

# 'Improper words' Silencing same-sex desire in eighteenth-century general English dictionaries

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A literary lady expressing to Dr. J[ohnson] her approbation of his Dictionary, and, in particular, her satisfaction at his not having admitted into it any *improper words*; 'No, Madam,' replied he, 'I hope I have not daubed my fingers. I find, however, that you have been looking for them.'<sup>1</sup>

This apocryphal tale was recounted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1785, a year after Samuel Johnson's death; a variation of it appeared in Beste's *Personal and Literary Memorials* in 1829, in which the 'literary lady' was replaced with two ladies, but Johnson's riposte went unchanged.<sup>2</sup> In both versions, the implication remains the same: a reader should not seek out certain kinds of knowledge in a dictionary any more than a lexicographer should record them. The 'orchestration of ignorance', to adopt a phrase from Sedgwick,<sup>3</sup> is an activity in which both the dictionary-writer and -user should seemingly be complicit, in order to suppress the transmission of any knowledge deemed to be 'improper'. Such wilful ignorance is not simply a matter of linguistic propriety. Cameron argues that the normative treatment of language is 'not just about ordering language itself, but also exploits the powerful symbolism in which language stands for other kinds of order—moral, social and political.'<sup>4</sup> Imposed ignorance and silence may be used to reinforce hegemonic structures around what, or who,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dr. Johnson at Oxford, and Lichfield', *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle*, 55.1 (1785), 288. Original emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Digby Beste, *Personal and Literary Memorials* (London: Henry Colborn, 1829), pp. 11–12.

<sup>3</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 25.

is permissible in respectable discourse and reputable society, and who or what is unacceptable and unspeakable. Attempts by lexicographers at organizing the English language in dictionaries are inevitably shaped by broader social mandates about the ordering of decency and morality.

In the story from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 'improper words' are evidently indecent ones—including the sexually taboo. Yet words may be 'proper' in more than one sense: 'properness' may also denote legitimacy or authenticity. Thus, while Johnson illustrated many of the headwords in his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* with quotations drawn from a range of literary sources, he also included entries for words which he could find no 'authorities' for, but which he 'kn[e]w to be proper' to the language.<sup>5</sup> A century and a half earlier, Robert Cawdrey had argued in his *Table Alphabeticall*—generally regarded to be the first monolingual English dictionary<sup>6</sup>—that speakers who wished to use 'the best kind of speech' should choose words 'proper vnto the tongue wherein we speake'; that is, proper English words, not 'French English' or 'English Italianated'.<sup>7</sup> Of course, in any dictionary, which words are considered 'proper' to a language and worthy of record, and which are not, is partly up to the discretion of the dictionary's writer. A lexicographer may not just mark the borders of a language, but actively and autocratically draw them up.

This construction has implications not only for English but Englishness, as language and nation-building were ideologically imbricated in early modern dictionary-writing. The seventeenth-century lexicographer Edward Phillips (1658: C4r) proclaimed that 'the renown and glory of the Nation [...] cannot but be much advanced by such like indeavours' as writing dictionaries.<sup>8</sup> A century later, Johnson's dictionary would be repeatedly characterized as an Englishman's riposte to the national lexicons of the Académie française in France and the Accademia della Crusca in Italy.<sup>9</sup> In his dictionary's preface, Johnson reinforces the link between language and nationhood: 'tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us

5 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: Printed by William Strahan for John Knapton and others, 1755), 1, sig. B2<sup>r</sup>.

6 Noel E. Osselton, 'The Early Development of the English Monolingual Dictionary (Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries)', in *The Oxford History of English Lexicography*, ed. by Anthony P. Cowie, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1, pp. 131–54 (p. 132).

7 Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabeticall, conteyning and teaching the true vwriting, and vnderstanding of hard vsvall English wordes, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French. &c.* (London: Printed by I. R. for Edmund Weaver, 1604), sigs. A3<sup>r</sup>–A4<sup>r</sup>.

8 Edward Phillips, *The New World of English Words: or, a General Dictionary* (London: Printed by E. Tyler for N. Brooke, 1658), sig. C4<sup>r</sup>.

9 See John Considine, *Academy Dictionaries 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 121–133.

make some struggles for our language'.<sup>10</sup> Johnson's use of the first-person plural joins dictionary-writer and -user in a shared cause to preserve their national heritage: the language which, like their legislature, gives structure to their society. Crucially, Mugglestone points out that implicit in the notion of lexicography as a tool for 'imaging both nation and identity' is the polarity of that image.<sup>11</sup> If a dictionary presents what a nation is, then it also delimits what a nation is not. The whole dictionary text comes to act as an extended performative utterance, constructing a selective image of a language and society from which certain words can be tacitly excluded as 'improper'.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the lexis of same-sex sexuality was, to a considerable extent, included in general English dictionaries, even though it was often defined opprobriously—in terms of sinfulness and unnaturalness. The definitions of words concerning same-sex sexuality in Nathan Bailey's influential folio dictionary, the *Dictionarium Britannicum*, reproduced in Table 1, are representative.<sup>12</sup> (Etymologies have been elided from these entries, as has Bailey's retelling of the myth of Ganymede.)

These entries are overwhelmingly about sexuality between men (though *bugger* and *buggery* also encompass sex with a woman 'after an unnatural manner', or between human and animal).<sup>13</sup> The sole entry to address sexuality between women explicitly is *confricatrices* or *confrictrices*. This entry had already appeared in one of Bailey's earlier lexicons, the second edition of the quarto-sized *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, though it was again the sole entry of this kind in that work.<sup>14</sup> Remarkably, Bailey's dictionaries are the only general English lexicons surveyed for this article to include any headword expressly for a woman who has sex with women, although a range of terms besides *confric(a)trice* can be found sporadically in other English texts of the period, ranging from satirical poetry to travelogues and anatomical treatises.<sup>15</sup> By the seventeenth century, a woman who took other women as sexual partners could be called a *tribade* or *fricatrice*; both terms were already in use in French, and ultimately derive from verbs meaning

10 Johnson, 1755, 1, sig. C2<sup>v</sup>.

11 Lynda Mugglestone, *Dictionaries: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 96.

12 Nathan Bailey, *Dictionarium Britannicum: Or a more Compleat Universal Etymological English Dictionary Than any Extant* (London: Printed for T. Cox, 1730).

13 See also Stephen Turton, 'Unlawful Entries: Buggery, Sodomy, and the Construction of Sexual Normativity in Early English Dictionaries', *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America*, 40.1 (2019), forthcoming.

14 Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London: Printed for E. Bell and others, 1724).

15 For a detailed account of the lexis of sexuality between women in these and other genres, see Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993).

IMPROPER WORDS

<b>Table 1: Definitions concerning same-sex sexuality in Bailey's <i>Dictionarium Britannicum</i></b>
BARDACH, BARDASH [...] a Boy kept for Pleasure, to be abused contrary to Nature.
TO BUGGER [...] to copulate with a beast; also with a man or woman after an unnatural manner.
BUGGERER [...] one who copulates beastlily [sic].
BUGGERY [...] the copulation of one man with another, or of a man or woman with a beast.
CATAMITE [...] an Ingle, a Boy kept for sodomitical Practices.
CONFRICATRICES, CONFRICTRICES [...] lustful women, who titulate one another in the <i>Clitoris</i> , in imitation of venereal intercourses with men.
GANYMEDE, a Catamite or Bardachio, the Name takes its rise from what the Poets tell us of a beautiful young <i>Trojan</i> Shepherd, whom <i>Jupiter</i> ravish'd [...]
INGLE, a Boy hired to be abused contrary to Nature.
PATHIC [...] a Sodomite, an Ingle, who suffers his Body to be abused contrary to Nature.
PEDERAST [...] a Sodomite, a Buggerer.
PEDERASTY [...] Buggery, Sodomy.
SODOMITE [...] one who commits the Sin of <i>Sodomy</i> , a Buggerer.
SODOMITICAL [...] of, or pertaining to the Sin of <i>Sodomy</i> .
SODOMITICALNESS [...] Guiltiness of Sodomy.
SODOMY [...] the Sin of the Flesh against Nature, so named because committed by the Inhabitants of the City of <i>Sodom</i> , Buggery.

'to rub' in Greek (τριβειν) and Latin (*fricare*). *Tribade* and *fricatrice* were joined by the English calque *rubster* in the same century. *Lesbian* in the sense of a woman who desires other women was a later addition, but it had arrived in English by the 1730s.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The OED Online offers the following earliest known attestations of these words in English: *tribade*, 1585; *fricatrice*, 1607; *rubster*, 1657; *lesbian*, 1732. *Lesbian* in its original demonymic sense, 'A native of Lesbos, an inhabitant of Lesbos', is recorded in John Ash, *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: Printed for Edward Dilly, Charles Dilly, and R. Baldwin, 1775), I, sig. Xxx2<sup>r</sup>.



Although *tribade*, *fricatrice*, *rubster*, and *lesbian* in its sexual sense are not recorded in eighteenth-century general dictionaries, they did not pass unnoticed in all corners of English lexicography. Medical dictionaries offer a partial but significant exception. Bailey's definition of *confricatrices* or *confrictrices* had, in fact, been copied almost verbatim from a medical dictionary, the *Lexicon Physico-Medicum* of John Quincy.<sup>17</sup> Before the middle of the century, *confricatrices* would also appear in Robert James's *Medicinal Dictionary* and John Barrow's *Dictionarium Medicum Universale*, in both of which the word is tersely explained to mean 'Tribades'.<sup>18</sup> James is the only one to define *tribades* in turn: these 'unhappy Females', he asserts, who 'are by the Greeks call'd Τριβάδες, and by the Latins *Fricatrices*', are 'fonder of associating themselves with Women than with Men'.<sup>19</sup>

An analysis of same-sex desire in eighteenth-century medical lexicography is beyond the scope of this article, but these dictionaries provide a useful counterpoint to general lexicography of the same period.<sup>20</sup> Medical lexicons were specialized reference works written for an elite, implicitly male audience of medical practitioners and students. General dictionaries, on the other hand, were meant to encompass a broader stock of English vocabulary, and were aimed at female and male readers of varied educational backgrounds. Thus, J.K.'s *New English Dictionary* is addressed to 'Young Scholars, Tradesmen, Artificers, and the Female Sex'; Dyche and Pardon's *New General English Dictionary* is 'intended for the Information of the Unlearned, and particularly recommended to those Boarding Schools, where *English* only is taught, as is the Case commonly among the Ladies'; and the anonymous *Pocket Dictionary* is 'design'd for the YOUTH of both Sexes, the LADIES and PERSONS in BUSINESS'.<sup>21</sup>

17 These terms, Quincy writes, 'are used by many Authors for such lustful Women who have learned to titulate one another with their *Clitoris*, in imitation of venereal Intercourses with Men'. See John Quincy, *Lexicon Physico-Medicum: or, A New Physical Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London: Printed for E. Bell, W. Taylor, and J. Osborn, 1722), sig. G3<sup>v</sup>.

18 Robert James, *A Medicinal Dictionary*, 3 vols (London: Printed for T. Osborne, 1743–1745), II, sig. 5A2<sup>r</sup>. John Barrow, *Dictionarium Medicum Universale: or, a New Medicinal Dictionary* (London: Printed for T. Longman, C. Hitch, and A. Millar, 1749), sig. M3<sup>v</sup>.

19 James, III, sig. U†2<sup>v</sup>.

20 For the treatment of tribades as objects of medical study in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, see Theresa Braunschneider, 'The Macroclitoride, the Tribade and the Woman: Configuring Gender and Sexuality in English Anatomical Discourse', *Textual Practice*, 13.3 (1999), 509–32.

21 J.K., *A New English Dictionary: Or, a Compleat Collection of the Most Proper and Significant Words, Commonly used in the Language* (London: Printed for Henry Bonwicke and Robert Knaplock, 1702), sig. A1<sup>r</sup>. Thomas Dyche and William Pardon, *A New General English Dictionary* (London: Printed for Richard Ware, 1735), sig. A3<sup>v</sup>. *A Pocket Dictionary or Complete English Expositor* (London: Printed for J. Newbery, 1753), p. 1.

We may contrast the exclusion of words for female same-sex sexuality from these and other pre-1755 general dictionaries with, firstly, the same dictionaries' inclusion of words for male same-sex sexuality (see Table 3 below); and, secondly, the documentation of sexuality between women in medical lexicons. It is tempting to suppose that the absence of the tribade from general dictionaries might reflect a desire on the part of their writers to withhold information about tribadery from their female readers. Certainly, in other works intended for lay audiences in early modern England, historians of sexuality have identified a reluctance to describe female same-sex acts, and a reticence to make such knowledge available to women who might otherwise have (supposedly) remained ignorant of the acts' possibility.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, while the physician James Parsons could write with fanciful candour to fellow members of the Royal Society about 'Confricatrices' who penetrate other women with their clitorises—for that Part being, as all allow, the Seat of great Titulation, it is no wonder it should be stimulated by being embraced in the Vagina—a popular pamphlet like Henry Fielding's *Female Husband* is much more circumspect in presenting the same subject to a general readership.<sup>23</sup> Though the avowed purpose of his pamphlet is to warn women against engaging in 'transactions not fit to be mention'd' with their own sex, Fielding explains neither what these acts might physically entail nor what the woman who engage in them are called.<sup>24</sup> Instead, he vouches that 'not a single word occurs through the whole [work], which might shock the most delicate ear, or give offence to the purest chastity' of the female reader, and tellingly concludes that 'unnatural affections are equally vicious and equally detestable in both sexes, nay, if modesty be the peculiar characteristick of the fair sex, it is in them most shocking and odious to prostitute and debase it'.<sup>25</sup> Amid such epistemic anxieties, it is less surprising that sexuality between women was almost entirely beyond the purview of eighteenth-century general lexicography even before Samuel Johnson was applauded for excluding 'improper words' from his own dictionary.

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22 See Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1714* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Catherine Craft-Fairchild, 'Sexual and Textual Indeterminacy: Eighteenth-century English Representations of Sapphism', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 15,3 (2006), 408–431.

23 James Parsons, *A Mechanical and Critical Enquiry into the Nature of Hermaphrodites* (London: Printed for J. Walthoe, 1741), pp. 21–22. [Henry Fielding], *The Female Husband: or, the Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, Alias Mr George Hamilton* (London: Printed for M. Cooper, 1746).

24 Fielding, p. 3.

25 Fielding, p. 23.

<b>Table 2: A comparison of sexual definitions in Bailey's <i>Dictionarium</i> and Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i></b>	
<b>Bailey</b>	<b>Johnson</b>
ADULTERY [...] properly the Sin of Incontinency in Married Persons, defiling the Marriage Bed; it is Adultery, if but one of them be married, in the married Person, Fornication in the unmarried.	ADULTERY [...] The act of violating the bed of a married person.
BESTIALITY [...] the copulation of a man or woman with a beast; also beastly quality, filthiness.	BESTIALITY [...] The quality of beasts; degeneracy from human nature.
DILDO [...] <i>Penis succedaneus</i> ['substitute penis'], called by the <i>Italians Passatempo</i> .	x
FORNICATION [...] the act of unchastity between single persons.	FORNICATION [...] 1. Concubinage or commerce with an unmarried woman.
TO FUCK [...] a term used of a goat; also <i>subagitare fœminam</i> ['to subagitate a woman'].	x
GONORRHOEA [...] a Disease when there is a frequent discharge, or an involuntary dripping of the Seed without erection of the <i>Penis</i> ; called also a Clap or running of the Reins.	GONORRHOEA [...] A morbid running of venereal hurts.
ONANIA [...] the Crime of self pollution.	x
ONANISM [...] the Crime of self pollution.	x
PRIAPISMUS [...] an involuntary Erection of the Yard, or without any Provocation to Lust, <i>L[atin]</i> .	PRIAPISM [...] A preternatural tension.
PROSTITUTION [...] a Harlot's letting out the Use of her Body for Hire	PROSTITUTION [...] 2. The life of a publick strumpet.
TO SWIVE [...] to copulate with a Woman.	x

### Impropriety in Johnson's Dictionary

Johnson's dictionary did not, in fact, omit all sexually improper words.<sup>26</sup> Still, as the examples in Table 2 illustrate, Johnson's documentation of the lexis of sexuality was often deficient in comparison to Nathan Bailey's, whose *Dictionarium Britannicum* was one of the sources consulted by Johnson when compiling his own dictionary.<sup>27</sup> (Etymologies are again omitted.)

In Johnson, terms for indecent sexuality may be veiled in euphemism (e.g. *gonorrhoea*, *priapism*) or simply omitted.<sup>28</sup> Notably, there is a schism between sexual acts that are heteronormative and acts that are not. Adultery, fornication, and prostitution are socially stigmatized, but they are still physically 'natural' insofar as they are acts that may occur peno-vaginally between a man and a woman. All are encompassed, with variable frankness, in Johnson's dictionary. (The exceptions are *fuck* and *swive*, in which case it is not the acts but the words themselves that are obscene.) On the other hand, terms and senses for inherently non-procreative acts—bestiality, masturbation, the use of a dildo—are routinely excluded from the dictionary. Firmly within this latter category are words for same-sex acts and their actors.

Johnson did not include *confricatrices* either from Bailey's *Dictionarium* or directly from Bailey's own source, Quincy's *Lexicon Physico-Medicum*, which Johnson also consulted. Johnson's dictionary quotes other entries from Quincy, with citation, under numerous headwords for which Johnson offers no definitions of his own (e.g. *colick n. s.*, *hydatides*, *levigation*, *marmalade*, and *scleroticks*).<sup>29</sup> Johnson might otherwise have found *confricatrices*, as well as *tribades*, in James's *Medicinal Dictionary*—for Johnson was a lifelong friend of James, and is known to have contributed material to the latter's dictionary.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, Johnson's own dictionary was not a medical text, and in choosing its headwords and quotations he favoured literary sources over technical. It would be unreasonable to expect him to reproduce all or even most of the terms covered by the specialist works of Quincy and James. Yet *tribade*, at least, was not restricted to technical usage. Significantly, it appears in two literary works, both by Ben

26 See Freya Johnston, *Samuel Johnson and the Art of Sinking*, 1709–1791 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 12.

27 Allen Reddick, *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary: 1746–1773*, rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 201.

28 See Lynda Mugglestone, "'The Indefinable Something': Representing Rudeness in the English Dictionary", in *Rude Britannia*, ed. by Mina Gorji (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 23–34.

29 *Confricatrices* appears in Quincy's *Lexicon* from its second edition (1722) onwards. Johnson relied on the third (1726) or a later edition: he attributes to 'Quincy' his definition of *condenser*, which is absent from Quincy's first and second editions.

30 Johnson's hand has been identified in James's proposal for the *Medicinal Dictionary's* compilation, the dictionary's dedication, and a number of its biographical entries for famed physicians: see O. M. Brack, Jr., and Thomas Kaminski, 'Johnson, James, and the Medicinal Dictionary', *Modern Philology*, 81.4 (1984), 378–400.

Jonson, that Johnson cites elsewhere in his dictionary. In Canto X of *The Forest*, Jonson exhorts the goddess Venus to '[g]o, crampe dull Mars [...] when he snorts, / Or with [her] Tribade Trine, inuent new sports'.<sup>31</sup> Johnson's dictionary quotes Canto VIII of *The Forest* under *daintiness* (sense 1) and *to man* (sense 5), and Canto IV under *gyves*. In 'An Epigram on The Court Pucell', Ben Jonson accuses the writer Cecilia Bulstrode of committing 'Tribade lust' with her muse; the poem appeared in the collection *Under-woods*, which is cited by Johnson under various headwords, including *bridecake*, *clatter* (n. s. 2), *nard* (sense 2), and *weft* (n. s. 1).<sup>32</sup> It seems implausible that, in selecting quotations from these works, Johnson inadvertently overlooked *tribade* twice.

Despite the lacunae concerning sexuality between women among Johnson's headwords and definitions, there are occasional echoes of Sapphic desire within the other quotations he selected for the dictionary. Under *conformable* (sense 3) appears an ambiguous comment from Addison's *Spectator* that '[t]he fragments of Sappho give us a taste of her way of writing, perfectly *conformable with* that character we find of her'.<sup>33</sup> *The Spectator* itself suggestively went on to remark that it may have been 'for the Benefit of Mankind that [her Works] are lost', filled as they were with 'such bewitching Tenderness and Rapture, that it might have been dangerous to have given them a Reading'.<sup>34</sup> Under *to sport* (v. a. 2), a quotation from Dryden's translation of Persius's sixth satire alludes to 'Sappho's wanton art / Of odes'; how they were 'wanton' goes unsaid.<sup>35</sup> Early modern classicists were uneasily aware that pieces of Sappho's surviving poetry were addressed to female lovers, though contemporary translations of her work from Greek into English elided the feminine gender of the addressees.<sup>36</sup>

Yet sexuality between women was not always lost in translation, as is demonstrated by Dryden's translation of the satires of Juvenal. Dryden's rendering of the sixth satire is cited in Johnson's dictionary under *turn* (v. n. 10): 'They turn viragos too; the wrestler's toil / They try'; the second line, modestly clipped in Johnson's dictionary, concludes 'and Smear their Naked Limbs with Oyl' in Dryden's Juvenal.<sup>37</sup> Johnson would go on to explain *virago* as a 'female warrior; a

31 Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Beniamin Ionson* (London: Printed by Will Stansby, 1616), pp. 829–830.

32 Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Beniamin Ionson. The second Volume* (London: Printed for Richard Meighen, 1640), p. 220.

33 Johnson, 1755, I, sig. 5H1<sup>r</sup>.

34 Joseph Addison, 'No. 223. Saturday, November 15, 1711', in *The Spectator* (Dublin: Printed for Peter Wilson, 1755), III, pp. 208–12 (p. 209).

35 Johnson, 1755, II, sig. 24X1<sup>r</sup>.

36 Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 340. Yopie Prins, 'Sappho's Afterlife in Translation', in *Re-reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. by Ellen Greene (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 36–67 (p. 43).

37 Johnson, 1755, II, sig. 27C2<sup>r</sup>. Juvenal, *The Satires of Decimus Junius Juvenalis*, trans. by John Dryden (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1693), p. 102.

woman with the qualities of a man' (sense 1), before observing that it is 'commonly used in detestation for an impudent turbulent woman' (sense 2).<sup>38</sup> Dryden's use of the word to translate Juvenal combines both senses. The satire's depiction of women who engage in warlike sports proper to men is followed by a denunciation of women's sexual immorality, including their tribadic indulgence in the 'mimick Leachery of Manly Loves' with each other.<sup>39</sup> Such lustful and assertive behaviour is not compatible with the feminine ideals presented by Johnson in his quotations for *woman* (sense 1): women are 'soft, mild, pitiful and flexible' (Shakespeare), by 'nature form'd [...] To temper man' (Otway).<sup>40</sup> The quotations cannot help but recall Johnson's initial intention to select authorities for the dictionary that would give 'instruction' as well as 'pleasure'.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, how these authorities are interpreted depends upon the dictionary-user. It is conceivable that someone who found the quotations from Dryden's translated satires in the dictionary might decide to inquire into Sappho's 'wanton odes' herself, if she could read them in unexpurgated Greek, or to consider the depiction of sex between women in Juvenal's sixth satire, whether in the original Latin or Dryden's English version. The uses to which the dictionary's quotations were put by contemporary or near-contemporary readers are largely inaccessible. Nonetheless, it is tempting to wonder what would have been made of them by a classically educated woman like Anne Lister, whose sexual encounters with other women in the early nineteenth century are well-documented in her diaries. Johnson's own aphoristic reply to Lord Chesterfield's belated show of support for his dictionary—that '[h]ad it been earlier, it had been kinder'<sup>42</sup>—would be quoted by Lister in a diary entry of 1819, as her rationale for staging a timely 'tête-à-tête' with a woman in whom she had developed a romantic interest.<sup>43</sup>

By the time the fourth edition of Johnson's dictionary was published in 1773, Sappho's erotic legacy had led to a new term for sexual desire between women entering the English language: *Sapphic*. The word was deployed in *The Banquet*, a 1761 translation of Plato's *Symposium* printed to be sold by William Sandy, James Dodsley, and Robert Dodsley (the last of whom had first proposed to Johnson

38 Johnson, 1755, II, sig. 29F2<sup>v</sup>.

39 Juvenal, p. 106.

40 Johnson, 1755, II, sig. 30U2<sup>r</sup>.

41 Samuel Johnson, *A Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Printed for John Knapton and others, 1747), p. 31.

42 The precise wording in Johnson's letter to Chesterfield, whose planned patronage of the dictionary had proved unsatisfactory, was: 'The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind'. See Samuel Johnson, *The Celebrated Letter from Samuel Johnson, LL.D., to Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield; Now First Published, with Notes*, ed. by James Boswell (London: Printed by Henry Baldwin for Charles Dilly, 1790), p. 4.

43 Anne Lister, *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister, 1791–1840*, ed. by Helena Whitbread (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), p. 81.



that he compile a dictionary, and was among the booksellers who funded and sold the work).<sup>44</sup> *The Banquet* describes women whose ‘Affections tend rather to their own Sex: and of this Kind are the Sapphic Lovers.’<sup>45</sup> By then, *Sapphic* was already in use in a poetic sense, denoting ‘a Kind of *Greek* and *Latin* Verse; so called of *Sappho*, a famous Poetess of *Mytelene*, the Inventress of it’, as Bailey defined it in the *Dictionarium*.<sup>46</sup> Johnson’s dictionary does not admit *Sapphic* in any sense, in keeping with his lexicographical policy of ‘omitt[ing] all words which have relation to proper names.’<sup>47</sup> Nor would he have included two related terms, *Sapphist* and *Sapphism*, had they been in use before his death in 1784. As it is, their earliest known attestations in English occur in the writings of Johnson’s friend, Hester Thrale Piozzi. In 1789, *Thrale* recorded in her diary that ‘One hears of Things now, fit for the Pens of Petronius only, or Juvenal to record and satyrize: The Queen of France is at the Head of a Set of Monsters call’d by each other *Sapphists*.’<sup>48</sup> In 1795, Thrale observed with alarm that ‘French and English Women are now publicly said to practise Atrocities’; their ‘Vice’ has ‘a Greek name now & is call’d Sapphism.’<sup>49</sup>

Despite its historic association with the homoerotic poetry of Sappho in ancient Greece, modern Sapphism was persistently cast as a (Catholic) French vice. Yet not all eighteenth-century writers were as ready as Thrale to admit that Sapphism had crossed the English border. The anonymous tract *Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy, in England* reports that in France, ‘the Ladies (in the *Nunneries*) are criminally *amorous* of each other, in a *Method* too gross for Expression’—in English, presumably, for the author ‘affirm[s], or, at least, hope[s]’ that Englishwomen ‘claim no Share of this *Charge*.’<sup>50</sup> In a similar vein, Emma Donoghue has pointed out that in the first English translation of Diderot’s *La religieuse*, a passage describing the sexual intimacy between two nuns is expurgated, and a footnote from the translator explains that ‘French writers [...] are permitted a latitude which the English Taste has forbidden.’<sup>51</sup>

*The foreignness and unspeakableness of same-sex activity in England and in English was also applicable to sexuality between men. Plain Reasons for the*

44 Reddick, p. 17.

45 Plato, *The Banquet a Dialogue of Plato Concerning Love. The First Part*, trans. Floyer Sydenham (London: Printed by H. Woodfall, 1761), p. 93.

46 Bailey, *Dictionarium Britannicum*, sig. 7G1<sup>v</sup>.

47 Johnson, 1755, I, sig. B1<sup>v</sup>.

48 Hester Lynch Thrale, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale* (Later Mrs. Piozzi), ed. by Katharine C. Balderston, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), II, p. 740.

49 Thrale, II, p. 949.

50 *Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy, in England* (London: Printed for A. Dodd and E. Nutt, c. 1730), p. 12.

51 Donoghue, p. 193. Denis Diderot, *The Nun*, trans. (Dublin: Printed by Brett Smith, 1797), p. 142.



*Growth of Sodomy* declares that ‘How famous, or rather how infamous *Italy* has been in all Ages, and still continues in the Odious Practice of *Sodomy* needs no Explanation.’<sup>52</sup> Twenty years later, the newspaper *Old England* disingenuously claims that ‘*peccatum illud Sodomiticum*’ (‘that sin of Sodom’) is ‘yet without a Name’ in English, for ‘There are not Words in our Language expressive enough of the Horror of it.’<sup>53</sup> In his influential *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Sir William Blackstone describes ‘the infamous crime against nature, committed either with man or beast’ as ‘a crime not fit to be named’, for ‘the very mention of [it] is a disgrace to human nature.’<sup>54</sup> The symbolic unnameability of this transgression was well established by then: the jurist Sir Edward Coke had called buggery a ‘sin, amongst Christians not to be named’ a century before.<sup>55</sup> Yet, unlike Coke, Blackstone follows his own proscription. While *buggery* and *sodomy* are listed in the index to his *Commentaries*, neither word occurs in his description of the offence.

By the time that Blackstone had called sex between men an unnameable crime, ‘of a still deeper malignity’ than ‘rape’,<sup>56</sup> both *buggery* and *sodomy* had been omitted from Johnson’s dictionary. It is the earliest general English lexicon surveyed for this article to include neither term, though denunciative allusions to the act can still be found elsewhere in the dictionary. An admonitory quotation from the Book of Jude appears under *example* (sense 5): ‘Sodom and Gomorrah, giving themselves over to fornication, are set forth for an *example*, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire’. Under *rape* (sense 1), a quotation from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* reads:

Witness that night  
In Gibeah, when the hospitable door  
Expos’d a matron, to avoid worse *rape*.<sup>57</sup>

The ‘worse rape’ in question was, as biblically literate readers would have known, that of a man by men.<sup>58</sup> The sense of *rape* that Milton’s quotation is meant to illustrate in Johnson’s dictionary, ‘Violent defloration of chastity’, is seemingly

<sup>52</sup> *Plain Reasons*, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Argus Centoculi, ‘Saturday, June 2, 1750. No. 323,’ *Old England*, sigs. A1<sup>r</sup>–A1<sup>v</sup> (sig. A1<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>54</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England. Book the Fourth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1769), pp. 215–16.

<sup>55</sup> Edward Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (London: Printed by M. Flesher for W. Lee and D. Pakeman, 1644), p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Blackstone, p. 215.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, 1755, I, sigs. 8K2<sup>r</sup>, 21D2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> Judges 19. 22–25.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, 1755, II, sig. 21D2<sup>v</sup>.

vague enough to encompass sex between men.<sup>59</sup> Yet Johnson defines *defloration* in turn as ‘The act of deflouring; the taking away of a woman’s virginity’ (sense 1), which complicates the possibility of a male victim.<sup>60</sup> In any case, the prospect of sexual intercourse between men or between women is not countenanced in Johnson’s definition of *copulation* itself: ‘The congress or embrace of the two sexes.’<sup>61</sup>

Johnson’s failure to name or describe same-sex acts—along with the reticence he shows in treating other forms of ‘deviant’ sexuality—is in part, perhaps, a reflection of his staunch Anglicanism.<sup>62</sup> Though he did not always succeed in finding quotations for the dictionary that embodied ‘precept[s] of prudence, or piety’, as he had initially hoped, prudent and pious scruples may still have influenced his choice of headwords and definitions, just as such scruples are visible in his other published works.<sup>63</sup> In *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, Johnson castigates the Earl of Rochester for ‘los[ing] all sense of religious restraint’ and ‘play[ing] many frolicks, which it is not for his honour that we should remember.’<sup>64</sup> James Boswell reports that Johnson gave instructions for Rochester’s poems to be ‘castrate[d]’ before inclusion in the anthology which *Lives of the Poets* was meant to accompany.<sup>65</sup> Rochester was notorious for his poetical celebrations of sodomy and fornication; to him was credited the scandalous volume *Poems on Several Occasions by the Right Honourable, the E of R—*, published in 1680 ‘with an air of concealment’, according to Johnson.<sup>66</sup> The collected poems contain such homoerotic lines as ‘two *Beldames*, and a jilting *Wife*, / Came to swive off, the tedious hours of life’, and ‘missing my *Whore*, I bugger my *Page*’.<sup>67</sup> If Rochester’s unexpurgated poetry was unsuitable, in Johnson’s view, for the polite literature of the eighteenth century, it is hardly surprising that such words as *bugger* and *swive* are not countenanced in Johnson’s dictionary. The dictionary itself would

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60 Johnson, 1755, I, sig. 6M2<sup>r</sup>.

61 Johnson, 1755, I, sig. 5P2<sup>r</sup>.

62 See Reddick, p. 145.

63 Johnson, *A Plan of a Dictionary*, p. 31. For the contrast between Johnson’s public reputation for piety and his use of obscenity in private settings, see Allen Walker Read, ‘An Obscenity Symbol’, *American Speech*, 9.4 (1934), 264–78 (p. 270).

64 Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, 4 vols (London: Printed for C. Bathurst and others, 1781), I, p. 300.

65 James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, LL.D., 3rd edn, 4 vols (London: Printed by H. Baldwin and Son for Charles Dilly, 1799), III, p. 208.

66 Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, new edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 49–50. Johnson, 1781, I, p. 304.

67 John Wilmot, *Poems on Several Occasions by the Right Honourable, the E of R—* (Antwerp: n.p., 1680), pp. 36, 60.

later be praised by James Murray, chief editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, for having ‘raised English lexicography’ into a ‘department of literature’ in its own right.<sup>68</sup> The only quotation from Rochester that has been identified in Johnson’s dictionary—attributed to ‘Anon’ under *refine* (v. a. 1)—is, in this case, fitting: ‘Weigh ev’ry word, and ev’ry thought *refine*’.<sup>69</sup>

### Johnson’s Legacy

New editions of dictionaries first published before Johnson’s, such as Bailey’s *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* and Dyche and Pardon’s *New General English Dictionary*, continued to appear after 1755, and these retained their earlier entries for same-sex sexuality.<sup>70</sup> Yet their influence could not compete with that of Johnson. In 1791, John Walker remarked that Johnson’s dictionary had been ‘deemed lawful plunder by every subsequent Lexicographer; and so servilely [had] it been copied, that such words as he must have omitted merely by mistake [...] are neither in Mr. Sheridan’s, Dr. Kenrick’s, nor several other Dictionaries’.<sup>71</sup> The lexis of sexuality between women and between men is among the words absent from the dictionaries of Sheridan and Kenrick—as well as those of Baskerville, Perry, Browne, and Walker himself.<sup>72</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the declining coverage of terms for same-sex sexuality in general English dictionaries across the eighteenth century. The graph includes only first editions, except where these have been unavailable (e.g. Anne Fisher’s *Accurate New Spelling Dictionary*), and later editions revised by a different lexicographer from the first (e.g. John Kersey’s 1706 revision of Edward Phillips’s seventeenth-century dictionary *The New World of English Words*).<sup>73</sup>

68 James A. H. Murray, *The Evolution of English Lexicography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p. 42.

69 The quotation is from Rochester’s bawdy “Allusion to Horace” (Wilmot, p. 44). For the attributions of anonymous quotations in Johnson’s dictionary, see W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Margaret H. Wimsatt, ‘Self-quotations and Anonymous Quotations in Johnson’s Dictionary’, *ELH*, 15.1 (1948), 60–68.

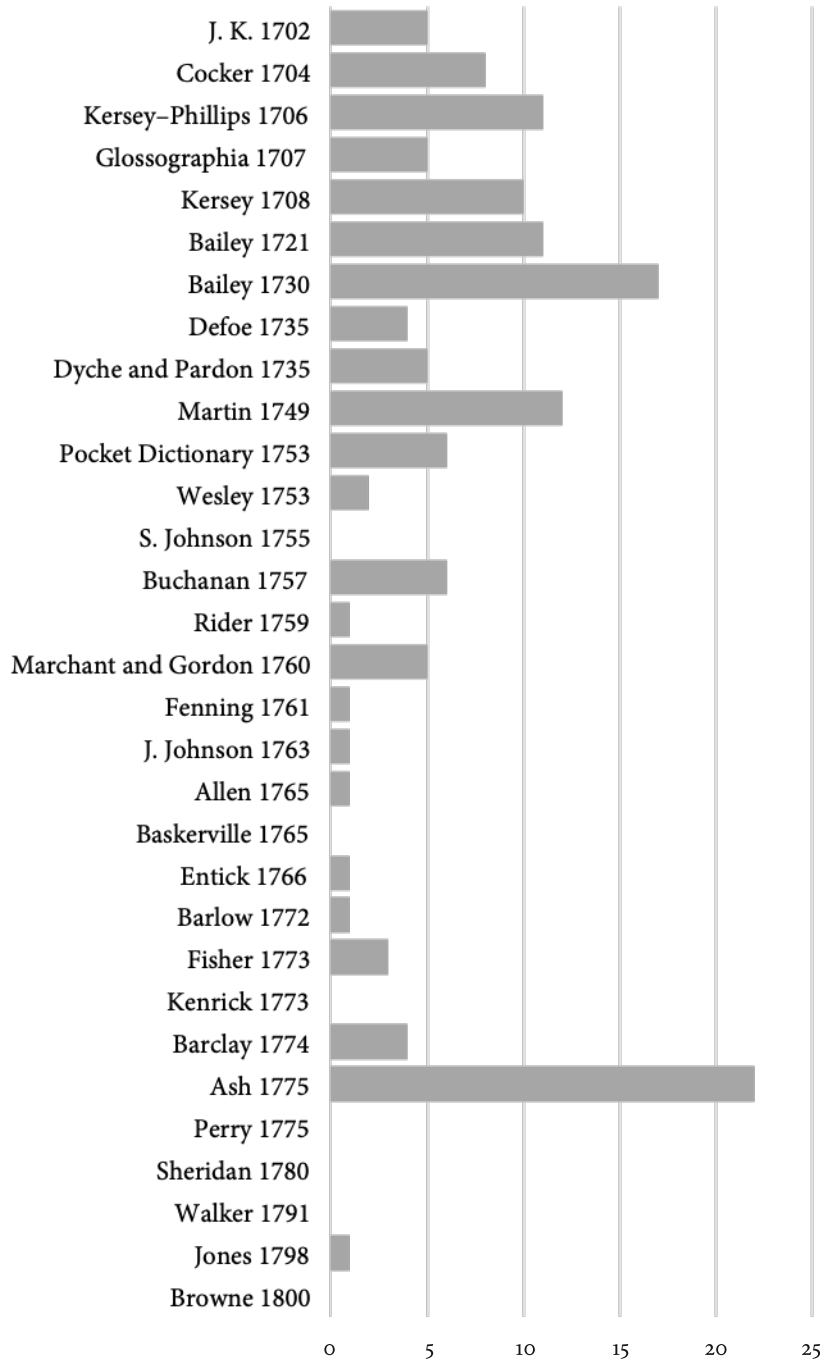
70 For example, Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 22nd edn (London: Printed for J. Buckland and others, 1770); Thomas Dyche and William Pardon, *A New General English Dictionary*, 18th edn (London: Printed for Toplis, Bunney, and J. Mozley, 1781).

71 John Walker, *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language* (London: G. G. J. Robinson, J. Robinson, and T. Cadell, 1791), p. viii.

72 Thomas Sheridan, *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Printed for James Dodsley, Charles Dilly, and J. Wilkie, 1780). William Kenrick, *A New Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Printed for John Rivington and others, 1773). John Baskerville, *A Vocabulary, or Pocket Dictionary* (Birmingham: Printed by John Baskerville, 1765). William Perry, *The Royal Standard English Dictionary* (London: Printed by David Willison for William Perry, 1775). Thomas Browne, *The Union Dictionary* (London: Printed by J. W. Myers for G. Wilkie and others, 1800).

73 Anne Fisher, *An Accurate New Spelling Dictionary, and Expositor of the English Language*, 2nd edn (London: Printed for Anne Fisher, 1773). Edward Phillips and John

**Figure 1: Headwords for same-sex sexuality in general English dictionaries of the eighteenth century**



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<b>Table 3: Headwords for same-sex sexuality in general dictionaries of the eighteenth century</b>	
J. K. (1702)	<i>bugger (v.), buggerer, buggery, sodomite, sodomy</i>
Cocker (1704)	<i>catamite, ganymede, gomorrhean, ingle, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy, spintrian</i>
Kersey-Phillips (1706)	<i>bardach, bardash, buggery, catamite, Ganymedes, ingle, pederast, pederasty, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
<i>Glossographia Anglica-Nova</i> (1707)	<i>buggery, catamite, ganymede, gomorrhean, sodomite</i>
Kersey (1708)	<i>bardach, bardash, buggery, catamite, ingle, pederast, pederasty, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
Bailey (1721)	<i>bardach, bardash, buggery, catamite, ganymede, ingle, pederast, pederasty, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
Bailey (1730)	<i>bardach, bardash, bugger (v.), buggerer, buggery, catamite, confricatrices, confrictrices, ganymede, ingle, pathic, pederast, pederasty, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomiticalness, sodomy</i>
Defoe (1735)	<i>buggery, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
Dyche and Pardon (1735)	<i>catamite, Ganymede, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
Martin (1749)	<i>bardachio, bardach, buggery, catamite, ingle, molly, pathic, pederast, pederasty, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
<i>Pocket Dictionary</i> (1753)	<i>buggery, catamite, ganymede, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
Wesley (1753)	<i>catamite, sodomy</i>
S. Johnson (1755)	x
Buchanan (1757)	<i>buggery, catamite, ganymede, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomy</i>
Rider (1759)	<i>catamite</i>
Marchant and Gordon (1760)	<i>bugger (v.), catamite, ganymede, pathic, sodomy</i>

<b>Table 3: Headwords for same-sex sexuality in general dictionaries of the eighteenth century</b>	
Fenning (1761)	<i>catamite</i>
J. Johnson (1763)	<i>catamite</i>
Allen (1765)	<i>catamite</i>
Baskerville (1765)	x
Entick (2nd edn, 1766)	<i>catamite</i>
Barlow (1772)	<i>catamite</i>
Fisher (2nd edn, 1773)	<i>catamite, sodomite, sodomy</i>
Kenrick (1773)	x
Barclay (1774)	<i>catamite, ganymede, pathicks, sodomy</i>
Ash (1775)	<i>bardach, bardash, bougerons, bugger (v.), buggered, buggerer, buggering (n.), buggering (v.), buggery, catamite, Ganymed, Ganymedes, ingle, pathic, pederast, pederasty, sodomite, sodomitical, sodomiticalness, sodomitish, sodomy, spintrian</i>
Perry (1775)	x
Sheridan (1780)	x
Walker (1791)	x
Jones (1798)	<i>catamite</i>
Browne (1800)	x

The twelve dictionaries surveyed before Johnson have an average of eight headwords concerning same-sex sexuality; a dictionary most commonly has five such headwords in this period. In the nineteen dictionaries surveyed from Johnson onwards—a more prolific lexicographical period—the average number of relevant headwords drops to 2.5, and a dictionary most frequently has one or none. The headwords in each of the surveyed dictionaries are listed in Table 3.

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Kersey, *The New World of Words: or, Universal English Dictionary*, 6th edn (London: Printed for J. Phillips, H. Rhodes, and J. Taylor, 1706).

Whatever Johnson's reasons for omitting the lexis of same-sex sexuality, it seems improbable that its low coverage, or total absence, in many subsequent dictionaries is merely a recurring accident resulting from their writers hewing too closely to Johnson's wordlist. Johnson makes no overt mention of his policy for treating obscenity in the preface to his dictionary, but a number of his contemporaries and successors were eager to assure their readers of the propriety of their works in this respect. The anonymous *Pocket Dictionary* is advertised as having 'rejected all obsolete, bad, low and despicable words', and Marchant and Gordon's *New Complete English Dictionary* asserts that the compilers had 'taken especial Care to exclude all those Terms that carry any Indecency in their Meaning, or have the least Tendency to corrupt the Minds of Youth'.<sup>74</sup> Fisher claims that her dictionary is 'without any obsolete or inelegant [words]', and Kenrick omits words 'not of modern and elegant use'.<sup>75</sup>

Such protestations of decency contrast with, for instance, the earlier attitude of Ephraim Chambers in his lexicon of technical terms, the *Cyclopædia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*. Chambers argues that words need 'not [be] infamous and indecent, tho' they signify very infamous things; because they represent them as covered with a Veil of Horror'; Chambers's own examples are *incest* and *adultery*.<sup>76</sup> In this view, the distance between speech and act is emphasized. A word should be admissible in polite society even when the practice it signifies is not. It is an attitude which places Chambers at odds with subsequent lexicographers like John Baskerville, whose 1765 *Vocabulary, or Pocket Dictionary* avowedly treats 'only those more difficult Words which occur in sensible genteel Company'; *adultery* and *incest* are not among them.<sup>77</sup>

Notably, the attitudinal shift between Chambers's *Cyclopædia* and the dictionaries of Johnson and his successors coincides with a change in the legal status of obscene literature. In 1728, the same year that the *Cyclopædia* was published, printing obscenity became a criminal offence under English law.<sup>78</sup> The legal construction of libel, previously limited to the defamation of a particular person or the government, was broadened to include any text which the courts deemed was 'intend[ed] to weaken the bonds of civil society, virtue, and morality'.<sup>79</sup> Language was once again imbricated in nation-building: if cultivated

74 *A Pocket Dictionary or Complete English Expositor*, p. 4. John Marchant and M. Gordon, *A New Complete English Dictionary* (London: Printed for J. Fuller, 1760), p. iv.

75 Fisher, p. ii. Kenrick, p. iii.

76 Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopædia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols (London: Printed for J. Knapton and others, 1728), II, p. 380.

77 Baskerville, p. ii.

78 See Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 312–18.

79 T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London: Printed by T. C. Hansard for Longman and others, 1813), XVII, col. 160.



speech could strengthen society, then indecent speech could destabilize it. In the subsequent decades, the Court of King's Bench issued warrants for the arrest of several individual authors, printers, and publishers of obscene books; and in 1755, a general warrant was issued which authorized agents of the law to search any 'Houses, Warehouses, Shops, and other Places' suspected to contain 'lewd and infamous Books and Prints', and to arrest any 'Person or Persons, in whose Custody they shall be found'.<sup>80</sup> Not only the production, but the possession, of obscene libel became hazardous, though what counted as obscene was ill-defined and left to the discretion of the courts. In this suppressive climate, it is perhaps more understandable why later eighteenth-century general dictionaries can appear, in Burchfield's phrase, 'like herbaceous borders in a private garden, filled with well-cultivated flowers that had been planted with reasonable deliberation'.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, some terms were more prone to being weeded out than others. Baskerville's decision to omit *adultery* and *incest* from his *Vocabulary* is exceptionally restrained. Of the 19 dictionaries published from Johnson's onwards that are surveyed in Table 3, all but Baskerville's contain entries for *adultery* and *incest*, as well as *fornication*, *harlot*, and *rape*. 17 dictionaries (other than Baskerville's and Allen's) include *whore*, 18 (other than Allen's) contain *polygamy*, and all 19 encompass *bigamy* and *prostitute*. As Table 2 earlier demonstrated for Johnson's dictionary, terms for promiscuous or iniquitous opposite-sex intercourse could be tolerated in spaces where the lexis of same-sex sexuality was not.

In light of this trend, John Ash's 1755 *New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* is an extreme outlier. The dictionary boasts 22 headwords concerning same-sex sexuality, its wordlist swelled by the inclusion of separate entries for alternative spellings of the same word (*bardach*, *bardash*), derived terms (*sodomite*, *sodomitical*, *sodomiticalness*, *sodomitish*) and inflected forms of the same lemma (*bugger*, *buggered*, *buggering*). Yet despite this prolixity, Ash's definitions are devoid of any explicit same-sex dimension. A comparison of entries for the verb *bugger* and its inflected and derived forms between Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* and Ash, illustrated by Table 4, is representative.

Where expressly sexual relations exist in Ash's entries, only one of the sexual partners is gendered. The reader is left to conjecture whether a *pederast* ('One who has a criminal passion for boys') can be female, male, or either, or to whom exactly an *ingle* ('A boy prostituted to unnatural purposes') is prostituted.<sup>82</sup> Ash's dictionary presents a wordlist in which sexuality between men, although named, is never clearly defined. Sexuality between women is not even named. Ash drew on Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, perhaps the 1770 edition,

80 Philip Carteret Webb, *Copies Taken from the Records of the Court of King's-Bench, at Westminster* (London: Court of the King's Bench, 1763), p. 55.

81 Robert W. Burchfield, *Unlocking the English Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989; repr. New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), p. 149.

82 Ash, 1775, II, sig. 4P2<sup>v</sup>; and I, sig. Ppp2<sup>v</sup>.

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for several sexual terms: ‘*Bai*’ or ‘*Bailey*’ is cited in Ash’s entries for *frig* (‘To rub’), *fuck* (‘To perform the act of generation, to have to do with a woman’), and *swive* (‘To perform the act of generation’).<sup>83</sup> Yet Bailey’s entry for *confricatrices* or *confrictrices* is absent from Ash’s *New and Complete English Dictionary*. It is one instance of how, in Ash’s own words, ‘the copiousness of the English Language’ leaves the lexicographer ‘short of that perfection which the [dictionary’s] plan seems to require’.<sup>84</sup>

**Table 4: A comparison of definitions concerning buggery in Bailey and Ash**

Bailey	Ash
To BUGGER [...] to copulate with a beast; also with a man or woman after an unnatural manner.	Bugger [...] To commit an unnatural crime. Bugged [...] Defiled by unnatural intercourse. Bugging [...] Committing an unnatural crime. Bugging [...] The act of committing an unnatural crime.
BUGGERER [...] one who copulates beastlily [sic].	Buggerer [...] One guilty of an unnatural crime.
BUGGERY [...] the copulation of one man with another, or of a man or woman with a beast.	Buggery [...] An unnatural intercourse.

Johnson had expressed similar sentiments about the limits of lexicography: he acknowledges in the advertisement to his dictionary’s fourth edition that he had ‘left [...] that imperfect which never was completed’.<sup>85</sup> Yet his *Dictionary of the English Language* makes no titular claim to completeness. Nor does Johnson’s definition of *dictionary*: ‘A book containing the words of any language in alphabetical order, with explanations of their meaning; a lexicon; a vocabulary; a word-book’. In these respects, Johnson departs from Nathan Bailey’s first general lexicon, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, in which a *dictionary* is ‘a Collection of all the Words of a Language, explain’d in Alphabetical Order’.<sup>86</sup>

83 Ash, I, sigs. Aaaz<sup>v</sup>, Aaa4<sup>t</sup>, and II, sig. 5Z2<sup>v</sup>.

84 Ash, I, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

85 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th edn, 2 vols (London: Printed by William Strahan for William Strahan and others, 1773), I, sig. [C].

86 Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (London: Printed for E. Bell and others, 1721).

Equally inclusive assertions are made for dictionaries succeeding Johnson's.<sup>87</sup> Rider's *New Universal English Dictionary*, J. Johnson's *New Royal and Universal English Dictionary*, and the *Complete English Dictionary* of Allen and, later, Barlow proclaim the exhaustiveness of their linguistic coverage in their titles.<sup>88</sup> Fenning's *Royal English Dictionary* is said to explain 'Every word made use of in the common occurrences of life, or in the several arts and sciences necessary for the subsistence or improvement of our being', while Entick's *New Spelling Dictionary* is advertised as a 'Complete Pocket Companion For those That read [...] English Authors of Repute.'<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Browne's *Union Dictionary* is 'calculated [...] to explain [...] every approved word in our language.'<sup>90</sup> It is significant, then, that Browne's dictionary seemingly contains no headwords for same-sex sexuality, and the other six post-Johnsonian lexicons contain only one: *catamite*. Moreover, all of their definitions of this word manage to avoid making its same-sex dimension clear, as Table 5 shows (while also demonstrating the pronounced intertextuality of dictionaries in this period).

Four of the dictionaries position the *catamite* as a foreign subject, kept by the Romans and Italians for purposes that were immodest, vile, or infamous, but never actually clarified. J. Johnson and Entick both explain the *catamite* in terms of sodomy, but as neither dictionary has an entry for *sodomy* or any of its related terms, the reader is left uninformed. Same-sex sexuality remains exotic and inexplicable.

The partial disappearance of men who have sex with men, and the total absence of women who have sex with women, from the 'complete' and 'universal' dictionaries of the late eighteenth century has a powerful performative force—for silence, as Sedgwick remarks, can be 'rendered as pointed and performative as speech.'<sup>91</sup> If a dictionary is advertised as a comprehensive record of English, or at least of all 'authorized' English words, then any term excluded from the dictionary is tacitly positioned as peripheral or exterior to the English language, at best unauthorized, at worst non-existent.

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87 See Lynda Mugglestone, 'Registering the Language: Dictionaries, Diction and the Art of Elocution', in *Eighteenth-century English: Ideology and Change*, ed. by Raymond Hickey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 309–38 (pp. 319–320).

88 William Rider, *A New Universal English Dictionary: or, a Compleat Treasure of the English Language* (London: Printed by W. Griffin for I. Pottinger, 1759). J. Johnson, *The New Royal and Universal English Dictionary*, 2 vols (London: Printed for A. Millard and R. Dorsley, 1763). Francis Allen, *A Complete English Dictionary* (London: Printed for J. Wilson and J. Fell, 1765). Frederick Barlow, *The Complete English Dictionary: or, General Repository of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: Printed for Frederick Barlow, 1772).

89 Daniel Fenning, *The Royal English Dictionary: or, a Treasury of the English Language* (London: Printed for S. Crowder and Co., 1761), p. viii. John Entick, *The New Spelling Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London: Printed for Edward Dilly and Charles Dilly, 1766), sig. A1<sup>r</sup>.

90 Browne, p. iii.

91 Sedgwick, p. 4.

Rider (1759)	a person kept by the antient Romans and Italians for immodest purposes.
Fenning (1761)	a person kept by the antient Romans and Italians for the vilest of purposes.
J. Johnson (1763)	a sodomite.
Allen (1765)	a person kept by the antient Romans and Italians for the vilest of purposes.
Entick (1766)	one kept for sodomy
Barlow (1772)	a person kept by the antient Romans and Italians, for the most infamous purposes.

Such exclusions should not always be assumed to be deliberate. However, dictionaries' repeated omissions of same-sex sexuality cannot be divorced from a wider textual culture of silencing. We have already observed that sex between men was 'a crime not fit to be named' in the view of William Blackstone, and sexual acts between women were 'transactions not fit to be mention'd' according to Henry Fielding. Hester Thrale would go on to brand erotic desires between women and between men alike as 'unspeakable Sins'.<sup>92</sup> It was a silence that continued to spread into new terrain beyond the close of the century. While, for instance, the popular trade in pamphlets describing adultery trials flourished from the 1780s onwards, the distribution of pamphlets concerning buggery trials 'virtually ceased after 1800'.<sup>93</sup> Such textual omissions did not correspond to any judicial lapse in prosecutions under the Buggery Act 1533: H. G. Cocks demonstrates a steady increase in committals per capita for sex (or attempted sex) between men from the 1780s into the nineteenth century.<sup>94</sup> Literary attempts to erase the word *buggery* thus coincided with continued legal efforts to eradicate the act.

The symbolic unspeakableness of same-sex sexuality turns its signifiers into shibboleths whose avoidance distinguishes the polite from the impolite, the pious from the impious, and the proper from the improper. It is small wonder that these words should be banished from the cultivated dictionaries of the post-Johnsonian decades. Butler has argued that the 'production of the *unsymbolizable*, the

<sup>92</sup> Thrale, II, p. 770.

<sup>93</sup> ; Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>94</sup> H. G. Cocks, *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the 19th Century* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 24.

unspeakable, the illegible is [...] always a strategy of social abjection, implicated in the 'regulation of what will and will not qualify as a discursively intelligible way of being'.<sup>95</sup> In the images of the English nation regulated and constructed by late eighteenth-century lexicographers, in their struggle against the linguistic and civil 'degeneration' envisioned by Johnson, there is little space for the lexis or praxis of non-procreative sexuality. The Sapphist and, to a lesser extent, the sodomite are alienated by their absence: their names are repeatedly unrecorded, and their experiences are unexplained. They become indefinite beings beyond the margins of legitimate English, their existence inarticulable in respectable English society.

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<sup>95</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1993; repr. 2011), p. 142.

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