible. As she herself put it, ‘when words are pinned down, they fold their wings and die’.⁶⁰

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⁶⁰ Woolf, ‘Craftsmanship’, p. 869.

APOLOGETIC PROSODY AND ITS REMEDY

‘THE aspect of a poem’s sound most laboriously studied in literature classes is its rhythm. What makes the study so laborious and frustrating is that the rhythm can be very complex, and the system we use to analyze it is complicated without being complete.’ These are the words of Douglas Hunt in his second edition of *The Riverside Anthology of Literature*, where he protests that often in traditional prosody ‘the rules of scansion become as cumbersome as the instructions on a tax form,’ and offers this solution: ‘We all grow up with an instinct for the rhythms of the language; if the sheet music becomes too confusing to us, we can lay it aside and play by ear.’¹

The state of prosody also concerns Helen Vendler who, in her remarkable study *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, regrets ‘the absence . . . of metrical commentary’ because of ‘not yet having found an acceptably subtle and yet communicable theory of scansion.’²

Still, the commitment of fifteen prominent contemporary poets to traditional foot scansion is evident in David Baker’s *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement*, a collection of essays which respond to ten theses advanced by the poet and teacher Robert Wallace. It is striking, though, how frequently these writers

¹ Douglas Hunt, *The Riverside Anthology of Literature*, 2nd edn (Boston, 1991), 1615.

² Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 11.