

Some Victorian Reflections on a Dictionary of Women Economists and the Art of Dictionary Making

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Dimand, R.W., M.A. Dimand and E.L. Forget (eds). *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. 2000. Pp. xviii+491. ISBN 1 85278 694 6. £100; \$US160.

The editors should be congratulated for their excellent work on this handsomely produced biographical dictionary of women economists. The publication itself may be interpreted as a belated product of that peculiarly late-twentieth century enterprise of subverting the patriarchal system by recovering the outstanding contributions made by women to various intellectual endeavours throughout history. Indeed, the swiftest of perusals of the reference shelves in any decent university library will reveal a myriad of similar biographical volumes from a range of disciplines dating from this period, with titles such as *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, *The Biographical Dictionary of Women in Science*, *Extraordinary Women of the Medieval and Renaissance World*, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720* and *The A to Z of Native American Women*. The dictionary under review is equal to any of these publications and all librarians should be induced, even in these financially straitened times, to add this work to their shopping list. This dictionary is not, however, without its faults, and, proceeding on the rather bold assumption that its many outstanding attributes will be glaringly obvious to those readers who consult it from time to time as a work of reference, I will devote the rest of this review to delineating some criticisms of its contents and structure. These criticisms will be brought into sharp relief by comparing *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists* with some of the editorial masterpieces of the nineteenth century, namely, *The Dictionary of National Biography*, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (subsequently known as the scholar's edition), and *The Dictionary of Political Economy*. These literary monuments of the Victorian age are now venerated institutions and all but one (the *Britannica*) are deemed sufficiently worthy to be sustained by funds, either directly or indirectly, from the public purse. They certainly provide templates for how best to proceed on such editorial enterprises, and, hopefully, my meditations on their outstanding attributes will provide some guidance to future editors in the field of social sciences, which, in recent years, has unfortunately seen a proliferation of less weighty and transient dictionaries that can only be described as dull, half-baked and, above all, unacceptable.

1 Achieving Uniformity

The most difficult and tiresome of the many tasks confronting the editors of a dictionary is to ensure that there is a certain uniformity in quality, form and content across the entries. No editor will master this problem to the point where the exacting demands of every pedantic reviewer will be met, and I am afraid that, in the case of the dictionary under review, there is indeed a little unevenness in not

just the quality of the entries (which is nonetheless extremely high on average), but also their form and content. This suggests to me either that very few editorial rules were imposed on the contributors or that the various editorial rules that were nominally adopted at the beginning of the enterprise were not enforced with any rigour. Some of the contributors, for example, dwell on the biographical details of their subjects, yet provide little analysis of their contributions to the discipline of economics, while others provide lengthy discourses on their subjects' contributions, but overlook many of the most basic personal details that are needed for placing these contributions in context. Thus, in one solid entry it is related that the subject was born on the corner of Sixth and Locust Streets, Newark, Ohio (Bartlett 2000), while in another worthy piece no reference is made to the fact that the subject received (perhaps scandalously) a second-class result in the Economics Tripos (Emami 2000). These biographical details, whether they be in abundance or in short supply, are also presented in a variety of ways: some authors provide the details at the start of the entry, while others either slowly release this information over the course of the entry or provide it, as if it were an after-thought, at the far end of the piece. Contributors to dictionaries should not exercise their personal preferences in this breezy manner and, indeed, it is imperative that editors systematically and ruthlessly remove as many of these sorts of narrative choices from the contributor's orbit as humanly possible. Readers properly expect a certain degree of uniformity, and a certain minimum amount of information, from such basic works of reference. They also expect that the length of each entry should be roughly (but certainly not precisely) proportional to the importance of the subject, a desired feature that is invariably not realised when contributors are allowed full creative control over a subject. Why, for instance, was the author responsible for the very sound piece on Rosa Luxemburg in the dictionary at hand allowed to devote the majority of twenty pages to the minutiae of her prewar revolutionary activities when the average length of an entry is one or two pages and when the entry on Joan Robinson (who is of at least equal importance) is only twelve pages?

Achieving uniformity in form and quality across entries is particularly troublesome for those editors who, owing to the size of the task that confronts them, need to call upon a large number of contributors. The eminent editors of the Victorian age undertook their enterprises on a grand scale over many years and drew upon the services of the countless amateur and semi-professional scholars of the day, and hence their editorial trials in relation to this problem are particularly instructive. R.H. Inglis Palgrave, for one, showed remarkable forbearance and diplomacy in his twenty years of editorial dealings with the many tried and untried scholars who contributed to the three volumes of the original *Dictionary of Political Economy*. He nonetheless did feel obliged on occasion to send men around to the homes of his more indolent contributors to inquire into the whereabouts of promised articles (Milgate 1987). William Robertson Smith and Thomas Spencer Baynes, the editors of the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, also demonstrated remarkable skill by inducing the greatest scholars of the day, from James Clerk Maxwell to Thomas Henry Huxley, to contribute substantive and path-breaking pieces (including many on political economy) over a nineteen-year period. They attributed their success to a policy of allowing contributors to write lengthy pieces under one heading, but I am sure that, as William Stanley Jevons noted, the handsome remuneration of £3 per page also probably had something to do with it (Moore 2000). Dr James Murray, the most important editor of *The Oxford English Dictionary* throughout its seventy years of construction, surpassed both of these editorial accomplishments by calling upon

the entire English-reading population to assist in writing the biography of each word in the English language (including economic terms such as ‘capital’, ‘marginal’ and, at the very last moment, that new-fangled noun, ‘unemployment’). One particularly valuable contributor, an insane ex-army surgeon and convicted murderer, even posted his sentences from a cell in a lunatic asylum (Winchester 1999). Success in managing regiments of scholars to achieve a polished and uniform product is, however, most dramatically illustrated by the unremitting labours of Leslie Stephen, the first editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Stephen combined silky diplomacy and ruthless autocracy when dealing with the original 653 contributors to this dictionary, and yet somehow still had time to write 378 entries of his own, including nearly all of the entries on economists. As Stephen’s biographer, Noel Annan, wrote: ‘the Victorian intelligentsia may not have been professionals but they worked hard’ (1984, p. 86). Stephen circulated his own entry on Addison as a model of style and format (a sound first step), and explicitly ordered contributors to keep eulogy and wordiness, the great shortcomings of Victorian biography, to a minimum. Many of the contributors simply ignored these directives, and so Stephen subsequently spent most of his productive years struggling with their ‘insane verbosity’, ‘pedantry’ and ‘damnable styles’ (Fenwick 1989, 1994). His firm editorial hand also naturally led to some famous quarrels (most notably with the boorish E.A. Freeman over Anglo-Saxon spelling) and, indeed, numerous outraged scholars refused to speak to Stephen after being overlooked for entries that they believed were rightfully theirs. One potential author actually signed himself ‘Your justly incensed enemy’ (Fenwick 1989, pp. xv-xvi). This is, of course, the key finding from these Victorian case studies: one must rule with a firm hand and not expect to make friends as an editor of a dictionary. Stephen himself wrote that he made more enemies editing *The Dictionary of National Biography* in two years than in the ten years he edited the *Cornhill* magazine.

2 Designing the Selection Criteria

The second major task confronting editors of dictionaries is the difficult assignment of designing a suitable principle that determines who or what is included and who or what is excluded. The inevitable bias that immediately results from drafting any such selection principle makes this step perhaps the most perilous of any editorial enterprise. It certainly induces most of the hostile reviews that immediately follow the publication of any dictionary, and, as it happens, my main criticism of the dictionary under review, mild as it is, turns on this very issue. The selection principle employed in the dictionary before me seems, at first blush, to be sensible enough: the subject must be a dead or retired woman who has made a ‘substantive contribution’ to, or is in some way ‘historically important’ within, the ‘field of economics’ (2000, pp. xvii-xviii). This seems to be a tight criterion of taxonomy for a text entitled *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists*, but in practice it is extremely loose, since ‘substantive contribution’ is interpreted very broadly, to say the least, and ‘field of economics’ is expansively delimited by the strategy of adopting liberal readings of what economics entailed at the time each of the subjects was writing. The decision to interpret these terms in this all-embracing way is no doubt partly the result of the editors’ own effort to minimise the aforementioned problem of bias that results from choosing any selection principle, but, paradoxically, it is also undoubtedly partly the product of their own ideological commitments. Specifically, it is clear that one of the many reasons for writing a

dictionary solely devoted to women economists is to rectify the perceived injustice that women's contributions to this field have been overlooked, and hence it is natural that, when interpreting 'substantive contribution' and the 'field of economics', the editors would give the various potential subjects the benefit of the doubt. I cannot help but have sympathy with both of these broad interpretations – with the first because it is evident that women's voices are often silenced within patriarchal systems (especially in those male-centered systems from the past) and with the second because, as the editors themselves state, the discipline of economics is increasingly becoming narrowly defined as the study of *homo economicus* operating within a choice-theoretic framework. However, no matter how understandable, such an approach reveals a fundamental contradiction in this sort of feminist research program, namely, the idea that a patriarchal system both explicitly and surreptitiously confines women to subordinate roles in society is at odds with the claim that there are legions of women in the historical records who have made *substantive* contributions to the field and who are just waiting to be rehabilitated. Indeed, in my view, the fact that Mark Blaug's *Who's Who of Economics* (1986) contains only 31 women out of the 1275 names listed (Bodkin 2000), that Steven Pressman's *Fifty Major Economists* (1999) includes only two women (Joan Robinson and Barbara Bergman) and that Joseph Schumpeter's *Ten Great Economists* (1951) includes no women, are not so much examples of present discrimination by editors, but striking illustrations of the consequences of past, deep-seated discrimination. Thomas Carlyle's famous dictum is nothing but a feminist rallying cry: 'The history of the world is but the biography of great men'.¹

This criticism of feminist literature is hardly original, but it does explain why the dictionary under review is littered with entries on economists of the second or even third rank who published no more than a handful of articles of little consequence, and why many of the contributors write slightly embarrassed asides explaining why their subjects did not make a more substantial contribution to economics. Time and time again we read that the subject was more a philosopher, sociologist, diplomat, or social activist than an economist. One can only imagine how large a second edition of this dictionary would need to be if it is published after the many contemporary women economists, of equal standing to the incumbent subjects, begin to die off. Giants in the field like Anne Krueger and Barbara Bergman will be listed alongside associate professors from small mid-western liberal arts colleges who struggled to get tenure. I cannot, of course, take this criticism too far, not least because there are many indirect benefits to be derived from systematically collecting together biographical sketches of deceased women economists, whether or not they have made a substantial contribution to their profession. The various entries demonstrate, for example, just how many obstacles have been placed in the way of women who have attempted to build careers within the discipline of economics and, as related in Robert Dimand's own introductory essay to the dictionary, the extent to which women economists have chosen research programs that are in some way important to women, such as household production and the role of gender in the workplace. The biographical entries may also act either as useful protocol statements for those scholars, like Pujol (1992), Nelson (1996) and Hewitson (1999), who (in very different ways) maintain that the discipline of economics is phallogocentric in nature, or as the raw materials for those scholars who wish to undertake a wider Namier-like historiographical exercise in which an historical episode is rendered concrete by the sum of the biographies of those who played a part in that episode (see Dimand

1995, p. 18). Finally, and most importantly, it must not be forgotten that any alternative selection mechanism, including one designed by me, will be subject to a bias of its own. One simply cannot escape from these problems, and the dictionaries from the past, where the social norms and intellectual preferences of the time are brought into sharper focus by the passage of time, once again illustrate this nicely. Murray, for example, famously excluded certain words from his lexicographical exercise simply because they were offensive to the ears of his more delicate contemporaries (Green 1996, p. 30; Winchester 1999, p. 86). Palgrave was confronted with similar, but obviously less salacious, selection problems, which he casually resolved in a manner that suited his own research interests in practical banking. This cavalier approach, even in those happier times when the boundaries of the discipline were more fluid, disturbed a number of reviewers (see Price 1891, Laughlin 1897), and it explains why *The Dictionary of Political Economy* has endless entries on obscure banking, financial and legal terms. Do we really need to know, for example, what *Encabezamiento* means? Stephen, on the other hand, settled on a seemingly reasonable selection criterion for *The Dictionary of National Biography*, namely, that the subject must have made some sort of substantial contribution to a field of endeavour that would make him or her of some lasting interest. But he then implicitly defined ‘field of endeavour’ in a way that a male member of the Victorian intellectual aristocracy would, and thereby excluded numerous working-class heroes, industrialists and, above all, women (Fenwick 1994; cf. Matthew 1997). The only firm recommendation I am therefore willing to make in the face of these selection difficulties is that if women economists of the second rank are to be included in a second edition to this biography, their entries should be curtailed to leave space for those neglected women economists who really did make a substantial contribution.

3 Employing the Selection Criteria

The third major task confronting editors of dictionaries is that, once a selection criterion is decided upon, no matter how biased it may be, every effort must be made to include entries on all of those subjects who meet this criterion. This problem is particularly acute for the dictionary at hand, since the editors have set the bar for inclusion sufficiently low that it is inevitable that some of the many ‘minor’ women economists have been overlooked. Indeed, with some humility, the editors have resigned themselves to the likelihood of omissions, pointing to difficulties such as determining the sex of authors who sign their articles with initials (2000, p. xvii). I have quickly detected a number of notable omissions from my own field of interest and without having to undertake any trawling at the library. The most important oversight is the absence of an entry on Vera Smith (later Lutz), who is strangely mentioned in the introductory essay by Robert Dimand, but then does not merit a guernsey in the dictionary itself. Smith received her Ph.D. from the University of London under the supervision of Hayek, and published her highly innovative thesis, in which she recovered the long forgotten free-banking school of the nineteenth century, as *The Rationale of Central Banking* (1936). This work is now correctly treated as a minor classic worthy of reissue (1990), and it is increasingly being cited by members of the rapidly-growing modern free-banking movement. Smith also contributed to the LSE project of disseminating the economic ideas from *Mittel Europa*, translating works by Fritz Machlup, Oscar Morgenstein and Wilhelm Röpke. Another, less important,

omission is Marjorie Tappan (later Hollond), whom some may have come across in their research on Joan Robinson. Tappan was educated at Byrn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, received a Ph.D. from Columbia and became director of studies and lecturer in economics at Girton College, Cambridge, in 1923. She was also a lecturer in economics for the university and for Newnham College. Although she was known for her sophistication and long cigarette holder, she held a conservative disposition, and was said to be too retiring, precise and scholarly to be an exciting expounder of the new and innovative generalities that were then being developed at Cambridge (Robinson 1978, p. 27; Turner 1989). It was probably her conservative nature that brought her into conflict with Joan Robinson, whom she had supervised as a Girton student. Her influence as a director of studies during these tumultuous times might alone warrant her inclusion in a dictionary of women economists, but it also should be noted that Keynes drew on her knowledge of US banking, and (from the briefest of surveys of the *Economic Journal*) that she published at least one article (in 1930) and a number of reviews (six in the 1936 volume). Finally, the editors have failed to include the numerous English women economists, such as Lillian Knowles and Eileen Power, who were well known in their day for practising that old-fashioned and dreary sort of economic history that was popular in England at one time.² Indeed, although the editors should be praised for consciously looking for women economists from every corner of the globe—whether they be Russian game theorists (Olga Bondareva), Swedish macroeconomists (Karin Kock) or Japanese economic historians (Koko Sanpei)—the paradoxical result is that most of the omissions seem to be from England, a country that is traditionally over-represented in reference books. It is also surprising that even though there are first-class entries by five Australian scholars, and despite the fact that there is a substantial existing literature on Australian women economists (see the Groenewegen-led symposium in the March 1998 issue of *Economic Papers*), there is not a single entry on an Australian woman economist. By contrast, and perhaps reflecting the Canadian origins of the editors, there are at least three entries on Canadian women economists (Rosalind Blauer, Agatha Chapman and Mary Innes).

A captious critic in search of omissions will, of course, always find at least a few editorial slips of this sort, and the editors of the dictionary under review may seek further solace in the fact that the great Victorian editorial enterprises did not all have perfect records in this regard. Palgrave, for one, was still collecting omitted material for an appendix to his *Dictionary of Political Economy* in 1908, nine years after the final volume had been published and by which time he was an octogenarian. He was spurred along, in part, by E.R.A. Seligman's 1903 exercise in historical revisionism, 'Some Neglected British Economists' (see Palgrave's introduction to the appendix). Stephen's successor as editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*, George Smith, also found it necessary to bring out supplementary volumes that contained no less than one thousand names (of which roughly 200 were accidental omissions and 800 were individuals who had died during the project), and I notice that the twentieth-century volumes of this dictionary (including the recent 1993 Missing Persons volume) do not have entries on either Palgrave himself or John Neville Keynes. But, having stated this, it must be emphasised that the dictionary under review is primarily a book of reference, and, as such, it will ultimately be judged by its comprehensiveness. Readers will therefore be bemused by the omission of notable women economists, such as Vera Smith, who are actually cited in the editors' earlier landmark publications (R. Dimand 1995, 1999; M. Dimand 1995), and they will only partly accept Robert

Dimand's self-effacing admissions that the editors 'do not present this volume as an exhaustive account of women's contributions', and that they 'have also developed enough humility to know that there are many women in the history of our discipline of whom we remain ignorant' (2000, p. xvii). The Victorians would certainly not have set out upon their grand enterprises with such a defeatist attitude, and, for this reason, it is again worthwhile to consider the various strategies that they employed to minimise the possibility of omissions. Nearly all of them called upon the services of the wider intellectual community, either by establishing numerous editorial committees of specialists or by making direct appeals for subjects from the public through scholarly magazines. Stephen, for example, printed in the *Athenaeum* twice a year names that he and his correspondents considered worthy of inclusion and then called upon readers for further suggestions, corrections and information on sources. This is an ingenious means by which to prevent subjects falling through the cracks, but it does bring other problems in its train, such as when one clergyman provided a list of 1,400 hymn writers, each of whom he believed was worthy of a place in a dictionary of national biography (Annan 1984, p. 84). Palgrave, by contrast, was the exception amongst the Victorian editors when he decided to take the more heroic (and foolish) route of not even forming an editorial committee, and, indeed, he was promptly admonished for such hubris by Marshall (who made play of Palgrave's initials, R.I.P) and Edgeworth (see Edgeworth 1892, p. 525). It is known, however, that Palgrave overcame some of the problems associated with his autarkic editorial strategy by consulting specialists and then giving them a free rein. How else are we to explain the fact that one F.E. Allum of the Royal Mint at Perth, Western Australia, contributed over 100 entries on various media of exchange, 'from the English Angel to the Japanese Yen' (Milgate 1987, pp. 791-2)? Palgrave, and indeed the editors of the dictionary under review, would nonetheless have done well to follow Stephen's lead by making direct and repeated appeals to the academic community, via a suitable journal, for feedback on a proposed list of subject headings.

4 Striking a Suitable Tone

The fourth major task confronting the compilers of a dictionary is to ensure that the work, as a whole, strikes a suitable tone. It is, of course, the responsibility of the editors to ensure that the final draft of each entry is scholarly and objective, and yet—and this is not usually emphasised—it is also their duty to encourage contributors to avoid humourless accounts that avoid all mention of their subjects' failings and peccadilloes, especially when these human weaknesses have some bearing on the academic work of the subject. It is my view that the second of these editorial objectives is not fully realised in the dictionary under review. Although I was impressed by how many of the authors have managed to catch the extremely interesting and (sometimes) tragic lives led by their subjects, I was also struck by the serious and uncritical manner in which they approached their subject matter. There is, in short, a strong vein of dry piety running through the entries. Many of the biographical sketches remind me of reverential Victorian biographies, devoid of psychological analysis and scurrilous detail, and full of filial respect. I must emphasise from the outset that I am not at this point wheeling out the old anti-feminist conceit that women's studies is populated by humourless, boiler-suited activists who cannot take a joke. This hoary old chestnut is not only untrue, but irrelevant, since the problem to which I am referring is crippling the entire social

sciences, not just women's studies. So-called 'scientific history' now seems to be an excuse to write uninteresting things, in an uninteresting manner, about seemingly uninteresting subjects. It does not need to be like this, and it should not be like this. Even dictionaries that collate the biographies of words need not be devoid of some light relief. Who can forget Dr Johnson's definition of oats: 'A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people'? The need to avoid one-dimensional dry-as-dust entries is, however, even more important in more traditional biographies, since all great individuals possess complex, inherently flawed personalities. They are not open books to be read. It is therefore a cardinal requisite for the biographer occasionally to leave the reader in doubt about the subject's dispositions, motives, or actions, and if this can be done with some epigram or paradoxical statement, so much the better. It was just these sorts of statements that were lacking in the dictionary under review. I yearned, just occasionally, for an enlivening phrase such as 'she suffered from no vices', 'her preference for sensible shoes was an asset in her favourite pastime, departmental intrigue', and 'her fussy vegetarianism was matched by her taste for fine whisky'. No woman economist calls for this sort of analysis more than Joan Robinson, whom I select not only because she was one of the great characters of our discipline, but also because the entry on her, though dry, is of sufficient quality to be noted. Robinson was known to be extremely polite to those she believed to be her intellectual inferiors and she was very kind to the callow Australian youths confronted with the alien culture of Cambridge for the first time (and there is, of course, no connection between the first and second of these attitudes), but her haughty rudeness in her dealings with the brilliant North American neoclassical economists was, I think, simply bad manners. Yet, and this adds to our interest in her, these very same Americans had some affection for her, while she induced extreme loyalty in others. Robert Clower, for one, initially thought that she was an 'unadulterated bitch', but soon warmed to her (Turner 1989, p. 133), while, more understandably, elderly 'colonial boys' now positively brace at the bit when her good name is taken in vain. The ever-kind Geoff Harcourt is, for this reason, even more reverential when dealing with Robinson than with his other Cambridge demigods, and so his writings are perhaps not the best to draw upon to illustrate my proposed approach to biography. He nonetheless often manages to portray Robinson's personality in the complex and less than solemn manner that I am promoting, as shown by his concluding comments to his entry on her for *The Dictionary of National Biography*: 'In her later years Joan Robinson, a strict vegetarian, slept all year round in a small hut, open on one side, at the bottom of the garden. In spring the tits would wake her by pecking at her long grey hair for the material for their nests' (Harcourt 1990, p. 347).

One would think that the great editorial enterprises of the nineteenth century would shed little light on ways to overcome this dullness of tone. After all, it was the Victorian age that championed the mealy-mouthed, two-volume, family-approved Victorian biography (usually accompanied by a carefully vetted selection of letters and diary entries), and the traditional reading of events is that this literary form only ended, in spectacular style, when Lytton Strachey published his irreverent *Eminent Victorians* in 1918. This account of the historical development of biography is, however, not strictly true. There was a strong and growing undercurrent of opinion in late-nineteenth century England that was in open rebellion against this dry, eulogistic approach well before Strachey came on to the scene. James Anthony Froude, for one, felt it was his responsibility to publish a

complex psychological portrait that showed the darker side of his recently deceased friend, the impotent and tyrannical Thomas Carlyle. Still, the reading public was not quite ready for such details, especially those that hinted that Carlyle beat his wife, and Froude himself balked at relating the story that Carlyle ‘was one of those persons who ought never to have married’ (Hamilton 1992, p. 167). Stephen did not quite follow Froude’s example, but, as already mentioned, he did explicitly call upon contributors to *The Dictionary of National Biography* to avoid eulogising and antiquarianism, and with much effort he took his pen to those submissions from contributors who did not heed his advice. In his words: ‘The wild beasts at Ephesus were but a type of the unreasonable herd of antiquarians who struggle over my body’ (Bell 1977; Matthew 1997, p. 12). Baynes and Robertson Smith were similarly happy to permit John Kells Ingram (a Comtean-cum-historicist who was at war with orthodox economics) to perform hatchet jobs on John Elliott Cairnes, John Ramsey McCulloch and David Ricardo for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Moore 2000, p. 444). This sort of hyper-critical approach, together with the increasing number of candid references to incidents from the subject’s private sphere, was noted with horror by some commentators, and articles appeared in the reviews entitled ‘On Undesirable Information’ and ‘The Rakers’ (Hamilton 1992, p. 239). It is clear, then, that Strachey had firm foundations from which to launch what soon became known as the ‘new biography’, and the end-product was strangely less than perfect. Strachey should, of course, be praised for making manifest the self-serving humanitarianism, destructive patriotism, and hypocritical evangelicalism that made the Victorians partly responsible for a world war and quite obviously stifled free spirits, especially the free spirits to which he and his friends, like Keynes, were disposed. But he threw the baby out with the proverbial bath water. His mocking and flippant tone was a little too self-satisfied, he took too many cheap shots, and, above all, he regularly distorted the historical truth to round off his ridicule (see Annan 1990, pp. 82ff). So, in short, editors should again follow Stephen’s lead by frowning equally on dull eulogies that parade objectivity and character assassinations that value ridicule over facts, as both lead to historical mis-truths.

5 Recruiting the Contributors

The fifth task confronting the editors of dictionaries is to ensure that the entries are not monopolised by contributors from a single ideological position. Complete objectivity is, of course, a myth, not least because of the selection principle mentioned in relation to the second editorial task above. But extreme bias in the entries finally included can and should be curtailed, not only by appealing to each contributor’s sense of fair play, but by actively searching for contributors from a range of different backgrounds and ideological dispositions. This is a little difficult for the editors of the dictionary of women economists under review because most scholars working in this field are academics with strong feminist commitments and/or heterodox backgrounds. The editors have nonetheless obviously gone to great lengths to draw upon the services of a range of different academics. There are numerous male contributors (around 33 per cent of the total), and the banking theorist, Michael D. Bordo, can hardly be described as heterodox. The majority of the entries, nonetheless, do reflect an obvious ideological commitment, namely, the belief that the women economists under examination have made a substantial contribution to the literature of economics, but were discriminated against during their lifetime and have since been unjustly excluded from the collective memory of

the discipline. Reference has already been made to the way this near-truth has probably led to the inclusion of too many women economists of the second rank, and it also probably contributed to the aforementioned excessively reverential tone in some of the pieces. But, most worryingly, it has led to some of the contributors waxing lyrical over, or at least failing to pass judgement on, some of the poor research programs pursued by their subjects. This problem is particularly acute because it is apparent from the entries that a fair proportion of women economists from the early twentieth century employed an extreme form of empiricism that was then being promoted by some of the more inflexible institutionalists, historicists and economic historians. Admittedly a few of the women economists who employed this approach ultimately drew some important conclusions relating to the role of gender in the workplace or solved some conundrums worrying the self-contained community of mediaeval economic historians, but any results worthy of note were the product of the researchers failing to adhere to their own methodological precepts, and most of their research was wasted effort. The mere collection of facts leads nowhere, and the Victorian male scholars who encouraged their female charges to go down this Baconian path have much for which to answer. Indeed, given the number of women who participated in this ultra-empiricist revival, it is strange that it is men who have been mocked in literature for practising this dull trade, and, worse, for sometimes destroying their wives in the process. Mr Casaubon from George Elliot's *Middlemarch* blights his marriage by mindlessly collecting historical facts for his never-to-be-finished *Key to all Mythologies*; Dr Tessman from Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is portrayed as a dunce by completing a work on the linen industry of the Brabant in the sixteenth century while his wife, Hedda, suffocates within the confines of their marriage; and Jim Dixon from Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* has his patience tried by writing a formulaic economic history article entitled 'The Economic Influence of the Development in Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450 to 1485'. At one stage Amis has Dixon describe the title of this article as perfect, 'in that it crystallised the article's niggling mindlessness, its funeral parade of yawn-enforcing facts, the pseudo-light it threw upon non-problems' (1954, p. 14). Many of the women economists included in the dictionary at hand seemed intent on not capturing the reader's interest by writing just this sort of tedious monograph, and this may partly explain why some have since been neglected. Even some of the titles written by the better women economists makes one think of sleep: 'Employment of Women in Industries: Cigar Making – its History and Present Tendencies', 'Saleswomen in Mercantile Stores: Baltimore, 1909'. These sort of carefully compiled empirical studies (by men and women) could be bought by the yard from one's local haberdashery right up until the 1940s, and, like the very differently conceived econometric studies that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, they neither wore well nor for very long.

The great Victorian editorial undertakings were not exactly free from ideological bias, and so, one might again ask, how do they illuminate the issue? Stephen, for one, oversaw *The Dictionary of National Biography* in a way that avoided to a remarkable extent the jingoistic tone of the late-Victorian period, but, reflecting his strong Liberal-Unionist sympathies, he still thought nothing of commissioning extended entries on very nearly every Irish rebel of 1798 to show that the Irish were unmistakably included in this 'national' dictionary (Matthew 1997, p. 12-13). Many of the entries in the *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* similarly reflect the prejudices of this historical period, but none more so than Ingram's

extended entry on 'Political Economy', which amounted to a Comtean-cum-historicist diatribe against orthodox economics at a time when the historicists had momentarily gained the ascendancy in the English *Methodenstreit*. The entry certainly infuriated Joseph Shield Nicholson, who accused Ingram of plagiarism and incompetence, which, in turn, prompted editors to seek some balance by commissioning Nicholson to write the economic-related entries for the final volumes of the *Encyclopaedia* (see Moore 2000). Palgrave's *Dictionary of Political Economy* was conceived shortly after this unsavoury affair, and, due to the new spirit of conciliation that was being promoted in the 1890s, he decided upon a scheme of multiple entries on closely related topics in an attempt to air both historicist and orthodox views. Thus the unreconstructed historicist, William James Ashley, wrote an entry on 'The Historical School of Economics', and the relatively unknown J.S. McKenzie wrote an orthodox-leaning entry on 'The Historical Method'. This solution was not greeted with enthusiasm by everyone, with the American, J.L. Laughlin, criticising the 'extremist' tone of the resulting entries in a particularly dyspeptic review (1897, p. 259, cf. Edgeworth 1892, p. 525). This critique, however, was positively mild compared to Mark Blaug's scathing 1987 review of the *New Palgrave*, which, for an IEA paper, has gained a surprisingly wide circulation, if only by word of mouth. Blaug poured scorn on Milgate *et al.* for using the *New Palgrave* as an altar from which to worship the new god of formalism and to promote Sraffian economics. He maintained that the former editorial disposition had led to badly written entries, further obscured by mathematical excess, and the latter had led to such bias that the dictionary should really be entitled the 'Marxism/Sraffian Dictionary of Theoretical Economics'. Blaug did not even appreciate the noble attempt by these editors to overcome the problem of ideological bias by allowing (in the original Palgravian fashion) a number of entries on closely related subjects. This, he believes, simply creates confusion and decreases the utility of a dictionary as a work of reference. A far better solution, in his view, is to provide competing views under a single entry heading. Blaug may have something here, but, again, I think the best solution is to recruit carefully and widely, and then adopt the demonic editorial persona of Leslie Stephen.

6 Conclusion

This review has been guided by the firmly held belief that the Victorians should be to us what the Greeks were to the Victorians: sources of wisdom on all great issues except sex. I certainly believe that Stephen, Robertson Smith, Baynes, Murray and Palgrave have one or two things to teach us about compiling dictionaries. At the same time, however, it is perhaps unfair to compare the dictionary under review with the nineteenth-century editorial masterpieces, especially since the former publication was obviously not designed on the grand scale of the Victorian projects. Indeed, I am quite sure that the editors of this dictionary of women economists have other things to do with their time than to devote decades of their labour to a single enterprise. After all, just consider for a moment the unremitting diligence that was needed for the Victorians to render their aspirations concrete. The ninth edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* contained 20,000 pages and 9000 illustrations; the first series of *The Dictionary of National Biography* contained over 30,000 entries in 63 volumes; the first edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* contained 15,487 pages (of which just less than half were edited by Murray); and Palgrave's

Dictionary of Political Economy consisted of more than 2000 pages. It is evident that size mattered to these gentlemen, but, in the compilation of dictionaries at least, where comprehensiveness is important, such a preoccupation was perhaps warranted. The editors of *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists* might also have been justifiably concerned for their health. It is known, for example, that the emotional energy out-laid by Stephen on his dictionary-making led to 'a fit of horrors' and his early retirement from editorial duties, while Baynes became deranged (and died shortly after) under the twin burdens of the death of his much-loved brother and his editorial obligations. So, with these important qualifications in mind, and in the belief that *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Economists* has much merit, I conclude by emphasising its merits rather than its failings. The entries may be uneven, but they are, on average, of an extremely high standard; the inclusion of so many marginal women economists might partly contradict the claim that women were discriminated against in the past, but at least this strategy provides some balance to the existing historical record; there may be omissions, but these are not sufficiently numerous to detract from the value of the majority of the entries; many of the contributors might write in a dry and excessively reverential style, but one is hard pressed to find a piece that is actually badly written; and there may be some bias in the assessments of the research undertaken by some of the women economists, but there is no more bias than one would expect from such a publication. In short, the jaundiced eye of a carping Victorian enthusiast may find countless minor faults, but the fact remains that the book is worth buying, and, as any neoclassical economist on a soap box will argue, this is the true litmus test of a book's worth. The editors and contributors should be congratulated and the dictionary can be consulted as a work of reference with advantage.

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Notes

1 This contradiction is partly overcome (but in my opinion not wholly overcome) if one believes that the prevailing criteria employed to appraise an individual's contribution are androcentric and that many women would immediately be raised from obscurity once alternative standards are applied. There is also the very reasonable qualifying argument advanced by the first editor of the forthcoming *The New Dictionary of National Biography*: 'To an extent, the old DNB bears out the feminist argument that women were simply excluded from the British power structure. But women in fact were included in that power structure to a much greater extent than a reader of the DNB would be led to suppose' (Matthew 1997, p. 18). Finally, when considering these issues, it is important to keep in mind the subtle distinction between the claim that women economists were more numerous within the early history of the discipline than is commonly thought (made by Groenewegen and King 1994) and the claim that women economists were both more numerous and made more substantive contributions than is commonly thought.

2 Knowles and Power were two ex-Girtonians who traded out of the LSE. It is perhaps a little unfair of me to class Power with the rest of the dull economic historians who practised in England at this time, as she published some extremely readable and important material, including pieces (and this makes her exclusion from the dictionary under the review even more astonishing) on the role of women in mediaeval society. She was also a fascinating character. Her father was a recidivist who was repeatedly

gaoled for fraud, and, so the joke goes, her student, M.M. Postan (ten years her junior), removed his one serious rival for the chair of economic history at Cambridge by marrying her. Every time she published an article she went to Paris to buy a dress, and, proving that one can really shop until one drops, she died in 1940 while buying a hat (Berg 1992, 1996; Annan 1999, pp. 245-6).

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