1 Walking Dictionary, Sleeping Dictionary
Toward a Gendered History of a Rhetorical Genre

Women and ideas about women have been important to the English language dictionary throughout the genre's history. As prominent patrons and readers, women sponsored English's earliest bi- and monolingual dictionaries; as volunteers and employees, they contributed to the most well-known male-attributed dictionary projects in history; as observers of and participants in dictionary making, they critiqued the androcentrism of dictionaries that ignored English as it was spoken by women as well as the sexism of dictionary work that celebrated and compensated men working alongside overlooked and underpaid women; and, as dictionary makers, they compiled a great many fascinating dictionaries ranging from traditional to radical in form, content, and function. The dictionary genre has always been intimately intertwined with gender hierarchies and dependent on gendered participations to sustain its rich variety and widespread popularity.

For many people it is counterintuitive to think of the dictionary as gendered. A dictionary is, after all, a neuter and neutral thing, merely a "book containing the words of any language in alphabetical order, with explanations of their meaning; a lexicon; a vocabulary; a word-book." This definition of *dictionary* appeared in Samuel Johnson's (1755) *A Dictionary of the English Language*, which ascribed a rather unassuming character to the term *dictionary* at the same time that it helped to construct an imposing status for the genre in the popular imagination as an indispensable and infallible resource for all English speakers. Whether people citing "the dictionary" have a particular text in mind or some more abstract authority, their invocation harkens this sense of the genre as an immaculate arbiter of truth – timeless, authorless, faultless, sexless, certainly not *sexist*.

Yet the English language dictionary is not separable from concerns of sex. English speakers readily owned this fact as early as the seventeenth century when figurative uses of *dictionary*, giving masculine and feminine pronouns to the genre, came into use: *walking dictionary* typically describes a man who ostentatiously displays his knowledge to others and *sleeping dictionary* a woman who teaches her language to a sexual partner. Potent counters to *dictionary* as a thing unmodified, inanimate, and imposing, *walking dictionary* and *sleeping dictionary* give human form and social function to the genre.

These vernacular stylizations do not constitute an accurate portrait of dictionary making, of course, but they bring to the fore a crucial consideration for histories of English language lexicography: sex, sexuality, sex-roles, and sex-based hierarchies have influenced dictionary makers and dictionary making from the very beginnings of the genre. A closer look at these two terms will, then, help to set the stage for understanding *all* dictionaries, not just walking and sleeping ones, as gendered.

Living Lexicons

Today, the term *walking dictionary* is perhaps comfortably applied to persons of any gender, but historically, its application emphasized very particular entanglements with masculinity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term gender-neutrally; like *walking dead* or *walking disaster*, a *walking dictionary* is described as any object "That goes about in the form of a living creature," and, like *walking encyclopedia* or *walking library*, a *walking dictionary* is characterized as any "person who has great stores of knowledge at his or her command" (*OED Online*).[1] However, this gender-inclusive definition is countered by evidentiary material that ascribes masculinity to walking dictionaries, as in the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s earliest citation, from seventeenth-century poet George Chapman:

> 1609 G. CHAPMAN *Euthymiae Raptus* sig. C3 Let a Scholler, all earths volumes carrie, He will be but a walking dictionarie: A meere articulate Clocke, that doth but speake By others arts.

Or this citation from a nineteenth-century romance novel:[2]

> 1835 George Payne Rainsford James, *Gipsy*: These men's minds are like a yard measure, a thing on which a multitude of figures are written down, without the slightest use till they are properly applied by someone else. When I am seeing anything fine, heaven deliver me from the proximity of a walking dictionary of technical terms! (141–42)

[1] The terms *living dictionary* and *talking dictionary* are similar in meaning to *walking dictionary*. The *OED* defines *walking dictionary* under the headword *walking* and mentions it under the headword *dictionary* in the first, second, and online editions and under the headword *cricket* in the online edition.

[2] The *OED* cites only the final clause of this quotation and credits Edward Bulwer-Lytton (presumably Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer Lytton) as author, but the more usual attribution is George Payne Rainsford James.

Both citations make clear the cool reception that walking dictionaries typically receive, as do the following early print instances of *walking dictionary* not included in the *OED* entry:

1677 William Cavendish, *The Triumphant Widow*: ſuch Fools as value themſelves upon Languages, never conſider Language is but a Trunk to convey our meanings by; for ought I know Welch is as good as Hebrew; a Dictionary is no wiſe book, nor a walking Dictionary a wiſe man. (11)

1735 Elizabeth Cooper, *The Rival Widows*: Mr. *Formal*, the great Scholar, was [. . .] Yes, a walking Dictionary! Words in all Languages, and senſe in none. (30)

1781 William Combe, *The R—l Register*: The walking Dictionary, and the brutal Pedant, make learning itſelf disguſting, and rob Truth of its lovely appearance [. . .] Such men bear the ſame relation to the higher orders of the learned world, as the labour of the quarry to the ſkill of the ſculptor. (109–10)

1791 Edmund John Eyre, *The Dreamer Awake*: he is a rank pedant – a walking dictionary, and a mere vocabulary of empty words. (6–7)

The above citations are not only disparaging but disparaging of men in particular, and half (Cavendish, Cooper, and Eyre) situate dictionary disparagement in the mouth of a woman decrying a walking dictionary for draining words of sense, for brutalizing conversation, for boring her.

The early corpus would thus seem to suggest that a walking dictionary is not, in fact, a person who is a great store of knowledge but a man who is an indiscriminate store of words in many languages; not a celebration of generous genius but a caricature of foolish excess, showy emptiness, and violent pedantry; not gender-inclusive but gender-specific. Walking dictionaries are men who are fascinated by dictionary making and interested in compiling and describing portions of the lexicon – no matter how irritating either activity may prove to be in social contexts. Women are set opposite this project – accosted, annoyed, and unamused by it. In this way, the term *walking dictionary* recognizes and reinforces a particular place for the dictionary within a binary gender system: It privileges certain (masculine) domains of knowledge, appeals to certain persons (men) while alienating others (women), and secures gendered and gendering effects (e.g., the domineering performance of knowledgeability by men in the face of forbearing women).

A sleeping dictionary is quite unlike walking ones – in terms of gender as well as behavior. Where *walking dictionary* is often aligned with masculinity, *sleeping dictionary* is typically connected to femininity, and, where walking dictionaries only pretend to proficiency and pedagogy, sleeping dictionaries

succeed. A *sleeping dictionary* is a person (usually a woman) who teaches a language to someone else (usually a man) in the context of a continuing sexual relationship.[3] The *OED* offers a rather tortuous definition of the phrase that is gender-specific: "a foreign woman with whom a man has a sexual relationship and from whom he learns her language" (*OED Online*).[4] Earliest use is dated to the twentieth century:

1928 J. B. WHARTON *Squad* 21 We picked up two beauties . . . Oo-la-la – I've learned French out uv a sleepin' dictionary – dat's what dey're called.

For a variety of reasons – for example, the colloquial nature of the term, its circulation in foreign rather than domestic contexts, and the indelicacy of its referent – the phrase *sleeping dictionary* may have taken a particularly long time (longer than, say, *walking dictionary*) to find its way into print, but citations from nearly a century before the *OED*'s first attestation can be found:

1835 *The Satirist*: "Then when you get to Bilboa, do as I did – study the *sleeping dictionary*," rejoined the other; "make the acquaintance of some pretty dark-eyed damsel, and I'll answer for your speedy acquaintance with the genders and conjugations. That's how I got the language – I soon dreamt in Spanish." (331)

1873 John Hanson Beadle, *The Undeveloped West*: My essay at Spanish amused him, and he told me, when I reached Santa Fe, to procure at once *una diccionaria dormiente* – "a sleeping dictionary" (446)

1881 John Logan Campbell, *Poenamo*: after all, Madame Waipeha was not quite the intellectual fall-back-upon to satisfy him. He did not now require a sleeping dictionary to learn Maori from. (128–29)

1904 *Prescott Evening Courier*: You republicans seem to be enthused over your man Roosevelt presenting New Mexico to Arizona as a sleeping dictionary. (2)

Four of these five citations characterize sleeping dictionaries as feminine, but none attest to sleeping dictionaries as foreign. In fact, quite contrary to the *OED*'s definition of the term, the woman, in the moment that she acts as a sleeping dictionary, is precisely and necessarily *at home* – geographically, linguistically, and metaphorically: She is native to and living in the scene of

[3] The phrases *long-haired dictionary* and *pillow dictionary* are similar in meaning to *sleeping dictionary*.

[4] The *OED* first defined the term *sleeping dictionary* in its second edition (Simpson and Weiner 1989), and the definition has since appeared in other dictionaries (e.g., Ayto and Simpson 1997/2008; Green 1998, 2010).

"sleep" (the American West, an Auckland island, a European outpost of the British army), and she is as comfortable in her native tongue as she is in a traveling man's bed. These intimacies with her language and her learner are exactly what make her "dictionary material." And yet, her intimacies are not to be mistaken for competencies, linguistic or lexicographical. For *sleeping dictionary* is not a term that celebrates feminine proficiencies but, instead, one that relies on female sexuality as it serves the interests of English-speaking men.

In all four of the citations that antedate the *OED*'s and in all three quotations included in the *OED*, the term *sleeping dictionary* is used by and among men and, more specifically, men advising other men how best to acquire languages other than English. A sleeping dictionary is, to them, not so much a person who commands and propagates great stores of knowledge as it is a passive sexual body (with tongue) from which stores of knowledge can be extracted, aggregated, and put to use to accomplish personal goals entirely disconnected from the sleeping dictionary herself. The *OED* definition accomplishes this objectification of the feminine in its acrobatic syntax: "a foreign woman with whom a man has a sexual relationship and from whom he learns her language." The thematic head of the sentence, "woman," is made into the object of primary verbs that take "man" as their subject. A "foreign woman" passively *is* while an unspecified "he" actively "learns" without anything coming between the two – no one, for example, "talks to" or "teaches" him, and yet "he learns." *Sleeping dictionary* thus suggests that the dictionary is more often about active and effective men who amass and deploy than women who know, speak, or instruct.

Moreover, sleeping dictionaries *of English* are notably absent from early written evidence. In all of the *OED* citations and all of the above quotations, English-speaking men are seeking dictionaries of Spanish, French, Maori, Chinese. A sleeping dictionary of English would be unnecessary, even oxymoronic, both to the evidenced speakers of the term *sleeping dictionary* and to the assumed readers of the *OED*: Englishmen. Joining andro- and ethnocentrism, the *OED* reflects trenchant ideologies about Englishwomen that suggested they could not be simultaneously linguistically proficient and sexually promiscuous. From the fourteenth century onward, women's speech had been conflated with women's sexuality; the purity of one was thought to be contingent upon the purity of the other (Baron 1986). Presumably, then, a corrupt woman could transmit only her corrupt English to a sexual-*cum*-educational partner, while an unimpeachable woman would never impart her unimpeachable English because she would never enter into such an unseemly sexual-*cum*-educational relationship in the first place. Hence, even as this English term gives the dictionary feminine form, it creates a chasm between women and the English language, conjuring a world in which English-speaking women simply have no place in relation to the dictionary genre.

With women and men to take the place of books and lists, *sleeping dictionary* and *walking dictionary* draw attention not just to the biologically sexed human bodies that are agents of lexicography; they also highlight the gender economies and ideologies that enable and sustain the dictionary genre. Where *walking dictionary* suggests that the impulse to make a dictionary and the practices of lexicographical collection and description belong to men, *sleeping dictionary* emphasizes that the product that emerges and the benefits that accrue from these impulses and practices *also* belong to men, no matter the strange and prominent imbrications of women, women's bodies, women's competencies, and women's investments. These two terms help us sense the gendering of English language dictionaries, but to *make sense* of the gendering of English language dictionaries we need a more robust investigation of how the social life of the genre is influenced by the social expectations of gender. Neither immaculate nor unimpeachable, English dictionaries are complex systems of ongoing social activity, and those systems are profoundly, productively, and sometimes also problematically structured by gender.

Mixing Methods

In the simplest terms, dictionaries are ongoing processes of interaction between individuals and texts. But both individuals and texts are surrounded by larger frameworks: Individuals exist within compulsory systems of gender, and texts exist within compulsory systems of genre. Where gender forecasts the kinds of people we can be in relation to one another, genre forecasts the kinds of texts we can make, interpret, imagine. Genre is, therefore, a necessary counterpart to gender in understanding the abstract expectations that organize the complex patterns of social and textual activity that constitute dictionary making and use.

Working against perceptions of dictionaries as asocial (texts) and arhetorical (authorities), this book combines methods from feminist historiography and rhetorical genre theory. Feminist historiography is a cross-disciplinary critical response to the sexism and androcentrism that have predominated in standard historical accounts of most fields (e.g., rhetoric, science, agriculture, printing). Feminist historiography is *feminist* insofar as it aims to enhance the visibility of women and gender in the interest of securing social equality for all. And it is *historiographical* insofar as it disrupts a sense of "history" as a flow of time or a string of causalities by distinguishing between the past ("the totality of humanity's previous experiences"), history ("the story or narrative ordering of that past"), and historiography ("ongoing critical rethinking" of the discourses of history) (Morgan 2006, 2–3). Feminist historiography is, then, an attempt to imagine and enact alternative modes of history-making that will afford access to a more usable, more gender-inclusive past.

Rhetorical genre theory reinvigorates classical and literary methodologies by expanding the definition of *genre* to include not only texts similar to one another in form and content but also sets of shared ideas and activities that frame and mediate textual production and circulation. Instead of cataloguing abstract types, rhetorical genre scholars map social and textual relationships – trying to understand how generic ideas orchestrate certain identities, relationships, actions, and expectations while foreclosing others. Rhetorical genre theory is, then, an attempt to understand how related but heterogeneous communicative practices enable and constrain both daily exchange and future action.

Toward a Feminist Historiography of Dictionaries

Feminist historiography begins with the recognition that, throughout time, women's participation in public life has been severely circumscribed and unevenly remembered. Largely "excluded from making war, wealth, laws, governments, art, and science" (Kelly-Gadol 1976, 810), women have managed to make contributions in spite of sexist regimes, but those contributions "have been persistently subjected to measures of value and achievement that have been set and monitored by others, who have not had their interests or potential in mind and who have been free historically to discount, ignore, and disempower them" (Royster 2000, 3–4). Women authors, for instance, were likely to meet with a variety of historical prohibitions – denied education, deprived of the materials and time required to write, and barred from or persecuted for publishing, to name a few examples. When not effectively discouraged from composing in a variety of genres, women nevertheless found their writing to be less enthusiastically received and less carefully conserved than the writing of men, not only by their contemporaries but also by succeeding generations (cf. Domosh 1990, 95–96, 102; Kelly-Gadol 1976; Russ 1983). Women's past exclusions have thus been exacerbated by compounding and ongoing erasures enacted by standard historical practices.

The field of English language lexicography has been no exception to such patterns of exclusion and erasure. Women were often less successful than men in making dictionaries, and their dictionaries, as well as evidence of their contributions to dictionaries, were less likely than those of men to survive materially or thrive critically – as "important," "significant," "excellent," or "influential." There are, for instance, very few pre-twentieth-century general-purpose dictionaries known to have been compiled by women; the second edition of Anne Fisher's (1773) *An Accurate New Spelling Dictionary and Expoſitor of the English Language* is among them, but this dictionary very nearly failed to make it to press. Fisher was a popular educational reference writer whose embittered former publisher falsified evidence of piracy in order

to suppress publication of the dictionary's first edition (Rodríguez-Alvarez and Rodríguez-Gil 2006). Fisher is today mostly remembered as a grammarian (see Percy 1994) and only occasionally recalled as a dictionary maker alongside a lean list of women lexicographers, including Elizabeth Elstob (1715), compiler of the Latin–English *Rudiments of Grammar*, or Hester Piozzi (1794), author of *British Synonymy*, or Charlotte Yonge (1863), creator of the *History of Christian Names*, though each of these texts tends to be carefully categorized as a textbook, a grammar, a thesaurus, or an encyclopedia – relevant to, but not quite constituting, a dictionary proper.

Similar qualifications often attend historical descriptions of women connected to the *OED*. The project is widely recognized for welcoming the contributions of women (and men), who volunteered lexical information and expertise from across the globe. Women close to home did the same; for example, editor James Murray's wife, Ada, is commonly credited with conceiving of the "Scriptorium" in which the dictionary would be assembled, and his daughters, Elsie and Rosfrith, are known to have joined the *OED*'s staff as adults after performing dictionary-related "chores" throughout childhood. The work of these women is, again, often scrupulously specified as voluntary, amateur, specialized, ancillary, dutiful to husband, father, nation, or tongue – helpful to, but not quite constituting, lexicography proper.

More common in dictionary histories than these real women seem to be a handful of fictional, apocryphal, or hypothetical ones: Becky Sharp, antihero of William Makepeace Thackeray's (1847–48) *Vanity Fair*, is often remembered for throwing a gifted edition of "Johnson's Dixonary" out the window of her moving carriage, and Amy Cooper, discontented wife of lexicographer Thomas Cooper, is often remembered for throwing her husband's nearly completed dictionary into a blazing fireplace. The fact that the earliest monolingual English dictionaries imagined women as a primary audience is frequently characterized as an "uncanny irruption" of the feminine in a genre that would eventually find its focal point among men (Fleming 1994, 291, 295). Robert Cawdrey's (1604) *A Table Alphabeticall* is the favored example; the voluminous title of its first edition at once bears and buries mention of women:

A Table Alphabeticall, conteyning and teaching the true vvriting, and vnderſtanding of hard vſuall Engliſh wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French. &c. With the interpretation thereof by plaine Engliſh words, gathered for the benefit & helpe of Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other vnskilfull perſons. Whereby they may the more eaſilie and better vnderſtand many hard Engliſh wordes, vvhich they ſhall heare or read in Scriptures, Sermons, or elſwhere, and alſo be made able to vſe the ſame aptly themſelues.

Although subsequent dictionaries followed Cawdrey's lead, histories often take care to emphasize that the practice of regularly and prominently addressing women eventually disappeared from English lexicography.

These compilers, contributors, audiences, wives, daughters, and destroyers, are the usual suspects when it comes to women in dictionary history, but they mostly serve as footnotes to a fairly regular roster of dictionaries known and distinguished by particular men – "Johnson's *Dictionary*," "Webster's dictionaries," "Murray's *OED*." Women thus have a way of fading into the wallpaper of lexicographical history, even as they come out of the woodwork of its fine print. But women's presence in dictionary making of the past was not nearly so tenuous as it is made to seem in standard accounts.

The practice of feminist historiography asserts that it is not only a safe assumption but a scholarly obligation to understand women as present and participating in the earlier experiences of humanity regardless of whether they have figured into narratives of those experiences. The standard of human value simply is not set by the male gender, and any full account of human endeavors cannot be told in the absence of women. Recognizing "the full humanity of women" and discovering the nature and extent of their contributions to human knowledge is, then, a priority of feminist work that seeks equal treatment for women and men (Cameron 1992, 4; Royster 2000, 13), but it is likewise a responsibility for any intellectual project that hopes to make sense of individual behaviors, social order, or systems of power – all of which are inseparable from gendered sensibilities and sexual politics (Cameron 1992, 4; Kelly-Gadol 1976, 816). Gender not only has "deep roots in the everyday behaviors and fantasies of individual women and men"; it is "built into the structure and practice of families, education, labor markets, and government policies" (Meyerowitz 2008, 1355), and it is "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 1986, 1067). Hence, there is no way to understand "men," "women," or their experiences apart from these historically contingent ideas about gender, about who and how (real or imagined) women and men can or should be in relation to others (cf. Beauvoir 1949/2010; Butler 1990; Kelly-Gadol 1976; Scott 1986).

Working from these assumptions about women and gender, feminist scholarship since the 1970s has paired attempts to recover women of the past with attempts to understand past patterns of subjective identity, symbolic representation, social norms, and power dynamics that constitute gender (Scott 1986, 1067–68). This research sometimes assumes a real and relatively stable social collectivity of persons self-identified or historically identified as "women," but, more often and more powerfully, it seeks to complicate how we understand "women," "men," and "gender" as "at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them

alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions" (Scott 1986, 1074). Hence, pursuing visibility for women and gender is not to be mistaken for asserting experiential uniformity that eclipses the ambiguity and variability of persons and systems: Alignments are shifty, collectivities volatile, and regimes shaky. These are precisely the aspects of changeability that historical work on women and gender (and other marginalized groups or systems of marginalization) seeks to map. When we understand gender categories and relations to be "cultural fictions" (Butler 1990, 178) – "constructed, rather than natural" – we might also begin to imagine them otherwise (Cameron 1992, 4).

This book proceeds from these feminist and historiographical tenets, accepting the ethical and intellectual obligation to understand women and gender as playing some significant part in the human endeavor of lexicography past and present. Thinking across varied scenes and stages of dictionary making and use, this project asks: How have women contributed to the field of lexicography? What roles have they played as authors, patrons, assistants, critics, or theorists? How did women come to participate, and what effects did their contributions have on dictionary theory, practice, and history? The preliminary answers to such questions that are offered here demonstrate that women's patronage and labor supported the production and circulation of a vast array of dictionaries, ordinary to extraordinary. Women not only supported early and important large-scale male-attributed dictionaries, they also critiqued prevailing modes of dictionary making and compiled innovative lexicons to challenge understandings of the genre as well as the versions of English it could and should record.

Pairing questions about individual persons with questions about the larger social systems they inhabit, this project also asks: How were women's participations in lexicography shaped by ideas about what was appropriate for women to know or do? What gender norms – or gender norm suspensions – made it possible for women to make or sponsor dictionaries? To what extent has lexicography relied on and shored up stereotypical sex-roles and an unequal gender order? How, for example, have sexual divisions of labor and sex-specific control of resources within and beyond households shaped dictionary production, circulation, and reception? And how have standard or deviant sex-roles and sexual symbolism functioned to establish lexicographical exigence, to maintain lexicographical order, or to promote lexicographical change? This book suggests that gender ideologies have been mobilized, at turns, to prevent, secure, and veil women's involvements, while gender norms have likewise been enforced, suspended, or flouted to allow women's participations and innovations in dictionary work. In this way, gender has served as a perennial ideological affordance to lexicography that, like the technological affordance of the printing press, made possible new modes of making and