

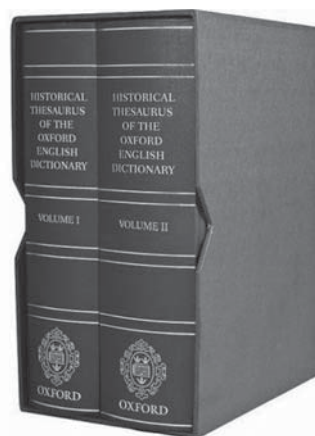
The Cambridge Handbook of Earth Science Data, by Paul and Gideon M. Henderson (277 pages, July 2009), incorporates many handy tables that students of geology, paleontology, and hydrology will consult often, such as composition of the crust and mantle, element concentration in ocean and river water, properties of the atmosphere, life events and geological time scales, primary impact structures, naturally occurring nuclides, common silicate and nonsilicate minerals, oil and gas reserves, the Volcanic Explosivity Index, and the European Macroseismic Scale. References to original data sources are provided. \$30.00. Cambridge University. 978-0-521-69317-2.

The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future, by Robert Darnton (240 pages, October 2009), brings together 11 recent essays the author has written on Google and the future of books, libraries in the digital age, e-books, open access, a response to Nicholson Baker's *Double Fold*, descriptive bibliography, commonplace books, and the history of books. The successor to Sidney Verba as director of the Harvard University Library, Darnton is also a cultural historian as well as a former journalist and publisher who writes engagingly on topics central to librarianship. My new favorite German word is *Fingerspitzengefühl* (literally, "fingertip feeling"), which Darnton describes as our physical interaction with media, whether it's paging through a book, adjusting a radio dial, or thumbing a text message. \$23.95. PublicAffairs. 978-1-58648-826-0.

The F-Word, by Jesse Sheidlower (270 pages, 3rd ed., September 2009), examines every possible variant and combination of the English language's most versatile vulgarity, with well more than 100 new words and senses than the second edition, which was pub-

lished in 1999 by Random House. Since then, Sheidlower has become editor at large of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and has made use of its extensive database to add non-U.S. examples. The main part of the book is in *OED* format, consisting of definitions, etymologies, use in phrases, and abundant examples of quotations in chronological order. Even acronyms are included (WTF, FUBAR). His introduction provides a general history of the word, which does not appear to be older than the late 15th century, when it began to be used as a synonym for the equally vulgar "swive." Its first appearance in a dictionary dates from 1598. Comedian Lewis Black contributes a short, amusing foreword to this edition, claiming that the word is one of the few in English "with true medicinal qualities," clearing our heads of the cobwebs spun by the banal, tired clichés we hear from politicians and pundits. \$16.95. Oxford University. 978-0-19-539311-8.

The Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary, edited by Christian Kay, Jane Roberts, Michael Samuels, and Irené Wotherpoon (2 vols., October 2009), is an extraordinary work of lexical scholarship, billed by the publishers as the first historical thesaurus to be written for any of the world's



At first glance it seems quite intimidating with its long strings of numbers and 6-point type, but the *HTOED* (as it likes to be called) deserves a place on the academic shelf because it indeed leaves Roget, Webster, and even other Oxford thesauri far behind. For example, the second edition of the *Oxford American Dictionary*

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and Thesaurus provides synonyms for a mere 150,000 words and phrases; this 4,000-page monster covers more than 920,000 words and phrases. The precision and granularity of its semantic arrangement is also distinctly superior.

Here's how it works. Volume 1 is the thesaurus, which arranges nearly every word in the language by categories of meaning, and volume 2 is the index, an alphabetic list that lets you locate words and phrases in the first volume. Let's look at "darkness," which we find in volume 1 at the category number 01.04.08.10. Roget used integers for his arrangement, which were sequential and inherently meaningless, but the *HTOED's* numerical categories make sense, once you get the hang of them. The 01 means that our word is in the first of three major sections—the external world, the other two being the mental world and the social world. The 04 indicates that darkness is within the subcategory of "matter," while 08 refers to "light" (or lack thereof) and 10 introduces a whole range of dark, dim, and shadowy shades of meaning that are further subdivided.

The general entry for the noun "darkness" gives us synonyms that are arranged chronologically from the date of their first known use. So the first listed are Old English terms like "blindnes" and "þeostorfulnes," which lead to "therkness (c1250–c1485)," "tenebrosity (1490–)," "murksomeness (1625)," "lightlessness (1865–)," and finally "darkling (1903–1963)." Not only will this allow philologists to track the evolution of the language, but it will also be a boon to writers of historical fiction.

But wait, there's more. The entry further subdivides into darkness related to heavenly bodies, night, mist, confinement, and the underworld; people who like darkness; the process of darkening; one who or something that extinguishes light; and (remember, this is British) darkness as an air-raid precaution (black-out). Then the 01.04.08.10 entry moves on to adjectives (dark), adverbs (darkly), intransitive verbs (become dark), and transitive verbs (make dark). Semidarkness merits two further subdivisions—dimness (01) and gloominess

(02)—with a third reserved for cutting off light in the sense of causing a shadow (03).

Work on the *HTOED* began in 1965, with volunteers collecting data on slips of paper just like James Murray did with the original *OED* in the 19th century. In the 1970s the major semantic arrangement solidified, and in the 1980s it was all transferred to an electronic database. The final words were added in 2008.

Slang is well-represented, especially historical slang. Corporate and product names are avoided unless they've earned longevity, like Kleenex and Xerox. "Google," although it seems to have solidly entered the language as a verb, is only included as a bowling term; in fact, computer terminology more recent than the early 1990s seems sparse. Scottish, Irish, U.S., Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and African variants are clearly labeled, although Anglo-Indian words (such as *tiffin* and *mabarajah*) are strangely uncredited. For some reason "bigfoot" is missing, though "sasquatch" and "yeti" are present.

The set comes in a box and is accompanied by a poster that sets out the general arrangement. An essential purchase, though the numeric coding may prove daunting for some. \$395. Oxford University. 978-0-19-920899-9.

Sea of Dangers: Captain Cook and His Rivals in the South Pacific,

by Geoffrey Blainey (322 pages, May 2009), retells the epic story of Cook's first voyage in the *Endeavour* in search of a suspected southern continent in 1768–1771. It was also a successful scientific voyage, thanks to naturalist Joseph Banks bringing back to England more new specimens of flora than any other expedition in history. Australian historian Blainey coaxes out scintillating details from Cook's and Banks's journals, offering insights gleaned from his own visits to many landmarks on the voyage. He also contrasts the contemporaneous visit to New Zealand by Jean-François-Marie de Surville, who would have had more success if his crew had not been wracked with scurvy. \$27.50. Ivan R. Dee. 978-1-56663-825-8. 