'HAPPY COPIOUSNESS'? *OED*'S RECORDING OF FEMALE AUTHORS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Eighteenth-century language usage is markedly under-represented in the first two editions of the *OED*, whose quotations for this period were gathered almost entirely during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This article reviews some of the possible causes, characteristics and consequences of *OED*'s gap in eighteenth-century documentation and shows that female authors were particularly scanted. The role of quotations in the *OED*, as the evidential basis for the dictionary, is briefly considered, along with eighteenth-century (and Victorian/Edwardian) views on women and language, and the availability of female-authored texts for quotation by the lexicographers. The article reports sample reading in eighteenth-century female writers (especially Jean Adam, Penelope Aubin and Anna Seward), which shows that *OED* could easily have supplied its eighteenth-century deficiency from such authors, and that it often favoured distinctive usages in female-authored texts—innovative, eccentric or domestic vocabulary—rather than usage which exemplified linguistic norms (especially in poetry, where Seward's case is examined). It also discusses revisions to the *OED* so far conducted in the third (ongoing) edition, and their implications for readers and editors of eighteenth-century texts.

Introduction

In 1980, Jürgen Schäfer's *Documentation in the OED* analysed the *OED*'s coverage of quotation sources to show that the dictionary had quoted from some sources, and some periods in the language, much more intensively than from others. Since *OED* is a dictionary created first and foremost from its collection of quotations, Schäfer pointed out, any distortion in this primary evidence will feed through into the dictionary itself, with significant implications both for its representation of the development of the English language, and for the contribution to that development made by individual writers. This means that conclusions drawn from *OED*'s evidence will not necessarily tell us about the language *per se*, but rather reflect the sources available to the lexicographers and chosen by them for quotation. So using the *OED* to examine the relative lexical productivity of different periods, for example, will not tell us about 'the absolute diachronic increase in English vocabulary'. Instead, the results will 'religiously [reflect] and statistically [chart] the number of sources used in compiling the *OED*'.[1]

One of the periods most under-represented in the *OED*, Schäfer showed, was the eighteenth century. The consequences of this are of some importance, as systematic under-reading of eighteenth-century sources will have resulted in

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1 Jürgen Schäfer, *Documentation in the O.E.D.* (Oxford, 1980), 53.

OED missing first instances of the use of a word, and recording them instead from the much better-documented nineteenth century. Similarly, specific nuances of language, and sense developments or restrictions peculiar to this period, even uniquely instanced words, may have escaped the *OED* record. If this is so, then readers, and especially editors, of eighteenth-century texts need to be aware of *OED*'s limitations in these respects, and cautious of drawing inferences from its otherwise magnificently authoritative display of lexical evidence. But it would be good to understand more clearly how and in what ways *OED* fell down on the eighteenth century. What were the eighteenth-century sources that the *OED* lexicographers did read, and to what uses did they put them? How did their reading and quoting of this period compare with that for the centuries before and after? What were the deficiencies and what can be done to remedy them, if indeed Schäfer was right and there were deficiencies? And how is the problem being tackled by the editors of the new edition of *OED* (*OED3*), under preparation since the late 1990s in Oxford and scheduled to be completed a few decades hence?

After initial explanation of the different editions of *OED*, this article reports recent (electronically derived) evidence, illuminating Schäfer's original study, which suggests that female writers of this period are particularly under-represented. To understand and evaluate this evidence, I consider (briefly) the role of quotations in the *OED*, late nineteenth- and eighteenth-century views on women and language, and the question of what female-authored texts were available to the lexicographers. The results of exploratory reading of sample works by eighteenth-century female writers (along with one early nineteenth-century one, Jane Austen) are reported under 'Sample reading', and subsequent sections in the article discuss *OED*'s treatment of three different writers—Jean Adam, Penelope Aubin and Anna Seward—selected to represent different genres, sub-periods, social ranks, and regional identities. I conclude with some reflections on *OED3*'s revisions to the dictionary so far, and their implications for readers and editors of eighteenth-century texts.[2]

OED1, OED2 and OED3

While Schäfer worked on a print copy of the first edition of *OED* (*OED1*), gathering his data with what now seems to us almost unimaginable industry, *OED* researchers today have a far more user-friendly resource, *OED Online* (www.oed.com), which makes available digitized versions both of the second edition (*OED2*) and of the newly emerging third edition (*OED3*). Analysing the evidence of these two dictionaries is not straightforward, however. *OED2* is a

composite work and in some ways a misleading one: a merging of *OED1* (completed in 1928) with R. W. Burchfield's twentieth-century Supplement (1972–1986). Despite its recent date, therefore, the bulk of its contents derive from scholarship unrevised since issuing from the original dictionary workshops between 1884 and 1928. Naturally, lexical and linguistic study had moved on by 1989, and the *OED*'s source material—historical texts in English of all kinds—had been enormously enhanced by discoveries of new texts, and new editions of known texts, in many different subject areas. But almost none of this fresh knowledge and evidence was drawn on for *OED2*, despite the latter's incorporation of the Supplement, since Burchfield had sought, quite properly, only to update *OED*'s record of twentieth-century English, not to revise the period covered by the first edition of *OED* (1150 to the mid-nineteenth century).[3]

Happily, *OED2* turned out not to be an end in itself but a preface to a much more ambitious and long-drawn-out project: root-and-branch revision of the entire work to create the third edition of *OED* (*OED3*). This massive undertaking began in the 1990s, under the leadership of John Simpson, and has been released online since 2000 in quarterly installments inching their way through the alphabet: beginning with the letter M, the revising lexicographers had worked their way part-way through the letter R by March 2008, and have since then continued through R while revising small groups of entries here and there across the alphabet. At the same time, entries for entirely new words and senses have been added throughout the dictionary. The website (the only method of access to *OED3*) blends the revised material in alphabetical sequence with the unrevised entries in *OED2*, although one can still view and search *OED2* independently from this new (again composite) dictionary.

Digitization of the *OED* has transformed the way that the dictionary has been edited. It has also transformed the way that the dictionary can be used: imaginative manipulation of the electronic search tools allows one to repeat Schäfer's investigations of the dictionary's treatment of different periods in a fraction of the time it must have taken him to produce his results, and the same tools, used differently, permit one to identify all the quotations from a particular work or author, as well as identifying first citations (although this latter facility is cruder and less satisfactory). Additionally, one can search the dictionary for all sorts of features relating to the historical development of the language, such as increases or decreases in the use of specific prefixes or suffixes, or the rate of entry into the language of words from a particular language.[4] As a result, the vast quantities of information and learning poured into the dictionary by its original editors, which in the printed form of *OED* have been to all intents and purposes irretrievable on any substantial scale (other than by reading through one individual entry after another, a scarcely

3 See Charlotte Brewer, 'Burchfield's Supplement (2): Editorial Policies and Practice', in *Treasure-House of the Language: the Living OED* (New Haven and London, 2007), 175–212.

4 Caution has to be exercised in interpreting the results, since it has been impossible for the *OED* to maintain consistency in labelling and other editorial policies over so long a period of compilation.

practicable technique for someone wishing to get information widely scattered throughout the work), are now for the first time accessible and analysable. *OED Online* is thus a fabulous resource for linguists working on the history of English, especially those interested in detecting large-scale changes.

But all evidence retrieved in this way must be treated with great care. Much of it represents the culturally determined choices of Victorian and Edwardian lexicographers and their volunteer readers, limited not just by the state of scholarly knowledge of the time, and the obstacles they confronted in amassing, organizing, editing and printing their material, but also by their assumptions about what was important. In other words, it tells us about the lexicographers and their working methods as well as about the history and development of the English language.[5] This brings us back to the point of Schäfer's investigations of *OED* in the first place. If this great dictionary is constructed from its quotations—which it is—then it is those quotations which we need to study in the first place, so that we can interpret the conclusions which the lexicographers drew from them.[6]

Electronic evidence on *OED2*'s treatment of periods and authors

It is impossible, using electronic searches, to replicate Schäfer's investigations exactly, since no digital version of *OED1* is now available. Instead, we have to make do with *OED2*, which as explained combines *OED1* with Burchfield's twentieth-century Supplement. Theoretically, the difference should not matter for pre-twentieth-century searches, but in fact Burchfield added considerable numbers of quotations for earlier authors too: nearly 350 for Jane Austen alone, for example, and many others too, to an unidentifiable extent, from other texts published both before and after Austen. This qualification notwithstanding, the results of searching for the chronological distribution of quotations over the modern period of English in *OED2* look very similar to Schäfer's. Figure 1 shows a peak at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century (partly explained by devoted excerption of Shakespeare's works), followed by a gradual decline, a lesser peak over the mid-seventeenth century (due to intensive use by the lexicographers of literature related to the civil war?), a staggered decline to a trough in the 1730s and then a more-or-less steady rise through the nineteenth century.[7]

5 The *OED*'s restriction of its quotation sources to printed material (including modern editions of Middle English and Old English works) is an additional limitation, unavoidable but often disregarded, on its representation of the English language.

6 For the fundamental role played by quotations in the *OED* and its recognition by the lexicographers themselves, from Murray onwards, see *Treasure-House*, 110–14.

7 Figures 1 and 2 (as Figs. 3–6 below) are reproduced from the EOED website, where more information and discussion may be found.
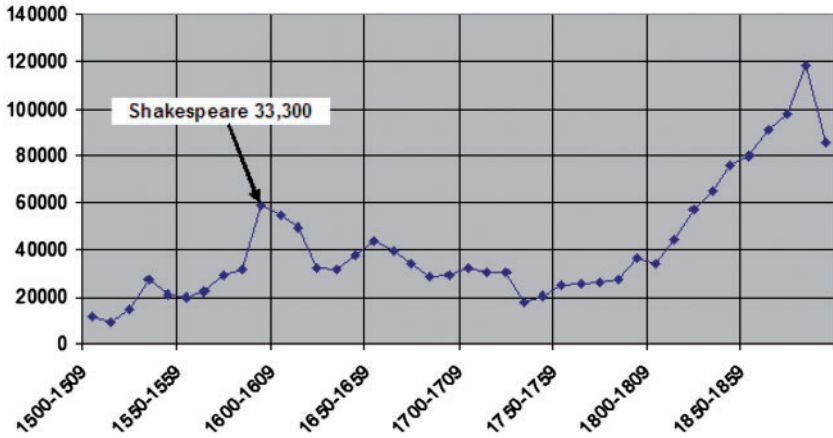
Fig. 1. *OED2* quotations per decade 1500–1899.

For our present purposes, the most interesting similarity is the gap in *OED*'s documentation for the eighteenth century. This is particularly clear if we represent the numbers by century rather than by decade (Fig. 2).
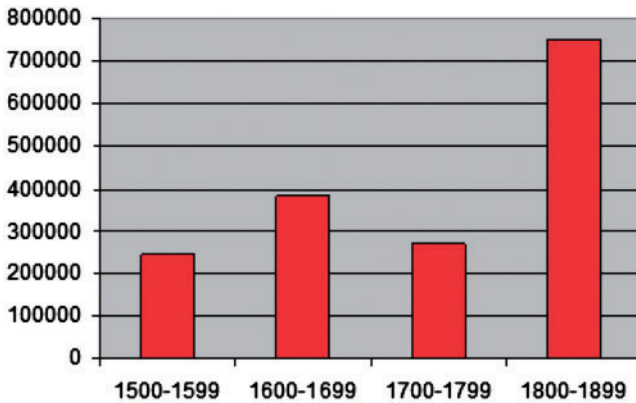

Fig. 2. Relative number of quotations for 16c, 17c, 18c and 19c in *OED2*.

What is the implication of these results for those working on the language and literature of the eighteenth century? While it is foolhardy to draw any firm conclusions, several possible explanatory hypotheses spring immediately to mind. For example, might the eighteenth century have been less lexically productive than the seventeenth and nineteenth? That seems unlikely, although it cannot be ruled out. Did the eighteenth century produce less appropriate source material than the other two centuries? Not according to a wealth of bibliographical and

historical evidence.[8] Were the Victorian and Edwardian lexicographers and their volunteer readers less keen on reading eighteenth-century sources than seventeenth- and nineteenth-century ones, meaning that the lexicographers had fewer quotations to choose from? There is some interesting and persuasive archival evidence for this, although it is not ultimately conclusive.[9] Even when the lexicographers did have eighteenth-century quotations, did they choose, for whatever reason, not to print them in the dictionary? There is some evidence for this idea too (see further below).

Several possible avenues of exploration also leap to mind. For example, is the eighteenth-century gap in documentation to be explained by certain words falling out of use at the end of the seventeenth century, and many more being created in the nineteenth? And/or by certain words falling out of use in the eighteenth century, and being revived in the nineteenth? So far, it seems that neither of these explanations need to be invoked, as it is usually easy to find examples of eighteenth-century usage of the missing words by consulting databases such as *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. In other words, their absence from the *OED* tells us not about the language but about the *OED*.

Another obvious line of inquiry concerns the eighteenth-century sources that the *OED* did quote from. This is a harder question to investigate: one has to scan the thousands of quotations manually, pick out authors and texts which seem to recur most frequently, then search for these individually and compare the results. Here is the result of this process as conducted by the research project 'Examining the *OED*' (Fig. 3).

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8 Using the *English Short-Title Catalogue* (STC; itself a growing and changing tool), Michael Suarez shows that the number of titles published per annum in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland 'exhibits a remarkable rise from a low of 1,744 per annum in 1723 to 6,801 in 1793, an increase of 390 per cent'; he also explains the complications and qualifications pertinent to analysing and interpreting the source data ('Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record', in John Barnard *et al.* (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Book*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 2009), 37–65). The relationship between such data on the one hand, and the use and record of language (i.e. the concern of the present essay) on the other, is additionally complex and difficult; it is interesting to see that the variations in the number of imprints published over the eighteenth century, as represented in Suarez's Figure 1.1 (p. 43), correlate to some degree with the variations in the *OED*'s quotation totals for that century—although not with the *OED*'s dip in documentation for the century as a whole. For a crude representation of STC data, extracted in 2004, showing the predictable outline rise in printing over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at odds with the *OED*'s quotation totals, see 'Examining the OED' webpage 'STC 1500-1799' at http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/47/128/.

9 In 1879, Murray reported that 'It is in the eighteenth century above all that help is urgently needed. The American scholars promised to get the eighteenth-century literature taken up in the United States, a promise which they appear not to have to any extent fulfilled . . . the literature of this century has hardly been touched'. However, by 1880, he judged that the eighteenth-century deficiency in slips had been 'to a great extent supplied.' See further Charlotte Brewer, 'Eighteenth-Century Quotation Searches in the *OED*', in Rod McConchie (ed.), *New Directions in Historical Linguistics* (Somerville, MA, 2006), 41–50, and 'Reporting Eighteenth-Century Vocabulary in the *OED*,' in John Considine and Giovanni Iammartino (eds), *Words and Dictionaries from the British Isles* (Newcastle, 2007), 109–35.
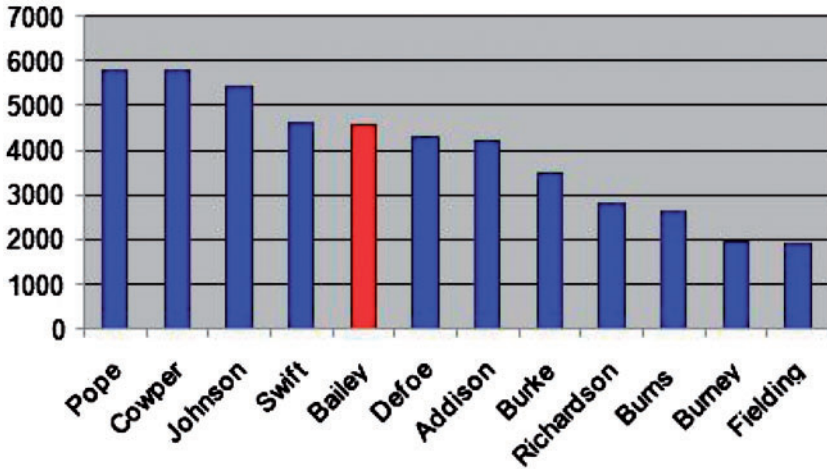
FIG. 3. Some major eighteenth-century sources.

Such results generate further questions in their turn, many of which require substantial research if they are to be illuminated. Does the *OED*'s concentration on these authors reflect their relative contribution to the history of the language, or their cultural importance in the period in which the quotations were gathered? What sort of vocabulary were the lexicographers most interested in, and how did they select and make use of quotations to construct their dictionary? Does the extensive citation from the various editions of Bailey's dictionaries indicate that the lexicographers had trouble getting examples of usage from texts which were not meta-linguistic?[10] And does this in turn point to a low supply of eighteenth-century quotation slips? How can one further interrogate the *OED* to see whether the eighteenth century was less lexically productive, according to dictionary record, than other periods—for instance, does *OED* record fewer first examples of use of words and senses from this period?

Part of the answer to the last question is yes, since we can search for the first quotations in an *OED* entry. The result is a clear eighteenth-century dip (Fig. 4).

10 Virtually all of the Bailey quotations are dictionary citations; by contrast, comparatively few of *OED2*'s nearly 6,000 quotations from Johnson are from his *Dictionary*. This state-ment is based on scanning by eye the quotations identified by 'author searches' for the two writers, respectively (see http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/category/11/43/161/); it seems to be impossible to devise electronic searches of the *OED* which discrim-inate between the two types of quotation (i.e. dictionary and non-dictionary).
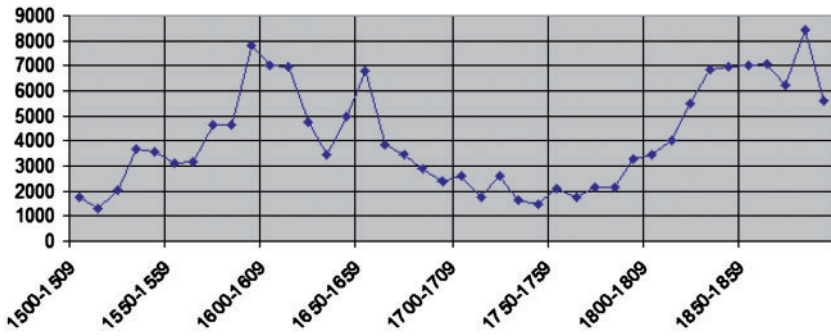
FIG. 4. Number of first quotations in *OED2* per decade 1500–1899.

But this finding too needs interpretation and investigation: firstly, as Schäfer predicted, 'More sources per period results in more first citations for this period'—so the low rate of first citation may simply correlate with the low number of quotations gathered overall for the eighteenth century—and secondly, the electronic search tool on the *OED* is currently limited in application, identifying only the first quotation for an entry as a whole, not for senses within an entry. If you search electronically for the number of first citations recorded in Anna Seward's work, for example, you get 59 results, but if you look up all her quotations individually in the dictionary, you find that the true number is nearer 115 (out of a total of around 270, a notable proportion discussed below). So the first-citation search tool is too crude to be more than a rough indication of lexical productivity, and its results may be belied by fuller research.[11]

The other striking feature of Fig. 3 is the absence of women writers other than Frances Burney. In general, women writers were cited very sparsely in the *OED* compared with male, as shown by the different totals in Figs. 5 and 6 below.
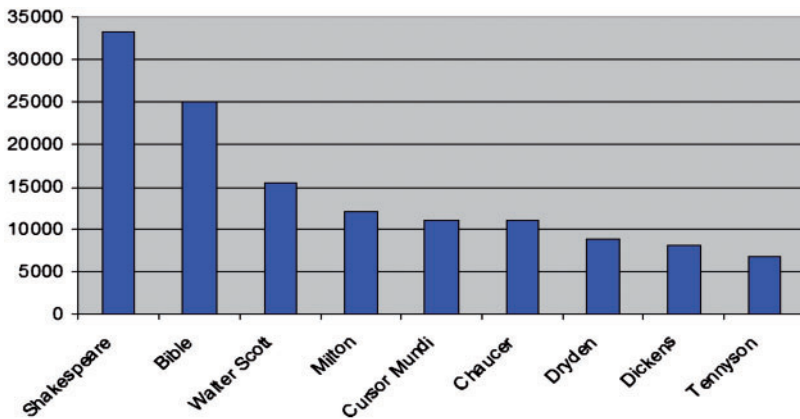

FIG. 5. Top quotation sources in *OED2*.

11 The *OED* search tools will be updated in the new release of the website, due in December 2010.
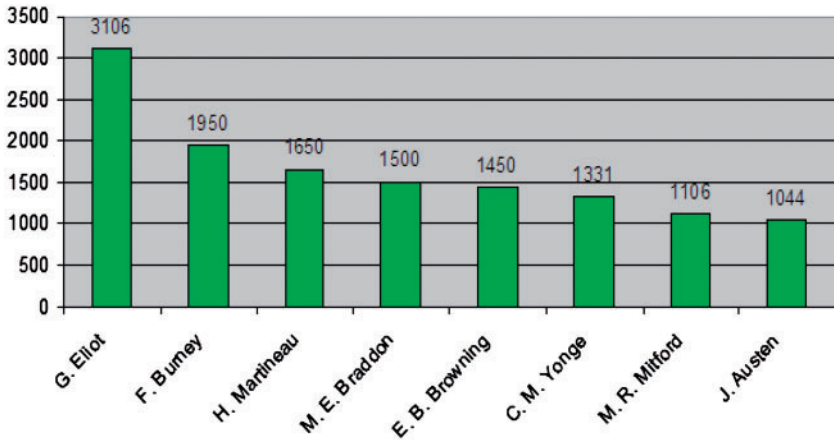
FIG. 6. *OED2*'s most quoted female sources[12]

George Eliot's total is well below that of the male top authors, and quotation from other women (mostly prose writers, in contrast to the poets who dominate Fig. 5) swiftly tails off.

This topic too is ripe for further study. What has the *OED* missed by not quoting women? What sort of women did the lexicographers quote and for what usages? What does this tell us about women's use of language over the eighteenth century (and other periods)—or less ambitiously, about the language of specific female authors? These are unmanageably large questions for an individual researcher. Narrowing the field of inquiry, I have read a selection of eighteenth-century female writers' work, cited to varying degrees in the *OED*, to see if the results help to fill the gap in the dictionary's documentation of this period and to illuminate the special characteristics (if such exist) of these writers' choice of vocabulary. The remainder of the essay reports the results of this experiment, but begins with three more general sections intended to provide a context for interpreting them: a consideration of the role of quotations in the *OED*, of the lexicographers' assumptions about gender, and of eighteenth-century views on women's language.

Role of quotations in *OED*: their function as cultural and linguistic authorities

As the lexicographers themselves many times acknowledge, quotations are the raw material of the *OED*. The rationale of this historical dictionary was to gather together as many examples as possible of real usage occurring in the language

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12 The totals on this graph include just under 350 quotations for Austen added by Burchfield in the Supplement and subsequently incorporated into *OED2*, plus an unknown number for Burney and Yonge added at the same time (the Austen figure is derived from manual searching of print copies of *OED1* and Supplement). Of Burney's quotations, c.100 are early nineteenth-century.

between 1150 and the mid-nineteenth century and, by scrutinizing how words had been used in context, deduce the range of their possible meanings and show how senses had developed over time. The quality and representativeness of the quotations was therefore crucial, but their influence extends beyond this purely linguistic function. When we look up a word in the *OED*, we expect to see not just a definition, but also some sense of how, in what contexts, and by whom it has been characteristically used. In this respect, the dictionary's quotation sources can be decisive. Samuel Johnson, the first person to use quotations to produce a monolingual English dictionary, called them 'authorities', and half of his total of 140,000-odd came from just seven sources, all of which, by common cultural consent then and now, exhibit mastery of the language: Shakespeare, Dryden, Milton and Bacon, the Bible, Addison and Pope. Inevitably, Johnson's repeated favouring of such bodies of work influenced the dictionary he produced and the sort of information it conveyed about language and culture.[13] Authorities—cultural and aesthetic, whether or not linguistic—these sources doubtless were, and are. By contrast, the *OED* spread its nets very much wider, and strove to record language comprehensively and objectively, not restricting itself to the 'wells of English undefiled' (as Johnson put it in the preface to his dictionary). Nevertheless, *OED*'s most-quoted post-1500 works (Fig. 5 above) are remarkably similar to Johnson's: Shakespeare, the Bible (in many translations), Walter Scott, Milton, Dryden, Dickens and Tennyson. Time and again, as one consults the dictionary and sees in successive entries the roll call of canonical names, one receives the cumulative impression that these texts, all written by men, have created the language—or at any rate are exemplary of it in ways that texts written by women cannot be, because they are so rarely cited in comparison. This is also true of the many thousands of cases where the *OED*'s quotations are from authors whose names are less familiar: these writers are still, overwhelmingly, male not female. Where does this leave women and their contribution to the language?

Cultural assumptions of *OED* editors: literature and gender and their relation to language

The answer to this question must in large part turn on the historical circumstances under which women wrote and published. Over most of the period covered by *OED1* (1150 to the late 1800s), women were less likely than men to write and far less likely to get into print. Since the *OED* has always restricted itself to printed sources, the opportunities to quote women have, therefore, always been similarly restricted, especially for the period up to the eighteenth century. But setting aside such issues of availability (considered below), what is it reasonable to expect the first edition of the *OED* to have done with female authors? Several influences may

13 See Rüdiger Schreyer, 'Illustrations of Authority: Quotations in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language,*' *Lexicographica*, 16 (2000), 67, 58–103; Robert DeMaria, 'Johnson's Dictionary', in Gregory Clingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson* (Cambridge, 1997), 90, 85–101.

have been at work here, not all mutually compatible. First, the defining charac-
teristic of the *OED* was its determination to be comprehensive and objective,
tracking every word it recorded from the cradle to the grave and doing so by
demonstrating its use over time in a wide range of texts. The Philological Society
was clear, at the beginning of the process of compiling the dictionary, that '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',[14] and the *OED*'s chief editor James Murray was equally
robust in defending his use of quotations from culturally varied sources over 20
years later, after the first installment had appeared in print.[15] Theoretically, there
should have been no distinction made between quoting from texts written by
women and those written by men.

However, as evident in the list of *OED*'s top sources post-1500, there was a
cultural bias towards quoting from 'great writers'. No doubt this was in part due to
the preferences of volunteer readers for perusing and excerpting such works, but
at times the lexicographers seem fully to have embraced the notion that their
dictionary was a 'literary instrument', that is, one dedicated to the exposition
and illustration of the great literary texts of the nation.[16] Whatever their views
on the desirability of being linguistically inclusive and objective, we cannot be
surprised at both lexicographers and volunteer readers subscribing to the social
and aesthetic values of the day, in which literature was seen as the highest expres-
sion of language. W. D. Whitney, the influential American linguist who edited the
Century dictionary (an early rival to *OED1*), was one of many to explain the
connection between the two: 'The great body of literary works of acknowledged
merit and authority, in the midst of a people proud and fond of it, is an agent in
the preservation and transmission of any tongue, the importance of which cannot
be easily over-estimated'. Another was J. H. Newman, who believed that the
'sayings' of 'a great author . . . pass into proverbs among his people, and his phrases
become household words and idioms of their daily speech, which is tessellated
with the rich fragments of his language'. Murray could thus quite comfortably
claim, on the first page of the first volume of the *OED* (1888), that the quotations
substantiating his innovative linguistic project were drawn from 'all the great
English writers of all ages', and it was equally natural for his successors to describe
the bibliography of *OED* sources published in the 1933 re-issue of the first edition
as a 'guide to English literature'.[17]

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14 K. M. E. Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words: James A. H. Murray and the OED* (New
Haven and London, 1977), 195.

15 'Thirteenth Address of the President', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1882–
1884), 523–5.

16 'Literary instrument' is Burchfield's term; see further Brewer, *Treasure-House*, 165.

17 W. D. Whitney, *Language and the Study of Language* (London, 1867), 23; J. H. Newman,
The Idea of a University (London, 1873), 292–3; I rehearse these points in 'Literary
Quotations in the *OED*', *RES*, 61 (2009), 93–125.

For the most part, women did not figure in the literary canon, so the enormous disparity between *OED*'s citation of female sources and of male is partly to be explained by their relative literary and cultural standing and not just by their relative availability in printed texts. But on other grounds, too, women were less likely to be quoted in the dictionary. It is a truism that history and culture as well as language and literature have generally been regarded as centred on men and men's experience and view of the world, with the role of women being regarded as secondary, incidental and 'other'. This was not an entirely unproblematic and consensual viewpoint in the late nineteenth century—witness the rise of the women's movement—but it broadly predominated, among women as well as men, and it can be seen in the remark made by one of Murray's most influential advisers, H. H. Gibbs, who wrote to Murray in 1883 to complain that '[F. J.] Furnivall has a fancy that it is good to quote women, because the writings of women are a characteristic of the Age.' Gibbs himself felt that the dictionary was 'not meant to be a record of the progress of the Emancipation of women but of the birth and life and death of words'.[18] So 'words'—the subject of the *OED*'s objective and quasi-scientific investigation of language—were somehow viewed as independent of their cultural and historical context, even though the *OED*'s distinctive methodology was predicated on the notion that the context in which words occur—the five million quotations which were the work's 'basis' (to quote the lexicographers' own term)—was the single most important factor that determined their meaning, since it was by scrutinizing the use of words as embedded in their context that the lexicographers deduced their signification. But users of all sorts will have participated in 'the birth and life and death of words', women as well as men (and in oral language, women were presumably equally influential—in fact they were often thought to be more influential, as Addison, quoted by Johnson, suggests below). To exclude, or under-represent, texts written by women, or to regard such texts as qualitatively different because they were originated by women, and therefore had a distinctive (i.e. 'not-male') social import, of which male-authored texts were apparently innocent, would have been—however understandably—to disregard relevant evidence.

There were further assumptions current about women and their use of language, over the time that the *OED* was compiled, which were more specifically linguistic. Here the great grammarian Otto Jespersen is a valuable because hugely influential witness, in 1905 characterizing the English language as 'positively and expressly masculine . . . the language of a grown-up man [with] very little childish or feminine about it' (Jespersen's work was heavily dependent on the *OED*, as he acknowledged with gratitude on the first page of his preface).[19] In 1922, Jespersen published a substantial account of the special characteristics of female language use, showing that women were more loquacious than men, linguistically illogical,

18 Gibbs to Murray, 3 May 1883, quoted Lynda Mugglestone, 'The New English Dictionary,' in Mugglestone (ed.), *Lexicography and the OED* (Oxford, 2000), 14.

19 Otto Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (Leipzig, 1905).

verbally undisciplined and so on. Much of his analysis was based on evidence
we would not now regard as valid, for example, quotations of female language
in male-authored novels and other works (including, in at least one case, a mis-
ogynistic account of woman's language that in its original context was clearly
designed to be satiric—Lord Chesterfield's testimony to women's tendency to
use 'vastly' as a semantically empty intensive).[20] Presenting these judgements as
uncontroversial and self-evident, and notwithstanding his professional status,
Jespersen was participating in a tradition firmly established in folk-linguistics
before, after and during the period that the *OED* was compiled.[21]

Such negative assumptions sit naturally with the belief that women's usage
has not contributed to the history and development of the English language in
the same way as has men's, and it is easy to understand why, independently of the
relative availability of female-authored quotation sources, women writers would be
less likely to be quoted in the *OED*. With hindsight, however, it is also easy to see
the problems and inconsistencies in this practice. If women do in fact use language
differently from men, then that is an argument for their texts to figure significantly
as quotation sources: the *OED* was (and is) supposed to be a record of the English
language in its entirety, not just the use made of it by male writers.[22]

Eighteenth-century 'society' and cultural and linguistic assumptions

What are the consequences of the *OED*'s low representation of women authors?
The answer to this again addresses the *OED*'s role as a cultural record. As we have
seen, this has always been an implicit feature of the *OED*, but it has recently been
explicitly affirmed by the current chief editor John Simpson: 'the *Oxford English
Dictionary* is an irreplaceable part of English culture. It not only provides an
important record of the evolution of our language, but also documents the con-
tinuing development of our society'.[23] Our understanding of culture, history,
language and literature is now very different from that of a hundred years ago,
and this applies to the eighteenth century as to every other period. Recent research
has made it clear that women contributed significantly to the explosion of print
culture in the eighteenth century: for example, identifiable female authors were
responsible for almost 40 per cent of the total number of novels published from

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20 *Ibid.*, 'The Woman', in *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (London, 1922),
237–54. Jespersen quotes the well-known letter by Chesterfield to *The World*, and does not
observe that elsewhere (letter to his son, 27 September, o. s. 1749) Chesterfield character-
izes this use of *vastly* as typical of the 'vulgar man'.

21 See Deborah Cameron, 'Gender and Language Ideologies,' in Janet Holmes and Miriam
Meyerhoff (eds), *The Handbook of Language and Gender* (Oxford, 2005); Jennifer Coates,
'Introductory', in *Women, Men and Language* (Harlow, 3rd edn, 2004), 3–28.

22 See further Elizabeth Baigent *et al.*, 'Women and the Archive: The Representation of
Gender in the *DNB* and the *OED*,' *Archives,* 30 (2005), 13–35.

23 Preface to the Third Edition, at http://oed.com/about/history.html#future (accessed
11 December 2009).

1770 to 1799 (and female authors may also have written a sizable proportion of the novels for which it is impossible to identify gender of author, a further 30 per cent of the total).[24] Well before the end of the century, however, women had made an enormous impression on literary culture more generally, notwithstanding their relatively small printed output compared with that of men.[25] This is witnessed on the one hand by the innumerable discussions from the late seventeenth-century onwards on the propriety and desirability of women writing and publishing and on the conflicts that were perceived to exist between women's domestic and public roles, and on the other, by the substantial body of research that has uncovered these women and their writings over the last few decades.[26] Many of the men so intensively represented in the *OED*—Pope, for example—interacted intimately with women writers such as Mary Wortley Montagu, exchanging letters and poems discussing the nature of literate women and their impact on the literary and cultural environment.[27] Despite this role in public and private literary life, however, entry after entry in the *OED*, even when eighteenth-century sources are well represented in the quotation record, has no example of women's use of language. We are much better placed now than were the original *OED* lexicographers to see that this absence of women from the linguistic record in the *OED* undermines the dictionary's account of 'the development of our society'.

This is all the more notable given that the specific question of women's use of language was regularly discussed over the eighteenth century, in ways that made it clear that it was believed, by the men who made such judgements (as by Jespersen later), that women spoke and wrote differently from (and less well than) men. Johnson's dictionary quotes many examples of traditional folk-linguistic beliefs about women and language that were clearly current at the time (e.g. from Addison, under *canine*: 'A third kind of women are made up of *canine* particles: these are scolds, who imitate the animals out of which they were taken, always busy and barking and snarl at every one that comes their way', or *gifted*: 'There is no talent so pernicious as eloquence, to those who have it not under command: women, who are so liberally gifted by nature in this particular, ought to study the rules of female oratory'), while Lord Chesterfield, in his two tongue-in-cheek letters to the *World* advising Johnson on how to deal with women's language in his Dictionary, associates them with 'the *genteeler* part of our language' and says that women's speech is characterized by 'copiousness'

24 James Raven *et al.*, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2000), 46–7.

25 We are some way off from a full bibliographical record of eighteenth-century publications by gender; see further Suarez, *loc cit.*, Isobel Grundy, 'Women and print: readers, writers and the market', *Cambridge History of the Book*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, 2009) 146–59, and n 33 below.

26 See Roger Lonsdale, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford, 1989), Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London, 1989), and much literary and historical scholarship appearing thereafter.

27 See Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford, 1999).

rather than by 'correctness'. Altogether, language was 'most indisputably the more immediate province of the fair sex: there they shine, there they excel', and enlarging on the sort of language that women write, Chesterfield commented 'When this happy copiousness flows, as it often does, into gentle numbers, good gods! how is the poetical diction enriched, and the poetical licence extended!' No such examples of female copiousness in poetry can be found in Johnson's dictionary, however: where Johnson gives instances of diction he specifically identifies as female, his quotations are from male sources impersonating, usually mocking, women. So under the senses of *horrid* and *frightfully* said to be women's 'cant', for example, Johnson quotes Pope and Swift, and under sense 4 of *odious*, which he says is 'A word expressive of disgust: used by women', he quotes Edward Young. As with Jespersen's account of women's language, it goes without saying that this is not good linguistic evidence, not least since it is in line with recorded male prejudice about female speech that has been expressed through the ages and rarely supported by any form of reliable data.[28] But of the 140,000 quotations in Johnson's dictionary, a tiny number (under 20?) are from female-authored sources—and none of these display characteristics one might with confidence designate as either male or female, assuming one held the view that it was likely to be possible to distinguish between them. On the contrary, these female-authored quotations would tend to support the judgement of Judith Drake in 1696 that '[one] will no more be able to discern a Man's Style from a Woman's, than [one] can tell whether this was written with a Goose-Quill or a Gander's'.[29]

Other remarks on women's particular aptitude for language are more favourable. Elizabeth Elstob's *Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (1715) begins with an epigraph from the distinguished antiquarian encylopaedist and linguist George Hickes, in which he noted the special appropriateness to women of literary and linguistic study: 'Our Earthly Possessions are truly enough called a PATRIMONY, as derived to us by the Industry of our FATHERS; but the Language that we speak is our MOTHER-TONGUE; And who so proper to play the Critick in this as the FEMALES.' But, here too, there is no evidence (apart from the remarkable scholarship displayed in Elstob's pages); Elstob does not figure in Johnson's dictionary and is quoted only four times in *OED1*—although interestingly enough, three of these

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28 See Coates, *loc cit*. For contemporary misogynist views, see Felicity Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660-1750* (Lexington, 1984).

29 Judith Drake, *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*, 1696 (quoted from 4th edn, London, 1721, xxi–xxii). I have been able to find only 14 female quotations in Johnson's *Dictionary*, from Jane Barker, Elizabeth Carter and Hester Mulso (1 each), Jane Collier (2) and from Charlotte Lennox (9, all from *The Female Quixote*); there is probably a handful more. Despite this minimal quotation, Johnson gave unparalleled professional support to women writers; see Isobel Grundy, 'Samuel Johnson as Patron of Women,' *Age of Johnson*, 1 (1987), 59–77.

quotations are for her first use of a word or sense (*menologium*, *pan-Britannic*, and *verse* to refer to Old English poetry).[30]

In summary, despite widespread contemporary recognition of the significance of female speech and writing in eighteenth-century culture, it is difficult to learn much about it either from Johnson's dictionary, a specifically linguistic document, or from the many adverse observations on female speech made by male commentators (of whom Chesterfield is a comparatively benign example).[31] To get some idea of whether, and to what extent, women's language was different from that of men, and how, as a (demonstrably) noteworthy body of language users, they may have contributed to the development of the language in general, we are thrown back either onto the more generous but still highly selective evidence of their usage in the *OED* or onto independent reading of their texts.

What women were treated in the *OED*, and what texts were available?

Significant numbers of literate women from the seventeenth century onwards engaged in writing letters and diaries. By their nature, however, such documents had an uncertain life (Pepys ordered his wife to destroy hers), and those documents that did survive were more likely to be published in the twentieth century, after the first edition of the *OED* had been compiled, than before.[32] In addition, women wrote and published religious poetry, prophecies, autobiographies and biographies, works on medicine, midwifery and housewifery, as well as plays, secular poetry and prose (including translations). The proportion of female- to male-published output was, however, tiny: less than 2 per cent of all printed works of the seventeenth century is (ascertainably) by women.[33] It is not surprising, therefore, that female writing was often regarded with suspicion and disapproval at the time (and may often have been published anonymously); as one of the most accomplished female poets, Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, remarked in

30 *OED3* (as of November 2009) has added one more quotation, again a first example of use: *mell-supper*, 'harvest-supper', from Elstob's translation of Aelfric's English Saxon Homily.

31 Patricia Michaelson gives many other contemporary examples of male views on women's language; see 'Women and Language in the Eighteenth Century', in *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford, 2002), *passim*, also Carol Percy, '"Easy Women": Defining and Confining the "Feminine" Style in Eighteenth-Century Print Culture,' *Language Sciences,* 22 (2000), 315–37. Johnson's lack of evidence from women writers is entirely normal: e.g. Lowth cited no examples from female writers (as he constantly did from male) in the footnotes to his best-selling *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762).

32 On Pepys's view of his wife's diary, see Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, 36. Burchfield added several hundreds of quotations to the Supplement (hence to *OED2*) from such works, e.g. by Dorothy Wordsworth, Edgeworth and Austen.

33 See further Maureen Bell, 'Women Writing and Women Written,' in *Cambridge History of the Book*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 2009), 431–51. As Bell observes, bibliographical research is complicated by the fact that 'women's texts are frequently hidden by their mode of presentation or by their being embedded in a work with multiple authors and parts'.

1713, 'Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,/Such an intruder on the rights of men,/Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,/The fault, can by no virtue be redeem'd.'[34]

Much more surprising, given the comparative rarity of sources and the views on female use of language already discussed, is that the *OED* did in fact quote from works written by women before 1700, in however small numbers. To take a small random selection of quotations from seventeenth-century female-authored sources, the first edition includes

- 5 quotations from Alice Thornton's *Autobiography* (quoted from the Surtees Society edition of 1875), one of which is for a first example of usage (*waft* = 'breath of air') and one for a last example (*vidz* = 'videlicet')
- one quotation from Jane Barker's *Poetical Recreations* of 1688, for the term *sea-cates*, 'provisions to eat at sea', for which Barker's is the sole example
- 50 quotations from Dorothy Osborne's *Letters to William Temple*, quoted from editions of 1888 and 1903
- around 70 quotations from Hannah Woolley's works on household management, principally *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (1675), nearly all for culinary terms but also for vocabulary relating to clothes or the body, e.g. *strait-lace* (verb), *scald-head* (scalp condition, for which Woolley is cited as first user), *thistolow* (a term for an ulcer, uniquely attested in her works)
- 176 quotations from various works by Aphra Behn (publications dated 1668-1716; 170 of these are seventeenth-century)

The explanation for the comparatively high rate of quotation from Woolley is presumably the specialized nature of her vocabulary; the distinctive female use, according to the *OED*, of such domestic and household terms is discussed in the next section. Otherwise, it is hard to know which is more puzzling, that the *OED* should have quoted only once from Jane Barker's *Poetical Recreations*, a work that would have usefully yielded additional material for the dictionary,[35] or that it should have quoted far more generously from Behn, an author judged by another Victorian (Julia Kavanagh, in *English Women of Letters*, 1862) to have had a mind 'tainted to the very core', so that 'she loved grossness for its own sake, because it was congenial to her' (vol 1, p. 21). Given the cultural barriers to the inclusion of female sources, why should Behn have been excepted? But it appears that, most commendably, 'grossness', where female authors were concerned, was not necessarily seen as a problem by *OED* editors, at any rate not consistently; the first

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34 Anne Finch, 'Introduction', in Myra Reynolds (ed.), *The Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea* (Chicago, 1903), 4–5; *cf.* Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-1688* (London, 1988).

35 For example, an instance between 1671 (Milton) and 1848 of the use of the word *bondslave*: 'Thus hellish cunning drest in Masquerade / Of Wit's disguise, so many have betray'd, / And made them Bondslaves' [*Poetical Recreations*, vol. 1 (London, 1688), 6]. Barker's Jacobite heroic romance *Exilius, or, The Banished Roman* (1715) is quoted 15 times in *OED1*. Her citations have risen considerably in *OED3*, to a total of over 110 (as of September 2009), from both poetry and prose.

edition, for example, included over 200 quotations from Delarivier Manley, many of which were from her scandalous *New Atalantis*.[36]

Casual examination of the words for which all these women (along with many others) were quoted suggests a more linguistic reason for their inclusion. Repeatedly, when looking up the quotations from female authors in the first and second edition of the *OED*, one is struck by their linguistic distinctiveness. This is so not just for the seventeenth but for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries too, although it is difficult to demonstrate or quantify on a statistical basis (the *OED* search tools cannot discriminate by gender of source). I discuss this characteristic further below; it not infrequently correlates with the domestic vocabulary for which women are also characteristically cited. Meanwhile, once into the eighteenth century, 'female' quotations begin to pick up, although not—despite the greatly increasing numbers and identifiability of female authors—in proportions that in any way resemble the rate of quotation from male authors. Burney (*c.* 1,950 quotations, from both novels and diaries) is the most-quoted female writer of the period, with all but 100-odd of her total dated to the 1790s; she is followed at some distance by Ann Radcliffe, with *c.* 1,100 quotations (all from novels) from the same decade. Mary Wortley Montagu is also extensively quoted, with around 675 citations (from her correspondence), but then the totals drop sharply away. Hannah Glasse, a special case given her specifically culinary vocabulary, comes in at around 400 quotations, Charlotte Smith and Mrs Thrale at over 300, Elizabeth Raffald (another cookery writer, always designated Mrs Raffald), at around 270, Manley, Centlivre (an interesting example, as a dramatist cited from a wide range of her plays), Anna Seward and Hannah More at 200-odd (Seward is quoted almost entirely for her letters, rather than her poetry, which was much more widely read at the time), Wollstonecraft at around 75, Elizabeth Carter at 70, Elizabeth Inchbald at around 60 and Eliza Haywood at 55. As before, all these writers, barring Inchbald, are quoted for unusual or distinctive usages. Many equally well-known and distinguished women, whose voluminous works in different areas of endeavour—history, translation, philosophy, fiction, poetry and education—sold widely and were received with both critical and popular acclaim, were cited in much smaller numbers or not at all: A. L. Barbauld (something over 20 quotations), Catharine Macaulay (2 quotations), Penelope Aubin (0) and Catherine Trotter/Cockburn (0).[37] These figures dwindle into insignificance beside the enormous number of quotations amassed for male authors: nearly 6,000 each for Pope and Cowper, around 5,000 for Johnson, over 4,600 for Swift, over 4,000 for Defoe and Addison and so on.

The question of how and whether quotation in the *OED* should correspond to the relative proportions of male and female authors, to the quantity of their

36 For *OED1*'s inconsistent treatment of words relating to sex and the body see Lynda Mugglestone, '"Decent Reticence": Coarseness, Contraception, and the First Edition of the *OED*,' *Dictionaries,* 28 (2007), 1–22; Brewer, *Treasure-House*, 203–5, 225–6.

37 Barbauld's quotations include around 12 from *Evenings at Home*, published jointly with her brother John Aikin; she is once cited by her maiden name.

published output or to other factors again, such as their relative linguistic or cultural influence and significance (however ascertained or evaluated), is an immensely tricky one, not least given the uncertainties of the eighteenth-century bibliographic record; it awaits full treatment by the lexicographers themselves. Acknowledging, nevertheless, that the first edition of the *OED* had manifestly under-represented both female authors and the eighteenth century generally, *OED3* has attempted to increase quotation rates from such authors. But by March 2008, when it was last possible for dictionary outsiders to investigate the relative rate of quotations between *OED2* and *OED3* systematically, it had made little impression on the existing disparity between male and female proportions (see section titled '*OED3* and the Future' below).

Sample reading

Would the *OED* have been different if it had cited more texts written by women? Did such writers use distinctive locutions? In an attempt to begin to answer these questions, and understand more about *OED*'s record of eighteenth-century vocabulary, I read extracts against the dictionary from Jean Adam, Penelope Aubin, Mary Wortley Montagu, Anna Seward, A. L. Barbauld, Anne Radcliffe and Jane Austen (chosen for their different sub-periods, genres, social and geographical provenance and public impact).[38] The results of the experiment were clear: unquestionably, the *OED* could have made good the deficiencies in its eighteenth-century coverage by quoting from female writers: these texts are full of usages for which the *OED* either has no eighteenth-century quotations, or has only one or two eighteenth-century quotations in comparison with many more seventeenth- and nineteenth-century ones. This is reassuring evidence that the dip in the *OED*'s documentation of vocabulary for the eighteenth century does not reflect a deficiency in language use of the time. However, despite first appearances, it tells us virtually nothing about the language of female writers as opposed to male ones, for, time and again, it is possible to find instances of the *OED*'s missing usages in male writers too. For instance, I found at least 23 words or senses in Jean Adam's *Miscellany Poems* (1734) for which the *OED* had no eighteenth-century example. In eight of these cases it was straightforward to search for the term in *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECCO)—that is, the search was not complicated by grammatical ambiguity (e.g. between an adjectival and a verbal use of a past participle, or a noun and verb having the same form), or by some other problem—and for all eight, one could find other eighteenth-century examples

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38 Clearly, the sample could be fruitfully expanded, e.g. to include dramatists. For reading and recording conventions, details of texts examined, and lists of findings, see EOED pages at http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/category/14/64/217/. The reading was carried out over 2009 and checked against *OED1*, *OED2* and *OED3*, the last of these in its revised version of September 2009, since superseded by further quarterly revision. Some of the experiment's results, passed on to the *OED3* lexicographers, have now been adopted into the revised *OED*; I am most grateful to the editor John Simpson for his advice on the project.

in texts written by male authors. In only one instance did a word appear genuinely rare (*flowerless*).[39] This pattern was repeated with all the authors read. The *OED*'s comparatively low rate of citation from the eighteenth century remains a puzzle, therefore, not least since in many cases the lexicographers did have examples of missing documentation to hand in texts which they quoted from elsewhere. This is true even of vocabulary evidenced in Johnson's *Dictionary*, a major source for the *OED* from which the lexicographers lifted hundreds of quotations. Under the verb *essence*, for example, Johnson quoted Addison (1711): 'The husband rails, from morning to night, at essenced fops and tawdry courtiers'. Yet the *OED*'s quotations for this usage are dated 1675, 1678 and 1823, creating a mystifying eighteenth-century gap in documentation.

The same applies to all the distinctive vocabulary to be found in these female writers' texts. They yield many examples of ante- and post-datings to the *OED*'s record (e.g. *helmless*, 'without a helm or steering gear', not recorded before 1824; [mariner's] *card*, recorded only from dictionary sources after 1674), and they also contain a small number of words and usages unrecorded in the *OED* altogether (intransitive use of the verb *dung*, specialist uses of *implicit, possess* and *proselite*; all examples quoted in this sentence from Jean Adam's *Miscellany Poems* of 1734). But again, although this valuably repairs and enhances the *OED*'s record of eighteenth-century vocabulary, there is nothing to suggest that we could not find broadly comparable types of usage in male-authored texts too that were unread by the *OED*, or indeed in those that were both read and quoted: as Rod McConchie showed in 1996, the *OED* 'sources already scrutinized, and even relatively thoroughly excerpted, may nevertheless be productive of much more material', so that 'the fact of a book's having already been read is simply no guide to what useful data might still be found in it'.[40]

There is a possible exception to this generalization where domestic and household vocabulary is concerned, which may sometimes be more easily found in sources written by women. If we look at the quotations for one of the few female authors cited in large numbers in *OED1*, Jane Austen, we find a remarkable prevalence of words to do with domestic or household matters, for example, *beaver* ('a particular kind of glove'), *butler's pantry* ('a pantry where the plate, glass, etc., are kept'), *spot* ('a spotted textile material') and others, while the same characteristic emerges even more strongly in the 350-odd quotations from the same writer added in Burchfield's Supplement (a rather bizarre addition, given that so early a writer was outside Burchfield's twentieth-century remit): for example, *baby-linen, baker's bread, bath-bun, black butter* (i.e. 'apple-butter'), *bobbinet* ('A kind of

39 ECCO searches can be problematic: many of the resulting 'hits' occur in dictionaries, in multiple copies of the same text, or in editions of works originally published before the eighteenth century; the reliability of results varies according to the legibility of the facsimiles. For *flowerless* see http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/412/461/#flowerless.

40 R. W. McConchie, *Lexicography and Physicke: The Record of Sixteenth-Century English Medical Terminology* (Oxford, 1997), 155, 177–8.

machine-made cotton net, originally imitating the lace made with bobbins on a pillow') and many more. Some other female writers (e.g. as already mentioned, Hannah Woolley, Hannah Glasse and Elizabeth Raffald) are cited almost entirely for domestic cooking terms taken from their books on cookery and housewifery. (The same is occasionally true for male writers too, e.g. J. Knott, cited around 70 times, in quotations again added in the Supplement, for culinary terms from his *Cook's & Confectioner's Dictionary* of 1723). In general, the explanation for the female provenance of the quotation sources for such vocabulary must be that domestic and household matters were often a subject of discussion or responsibility for female writers rather than for male. But it may also be the case, given prevailing assumptions about women's roles and women's characteristic subjects of interest, that the *OED* lexicographers were more likely to identify such vocabulary in female- than in male-authored sources (or as Anne Finch put it, in lines following those already quoted, 'the dull manage of a servile house/Is held by some, our utmost art, and use').

Despite the *OED*'s enthusiasm for citing female authors for domestic vocabulary, however, one can often find such terms unrecorded or undertreated in these writers, both Austen and others (e.g. *family party, netting silk, working candle* in Austen, *brass* and *braziery* in Wortley Montagu, *winter-room* in Seward).[41]

Perhaps the most striking impression to emerge from this study of women's vocabulary as represented in the *OED*, apart from its general paucity, is the dictionary's enthusiasm—on those occasions when it does print quotations from female authors—for recording the unusual (including specialized) usages in women's texts. This is a difficult subject to research systematically, given the substantial, and widely dispersed, amounts of data involved and the impossibility of looking at more than a small number of sample authors and their quotations in the *OED*. However, as already remarked, many of the women examined in my experiment are cited in the *OED* for a high proportion of distinctive words and senses (e.g. all of the domestic terms cited above from Jane Austen are identified as first examples of use in the *OED*). It is tempting to hypothesize that, as a rule, the *OED* chose where possible to illustrate words and senses with quotations from male sources (for reasons already described), and that for the core vocabulary such male-authored quotations would always have been freely available. By contrast, when looking out quotations for unusual vocabulary, or for earliest use of a term, the lexicographers would presumably have had far fewer quotations to choose between—perhaps only one example of a particular usage over a particular period. In these instances, they would have had to make do with the material they had to hand, which would sometimes have meant quoting from a female-authored source because that was the best, first, or only example available.

The result, as a general tendency, may be that the *OED*'s record of a female writer's use of language misrepresents the unusualness of her diction considered

41 See EOED pages on 'Women's distinctive vocabulary'.

over the whole body of her work. Where male authors are concerned, their un-usual vocabulary, as quoted in the *OED*, would be absorbed by the much larger proportion of 'bread-and-butter' examples from their work that are also quoted in the *OED*—that is, examples of usage typical of the language of their time. In general, though, female writers were less likely to be quoted for typical usage, so their individualistic usages form a higher proportion of their *OED* quotations in total. At this stage, one can only guess whether this holds true for a wide range of *OED* authors, whether male or female (certainly there are exceptions; e.g. Elizabeth Inchbald's 61 quotations are for words and usages that look almost uniformly unremarkable).[42] But Anna Seward's case furnishes an interesting il-lustration of how the *OED*'s criteria and priorities in deciding which sources to quote for what vocabulary, whether or not deliberately and consciously exercised, may have worked in practice. The reader and user of the *OED* will find that women's writing is far more likely to figure as exemplary of eccentric or specialized or first uses of vocabulary rather than of mainstream literary or unmarked usage. In particular, where the tradition of poetic diction in English is concerned, women participants are regularly passed over (so Wortley Montagu and Seward are quoted almost entirely for their letters, not for their poetry).

Closer examination of three of these authors, variously representative of the countless women whose contribution to the use and development of the English language is virtually unrecorded in the *OED*, illustrates some of the issues involved in this great dictionary's representation of eighteenth-century language generally and of women writers in particular.[43] The remainder of this essay surveys the vocabulary of the little-known Scottish working-class poet Jean Adam, successful London-based novelist Penelope Aubin, and public literary figure Anna Seward, before concluding with a discussion of the relevant lexicographical policies and practices discernible in the *OED's* slowly emerging revision.

Jean Adam and Penelope Aubin

Jean Adam (1704–1765) is extremely unusual among lower-class women writers in being given an entry in the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* (1885). This distinction was due solely to the view, disputed by the *DNB* itself, that she was the author of the famous ballad, praised by Robert Burns, 'There's nae luck about the house', a simple and moving account of a wife's joyful preparations for her absent husband's home-coming. The *OED1* editors knew the ballad and cited it three times in the dictionary, for

42 Studies of other authors in *OED3* indicate that women are being treated differently in the current revision of the dictionary: Virginia Woolf, for example, is now being cited for many more run-of-the-mill usages than in the past [Brewer, 'The *OED* as "Literary Instrument": Its Treatment Past and Present of the Vocabulary of Virginia Woolf', *Notes & Queries*, 56 (2009), 430–44].

43 Lists of usages discussed (unrecorded in the *OED*, ante- and post-dating *OED*, and supplying eighteenth-century quotations where the *OED* has none or fewer than for the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries) can be found on the EOED website.

(1) a special sense of the conjunction *and* ('And are ye sure the news is true? And are ye sure he's weel?')

(2) *balk* ('a tie-beam of a house, stretching from wall to wall') and

(3) *turkey slipper*: the ballad provides the sole example of this term, which the *OED* explains only as a slipper 'of Turkish workmanship or manufacture, or made in imitation of this'—no indication is given of what counted as 'Turkish' at this date (the design? the material?)

In each case, authorship was ascribed to W. J. Mickle, although the *OED* gave the poem two different dates and three different title forms. The second edition of the *DNB* argues firmly that Adam was the ballad's originator, but its sister publication *OED3*, which introduced a further quotation in a draft revision of September 2008 (for *bigonnet*, a Scottish word for a woman's cap), retains the ascription to Mickle. This is a pity, given the low citation rate from women authors—and given too that the ballad still has valuable lexical evidence as yet untreated in *OED3*, for example, the term 'bishop-sattin' as in *bishop-sattin gown*.

Adam's *Miscellany Poems* (1734), the cost of whose publication seems to have ruined its author, are richer still. This work is entirely unlike the ballad, consisting of 80 poems altogether (all read for the experiment), mostly on religious and moral subjects. They bear no trace of Scottish dialect, although some of the vocabulary has Scottish connections (e.g. the noun *depute*, as in 'The Deput Conscience justifies the Deed', for which the *OED* has no quotation between 1605 and 1821)[44] and the title page of the volume gives her name in anglicized form, that is, 'Jane Adams'. The *DNB* characterized *Miscellany Poems* as 'written in the Brady and Tate style . . . poor specimens indeed of what she called [in her preface] "the style of the best English poets that have written within seventy years" . . . only fitted to win a little local popularity'. Although 'correct in phrase and sentiment', they were 'inflated and childish.' Perhaps this contemporary, gendered evaluation—along with the comparative rarity of the volume—explains why *OED1* editors might not have read the poems. Altogether uncited in *OED1*, the collection has now crept into the third edition of the dictionary in the form of just two quotations, for *pilotless* and *rebel-like*, in both cases to enhance the *OED*'s representation of eighteenth-century vocabulary, which, in the previous two editions, had no examples of these words.

Many other of Adam's usages also deserve record. At least 11 words or senses are altogether absent from the *OED*, as well as a handful of ante-datings and a larger number of post-datings, the latter probably indicating that Adam was a conservative language user (e.g. her reference to a mariner's *card*, an old-fashioned word for *chart* which according to the *OED* evidence was last used in 1613 and 1674, and thenceforward found only in dictionaries). By contrast, the many examples in her work of words and senses for which the *OED* has either no eighteenth-century evidence, or disproportionately sparse evidence, may tell us

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44 Alternatively, Adam's usage could be construed as a participial adjective, for which the *OED*'s last recorded use is 1623.

more about the *OED*'s neglect of this period than about Adam's language preferences: here, the quantity and variety of words for which she provides early eighteenth-century examples are a good illustration, in individuated detail, of the consequences of the first edition's apparent problems in collecting material for this period (she has a figurative use of *treasure-house*, for instance, for which the *OED* has no quotations between 1598 and 1890, an example of *howbeit*, unrecorded between 1612 and 1850, of *antetype*, unrecorded between 1612 and 1844, and so on). The linguistic evidence to be found in her writing is rich in literary and cultural information too: Jean Adam is a rare example of a working-class woman who gathered her education where she could (a local minister's library, apparently), whose reading from Milton and the Bible was refracted in the diction of her poems, and who was lucky and determined enough to get herself into print. As a representative of a segment of 'society' at present poorly documented in the *OED*, she merits fuller treatment.[45]

Penelope Aubin's social and economic status was higher, and as a successful novelist she made a far greater impact on a reading public; recently, she has been accorded serious critical treatment by literary historians seeking to recover the lives and works of women influential in their time but subsequently fallen from view. One attraction of her work seems to have been its presentation of impeccably virtuous and beautiful heroines caught up in a fantastic series of adventures, often in exotic faraway places, in which they successfully fended off all manner of predatory male tyrants and villains. Despite its overt moral purpose, however, it contained salacious elements and it sold spectacularly well.[46] Aubin's language is highly conventional, unlike that of her immediate female predecessors Eliza Haywood and Delarivier Manley, and it is tempting to see this linguistic conventionality as a reflection of her similarly conservative moral code and political beliefs. Her poems are notable chiefly for their complex metre, while the writing of her novels is unadorned and clear, with few examples of unusual vocabulary and/or style, little use of imagery, and relatively scant use of adjectives and adverbs. This simplicity, or neutrality, of style was specifically remarked on as a virtue in the Preface to her posthumous collected works (arguably written by Richardson), where it is discussed in terms of her gender: 'She was Mistress of a polite and unaffected Style, and aimed not at the unnatural Flights, and hyperbolical Flourishes, that catch the weaker and more glittering Fancies of some of her Sex . . .'.[47]

It is not surprising, therefore, that my sample of Aubin's work (two poems, the novel *The Life of Madam de Beaumont*, and part of the translation *The History of Genghizcan*) furnishes only a handful of ante- and post-datings for the *OED* record,

45 See Bill Overton, 'The Poems of Jean Adam, 1704-65', *Women's Writing,* 10 (2003), 425–51.

46 See e.g. Sarah Prescott, 'Penelope Aubin and *The Doctrine of Morality*: a reassessment of the pious woman moralist', *Women's Writing,* 1 (1994), 99–112.

47 Penelope Aubin, *A Collection of Entertaining Histories and Novels*, vol. 1 (London, 1739), Preface (unpaginated); see Wolfgang Zach, 'Mrs. Aubin and Richardson's Earliest Literary Manifesto (1739)', *English Studies,* 62 (1981), 271–85.

and has only one clear example of a usage which is unrecorded in the dictionary (*dispose*, meaning 'to dispose in marriage'), one that can be easily found in other contemporary and subsequent texts. Perhaps the conventionality of her diction also rendered her uninteresting to *OED1* editors inclined to quote from female-authored texts only when their usage was in some way singular. On the other hand, as with all the writers studied, her work is full of usages for which the *OED* has no or few eighteenth-century quotations: for example, *enjoy*, defined by the *OED* as 'to have one's will of (a woman)', unrecorded between 1667 (Milton) and 1950; *Israelitish*, unrecorded between 1656 and 1884, *well-horsed*, unrecorded between 1666 and 1884, etc. As with Adam, this probably tells us about *OED1*'s problems with eighteenth-century-quotation evidence rather than about the writer in question.

In *OED3*, Aubin has so far been given comparatively slight prominence. As of September 2009, the revision had included only a further 34 quotations from her writings (making a total of 35 in all), although these are widely distributed: all seven of her novels are now quoted as well as a couple of her translations. Disappointing as this is, given that female novelists of this period are so sparsely represented in the *OED*, it may be that the small number and wide provenance of the new quotations for Aubin is evidence of *OED3*'s wish to quote lightly from a much broader range of sources, rather than, as in the past, favour fewer sources heavily (see section titled '*OED3* and the Future' below).

Anna Seward

Anna Seward (1742–1809) was a figure of substantial literary and public import-ance in her lifetime: indeed, she combined nation and literature in her own person, dubbed 'the'immortal Muse of Britain', as well as 'swan of Lichfield'.[48] Public recognition of her as a distinguished literary authority continued some time after her death; the Rev R. Polwhele (author of the now notorious *The Unsex'd Females*, 1798) was proud to include a selection of her letters to him, along with those from a number of accomplished male contemporaries including Cowper and Walter Scott, in his *Traditions and Recollections* of 1826, listing her name on the title page. But her reputation dropped sharply thereafter, and by the time her *DNB* entry was written (and the *OED* compiled) she was treated as an object of gentle scorn.

Looking up Anna Seward's words in the *OED*, especially those occurring in her poetry, is a wonderful example of the illuminating quality of the *OED*'s docu-mentation of vocabulary. This illumination has nothing to do with the *OED*'s treatment of Seward's poetry specifically, which barely figures in its pages. Rather, this dictionary's close attention to the canonical tradition of male-authored poetry, in which Seward herself strove to play a part, sheds light on the

48 See Norma Clarke, 'Anna Seward, Bluestocking', *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London, 2004), 31–51; John Brewer, '"Queen Muse of Britain"', *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (New York, 1997), 573–612; Harriet Guest, 'Britain Mourn'd', *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago, 2000), 252–67.

connotations of her vocabulary in relation to this tradition. At the same time, consulting the dictionary record reveals how absent women's writing is from the *OED*'s examples of illustrative quotations from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (as from other periods).

This can be swiftly demonstrated from the first few verses of *Llangollen Vale, with Other Poems,* which are characteristic of Seward's later poetic style. Dedicated to her friends Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, the so-called Llangollen Ladies, the collection was published in 1796 (and twice reprinted within the year); the title poem reviews the valley's history and celebrates its landscape and the serene friendship of the two dedicatees. Seward favours an allusive and ornate style that is sometimes clotted and hard to follow:

> Luxuriant Vale, thy Country's early boast,
>   What time great GLENDOUR gave thy scenes to Fame;
> Taught the proud numbers of the English Host,
>   How vain their vaunted force, when Freedom's flame
> Fir'd him to brave the Myriads he abhorr'd
> Wing'd his unerring shaft, and edgd his victor sword . . . (p. 1)
> . . .
> Now with a Vestal luster glows the VALE,
>   Thine, sacred FRIENDSHIP, permanent as pure;
> In vain the stern Authorities assail,
>   In vain Persuasion spreads her silken lure,
> High-born, and high-endow'd, the peerless Twain,
> Pant for coy Nature's charms 'mid silent dale, and plain (p. 6)
> . . .
> The prouder sex as soon, with virtue calm,
> Might win from this bright Pair pure Friendship's spotless palm (p. 9)

These lines exemplify typical features of eighteenth-century poetic diction, for example the opening apostrophe to the landscape (the 'vale') rather than to a person, personified references to abstract concepts ('Fame', 'Freedom', 'FRIENDSHIP' and 'Persuasion'), deliberate archaicisms ('What time' and the adjective 'vestal', both recalling an early historic period invoked in the poem) and the matching compound adjectives 'high-born' and 'high-endow'd'.

Turning to the *OED* for information on this diction, we can see that its usefulness resides in the fact that the dictionary tends to quote just the authors that Seward herself knew well and took pride in echoing: principally Milton, Pope and Cowper, all among the *OED*'s favourite quotation sources, but other influential eighteenth-century writers too, such as Edward Young. The *OED* also shows how later writers like Walter Scott, Shelley and their followers—whether or not influenced by Seward herself—participated enthusiastically in the same tradition, since (especially Scott, himself the *OED*'s most cited writer after Shakespeare) they are often quoted to exemplify subsequent use of the same locution. So the archaic phrase 'What time' (as in Seward's second line quoted above, 'What time great GLENDOUR gave thy scenes to Fame') is illustrated in the *OED* with a range of

male-authored texts including Milton's *Lycidas* (1637: 'What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn'), Cowper's translation of the *Iliad* (1791: 'What time the monster of the Deep pursued The Hero') and D. G. Rossetti, Hopkins and Bridges; while her use of the term *fired,* as in 'when Freedom's flame / Fir'd him to brave the Myriads he abhorr'd' is exemplified with eighteenth-century quotations from Dryden, Young, Fielding and Johnson, followed by Walter Scott:

... **1697** DRYDEN *Virg. Past.* VIII. 99 Verse fires the frozen Veins. **1728** YOUNG *Odes to King* Wks. 1757 I. 176 What hero's praise Can fire my lays, Like His? **1749** FIELDING *Tom Jones* XV. iv, Perceiving she had fired the young Lord's pride. **1775** JOHNSON *Tax. no Tyr.* 22 The nations of Europe were fired with boundless expectation. **1813** SCOTT *Rokeby* I. xii, Fired was each eye, and flushed each brow ...

A comparable line-up of authorities illustrates Seward's *wing'd* (as in 'Wing'd his unerring shaft'):

... **1667** MILTON *P.L.* I. 175 The Thunder, Wing'd with red Lightning and impetuous rage. **1781** COWPER *Catharina* 50 With her book, and her voice, and her lyre, To wing all her moments at home. **1814** CARY *Dante, Parad.* xx. 102 Lively hope, that wing'd The prayers [of St. Gregory] sent up to God for his release. **1818** SCOTT *Hrt. Midl.* xiv, The hours glided on,..whether winged with joy or laden with affliction ...

The same is true again of her phrase 'edged his ... sword', where *OED*'s quotations include the following:

... **1718** POPE *Odyss.* xx. 62 Thy sure divinity shall..edge thy sword to reap the glorious field. **1719** YOUNG *Busiris* IV. i, One dear embrace; 'twill edge my sword. **1808** J. BARLOW *Columb.* VI. 336 Fame fired their courage, freedom edged their swords ...

One could go on making the same point indefinitely about Seward's participation in a male poetic convention stretching both before and after her. Under the *OED* entry for *vestal*, for instance, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Young, Cowper, Scott, Shelley (three times), Keats and Tennyson are all quoted. Seward's invocation of the chaste Roman goddess of the hearth and household ('Now with a Vestal luster glows the VALE', p. 6) is a singularly apt deity for Seward to conjure up in relation both to the Llangollen Ladies themselves, who spurned male attachments, and to the cosy home they created in the valley, which Seward regarded (as she describes in the poem, and elsewhere in her *Letters*) as a sanctuary of female friendship, virtue and happiness.[49] This specifically female, even feminist application of the term is unrecorded in the *OED*.

The *OED*'s characteristic blindness to female literary endeavour, or lack of interest in it, is indicated by its scarce documentation of Seward's poetry: she is cited for seven usages only, despite her prominence, in her own time, as a distinguished poet and influential literary personage. She is thus treated very differently from her male contemporaries of comparable reputation and literary visibility,

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49 A. Constable (ed.), *Letters of Anna Seward*, vol. 4 (London, 1811).

whether poets well known today, such as Cowper, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, etc., or less familiar figures like Edward Young and Henry Cary (the latter, the translator of Dante quoted under *wing'd* above, was a protégé of Seward's and wrote the epigraphic sonnet for the Llangollen Vale collection describing her as 'th'immortal MUSE of Britain'; by contrast with Seward's, Cary's poetry was cited around 425 times in the *OED*). Of course, it is very hard to say what would be a just representation either of Seward's poetry or of women's poetry more generally in the *OED*. But whether the *OED* should have quoted more from Seward's poetry specifically or not, it is clearly unsatisfactory that it quoted so little from *any* woman's poetry. Seward's very conventionality is a feature to recommend it for quotation, as typical of, not deviant from, a certain type of discourse. Moreover, like other women's texts of this period, it is full of examples of usage for which the *OED* had insufficient numbers of eighteenth-century quotations: *arrested*, as in 'Huge blocks of ice th'arrested ship embay' (*Elegy on Captain Cook*, 1780, p. 8), for which the *OED*'s record begins with 1611, citing an entry in Cotgrave's dictionary, with no 'real' examples of use until 1859 and 1871; *beaked*, as in 'While seas on Orm's beak'd promontory burst' ('Hoyle Lake, in *Llangollen Vale*, 1796, p. 17) for which the *OED* has no quotation between 1637 (*Lycidas*, which Seward is probably quoting here) and 1863, and so on.

As with the single Jane Barker quotation mentioned above, it is often a puzzle why, given that in general the *OED* cited so little from women's texts, it chose to cite what it did. And as with Barker's use of *sea-cates*, the explanation often seems to reside in the term's unusualness. Barker's is the only example of *sea-cates* quoted in the *OED*, and four out of the seven Seward poetry quotations are for first cited usages, that is, they are the first example of the use of a word or sense that the *OED* has been able to identify (for the adjectives *crimp*, *limitary*, *reverseless* and the verb *tint* used figuratively). If a woman's text furnishes unique evidence in this way, it seems that its linguistic value will trump the negative value of the gender of its author.

Singularity of diction seems also to be the explanation for the contrasting enthusiasm with which the *OED* cites Seward's *Letters*. Of a total of 237 quotations from Seward altogether, 230 are from prose sources, of which all but a handful are from her correspondence. If we look up each of the individual words for which Seward is cited in the *OED* itself, a striking characteristic emerges: 113 of her 237 quotations are for first-cited use, occurring as the earliest example in the entry or sub-entry for the particular word or sense they illustrate (*addio*, *Dantean*, *girlhood*, *gradatory*, *gothicize*, *high-toned*, etc.). And of these 113 first-cited uses, 44 are *hapax legomena*, that is, Seward's quotations furnish the *only* examples of use that the *OED* has been able to find (*crescent* (vb), *dupism*, *girlism*, *grandmotherism*, *hostilize*, etc.).

These are remarkable proportions. Any reader will feel that the exploratory, often exuberant, use of language in Seward's letters makes them immensely read-able and enjoyable (in contrast to the clogging effect of the ornamented and archaic

diction of the poems), and suspect that Seward is exploiting the language resources of her day with some creativity. The *OED*'s evidence on the originality of Seward's epistolary diction furnishes a demonstrable objective basis for this impression. Of course, at any stage new evidence may come to light from other sources, showing that other writers as well as Seward used these words either before she did or at the same time: the *OED* can never be sure that it really has identified the first (or the sole) example of use. The cumulative nature of its evidence on Seward, however, points clearly to a consistent level of linguistic innovation on her part.[50]

This whets one's appetite for the dictionary's future treatment of Seward, given *OED3*'s stated intention (see below) to swell its quotation bank with examples from female writers. Seward's varied lexical characteristics—conventional diction in the poetry, for which the *OED* notably lacks female examples, and innovative diction (which the *OED* loves to record) in the prose—would seem to make her an especially eligible candidate. But *OED3* has only very slightly increased its quotations from Seward: as of September 2009 it had added a mere 26. Interestingly, 16 of these are from her poetry, with the remaining 10 from her prose, and only three are first quotations, all her poetry: *love-lit*, as in 'Long shall thy love-lit eyes be dim If soon thou art not bravely free', where Seward provides the only quotation other than Edmund Blunden in 1948; *murky* in the sense 'obscure, confused' ('Rise, kindred dunces, from your drear abodes . . . till your growing numbers equal those That hurl'd at Pope's bright verse their murky prose!'), and *perspective* to mean 'In proportion; correctly regarded in terms of relative importance': 'Hope, contemplating the stinted plan, Throws it in perspective, and calms our fears'. Usages from the small sample of letters read in my experiment, passed over by the *OED* in its revisions up to September 2009, include

mannerist (1790): 'the author is so much of a mannerist, that every different personage of the novel writes and speaks in precisely the same style - a style loaded with epithets' (III: 9). The first quotation for this sense, 'a person who adopts a mannered style of writing', is dated 1813 (*OED3* draft revision June 2009)

Miss Mollyish (1790): 'Clean, pretty, clever, faithful, sober, home-keeping Thomas has a Miss Mollyish terror of a gun, and is but a poor horseman' (III: 38). The first quotation for this term, meaning 'Effeminate' (derived from 'Miss Molly', i.e. 'effeminate or homosexual man or boy'), is dated 1813 (*OED3* draft revision June 2008)

naked (1791), of water (sense 7a: 'clear, without weeds'); *OED3* (draft revision June 2008) dates the last use of this obsolete term to 1721. Writing of 'crystal waters, in which alders and willows dip their long arms', Seward refers to her 'life-long aversion to naked waters',

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50 Seward herself believed 'All new words, that are at once forcible and harmonious, do surely enrich and adorn our language' (1788; *Letters* 2, 155), and she often introduced them into her correspondence with a self-conscious flourish (e.g. in 1803, 'The hushy sound (if I may be allowed to coin that epithet) of the sea-shore', *Letters* 6, 97); *OED* defines 'That is characterized by the sound *hush*' and cites Seward as the only example.

for example the 'tressless banks' of the Trent (*OED*'s only quotation—from Carlyle—for *tressless,* as yet unrevised, is dated 1865).

Like her poetry, Seward's letters also contain many examples of eighteenth-century usage undocumented by *OED* to date. It is clear that the two bodies of work will amply repay fresh reading, both for the quality of lexical evidence they contain and to increase the proportion of female-authored sources cited in the *OED* overall.

OED3 and the future

The Preface to *OED3*, published online in 2000, explains the background to the compilation of the first edition of *OED1* and describes how its new reading pro-gramme has been designed to remedy insufficiencies or biases of the past, with special attention being paid to 'women's writing and non-literary texts . . . [and] the eighteenth century'. *OED3* is about a quarter of the way through the alphabet and is re-sculpting the dictionary as it writes: every element in each revised entry has been re-written and re-thought in the light of new research—etymology, spelling, pronunciation, editorial labels and notes—and vast numbers of new quotations have enabled the editors to reconfigure the semantic structure of entries. As anyone working with the new version will attest, the results are dazzling. Yet the *OED3* revisers have continued to add substantial numbers of new quota-tions to the dictionary from canonical male authors already heavily cited in *OED1*: a study of March 2008, for example, found that Defoe's total (originally *c.* 4,300) had risen by around 440, and Henry Fielding's (originally *c.* 1,900) by around 470. Meanwhile, the new quotations for female authors continued to lag behind: the highest number found was 230 new quotations for Burney, while many other female writers, for example, Barbauld with 22 new quotations, were cited in far smaller quantities.[51] Why should this have been the case, and why is it that the sample reading described in this article should have yielded so little evidence of *OED3*'s new reading from women's writing?

This is a difficult question to answer. When work on *OED3* first began, the lexicographers sensibly turned to electronic databases of historical English lan-guage texts as a vastly more efficient and fruitful source of lexical evidence than manual reading alone. In the 1990s, when such databases were in their infancy, they were often slanted towards literary and canonical texts, usually therefore male-authored, and quotations gathered from these sources are still feeding through into the new entries (there can never be any point in throwing good lexical data away).[52] Future revision of the *OED* is likely to draw proportionally

51 Charlotte Brewer, 'The *OED*'s Treatment of Female-Authored Sources of the Eighteenth Century,' in Ingrid Tieken Boone van Ostad and Wim van der Wurff (eds), *Current Issues in Late Modern English* (Bern, 2009), 209–38.

52 *OED3*'s inherited quotation files, maintained in various forms since *OED1* was completed, are also likely to have had many examples (submitted by volunteer readers) excerpted from canonical texts.

more on the many recently available databases of all types of text, whether *Early English Books Online*, *ECCO*, or collections of US and UK newspapers. This means that citations from traditional literary sources will decline, relatively speaking. At the same time, it is possible that female citation may relatively increase.

The present low quotation rates from individual female writers may also be explained by another new *OED3* policy, namely quoting more sources in fewer numbers, rather than quoting fewer sources in large numbers. The latter practice, whatever its causes, resulted in the huge *OED1* totals for Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Pope *et al.*, which *OED3* understandably wants to avoid. Clearly, the new policy had not, by March 2008, affected quotation rates from Defoe and Fielding—but one can see that it is a good thing, since it should give wider linguistic coverage and run less risk of cultural bias. The problem is that those original batches of quotations from canonical male authors are so very huge, dominating the entries in both *OED1* and *OED3* (in which they are carried forward). How will the balance between male and female citation (whatever that balance should be) be redressed, or at any rate improved, unless the lexicographers now make a determined effort to cite intensively from female-authored texts? Moreover, how can we (or the lexicographers themselves) fully understand this issue, given that we cannot search the *OED* electronically by gender of quotation and thus see what the proportions are at present?[53]

How much does all this matter? I have not turned up a single example of a word or usage found in female-authored texts, unrecorded in the *OED* over the eighteenth century, that might not also be found in a male-authored one, if we looked hard enough. (*Hapax legomena*, which in some instances seem to figure highly in women's writing, may perhaps be left out of consideration: by definition, they have not contributed to the development of the language). To answer this final question we can return to Simpson's words quoted above, pointing to the cultural function of the *OED*: 'It not only provides an important record of the evolution of our language, but also documents the continuing development of our society'. To document the eighteenth century with thousands of male-authored quotations and a mere drizzle of female-authored ones is to distort the historical, literary and, therefore, linguistic, record as we now understand it. The result is to obliterate the evidence of one half of a body of language users endlessly discussed (and often complained about) by the other, and to do a disservice to editors and readers of eighteenth-century texts who wish to see a full representation of the usage of the time: female writers were not, in fact, restricted to eccentric and specialized vocabulary, and they did write poetry. Notwithstanding the imbalance in the bibliographic record, eighteenth-century female users of language (whether deplored or

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53 *OED3* has created a partnership with Browns Woman's Writing Project (see http://www.wwp.brown.edu/about/OED.html, accessed 11 December 2009), which has 'thus far contributed over 800 citations for the letters M through R'; to assess the impact of this we need to know how many new quotations have been added from male-authored sources.

celebrated) were significant contributors to linguistic and literary culture and we should expect to see this reflected in the *OED*.[54]

The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the representation of eighteenth-century language in the *OED* as a whole. Here the bibliographic record is vast, giving ample opportunity to the present *OED* lexicographers to redress their predecessors' scanted treatment of this period. The most recent analysis of *OED3*'s distribution of quotations by century, conducted in December 2005 (and now unfortunately unrepeatable), shows a clear upward trend in quotations dated 1700–1799 which has almost certainly continued, fuelled by the wealth of lexical information available on *ECCO*.[55] In this respect, it looks as if *OED3* is correcting the chronological imbalance detected by Schäfer in the dictionary's treatment of the growth and development of the language. Now the revisers must turn their attention to correcting the imbalance in the treatment of female-authored quotations too.

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54 Especially given recent research indicating that, in some circumstances, women more than men may be linguistic innovators: see William Labov, *Principles of Linguistic Change*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1994), 292–3.

55 See http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/content/view/62/149/. Since 13 March 2008, *OED3* has revised selected entries from across the alphabet as well as in alphabetical sequence. Because *OED3* is—most unfortunately—electronically merged with *OED2*, it is now virtually impossible to compare *OED2* with *OED3* to identify changes in the rate of quotation over specified date ranges, since one cannot isolate the revised alphabet-ranges and thus compare like with like.