"MRS GLADSTONE'S DRAWERS": LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN VICTORIAN FAMILIES

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Introduction

Victorian England is rich in examples of the dual uses of language: both for communication and for the assertion of identity and solidarity. English was the common language, but the ambiguity of "common" (shared/vulgar) signals its dual role. Victorian social and linguistic hierarchies were mutually reinforcing, and the use of Latin and Greek, as well as English, for solidarity and exclusion is well documented (for Latin and Greek, see Stray 1998, 2003; for English, Smith 1984, Crowley 1989, Mugglestone 1994). The literature in this area has tended to concentrate on the use of language by class and status groups; much less attention has been paid to the usage of families and schools. In Richard Altick's (Altick 1991, 769-75) perceptive discussion of the gradual acceptance of slang usage in polite society in the Victorian period, though the exceptional status of university slang is acknowledged, there is no mention of family languages. In this paper I briefly consider the nature and genesis of English public school slang, but the primary focus is on family languages. Particular attention is paid to the best-documented example in Victorian England, Glynnese, the language of the Glynnes, Gladstones and Lytteltons, created in the 1820s and 1830s and still (tenuously) in use today. The phenomenon was nicely summarised by Walter Raleigh in 1897.

> There are few families, or groups of familiars, that have not some small coinage of this token-money, issued and accepted by affection, passing current only within those narrow and privileged boundaries. This wealth is of no avail to the travelling mind, save as a memorial of home, nor is its material such "as, buried once, men want dug up again." A few happy words and phrases promoted, for some accidental fitness, to the wider world of letters, are all that reach posterity; the rest must pass into oblivion with the other perishables of the age. (Raleigh 33)[1]

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[1] As the tone of this passage suggests, Raleigh wrote from personal experience: his own family had some treasured phrases, e.g. "mountain-goat" for "the cultured hotel-haunting British spinster" (Raleigh 1926 1. 243).

The Victorian nursery was a fertile source of family languages. In the large upper- and middle-class families common before contraception become widespread, children spent much of their early years in the nursery, taught by a governess and, informally, by one another (King-Hall 1958). These small societies often developed their own vocabularies: words were collected, defined and played with much as were the flowers gathered on country walks. The older children witnessed their juniors' early attempts at speech and elaborated on them. Siblings whose intimacy was defined and reinforced by such shared vocabularies often continued to use them as adults, so that they were sometimes passed on to the next generation. Brothers and sisters grew up together in the nursery, but at the age of 7 or 8 boys were commonly sent away to preparatory schools, and then a few years later to public school; in both cases usually as boarders. Until the 1870s there were almost no schools for girls to go to, and so the society of the nursery was predominantly female (including of course the governess). It should not be surprising, then, to find that most recorded examples of family language originate with sisters, though they spread to brothers within the family, and then beyond its confines through friendship and marriage. The girls and women were the originators, guardians and in many cases the most authoritative users of family usage.

As Raleigh's sketch indicates, such languages are usually transient phenomena, and it is difficult to find enough well-documented examples to establish just what kinds of relationships are most likely to generate a family language. The first joint writing venture of those close-knit cousins Edith Somerville and Violet Martin (Somerville and Ross) was a dictionary of their families' speech: now lost (Robinson 48). The children of the Cambridge Latinist John Postgate and his wife Edith assembled a "Mrs P. vocabulary" to record the phrases they shared with her - but not with their father. This too has not survived (Cole 8). Married couples often developed their own vocabularies; Jane and Thomas Carlyle providing perhaps the best-known example. Reading her letters while preparing them for publication after her death in 1866, Thomas Carlyle was moved to this encomium on her "coterie-sprache":

> [. . .] it is difficult to make these letters fairly legible; except myself there is nobody at all that can completely read them as they are now. They abound in allusions, very full of meaning in this circle, but perfectly dark and void in all others. *Coterie-sprache*, as the Germans call it, "family circle dialect," occurs every line or two; nobody ever so rich in that kind as she; ready to pick up every diamond-spark, out of the common floor-dust, and keep it brightly available; so that hardly, I think, in any house, was there more of *coterie-sprache*, shining innocently, with a perpetual expressiveness and twinkle generally of quiz and real humour

> about it, than in ours. She mainly was the real creatress of all this;
> unmatchable for quickness (and trueness) in regard to it, and in her
> letters it is continually recurring. (Letter of 8 July 1866, qtd.
> Saunders ix-x)

The Carlyles' term "coterie-sprache" was picked up by Lewis Campbell and
Anthony Garnett in their memoir of another Scot, James Clerk Maxwell. They
described him as

> one of a race in whom strong individuality had occasionally
> verged on eccentricity [. . .] Each generation had been remarkable
> for the talents and accomplishments of some of its members; and it
> was natural that a family with such antecedents should have
> acquired something of clannishness. [. . .] No house was ever
> more affluent in that *Coterie-Sprache*, for which the Scottish
> dialect of that day afforded such full materials. (Campbell and
> Garnett 1: the "race" was Maxwell's mother's family the Clerks)

Two other couples deserve to be mentioned. With William and Lucy Smith, it was
when he began to misuse their private language that she realised he was dying:
"Throughout the hours of the last weariness he used some of *our words* for different
things" (Smith 116; cf. Merriam 1889). The Greenlys, Edward and Annie, are very
well documented thanks to Edward's extensive memoir of his wife (Greenly 1938).
He devotes a chapter to her unusual phrases and sayings, and at the end of his
memoir, gives a list of other obiter dicta, next to a glossary of technical terms in his
own field, geology. What was surely a crucial factor in encouraging their
construction of private linguistic worlds is that all three couples were childless. Just
as striking, however, is that the available evidence points in each case to the wife as
the prime inventor of words and phrases.

The case of the Greenlys also points to the importance of the female sibling
group, for Annie was one of five Barnard sisters who were noted for their artistic
talent and somewhat fey character. The best-known example, however, is that of the
six Mitford sisters, daughters of Lord Redesdale. Two of them, Jessica and her elder
sister Unity, called each other "Boud," and invented a language called
"Boudledidge." The name itself exemplified the mechanical insertions and
reduplications which turned ordinary English into something unintelligible to
outsiders. Jessica's autobiography includes the text of the song "Sex Appeal Sarah"
with a translation into Boudledidge (Mitford 27).The two sisters used Boudledidge
to discuss subjects regarded as improper by their parents in their presence. Jessica
and her younger sister Deborah, meanwhile, communicated in another invented
language, Honnish. Hence the title of Jessica's memoir *Hons and Rebels*, which was
usually, and wrongly, taken to refer to the girls' being "Honourables," as the

daughters of a Lord. In fact it was a corruption of "hen"; she and Deborah kept hens and sold the eggs to their mother (Mitford 4).

When the boys in these families went to preparatory and then public schools, they entered self-contained and often isolated environments where, once again, special languages flourished. Many of the public schools had well-developed slangs, as did the two ancient universities ([Paley] 1803, Farmer 1900, Marples 1940, 1950, Stray 2002). Some of the schools had strong links with particular Oxford or Cambridge colleges, and the tendency for pupils of Winchester to go on to New College Oxford, or Etonians to move on to King's College Cambridge, and then return to teach at their old school, set up closed systems of recruitment. This will surely have encouraged the transmission of slang terminology. The legislation following the Oxford and Cambridge Commission of 1850 broke these links, and thus, it can be argued, provoked a reactive stress on the traditional identities of such schools. This reaction can be seen in the accelerated production and recording of school slang, notably in Winchester College, both the most introverted of the major public schools and the richest in slang (Stevens, Stray 1996).

The development of these family and school languages needs to be put into a broader context. Nineteenth-century England witnessed a wide range of linguistic variation, both lateral, as with regional dialect, and vertical, as with class differences in speech. Such developments as the newspaper, the railway and the telephone promoted standardisation, but also provoked reactive formations. Standard language was not ideologically or socially neutral; the original title of the Received Pronunciation of English was "Public School English" (Crowley). The public school system which was consolidated through the century in fact had structurally ambiguous effects on language use. As a homogeneous sector appealing to parents who wanted to maintain, or improve, social status, the schools stood together against their inferiors. But precisely because of this shared ambition, they competed with another, and this fostered the creation of institutional idiosyncrasy. Supporting such efforts was a powerful ideological tradition which contrasted the freedom of England and of its citizens with the centralised regimentation of continental states. The foreign bogey changed as political fortunes rose or fell: France in the Napoleonic period and in the 1850s, Prussia later on in the century. In the realm of language use and prescription, this ideological current met the philological ideas carried from the continent in the writings of such men as Julius Hare - including the conception of language as a moral barometer of national life. Hare's views had a powerful influence on Richard Chenevix Trench, who quotes from the Hare brothers' *Guesses at Truth* at the end of the preface to his *On the Study of Words* (Trench 1851). Later in the decade, Trench delivered two papers "On some deficiencies in our English dictionaries" to the Philological Society of London; in these he declared his commitment to descriptive rather than prescriptive lexicography:

> There are many who conceive of a Dictionary as though it had this
> function, to be a standard of the language; and the pretensions to
> be this which the French *Dictionary of the Academy* sets up, may
> have helped on such confusion. Those who desire, are welcome to
> such a book: but for myself I will only say that I cannot understand
> how any writer with any confidence in himself, the least measure
> of that vigour and vitality which would justify him in addressing
> his fellow-countrymen [. . .] should consent in this manner to let
> one self-made dictator, or forty, determine for him what words he
> should use, and what he should forbear from using. (Trench 1858,
> 5)

The patriotic theme is evident, as is the casting of France as Other - the "forty
dictators" being the members of the Académie française. The Englishman, in
contrast to the regimented French, is capable of individual choice - even the choice
to take orders from a dictator. A few years before Trench gave his paper, and
perhaps influenced by his *On the Study of Words*, a dictionary was assembled which
exemplified, and indeed celebrated, the glorious particularism to which Trench
appealed: Lord Lyttelton's *Glynnese Glossary* (Lyttelton).

The Glynnese Glossary

The *Glossary* is a splendid parody of the dialectal and regional listings of the period,
and lists with tongue firmly in cheek what Lyttelton calls the "anomalous caprice"
of the dialect (Lyttelton 87). While providing an accurate record of the family
language, Lyttelton was guying the productions of an army of word collectors.
Amateur research into local and regional dialects had blossomed in the early
Victorian era, much of it carried out by learned clerics in their rural rectories and
parsonages. The comparative philology which emerged from Germany and Denmark
in the first quarter of the century, developed by Franz Bopp, Rasmus Rask and the
brothers Grimm, was taken up with enthusiasm in England. The identification of
Sanskrit as an ancient and complex Indo-European language comparable in subtlety
to Greek weakened the authority of the classical languages. Any language might
now be dignified with a history, and its varied forms could be seen as objects of
exploration, rather than as examples of rustic degeneration (Aarsleff). The county
printing and archaeological societies which flourished in the 1830s and 40s
contained numbers of keen amateur researchers who toured their region collecting
examples of rural speech which they recorded in printed glossaries (Levine). The
cultivation of localism was determined and often conscious, buttressed by an
ideology of Englishness which, as we have seen, rejected centralised organization in
favour of individual freedom and local autonomy.

Glynnese was the creation of the sisters Catherine and Mary Glynne. In 1839 they married William Gladstone and Lord Lyttelton at a double wedding, and their characteristic phrases spread both to their in-laws and to their own growing families. The two couples saw a lot of each other, and the link was reinforced in 1843 by the marriage of Catherine and Mary's brother Henry to George Lyttelton's sister Lavinia. Both the marriages of 1839 led to large families: whereas Catherine and Mary had only two siblings, the Gladstone family eventually included eight children, while the Lytteltons had twelve. (Of the 20 children, all but four married - another avenue for the dissemination of Glynnese beyond family bounds.) The family group at Hagley, Lyttelton's country house near Birmingham, was such that he was able to field a cricket team.[2]

The two Glynne sisters formed the fundamental link between the Gladstone and Lyttelton families. Born only 18 months apart, Catherine and Mary had always been very close. This closeness had perhaps been intensified by the fact that they were the only girls, in a family which was in any case female-centred after the premature death of their father not long after they were born. William Gladstone and George Lyttelton also had shared interests, including a passion for composition in Latin and Greek; they even published a book of translations together (Gladstone and Lyttelton). In this they were not untypical of the educated elite: men would turn English into Latin or Greek and vice versa on walks, on trains, and would play competitively with translation and quotation at dinner parties (Matthew 2.371, Stray 1998, 65-75). George Lyttelton was in the habit of translating Milton into Greek as he took fences on the hunting field (on a good day he reckoned to do 18 lines).

The title page of the *Glossary* sets the tone, imitating the earnest humility of the word-collector: "Contributions towards a study of the Glynne language." Like so many vocabularies and glossaries, the title page includes a motto, but rather than a suitably allusive line from Horace or Plato, Lyttelton offers a subversive quotation from Talleyrand: "Language was given to man to conceal his thoughts." A dedication follows, "to the shades of his great predecessors in the field of philological science"; and then a preface in which the leading authorities for Glynnese are named. The joke here is that where authorities would normally be other collectors, or learned linguists, here they are the native speakers themselves. Lyttelton lists the authorities: the Dean of Windsor, Lady Glynne, Sir Stephen Glynne (Mary Glynne's uncle, mother and brother), Mrs Gladstone (her sister) and Lady Lyttelton herself. Of these, he goes on, the leading authorities are the Dean and Mrs Gladstone. It is worth noting that neither of the Glynne brothers is named; and

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[2] The highlight of the cricketing year was the annual match against the nearly Bromsgrove School. In 1867 the Lytteltons won by ten wickets; the family team consisting of Lord Lyttelton and ten Hon. Lytteltons. The baron himself led the assault, but not very effectively, as he was bowled for a duck. (His position in the batting order presumably reflected his status as head of the family rather than his prowess as a batman.)

the impression of female preponderance is perhaps strengthened by the fact that the Dean was a maternal uncle.

The "anomalous caprice" of Glynnese is reflected and celebrated in the layout of the *Glossary*, which has both pagination and index. As Lyttelton explains in a prefatory note, "Alphabetic arrangement has been neglected, as less appropriate to the mysterious and anomalous character of the subjects treated of" (Lyttelton 1). Thus the very first entry is for "phantod" (someone who has become imbecile or irrational). Lyttelton suggests that it is "apparently a corruption of the English 'phantom' ," thus reminding us from the start that we are not dealing with the national language. This is underlined by the fact that the word, often abbreviated to "ph," is pronounced *p h*, not *f*. (Lyttelton was perhaps aware that "fantod" is attested in English regional dialect and naval slang, meaning "crotchet" or "fad.")

Individuals and idiosyncrasies

The theme of elusive idiosyncrasy is pursued at individual as well as familial level. Catherine Gladstone was clearly a woman of distinct and unusual character. Henry Scott Holland said after her death, "You felt her splendid intuition, her swift motions, the magic of her elusive phrases [. . .] " (Drew 209). Marriage with Gladstone must in practice have forced some compromises - Catherine's daughter tells us, for example, of her careful attendance on Gladstone at official events: "Unpunctual by nature, she never kept him waiting" (Drew 208). The sisters' intuition and playfulness were allied to untidiness, a fact brought out by comparison with their husbands' habits. In his entry on "offal" and "groutle," Lyttelton declares that they both mean roughly "rubbish," but the former is perhaps stronger - "more utter rubbish" - than the latter. He continues: "Example of offal: All Mrs Gladstone's drawers. Example of groutle: All Lady Lyttelton's drawers" (Lyttelton 20). The next entry is on "hydra," and refers to the mass of correspondence and other papers which grow in confusion like a many-headed monster unless they are sorted every day. Lyttelton points out that unlike offal and groutle, these are not intrinsically rubbish, but fit to be kept, if kept in order. Catherine and Mary's brother Sir Stephen Glynne is quoted as saying, "I have been several hours settling hydra." (Lyttelton 21) He told Lyttelton that the statement "Litter is a hydra" was to be found in "Theresa Tidy" (Tidy 1817). Lyttelton refers to it as a familiar text; one suspects it was quoted in the running battle between the tidy and messy members of the clan.

The character and habits of the lexicographer himself are also on display in the article on "old-maid, old-maidish."

> It is undeniable that these phrases are intended to convey some
> mild derision, if not reproach; somewhat injuriously [. . .] both to
> the respectable class indicated, and to the habits thus ..stigmatised.
> They are simply those of decent order, unswerving punctuality,

> sensitive tidiness, and methodical arrangement; these, pushed, as it seems to be alleged [. . .] to a minutious scrupulosity where no foundation of reason can any longer be discerned for their observance [. . .] the type of this class has been, by universal consent [. . .] pronounced to be the Lord Lyttelton. (Lyttelton 9)

Here Lyttelton ironically suggests that his concern with order is as irrational as the women's disorder. How, then, is Gladstone: a man noted for his obsessive seriousness, fussiness and lack of a sense of humour, dealt with in the *Glossary*?

Of the roughly 180 references to individuals in the book, only five refer to Gladstone.

> *one of his* (about little habits) Most frequently in use with Lady Lyttelton and Mrs Gladstone, and most in reference to their respective husbands: as, of Mr Gladstone when writing out a list of his coats before a journey [. . .] of Mr Gladstone when agitated by a drop of spilt milk on the cloth.

Here Gladstone is portrayed as obsessively fussy and an over-preparer.

> *bathing-feel* The state of mind previous to some formidable undertaking [. . .] about to make a speech [. . .] going to the dentist. Mr G, so long ago as 1841, had so far advanced with the language that on being asked how he felt on becoming Vice President of the Board of Trade, he was able to reply "bathing-feel."

In this case Gladstone is presented as a learner, though a promising one.

> *gaunt* producing melancholic thought [. . .] one of the first essays of Mr G in this language was, that in walking in twilight along the road between Saltney and Broughton Church, he said that in fancy the word "gaunt" was continually sounding in his ears.

Here again, Gladstone is a learner, taking his first steps.

> *addle, to be in addle* Mr Gladstone is the first and hitherto the only person who has succeeded in *introducing* a variation of his own devising, into this jealous and mysterious language [. . .] For about two days before the delivery of a great speech in parliament, he is, or believes that he is, in an universal *addle* on all possible subjects; and during that time Mrs Gladstone will, with a wink in her eye, advise her friends to [. . .] eschew bringing dirt upon the carpet

> from their boots, which in all such cases he will straightway shovel
> and fling into the fire, in the very eye of the offender.

Presented as praise, this was surely written "with a wink in his eye": Lyttelton is teasing his brother-in-law. The words "or believes that he is" suggest a contradiction worthy of Lewis Carroll. If Gladstone is in an addle, he is. If he thinks he isn't, perhaps he is too addled to think straight. His foibles are again on display: the obsessive cleaning of the carpet belongs with the coat listing and the hatred of spilt milk.

> *to curtsey* The author has been reminded of this by Mr Gladstone.
> It means what in some other dialect signified by the ungainly
> colloquialism "to squiggle:" namely to refuse to take precedence.

To summarise: in these five references to Gladstone, in one he and his foibles are the subject; in another he is cast as authority but is in fact is being teased; in one he simply reminds Lyttelton of a word; and in two cases he is recalled as a promising beginner. In a book where a variety of different voices can be heard, Gladstone's is hardly audible. (In contrast, it is accurately captured in the many published parodies of his style: see e.g. Fitzgerald 1882, Meisel 1999).

Within the Glynnese coterie, with all its delight in anomaly, Gladstone was himself an anomaly. His relatively lowly social origin (son of a Liverpool merchant) was very different from that of Lyttelton, the second baron. As for the Glynne sisters, they were descended from crusader families, the Percies and the de Grenvilles, and their ancestors and relatives included Charlemagne, Lords Chatham, Grenville and Buckingham, and William Pitt. Gladstone's religious convictions were also different from those of the coterie because of his intensely evangelical upbringing. This brings us to Gladstone's celebrated seriousness, and so to a distinction notable in the gently teasing context of the Glossary: his notorious lack of a sense of humour. ("Serious" often referred to Evangelical beliefs: Altick 761-6.) Of all Lytton Strachey's debunking assertions in *Eminent Victorians*, this one seems to have stood the test of time; and Harold Nicolson went as far as to claim that Gladstone was the first British politician to be criticised for not having a sense of humour (Strachey 306, Nicolson 34-5). Joseph Meisel has recently offered a more nuanced account, but stresses that Gladstone's high seriousness was identified as his defining characteristic. As he points out, in the index to the 13 volumes of the GOM's diaries, there is only one entry for humour, "humour (see mirth)"; the diary entry reads, "The hours of our mirth are not the hours in which we live [. . .] The hours in which we live are the hours of trial sorrow care evil and struggle" (Meisel 281). It is not perhaps surprising, then, that according to Arthur Godley, his private secretary, Gladstone "never or hardly ever used the Glynnese language, which was constantly spoken by Mrs Gladstone and most of his nearest relations." Godley adds,

"Its merits, as a forcible and humorous form of expression, were so great that his abstention was curious" (Kilbracken 143).Curious indeed, but surely not surprising.

Towards the end of his life, Gladstone received a letter which suggested that some of the terms included in the *Glossary* were not peculiar to Glynnese. In his reply, he wrote that:

> It may be true, that some of the expressions are, and even have been, for many years in common use. Lord Lyttelton may have erred in supposing them peculiar. But there is another explanation. I apprehend that since the formation of the material for the book began, " 'tis sixty years since." Undoubtedly friends of the principal creators became very fond, I may almost say ambitious, of using the phrases from their point and aptitude: the last Duke of Devonshire to wit. So they may have oozed into a wider circulation.[3]

Some of the words listed in the *Glossary* can certainly be found elsewhere, transmitted to the outer Glynnese regions and beyond. An example is "an old shoe," meaning an old friend in whose company one can relax. In this case we have a glimpse of the fringes of Glynnese use. After the death of their friend John Talbot, the Glynnes, Gladstones and Lytteltons had brought his widow and her son John into their family circle. (John later married the eldest Lyttelton daughter; his younger brother married another; and one of the Lyttelton boys married his sister). When his mother was first invited to Hagley, John wrote urging her to get an invitation for him too. Aware that he was being rather forward, he told her "If you propose to Lady L. please say that I am conscious of making her old shoe-issimus" (Fletcher 42). Here he combines two usages, "old shoe" and the Glynnese intensitive "-issimus" - he is trying too hard, a beginner over-anxious to please. Later on we can glimpse the way in which Glynnese was distorted as it travelled beyond the boundaries of the original coterie. Maurice Baring (of whom, more below) invoked the Glynnese phrase "up and dressed" to describe his Eton tutor Edward Lyttelton - son of Lord Lyttelton - who was never at a loss in dealing with his pupils (Baring 33). In fact the phrase is derogatory, referring to forwardness and over-confidence (Lyttelton 41). The direct transmission of Glynnese can be seen in the diaries of Lyttelton's daughter Lucy, who in 1864 married Lord Frederick Cavendish (Bailey). When they were published in the 1920s, the editor felt obliged to include a

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[3] Gladstone to Mrs Wellesley, n.d. His correspondent was probably the wife of Gerald Wellesley, who succeeded Gladstone's wife's uncle as Dean of Windsor on the latter's death in 1882. The letter is in Gladstone's own copy of the *Glossary*, now in the British Library (C 40 c 43).

substantial appendix of Glynnese terms so that the reader could make sense of the diary entries. Even today, descendants keep some of the phrases alive.[4]

Baringese

Although it has never been systematically recorded, the best attested family language after Glynnese is what has been called Baringese, known to its native speakers as "The Expressions." Baringese seems to have been quite widely disseminated among the educated upper middle classes of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. This is probably because its eponymous user, Maurice Baring (1874-1945), was a literary figure with a wide circle of friends. A Baringese term which surfaced in literature is "floater," originally "floatface": anything startling or offensive. Unusually for such a coinage, the word reached the dignity of a mention in OED (cited from 1913 to 1967), though the dictionary's compilers seem to have been unaware of its origins.

Maurice Baring, who was largely responsible for spreading the quiet fame of Baringese, was certainly an imaginative coiner of expressions; but its creators were his mother and her sister. When he was at Eton (tutored, as we have seen, by Lord Lyttelton's son), he came into contact with several other practitioners of "coterie-sprache." His uncle Sir Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's private secretary, lived across the river in Windsor Castle. The originators of "Baringese" were Lady Ponsonby (born Barbara Bulteel) and her sister Mary, Maurice Baring's mother (Marsh 68-9, 72-5). To the same social circle belonged Sir James Reid, the Queen's doctor, who had married her maid of honour: Susan Baring, Maurice's sister (Reid 1996).[5] Maurice also became friendly with the Vice-Provost of Eton, Edmund Warre Cornish. His wife Blanche, a close friend of Lady Ponsonby, was a celebrated wordsmith, famous for her sudden and startling utterance. Mrs Cornish's mind was once described as proceeding not in a straight line but like a knight at chess - two steps forward and one sideways (Sheppard 29). She was in fact a lateral thinker *avant la lettre* (MacCarthy 1924, Benson 1924, 186-213, Smith 1935, Gathorne-Hardy 1948). After he left Eton Maurice Baring was a frequent visitor at the Cornishes. Mrs Cornish's granddaughter Clare Sheppard recalled that he "was one of a large family and initiated all his closer friends to the language and lore of his childhood. We and our cousins were all brought up on the Baring vocabulary, with expressions such as "Arch Baker" for a boring discourse, "Aunt Sister" for the shirking of a social duty, "padlock" for a private confidence, and so on" (Sheppard 41).

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[4] Professor Glynne Wickham informs me that the terms "offal," "groutle" and "break are still used in his family. (A "break" is an unexpected event; "offal" and "groutle" are discussed above.)

[5] I am grateful to Lady Michaela Reid for sharing her extensive knowledge of Baringese with me.

In a lecture he gave at Eton about his memories of the school, Baring referred both to Mrs Cornish and to Glynnese (Baring 33, 38-9). Not surprisingly, perhaps, for Glynnese was also part of this charmed world: Edward Lyttelton, son of the author of the *Glynnese Glossary*, whom we have met as Baring's tutor at Eton, was headmaster of the school during Cornish's period of office as Vice Provost. And there are still more linguistic links here. Lyttelton married the sister of Hercules West, who compiled a collection of the sayings of his father's servant Edward Edge, entitled *Edgiana*.[6] Lyttelton's successor was Cyril Alington, who married Edward's sister Hester Lyttelton. Once again, though more families were drawn in, the links with the speakers of Glynnese remained strong and many-stranded. Hester Alington and her daughter Lavinia spoke and wrote in Glynnese all their lives. Lavinia extended the bounds of Glynnese by means of her own idiolect - for example, to be moved by a book or painting was "to feel unwell." To cook in advance for guests was "prophetic cooking." She also gave all her family nicknames. One sister was called Spoffy, after Lavinia read an obituary of the Australian demon bowler Spofforth, and decided the name was too good to go out of circulation (Hayter xii). The editor of Lavinia's diaries and letters commented that "language to her was a sea of delight in which she sported like a dolphin, leaving everything in that sea [. . .] swirling in her wake" (Hayter xv).

Conclusion

In the beginning was the nursery. As Blanche Cornish's granddaughter commented in her memoir of childhood, "Our nursery was a world in itself. We invented our own language and customs" (Sheppard 97). With their brothers at first, and then without them when the boys went off to school, girls would sit round plaiting daisies and stitching samplers, gossiping and teasing, inventing games and playing them. Hence the preponderance of girls and women in the creation of Glynnese and Baringese. The pattern which emerges from these language is fairly clear: the language begins with sisters and spreads to their husbands' families. The girls and women were the originators, guardians and in some cases - as with Glynnese - the most authoritative users of such languages. Its lexicographer, however, was male. "The expressions" began in the Bulteel sisters' nursery; it became Baringese when Maurice Baring, a gifted linguist with a wide circle of friends, passed it on to a wider audience. Females created, males propagated.

The comparison with public school slangs is instructive. These were generally the lingua franca of pupils, not shared with schoolmasters and reinforcing the identity of a group which especially in the higher age range had considerable autonomy. As I have suggested above, external pressures towards standardisation

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6 West also produced a glossary of the speech habits of himself and his fellow-students at Trinity College, Cambridge: *Phluddiphry*, privately printed in Newport, IOW in 1908. This may have been inspired by the 1904 reprint of the *Glynnese Glossary*.

and state intervention provoked the assertion of independence through institutional slang. This was manifested in the production of dictionaries, which combined a defensive pride with the Victorian fascination with comparative philology. The production and propagation of family languages was carried on more diffusely and in a lower key: they flourished but were not published. *The Glynnese Glossary* thus stands alone in its field, at once an ironic parody of contemporary word-collecting and a window onto the members of the family and their relationships. (The closest parallel is perhaps Natalia Ginzburg's *Lessico famigliare* (tr. as Ginzburg 1967), which uses a discussion of linguistic and other usages to explore the author's family history.) While giving a collective portrait of the coterie, the *Glossary* also conjures up the idiolect of some of its members, and can thus be seen as a distant cousin of the *Mushri Dictionary*, a glossary of the speech of Edmund Morshead (Stray 1996).[7] Such portraits of individual usage might be seen as eccentric accounts of eccentrics; but as Barbara Johnstone has argued, "the linguistics of language cannot be fully explanatory without a linguistics of the individual speaker" (Johnstone 188). The Glossary enables us to catch a fleeting glimpse of one of many transient clusters of "coterie-sprache," most of which disappear without being recorded. In their *Vanishing Voices. The Extinction of the World's Languages*, Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine report the existence of languages which have only a handful of speakers. In Papua New Guinea, notable for the number of such languages, the inhabitants of one village decided to use a new word for "no," "benge," instead of their usual one, "bia," to make themselves a bit different from neighbouring communities (Nettle and Romaine 88). The impulse would have been recognised by the speakers of Glynnese.

Acknowledgement

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[7] The only other idiolectal dictionary known to me is Jan Cosinka's *Teach Yourself Malkielese* (Berkeley: Ian Jackson, forthcoming 2004); a introduction to the language of the Romance philologist Yakov Malkiel (1914-98).

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