

In response to the revelation that I work on dictionaries, a tax adviser (of all people!), said ‘That sounds boring’. Dictionaries and humour clearly seem an unpromising pairing. What can there possibly be to say? Well, an Amazon search for *dictionary* and *humour* produces over 300 results. There are humorous dictionaries of golf, snooker, fishing, gardening, computing, football, sailing, dieting, left-handedness, dating, sex, parenting, and rats (really), as well as various dialects and registers of English. Browse through books in the humour section of a bookshop, and you will often find a comic glossary included.

The reason dictionaries can be funny is that they do seem to be so utterly lacking in humour. There are clear rules about what can and what can’t be said in a dictionary as well as rules about how it’s supposed to be said. Playing with those expectations can cause a surprised snort, but it also pokes fun at the sort of pompous bossy know-alls who write serious dictionaries and the whole spectrum of authority they stand for.

Perhaps it’s useful to start with an account of what we expect when we pick up a dictionary. We expect an alphabetical arrangement of words (known in the business as *headwords*) with explanations of their meanings (*definitions*) and some information about how they’re used. Some dictionaries include examples (or *citations*) to show the words in use, and some provide diagrams, drawings, or photographs to make the meaning of words clearer still. Some offer information about the word’s origins (its *etymology*) or information about how it’s pronounced. Some dictionaries point us to related words, words with a similar origin, or words with a similar meaning using *cross-references*. We also expect dictionaries to be objective and concise. Lots of people look to dictionaries for advice on which words to use, but we don’t expect dictionaries to tell us how to think. Such detailed expectations leave lots of scope for playing with the dictionary format, and I’m going to try to cover all the different types of humour found in dictionaries as well as various kinds of dictionary-based humour in the wider world. The challenge is to do so without jokeicidal over-analysis.

‘The dictionary’ hasn’t always had a well-established format to follow, and this means that some older dictionaries now seem humorous when, probably, they didn’t at the time. When he published his groundbreaking *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755, Samuel Johnson was establishing a new standard by trying to include all the commonly used English words as well as the difficult ones from Latin and Greek. The problem is that commonly used words can be much harder to define,

and Johnson sometimes produced definitions that were more difficult to understand than the headwords. If you understand ‘a convulsion of the lungs, vellicated by some sharp serosity’, you probably wouldn’t need to look up *cough*, for example. ‘Any thing reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections’ may indeed describe a *network*, but it doesn’t make the word any easier to understand.

Humorous or barbed comments tucked away in an otherwise serious alphabetical listing can provide a glimpse of the personality of the compiler behind the apparently objective tone. So when Johnson chose to define *patron* as ‘commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery’ he knew that informed readers would see this as a reference to his own dealings with the Earl of Chesterfield (who tried to take credit for Johnson’s dictionary without providing the financial support its author badly needed during his nine years’ work). Johnson’s famous definition of *lexicographer* as ‘a harmless drudge’ is uncharacteristically humble and it’s echoed in an example of use given under *dull* ‘to make dictionaries is dull work’.

Changes in language can also cause unintentional humour, and the determinedly puerile will find much amusement in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the multi-volume treasure-trove of the history of English. For instance:

**associate** to keep company or have intercourse (*with*).

**bellhouse** a tower or other erection for containing a bell or set of bells ...

**interjaculate** to ejaculate in the midst of a conversation ...

In theory, these definitions could also give rise to genuine embarrassment. An example of lexical misunderstanding documented in the *OED* is Robert Browning’s misinterpretation of:

They talk’t of his having a Cardinalls Hat,

They’d send him as soon an Old Nuns Twat. [*Vanity of Vanities* (1660) (*OED*)]

Browning understood *twat* as referring to an item of clothing worn by nuns, and innocently employed it in that sense in his ‘Pippa Passes’:

Then, owls and bats, crows and twats,  
Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods,  
Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry! (IV Night)

Incidentally, the sense "a pregnant goldfish", a common misdefinition of *twat*, isn't listed in the *OED*.

The *Chambers Dictionary* is unique among modern mainstream dictionaries in including humorous definitions scattered among its more serious ones. This began in the first edition, called *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1901), with, for example *charity begins at home* 'usually an excuse for not allowing it to get abroad'. Later editors built on these entries and they became a distinctive feature of the dictionary:

**buckwheat** a plant (*Polygonum* or *Fagopyrum*), its seed used esp in Europe for feeding horses, cattle and poultry, in America for making into cakes for the breakfast table, etc.

**éclair** a cake long in shape but short in duration ...

**man-eater** a woman given to chasing, catching, and devouring men ...

**Santa Claus** an improbable source of improbable benefits ...

These are all carefully qualified by the rest of the definition to ensure that readers who genuinely don't know the meaning of the word could make sense of the entry. The definition of *buckwheat* is undoubtedly a nod towards Johnson's *oat* 'a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.'

In 1972 it was decided that these definitions had no place in a serious reference work, so they were all edited out. This was met with howls of disapproval from devoted users who had, presumably, traded up to a new edition and immediately checked that their favourite definitions were still there. The funnies were restored in 1983 and have been added to ever since:

**arm candy** someone who is invited as a partner to a social event more to add to the glamour of the occasion than for his or her sparkling conversational skills

**middle age** between youth and old age, variously reckoned to suit the reckoner

**track suit** a loose warm suit intended to be worn by athletes when warming up or training, but sometimes worn by others in an error of judgement

Witty definitions tucked in among the serious ones are the Alfred Hitchcock of the dictionary world: while there is a certain gratification in having them pointed out (<http://www.chambersharrap.co.uk/chambers/features/humorous.shtml>), it's far more satisfying to spot them for oneself. A hidden treat in a film, cd, dvd, or computer game is called an *easter egg*, and perhaps the term could be stretched to include Chambers's humorous definitions. So popular are they, that the editors post on their website a selection submitted by readers. Most follow the Chambers' format of commenting on the accepted use of normal terms:

**confidence** the feeling one experiences before one fully understands the situation (R McCarthy)

**naturist** a person who prefers to go about naked, and by doing so reminds others why it is a good idea to go about clothed (Robert James)

**unbelievable** a word used by sports commentators to describe any normal event (G. Kelly)

These gleams of gold in the gritty matter of serious dictionaries are a small part of the humour to be found in defining. Ambrose Bierce was an American journalist and satirist who included satirical definitions in his newspaper columns. They were later collected as *The Cynic's Word book* in 1906, and re-published with his preferred title, *The Devil's Dictionary* in 1911. It is perhaps the best known example of a comic dictionary: a book that subverts the dictionary-format for comic effect. Bierce used his definitions to comment on various aspects of contemporary life:

**clarionet** *n.* an instrument of torture operated by a person with cotton in his ears. There are two instruments worse than a clarionet – two clarionets.

**learning** *n.* the kind of ignorance distinguishing the studious.

**referendum** *n.* a law for submission of proposed legislation to a popular vote to learn the nonsensus of public opinion.

**year** a period of three hundred and sixty-five disappointments.

Evan Esar, another American humorist, adopted a similar approach in his *Comic Dictionary* (1943):

**family** a social unit where the father is concerned with parking space, the children with outer space, and the mother with closet space.

**play** work that you enjoy doing for nothing.

**statistics** the only science that enables different experts using the same figures to draw different conclusions.

From *Alphabet Soup* (1997), a collection of aphorisms by poet and satirist Leslie Woolf Hedley:

**advice** make certain you have rich parents.

**chess** boredom made complicated

This type of definition seems to be particularly associated with the cinema and Hollywood, where obscuring the distinction between reality and fantasy is an essential part of life. These examples are from John Jesco's unpublished 'Movie Dictionary' (1916-18):

**babies** the coupons on the bonds of matrimony. An expensive, useless luxury – unless they are “cute” enough to get in the pictures

**efficiency** the conqueror of conquerors. A word monopolized and patented by the Huns. A rare virtue among certain players who have been in pictures long enough to know better.

**greatness** the ability to select a good press agent.

Glendon Allvine's 'Studio Lingo' (1935) includes:

**career** more than a month's work on a picture.

**producer** usually the individual who thinks up an idea, finds a story, works out the preliminary set-up for a picture, builds in showmanship,

engages writers, indicates script revisions, designates director and with him selects case, untangles unforeseen [sic] problems, worries about budget, weather and overages, takes the bow when things go right and the rap when things go wrong.

A good producer has been defined along Hollywood Boulevard as one who has Frank Capra as director.

**resigned** euphemism for fired. Sooner or later in Hollywood practically everyone is fired. Producers fire writers; studio managers fire producers; presidents fire vice-presidents in charge of production; bankers fire presidents; depositors, judges and juries fire bankers.

Humorous definitions also work outside the dictionary context, and Oscar Wilde was fond of them in conversation as well as in his plays. He is commonly credited with:

Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same.

Extravagance is the luxury of the poor; penury is the luxury of the rich.

—and can certainly take credit for:

A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing. [*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892)]

Although he is now probably best known for *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain was an incisive satirist, and is credited with:

Climate is what we expect, weather is what we get.

Golf is a good walk spoiled.

Wit is the sudden marriage of ideas which before their union were not perceived to have any relation.

He certainly did write:

Cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education. [*Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894)]

In a rather more sombre tone, Woody Allen is credited with:

Marriage is the death of hope.

Time is nature's way of keeping everything from happening at once.

Tradition is the illusion of permanance.

This type of aphorism is quoted so frequently that they can change in the telling, and are found in various forms. Perhaps they seem funnier if they're introduced by 'As someone much wittier than me said ...'. Whether they began as definitions or were transformed into them by misquotation, it's evident that the dictionary-format is a useful short-hand for a seriousness that is quickly undercut by the subversive definition.

Humour isn't just for light-hearted entertainment, though. It can be used to avoid confronting unpleasant realities, and many dictionaries of the slang of soldiers serving in the First World War favoured misdefinition as a way of making light of inhuman conditions and incompetent or incomprehensible bureaucracy. These examples are from 'Tommy's Dictionary of the Trenches', an American's account of British trench language in Arthur Guy Empey's *Over the Top* (1917):

**adjutant** the name given to an officer who helps the Colonel do nothing.

He rides a horse and you see him at guard mounting and battalion parade.

**iron rations** a tin of bully beef, two biscuits, and a tin containing tea, sugar, and Oxo cubes. These are not supposed to be eaten until you die of starvation.

**rifle** a part of Tommy's armament. Its main use is to be cleaned.

Sometimes it is fired, when you are not using a pick or shovel. You also "present arms by numbers" with it. This is a very fascinating exercise to Tommy. Ask him.

First World War comic definitions often emphasize the distance between the troops' and their officers' understanding of the experience of war. This type of comic

glossary is found in several informal and unofficial newspapers or magazines published by the troops for the troops in or near the front line, called troop journals. These examples are from Iddy Umpty's 'Trench Terms', published in *The Listening Post* in 1917:

**brass hats** these are normal human beings in civil life, who, after enlisting, are dressed up in the clothing of an officer, but with the addition of scarlet-coloured bands around the hat and various parts of the clothing, and the addition of gold leaves on the peak of the hat. The junior of these individuals are usually employed on the game of "Passed to you, please." This consists of sending a page of meaningless typewritten symbols to some other "Brass-Hat," who scrawls something illegible on it, and passes it to another "Brass-Hat," or returns it, Should any "Brass-Hat" forget it, or keep it too long, the sender immediately follows it up with a "chaser." The "Brass-Hat" who gets out the largest number of chasers in a given time is deemed to be the most brilliant, and is awarded the Military Cross. There are cases recorded of "Brass-Hats" having been seen in the trenches.

**M and D** the total amount of sympathy handed out to suffering humanity by members of the medical profession on morning sick-parades. The "M" means "medicine" which consists generally of sarcastic advice on the question of beating it and not returning thither. The "D" represents "duty" which in these unsettled days may mean anything from going over the top to the latest thing in drill, such as turning about in four movements without letting the feet touch the ground.

Others imply that language is deliberately misused in an attempt to fool the troops into believing that conditions were better than they were:

**bacon** a mythical breakfast dish rumoured to have been issued to soldiers sometime in the forgotten past ... ['The Dictionary of War Terms', *The Listening Post*]

**leave** a fictitious period of leisure supposed to be spent in Blighty.  
[*Golden Horseshoe*]

**rest** a mythical period between being relieved and relieving in the trenches, which is usually spent in walking away from the line and returning straight back in poor weather and at short notice. [Johnston ‘Aussie Dictionary’]

Another technique used in First World War glossaries was to emphasize differences between civilian expectations and military reality:

**beer** a much appreciated form of nectar now replaced by a coloured liquor of a light yellow taste. [Johnston ‘Aussie Dictionary’]

**Flanders** a piece of mud almost surrounded by water [‘Definitions (in memory of H.M.F.)’]

**rain** a liquid. One of the ingredients used in the process of making mud. Also used to find the holes in tents. Is commonly known in almost any country, especially France. [‘Dictionary of War Terms’, *The Sling*]

**trench** long narrow excavations in earth or chalk, sometimes filled with mud containing soldiers, bits of soldiers, salvage and alleged shelters. [Johnston ‘Aussie Dictionary’]

Walter Hubert Downing, another Australian soldier, included some entries with deliberately obscured definitions in his *Digger Dialects* (1919). These include:

**carksuccer** an American soldier.

**fooker** an English private.

**knocking-shop** an untidy or squalid place.

**short-arm** medical examination.

Fellow veterans would certainly have understood *knocking-shop* in its usual sense of “brothel” and *short-arm* as a reference to humiliating public examinations for venereal disease. In an age of greater censorship and propriety, it’s possible that the entries for *carksuccer* and *fooker* might have been understood by some readers as straightforward headwords and definitions, rather than as obscenities respelt to represent the pronunciation of the soldiers who used them.

Dictionaries of Second World War slang also used humour, but in crucially different ways than the glossaries of First World War slang. They're often upbeat and usually considerably less cynical, and were designed to raise morale rather than to record the words that soldiers were really using. They tended to have introductions written by senior officers emphasizing what fun it was to be in the army, and some were even published by government departments. Johnny Viney's *Hi Hattie* (1941), a collection of letters home from a recruit in the American Navy, includes:

**AOL** absent over leave. Probably delayed by a brunette, tch tch. Or a blonde, tch tch tch. Or a red head, tch tch tch. That's terrible. By the way, what's her phone number?

**a fresh water wrench** fun to send a recruit after.

**a navy cocktail** castor oil gaulluppgullup-gulluup UGH!

Park Kendall's 'Army Slang' glossary in *Still in the Draft* (1942) also includes several wild-goose chases for recruits:

**biscuit gun** non-existent—shoots food to inept flyers.

**a muster button** you have to have one to wear on your uniform to show the paymaster that you have been mustered into Federal service, otherwise you won't get your check—and a rookie is aboard the merry-go-round again.

**rubber flag** sounds very logical for use on rainy days so rookie starts search. Even Majors have been known to suggest places to try. Rookie gets wet but smart.

Some of Kendall's other entries use excessively elaborate language to explain refusals and rejections:

**Horsecollar, Soldiers!** I do not wish to question the sincerity of your statement but might I suggest that you re-check the sources of information on which your affirmation is predicated.

**see the Chaplain!** I greatly regret that there is nothing I can do to assist you. Nor [can] I think of any department in the army to which to refer you

with your irksome complaints. Being a gentleman, I hesitate to tell you to shut your face. So may I suggest that you see the Chaplain.

Humorous dialect dictionaries also play with language by forcing formal and informal registers into unnatural proximity. For instance, Frank Shaw's *Lern Yerself Scouse* (1966) includes:

**yer a derty stopout** "You are a nocturnal reveller"

**she gave im de rounds uv de kitchen** "They had a domestic altercation"

**ee lewks like de unchback a Knotty Ash** "He is of grotesque appearance"

For both Kendall and Shaw the humour lies in the impossibility of comprehension between the standard and non-standard speaker. A soldier who sounded like Kendall's elaborate definitions would be more liable to punishment than one using the more direct words defined, while Shaw's entries suggest an Oxbridge anthropologist explaining the intricacies of working-class life in the North.

The *Humorous Dictionary of Computer Terms*

([http://agg3333.ifas.ufl.edu/humor\\_dict.htm](http://agg3333.ifas.ufl.edu/humor_dict.htm)) demonstrates that misdefinition of genuine words hasn't gone out of fashion:

**keyboard** the standard way to generate computer errors.

**mouse** an advanced input device to make computer errors easier to generate.

**state-of-the-art** any computer you can't afford.

So much for humorous definitions of real words. Another type of dictionary-based humour relies on the provision of definitions for words and phrases that don't exist at all. An online 'dictionary of non-existent words', by Matthew Feinberg, called the *Nonsensicon* (<http://www.nonsensicon.com/>) lists:

**chronosecistness** not being able to find a proper stopwatch for a race and having to use an ordinary watch with just a second hand.

**quiggiligus** one of the individual holes in the mesh on most speakers (plural - quiggiligi).

**zix** a word with no meaning designed only for use in Scrabble.

Many other entries in the *Nonsensicon* are blends, where two words that do exist are combined to produce a new form. Words produced in this way do sometimes catch on, with some of the most common including *brunch* (from *breakfast* and *lunch*), *motel* (*motor* and *hotel*), and *smog* (*smoke* and *fog*). Examples from the *Nonsensicon* include:

**blamestorming** sitting around in a group discussing why a deadline was missed or a project failed, and who was responsible.

**frisbeterian** *noun* someone who religiously spends Sunday afternoons teaching his/her dog to catch Frisbees.

**unobtainium** *noun* the perfect material for the job, but does not exist, or cannot be had.

Advertisers are particularly fond of blends because they combine novelty with transparency. Even if you've never come across *infomercial*, *advertainment*, or *opinionnaire* before, there's a good chance that you'll be able to work out what they mean. The intention is to make the purchaser feel clever while persuading them to do something stupid.

Newspapers and dictionary-companies run regular competitions to produce new words, and blending is one of the most popular devices employed. These examples are from *The Washington Post*:

**Dopeler Effect** the tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when you have been smoking marijuana.

**osteopornosis** a degenerate disease.

**reintarnation** coming back to life as a hillbilly.

Inventing words in order to define them was a device frequently employed by opponents of political correctness, often in television comedies such as *The Two Ronnies* (where *personhole* and *Personchester* were suggested instead of the established terms beginning with *man-*), but it also found a place in dictionaries. Henry Beard and Christopher Cerf's *Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook* (1993) includes:

**differently evolved** an adjective appropriate for describing a non-human animal, particularly one who has behaved in a manner upsetting to unenlightened humans. Example: *That shark isn't vicious. He/she just happens to be differently evolved.*

**follicularly challenged** bald. Also: differently hirsute; hair disadvantaged.

**personhole** an ambigenic term for “manhole”. See also: femhole; maintenance hatch; personnel access structure; utility hole.

Invented words and phrases like these leaked into everyday rants as examples of political correctness gone mad, although no-one had ever seriously suggested using them. The mockery is undoubtedly as political as the correctness.

A combination between misdefinition and word-invention is found in an online dictionary of legal terms ([http://www.power-of-attorneys.com/legal\\_definitions.htm](http://www.power-of-attorneys.com/legal_definitions.htm)). Here standard English terms, often with specialist legal senses, are deliberately misinterpreted:

**appeal** something a person slips on in a grocery store and results in a lawsuit being filed against said store.

**discovery** when the lawyer suddenly finds out that the client still has some money left in his or her account.

**pro bono** lawyers who prefer Sonny over Cher.

The examples above all have some relation to the words' genuine meaning, and are listed on an irreverent website for lawyers. Perhaps they are particularly funny for lawyers because of the implied inability of less clever individuals to understand legal terms properly.

Where there is no relationship at all between the comic and the usual meaning, and where the context gives no clues, this type of definition becomes a test of mental agility. These examples are from *Humorous Dictionary* (<http://digitaldreamdoor.com/pages/quotes/humdict.html>):

**avoidable** what a bullfighter tries to do.

**dilate** to live long.

**polygon** who left the cage door open?

**subdued** a guy that works on submarines.

Afferbeck Lauder's *Let Stalk Strine*, published in 1965, took Australian English as its target, and was one of the first comic dictionaries to look at non-standard forms of English. It drew attention to Australian pronunciation, particularly its tendency to run words together:

**egg jelly** in fact; really. As in: 'Well, there's nothing egg jelly the matter with her. It's jess psychological.'

**laze and gem** usual beginning of a public speech. Often combined with Miss Gem. As in: 'Miss gem, laze and gem. It gives me grape leisure ...

**Miss Gem** correct method of addressing a person chairing a meeting.

**sander's lape** in a state of suspended animation. As in: 'Doan mica noise, Norm, the kiddies are Sander's lape.'

Lauder, whose real name was Alistair Morrison, produced several comic accounts of Australian pronunciation for sale in Australia, and his influence can be seen in lots of dictionaries of Australian slang published since:

**ardunno** I have no idea. [Blind Freddy's *Australian Dictionary of Insults and Vulgarities* (1988)]

**Emma Chisit** how much is it, what does it cost? [Lolla Stewart's *Aussie Slang Dictionary* (2002)]

**Strine** what this book 'issorlabowt'?! Once you master the Aussie dialect, you'll be talking 'Strine' ... lazy corruption of Australian. [John Blackman's *Aussie Slang Dictionary* (1990)]

Lauder wasn't the first Australian to produce a humorous dictionary, however. 'Turner O'Lingo's' *Australian Comic Dictionary* (1916) was written by Mary Eliza Fullerton. She presented her dictionary-entries in reverse alphabetical order (Z-A) 'to prove [herself] thoroughly Antipodean' (4), and included a variety of comic forms:

**versatility** pertaining to verse; what the Australian poets have.

**Sydney** man's attempt to destroy the beauty of Port Jackson.

**prickly pair** the trouble is its not a pair at all, there are millions of them.

**Lorne** a seaside resort where the girls all like to go. "The maidens all for Lorne."

Misunderstandings can come out of from national and regional differences in use, and an early American slang dictionary, Eruera Tooné's *Yankee Slang* (1932), often comments on these:

**honey** a friendly greeting. Say, Honey, what's eatin' you? Bring me some watter, Honey. In a London restaurant I asked a waitress: "Fetch me coffee and sandwiches, Honey." Coffee, sandwiches, and a pot of honey duly appeared! ...

**knocked up** in England, weary and worn, tired; in the States, *enceinte*. Discreet girls should avoid requesting any man to knock them up in the morning—awaken is much better.

**rubber** inquisitive person.

*Story*: Englishman, wearing eyeglass, in street car. White girl nursing black baby. Anglo hombre keeps stretching and twisting his neck to peep at the baby. Nurse gives him icy glare and calls out "Rubber!" "Oh, is it?" asks the Englishman, "I weally thought it was weal!" Favourite story in States.

Online user-edited dictionaries provide scope for a much more aggressive style of humour. These examples are from Urban Dictionary website (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/>), exactly as written:

**chav** a human sub-species also known as homo-inferior. They plan to conquer the world by lowering the nations IQ to single didgit numbers, like themselves. They do this by subjecting those around them to monotonous rap music and brandnames. They are braindead, almost zombie like. They are currently hatching a co-plot to ruin the English language through Abreveation and talking like they havn't got a tongue.

(phonetics) "welw den mush, init dat way den bruv! CHIKEN LAY AN EEEEEG BOI!"

**feminist** a strong advocate of women's rights and equality. They preach the importance of women in this society, and their contribution to the world. They also understand the handicap of being a woman in a man's world, and how a woman should be treated equally, as a man would.

Until the check comes.

*Feminist: I'm a strong, proud woman and I am independent!*

*Waiter: Here's the check*

*Feminist: \*silence\**

*Man: You were saying?*

**yank** a cute little word that aussies, brits, kiwis and south african people use to describe Americans...on the internet.

You rarely hear this term used to the face of an American in a real life situation because Americans are intimidating to faggy little euro-twats and southern hemisphere kangaroo fuckers. ...

Naturally this type of definition gets a heated response, and when I last checked there were 33 definitions for *yank*, 61 for *feminist*, and 139 for *chav*.

Nearly all of the humorous dictionaries discussed so far were from the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, but playing with dictionary conventions goes back further than that. Unfortunately, many of the earlier examples aren't particularly funny any more. Francis Grose, an eighteenth-century antiquarian, included numerous humorous anecdotes alongside more conventional definitions in his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*:

**cods** nick name for a curate. A rude fellow meeting a curate, mistook him for a rector; and accosted him with the vulgar appellation of, Bol—ks the rector, No, Sir, answered he, only Cods the curate, at your service. (first edition, 1785)

**whore-monger** a man that keeps more than one mistress. A country gentleman, who kept a female friend, being reproved by the parson of the parish, and styled a whore-monger, asked the parson whether he had a cheese in his house; and being answered in the affirmative, 'Pray,' says he, 'does that one cheese make you a cheese-monger?' (second edition, 1788)

Grose also includes entries that appear to be punch-line and joke rather than headword and definition. These include:

**orthodoxy and heterodoxy** somebody explained these terms by saying, the first was a man who had a doxy of his own, the second a person who made use of the doxy of another man.

**public ledger** a prostitute: because, like that paper, she is open to all parties.

**wasp** an infected prostitute, who like a wasp carries a sting in her tail. (all from the second edition, 1788)

John Bee was a sporting writer before that was an established profession. He published his *Dictionary of the Turf* in 1823, and included some pretty libellous anecdotes:

**Go along Bob** Bob Bussicks was a notorious sheep-drover in St. John-street, and the word of command ‘when flock follows flock in quick succession moving,’ was naturally enough extended to all who might engage in the same occupation. ‘Come along Bob,’ had the same origin. Bob died of old age some thirty years ago, but his tom[b]-stone (if his mortality had such a *thing*,) would not contain the foregoing surname, which was applied to the shape of his legs, that were of this form ( ) or some thicker part of his body; derived from the compound *bi* and *sex* or *section*, or bi-section which his lower members described in walking, or else the double (bi) sex which Robert was supposed to enjoy. Either Hybrid or Hermaphroditical, Bob’s choler could not be excited by all the girls in Cow-cross.

**Jemmy (bloody)** a sheep’s head; so called from a great dealer in these delicious *morceaux*, Jemmy Lincomb, who lived near Scotland-yard, and who, from his occupation, would necessarily be bedaubed with blood. His customers mostly addressed him with ‘B— Jemmy, bring us a b—y head,

and lend us von o' your b— shivers, — mine's at my uncle's' *Jemmy*.

'Now, gemmen, there you are, in a pig's vhisper, if you wants it viping, vy there's the bitch ye know.' And the legend adds, that a she-dog's shaggy back served for knife-cloth to his dainty guests. We never *saw it done*, though there was the canine means of cleanliness.

Laugh? I nearly did. If these weren't uproariously funny at the time it's hard to imagine why they were included.

A generation later, but in a very different context, George William, Lord Lyttelton, published his own humorous dictionary. In a double wedding in 1839, he and William Gladstone (a member of Parliament, but not yet Prime Minister) had married Mary and Catherine Glynne. Henry Glynne, Mary and Catherine's brother, later married Lyttelton's sister, Lavinia, creating an incredibly close-knit family group. *Contributions Towards a Glossary of the Glynne Language* (1851) documents their in-jokes and familiar language:

**one of mine, one of ours, one of yours, one of his, hers, or theirs** these expressions may be considered elliptical, and a dry and bare account of them might be given by simply noting that 'peculiarities', or 'habits', is to be understood after the possessive pronoun. But it rarely happens that the phrases in this language can be exhaustively defined by any such simple process as this, in the fullness and comprehension of their spirit. By usage, those now before us are mostly restricted to habits of a small and trivial nature: such as he who has them sets much store by, yet would not often talk about, or would willingly have to justify in public: often of an unreasoning and half-superstitious character: known perhaps only to the nearest associates, and with them matter rather for cheerful toleration, than either actual approval, or the attack of deliberate argument.

These terms are chiefly in use with Lady Lyttelton and Mrs. Gladstone, and most frequently in reference to their respective husbands: as, of Mr. Gladstone when writing out a list of his coats before a journey: of Lord Lyttelton when folding up the well-read newspaper and flinging it on the ottoman: of Mr. Gladstone when agitated by a drop of spilt milk on the cloth: of Lord Lyttelton

when demurring to read in the evening the book usually read in the morning,  
&c. &c.

The humour is two-sided. On the one hand, the terms were used by the women to poke gentle fun at their terribly important husbands. On the other, including detailed domestic information in a dictionary definition and cataloguing homely in-jokes in such meticulous detail is a humorous comment, however affectionate, on the triviality of women's concerns. Lyttelton notes that 'alphabetical arrangement has been neglected, as less appropriate to the mysterious and anomalous character of the subjects treated of' (1), and the entries are presented in an apparently random order.

This same sense that treating trivial material in a dictionary format was funny in itself is also apparent in the earliest dictionary of college slang, *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam* (1803), where many of the entries provide an undergraduate's view of university regulations:

**ægrota** permission to be absent from chapel and lecture, on account of corporal indisposition—though, commonly, the real complaint is much more serious; viz. *indisposition of the mind!*

**dormiat** to take out a DORMIAT. *Phr.* a license to sleep. The licensed person is excused from attending early prayers in the Chapel, from a plea of being really *indisposed*—i.e. to attend!

The stereotypical student hasn't changed in over two centuries!

Dictionary definitions are supposed to be brief and impersonal. John Blackman is a comedian on Australian radio and television, and his dictionary is characterized by the gags he inserts:

**bag** uncomplimentary term for a woman. Wives are sometimes referred to as 'the old bag' (except mine of course!).

**game (as Ned Kelly)** adventurous, foolhardy, and willing to take a chance. As did the infamous bushranger, Ned Kelly, who wore a tin helmet with a slot for his eyes to see through. The last time I tried that someone posted six letters in my face!

**mollydooker** a left-hander. Personally, I'd give my right arm to be ambidextrous!

Although dictionaries can be used for many purposes, such as checking spelling or pronunciation, or settling a dispute, their main function is to explain the meaning of words. It's hard to make the absence of a definition amusing, but in 1927-8 *The Columbia Jester*, a student newspaper, managed it in four instalments of an 'Unabridged Collegiate Dictionary'. It was allegedly by 'Professor I. Noall', but actually by J. R. McReynolds Banks:

**dress** you can see through this yourself!

**matrimony** speak now or forever hold your peace!

**nightgown** hey hey!

Looking back to the English of the previous century from 1909, James Redding Ware also avoided defining terms that he considered too offensive to explain:

**OVO** (*Low Class, Hist.*) Quite inexplicable. No solution ever obtained from the initiates.

**part that goes over the fence last** (*American*). Evident.

**propers** (*Low. Class*). Meaning refused—but thoroughly comprehended by the coster classes. Erotic.

Ware wasn't alone in refusing or being unable to define the terms listed in his dictionary:

**bagpipe, to bagpipe** a lascivious practice too indecent for explanation.

[Grose, *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, first edition, 1785]

**FIFO** (*RM*) *Fit In – or \*Foxtrot Oscar*: "Look, mate – in this little outfit you've got to **FIFO** – see?" ... [Jolly, *Jackspeak*]

**rouge** a football term, used to express an advantage gained by one side over the other. It is obtained by touching the ball where it lies behind the enemy's quarters. It may eventually lead to a goal, but the rules are too complicated for me to explain. [Nugent-Bankes, *A Day of My Life*]

George Nugent-Bankes was a schoolboy at Eton when he wrote an account of a single day's events. He included a glossary as an afterthought, complaining that it was harder to write than the rest of the book put together. His refusal to explain the rules of Eton football is in keeping with the character of his narrator, who does as little work as necessary and is more interested in his social and sporting life than education. Jolly, who describes himself as 'a Surgeon Commander in the Royal Navy', draws his readers into complicity in an obscene usage by failing to define it. The cross-reference sends them to a definition of *Foxtrot Oscar* that reads "The classic, phonetically-expressed invitation to investigate *sex and travel*'. A reader who didn't anticipate this meaning might enjoy the surprise, a reader who did would enjoy a sense of community with other initiates. No-one is likely to be offended, because nothing obscene has been said. Grose draws attention to his obscenities by loudly refusing to define them – he could have just left them out. Until relatively recently most dictionaries did choose quiet omission as the best way to deal with offensive words. Guy Miège took the curious step in his *Great French Dictionary* of noting, towards the end of the letter 'F', that he had omitted a commonly used term.

So far I have concentrated on the headword and definition parts of a dictionary entry. These are the most obvious targets for comic lexicographers, but by no means the only ones. Etymologies tend to be written in a style incomprehensible to normal people. Even if you're able to extract any information from an etymology, you generally have to take it on trust. This makes it possible to insert absurd etymologies in the hope that the reader will foolishly believe them to be true. An article called 'Army Terms and Their Derivation' in the *B.E.F. Times* (1917), offers:

CAMOUFLAGE—From camel and flag, referring to the device adopted by this animal of tying a flag to its tail, and thus disguising itself as a ship of the desert. Hence—to deceive.

Gideon Wurdz's *Foolish Dictionary* (1904) includes several comic etymologies:

**cajole** v. t., from Grk. *kalos*, beautiful, and Eng. *jolly*, to jolly beautifully.

**jockey** from *jog*, to move slowly, and *key*, something that makes fast. Hence, one who makes the pace fast or slow, according to instructions.

**spaghetti** a table-dish eaten only by Italians and jugglers. From Lat. *spadix*, branch, or fork, and *gestamen*, burden. A burden for the fork.

Incidentally, *cajole* is from a French verb with the same sense, and presents no opportunity for humour. *Jockey* is a diminutive of *jock*, the Scottish pet-form of John, and originally meant “little fellow”. *Spaghetti* is from Italian for “thin string”. Etymology sometimes just is funny. Although Wurdz’s solemn references to the classical languages adds an additional layer of comedy, humorous etymology can also appeal to non-standard pronunciation or everyday expressions:

**misdemeanor** a colloquial expression for a well known fact in the legal community that if the trial runs long and the judge has to miss lunch, demeanor the judge gets.

**waiver** a client who has given the lawyer his or her money is said to have waived his or her right to ever see the money again. This person is called a waiver, having waved the money good-bye. [[http://www.power-of-attorneys.com/legal\\_definitions.htm](http://www.power-of-attorneys.com/legal_definitions.htm)]

The cross-reference is another unlikely source of dictionary humour. Comic cross-references in Banks’s ‘Unabridged Collegiate Dictionary’ include:

**burlesque** see *undraped*.

**cash** see *Papa*.

**easy** see *speak*.

Anyone daft enough to follow the cross-references would find no entry for *undraped*, *Papa*, or *speak*. Frederic Mullally’s *The Penthouse Sexicon* (1968) sometimes does provide an entry for the user who actually follows up the cross-reference:

**amulet** anything carried about the person as an imagined preservative against bad luck. See *diaphragm*.

**Diana** goddess who became careless at the hunt from all that bareback riding. See *Spoonerism*.

**Egyptologist** one who digs older women. See *mummy’s boy*.

— but they rarely offer any help. In each case, the puzzled dictionary-user is more likely to understand the entry by stopping and thinking.

Some dictionaries don't expect their readers to take anything on trust. If they say that a word is used with a certain meaning, they'll give an example (or sometimes lots of examples) of it being used with that meaning. And what's more, they'll tell you who used it, when, and where. So if you don't believe them, you can check it out. That's why the *OED* is so very big. Concise dictionaries sometimes just give a name (e.g. 'Shakespeare') or a title ('*Pickwick Papers*'). *Roger's Profanisaurus*, an offshoot of *Viz* magazine, sometimes illustrates its entries with completely invented citations. For instance:

**lick one's arse and call it chocolate** *phr.* Expression used to bring a deludedly optimistic person down to earth. '*Mr Speaker, my Right Honourable friend the Chancellor has told the house that thanks to his prudent fiscal policies the economy is in a stronger position now than ever. He is entitled to take that view, of course, and he is likewise entitled, should he wish, to lick his arse and call it chocolate.*' (Miss Widdecombe (Conservative) *Hansard* report, October 2001).

**salad dodger** *n.* A contemptuous epithet for a fat bastard. One who at a buffet sidesteps the lettuce and celery and heads straight for the pork pies.

'*'Contrarywise', continued Tweedledee, 'if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic.'* '*That's not logic, that's bollocks, you salad dodger.*'" (from *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll).

It hardly needs saying that the *Profanisaurus*, subtitled 'The World's Sweariest Dictionary', also subverts the convention that definitions should be written in a formal style and should be suitable for any audience. Anyone who's ever thumbed through a dictionary in a boring English lesson knows just how much funnier rude words become.

Some dictionaries provide diagrams and pictures to explain or illustrate the meaning of words. Typically this might be a stylized line-drawing of a flower with an arrow pointing to the *stamen*, or a picture of two closely related animals side by side to make it easier to distinguish between them. Illustrations in this style appear in the

*Uxbridge English Dictionary*, written by Tim Brooke-Taylor, Barry Cryer, Graeme Garden, Jon Naismith, and Iain Pattinson. It is liveried in imitation of more serious reference works and includes humorous misdefinitions of real words from the Radio 4 show *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*. We have already seen plenty of examples of misdefinition, but in this book the illustrations present an additional level of challenge to any reader who sees the drawing before the definition. For instance, a picture of a computer-driven artificial leg is captioned 'Ipswich'. Reference to the alphabetical listing provides the definition 'What you turn your hip on with'. A picture of a monocled duck with a cigarette-holder in its beak is captioned 'Quaker'. Don't look at the footnote if you would rather work it out for yourself.<sup>1</sup> In addition to its contents, the *Uxbridge English Dictionary* also mocks various publishing conventions, such as the careful distinction between editions ('Seventeenth Edition (Approx.) Completely Revived' [*sic*]), the slogan "'Say Goodbye to Wrong-Sounding-Word Misery!')", and the editor's preface:

If you abhor the fragrant misregard for basic English constriction, rest assured: this book will help you to keep your feet firmly on terra cotta.

Lots of slang dictionaries include cartoons. In rhyming slang dictionaries they often try to combine the rhyming slang term with its standard English meaning. You can imagine for yourself the illustrations for *dog and bone* "telephone", *plates of meat* "feet", and *loaf of bread* "head". Australian slang dictionaries are full of drunken kangaroos wearing Akubra-style hats hung with corks. Hunt and Pringle's *Service Slang* (1943), a dictionary of British World War II slang, also uses illustrations for humour. The entry for *on a peg* "on a charge" is illustrated by a cartoon of a private hung up by his shirt collar while listening to extracts from the King's Regulations. *Chiefie* "one's N.C.O." is illustrated by a cartoon of an officer wearing a feathered headdress and holding a tomahawk. In the cartoon for *gone for a Burton* "missing in action", a bored-looking St Peter is standing behind a bar, floating on a cloud. An RAF pilot with angel-wings is buying a pint and re-telling the story of his last flight.

Dictionary humour isn't confined to dictionaries. Anything solemn, authoritative, and bound by rules is a great target for parody, and dictionaries fit the

---

<sup>1</sup> "a posh duck".

bill perfectly. They regularly feature in cartoons, for instance.<sup>2</sup> Dan Reynolds has a hen looking through a dictionary and exclaiming delightedly “I knew it! Chicken comes first!”. Dave Carpenter’s character, Wendell, looking up *déjà vu* in a dictionary ‘has a strange feeling that he has seen this word before’. In Craig Gillespie’s cartoon ‘Caveman Dictionaries’, the dictionary reads:

Agg ... Agg

Arg ... Arg

Nngh ... Nngh ...

Anything that works in a cartoon works on a T-shirt, and these examples are all currently available through an online retailer called [cafepress.com](http://cafepress.com):

**al.co.hole** [al-hul-hohl] n. 1. a person who turns into an asshole after consuming alcohol

**democrat** (n.) a rich whiny, out-of-touch, self-hating, condescending, racist, two-faced, elitist snob supposedly looking out for the good of the people.

**mouse potato** a person who spends a great deal of time using a computer.

An American company called Zazzle offers customized dictionary-style T-shirts, where the customer provides the headword and definition. The dictionary-format is clearly easily recognizable, and that makes circumventing it rewarding.

Dictionaries and definitions also feature in jokes. Did you know the word *gullible* isn’t in the dictionary?:

*Question:* What’s the definition of *optimism*?

*Answer:* A bagpiper with a beeper.<sup>3</sup>

*Question:* What’s the definition of an optimist?

*Answer:* A banjo player with a mortgage.<sup>4</sup>

*Question:* What’s the definition of *perfect pitch*?

*Answer:* Throwing a viola into a dumpster without hitting the rim.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> All of these examples are from [www.cartoonstock.com](http://www.cartoonstock.com).

<sup>3</sup> <http://users.aol.com/wgority/jokes.html>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://midnightmesa.net/banjo.htm>.

For some reason, musicians are usually the butt of this type of joke, with the type of musician interchangeable. I also found some far more obscene examples online, but I will omit them just to prove that I can.

Andrea R. Nagy wrote an article on dictionary-related humour in popular culture, and quoted the following examples:

**gift** /gift/ *n.* 1. something that is given to somebody, usually to give pleasure or show gratitude. SYNONYMS *present, Encarta.*

**re.li.a.ble** (ri-li'ə-bəl) *adj.* able to be relied on or dependable. – re.li.a.bil'i.ty *n.* re.li.a.bly *adv.* See *Fedex.*

**rule** to be pre-eminent in or have control over. Common usage: to be numero uno. Welcome to the '98 Honda clearance. Don't you just love it when you win?<sup>6</sup>

This use of the dictionary-format suggests that advertisers believe it to be a trusted medium for information. The dependability of the dictionary rubs off on to their product.

My final example of dictionary humour is found in an episode of *The Simpsons* called 'Homer Defined'.<sup>7</sup> In it, Homer is fêted for averting a nuclear catastrophe, and his successes and failures are documented throughout the episode by reference to a dictionary that presents his picture under relevant entries. They all follow a similar format:

**stupid**

\adj\ [L stupidus]

1. slow of mind.
2. unintelligent.
3. Homer Simpson.

**lucky** \adj\

1. prone to good fortune.
2. succeeding through chance.
3. Homer Simpson.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mit.edu/~jcb/jokes/viola.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Andrea R. Nagy, 'Life or Lexicography: How Popular Culture Imitates Dictionaries', *Dictionaries* 25, 2004, 107-22.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.snpp.com/episodes/8F04.html>.

**fraud** \noun\

1. imposter.
2. fake.
3. Homer Simpson.

In this case the apparently comic etymology for *stupid* is actually correct. In addition to the obvious humour, there is comedy in the similarity of definitions 1 and 2 for each entry. These mock the fine distinctions in meaning and use made by lexicographers but sometimes hard for normal people to understand even when patiently explained.

With any luck it is now beyond question that dictionaries really are funny (or at least, they can be). They are funny in the same way that schoolteachers, organized religion and the monarchy are. If they take themselves too seriously, the irreverent suffer from an irresistible urge to giggle. It's easier to surprise someone into laughter if they think they know what is coming, and the dictionary-format is easily recognizable: it sets up expectations which can then be undercut. Although the humour is sometimes far from light-hearted, the dictionary is usually the medium rather than the target. We still trust 'the dictionary'.

Now read on and enjoy ...

## Bibliography

Allvine, Glendon, 'Studio Lingo' in Roger Whately, Jack O'Donnell and H. W. Hanemann, eds., *The Silver Streak* (Los Angeles: Haskell-Travers, 1935)

'Army Terms and their Derivation', *B.E.F. Times* 1.2, August 15, 1917, pages unnumbered. Reprinted in *The B.E.F. Times* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1918)

Arthur, J. M., and W. S. Ramson, *W.H. Downing's Digger Dialects* (Oxford/Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990)

Banks, J. R. McReynolds, 'An Unabridged Collegiate Dictionary', *Columbia Jester* 27, Dec. 1927, 10; Jan. 1928, 19; Feb. 1928, 14; March 1928, 12

Beard, Henry, and Christopher Cerf's *Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook* (New York: Villard Books, 1993)

Bee, John, *Slang. A Dictionary of the Turf, the Ring, the Chase, the Pit, of Bon Ton, and the Varieties of Life, forming the completest and most Authentic Lexicon*

*Balatronicum hitherto offered to the Notice of the Sporting World, For elucidating Words and Phrases that are necessarily, or purposely, cramp, mutative, and unintelligible, outside their respective Spheres. Interspersed with Anecdotes and Whimsies, with Tart Quotations, and Rum-Ones; with examples, proofs, and monitory precepts, useful and proper for Novices, Flats, and Yokels* (London: T. Hughes, 1823)  
Bierce, Ambrose, *Devil's Dictionary* (1911) reprint (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1993)

Blackman, John, *The Aussie Slang Dictionary for Old and New Australians* (South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1990)

Blind Freddy, *The Australian Dictionary of Insults and Vulgarities* (Castle Hill, N.S.W.: Peter Anthill-Rose, 1988)

Brooke-Taylor, Tim, *et al.*, *The Uxbridge English Dictionary* (London: HarperCollins, 2005)

'Definitions (in memory of H.M.F.)', *The Dump* 3, Xmas, 1917, 20

'Dictionary of War Terms', *The Sling*, October, 1917, 39-41

'The Dictionary of War Terms', *The Listening Post* 26, July 20, 1917

Downing *see* Arthur and Ramson

Empey, Arthur Guy, *Over the Top* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917)

Esar, Evan, *Comic Dictionary* (New York: Horizon, 1943)

*The Golden Horseshoe. Written and Illustrated by Men of the 37<sup>th</sup> Division B.E.F.* (London: Cassell, 103)

*Gradus ad Cantabrigiam or, a Dictionary of Terms, Academical and Colloquial, or Cant, which are used at the University of Cambridge* (London: Thomas Maiden for W.J. and J. Richardson, 1803)

Grose, Francis, *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: S. Hooper, 1785)

Grose, Francis, *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 2nd edn. (London: S. Hooper, 1788)

Hedley, Leslie Woolf, *Alphabet Soup. A Dictionary of Homo Sapiens Americanus* (Cotati, CA: EXile press, 1997)

Hunt, J. L., and A. G. Pringle, *Service Slang* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943)

Iddy Umpty, 'Trench Terms and Their Meanings', *The Listening Post* 27 (Aug. 10 1917), 10; *Listening Post* 28 (Sep. 20 1917), 192; *Listening Post* 29 (Dec. 1 1917), 26

Jesco, John, 'The Movie Dictionary' (unpublished MS in the New York Public Library, 1916-1918)

Johnson, Samuel, *A Dictionary of the English Language. In which the Words are Deduced from their Originals, and Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers* (London: W. Strahan, and others, 1755)

Johnston, Murray, 'Aussie Dictionary (For the use of those at Home)', *Aussie. The Australian Soldiers' Magazine* (Jan. 18 1918), 10-11

Jolly, Rick, and Tugg, Jackspeak. *The Pusser's Rum. Guide to Royal Navy Slang* (Torpoint, Cornwall: Palamanando Publishing, 1989)

Kendall, Park, *Still in the Draft* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1942)

Lauder, Afferbeck, Strine. *Let Stalk Strine and Nose Tone Unturned. A Lexicon on Modern Strine Usage* (Sydney/Auckland/London/New York: Lansdowne Press, 1965)

Lyttelton *see* Stray

Maines, George, and Bruce Grant, *Wisecrack Dictionary. More than 1,000 phrases and words in every day use collected from 10,000 communications received during a newspaper prize contest and other sources -- a new addition to the American dictionary* (New York: Spot News Service, 1926)

Mullally, Frederic, *The Penthouse Sexicon* (1968) reprint (London: New English Library, 1970)

Nagy, Andrea R., 'Life or Lexicography: How Popular Culture Imitates Dictionaries', *Dictionaries* 25, 2004, 107-22

Nugent-Bankes, George, *A Day of My Life; or, Every-day Experiences at Eton, by a Present Eton Boy* (New York: George R. Lockwood, 1877)

O'Lingo, Turner, *Australian Comic Dictionary* (no publisher details, 1916)

*Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com/>>

*Oxford Reference Online* <<http://www.oxfordreference.com>>

Roger's Profanisaurus. *The Magna Farta* (London: Dennis, 2007)

Shaw, Frank, *Lern Yerself Scouse. How to Talk Proper in Liverpool* (1966) reprint (Liverpool: Scouse Press, 1966)

Stewart, Lolla, *Aussie Slang Dictionary* (Ringwood, Vic.: Brolga Publishing, 2002)

Stray, Christopher, *Contributions Towards a Glossary of the Glynne Language by George William, Lord Lyttelton* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005)

Tooné, Eruera, *Yankee Slang* (London: Harrison, 1932)

Ware, James Redding, *Passing English of the Victorian Era* (London/New York: Routledge/E.P. Dutton & Co, 1909)

Wurdz, Gideon, *Foolish Dictionary. An Exhausting Work of Reference to Un-certain English Words, their Origin, Meaning, Legitimate and Illegitimate Use, Confused by a few Pictures* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1904)