

Borrowed Words: Using the Words of Others to Express What We Want to Say

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When we learn to speak we acquire a vocabulary: nouns and verbs, phrases and idioms. As part of this process, we also begin to build up a personal collection of items from another area of the linguistic field, that is, quotations, less likely to be recognized by compilers of traditional dictionaries. Some of these will come from a general stock to which most people have access; in a time of diverse cultures, others will belong to those who are part of a certain group. Beyond that, most people will have a body of quotations of particular significance for themselves: pieces of speech or writing encountered at a special moment for that person, and therefore particularly meaningful to them. It is not really surprising that a search for the string “my favourite quote” garners an enormous number of hits on Google.

Quotations are a particular area of linguistic resource. Probably as long as we have had speech or writing, we have adduced the utterances of others to give authority, emphasis or clarity to what we ourselves want to say. When we quote knowingly we may do so allusively, assuming that our hearers will pick up and understand the reference. In some cases, this communication may constitute a kind of coded reference. The surface meaning makes perfect sense, but knowledge of the origins of the quotation adds a special context to those in on the secret. In July 1976, Queen Elizabeth II was in Boston Massachusetts, concluding a visit to the United States. A photograph in the *New York Times* of 11 July shows her walking past a number of demonstrators with placards including one with the legend “Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.” At face value, this could be taken simply as a protest against the British status of Northern Ireland, but in Irish Republican circles it would have had great resonance. The words come from the oration by Patrick Pearse, one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, over the grave of the Fenian Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa:

The fools, the fools, the fools, they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace. (Speech, 1 August, 1915.)

The words thus invoke key figures of the Republican pantheon.

We may not make explicit acknowledgement of our linguistic debt when we quote, and indeed many quotations have embedded themselves so firmly in the language that we may not be aware of what we owe to the original author of the words. (In the English language we might think particularly of phrases from the Bible and Shakespeare, for example *salt of the earth* and *through a glass darkly* from the Bible, and *at one fell swoop* and *a rose by any other name* from Shakespeare.)

Quotations which have become part of the general vocabulary are like other vocabulary items subject to language change. Such “misquotations”, like apocryphal quotations, often shed an interesting light on how people perceive a particular person or event. Individual items last because they fill a useful linguistic gap.

In this paper, I shall look at different categories of quotation, and explore some of the linguistic processes involved. Work on the next (seventh) edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, first published in 1941, is currently in progress, and has brought to light a number of specific examples of quotations in the language of past and present.

In discussing this topic, it is necessary to reach some kind of working definition for a quotation, especially as distinct from a proverb or saying. For the purposes of this paper, I am taking a quotation to be a fixed group of words said or written by a particular person at a particular time, often in response to a particular event. Whether or not we now know who originated it (there are many anonymous quotations), it is intrinsically an individual coinage with fixed, and distinctive, wording, in which the key thought is pithily expressed. A proverb or saying, by contrast, encapsulates a general truth

expressed through observation of the surrounding world. With alteration of specific wording depending on circumstance, it might be voiced by different people in different places over a span of time.

One of the points I want to make is that these are general categories. As lexicographers we may make distinctions that allow us to discuss main groupings, but we also recognize that individually items are capable of moving from one group to another. A number of quotations have been so widely adopted as expressions of a general truth that they have gained effective proverbial status. Alexander Pope's couplet warning that:

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring. (*An Essay on Criticism*, 1711.)

generated the familiar proverb, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". Quotations, like other linguistic items, may transmute, shift their ground, generate fixed phrases, or become clichés. The point is often reached at which we can say that the linguistic status of the item has changed, and it has become part of the wider vocabulary.

In terms of usage, the most "successful" quotations are those which have both individuality and universality. They encapsulate precisely and vividly an individual response to a particular situation at a given time, but their very precision means that another person in a different time and place will find that the words express precisely what he or she wants to say.

In a recent interview, I was asked (as Editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*) "Who owns a quotation?" I found it an interesting question, as the answer seems to me to reach beyond the strict realm of authorship or copyright. Clearly Shakespeare will always be recognized as the author of "To be or not to be", and the laws of copyright, while varying from country to country, can never be magically suspended. However, once a particular quotation has lodged itself in the public consciousness, it is as subject to the process of language change as any other vocabulary item, and it is as likely to be used without the user necessarily realizing that they are quoting from a particular source.

Explicit quotation is often intended to add authority to what we say. The writer Sir Antony Jay has commented on this with his customary wit:

In mobilizing support for a project or a policy it is especially agreeable to be able to call upon the distinguished dead; their distinction adds intellectual weight and moral force to the argument, and their death makes it impossible to appear on television later and say that they meant something completely different. (Introduction, *Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*, 1995.)

We recognize the process, and are not surprised to find strings such as "as Shakespeare says", "the words of Mark Twain", and "quoting Oscar Wilde" getting hits on Google News for March and April 2008. However, it is worth noting that explicit quotation has its own dangers. In May 2007, Representative Ted Poe was arguing in the US Congress for funds for military action in Iraq. He said:

Congress needs to quit talking about supporting the troops and put money where our mouths seem to be. Nathan Bedford Forrest, successful Confederate general, said it best about winning and victory and the means to do so. He said, "Git there firstest with the mostest." (Speech, 7 May, US House of Representatives.)

The words attributed to Forrest (actually a popular version of his advice "Get there first with the most men") were certainly apposite, and might have been seen as helpful to the argument. However, because of Forrest's own history (following the Civil War he became First Grand Wizard of the Klu Klux Klan), the citation generated outrage at the source rather than making a telling point.

Current circumstances may bring particular formulations into prominence. In English usage, Bismarck's view of involvement in Balkan politics, that it was "Not worth the healthy bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier", had rather died from sight, as had the summary of a fictional war correspondent created by Kipling in his 1891 novel *The Light That Failed*: "There'll be trouble in the Balkans in the spring." Events in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, however, brought both expressions back into prominence, as a search of Google News Archive can demonstrate.

In Britain, following on Labour's electoral success of 1997, the relationship between Tony Blair as Prime Minister and his Chancellor Gordon Brown became of great interest to the public. Over the years many journalists wrote about the Chancellor's presumed resentments, and desire for top office. Seeking the right words to evoke a sense of his brooding presence, a fair number of them reached back to the 1930s. P. G. Wodehouse, describing the formidable McAllister, Lord Emsworth's gardener, wrote in *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere* (1935): "It is never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine." Since 1997, those words have frequently been in the public eye in Britain.

This is not the only well-known quotation deployed significantly by those chronicling the story of this political duo. An article in the *New York Sun* of 12 May 2006 reached back to a much earlier writer with the words, "Mr Brown is willing to wound, but afraid to strike." The reference is to Alexander Pope's character of Addison, in "An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot" (1735):

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike.

"Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike" would probably not be found (yet) in a lexical dictionary, but it has a respectable history of usage. In October 1820, when George IV attempted to divorce his popular wife Caroline of Brunswick, the House of Lords was debating (with some acrimony) a *Bill of Pains and Penalties against Her Majesty*. One speaker objected to proposed procedure:

How could they vote the preamble of the bill proved, and then resort to a new measure of a different form? Such conduct would be a gross insult to the unfortunate woman against whom the bill was directed. That, indeed, would show that their lordships were
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike—
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike. (Lord Carnarvon, speech, House of Lords, 16 October 1820)

There are other examples of the couplet being quoted, but it is the first line which has lodged itself in the language.

In Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) the following exchange occurs between Isabel Archer and her cousin Ralph:

"You're beating about the bush, Ralph. You wish to say you don't like Mr Osmond, and yet you're afraid."
"Willing to wound and yet afraid to strike?" I'm willing to wound *him*, yes—but not to wound you. I'm afraid of you, not of him. If you marry him it won't be a fortunate way for me to have spoken."

In this exchange, Ralph finds Pope's words the perfect expression for his situation. He evidently expects that Isabel will take the allusion, and his use of Pope's phrase, with its pejorative context, tacitly acknowledges the criticism she makes of his behaviour.

The more established a quotation becomes in the language, the more likely it is to be used allusively, and perhaps to have some of the words varied. In 1960, the literary scholar C. S. Lewis published *Studies in Words*, in which he considered the development of various items of vocabulary. At one point, he looked at the way in which the free use of strongly pejorative terms tended to weaken the impact of those terms. He wrote:

In the field of language ... hatred cuts its own throat, and those who are too "willing to wound" become thereby impotent to strike ... as words become exclusively emotional they cease to be words and therefore of course cease to perform any strictly linguistic function.

James and Lewis are both figures from the world of literature, but there is good evidence that "willing to wound" had moved into the more general language. An editorial in the *New York Times* of 24 January 1871 opened with the words "Willing to wound, the Democrats in the Legislature may yet be afraid to strike."

Over the years, Pope's words became a natural part of the language. It is therefore probably unsurprising to find an established variant, in which elements of the formulation are transposed. A *New York Times* column of 1 February 1931, on what it called "Britain's tangle of politics", looked at voting patterns in the House of Commons and concluded: "Many members are willing to strike but afraid to wound." The form is now well-evidenced: for example, the "Reporter's Diary" column in the Indian paper *The Hindu* of 14 February 2005 had an item on industrial relations which opened:

Hair-dressers or hair stylists or hair beauticians, however one calls them, saloon owners in Tiruchi find themselves afflicted with the "willing to strike but afraid to wound" syndrome.

It is not unfair to comment that along with the alteration there has been a weakening of the sense. Pope's original phrasing precisely evoked a malice held back by timidity. The modified version suggests a more general lack of resolution, in which the concern is that the blow struck may not be a final one.

Pope's original words have become to some degree affected by language change, but the original (and correct) form is still firmly current. In other cases, the altered form may become dominant. A review in the *New York Review of Books* for 10 November 1988 included an anecdote about the Latin scholar and poet A. E. Housman, who in 1931 had offered a classical journal a set of notes on a number of obscene Latin poems. The *New York Review of Books* noted that "Although presented in what Gibbon calls 'the decent obscurity of a learned language', to wit Latin, his contribution was rejected."

The expression supposedly coined by Gibbon actually comes from a parody in the *Anti-Jacobin* (1797–8), which was written by the Tory statesman George Canning and his friends to satirize and counter radical views. In *Memoirs of My Life* (1796), looking back at to the composition of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), Gibbon actually wrote: "My English text is chaste, and all licentious passages are left in the obscurity of a learned language." ("Decent obscurity" was however a Gibbonian phrase: he used it in the *Decline and Fall*, in a footnote about the French historian Tillemont's account of St Cyril, saying that Tillemont had "thrown his virtues into the text, and his faults in to the notes, in decent obscurity, at the end of the volume".) It is not difficult to see why the shorter and pithier form has established itself as a favourite linguistic device.

We have a propensity to edit as we repeat. Without necessarily realizing it, we précis and paraphrase, reproducing the nub of what we have heard. From the world of Antarctic exploration, reflecting the enormous reputation of the explorer Ernest Shackleton, there is a saying: "When disaster strikes, and all hope is gone, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton." This can be traced back initially to a lecture given in 1950 to the British Association for the Advancement of Science by the geologist Raymond Priestley. Looking at the great names of Antarctic exploration, Priestley said:

I served both with Shackleton and Scott and very briefly met Amundsen in mid-career. I believe a colleague hit the nail when he wrote: "As a scientific leader give me Scott; for swift and efficient polar travel Amundsen but when things are hopeless and there seems no way out, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton."

The colleague was Apsley Cherry-Garrard, who had written in *The Worst Journey in the World* (1923):

For a joint scientific and geographical piece of organization, give me Scott; for a Winter Journey, Wilson; for a dash to the pole and nothing else, Amundsen: and if I am in the devil of a hole and want to get out of it, give me Shackleton every time.

By an extension of this process, we may virtually invent: giving as a quotation what in fact sums up our view of a particular person. It is generally acknowledged that there is no record of Marie Antoinette saying "Let them eat cake." (Her own letters reflect a much more responsible attitude to the problems of the poor. Rousseau in 1740 referred to a similar remark as a well-known saying, and in 1823 Marie Antoinette's brother-in-law, Louis XVIII, attributed "Why don't they eat pastry" to an earlier Queen of France, the Spanish princess Marie Thérèse.) However, "Let them eat cake" has become part of the English language, typifying a dismissive attitude redolent of carelessness and ignorance. A letter in the *New York Times Magazine* of 19 March 2006 began: "There is a certain 'let them eat cake' aspect to the anti-zoning view. Almost no one with money, despite the rhetoric, is

actually against zoning.” Apocryphal “quotations” of this kind last because they are linguistically useful.

It is worth noting here that establishing what was exactly said or written is not necessarily straightforward, even if you can get back to what appears to be an authentic source. In his *Autobiography* (1967) the philosopher Bertrand Russell attributed to the socialist and historian Sidney Webb the summary “Marriage is the waste-paper basket of the emotions.” There are a number of sources which attribute the comment to Sidney’s wife Beatrice, qualified by the words “we always say”. However, the source which demonstrates possible complexities to the full is Leonard Woolf’s *Beginning Again: an Autobiography of the Years 1911–18* (1964). Leonard describes a visit made by the Webbs to the Woolfs in 1918. They went out for an evening walk, and at one point Sidney was walking with Leonard at some distance from Virginia and Beatrice. Looking back, Sidney said to Leonard, “I know what she is saying to your wife; she is saying that marriage is the waste paper basket of the emotions.” Later that evening, Virginia confirmed these words, as accompanied by the parenthetic “we always say”.

So far so good, but Leonard’s account includes a footnote which offers a perfect picture of the difficulties inherent in verification:

It is a curious fact that in Virginia’s diary she records this conversation as follows: “One should have only one great personal relationship in one’s life, she said; or at most two—marriage and parenthood. Marriage was necessary as a waste pipe for emotion, as security in old age when personal attractiveness fails and as a help to work.”

He continues:

This shows how difficult it is to be certain of any accuracy in recorded conversations. I am absolutely certain that Sidney used the words “waste paper basket of the emotions” in speaking to me, and I am almost certain that those were the words that Virginia agreed Beatrice used to her. But did Beatrice in fact say “waste pipe” and not “waste paper basket”? It is impossible now to know. Virginia was never an accurate recorder of what people said, and it is quite possible, if not probable, that when she came to write her diary, three days after the events, she dashed down (inaccurately) waste pipe. But it is, as I say impossible to know.

Before turning to particular examples which have come to light in recent editing, it is appropriate to consider briefly the role of a dictionary of quotations. Initially, looking at collections from the eighteenth century, the primary purpose was to provide linguistic models: appropriate thoughts on a particular topic clothed in effective language by significant authors. These offered models for writing and behaviour, under headings such as *Advice* and *Ambition*. Early collections, such as Edward Bysshe’s “*A Collection of the Most Natural, Agreeable & Noble Thoughts ... to be found in the best English poets*”, the third part of his *The Art of Poetry* (1702), drew particularly on literature, especially poetry and drama, by what were regarded as “the best authors”. (For example, Shakespeare, Dryden, Milton, and the seventeenth-century dramatist Thomas Otway.) A secondary function was to list and decode classical tags and expressions from other languages which had gained currency, as in D. E. Macdonnell’s *A Dictionary of Quotations* (1797). However, as the nineteenth century advanced, another use was first explicitly stated and then became dominant. Compilations such as J. C. Grocott’s *An Index to Familiar Quotations* (1866), Henry Bohn’s *A Dictionary of Quotations from the English Poets* (1881), and J. K. Hoyt’s *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Quotations* (1896) not only allowed the reader to check on the authorship of a particular quotation, they provided useful and pithy expressions which could be incorporated into the work of a writer or journalist seeking for the right words.

In the twenty-first century, I suggest that the purpose of a dictionary of quotations is to fulfil one of two main functions: to answer the questions “Who said that?” and “What’s been said about this?” Collections such as the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, which belong to the first category, are typically organized according to author. (In the case of *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, author entries are ordered by date of birth rather than alphabetic listing, but it is still primarily an author-organized dictionary.) Collections belonging to the second category are organized according to subject: current examples include the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation* and the *Times Book of Quotations*.

Whether or not these collections are available electronically, they have all been prepared primarily as print volumes. The world of quotations today includes a number of significant websites, most of them with free content, and often hosting contributions from readers. They are least likely to have sourced attributions, but probably most likely to disseminate their material around the World Wide Web.

The seventh edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* is currently in preparation, and we need to identify quotations in currency today, and about which questions may be asked. We have to consider both whether what is already in the dictionary still justifies inclusion, and whether what has come to light since the last edition was published (in 2004) should find a place in *ODQ7*. I would like to look first at the question of what is already there.

The Oxford English Corpus is a major language resource for current English. (In Spring 2006 it passed the milestone of 2 billion words of real twenty-first century global English). It represents all types of English, from literary novels and specialist journals to everyday newspapers and the language of chatrooms and weblogs. With the help of English Dictionaries, we ran the existing text of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* against the Corpus, to assess the currency of individual items. The program devised made use of index context lines in place for each quotation, so we were effectively testing the best-known strings from each quotation. For example:

Ambition can creep (Burke: “Ambition can creep as well as soar”)
 nest of singing birds (Johnson: “Sir, we were a nest of singing birds”)

This process gave us approximately 50% of the existing book — 10,000 quotations — for which the evidence was sufficiently strong for continued inclusion to be unquestioned. We needed then to look more closely at material for which less usage evidence had been found. Was the usage, though numerically lower, still sufficient to justify inclusion? And were there other circumstances which meant that although the item might not have been quoted frequently, there was a context which gave it importance?

The material was assessed through further online searching, especially Google Book and Google News Archive, a procedure which brought up a number of categories. Firstly, quotations which have been quoted in classic sources which are still likely to be known and read. For example, there is no great modern currency for David Garrick’s lines from “A Riddle” (1762):

Kitty, a fair but frozen maid
 Kindled a flame I still deplore.

However, in Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816), they are recalled nostalgically by Mr Woodhouse. He tells his daughter that it is not difficult to see who she takes after:

Your dear mother was so clever at all those things! If I had but her memory! But I can remember nothing;—not even that particular riddle which you have heard me mention; I can only recollect the first stanza; and there are several.

He goes on to quote the stanza beginning with the lines we have. In Thomas Otway’s play *Venice Preserved* (1682), we find the assertion:

Give but an Englishman his whore and ease
 Beef and a sea-coal fire, he’s yours for ever.

Otway is probably not much read or performed today, but in a letter of 22 August 1822 Lord Byron wrote to his friend Hodgson:

If you should feel a disposition to come here, you will find “beef and a sea-coal fire”, and not ungenerous wine. Whether Otway’s two other requisites for an Englishman or not, I cannot tell, but probably one of them.

Clearly Byron expected Hodgson to be familiar with Otway's lines. Tennyson's poem "The Palace of Art" was published in 1832. One stanza runs:

An English home—grey twilight poured
On dewy pasture, dewy trees,
Softer than sleep—all things in order stored,
A haunt of ancient Peace.

"A haunt of ancient peace" makes a couple of significant appearances. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, writing in a letter of 1871 of William Morris's home Kelmscott, said, "This house and its surroundings are the loveliest 'haunt of ancient peace' that can well be imagined." In 1908, L. M. Montgomery's children's classic *Anne of Green Gables* featured Anne Shirley walking through her Prince Edward Island home in the evening: "All Avonlea lay before her in a dreamlike afterlight — 'a haunt of ancient peace'."

Emma and *Anne of Green Gables*, like Byron's and Rossetti's letters, are sources that may well be encountered today. It is appropriate that the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* should be a resource in which references of this kind can be traced.

Significant quotation in the past can include association with a particular event. A good example of this is found in lines from Sir Walter Scott's 1808 poem *Marmion*. In the introduction to the first canto, we find the lines:

Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon-light is quenched in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill!

The subject of these lines is William Pitt the younger, who died (in office as Prime Minister) in 1806. In 1850, the House of Commons was informed of the death of another (former) Prime Minister, Robert Peel following a riding accident. One of the tributes to him was paid by a future Premier, William Ewart Gladstone. Concluding his remarks, Gladstone said:

I ... quote those most touching and feeling lines which were applied by one of the greatest poets of this country to the memory of a man great indeed, but yet not greater than Sir Robert Peel. (Speech, House of Commons, 3 July 1850.)

He went on to quote Scott's stanza.

There are other quotations which, although they may not be widely quoted in modern times, have gained new resonance, or have appeared in high-profile circumstances. In 1847, the American philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson made a speech in Manchester, England, in which he said:

I feel in regard to this aged England ... that she sees a little better on a cloudy day, and that, in storm of battle and calamity, she has a secret vigour and a pulse like a cannon. (*English Traits*, 1883 edn.)

In May 1991, the words were quoted on a very high-profile occasion indeed, when the Queen of England addressed the two Houses of Congress, following on the conclusion of the first Gulf War.

It is sometimes the case that a quotation may demonstrate currency in one of the many varieties of World English. A headline in the *Business Line (The Hindu)*, 29 April 2006, read "A mosquito may sting a stately horse and make him wince." The allusion was to another quotation under question: Dr Johnson's assertion that "A fly, Sir, may sting a stately horse and make him wince; but one is but an insect, and the other is a horse still."

Work on a new edition requires us to validate what is already there. We need also to find space by cutting some material. A number of quotations, highly topical last time, have faded from view: for example, comments relating to England's success in the 2003 Rugby World Cup. Because the book is near the limit of what will work for a print volume, we have also identified some material which might sit more happily in a complementary volume: for example, *Modern Quotations* or *Political Quotations*. (*Modern Quotations* specializes in material from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; *Political*

Quotations predictably has as its focus the world of politics.) Finally, there are items from established authors which on closer examination of usage do not really justify inclusion. Items for which no significant usage evidence can be established, and which probably represent no more than an instance of a key author using a particular expression, include “I do not ask too much: I beg cold comfort” from Shakespeare’s *King John*, and “Rouse the lion from his lair” from Sir Walter Scott’s *The Talisman* (1825).

As well as assessing current content, we need of course to be alert to what we ought to add. As a matter of course, we monitor current publications, both print and online, and here again the Oxford English Corpus has been of great use. Items which have recently come to light include material from such diverse authors as the African writer and former slave Olaudah Equiano (“The worth of a soul cannot be told”), the explorer Matthew Flinders (“It is necessary ... to geographical propriety that the whole body of land should be designated under one name” — advocating the use of “Australia” for *Terra Australis*), the American statesman and President James Madison (“The diffusion of knowledge is the only true guardian of liberty”), the English pamphleteer and dramatist Thomas Nashe (“No leaf he wrote on but was like a burning-glass to set on fire all his readers” — apparently of Christopher Marlowe, although further research revealed that the subject of the comment was the Italian poet and dramatist Pietro Aretino), the first-century BC Roman freedman and writer of mimes Publilius Syrus (“Debt is the slavery of the free”), and Florence Nightingale (“Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better”). A reference to a question posed by the theologian and Church Father Tertullian, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem”, led on to a linked quotation attributed to the eight-century English scholar and theologian Alcuin. As the historian Henry Mayr-Harting explains:

In the year 797 when Alcuin was anxiously casting about in his mind as to why God had allowed the Norsemen to raid the monastery of Lindisfarne a few years previously, he concluded that the monks’ habit of listening to heathen poems at dinner had something to do with it. “What has Ingeld to do with Christ?” he asks. “Narrow is the house; it will not be able to hold them both.” (*The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 1991.)

It seems reasonably clear from online searching alone that most if not all of these quotations will be verifiable, but that is not always the case. A quotation attributed to George Orwell, “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act”, is widely quoted online. However, the attributions are unsourced, and none of them go back beyond the 1990s. It remains to be seen whether or not this will turn out to be a genuine usage. Similarly, I am extremely suspicious of words attributed to Joseph Addison which now appear in a number of motivational books: “What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity.”¹

Whether or not a quotation is authentic, the power of the Internet means that once cited online it can readily become widely known and quoted. (Modern communications have in some ways given new force to the proverbial statement that “A lie will go round the world while truth is pulling its boots on.”) A nice example of this came to light in 2007, when coverage of a total lunar eclipse included the words, attributed to the explorer Magellan: “The Church says that the Earth is flat, but I know that it is round. For I have seen the shadow of the earth on the moon and I have more faith in the shadow than the Church.”

This apparent example of early scientific observation and free-thinking (possibly coupled with a readiness to believe that acceptance of the flatness of the Earth was a doctrine of the Church) is clearly well-known today. However, investigation reveals that its origins are rather more recent. It seems to go back the nineteenth-century American lawyer, orator and atheist Robert Green Ingersoll, in his *The Gods and Other Lectures* (1879). He introduced the “quotation” with the words “I believe it was Magellan who said...”

Ingersoll’s attribution can be linked with the work of a contemporary. The American Unitarian minister and writer Minot Judson Savage in his poem “Magellan”, published in *Poems of Modern Thought* (1884), had written:

In the moon’s eclipse,

¹ Further research suggests that both attributions are apocryphal.

The earth's round shadow on its face I see!
 I read God's works, which are his book indeed,
 And trust the hint that falleth from his lips
 More than all man's infallibility.

However, although it seems exceedingly likely that Magellan's free-thinking is a nineteenth-century construct, it has now probably established a continuing existence for itself. We will certainly need to take cognizance of it, if only to offer the real background to what a journalist writing in the *Idaho Statesman* of 9 October 2007 called "my favourite quote by Ferdinand Magellan".²

To reinforce the role of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* as a reference book for publications of the past likely to be known today, we have also looked at annotated editions of classic texts, especially titles in the Oxford World's Classics series, and Penguin Classics. Quotations thrown up by this process include Richard Brinsley Sheridan's "I own the soft impeachment" (Mrs Malaprop in *The Rivals*; "soft impeachment" has phrasal currency, and appears in Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*) and Lord Tennyson's "Then fancy shapes — as fancy can" (*In Memoriam*; used as a chapter heading in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*). "Ignorance is a painless evil", from *Ajax* by Sophocles, is quoted in George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

Samuel Johnson said that "Classical quotation is the parole of literary men", but I think the foregoing probably better illustrates Ralph Waldo Emerson's view that "By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote." Quotation is a part of every language, and as rewarding a study as other more recognized areas of the linguistic field.

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² Further research has turned up an earlier nineteenth-century prose account which appears to be related, but has not provided any indication to pre-nineteenth-century usage.

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