

Gender in the archive: women in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*

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The *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* and the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* are rightly acclaimed as landmarks in the history of both scholarship and publishing.² Both enterprises were embarked on by men inspired by ideas of nationhood on the one hand and ideals of scholarly comprehensiveness on the other. Both have recently been subject to programmes of extensive revision and republication. After twelve years of research, the sixty volume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB)* was published in September 2004, under the editorship of H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, while a new, third edition of *OED* is gradually emerging in online publication from a team of lexicographers headed by John Simpson and Edmund Weiner.

While the compilers of the *OED* restricted their research to printed sources, the editors and contributors to the *DNB* relied heavily on archival material which they used according to the scholarly standards of the day. Soon after, and indeed during publication, both dictionaries came to be regarded as pillars of national scholarship, the works themselves became repositories of information to be mined in research. What and who are included in the dictionaries, and what and who are left out, are

¹ This paper was originally given at the conference organised in September 2004 by the universities of Oxford and Princeton on 'Women and the Book', in the section 'Women in the archive'. Elizabeth Baigent was the research director of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford DNB)* 1993–2003 and is now at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford; Vivienne Larminie has been a research editor for the seventeenth century at the *Oxford DNB* since 1998, and Charlotte Brewer is a fellow of Hertford College, Oxford and is researching the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* in the twentieth century. The authors would like to thank the staff of the *Oxford DNB* and the *OED* for their help in the writing of this paper, Martin Maw, archivist of Oxford University Press (OUP), the Secretary to the Delegates of OUP for permission to consult and quote from the *OED* archives, David Norbrook and Nigel Smith, the organisers of the conference, and Jeremy Black, the editor of *Archives*, for the invitation to publish the paper.

² The *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* was published in sixty-three volumes at quarterly intervals between 1885 and 1900, under the editorship of Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* was published in fascicles between 1884 and 1928, under the editorship of J.A.H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W.A. Craigie, and C.T. Onions.

questions influenced by the nature of archives; they are also questions on which hangs the direction of future research which uses the dictionaries as archives. The place of women in the archive at large is thus one which is reflected in the dictionaries and which the dictionaries can actively alter. This paper examines first the *DNB* and its successor the *Oxford DNB*, and then the various editions of the *OED* in order to elucidate the place of women in the works and to explore how this both reflects and shapes wider scholarship.

Women in the *DNB*

The editors of the original *DNB* produced no editorial policy statement or account of their working methods so analysis is based on inference from the resultant text together with the views of the editors expressed elsewhere. Four major factors affecting the portrayal of women in the dictionary emerge.

First, the original editors, the editorial staff, and almost all contributors were men.³ In the pages of the *Athenæum* Leslie Stephen, the founding editor, sought advice from metropolitan men of letters like himself on whom to include in the dictionary. ‘Most of those working in-house [in the *DNB*’s editorial office at 14 Waterloo Place, London] were journeymen “men of letters” ... The *Old DNB* exemplified the “men of letters” tradition and rewarded its practitioners with fulsome coverage of their predecessors’.⁴ The editorial team, which included Sidney Lee as joint editor after Stephen’s health broke, were remarkably catholic and unmoralistic in their inclusion policy: they did not exclude the odd, the wicked, the amoral, the deviant, or the lesser figure, and were ahead of their age in finding some areas such as sport worthy of historical enquiry and record; but the national life which they sought to epitomise in the *DNB* was male. If, following Benedict Anderson, we consider the nation as an ‘imagined community’, we see that the *DNB*’s editors’ imagination did

³ Gillian Fenwick, *Women and the Dictionary of National Biography*, (Aldershot, 1994); H.C.G. Matthew, *Leslie Stephen and the New Dictionary of National Biography*, (Cambridge, 1997), p.18. Forty-five of the original *DNB*’s 653 contributors were women; none of its sub editors was a woman, though Matthew raises the possibility that Charlotte Fell-Smith, a prolific contributor, might have worked in-house. Elizabeth Lee, sister of the second editor Sidney Lee, is listed as a contributor from 1892 and was officially on the in-house staff from 1903; it is possible that she had first contributed under her brother’s name. See Gillian Fenwick, ‘Elizabeth Lee’, in H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison eds, *Oxford DNB* (Oxford, 2004), and Brian Harrison, “‘A slice of their lives’”: editing the *DNB*, 1882–1999’, *English Historical Review* 119: 484 (November 2004), 1179–201.

⁴ H.C.G. Matthew, *Leslie Stephen and the New Dictionary of National Biography*, p.20.; J. Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life since 1800*, (Harmondsworth, 1973); J. Walter, ‘Seven questions about national biography’, pp.19–34 in Iain McCalman ed., *National Biographies and National Identities: a Critical Approach to Theory and Editorial Practice* (Canberra, 1996), esp. pp.29–30.

not readily extend to women.⁵ Only 3 per cent of those included in the original edition were women.

A second critical factor in coverage of women was its unrepresentative nature: male editors chose women men found interesting.⁶ Mary Anne Talbot, the British Amazon, Elizabeth Fenning, poisoner, and Margaret Catchpole, adventuress, joined disproportionate numbers of glamorous female aristocrats, actresses, courtesans, musicians, society beauties, and eye catching criminals, squeezing out women judged worthy but dull: nurses, nursery nurses, schoolmistresses, voluntary charitable workers.⁷ As Colin Matthew pointed out, the large numbers of schoolmasters included in the original edition show that it was not teaching *per se* which the male editors judged dull, but simply the teaching of girls by women: Miss Beale was the only schoolmistress included in the old *DNB*.⁸ The original *DNB* then did not simply accurately reflect women's exclusion from national life: it systematically exaggerated it.

A third, linked, factor was a conscious separation of public and private spheres.⁹ Leslie Stephen considered that the biographer's proper task was to record the public life of the subject, not the private life. In his view H. Halford Vaughan's biography of Thomas Carlyle made quite inappropriate incursions into the private life of the subject and his wife Jane.¹⁰ If this was true of full-length biographies, it applied even more to short notices in a biographical dictionary. As editor of the *DNB* Stephen did not prohibit inclusion of the private life, but articles which emerged under his editorship consistently subordinated it to the public.¹¹ The effects were both quantitative and qualitative. Large numbers of women who were active in areas which were to some extent private – for instance, as translators or secretaries, or as already noted, teachers or nurses – were excluded from the dictionary. In biographies of men the personal context was subordinated to the career, the life to the works. While *DNB* articles otherwise generally followed a strict chronological order, the

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983). On general criteria for selection of subjects in *DNB* and its Supplements, see Brian Harrison, 'Comparative biography and the D.N.B.', *Comparative Criticism* 10 (2004), 3–26.

⁶ Janet Howarth, Associate Editor typescript report, 1993, *DNB* archives.

⁷ Rosemary Mitchell, 'The monstrous regiment of women', *New Dictionary of National Biography Newsletter* 1 (1995)

⁸ Matthew, *Leslie Stephen and the New Dictionary of National Biography*, p.18.

⁹ Matthew, *Leslie Stephen and the New Dictionary of National Biography*, p.16.

¹⁰ Alan Bell ed., *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book* (Oxford, 1977), pp.69–70.

¹¹ H.C.G. Matthew, 'Dictionaries of national biography', pp.1–18 in McCalman, *National Biographies*.

marriage and family details came after the description of the death of the subject; characteristically ‘in [date] he married [wife’s name], daughter of [father’s name and profession] and by her he had issue [number of sons, number of daughters]’. Women were adjuncts first of father, then of husband, then of sons, lastly of daughters; marriage was a means to advantageous alliance with another family and to secure legal succession. In contrast, in women’s articles marriage generally appeared in correct chronological sequence as women’s private life was judged ‘naturally’ to affect the public.

Finally, the language used to describe women was often gendered. Those who against all odds made it into the dictionary were self-evidently not exemplars of the alleged womanly virtues of modesty and reticence. Some of them were not exemplars of virtues of any sort. This gave them a distinctly ambiguous status and often their memorialists, particularly if they were friends of the subject, strove to reassure readers of their true womanliness. Lucy Toulmin Smith wrote of her friend and protégée the explorer Mary Kingsley (1862–1900): ‘Although of daring and masculine courage, loving the sea and outdoor life, Miss Kingsley was full of womanly tenderness, sympathy, and modesty, entirely without false shame.’ An examination of Kingsley’s life and works suggests that this description of her womanly virtues is scarcely plausible: Toulmin Smith is evidently trying to resolve her friend’s sexually ambiguous position by emphasizing her womanliness.¹² There are parallels in men’s articles in which readers are reassured of the inherent manliness of the man whose actions call this into question, but examples are few. Furthermore, women subjects apparently had to be good, not just talented. J.A.F. Maitland’s memoir on singer Jenny Lind (1820–1887) declares that her public reputation rested on ‘the charm of her personality, probably quite as much as the glory of her wonderful voice’, and comments that, ‘her absolute integrity of life and character, her intellectual vigour, as well as her generosity of disposition, were in strong contrast with the characteristics of too many among her professional companions’. Lind’s piety is of great importance in her life and reception, and needs careful examination. However, it also becomes the peg for a moralising comment not only on Lind herself, but on her morally equivocal contemporaries. And if the female subject were neither womanly nor

¹² Kingsley herself tried to resolve the ambiguity by appearing before British lecture audiences in black, old fashioned dress and with hair scraped back, presenting herself as old and therefore beyond sexual ambiguity. Dea Birkett, *Mary Kingsley: Imperial Adventuress*, (Basingstoke, 1992); Dea Birkett, ‘Mary Kingsley’, *Oxford DNB*.

obviously good, readers were assured that she was not actually tainted. Writing on author Aphra Behn, (1640?–1689), Edmund Gosse was unable ‘to defend her manners as correct or her attitude to the world as delicate’, but confidently concluded ‘that a woman so witty, so active, and so versatile, was not degraded, though she might be lamentably unconventional.’ Unlike a man, a woman could not be both talented and bad. Although the *DNB* could be morally censorious of men,¹³ in general it was not. As Leslie Stephen put it: ‘The dictionary writer...is bound so far as he can to make the facts tell their own story’.¹⁴ But the facts of women’s lives are often not left to tell their own story: a moral commentary is provided by both male and female memorialists lest the story be misread.

If the tone of writing became less extreme in the *DNB* Supplements, which were published at ten-, latterly five-yearly intervals in the twentieth century to memorialise those who had died after the completion of the original dictionary, the problem of numbers was just as pressing. Far more than the original *DNB*, the *Supplements* memorialised the great and the good, excluding the less important and the odd. This was partly a result of the tight constraints on space and consequent inclusion of a smaller percentage of the population: it was not devised to exclude women, but it had that effect.¹⁵ There was also a clear narrowing of intellectual focus. Whilst there is no evidence that Stephen and Lee excluded women simply because of their sex, there is a suggestion that this happened in the Supplements: Christine Nicholls, editor of the later Supplements and of *Missing Persons* (1993) cites ‘the editor of the 1920s volume writing to his co-editor with the words “if she had been a man we would have considered including her”’.¹⁶ The marginalisation of women in the dictionary’s editorial structure continued and was paralleled by their exclusion from the university structure: of its 12 editors since the dictionary came to Oxford in 1917, ten were men. All ten held college fellowships; neither woman did.¹⁷

The Oxford DNB

¹³ The conclusion of the article on George IV is spectacularly and famously damning of his morals, actions, and influence.

¹⁴ Leslie Stephen, ‘National biography’, in Leslie Stephen, *Studies of a Biographer* (4 vols, London, 1898–1902) and discussion of this in J. Walter, ‘Seven questions about national biography’, pp.19–34 in McCalman, *National Biographies*.

¹⁵ p.viii in Brian Harrison, ‘Introduction’, pp.v–xix in vol.1, *Oxford DNB*.

¹⁶ p.57 in C. Nicholls, ‘Missing lives: an editorial perspective’, pp.55–61 in McCalman, *National Biographies*.

¹⁷ Robert Faber and Brian Harrison, ‘The Dictionary of National Biography: a publishing history’, pp.171–92 in Robin Myers, M. Harris and Giles Mandelbrote eds, *Lives in Print: Biography and the Book Trade from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, (London and New Castle, DE, 2002).

Although John Gross rightly cautions that, in reviewing the *DNB*'s treatment of women, 'it is possible to exaggerate the sins of the past' and to misrepresent some individual shocking cases as the norm, the *Oxford DNB*'s editorial team nonetheless faced a considerable challenge in reworking the place of women in the dictionary.¹⁸ When the project was established in 1992 Colin Matthew, the editor, began to develop the dictionary's first explicit editorial policy for approval by its Supervisory Committee.¹⁹ He identified ten classes of people underrepresented in the *DNB* to the extent that systematic attention would be needed to improve matters. One of these classes was women. The challenge was both quantitative – to get more women entrants – and qualitative – to change the way women were portrayed in their own articles and those of others where they featured as wives, mothers, or daughters.²⁰

One of the first ways in which Matthew set out to ensure the challenge was met was to appoint women to important editorial positions and particularly to create a post whose holder had particular responsibility for the representation of women. Four of the nine consultant editors chosen were women, among them Jane Garnett, fellow in modern history at Wadham College, Oxford, and historian of nineteenth-century intellectual, religious, and cultural life, appointed specifically as consultant editor for women. Her task was to point out deficiencies in the representation of women in the dictionary, to devise strategies to address them and to monitor progress.²¹ Many of the associate editors, who advised on who should be included and reviewed all articles before publication, were women; they had responsibility both for areas where gender was unspecified and for those where it was (for example, nineteenth-century female voluntary workers). Of the in-house research staff, the (only) research director and 14 of the 33 research editors were women; all research staff were committed to the goal of fuller representation of women in the dictionary.²² Women were likewise well represented among out-of-house editorial staff and contributors.

¹⁸ p.13 in John Gross, 'Feminine wills: a literary tour through the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 December 2004, pp.12–13.

¹⁹ Report of April 1993, typescript, *DNB* archives.

²⁰ Where women (and men) had entries in *DNB*, in the electronic version of *Oxford DNB* it is possible to view the original article alongside the new by clicking on 'DNB archive', which reveals a second window. The 'DNB archive' in this sense differs from the paper records which comprise the dictionary's historical and working papers, available in Oxford for the use of the editorial team.

²¹ Jane Garnett, 'Women and gender in the *New DNB*', *New Dictionary of National Biography Newsletter* 1 (1995).

²² Full lists of consultant, associate and research editors are given in Harrison, 'Introduction'.

Plans were made to increase the number of women in the *Oxford DNB* by systematic review of areas of life where women were active but previously unrecognised or which constituted new topics for historical research (for example children's literature, popular journalism, gardening, interior design, sport, and popular culture), and by ensuring that women practitioners were properly represented in areas already well covered by the dictionary and that a continuing emphasis on public life (which is proper for any dictionary of national biography) was not used as a device to exclude women.²³ Meanwhile, plans were made to change the tenor of articles. Neither men nor women would be subjected to moral judgement, though the reputations of both were a matter of legitimate historical assessment. Family details would be provided for both men and women. This recognised that parental influence might be formative, that marriage brought important affective bonds and ties of kinship and obligation, and that relatives of both sexes played vital supporting roles. Above all, it acknowledged that family life disturbs careers and public lives, and insisted that the style of biographies should reflect that messiness and interpenetration.²⁴

Success?

Given the decisions to retain in the new dictionary all the subjects from the old and to set the new total at around 50,000 articles, new women entrants had to share the 13,500 new places with deserving candidates from other neglected groups. Considering the pressing claims of other groups and the relative youth of the discipline of women's history, the rise in the proportion of women from 5 to 10 per cent of the total and the fact that they constitute 25 per cent of new entrants of the dictionary as published in September 2004 are significant achievements.²⁵ In general, proportions of women increase chronologically through the dictionary, reflecting partly women's undeniably higher public profile, partly evolving recognition of achievement in an ever more complex society, and partly greater parity of evidence for men's and for women's lives in more recent times. It is therefore on the more challenging centuries before 1800 that much of the following assessment will focus.

²³ Elizabeth Baigent, 'Nationality and dictionaries of national biography', pp.63–73 in McCalman, *National Biographies*.

²⁴ For a discussion of the interpenetration of private and public life in the context of the Australian DNB see p.42 in Pat Grimshaw, 'Female lives and the tradition of nation-making', pp.35–53 in McCalman, *National Biographies*.

²⁵ These and other useful statistics are to be found in Harrison, 'Introduction'.

Here it was necessary not only to identify more women worth inclusion but also to persuade potential contributors that there was sufficient archival evidence for an adequate biography to be constructed. Without collaboration between academics, archivists, local historians and others, and without a sharing of information and techniques, substantial progress would have been impossible. The fact that women could change their surnames once, twice, or more over a lifetime could cause confusion when initial suggestions for inclusion were made and hamper research thereafter. There were temporary duplications as subjects appeared under different names, sometimes with different occupations, but as more and more articles were loaded on to the electronic data and text bases which underlay the whole edition, and were cross-checked, fragments were reunited and new connections made.²⁶ Scholars were sometimes dissatisfied with offering only a partial life to a dictionary which also contained some of the most thoroughly documented lives in history. They feared being able to say too little, but the in-house view was that a partial life was better than no life, and that more might be discovered before publication. In the longer term editors realised that there was a case for placing in the public eye a rough sketch which future researchers might refine.

The desire to give greater coverage to other neglected areas also led to the inclusion of more women. The appearance for the first time of six Scottish queens illustrates simultaneously both this development and the broadening of the dictionary's geographical range.²⁷ Even if queens are regarded as exceptional, the fact remains that once a tendency to concentrate overly on metropolitan activity was abandoned and a spotlight was turned on provincial society, economy and politics, active women emerged running estates, establishing gardens and parks, building country houses, and maintaining such a commanding presence in their locality that no

²⁶ In its published form *Oxford DNB* is easier to search for variant names than its predecessor. In the print version not only are cross-references supplied from titles of honour to the relevant entries under family name, but also from the more significant of women's alternative names to the surname by which they were best known to contemporaries, chosen as the entry name. Thus, for example, there are cross references from 'Willoughby, Katherine' and 'Brandon, Katherine' to 'Bertie, Katherine, duchess of Suffolk' and from 'Egerton, Alice' to 'Spencer, Alice, countess of Derby'. In the online version sophisticated tagging allows identification of a particular article whichever variant of the search term is employed. Thus entering 'Cross', 'Eliot' or 'Evans' in the search field produces a list of possibilities including the novelist 'Evans, Marian, *pseud[onym]* George Eliot'. In *DNB* she was found exclusively under 'Cross, Mary Ann'.

²⁷ Maud (*d.* 1131) [see under David I], Ermengarde (*d.* 1233), Marie (*d.* 1284), Elizabeth (*d.* 1327), Margaret (*d.* in or after 1374), Euphemia (*b.* in or before 1329?, *d.* 1388/1389).

wise or ambitious man could overlook them.²⁸ Thus, for example, new entries include lord of the manor Dorothy Tasburgh (1531–1577), parish constable Jane Kitchen (*d.* 1658), agricultural improver Elizabeth Pinckney (1722–1793), and several female horticulturalists and botanists.²⁹ A search for early industrialists identified female iron manufacturers and cotton manufacturers, and the owner of a gunpowder works, while a survey of Britain’s maritime past yielded Mary Lacy (*b.* 1740), mariner and shipwright. Perhaps unsurprisingly, women were revealed in greater numbers in the commercial and financial sectors. In addition to milliners and lace-dealers, there is a grocer and a miller, banker Charlotte Matthews (1759–1802), several moneylenders in the mould of Janet Fockart (*d.* 1596) of Edinburgh, and Elizabeth Hampton (*d.* 1661), an Oxford laundress notorious because she presided over a Presbyterian conventicle. Elizabeth Wilford (*d.* 1559) was included as a founder member of the Muscovy Company, trading with Russia, while Catherine Nicks (*d.* 1709) traded in Madras, India. A general effort to improve representation of medical professions and trades likewise resulted in new entries on women, among them physician Mary Trye (*fl.* 1675) and bonesetter Sarah Mapp (1706–1737), as well as, perhaps more predictably, notable Cheshire healer Bridget Bostock (*c.* 1678–1749) and several midwives and nurses, including Elizabeth Alkin (*c.* 1600–1655), otherwise known as ‘Parliament Joan’ for her anti-royalist espionage and publishing activities.

The innovation of group articles helped to raise the profile of women, just as it proved an effective means of capturing significant collective activity in business. Female subjects for whom a rounded life could not be written but whose achievement was notable when placed in context were represented in articles such as those on ‘Women in trade and industry in York’ (*c.* 1300–1500) and 22 ‘Women traders and artisans in London’ (*c.* 1200–1500). While in later centuries women appear as the Edinburgh Seven (*act.* 1869–1873), a group who attempted to gain professional

²⁸ This is true also of the medieval period. Eadgifu (*fl.* 1066), Matilda de Percy, countess of Warwick (*d.* 1204) and Margaret Brotherton, duchess of Norfolk (*c.* 1320–1399), were among the richest of magnates. Across the chronological span articles such as these are of course underpinned by the wealth of research in local record offices undertaken in the century since *DNB* appeared, with the family papers of aristocratic and gentry families being especially valuable in the instances cited here. The advance of local record society publications has also made much previously inaccessible information readily available.

²⁹ All women cited as examples either have their own entry in *Oxford DNB* or are mentioned as a co-subject in another person’s article. The articles are not individually referenced here but may be found by searching on the given name.

qualifications in medicine from the University of Edinburgh, or ‘Women agents on active service in France’ (1942–1945), in the early modern period they feature among the witches of North Berwick in the 1590s, and the witches and their accusers of Salem, Massachusetts in the 1690s. Meanwhile, as family articles revealed more women in business, like the female member of the Spring family (*per. c.* 1400–*c.* 1550), clothiers of Lavenham, so they helped gentlewomen in particular assume their appropriate place in the ruling elites of the shires over successive generations from the de Beauchamp family (*c.* 1080–1265) to the Bedingfield family (1476–1760) and beyond.

Across the chronological span and gender divide of *Oxford DNB*, articles have been transformed because of new types of evidence to which contributors to its Victorian predecessor did not have easy access.³⁰ Some of the sources now most useful for supplying essential detail on men are simply unavailable for women.³¹ Even here, however, there are some institutional records ripe for exploitation. Convent records have been used to good effect in new entries on notable abbesses and nuns, like Elizabeth Knatchbull (1584–1629) and Mary Knatchbull (1610–1696). Because women change their names, it may be challenging to trace them in parish registers, but imaginative persistence may be rewarded. The many speculative entries in the *International Genealogical Index* are a hindrance and its concentration on birth/baptism rather than marriage or burial records is frustrating, but true hits are immensely valuable: speedily found online, and subsequently verifiable elsewhere, they can open up a trail leading to other surnames, spouses, children and places of at least temporary residence.³² While contributors for later centuries were offered a search for birth, marriage and death certificates, contributors working on the sixteenth

³⁰ Another editorial priority was to lead readers to collections of manuscript sources about the subject of the article. A questionnaire organized by Colin Matthew at the beginning of the project revealed information about archives and illustrations to be the two new features which readers most wanted to see added to the new dictionary. Online archive catalogues, notably that of the National Register of Archives (NRA), and the specialist knowledge of contributors and the editorial staff provided information for this section. Thanks are due to the staff of the NRA for their co-operation in this section of the dictionary. Electronic links to the NRA are available in the online dictionary.

³¹ For example, registers of long-established schools, universities, and professional and learned bodies.

³² Set up by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and available both on the world wide web and on CD, the *International Genealogical Index* is a database of birth, baptism, marriage, and burial information relating to people from all over the world. It is compiled both from evidence drawn from parish registers or their equivalent (via transcript, microfilm or published editions) and from information supplied by church members and others. In writing the *Oxford DNB* it was especially useful in articles from the early modern period when it could be cross-checked against parish registers.

and seventeenth centuries were routinely offered a will or probate search.³³ This became standard for male entries, but because few married women made wills or left property, seemed not to help us with many female entries. Yet even here, husbands' wills might prove remarkably revealing of detail on wives' perceived estate management capabilities or their active networks of kin. Where women's wills did exist, they could illuminate a whole world. Little was previously known of Anne Walker (1631–1660x1667), whose benefaction led to the establishment of the free grammar school at Charlbury, Oxfordshire; the *Victoria County History* pointed to her significance but not her life story.³⁴ Her will reveals 'that she had a wide circle of family and friends, especially in the London mercantile community, probably sharing puritan sympathies', and an uncle at Dort in the Netherlands; it also reveals her own religious preferences, and thus hints at the source of her charity.³⁵

As already suggested, *DNB* had included a good many female criminals. However, study in the twentieth century of the records of central law courts, assizes and quarter sessions as well as of legal material in private collections has not only revealed additional celebrated litigants and defendants but also allowed contributors to place all connected with the law in a secure social context.³⁶ It has enabled assessment of the significance and impact of their actions and a probing of the accuracy of the more colourful accounts of lawbreaking in the literature of the time. Articles on rioter Anne Carter (*d.* 1629), swindler Elizabeth Harriet Grieve (*b.c.* 1723, *d.* in or after 1782), prostitute and thief Elizabeth Lyon (*fl.* 1722–1726) ('Edgware Bess'), 'molly house' keeper Margaret or 'Mother' Clap (*fl.* 1710–1726) and murderer Margaret Hobry (*d.* 1688) offer windows on contemporary attitudes to deviant female behaviour. Hester Davenport (1642–1717), briefly noted by Samuel

³³ The latter practice was initiated following the beginning of work on the general seventeenth century area in January 1998. *Oxford DNB* is very grateful to the General Register Office, local record offices, and metropolitan and provincial probate offices across Britain for their assistance in what proved cumulatively a major research exercise.

³⁴ *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, vol.1, p.466; vol.10, p.155. Where evidence revealed that a subject's death occurred at an unknown point between two dates, as in the case of Anne Walker where the date of making the will and the date of probate were known but neither the day of death nor of burial, the dictionary provided the possible range with the convention 'earliest year x latest year'. Many other women, across the chronological span, appear for the first time as a result of founding schools or colleges, or of their educational benefaction. See also, for example, Dervorguilla de Balliol, lady of Galloway (*d.* 1290), Mary de St Pol, countess of Pembroke (*c.* 1304–1377), Katherine Berkeley, Lady Berkeley (*d.* 1385), Dorothy Wadham (1534/1535–1618), Bridget Bevan (*bap.* 1698, *d.* 1771).

³⁵ Joan Dils, 'Anne Walker', *Oxford DNB* (2004).

³⁶ Litigation over property and inheritance brought women into the public eye over many centuries. See for example Agnes of Essex, countess of Oxford (*b.* 1151, *d.* in or after 1206).

Pepys as an actress whose stage career was shortened when she became the mistress of the earl of Oxford, can have a rounded biography because of the will and published parish registers which illuminate her later life, but above all because of the discovery of a court case surrounding a bogus marriage to the earl in the dining room of a woman who kept a chandler's shop in Harts Horn Lane, London. Disentanglement of fact from fiction was a key feature of this article, as it was in the accounts of pirates and highwaywomen, some of whom, like Catherine Ferrers (1634–1660) were the inspiration (sometimes falsely, for it proves that Catherine was not, after all, the eponymous *Wicked Lady*) for twentieth-century films.

Although *DNB* gave some place to female courtiers, particularly the scandalous, coverage was far from comprehensive. Publication of further calendars of official papers, and a century of scholarship on central records, has led to the recognition of women who had an important impact on political life. Included for the first time are, for instance, Mary Stafford (c. 1499–1543) and Jane Boleyn (d. 1542), who as sister and sister-in-law of Henry VIII's second queen were caught up as tightly as any in court faction, the 'Queen's Maries' (act. 1548–1567), attendants on Mary, Queen of Scots, and Frances Howard, countess of Somerset (1590–1632), whose trial for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury constituted for many contemporaries the most shocking proof that the court of James VI and I was hopelessly riddled with scandal and corruption.³⁷ Finding prominent female plotters and rebels was not difficult: for instance new entries include female supporters of the rebel duke of Monmouth from different social strata.³⁸ But recent research has also brought to light women who, more subtly, exercised crucial patronage in parliamentary elections (for example Katherine Lowther, viscountess Lonsdale (1653–1713)), were hostesses of political gatherings (for example Georgiana Cavendish, duchess of Devonshire (1757–1806), and Elizabeth Lamb, viscountess Melbourne (bap. 1751, d. 1818)), and intrigued on behalf of husbands or friends in government. The parliamentary petitioning of Susanna Bastwick (d. in or after 1657) and the courtroom outburst of Anne Fairfax, Lady Fairfax (1617/18–1665), at the trial of Charles I help them gain places

³⁷ New entries for the medieval period include women who were in varying degrees personally politically active or notable dynastic pawns, e.g. Matilda of Lancaster, countess of Ulster (d. 1377), Anne of Woodstock, countess of Stafford (c. 1382–1438), Joan Beaufort, countess of Westmorland (1379?–1440), Cecily, duchess of York (1415–1495).

³⁸ For example: the duke's wife, Anna Scott, duchess of Buccleuch in her own right (1651–1732); Mary Jennings (bap. 1649?), see under 'George Speke (1623–1689)'; Ann Smith (fl. 1682–1686).

respectively alongside the radical agitator John Bastwick and the military commander Thomas Fairfax.

Religious significance accounted for a sizeable proportion of women in *DNB* but there had been an emphasis on the exceptionally saintly or eccentric. Although there are further examples of those, like the female ‘Messiah’, M. Marsin (*fl.* 1669–1729) or the hermit Juliana Popjoy (1714–1777), there are many women who fulfilled more mainstream roles. There are Anglo-Saxon abbesses, pre-Reformation visionaries, a group of Lollard women, Quaker leaders, Baptist preachers, and formidable matriarchs who advanced the careers of leading puritan ministers or whose ingenuity sheltered Catholic priests on the run.³⁹ As their work has received greater attention, so the number of female spiritual diarists and authors of religious meditations has increased.⁴⁰ In the context of more integrated treatment of life and works in all articles, *Oxford DNB* has included for the first time women like Alice Lucy, Lady Lucy (*c.* 1594–1648), and Mary Gunter (1586–1622), who were the subjects of celebrated funeral sermons or godly lives.

Perhaps the greatest source of articles on women for the period before 1800 remains, as in *DNB*, the area of literature and the arts, although even here the balance has shifted to comprehend more craftswomen and new approaches are apparent. Painters and illustrators and now joined by silversmiths and designers.⁴¹ The explosion of interest in early music has revealed a wider range of singers, now matched by instrumentalists.⁴² Actresses are complemented by theatre managers and shareholders like Sarah Baker (1736/1737–1816) and Elizabeth Baskerville (*bap.* 1573, *d.* 1649). It has become clear not only that a greater number of women were educated than previously supposed, and to a higher level (conclusions reflected in the greater representation of teachers and governesses), but that women were notably involved in every aspect of the development of the printed book. Thus a king’s printer in Edinburgh, Agnes Campbell (1637–1716), and a typefounder, Elizabeth Caslon (1730–1795), appear, together with female printers and booksellers.

³⁹ For example Bugga (*fl.* late 7th–early 8th cent.), Bugga (*d.* 759x65), Richeldis de Favereches (*fl.* *c.* 1130), Jane Wentworth, Maid of Ipswich (*c.* 1503–1572?), Elizabeth Estaugh (1680–1762), Mrs Attaway (*fl.* 1645–1646), Lady Frances Hobart (1603–1664), Jane Gordon, viscountess Kenmure (*d.* 1675), Anne Line (*d.* 1601).

⁴⁰ For example Grace Mildmay, Lady Mildmay (*c.* 1552–1620), Hester Ann Rogers (1756–1794).

⁴¹ For example Hester Bateman (*bap.* 1708, *d.* 1794), Anna Maria Garthwaite (1688–1763?).

⁴² For example Catherine Cibber (*bap.* 1669, *d.* 1734), Miss Davis (*b.* *c.* 1736, *d.* in or after 1755), Mary Dering, Lady Dering (*bap.* 1629, *d.* 1704).

Equally, there are book collectors, like Frances Wolfreston (*bap.* 1607, *d.* 1677), and library founders, like Frances Matthew (1550/1551–1629). The flowering of interest in women’s writing over the last generation is reflected in an expansion in the numbers of published translators, polemicists, travel writers and biographers, but the rediscovery of many family archives and of extensive manuscript circulation has also revealed the participation of women in a broader range of literary or literate activity.⁴³ Newly evident poets and playwrights have been included, while the lives of patrons like Alice Spencer, countess of Derby (1559–1637), and Katherine Jones, countess of Ranelagh (1615–1691), can now be written. As compilers of cookery books and of account books, women emerge as managers and authoritative purveyors of advice.⁴⁴ In letter-writers like Joan Barrington (*c.* 1558–1641) or Elizabeth Percy, duchess of Northumberland (1716–1776), women are seen as puritan networkers, family fixers, and political movers and shakers.

The *Oxford DNB* has more than 10,000 illustrations, chosen in consultation with the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) through the consultant editor for likeness, Dr Peter Funnell.⁴⁵ It was important to select images which mirrored the editorial priorities of the new dictionary, not the old. If the old *DNB* concentrated relentlessly on women that men found interesting, the NPG did so to an even greater extent, revealing just how much women were regarded as an ornament to national life, a superficial decorative element. The problems were again both quantitative – how to get enough images of women for them to be a real visual presence in the new dictionary – and qualitative – how to avoid visual stereotyping by balancing stylish oils of glamorous women with photographs depicting women in more commonplace, everyday poses. By dogged searching in their own and many other public and private archives, the NPG team ensured that women’s portrayal in prose as important contributors to the life of the nation was not compromised by their visual portrayal as an ornament.

Critical assessment

⁴³ For example Mary Alcock (1741?–1798), Henrietta Battier (*c.* 1751-1813), Frances Boothby (*fl.* 1669-1670), Jane Burdett, Lady Burdett (*d.* 1637), Lady Elizabeth Langham (1635–1664), Martha Sansom (1689–1736), Jane Vigor (1699–1783), Anna Weamys (*fl.* 1650–1651), Cassandra Willoughby (1670–1735)

⁴⁴ For example Anne Eyre (1612/1613–1681), Elinor Fettiplace, Lady Fettiplace (*b. c.* 1570, *d.* in or after 1647), Susanna Whatman (1753–1814).

⁴⁵ Peter Funnell, ‘Report on a policy for likenesses’, (1995), *DNB* archives; Peter Funnell, ‘National Portrait Gallery begins research on likenesses’, *New Dictionary of National Biography Newsletter* 2, (1996).

There were of course disappointments. Together with some other potential new subjects, certain women failed to find a contributor, while preliminary research led to the conclusion that the lives of some clearly important women could not yet be written. Specialists in army or naval history proved unable to find many female recruits beyond the occasional woman who enlisted as a man, though once given orders to provide wives, military historians unfailingly obeyed. Perhaps it will be local or family historians who can tell us life stories of camp followers for future editions; they are certainly likely to provide illuminating evidence to round out existing biographies of both men and women in online updates.⁴⁶

John Gross was among many reviewers of the *Oxford DNB* to note that ‘Nowhere have the editors of the dictionary worked harder to remedy past injustices than in improving the representation of women’, though Nicholas Barker noted that numbers and proportions were still modest.⁴⁷ David Starkey and Geoffrey Wheatcroft suspected political correctness, but Wheatcroft, who unlike Starkey made his judgement after the work was published, ‘squinted hard at these revisions, but they cannot honestly be faulted...most of those now gathered in [to the *Oxford DNB*]...belong there’.⁴⁸ On the whole then, the concerted drive to improve the place of women in the *DNB* seems to have met with critical approval. With the scholarly and literary world apparently receptive to the need to bring out the contribution of women more fully, the critical step in improving their representation seems to be a coherent and diligently effected editorial policy, and in this the *OED* differs somewhat from the *Oxford DNB*.

***OED* and gender**

What gender issues arise where the *OED* is concerned, and how does the *OED* compare with the *DNB*? The story is in some respects similar and in others different. The most important differences are that the publication of the *Oxford DNB* (2004) was of the complete work, not part of a larger project, and that its revisers from the start identified gender as one of the areas to be given special treatment in the new

⁴⁶ Thrice-yearly updates are planned each May, October, and January. The first update each year will concentrate on subjects who have died after 31 December 2000 (when coverage of the September 2004 edition stopped). May and October updates will contain new subjects across the dictionary’s chronological span. Additions and amendments to existing entries are now in every update from May 2005.

⁴⁷ Gross, ‘Feminine wills’, p.13; Nicolas Barker, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 December 2004, p.6.

⁴⁸ David Starkey, cited in Richard Brooks, ‘Women get puffed up’, *Sunday Times*, 19 September 2004; Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *Spectator*, 25 September 2004.

dictionary. Consequently, as has been described above, they analysed the representation of gender in the *DNB* and sought to change it, in various ways, in the *Oxford DNB*. The revision of the *OED* (*OED3*), by contrast, is in its early stages (at the time of writing, November 2004, only the alphabetical range *m–ottroye* has been released), and so far the revisers have not identified gender as a significant element in their rewriting of the dictionary. Moreover, the *OED* is a much more various and amorphous body of data than the *DNB*. This section of the article will discuss the representation of gender in the unrevised *OED* - that is, the first edition of *OED* (1884–1928), together with R.W. Burchfield’s twentieth-century Supplement (1972–1986), which were typographically merged to form the second edition of *OED* in 1989 – and will argue the case for giving the subject more attention in the new edition of the *OED*,⁴⁹ focussing in particular on the significant under-representation, in all versions of the dictionary, of writing by women.

The founders of the *OED* set out, in 1859 or so, to record every word in the English language.⁵⁰ The *DNB* set out some years later to record the lives of all the interesting and important people in the history and life of the nation. As discussed above, gender is a significant issue in identifying historically significant personages, however one defines ‘historically significant’. Gender is also a factor when it comes to making a comprehensive list of words, but less obviously so.

***OED* methodology: the importance of quotation sources**

As is well known, the *OED* lexicographers broke new ground in dictionary-making by creating a word list from scratch, not just (as had many past dictionaries) copying the

⁴⁹ The first instalment was published online in March 2000. Since then, further alphabetical tranches have been released every quarter. See www.oed.com.

⁵⁰ The history of the *OED* has been most satisfactorily told by C.T. Onions in the ‘Historical Introduction’ first printed in the 1933 edition of the *OED* (in part reproduced at http://www.oed.com/public/archive/oed2/oed2_hist.htm), and by K.M.E. Murray in *Caught in the Web of Words. James A.H. Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary* (New Haven and London, 1977). Both these accounts draw heavily on material now available in archives: C.T. Onions on *OED* in-house material, preserved in the Oxford University Press archive, and K.M.E. Murray on Murray family papers, subsequently bequeathed to the Bodleian Library. Onions describes how ‘as the result of a suggestion made by F.J. Furnivall to Dean Trench in May [1857]’, the Council of the Philological Society appointed Herbert Coleridge, Furnivall and Trench ‘as a committee to collect unregistered words in English’. Their report took the form of Trench’s two papers, which were subsequently published as a single document by the Philological Society, *On some deficiencies in our English Dictionaries*; the second edition can be read in the archive section of *OED Online* at <http://www.oed.com/public/archive/> (R.C. Trench, ‘On some deficiencies in our English dictionaries’, 2nd rev. edn, London, 1860). See also *Proposal for a Publication of a New English Dictionary by the Philological Society* (London, 1859), which stated ‘The first requirement of every lexicon is, that it should contain *every word in the literature of the language it professes to illustrate*’ [original italics], p.2.

words found in preceding dictionaries; and they did this by reading through all the printed sources they could find – those that they thought were suitable and appropriate – and by encouraging volunteers to do the same.⁵¹ So when words got into their new dictionary, they were substantiated by quotations illustrating how and *by whom* they had been used.

Since the overwhelming majority of printed sources available to the first editors were written by men, the *OED* quoted vastly more men than it did women.⁵² The significance of such gender bias in source provenance can hardly be overstated. Like the *DNB*, the *OED* rapidly assumed iconic status. It was seen as a treasure house of the nation's language and therefore of its culture; in the words of a press release issued in 1928 by its publishers, it was 'the supreme authority . . . a Dictionary not of our English, but of all English: the English of Chaucer, of the Bible, and of Shakespeare'.⁵³ That view is echoed by the current editor, John Simpson, in his Preface to the ongoing revision, *OED3*: 'Far more than a convenient place to look up words and their origins, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is an irreplaceable part of English culture. It not only provides an important record of the evolution of our language, but also documents the continuing development of our society. It is certain to continue in this role as we enter the new century'.⁵⁴ The authority for such a view rests on the nature and quality of *OED*'s sources, that is, its quotations: for it is these which constitute its claim to scholarly and historical supremacy. *OED*'s quotations communicate a decisive and formative sense of the language and how it operates, identifying and indicating who are the authorised users of the language, and what, in observable practice, are the connotations and the nuances of the way words were actually used. The favouring of sources written by men over those written by women,

⁵¹ For an account of previous dictionaries, see J.A.H. Murray, 'The evolution of English lexicography', Romanes lecture (Oxford, 1900), D. Starnes and G. Noyes, *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604–1755* (Chapel Hill, 1946; new ed. Amsterdam, 1991), and Jonathon Green, *Chasing the Sun: Dictionary-Makers and the Dictionaries They Made* (London, 1996).

⁵² It was impossible for the lexicographers to set out to read unprinted sources. For pre-print works, prior to 1500 or so, they were reliant on subsequent printed editions - early editions of major authors such as Chaucer, e.g., and many produced by the Early English Text Society (EETS), set up in 1864 by F.J. Furnivall, also an early editor of *OED*. None of the EETS editions printed over the life of *OED1* was of works by women.

⁵³ In Murray, *Web of Words*, p.312. For an account of *OED*'s critical reception since the publication of its first fascicle in 1884, see Richard Bailey, '“This unique and peerless specimen”: the reputation of the *OED*', and 'The *OED* and the public', Appendix III, in Lynda Mugglestone ed., *Lexicography and the *OED** (Oxford, 2000), 207-27, 253–84.

⁵⁴ Cited in <http://oed.com/about/history.html#cdrom>.

natural and inevitable at the time *OEDI* was compiled, is thus the most obvious way in which gender is an issue for the *OED*.

However, it is not easy to quantify and evaluate gender bias in the quoting of *OED* sources. There is no comprehensive and reliable bibliography (that is, list of sources) for *OED*. The most recent printed one is avowedly incomplete, gives no indication of the relative rate of quotation from the sources listed, and is not electronically analysable.⁵⁵ A sample analysis by hand indicates that just under 5 per cent of *OED* sources were written by women.⁵⁶ Whether or not this may be thought a reasonable figure depends on a number of factors, not least the ratio of men to women authors between 1150 and 1986 (the period covered by *OEDI* and the Supplement). There is little existing research on this subject.⁵⁷

Five per cent is, however, only an estimate: so how may one proceed to consider the exclusion or inclusion of women in the *OED* in more detail? Since the 1990s it has been possible to consult the second edition of the *OED* (which merged the first edition of 1884–1928 with Burchfield’s 1972–86 Supplement) on a CD Rom, and since March 2000 *OED2* has been available online.⁵⁸ Electronic search tools now enable various more or less sophisticated searches – for authors, periods, dates etc. Unfortunately, however, the tools were not designed with gender in mind, and nor was the electronic mark-up on which they depend. There are various possibilities for analysis, but none of them is systematic. Partly this is because the first edition of the *OED*, printed over forty-four years and compiled over many more, was unavoidably inconsistent in many of its editorial conventions, including the designation of individual authors. Many women authors were given *Mrs* or *Lady* as titles, but not all (e.g. **Jane Austen**, cited thus, with 1045 quotations, and **A. Behn**, cited thus, with 176 quotations). Generic title searches of this sort are consequently no more than an

⁵⁵ See J. Simpson and E. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed (Clarendon Press, 1989), vol 20; this is an amalgamation of the original partial bibliography, published in 1933, with one compiled by Burchfield for his twentieth-century sources. It is the only available bibliography on the *OED* online site.

⁵⁶ Taking the 300-odd items listed under the letter ‘A’ as a sample, 14 (c. 4.6 per cent) are by women, and one is by a husband and wife pair. Of these, nine are nineteenth-century and 6 twentieth-century (5 added by Burchfield); they represent a total of seven different authors. Of the 300 items, many are anonymous (e.g. treatises and expositions), and therefore by presumptively male authors.

⁵⁷ For a demographic analysis of published authors in France in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Robert Darnton, ‘The facts of literary life in eighteenth-century France’, pp.261–91 in Keith Baker ed., *The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (Oxford, 1987). Women authors formed 1–2 per cent of the recorded total.

⁵⁸ For an account of the changes brought about by making the dictionary electronically available, see Charlotte Brewer, ‘The electrification of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Dictionaries* 25 (2004), 1–43.

ancillary tool in establishing a picture, while the twentieth-century section of the dictionary – that is from Burchfield onwards – cites women authors in the same way that it does men, by initial and surname.

This leaves two possible ways further to investigate the number of female sources cited. One can check whether individual authors are quoted (and then compare the number of quotations with those of other, male, authors, perhaps writing in the same period or genre); or one can examine the dictionary year by year, or decade by decade, and simply count by hand and then analyse the number of quotations from texts by men or texts by women (where the authors are identifiable). Though very laborious, examining the quotations in *OED* in this way does throw up significant and useful information.

Once this material, or some sample of it, has been identified, there are further questions to be asked. Did the small number of female sources reflect the more general male to female proportion of writers getting into print? – so that as fewer women than men would have had the means and knowledge to write, and as the types of writing engaged in by women (diaries, letters etc) were less likely to have been printed and available to the lexicographers, there were bound to be fewer women than men cited in the *OED*? Or did the Oxford lexicographers additionally distort the record? Which female sources were most quoted, and which genres or types of female writing were most popular? Some of these questions are dealt with below as the task facing the *OED3* revisers today is considered.

Other manifestations of gender bias in *OED*

As with the *DNB*, there are other gender matters to take into account than the proportion of men to women cited (or treated), and the degree to which this might appropriately reflect the male to female proportion of texts that are ‘out there’. Words from female sources, and words associated with women rather than men, may not have been treated in the same way as words from male sources and words associated with men.

It can sometimes be forgotten how pervasive were anti-feminist, or perhaps pro-male and pro-masculine assumptions, attitudes and values when the first edition was produced. These had direct implications for language and language study. The obvious *locus classicus* here is the observation made by Otto Jespersen in 1906 in his influential *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (which made extensive use of the evidence in *OED*), that ‘There is one expression that continually comes to mind

when I think of the English language and compare it to others: it seems positively and expressly *masculine*, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish or feminine about it'.⁵⁹ So we can expect to find women's language, and women, differently treated from men's language and men, and this seems to be the case. Bias shows itself in a variety of different ways: from the choice of gendered labels to disparage (as when a sense of the adv *too*, as in 'too delightful', is described as 'Now chiefly an emotional feminine colloquialism'), to the definition of terms like 'strong-minded' when applied to women (described as those 'who take up an attitude of revolt against the restrictions and disabilities imposed on their sex by law and custom'), to the quotations chosen to illustrate the word *woman* (which famously included Congreve's 'Nor Hell a Fury, like a Woman scorn'd' and Pope's 'every Woman is at heart a Rake').⁶⁰ Other indications of gender bias are the favouring of the male as standard in definitions, with the female as deviant, and the overwhelming proportion of female to male sexually pejorative terms for women. The study by Fournier and Delbert from which these figures are quoted found significant biases in the full text of the dictionary – for example, the male pronoun *he* is used 211,781 times in *OED1*, while *she* is used 43,445 times; *his* is used 205,724 times but *her* 66,957 times; female pronouns in the quotations are 50 per cent more likely than male pronouns to be collocated with verbs referring to 'surface physical appearance' (*looked, wore, seemed, wears*) and to the expression of emotion (*felt, loves, liked, cried*). Obviously, it is important to distinguish between the language of the quotations on the one hand, and that used by the lexicographers themselves, in their definitions and other editorial matter, on the other. Fournier and Delbert ran comparisons of the two and concluded that 'the sex-role stereotyping of the *OED*, found mainly in the quotation texts, is a reflection of the sex-role stereotyping of society throughout history, while the language of the lexicographers themselves is relatively neutral' (19). But without further extensive examination of the quotations in relation to the language of the period from which they are taken, it is impossible to know how representative the quotations are of 'sex-role stereotyping of society throughout history'; certainly there is no question but that the lexicographers favoured

⁵⁹ Here quoted from the 2nd revised edition, London 1912, p.2.

⁶⁰ For more examples and further discussion see Hannah S. Fournier and Delbert W. Russell, 'A study of sex-role stereotyping in the Oxford English Dictionary 2E', *Computers and the Humanities* 26 (1992), 13–20.

male over female sources, and this bias will undoubtedly have affected the nature of the language witnessed in the quotations.

Another inevitable influence on the representation of gender in the *OED*, as in the *DNB*, was the gender of those in charge of writing the dictionary. During the compilation and publication of the first edition of *OED*, all the main editors and OUP officers were men, as were all the major outsiders who influenced the character and editing of the work, whether members of the Philological Society or Delegates of the Press. But women were involved from early on as volunteer readers, sub-editors, and editorial staff. The numbers varied over the years, ranging between about 9 per cent and 13 per cent of the whole.⁶¹ As abundantly evidenced in the OUP dictionary accounts, women were never paid the same amount for the same work as men until equal pay legislation in the 1970s, and some of the longest serving female contributors and assistants were related to the male lexicographers – James Murray’s wife and three of his daughters, and Henry Bradley’s daughter Eleanor. The prevailing culture of the time utterly precluded due recognition of female participation in the project.⁶²

R.W. Burchfield was appointed as editor of the main twentieth-century Supplement to the *OED* in 1957.⁶³ Like his predecessors, he nowhere took explicit notice of any matters relating to gender. However, as we shall see below, his quotation in relatively high numbers (400-plus citations each) from three twentieth-century women crime novelists, Ngaio Marsh, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy Sayers, made a slight difference to the representation of women in the *OED*, though given the

⁶¹ These percentages are based on the lists of editors and contributors printed in the prefaces to the various instalments of the first edition and on further information in the OUP archives. See also Peter Gilliver, ‘*OED* personalia’, Appendix 2, pp.232–52, in Mugglestone, *Lexicography and the OED*. Burchfield’s Supplement had a much higher percentage of female editors and assistants: 17 of the 40 named editorial staff, library researchers, and volunteer readers were women (see *A Supplement*, vol.4, p.xvii; Burchfield however exercised absolute editorial control). Today, the gender of editorial staff on the *OED* is split approximately 2–1 in favour of women; as with most organizations there are more men than women at the top end. See <http://oed.com/about/staff.html>.

⁶² Thus in 1928 the women lexicographers were excluded from participating in the Goldsmiths Hall banquet held to celebrate the completion of the first edition, and those who nevertheless chose to attend had to be ‘skied’ in the minstrels’ gallery, along with the wives of the Prime Minister and of the University’s Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor (Oxford University Press *OED* archives, PP 1928–PP 1929, letter from R.W. Chambers to W.A. Craigie, 13 Jan 1928). Murray’s daughters Elsie and Rosfrith worked on the editorial staff for over twenty years (though both had helped in Murray’s Scriptorium since childhood); Eleanor Bradley was one of the longest serving editorial staff members, having begun under her father in 1897 and continuing until 1932 in order to contribute to the first Supplement (see next note).

⁶³ The first Supplement to the *OED* was that of W.A. Craigie and C.T. Onions, published in 1933; most of this work was subsumed by Burchfield into the 1972–86 Supplement.

absence of comment it is not possible to say whether this was intentional or not. It is not until the second edition of the *OED* in 1989 that deliberate attention seems to have been paid to gender representation, though given the speed with which this dictionary was assembled its treatment was necessarily uneven and sporadic. Again, there is no specific mention of gender in any editorial discussion, but looking up serendipitously chosen words and phrases one can observe attempts to correct inaccurate or sexist definitions. Thus *OED2* redefines *jury* as ‘a company of persons (orig. men) sworn to render a verdict’, and adds a note to sense 9 of *chair (sb.)*, ‘Now also used as alternative for “chairman” or “chairwoman”, esp. deliberately so as not to imply a particular sex’. On the other hand, *housekeeper* (s.v. sense 4) is carried over unaltered from *OED1* and retains its unembarrassedly gender-specific definition as ‘A woman engaged in household or domestic occupations; esp. the woman in control of the female servants of a household’, while notes on or definitions of *man*, *men*, *mankind*, all to denote women as well as men, or *girls* instead of *women* used in collocation with *men* in certain contexts, yield no further examples where feminist objections, by the 1980s considered in many quarters standard, are acknowledged.⁶⁴ (By contrast, both Burchfield and *OED2* were far more sensitive to racist terms, and both dictionaries apply appropriate warning labels, albeit inconsistently, to offensive words and usages left unlabelled in *OED1*).⁶⁵

Gender and *OED3*

The record of *OED1* and *OED2* therefore indicates that there is work to be done on gender in the new edition of the Dictionary – the first attempt to undertake systematic and complete revision of *OED* – in two main respects: to increase the proportion of women authors quoted (though to what degree may be a matter of contention), and to eradicate sexism from editorial comments and treatment. The revisers are still at an early stage, and so far have published limited material on their editorial methodology and practice. Nowhere do they discuss the representation of gender in the *OED*, either in the previous versions of the dictionary or in their account of their own aims and achievements.⁶⁶ Serendipitous browsing of the revised alphabetical range so far

⁶⁴ For a discussion of this and other problematic characteristics of the second edition, see Charlotte Brewer, ‘The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*’, *RES* NS 44 (1993), 313–42.

⁶⁵ See further Charlotte Brewer, ‘Authority and personality in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 103 (2005), [forthcoming].

⁶⁶ There is a useful array of editorial material available online at www.oed.com, including a Preface to the Third Edition written by John Simpson. Other discussions by the editors have appeared in the form of periodical articles, the most recent of which contains a bibliography of published material; see John

released, however, reveals some careful notice of gender issues with respect to editorial treatment of words and senses. For example, the editors write s.v. *man* that the word ‘was considered until the 20th cent. to include women by implication, though referring primarily to males. It is now freq. understood to exclude women, and is therefore avoided by many people.’ They add ‘in some of the quotations in this section, it is difficult or impossible to tell whether man is intended to mean “person” or “male human being”’.⁶⁷ Sometimes eradication of sexism seems to have been subtle indeed: for example the revisers remove from the quotations under *man* the one (from the periodical *House & Garden*) inserted by Burchfield in 1976: ‘The Dry Martini...is a drink that will quickly separate the men from the boys and the girls from their principles’.

Increasing the proportion of women quoted is a more complex issue. The initial problem is that relative quotation from sources was itself highly uneven in the first *OED*, whether judged by author or by period (for variation in quotation rates by date, see Table 5 below).⁶⁸ None of the most quoted authors in the *OED* is a woman: the list (Table 1 below) is headed by Shakespeare, with about 33,000 quotations, followed (remarkably) by Walter Scott (15,900), and then Milton (12,300), Chaucer (11,700), Dryden (9,000), Dickens (7,500), and Tennyson (6,900).⁶⁹ There are a number of other male writers who are quoted around 4,000–6,000 times in the dictionary, for example (listed in no particular order) Johnson, Dryden, Carlyle, Pope, Langland, Cowper, Macaulay, Spenser. By contrast (see Table 2), the most frequently quoted woman, George Eliot, has about 3,300 quotations, and she is followed by a group with around half as many: Burney (1,950), Martineau (1,650), Braddon (the nineteenth-century novelist, 1,500), Barrett Browning (1,452), Charlotte Yonge (1,400, of which nearly half were inserted by Burchfield; see below), M.R.

Simpson, Edmund Weiner, and Philip Durkin, ‘The *Oxford English Dictionary* today’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 102 (2004), 335–81.

⁶⁷ Similarly, the *OED3* editors rewrite the *OED1* definition of *manly*, substituting ‘having those qualities or characteristics traditionally associated with men as distinguished from women or children’ for ‘possessing the virtues proper to a man as distinguished from a woman or child’.

⁶⁸ See further Charlotte Brewer, ‘*OED* sources’, pp.40–58 in Mugglestone, *Lexicography and the OED*.

⁶⁹ I (CB) have calculated these figures by attempting to search for all the ways in which the authors have been cited in *OED*, using the *OED Online* search tools. Searching on the second edition of the CD Rom produces slightly different results. See the appendix in John Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton, 1994), for further lists and figures, which differ again, and Dennis Taylor, *Hardy’s Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford, 1993), chapter 2, for a wealth of additional comparative figures for nineteenth-century authors. Interpreting such information is not straightforward, given that some authors wrote (or published) more than others: a small oeuvre might mean less chance of being quoted in *OED*.

Mitford (the prolific writer on village life, described by Barratt Browning as ‘a sort of prose Crabbe in the sun’, 1,106), Austen (1,046). (Interestingly, all except Barrett Browning are prose writers, in contrast to the favourite male authors who include many poets). Many female writers now considered outstanding were quoted even less frequently – for example, Christina Rossetti 133 times, Emily Brontë 68 times.

Many of these authors have been identified using tables in the book on *OED* by John Willinsky, who had access to software and search tools, no longer available, which distinguished between *OED1* and *OED2*. His list of Burchfield’s Supplement’s ‘Top Twenty Authors by Citation’ begins with G.B. Shaw, Kipling, Joyce, P.G. Wodehouse, D.H. Lawrence, Mark Twain (all with 1,500–2,000 quotations); the only woman is Charlotte Yonge, ranked 13th with 676 quotations.⁷⁰ Willinsky’s next most quoted women are the trio of women crime writers mentioned above – Marsh (443 quotations), Sayers (426) and Christie (404). Burchfield several times stated his passionate belief in the importance of drawing on good quality literary sources for the *OED* (‘I love poetry and poetical use has been poured into the Supplement’; ‘[ignoring] the language of . . . our greatest living writers [leaves] one looking at a language with one’s eyes partly blindfolded’), in this respect deliberately following the policy of *OED1*, but it is clear that this view did not influence his choice of sources written by women: compare his rate of citation from female writers of high literary standing such as Elizabeth Bowen (quoted 330 times), Virginia Woolf (209), Muriel Spark (174), Emily Dickinson (55).⁷¹

⁷⁰ Burchfield included a number of citations from pre-1900 material, for various reasons: sometimes, perhaps, because he felt authors had been unjustly passed over by *OED* - as with Twain and Yonge; sometimes because printed editions of their work had not been available at the time they were written - as with Hopkins, no. 20 on Willinsky’s list, or Emily Dickinson, quoted about 50 times in the Supplement. His stated policy appears on p.xv of Introduction to *A Supplement*, vol.1 (‘Nor have we added later examples to words and senses whose illustration ends in the [first edition of the] Dictionary with nineteenth-century examples’); cf. his remark that he ‘had to delve a little into the language of the second half of the nineteenth century as well as that of the twentieth. The language of Thackeray, Swinburne, Henry James, and others had been too uncomfortably close in time for Murray and his colleagues to take it fully into account’, R.W. Burchfield, *Unlocking the Language* (London, 1989), p.173.

⁷¹ ‘Discussion’, pp.280–86 in W. Pijnenburg and F. de Tollenaere, eds., *Proceedings of the Second International Round Table Conference on Historical Lexicography* (Dordrecht, 1980); *A Supplement* vol.4, p.x; cf. *Unlocking the Language*, p.12. Burchfield was responsible for all the Dickinson quotations in *OED*; see note 70 above. All *OED* editors have at all times been crucially dependent on the reading choices of their volunteers, and it is likely that the quotations from Marsh, Sayers, and Christie may be attributed to the preferences of Marghanita Laski, the single most prolific volunteer contributor to the Supplement, responsible for over a quarter of a million quotation slips. See *A Supplement*, vol.4, p.viii.

All things considered, it seems overwhelmingly probable that the choice of all of these authors, in these proportions, simply reflects the literary and cultural choices of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century lexicographers and readers responsible for reading sources and choosing quotations. It is unlikely to be an indication in any more general sense of the contribution made by such authors to the growth and development of the English language.

What then has been the policy, or practice, of the revisers in quoting sources written by women? Given the absence of any editorial discussion, the only way to examine this is to compare the number of quotations for an individual author in the revised segment of the dictionary with that in the corresponding alphabetical range of *OED2*, a laborious procedure which is made possible, though not easy, by the electronic search tools. Tables 3 and 4 indicate the results, which are variable. Whether deliberately or not, some female authors – notably Virginia Woolf – have enormously increased representation in *OED3*, some have what seems to be proportionally increased representation, some have slipped from favour. It is striking that comparatively little attempt has been made to draw on the writings of one of the only two known women writers from the medieval period, Julian of Norwich (7 quotations in the revised section, as against none in the original), although the other, Margery Kempe, is quoted 36 times. Except in the case of George Eliot, no female author has even approached the numbers of quotations provided for the canonic male authors over the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries – although these authors too have been variably treated in the new edition (for example, Tennyson and Cowper now have fewer quotations, Pope slightly and Dryden many more, and Dickens very many more).⁷²

This remarkable variation in the choice of which sources to quote – both in previous versions of the *OED* and in the current third edition, so far as it been released – appears, on the face of it, amply to justify the views expressed in 1985 by the two authors of a feminist dictionary: ‘A Dictionary is a word-book which collects somebody’s words into somebody’s book. Whose words are collected, how they are collected, and who collects them all influence what kind of book a given dictionary turns out to be and, in turn, whose purpose it can best serve. . . . Women’s invisibility

⁷² The figures are, for Tennyson, 624 in *OED2 m–otroye* compared with 607 in the corresponding alphabet range in *OED3*, Cowper 544:534, Pope 469:496, Dryden 783:917 (i.e. 17 per cent increase in revised edition), Dickens 650:929 (43 per cent increase).

as language-producers is closely bound to the scholarly practices of dictionary producers.⁷³

But is this a fair or reasonable criticism to make of the *OED*, whether past or present? How are the lexicographers to determine the appropriate proportion in which women (or any other category of source, whether chronological, generic or authorial) should be quoted? Should the proportion reflect the number of women authors in print as compared to men? Or the number of women writers (in whatever genre), in print or not, compared to men? Or the number of women speakers compared to men? How do the lexicographers determine whether one quotation is preferable to another? To what extent should gender play a role in that judgement?

These are hard questions and they raise harder ones. If it is really the case, as John Simpson claimed in the quotation at the start of this section on *OED*, that this dictionary ‘documents the continuing development of our society’, what aspects of society should it aim to document? It certainly seems the case that the proportion of female to male authors in print has always been low, whether in eighteenth-century France or twenty-first-century Britain.⁷⁴ In correspondence with Charlotte Brewer over the figures in this article, Simpson reported that of the texts (with identifiable authors) read by the *OED* in 2004 some 73 per cent were by male authors, and 27 per cent by women. As a control sample, he checked over 200 books listed in the *Bookseller's* catalogue of publications for October 2004 (discounting mixed joint authorship and foreign names where gender was not easily identifiable), to find that 72 per cent were by male, 28 per cent by female authors. (This congruence is striking but needs further investigation: for example, was the 3:1 ratio of male to female authors *read* matched by the proportions of the texts from which the lexicographers chose in the event to *quote*?)

If the *OED* is to correct, or adjust, these proportions, it needs to do so on the basis of some careful study and explanation of the relationship between the language of printed sources and the lexicon at large. More generally, it may be the case that focussing on individual authors (as in this article) gives a misleading impression of the way in which *OED3's* revision is proceeding. Simpson observes that ‘the increasing citation of women authors (following the expansion of the range of texts read since the days of the Supplement) tends to provide more citations from a wider

⁷³ Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *A Feminist Dictionary* (London, 1985), pp. 119–120.

⁷⁴ See footnote 57 for eighteenth-century France.

range of sources', so that 'the effect of our modern reading might best be judged from the large and growing number of authors cited moderately'.

In other words, *OED3* is broadening the number and range of sources and authors cited, while simultaneously taking care not to quote any individual source with particular intensity. This means that the phenomenon of individual writers (such as Shakespeare, Scott, Milton etc. for the earlier period, or Tennyson, Dickens, Carlyle for the nineteenth-century) with relatively vast *OED* coverage will disappear for subsequent periods, to be replaced by a larger number of sources more evenly cited (though it hard to see how the present treatment of George Eliot and Woolf in *OED3* falls into this pattern, or the 17 per cent increased citation in *OED3* of Dryden, and 43 per cent increased citation of Dickens: see Table 3 and note 72 above).

Whether this policy will result in more, or less, quotation from texts written by women is difficult to predict. Moreover, it will be very difficult to search the *OED* electronically to discover the effect of the new policy where gender is concerned unless the authors are to be tagged by gender; it is heartening that this tagging is something the editors are now actively considering for future entries.

What scholars and dictionary users now need is for the lexicographers to address these matters directly, and explain their principles and practice to the reader. To what extent are they taking gender into consideration when choosing which sources to cite either for their revision of *OED1* and *OED2*, or their writing of new material for *OED3*? And what is their basis for acting as they do?

Conclusion

Since both the *DNB* and the *OED* are both showcases for past research and archives for future research it is worth critically examining what they contain. This process is much easier for the *DNB* than for the *OED* since the former has benefited not only from Colin Matthew's lucid analysis of what needed to be done for the 2004 work, but from a set of tags and search facilities which allow readers and editorial staff to analyse the works' content in various ways to see what has been achieved and what needs to be done. As articles are added to and modified in the 2004 edition of the *Oxford DNB* their arrival is to be clearly signalled and their nature and purpose described.⁷⁵ By contrast the *OED* more closely resembles the *DNB* than the *Oxford*

⁷⁵ See for example <http://www.oxforddnb.com/oxforddnb/info/dictionary/intro/05apreface/> in which the present editor, Laurence Goldman, describes the intended tri-annual cycle of additions (January, May and October), comments in some detail on the content of the January 2005 release covering those

DNB in being less explicit in its editorial aims. This did not prevent the *DNB*'s being remarkably innovative, and it is similarly evident that revisions of the *OED* have brought significant new content under thoughtful editorial guidance. Nonetheless, *OED*'s analyst and historian cannot help but envy the *DNB*'s historian that work's clear editorial statements and more responsive search facilities.

What was striking about the *Oxford DNB*'s policy on women was not that their underrepresentation in the *DNB* was recognised as problematic: the editors of most countries' *DNBs* now recognise past gender imbalances, and express the hope that more women might be included in their dictionaries in the future.⁷⁶ Matthew's critical contribution, enthusiastically supported by his staff and his successor as editor Brian Harrison, was to establish structures and procedures to ensure that gender imbalance was actually addressed. With its less publicly articulated editorial policy, it is difficult to say whether gender imbalances at the *OED* have been adequately recognised, but if, as seems likely, such success as the *Oxford DNB* has had in redressing the imbalance rests critically on the establishment of structures to address the problem, then it may be difficult for *OED3*'s editors to tackle women's apparent underrepresentation in the short term.

Women were of course not the only kinds of people whose language and whose history were poorly represented in the *OED* and *DNB*.⁷⁷ Colin Matthew identified a further nine types of people as having been systematically underrepresented in the dictionary. Others included working class people, the colonised, and those living in particular regions of Britain such as Wales and the north and south west of England.⁷⁸ To these might be added children, whose status as public rather than private beings remains contested.⁷⁹

Similarly, it is clear that the first edition of the *OED* systematically underrepresented the language of several types of people other than women, notably

who died in 2001 (the first articles to be added to the dictionary since its September 2004 publication), and sketches the nature of the May 2005 additions.

⁷⁶ In the Netherlands, in the absence of a modern *DNB* project updating coverage of the pre-1850 period, a dictionary specifically devoted to women has been launched, housed at the Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, The Hague. For the *Digitale Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland* see <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DVN>.

⁷⁷ There will in addition always be individual people or words unjustly left out of the dictionaries, but it is not possible to address such deficiencies systematically in the same way that it is possible to improve the representation of classes of people who are underrepresented.

⁷⁸ Matthew, April 1993 report, *DNB* archive.

⁷⁹ Some children were included in the original *DNB* e.g. Pet Marjory (Margaret Fleming) (1803–1811) and others have been added in the new e.g. Anthony Nolan (1971–1979) and James Bulger (1990–1993).

writers in English outside the British Isles. Burchfield made a determined effort to remedy this, announcing in the first volume of his Supplement ‘bold forays into the written English of. . .North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and Pakistan’, though he later acknowledged some unevenness in treatment: ‘countries such as the West Indies and even Scotland. . . have better coverage in the range H–P than. . .in A–G.’⁸⁰

But imbalances in *OED* coverage, whether of the first edition or the Supplement, have always tended to be identified in terms of *genre*, not authorage, of source: something which has obscured underrepresentation of any type of personal attribute of a writer - whether gender, age, or social or geographical provenance.⁸¹

The dictionaries’ editors’ capacity to address these various imbalances depends not only on their own recognition of problems and implementation of procedures to address them, but also on the help of many outside individuals and institutions. Amongst these the importance of archives and their archivists is clear: the histories of those so far underrecorded in the *DNB* often depends much more heavily on manuscript sources, often in local archives, than do the histories of the already well known, whose lives are generally documented in print.⁸² Similarly writings available only in manuscript during the publication of *OEDI*, but since then brought out of the archive, edited, and printed, provide a rich source of quotations from those whose language was less well represented in the *OEDI*.⁸³

As *OED* and *DNB* continue to act as archives for research, so will archival research help to expand and improve their content.

⁸⁰ *A Supplement*, vol 1, p.xv; ‘The art of the lexicographer’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* (1975), 349–365 (356).

⁸¹ See for example John Simpson’s account of the revised dictionary’s new policy on sources: ‘The revised text makes use of many non-literary texts which were not available to the original Victorian readers and their immediate successors, particularly social documents such as wills, inventories, account books, diaries, journals, and letters such as the *York Civic Records*, Gilbert White’s *Journals*, and the *Diaries* of Robert Hooke’ (<http://oed.com/about/oed3-preface/documentation.html#documentation>).

⁸² This is not of course to deny the continuing importance of manuscript sources in writing and rewriting the lives of major figures.

⁸³ See footnote 52.

TABLE 1: MOST QUOTED AUTHORS IN *OED2* (LITERARY; APPROX FIGURES)⁸⁴

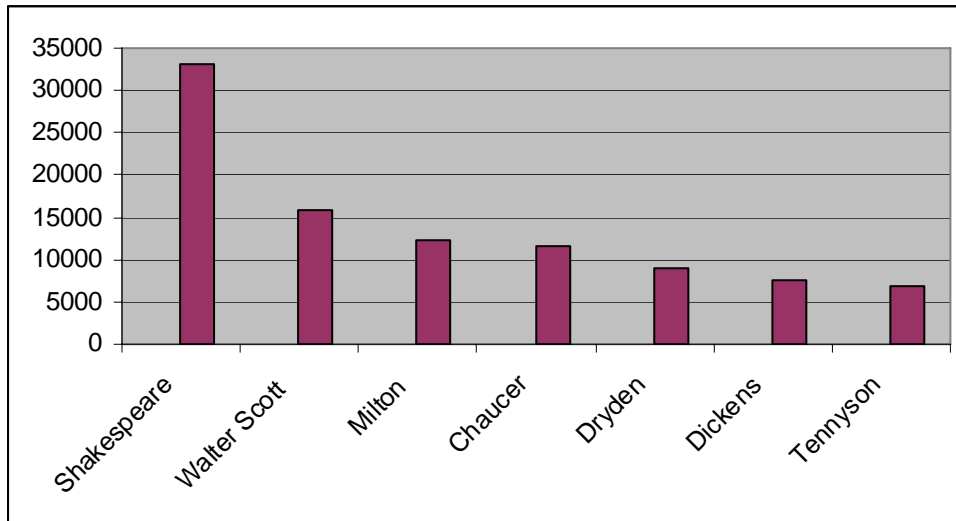
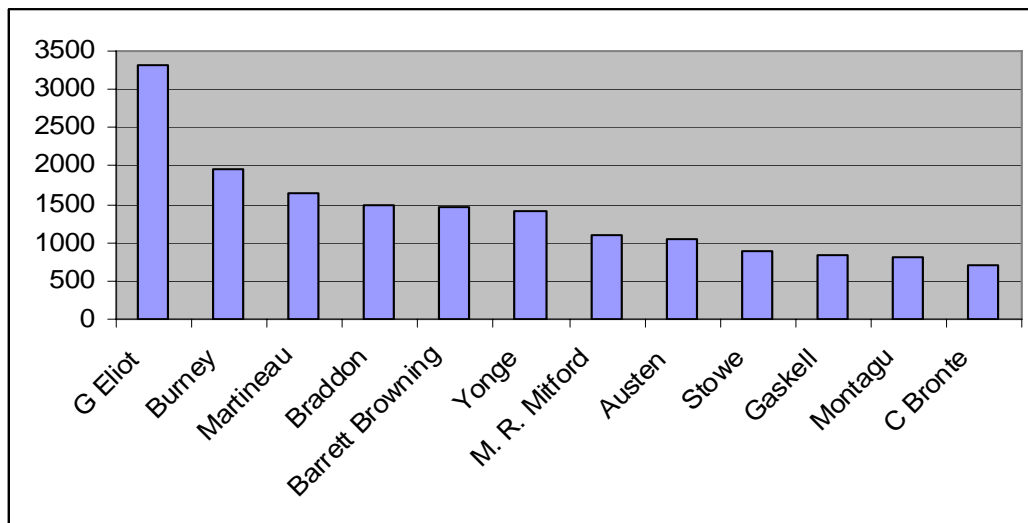


TABLE 2: MOST QUOTED FEMALE AUTHORS IN *OED2* (APPROX FIGURES)



⁸⁴ Tables 1-5 are based on figures derived from searches of *OED* online, using the electronic tools available (www.oed.com); see note 69 above. Subsequent research on these and other aspects of *OED* documentation may be seen at <http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/>.

TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF *OED2* QUOTATIONS (BLUE) OF MOST QUOTED WOMEN AUTHORS WITH *OED3* QUOTATIONS (YELLOW) OVER REVISED ALPHABET RANGE *m-ottroye*

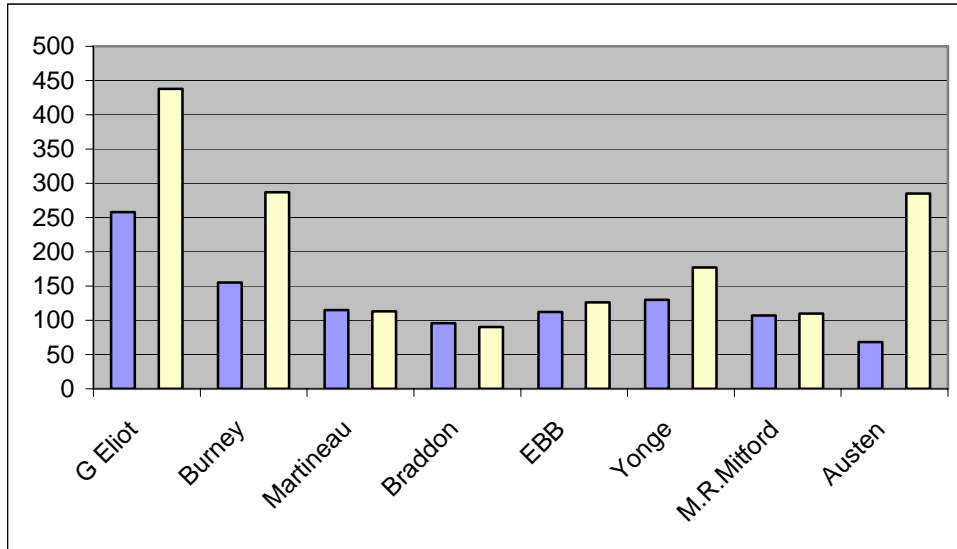


TABLE 4: COMPARISON OF *OED2* QUOTATIONS (RED) OF SELECTION OF OTHER WOMEN AUTHORS WITH *OED3* QUOTATIONS (BLUE) OVER REVISED ALPHABET RANGE *m-ottroye*

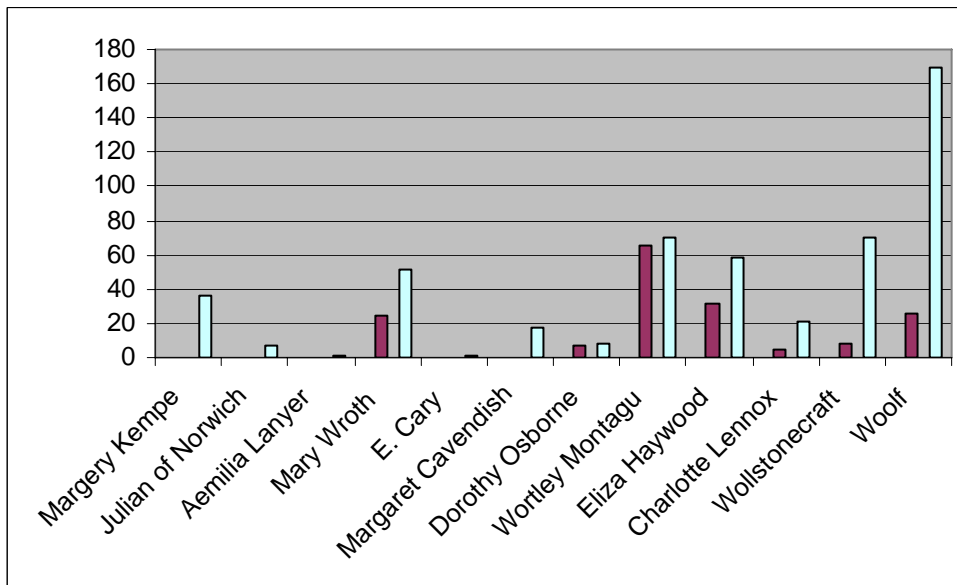
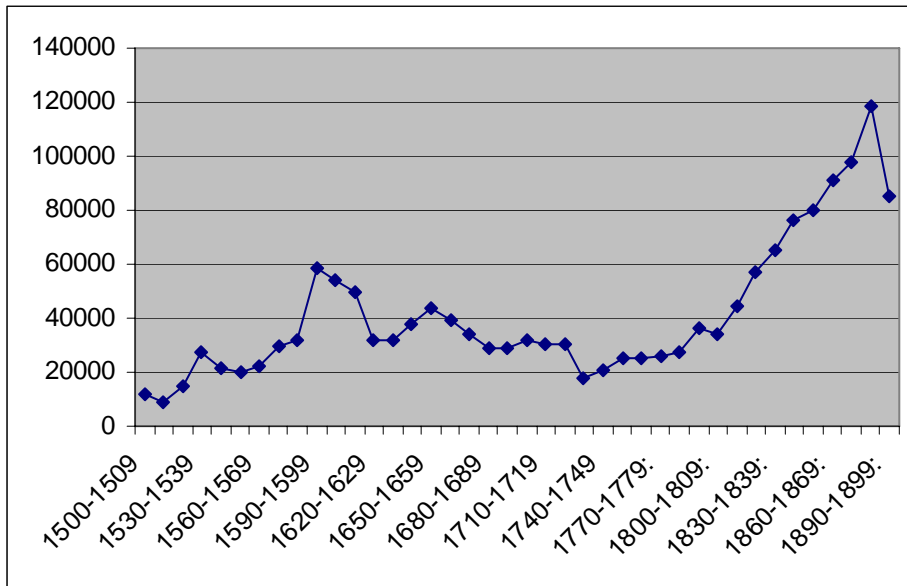


TABLE 5: NUMBER OF *OED2* QUOTATIONS PER DECADE 1500-1899



Each year in January, the coverage is extended by another year. It is a dictionary of national biography, but does not take a narrow view of 'Britishness'. Some articles, such as those on the Pre-Raphaelite women artists, do not contain a principal subject, but treat a number of co-subjects together as a group. These are called Group articles. The Oxford English Dictionary identifies many parts of each biography and makes them searchable, often in more than one place. For further explanation of the content of fields see help. Search "References" allows searching of the reference material that supports the biography such as Sources (citations), Archives, Likenesses, and Wealth at Death. The Dictionary of National Biography (or DNB) is a biographical reference for deceased persons notable in British history. The current edition of this work has been published online by Oxford University Press since 2004. The current electronic edition is not free, but is available through individual or library subscription. There is also a recent print edition. Some earlier editions of this work are freely available online, and remain of historic interest. Below we link to free online volumes of the first and second editions, and some of their supplementary volumes. First edition. The first ed Buy the selected items together. This item: The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology by C.T. Onions Hardcover \$89.95. Only 2 left in stock (more on the way). Ships from and sold by Amazon.com. FREE Shipping. Dr. C.T. Onions first joined the staff of the Oxford English Dictionary in 1895. He worked on the OED, the Shorter OED, and then published his Shakespeare Glossary in 1911. A wonderful and learned scholar, he died in 1966 as the first edition of The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology was going to press. For each entry, the dictionary provides the correct pronunciation, followed by a short definition, and the century and source of the word's first recording. Then come the etymological notes. In the end, he handed over nearly two tons of quotation slips and other materials to his successor, James Murray, who became the editor in 1870. James Murray, editor and philologist. He devoted 36 years of his life to the dictionary and, according to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, he was personally responsible for "more than half of the English vocabulary, comprising all the words beginning with the letters A-D, H-K, O-P, and all but a fraction of those beginning with T". He also provided a model methodology and set the standards that would make the OED the world-renowned resource it became. The first volume of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) was published in February of 1884 and covered from "A" to "Ant". The Dictionary of National Biography (DNB) is a standard work of reference on notable figures from British history, published since 1885. The updated Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB) was published on 23 September 2004 in 60 volumes and online, with 50,113 biographical articles covering 54,922 lives. Hoping to emulate national biographical collections published elsewhere in Europe, such as the Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (1875), in 1882 the publisher George Smith (1824-1901), of Smith