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Editorial

One of the most satisfying aspects of our current work revising the *OED* is our enhanced ability, given the wealth of texts which have been published since the appearance of the First Edition, to fill out the history of individual words.

Often this just means adding earlier and later examples (antedatings and postdatings), but occasionally new evidence shows us that a word or phrase has a radically different origin and development to that envisaged by the first editors.

In this issue of the *OED Newsletter* James McCracken takes us through this process of discovery with the *OED*'s entry for

mantrap, one of the many headwords included in the latest update of *OED Online*. On a more personal note Fiona McPherson gives us a description of her experience of working on the *OED*, with *A Day in the Life* (of an *OED* Editor), and Alan Hughes pays tribute to Richard Palmer, the *OED*'s longest-serving editor.

Bernadette Paton, Newsletter Editor and Principal Editor,
Oxford English Dictionary

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'Ware man-traps: rethinking an *OED* entry

When revising an *OED* entry, one often ends up thinking about the meaning not only of the word in question but also of the entry itself – what, in other words, was intended by the editor who originally put it together? Even the shortest entry may have involved dozens of editorial decisions, and, under the scrutiny of the revision process, these century-old trains of thought can occasionally reveal themselves.

In the case of *mantrap* (or *Man-trap*, as the First Edition spells it), one important editorial decision must have been that of splitting the

entry into two senses (unnumbered, but clearly differentiated): a literal sense first and a figurative sense following:



Man-trap.

A trap for catching men, esp. one for catching trespassers in private grounds.

1788 WOLCOT (P. Pindar) *Peter's Pension* Wks. (1812) II. 18 Your Man-traps, guards of goose and duck And cock and hens. **1791** BOSWELL *Johnson* 20 Mar. an. 1776, He should have warned us of our danger, before we entered his garden of flowery eloquence, by advertising, 'Spring-guns and men-traps set here'. **1880** BROWNING *Clive* 24 Did no writing on the wall Warn me 'Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!' *transf.* and *fig.* **1773** GOLDSM. *Stoops to Conq.* III. Wks. (Globe) 663/2 There's Mrs. Mantrap, Lady Betty Blackleg [etc.]. **1840** DICKENS *Barn. Rudge* xiii, Mrs. Varden, regarding the Maypole as a sort of humane man-trap, or decoy for husbands. **1846** GREENER *Sci. Gunnery* 197 Were you to bawl in the ears of those employed in the construction [of certain guns],...you would not affect nor abate one, in the number of these infernal man-traps.

First Edition (1905)

An early draft gave a definition for the second sense: 'fig. A person or thing which is likely to prove a pitfall or to cause injury

to persons.' But this was later crossed out and replaced with the more open-ended 'transferred use]. and fig[urative].' marking.

The September
OED Online
update contains
137 entries new
to the *OED* from
all over the
English-speaking
world. These
include:

mandir

(a Hindu temple),

manilla

(a variety of poker),

mapepire

(a venomous snake),

maqam

(a melodic mode in
Arabic music), and

marara

(an Australian tree).

The Second Edition entry adds some more recent quotations but, characteristically,

leaves the basic arrangement of the entry untouched:

'man-trap, sb.

A trap for catching men, esp. one for catching trespassers in private grounds.

1788 WOLCOT (P. Pindar) *Peter's Pension Wks.* (1812) II. 18 Your Man-traps, guards of goose and duck And cock and hens. **1791** BOSWELL *Johnson* 20 Mar. an. 1776, He should have warned us of our danger, before we entered his garden of flowery eloquence, by advertising, 'Spring-guns and men-traps set here'. **1880** BROWNING *Clive* 24 Did no writing on the wall Warn me 'Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!' *transf. and fig.* **1773** GOLDS. *Stoops to Conq.* III. Wks. (Globe) 663/2 There's Mrs. Mantrap, Lady Betty Blackleg [etc.], **1840** DICKENS *Barn. Rudge* xiii, Mrs. Varden, regarding the Maypole as a sort of humane man-trap, or decoy for husbands. **1846** GREENER *Sci. Gunnery* 197 Were you to bawl in the ears of those employed in the construction [of certain guns]...you would not affect nor abate one, in the number of these infernal man-traps. **1857** W. CHANDLESS *Visit to Salt Lake* II. xi. 330 The planks (of the streets) worn out and broken through, leaving large holes, popularly known as 'man-traps'. **1903** G. B. SHAW *Man & Superman* III. 121 You know better than any of us that marriage is a mantrap baited with simulated accomplishments. **1922** JOYCE *Ulysses* 425 You never seen me in the mantrap with a married highlander. **1929** W. FAULKNER *Sartoris* (1932) v. ii. 365 Some new kind of mantrap [sc. an aeroplane] that flies fine—on paper. **1965** H. SHEPPARD *Dict. Railway Slang* 7 *Man trap*, catch points to prevent unauthorised entry from siding. **1974** P. M. HUBBARD *Thirsty Evil* i. 9 She was no man-trap, but she did not miss much.

Second Edition (1989)

There's an interesting point to note about this arrangement: it makes it appear as if the literal sense gave rise to the figurative sense, in spite of the fact that the former is documented fifteen years *later* than the latter. Henry Bradley, the editor who approved *Man-trap* for the First Edition in 1905, had James Murray's backing for this. Murray stipulated that senses should be ordered chronologically according to the earliest evidence for each, *except* when this contradicted what one could reason about the order in which senses *should* have developed: 'That sense is placed first which was actually the earliest in the language: the others follow in the order in which they appear to have arisen.' So there are numerous entries like *Man-trap* in which the ordering of senses does not follow their chronology.

It's easy to see why Murray wanted to keep both options open. The readers who collected quotation evidence for the first edition were impressively skilled and productive, but they could by no means guarantee to have uncovered the earliest example of every word, or of every sense of a word. Like palaeontologists tracing the evolution of dinosaurs from an incomplete fossil record, Murray's team of editors had to keep considering whether an incomplete quotation record could be relied upon to set out accurately the history of a word's evolution. Now and then they evidently decided that it could not.

Man-trap appears to be just such a case. Bradley must have reasoned to himself that since one can't use a word in a figurative sense before it exists in a literal sense, the evidence collected so far must give an incomplete picture. With only

fifteen years in it, he probably felt that this wasn't chancing his arm too far.

When we came to revise the entry for the Third Edition, using much more extensive research resources than were available to the original editors, we were able to antedate both these senses. We found an example of the literal sense from 1775 in the comic opera *The Rival Candidates*. We also found an example of the figurative sense from 1726 in Charles Johnson's comedy *The Female Fortune-Teller*. (Johnson was a minor Grub-Street dramatist: a scathing footnote in Pope's *Dunciad* has him spending his days in a Covent Garden coffee house, 'a martyr to obesity'.) In *The Female Fortune-Teller* there is a scene in which the credulous Astraea questions a mysterious all-knowing brass head. Brazens as well as brass, the head cynically disabuses Astraea of various cherished ideals, informing her that so-called truth is nothing but opinion, that love is a mere effect of bodily constitution, and finally that marriage is 'a man-trap'.

These antedatings significantly widened the gap between the two senses identified in the First Edition entry. As we filled in more of the picture, then, it seemed that the evidence had been pointing in the right direction all along: the figurative sense now appeared to be almost half a century earlier than the literal one. It was starting to look as if Bradley's reasoning had misled him somehow.

Could a word exist in a figurative sense before it existed in any literal sense? It's not impossible for certain kinds of words, for example those borrowed from other languages; but it is unusual. Perhaps, then, in the case of *mantrap* it is inaccurate to identify the two senses as 'literal' and 'figurative'. Or

perhaps the word doesn't really fall into these two senses at all.

When we re-examined Bradley's six quotations with these doubts in mind, we began to see an awkwardness about the plan. The last quotation, from William Greener's *Science of Gunnery*, sits ill with the other 'transf. and fig.' quotations: Greener uses *mantrap* in more or less the same way we now use *deathtrap*, and so has little in common with Goldsmith and Dickens, who use *mantrap* in the context of sex and marriage.

With a relatively small array of evidence to go on, one can readily understand Bradley not making a meal out of this. But the quotations added for the Second Edition entry make this tension within the 'transf. and fig.' sense much harder to overlook. The Shaw, Joyce, and Hubbard quotations revolve around marriage and sex (the quotation from *Ulysses* refers to a brothel). Chandless and Faulkner, meanwhile, follow Greener in using *mantrap* to mean *deathtrap*. What emerges is a sense division running along a line quite different to that which Bradley's entry draws.

Picking through the quotations in this way made us realize that the flaw in Bradley's reasoning had to do with the meaning of *man*. As the *OED* entry for *man* demonstrates, the various senses of the word fall into two camps, some referring to people generally and others referring to males specifically: these two branches of meaning have coexisted as

far back as we can trace the word. The principal distinction to draw in analysing *mantrap* is not that between figurative and literal uses, but rather the same distinction that is drawn with *man* itself: something which traps *people*, and something which traps *males*. Within these two branches there may well be uses which are more or less literal and figurative, but distinguishing those would be a secondary concern.

It's interesting to look back and note that the original definition reads 'A trap for catching men, *esp.* one for catching trespassers in private grounds.' Had the drafter put *people* instead of *men*—for gins and legholds are indiscriminating, and surely even in 1905 women were known to trespass now and then?—one wonders whether Bradley might perhaps have paused at the Goldsmith and Dickens quotations and been led to reconsider *mantrap* along the lines of gender.

Just as the two branches of *man* run in parallel through the historical record—one does not develop from the other—so we can suppose the two branches of *mantrap* to be parallel and perhaps independent formations. Looking at things this way, there is no reason *not* to place first that sense which is documented earliest: so first place in the entry can be given to the brass head in *The Female Fortune-Teller*; and Charles Johnson, derided by Pope as a plagiaristic hack who 'means not, but blunders round about a meaning', gets his moment of lexical glory:

Revision of the entries in the September *OED Online* update has revealed an earlier origin than previously thought for many words, including:

Manchurian

(adjective; earliest evidence antedated to 1706 from 1869)

mangle

(the machine; 1696 from 1774)

maniac

(adjective; 1526 from 1604), and

manservant

(1409 from 1551).

mantrap /Brit. 'mantrap, U.S. 'mæntɹæp/, *n.* Plural **-s**, (rarely) **mentraps**. [< MAN *n.*¹ + TRAP *n.*¹ With sense 1 cf. MAN *n.*¹ II; with sense 2 cf. MAN *n.*¹ I.]

1. humorous. a. A thing which ensnares men. In early use chiefly with reference to marriage.

1726 C. JOHNSON *Female Fortune-teller* iv. 70 *Astr.* Marriage? *Head.* A Man-Trap. **1823** R. B. PEAKE *Duel* i. ii. 11 Before I enter their premises (especially where there is such a man-trap as matrimony set) I'll reconnoitre. **1841** DICKENS *Barnaby Rudge* xiii. 5 Mrs. Varden, regarding the Maypole as a sort of humane man-trap, or decoy for husbands. **1869** E. BULWER-LYTON *Walpole* iii. iii. 90 Warn him to shun That vile Jezebel's man-trap—I know he goes there. **1903** G. B. SHAW *Man & Superman* iii. 121 You know better than any of us that marriage is a mantrap baited with simulated accomplishments. **1922** J. JOYCE *Ulysses* 411 You never seen me in the mantrap with a married highlander. **1996** *Woman's Day* (Sydney) 10 June (verso front cover), Setting a man-trap in the sand trap, Sharon wore a slinky shoe-string top for her date with Dweezil.

b. spec. A woman who seeks to entrap a man into marriage (as a fictional personification in quots. 1773 and 1848); (more generally in later use) a woman who habitually seduces and exploits men, a vamp. Cf. *man-trapper* s.v. MAN *n.*¹ 32c.

1773 O. GOLDSMITH *She stoops to Conquer* iii. 62 There's Mrs. Mantrap, Lady Betty Blackleg [etc.]. **1848** THACKERAY *Vanity Fair* xxxvii. 335 Mrs. Mantrap..drives her greys in the Park. **1881** A. TRUMBLE *Slang Dict.* 22/1 *Man-trap*, a widow. **1974** P. M. HUBBARD *Thirsty Evil* i. 9 She was no man-trap, but she did not miss much. **1997** *Radio Times* 7 June 50/2 Hiding out in a small town, the manipulative mantrap changes identity, gets a new job and seduces besotted insurance agent Peter Berg into carrying out her every whim.

2. A person or thing which ensnares people. a. lit. A trap for catching trespassers or poachers.

1775 H. B. DUDLEY *Rival Candidates* i. iv. 17 Men-traps and spring-guns set in these grounds day and night. **1788** J. WOLCOT *Peter's Pension in Wks.* (1812) II. 18 Your Man-traps, guards of goose and duck And cock and hens. **1791** J. BOSWELL *Life Johnson* 20 Mar. an. 1776, He should have warned us of our danger, before we entered his garden of flowery eloquence, by advertising, 'Spring-guns and men-traps set here'. **1827** *Act 7-8 Geo. IV*, c.18 §1 If any Person shall set or place..any Spring Gun, Man Trap, or other Engine calculated to destroy human Life. **1880** R. BROWNING *Clive* 24 Did no writing on the wall Warn me 'Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!' **1971** *ELH* 38 128 Grace's willingness to take up..with..Fitzpiers [in Hardy's *Woodlanders*]..hinges on her near escape from a mantrap. **1992** *New Republic* 4 May 37/1 The intensification of the Game Laws, with mantraps and spring guns legalized to sustain a grotesque privilege (ownership of wild creatures), sparked a bush war in every hamlet.

b. fig. and in extended use: a person or thing intended or likely to entrap, ensnare, or injure a person or people.

1798 J. BOADEN *Cambro-Britons* i. 10 As hur is a christian soul's, as errant a man-trap as ever snapt up a false thief! **1834** R. H. HORNE *Spirit Peers & People* II. v. 103 Oh the infamous magistrates of Babylon! that parish-bane, Mr. Blight! that pauper bully, Joskins! that man=trap, Mr. Diggary! **1846** W. W. GREENER *Sci. Gunnery* 197 Were you to bawl in the ears of those employed in the construction [of certain guns]..you would not affect nor abate one, in the number of these infernal man-traps. **1857** W. CHANDLESS *Visit Salt Lake* II. xi. 330 The planks (of the streets) worn out and broken through, leaving large holes, popularly known as 'man-traps'. **1901** J. DAVIDSON *Test. Vivisector* 25 Caught in her snare, The man-trap Memory, towards the recreant hour When life is at the ebb, I rise and think to end it now. **1929** W. FAULKNER *Sartoris* (1932) v. ii. 365 Some new kind of mantrap [sc. an aeroplane] that flies fine—on paper. **1965** H. SHEPPARD *Dict. Railway Slang* 7 *Man trap*, catch points to prevent unauthorised entry from siding. **1995** *Wired* Mar. 80/2 There are plenty of legitimate security wares that any large employer would be smart to look into—for example, revolving door 'mantraps' equipped with metal detectors.

Third Edition (in progress: 2000)

In a very deliberate tightening of Murray's rules for the first edition, our policy for the Third Edition is always to respect the chronology of the quotations as we find them: that sense is placed first which the evidence tells us was earliest. The picture that results may sometimes contradict our initial suppositions, but by presenting the quotation record as we have it, and attempting to explain it rather than explain it away, we can ensure that truth in lexicography is more than just opinion, whatever the brass head may say.

At the same time, we have to recognize that pinning everything on the quotation record makes the ordering of each entry provisional to some extent, liable to be overthrown by the discovery of new evidence – an even earlier quotation, for example. It's always possible that Johnson's apparent coinage may turn out to be just another of his cribs, and Bradley may have the last laugh after all.

James McCracken, Principal Editor, *OED*

Richard Palmer

On 21 June Richard Palmer retired. He leaves an enormous gap in the *OED's* in-house expertise, for his knowledge of plants was enormous; latterly Richard was occupied full-time on *OED* entries for plant names.

His training in Latin and Greek meant that he was often turned to by the members of the Etymology Group. Richard was noted for his very clear and distinctive handwriting, still a valuable attribute for a lexicographer in this age of keyboards and computers.

Richard had been with OUP for 42 years, and on the staff of the *OED* revision project for the last seven. His career started on 30 September 1957, when he joined *the Oxford Latin Dictionary*, working under Peter Glare. In 1981, with the completion of this project, Richard moved to the *Supplement to*

the OED; in 1984 to the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*; and in 1993 to the *OED* revision project. Apart from his work at OUP, Richard is well-known in the Department of Plant Sciences in Oxford University, as both a contributor of specimens to its herbarium, and as someone who can answer questions sent in to the Department by members of the public. He has also co-authored a work on the flora of the Shetlands, and we look forward to benefiting from his expertise in his new capacity of botany consultant.

Alan Hughes, Associate Editor, *OED*

All areas of the animal kingdom are represented in the September *OED Online* update: mammals (*Manx cat*), birds (*manucode*), fishes (*manta*), reptiles (*map turtle*), amphibians (*marbled newt*), and invertebrates (*mantis*).





A day in the life

Music-related terms in the September *OED Online* update include instruments ranging from the *mandolin* to the *maracas*, the musical directions *mancando* (becoming softer) and *marcato* (in a distinct and emphasized manner), the *Manchester school* of composers, *manuscript paper*, and not forgetting *manganite* (a type of rock!).

This is a momentous day. After what seems like an eternity, I am about to finish editing *milk*. So it is with a certain amount of excitement that I get to my desk in the morning. My job for the last few weeks has been editing all the entries in the *OED* from *mild* to *Milky Way*, preparing them to be published in *OED Online*.

Momentous day or not, the editorial process remains basically the same whichever entry an editor is working on. Ongoing research means that there are antedatings to be found and added to the quotation paragraphs of many entries (with the evidence currently available to editors, over one in three *OED* senses can now be given an earlier citation). More recent evidence also comes to light, sometimes with the consequence of making a word which was previously held to be obsolete current (if somewhat rare). As editors we now have a large number of scholarly and commercial databases available to us, accessible via the Internet, which provide rich seams of evidence previously untapped. Not all contain modern texts – some are facsimile reproductions going back to the early 18th century, and so can prove useful in gathering more evidence for a seemingly sparsely illustrated term.

Although a large amount of time is spent compiling further evidence for the quotation paragraphs, *OED2* definitions also often need to be edited and updated. Newly added quotations might give the definition a slightly different nuance which will have to be covered. Occasionally the definition, if it comes directly from the First Edition, is written in rather quaint Victorian terms which, charming as it is, will have to be updated into clear modern English, without losing any shade of meaning, as in the case of *prothodaw* ('a prime simpleton, a noodle of the first rank'), or, more famously, *hairbrush* ('a toilet brush for smoothing and dressing the hair'). This can be especially tricky when you are faced with a word which died out centuries ago, and there is very little evidence for it.

Occasionally the definition, if it comes directly from the First Edition, is written in rather quaint Victorian terms which, charming as it is, will have to be updated into clear modern English...

As well as editing a given alphabetical range of words, I am also responsible for maintaining the *OED3* e-mail account, through which the public may communicate with *OED* editors, send in their contributions, and ask questions about the project. An eclectic mix of material is sent on a daily basis to the account, ranging from antedatings discovered during someone's academic research to pleas for help with homework.

As well as updating entries, editors are frequently called on to add 'new' senses within an entry – although often these are not so much new as previously overlooked.

As I cast my eyes over the entry for *milk* n., checking that the senses are in chronological order, I notice that there is an entry for *milk drinker*; but none for the much commoner *milk drink*, so I decide to add it. As I am searching for evidence (earliest date so far is 1863), I realize that it is not as straightforward as it first seemed. *Milk drink* is a drink which is milk-based, but it is also a drink which is prepared with milk. Two different things, and reading the quotations, it is not always immediately obvious which is which. So it all takes a little longer than envisaged.

As 6 o'clock beckons, I feel my work on *milk* is done. After seventeen senses, numerous subsenses, and two hundred and thirteen compounds (it seems you can add almost any word to *milk* to make a valid compound), *milk* is but a memory. Well, until tomorrow, when I turn my attention to the verb. But for the moment I can enjoy my small triumph.

I finished *milk* today, oh boy!

Fiona McPherson, Senior Assistant Editor, *OED*

Appeals

Words or phrases which appear on the Appeals List are those currently being drafted or revised for the *Oxford English Dictionary* for which the documentary evidence is incomplete. Often these are slang or colloquial items which cannot be researched in specialist texts and are most likely to be turned up by a general reader in popular or non-specialized literature.

Usually the appeal is for an earlier example than our current earliest (e.g. 'antedate 1970' for a word for which our earliest example comes from 1970), but sometimes the appeal is for an interdating where there is a large gap in the *OED*'s quotation evidence (e.g. 'interdate 1589-1910'). Occasionally we ask for a postdating (e.g. 'postdate 1875'), if an editor feels that an item being revised is still current but has failed to find any recent examples through the usual avenues of research.

cat in the meal-tub

antedate 1849; any 20th century evidence

milk stout antedate 1942

minority n. (member of minority group) antedate 1976

Moiré fringe antedate 1956

Moiré pattern

antedate 1950

nails adj. (= hard as nails; as 'he's nails') any evidence

And finally: any evidence of regional variations of the word for to call someone, let the phone ring a predetermined number of times, and hang up (as a signal of one's safe arrival, etc.).

Please send submissions to oad3@oup.co.uk

OED APPEALS AND SUBMISSIONS

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