



Columbia World of Quotations (CWQ) Is Online—And It's Free

By Péter Jacsó

More than 2 years ago I reviewed some CD-ROM and online databases of quotations in *Link-Up* ("Quotation Collections: Very Popular," January/February 1999).

Since that time the number of such databases has kept growing. I had mentioned back then (only a short mention because of its \$350 price tag at the time) that the Columbia World of Quotations (CWQ) on CD-ROM "is a nice product with impeccable attributions and good software, but only the most well-off university libraries can afford it. Check it out if you are nearby one."

Now it is nearby everyone—for free, just an URL away at <http://www.bartleby.com/66>.

Largest Collection

This is the largest collection of quotations, merged from many compilations published by Columbia University Press. My test in mid-March suggests that there are even more quotations in this collection (nearly 66,800) than the publicity blurb claims (65,000).

You take either number and it still runs circles around the other largest, well-known compendia of quotations, such as the *Encarta Book of Quotations* (25,000), *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (20,000), and the print publisher's own *Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* (18,000).

The Columbia World of Quotations is built from many of the quotations collections published by Columbia University Press dedicated to the most quoted authors, from Shakespeare to George Bernard Shaw to Ralph Waldo Emerson, as well as from the thematic collections of quotations, like *Women's Words*.

The only problem with this aggregate volume is that some of the quotations appear two or three times, and a quote from Hemingway appears four times. I can't quote it in this publication but if you make a search for Hemingway and radar, you will find this quadruple record. It is also true that contemporary poetry is way over-represented with excerpts that are just not really quotable.

But these are minor complaints in light of the richness and variety this collection offers.

Bartleby.com deserves credit for hosting the online version. It is one of my favorite online resources, offering an awesome collection of literary classics from Aeschylus to Virgil, and the best ready-reference sources, such as the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the *CIA World Factbook*, *Gray's Anatomy*, the *American Heritage Book of English Usage*, *Columbia Guide to Standard English*, two Roget's thesauri, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, and *Simpson's Contemporary Quotations*, among many other gems.

Attribution and Notes

Many of the free quotation collections on the Web suffer from the same weakness: lack of appropriate attributions. CWQ has excel-

lent attributions about the sources and authors of the quotations, as well as illuminative notes about the background and context of the quotations when needed, as illustrated in figures 1 and 2. In Figure 1, you see an example of informative attributions and notes. Figure 2 shows the kind of background quote information that is provided.

Links to Other Bartleby Sources

The value of the attributions is much enhanced also by links to entries in some other sources offered by Bartleby.com about the person who is quoted, or the work that is quoted (such as the New Testament).

In other cases, the links may take you to the entry about the *American Heritage Dictionary*, and often you are regaled by a link to all the works of an author in the Bartleby digital collection. This happens when you read a quote from Shakespeare, Chesterton, Byron, Voltaire, D. H. Lawrence, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and many others whose works have been digitized for the Bartleby collection. Sometimes a link is missing from the quotation's entry, even when it is obvious that the *Columbia Encyclopedia* has an entry about an author, such as Federico García Lorca.

For an example of a link to a biography and full-text collection in Bartleby.com, see Figure 3.

Occasionally, you are also linked to Bartlett's Famous Collection or Simpson's Contemporary Quotations, but these links are not consistent and they are not (yet) reciprocal. This is not a major problem, as you can select an option to search all three quotation collections simultaneously.

Subject Searching

While undoubtedly the big advantage of having the full text of a resource in digital source is to be able to look up every occurrence of a word, sometimes it may yield overwhelming results and lots of false drops, especially in case of homonyms.

It comes in handy that CWQ can be searched by subjects assigned by information specialists to each quotations. It is strange that the entries themselves do not show, let alone hotlink, the subject assigned to the quote, which would alert users to the presence of this value-added piece of information. The search options include full text, author, and subject, but this may escape the attention of users who do not use the pull-down menu of the search options and just type in a term to search.

I found it only after I was surprised that the full text search for the word "anger" did not retrieve the quote that I knew as, "Come not between the dragon and his anger"—what King Lear says to the Earl of Kent who comes to Cordelia's defense.

As it turned out after I chased the quote, the word was not anger but wrath. While the best searchers certainly would use synonyms (rage, ire), truncation, and

Figure 1. Informative attributes and notes.

The Columbia World of Quotations. 1996.

NUMBER: 19323

QUOTATION: My husband and I ...

ATTRIBUTION: Elizabeth II (b. 1926), British monarch, Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Christmas Message, 1953, New Zealand.

This form of words used by the Queen to initiate a speech quickly became a regular feature of her delivery, though the alternative "Prince Philip and I ..." appeared in the 1960s when it was apparent that the familiar formula was becoming a joke.

Figure 2. Background information to a quote.

NUMBER: 39490

QUOTATION: An Englishman, even if he is alone, forms an orderly queue of one.

ATTRIBUTION: George Mikes (1912-1987), Hungarian-born British humorist. *How To Be An Alien*, ch. 1, sect. 14 (1946).

Mikes elaborated further in *How To Be Decadent* (1977): "In shops the English stand in queues; in government offices they sit in queues; in churches they kneel in queues; at sale times, they lie in queues all night."

Figure 3. Link to a biography and full-text collection.

NUMBER: 9650

QUOTATION: The French courage proceeds from vanity—the German from phlegm—the Turkish from fanaticism & opium—the Spanish from pride—the English from coolness—the Dutch from obstinacy—the Russian from insensibility—but the Italian from anger.

ATTRIBUTION: George Gordon Noel Byron (1788-1824), British poet. letter, Aug. 31, 1820, to publisher John Murray. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. 7, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (1973-1981).

BIOGRAPHY: [Columbia Encyclopedia](#)

WORKS: [Byron Collection](#)

Figure 4. This pulsating junk banner ad should have no place on Bartleby.com

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alternate versions (angry), most users do not think of this and may miss out on many relevant items as I found out from my test searches.

Using subject headings instead of free-text words also makes the search more precise. The word anger retrieved five quotations from John Osborne's drama *Look Back in Anger*, which had nothing to do with anger. This could be avoided if there were options to limit the search to the quotations themselves. In lieu of that, choosing the subject search is a good solution, as the assigned subject index term is likely to retrieve quotations that include the synonym of your search term.

Although I would like to be able to search by avocation, time period, and maybe even

limit my search by nationality, even with the existing search options CWQ is a top-notch resource that will get better as the links to other sources in the Bartleby collection grow, and will become reciprocal.

My sour note: Bartleby used to run very unobtrusive banner ads. In March I was greeted by the most brain-damaged type of ad, the pulsating banner (see Figure 4), the trademark of depraved advertisers who promise to make you thousands in your lunch break. It will chase away users. I am not against ads, but the line must be drawn by Bartleby, as "He that lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas," according to the proverb (sometimes erroneously attributed to Benjamin Franklin). ♦