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T. S. ELIOT IN *THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*

The second Supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, edited by Robert Burchfield between 1957 and 1986, more than doubled the number of literary eponyms in the dictionary, to 167.[1] The first edition of 1933 (OED1), including the first Supplement, had *Aristophanic* (first attested 1827) and *Sophoclean* (1649) but not *Æschylean* (1844) or *Euripidean* (1821); *Ossianesque* (1874) but not *Omaresque* (1892); *Coleridgean* (1834) but not *Southeyan* (1817); and so on. In addition to these missing nineteenth century terms, the second Supplement—and subsequently the integrated second edition of 1989 (OED2)—also added a number of newer ones, such as *Joycean* (1927)*, Poundian* (1939)*, Woolfian* (1936), and *Yeatsian* (1928).[2] However, although there are headwords in OED2

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[1] Quantitative evidence is based on analysis of the pseudo-SGML text of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition (1989), encoded in the late 1980s at the University of Waterloo as part of the digitization process, and the TriStar CD-ROM edition (1987) of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st Edition (1928). Information from the first Supplement (1933) has been gleaned manually. Compiled results are available from the author. All OED data is published by Oxford University Press.

[2] As with many first citations in OED2, these all can be antedated. The earliest I have found are, respectively: 'Joycean ellipsis' in *The Dial*, lxix, (1925), 173; 'Poundian canons' in *This Quarter*, i (1925), 315; 'Woolfian novel' in *The Bookman*, lx, (1924), 193; and several instances of 'Yeatsian' from 1913, including 'a more Yeatsian reason' in *The*

as recent as *Durellian*, *Gravesian*, and *Greeneian* (all 1961), and as expendable, arguably, as *Lylian*, *Runyonesque*, and *Pinerotic*, there is no *Eliotian*, *Eliotesque*, or *Eliotic* to be found in any edition—including, as of mid-2015, the current *OED Online* (OED3), which is in the midst of a complete revision. This despite the appearance in print of these terms (with reference to the style of T. S. Eliot—earlier occurrences refer to earlier Eliots) as early as 1926 and 1928.[3]

The omission of adjectives derived from the name such a consequential literary figure becomes more curious when one takes note of the 'reverence' (Burchfield's own term)[4] otherwise shown by Burchfield to Eliot's writings. When Valerie Eliot enquired by letter in February of 1977 as to why the second volume of the second Supplement had overlooked her husband's earliest use of *mug's game* in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), though it had quoted him for the same phrase in *The Elder Statesman* (1959), Burchfield wrote back to say that '███████████████████████ ██ ██████',[5]

Living Age, cclxxvi (Jan-Mar, 1913), 488.

[3] Viz., 'T. S. Eliotian metaphysics' in *Voices: an Open Forum for the Poets*, vi (1926), 35; 'Eliotesque leanings', in *The Oxford Outlook*, viii.41 (1926), 308; and 'Eliotic complacence' in *The London Aphrodite*, i-vi (1928), 316.

[4] In his preface to *Unlocking the English Language* (London, 1989), which prints his T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures, Burchfield mentions his frequent references to Eliot and his works (the index gives sixteen topics under 'Eliot, T. S.', covering fourteen pages), saying 'It hardly needs to be said that in this case reference means reverence' (n.p.).

[5] Oxford University Press Archives, ████████████████████████████ █████████████████████████.

Perhaps this was mere diplomacy, but Burchfield's Supplement does show a degree of piety to Eliot. In terms of lexicographical evidence drawn from his work, Eliot is represented by more evidence quotations (556) than any of the influential contemporaries mentioned above, except Joyce (1,825 – *Ulysses* alone supplies 1,323). These illustrate 394 main senses or sub-senses, and 145 attributive and combined formations. Fifteen times OED2 does what Burchfield told Mrs Eliot would be an expected practice given the availability of evidence, quoting Eliot more than once for the same sense. Three quotations are reprinted for *culture* (n.), definition 5a. ('The training, development, and refinement of mind, tastes, and manners … the intellectual side of civilization'), all from *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). Another multiple citation affects the dictionary's definition even more directly: the second sense of *groaner* not only quotes Eliot's 'The heaving groaner | Rounded homewards,' from *The Dry Salvages* (1941),[6] but also his parenthetical gloss in the prefatory note to that poem—'Groaner: a whistling buoy'—which appears both as quotation evidence, and again verbatim within the OED definition: 'b. A whistling buoy. *local U.S.*'

Like most frequently-quoted literary sources, Eliot supplies evidence for a mix of unusual lexis (*acridian*, *azyme*, *autarky,* etc.), common words used in ordinary ways (*alibi*, *amateur*, *bike*), and words both ordinary and extraordinary which he used in such ways as to have made a mark on the reading culture. In OED2, words for which Eliot is cited and which might recall particular passages of his verse to the familiar reader include: *agonistes, anfractuous, Baedeker, barbituric, behovely, burnt-out, chthonic, coffee spoon, demob, demotic, door-yard, gramophone, groaner, grimpen, gutter* (v.)*, hyacinth, inoperancy, juvescence, Komsomol, laquearia, maculate, miasmal, mug's game, muttering* (ppl. a.)*, née, piaculative, pneumatic, polyphiloprogenitive, prayable, sawdust, semblable, shanti, smokefall, tereu, towelled, twit,*

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[6] *The Dry Salvages*, I, 8.

and *unprayable.*

When Charles Monteith, Eliot's latter-day colleague at Faber and Faber, wrote in to the *London Review of Books* to defend a poet's right to esoteric vocabulary, he recalled his first encounter with some of these words (and one or two others): 'when I was a schoolboy, I was very puzzled by "anfractuous", "pistillate", "staminate", "sutler", above all by "polyphiloprogenitive" … I looked them up in a dictionary.'[7] If this is true, the young Monteith would have been only partially unpuzzled by the dictionaries available to him, since Burchfield's Supplement vol. 3 (O-Sd) was the first to record the final and most puzzling of these terms, in 1982. Looking up *anfractuous* would only have puzzled him further, since the definition available in OED1 ('winding, sinuous') is not what Eliot means by 'Paint me the bold anfractuous rocks', in 'Sweeney Erect' (1920). He means something more like the current French sense of *anfractueux*— 'rugged, craggy'—which is how OED2 defines a new sense of the term, based on Eliot's usage alone.

Of the remaining terms on the list given above, *agonistes, inoperancy*, *juvescence, Komsomol, laquearia,* and *piaculative* are the other words for which Eliot is the first recorded user.[8] As with *anfractuous,* for *pneumatic, towelled*, *prayable* and *unprayable*, his is the first recorded use of a new sense or sub-sense (there are sixteen such semantic

[7] Charles Monteith, 'Reckless' (letter) *The London Review of Books*, xi.22 (23 November 1989).

[8] First recorded uses not on this list are from Eliot's prose or from drafts: *counter-rhythm*, *en principe*, *on-stage*, *rature*, *salonnière*. One might also wish to include *bullshit*, which has an anterior attribution buried within the first quotation: '**c 1915** Wyndham Lewis *Let.* (1963) 66 Eliot has sent me Bullshit and the Ballad for Big Louise. They are excellent bits of scholarly ribaldry.'

extensions recorded in all, not counting combinations). Literary usage, including even nonce usages and hapaxes, has always had a place in OED entries—James Murray himself coined the term 'nonce-word', self-reflexively, to describe terms coined for a particular purpose within a set context (i.e., employed only 'for the nonce').[9] Murray had wished to include the usages of 'all the great English writers of all ages',[10] a predilection shared by his successor Burchfield: 'I love poetry and poetical use has been poured into the Supplement'.[11]

As with Joyce's neologisms and nonce usages, however, some of the evidence from Eliot's works substantiates dictionary entries of dubious lexicographical value. The putative word *opherion*, for example, which appears in *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts* (1971), is given as a new headword, with the explanation that Eliot likely meant *orpharion*, but no other instances of this (mis)spelling are listed. It is not unheard of for OED to record one-time misspellings or transcription errors—Shakespeare's *cyme*, *pannell*, *prenzie*, *solidare*, and *wragged*, for instance—but these are exceedingly rare, especially for literary sources (many are from glossaries and lexicons), and even more so for texts written after spelling standardization. Eliot's *opherion* is the only twentieth century example in OED2 of an erroneous headword with only one citation.[12]

Charlotte Brewer has given one account of how Burchfield manoeuvered on

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[9] See OED2 s.v. *nonce*. Cf. James A. H. Murray, 'Preface' to *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford, 1888), I, xx.

[10] *Ibid.*, v.

[11] Quoted in Charlotte Brewer, *Treasure House of the Language: The Living OED* (New Haven, 2007), 191.

[12] In a 2004 revision, OED3 added a second citation from 1991.

behalf of an Eliotic coinage that had been called into question by his colleagues:

> his inclusion of T. S. Eliot's *loam feet* … was disapproved of both by
> some of the consulted scholars and by his 'publishing overlords within
> OUP' … Nevertheless, Burchfield decided to retain this quotation,
> together with one he has also included from a poem by Donald Davie
> … which he thought might have been influenced by Eliot's use.[13]

Davie's usage, after Eliot, in *Brides of Reason* (1955), may be scant corroboration of the term's broader currency, but it does mark down in the lexicographical record the suggestion that the term has made an impression on the tradition of English poetic diction. Similarly, Eliot's *juvescence*, described by Burchfield as a mis-formation of *juvenescence*,[14] is included in the dictionary along with a second quotation, by Stephen Spender (1948). As if to acknowledge the questionable validity of such entries on purely lexicographical criteria, Burchfield comments wryly that documenting such Eliotic echoes in OED2 would, 'At the very least … obviate the need for such a note in some future issue of *Notes & Queries*' (the other Oxford publication of which he was Editor).[15]

OED quotation evidence can often tell a story of literary influence in this way. Davie's and Spender's usages are almost certainly influenced by Eliot; they may even represent an allusion or reference to the works in which he coined them. It is also possible to reverse the angle of view, and discern Eliot's own sources: as Burchfield notes, before Eliot uses it allusively in 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar' (1920), *defunctive* is only attested in Shakespeare; *concitation*, used in 'Gerontion' (1920), is absent from the record after 1656. One could add to Burchfield's examples Eliot's title, 'Sweeney Agonistes' (1932), the first recorded use of the postpositive epithet since

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[13] Brewer, 185.

[14] *Ibid.*, 68.

[15] *Ibid.*, 12.

Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671), and *grimpen*, which does not appear between Arthur Conan Doyle's *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) and *East Coker* (1940). Even more complex stories of influence can be read in(to) such entries. Burchfield, for example, speculates that William Faulkner and Tom Wolfe use *defunctive* under the influence of Eliot, rather than of Shakespeare.[16] However, one must also be on one's guard: of the word *behovely* in *Little Gidding* (1942)—'Sin is Behovely, but | All shall be well'— Burchfield says, 'Eliot almost certainly encountered it in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*.'[17] The implication (not quite an assertion) of debt certainly wrong, though one can see how Chaucer's 'it is bihovely thing to telle whiche ben dedly synnes', which OED1 records, might suggest itself as a source. Neither OED1 nor Burchfield was acquainted with Eliot's actual source, Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (1395), which he is quoting directly (albeit without quotation marks).

In some cases the association of the term with its originator is so strong that it must enter into the definition, as with the headword *objective correlative* ('Term applied by T. S. Eliot to…' etc.), and the inclusion s.v. *sensibility* of the combination *dissociation of sensibility* ('T. S. Eliot's term for…' etc.), coinages that Burchfield described as 'towering over' Eliot's 'poetical experimentation with words'.[18] Two other OED2 definitions make a judgement of Eliot's literary influence explicitly. In the entry for *wasteland*, the Supplement added three new sub-senses, the last of which recognizing not only the appearance of a literary work of cultural significance, but also the lexical extension of the headword by the allusion-generating force of that text (which does not in fact

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[16] *Ibid.*, 68. I would guess from the context that Wolfe's primary debt is to Faulkner rather than to Eliot, however.

[17] *Ibid.*, 76.

[18] *Ibid.*, 70.

contain the headword—arguably not even in the title): '1.d *transf.* and *fig.*, sometimes with allusion to T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922).' In the same vein, OED2 supposes that in writing 'not with a bang but a whimper'[19] in 'The Hollow Men' (1925), Eliot had extended *bang* (n.^{1}) into a new allusive sub-sense, recording three subsequent variations on that phrase. One cannot overstate how rare such explicitly allusive sub-senses are in OED2. The dictionary has 1,874 occurrences of 'allusion to' or cognates ('alluding to', 'used allusively', 'in allusive use', etc.) in its definitions, of which about 575 are 'to' texts (the rest being non-textual types of allusion, e.g. 'allusion to sense 1', 'allusion to the convict's task of breaking stones', etc.), or 0.07% of all the definitions in the dictionary. Of those, 230 are alluding to passages of the Bible and 177 to Classical mythology or other cultural commonplaces, such as proverbs, sayings, fables, and legends. Of literary texts attributable to a particular author (169), half (87) are based on proper names (e.g. Dickens's *Scrooge*), or other invented names for things (e.g. Wyndham's *triffid*) and neologisms (e.g. Carroll's *slithy*), rather than on extant words used memorably (e.g. Milton's 'drop serene'). In this last and smallest category, only five sources appear more than once, headed by Shakespeare with twenty-five allusive definitions. Next come Milton with five, Swift and Virgil with three, and Eliot and Kipling with two.

When collocations such as *loam feet* are recorded as lexemes, the usual practice is to include them in a separate section within the main entry. Over 8,000 OED2 entries have such a section, listing over 145,000 words formed with affixes (e.g. *non-Christian*, *unaffrayed*) and attributive combinations both transparent (e.g. *weather report*, *sandwich papers*) and opaque (e.g. *loam feet*, *water fruit*, *Sunday face*). For the literary historian and critic these are either the most or the least interesting of the lexemes recorded in the

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[19] Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', V, 31.

dictionary. Though they cite him as the first compounder of fifty-four such forms, for instance, it is unlikely that OED2 lexicographers thought Eliot was the first to put *pre-Renaissance* together, or to write about a *poker game*.[20] Neither is his employment of these terms (in 'Dante' (1929) and in 'Sweeney Agonistes', respectively) particularly memorable or remarkable. On the other hand, he might reasonably be supposed to have come up with *dreamcrossed* on his own, as well as *dream kingdom* and perhaps a few others.[21]

Although the OED's practice for documenting attributive and affixal forms was not as exhaustive with as with main senses and sub-senses, as a corollary this involved more discretion in determining what could be included as a combination, and what evidence would substantiate these. From the first edition onwards, which and which types of formations to record had been a matter of some controversy, as

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[20] Indeed, OED3 antedates *pre-Renaissance* by some 57 years (and has removed the Eliot quotation), and *poker game* by 75.

[21] A number of Eliot's seemingly 'opaque' compounds have also been antedated in OED3's revised entries. While some of these, such as *rain land* and *time-ridden*, simply recognize that the terms have been in broader use than OED2 knew, for others antedating suggests the possibility of undetected influence in Eliot's use. Compare, for example, his 'proudnecked, like thoroughbreds' (*The Rock*, ii.75) to J. Cypress's (H. W. Herbert's) 'six proud-necked bitchampers' (*Sporting Scenes &c*, 1842, II.ii.25); or 'the timekept City' (*The Rock*, i.7) to Aaron Hill's 'the time-kept Clang' (*The Fanciad,* 1743, IV.31). Postdating also raises the possibility of influence, in the other direction: OED3's third citation for *timekept*, for instance, is unambiguously in reference to Eliot ('the "timekept" visible order', from an academic article on *The Rock*, 1969).

Burchfield described in a paper given to the Philological Society in 1971.[22] Because of this however, combinations provide a way to judge an author's esteem with the historical dictionary maker which headwords do not, since the policies for including these are comparatively rigid.

Eliot is the only cited source in OED2 for thirty combinations, including *batflight, blue-nailed, dreamcrossed, dream kingdom, proudnecked, sandsmoke, Sea-girls, smokefall, timekept,* and *time-ridden.* Dame Helen Gardner wrote to Burchfield in 1983 to ponder a definition for one of these, which she had been discussing with friends at a party. Burchfield published her suggestion verbatim in the dictionary, with attribution, s.v. *smoke*:

> **smokefall** [after *nightfall*] rare[-1], 'the moment when the wind drops and smoke that had ascended descends' (Dame Helen Gardner)

Though it would be mean to object *tout court* to the inclusion of this (lovely) compound, one might quibble that Gardner's gloss partakes less of 'scientific definition' than 'philosophic interpretation', as Eliot once complained of Friedrich Max

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[22] Reprinted in Burchfield, 83-108. It is fascinating that Burchfield could say, 'In practice the great majority [of combinations] that are admitted are in fact from literary sources' (Burchfield, 107, n.16), since this is not at all the case. Although it appears that, at least for the twentieth century sources Burchfield was handling, literary works may be slightly over-represented in combinations as compared with main senses, periodicals and newspapers are by far the most common types of source. *The Times*, *Nature*, and *The Westminster Gazette* contribute the most twentieth century quotations for combinations (none of the top ten sources are an individual author's corpus). See also Brewer, 180-84, for a fuller discussion of editorial policies regarding combinations.

Müller.[23] And, further, that if *smokefall* should be included in the dictionary, on what grounds could it ignore Gerard Manley Hopkins's *bloomfall* ('The Bugler's First Communion', 1918 [1878]), or Cecil Day-Lewis's *ghostfall* ('The Way In', 1965)?

For all these liberal inclusions of Eliot's poetical usages, two memorable Eliotic words are conspicuous by their absence. Neither the first nor the second Supplement thought *phthisic* (n. and a.) required revision. And (perhaps more surprisingly), as Burchfield notes, 'there is no record in [the Supplement] of Eliot's famous use of the word *etherised* … because this nineteenth century word was also covered by the OED, with illustrative examples beginning in 1800.'[24] Burchfield is again not quite correct about this, however. Eliot's immortal line employing *etherized* (with a 'z' in 1915/17) is, in fact, in Burchfield's Supplement, only not where one might expect to find it. It has a prominent place in the entry for *table* (n.)*,* quoted as the first recorded use of sub-sense I.5.d: 'A surgeon's operating table…'. In the same vein, 'A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand', as it turns out, also appears in OED2, not s.v. *phthisic*, but s.v. *blue* (a.). One might conjecture that, having recorded these lines on slips intended for the extraordinary (but deemed unneeded) usage, they were still found useful by lexicographers working on other entries. At least in the case of *etherize*, however, the famous quotation would pass into the dictionary unnoticed by its Eliot-revering editor.

A postscript: in a March 2014 revision, OED3 did update *etherize* with Eliot's line, just as an earlier (2006) revision had done for *phthisic*.

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23 Eliot, *Prose*, I, 106.

24 Burchfield, 75.