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THE LEXICOGRAPHER AS ANATOMIST: BODY WORDS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

Abstract

Body words – i.e. words denoting and describing the parts and functions of the human body – have often been a thorny issue in lexicography, as their usage is largely conditioned by the dominant ideology, which determines what is to be considered as a taboo in a given culture and time. The present paper will focus on body words and their lexicographical treatment in a selection of representative eighteenth-century dictionaries of the English language. Apart from highlighting the British eighteenth century's mental attitude to man's physical reality and animal functions, the data will clarify that dictionaries are not the objective, neutral representations of languages as is commonly thought, but a repository of (sometimes competing) ideologies and worldviews.

Keywords: body words, John Kersey, Samuel Johnson, Frances Grose, ideology in dictionaries, slang.

Body Words in English Lexis and Lexicography

The history of English monolingual lexicography can be divided into three phases. First, the seventeenth-century tradition of the so-called hard-word dictionaries inaugurated by Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604), which focused on English words of Latin, Greek or Hebrew origin, thus very difficult to understand if one lacked a university education of a sort. Second, the eighteenth century witnessed the development of modern monolingual lexicography because, on the one side, the first general purpose or universal dictionaries were published (that is to say, dictionaries theoretically aiming to include the whole lexical store of the English language) and, on the other side, the first specialized dictionaries, dictionaries of arts and crafts, and encyclopedias were compiled. The third stage may be made to start in the mid-nineteenth century when the towering presence exerted by Samuel Johnson and his dictionary started being challenged by the discussions and work that

led to the compilation and publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary* between 1884 and 1928, currently in its ongoing third edition online.¹

Given this historical framework, the present article's focus on a representative sample of eighteenth-century English monolingual dictionaries, and on body words in them, relies on a few critical assumptions and established facts that need highlighting. Most importantly, research has made it clear that dictionaries from past centuries are an inexhaustible source of information and data: on words, their usage and lexicographical treatment, of course; but also – and perhaps more interestingly – on cultural, social, political, and even moral or theological issues; seen from this broader perspective, dictionaries may be said to provide a composite picture of both their compilers' personality and the shared values and ideology of their age and society.² This is the reason why medical dictionaries and encyclopedias will not be considered here: the technical, (supposedly) neutral and objective presentation of the human body will be neglected in favour of the everyday usage of body words and the ideology or worldview involved in such usage. Reference here will be made to three outstanding lexicographers of eighteenth-century England: John Kersey, who started the tradition of general purpose dictionary early in the century, thus providing useful guides for the widening number of literate, but linguistically insecure people; Samuel Johnson, whose *Dictionary*, first published in 1755 and meant for the educated and upper classes, became the linguistic and literary monument of the age; and Francis Grose who, late in the century, compiled the first English dictionary of slang, mixing his antiquarian bent with a keen interest in the non-standard, colloquial and humorous usage of the low classes. Their dictionaries, therefore, may collectively represent the main trends of eighteenth-century lexicography, and the contemporary use of words – body words among them.

¹ Relevant criticism on the history of English lexicography includes: T. DeW. Starnes and G.E. Noyes, *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604-1755*, new edition by G. Stein, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1991 (1st edn 1946); T. Hayashi, *The Theory of English Lexicography, 1530-1791*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1978; W. Hüllen, *English Dictionaries, 800-1700: The Topical Tradition*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999; J. Considine and G. Iamartino (eds.), *Words and Dictionaries from the British Isles in Historical Perspective*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007; A.P. Cowie (ed.), *The Oxford History of English Lexicography*, 2 vols., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2009; H. Béjoint, *The Lexicography of English*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 50-95; S. Ogilvie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Dictionaries*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 2020, pp. 89-252.

² These latter sentences reproduce almost verbatim the first introductory lines of G. Iamartino, 'Lexicography as a Mirror of Society: Women in John Kersey's Dictionaries of the English Language', *Textus. English Studies in Italy*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2020, pp. 35-67.

As a final introductory comment, let it be emphasized that lexicographers may well be described as anatomists, of a very special kind though: they dissect the 'living' body of a language in order to analyze individual words and make clear a given word's properties – be they grammatical, semantic, or pragmatic – and their connections with other words in the big body of a language. This metaphor is, arguably, a very apt one when talking about body words: indeed, apart from denoting human beings' most basic, immediate reality (i.e., the use of *head*, *eye*, *heart* or *foot* to refer to a part of the body), these words have developed in time further meanings and usages that, in a way, linguistically document man's outlook on and interpretation of the world. These include, first of all, the anthropomorphic labelling of the world, be it the natural world (*the mouth of a river*, *the eye of a storm*, *tongues of fire*, *veins of gold*) or man-built reality (*the arm of a chair*, *the neck of a bottle*, *the foot of the stairs*). Secondly, there are expressions involving body words that may be used literally or, more often than not, metaphorically: *to fold one's arms*, *to turn one's back on somebody*, *to burn one's fingers*, or *to have a thin skin*. Thirdly, some purely idiomatic phrases may be mentioned, whose motivation behind the metaphorical usage of body words is largely lost: *to have two left feet* (= to be clumsy), *to put one's foot in one's mouth* (= to make a gaffe, to blunder), or *to pay through the nose* (= to cost a lot). Fourthly and finally, body words are often involved in euphemistic processes, especially words related to sexuality and bodily functions.³ This latter tendency is particularly interesting in the present context, as it very much depends on the dominant ideology of a given age and culture: what was perceived as taboo in the eighteenth century might not be considered the same nowadays, and vice versa. The lack of privacy in early modern Europe possibly made people unconcerned about some situations – excretion for one – that later generations came to be much more reserved, fussy or fastidious about. Indeed, as J.H. Plumb put it nicely long ago, "An exceedingly frank acknowledgment, one might almost say a relish, of man's animal functions was as much a part of the age as the elegant furniture or delicate china".⁴

³ Just to make a single example, the source of present-day English *toilet* is French *toilette*, originally denoting a cloth used as a wrapper for clothes, and coming to mean, in early twentieth-century English, a *lavatory* (itself a euphemism, because one does not only wash themselves there).

⁴ Quoted in V. Gattrell, *City of Laughter. Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*, London, Atlantic Books, 2006, p. 4. It is worth stressing here that the topic of the body – healthy or sick, clean or dirty, dressed or naked – is often dealt with in eighteenth-century works. See, among others: V. Kelly and D. von Mücke, *Body & Text in the Eighteenth Century*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994; J. McMaster, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan,

John Kersey's *A New English Dictionary* and *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*

John Kersey gave Britain its first general-purpose dictionary, *A New English Dictionary*, published in 1702 and later in 1713, and the first abridged one, the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* of 1708, a condensed version of his own revision, published two years earlier, of Edward Phillips's *New World of Words, or, Universal English Dictionary* (first published in 1658 and then in its sixth folio edition). Indeed, Kersey was a very active and progressive lexicographer; unfortunately, only scant information about his life is available, and nothing is known about his personality and opinions.⁵

The present analysis – relying on previous research⁶ into these dictionaries and a corpus of the 520 women-related entries excerpted from them – will zoom in on words used to refer to the female body and physical condition. Although Kersey defines the word “beauty” as either “a beautiful, very fair or charming woman” (1708) or “a beautiful or very fair woman” (1713), the pages of his dictionaries are not peopled by such paragons of beauty; we find, instead, a number of words visualising women and their body as unattractive:

BELDAME

1708 / 1713 – a decrepit old woman.

BLOWZE

1708 – a fat, red-faced bloated wench.

1713 – a fat bloated wench.

DOWDY

1713 – a swarthy gross woman.

A GREAT MAWKS

1713 – a huge nasty slut.

2004; and G. Iamartino (ed.), *Representing the Body in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, a monograph section of *Acme*, vol. 70, n. 2, 2017, pp. 9-65.

⁵ His biography is sketched in R. Wallis, ‘John Kersey the Younger’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/15475. Wallis does not refer to Kersey as the author of the 1702 compilation, since the title-page of *A New English Dictionary* only mentions the initials J.K.; still, historians of lexicography tend to attribute this dictionary to him, e.g. N.E. Osselton, ‘John Kersey and the Ordinary Words of English’, *English Studies*, vol. 60, 1979, pp. 555-561.

⁶ G. Iamartino, ‘Lexicography as a Mirror of Society: Women in John Kersey’s Dictionaries of the English Language’,... The three dictionaries quoted from will be referred to by mentioning their publication date.

SLUT

1713 – a dirty nasty wench.

SLUTTISH

1713 – that belongs to, or dirty like a slut.

A TATTERED HOUSEWIFE

1713 – a woman clothed with rags.

TRAPES

1713 – a meer slattern, a dirty slut.

AN OLD TROT

1713 – a decrepit old woman.

Apart from these words, mention of the woman's body is made only with reference to either childbirth and related problems or typical female illnesses. Quite a few entries are listed in the dictionary to define the three stages of procreation – pregnancy, childbearing and delivery. Some of them are present in both dictionaries, i.e. ABORTION, ABORTIVE, TO BEAR, CHILDING, IMPREGNATE, MISCARRIAGE, TO MISCARRY, MOTHER, MOTHERHOOD, PREGNANCY, PREGNANT, PROLIFICK, and TRAVEL, with only two definitions worth mentioning and comparing, the former to highlight the encyclopaedic character of the 1708 definition, the latter to show the different lexicographical presentations in the two dictionaries:

ABORTION:

1708 – miscarriage in women, or the bringing forth of a child before its time, that is in no capacity to live.

1713 – miscarriage in women, untimely birth.

MOTHER:

1708 – a woman that has brought forth a child; also, the womb; also, a disease in that part.

1713 – the womb, or a disease in that part.

1713 – a woman that has brought forth a child.

A dozen childbirth-related entries are only included in *A New English Dictionary* wordlist – TO BREED, CHILD, TO CHURCH A WOMAN, TO CONCEIVE, TO DELIVER, DELIVERY, LABOUR, MATERNAL, PROCREATE, PROCREATION, TEEM, THROWS OR PANGS, TO TRAVEL – the only particularly interesting one being TO CHURCH A WOMAN “to receive her in the church after her delivery from child-birth”, which refers to a rite of the Anglican Church in the *Book of Common Prayer*.⁷

⁷ See “The thanksgiving of women after child-birth, commonly called the Churching of women” in *The Book of Common Prayer...*, London, printed by John, Bill and Christopher Barker, 1662, pp. D4v-D5. The 1662 edition, revised after the English Civil War, became and still remains the official prayer book of the Church of England.

Most of the 27 childbirth-related words only to be found in the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* are straight from Latin or Greek:⁸

ALLANTOIS OR ALLANTOIDES, AMBLOSIS, AMBLOTICKS, CHILDIR, CHORION, TO ENGENDER, FOETUS, TO GENERATE, GENERATION, GESTATION, HYSTEROTOMOTOCIA, TO IMPREGNATE, IMPREGNATION, LACTEA FEBRIS, MATER, MATERNITY, PARTUS, PARTUS CAESAREUS, PARTUS DIFFICILIS, PLACENTA UTERINA, PUERPERA, SECTIO CAESAREA, SECUNDINE, THELYGONOS, TOMOTOCIA, TORMINA HYSTERICA, TORMINA POST PARTUM.

Further entries referring to the anatomy, physiology or pathology of women are listed in both dictionaries (TERMS, WILL-JILL); just a few only in *A New Dictionary* (MENSTRUOUS, TEAT, WHITES); many more in the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* only:

ADOLESCENCY, ANDROGYNOUS, HYSTERALGIA, HYSTERICAL OR HYSTERIC, HYSTEROCELE, HYSTEROTOMIA, HYSTEROTOMOTOCIA, LIGAMENTA UTERI, MAMMA, MATRICALIA, MULIEBRIA, NYMPHOMANIA, TORMINA HYSTERICA, UTERI ASCENSIO, UTERI PROCIDENTIA, UTERINE, UTERINE FURY, UTERUS, VIRGINEUS MORBUS, VULVA.

As to typical female illnesses, both dictionaries have *hysteria*, or fits, in the foreground: this is culturally relevant, because women's lack of control over their emotions – as can be seen in hysterical behaviour – was understood as a sign of their irrational nature and directly linked to the uterus (notice the connection between anatomy and pathology here):

FERVOUR OF THE MATRIX:

1708 – a distemper when the whole substance of the womb is very hot.

HYSTERICA:

1708 – medicines against the diseases of the womb.

HYSTERICA PASSIO:

1708 – a disease in women, commonly called fits of the mother.

HYSTERIC PASSION:

1713 – a disease in women, called fits of the mother.

MATRICE, OR MATRIX:

1713 – the mother, or womb.

MATRIX:

1708 – the matrice, or mother.

⁸ Indeed, the dictionary title-page states that Kersey's compilation will provide "A Brief, but Emphatical and Clear Explication of all sorts of difficult WORDS, that derive their Original from other Ancient and Modern Languages; as also, of all Terms relating to Arts and Sciences, both Liberal and Mechanical" – the following list including "*Physick, Surgery, Anatomy*".

MOTHER:

1708 – a woman that has brought forth a child; also the womb; also a disease in that part.

1713 – the womb, or a disease in that part.

VAPOURS:

1708 – a watery exhalation, or steam, rais'd by fire or the heat of the sun.

In a medicinal sense, vapour is taken for fits of the mother or melancholy; a disease.

1713 – (in a physical sense) fits of the mother or melancholy; a disease.

WOMB:

1713 – the mother, in women.

One might argue that there is no harm intended here, on the part of the lexicographer, as Kersey simply gave voice to the medical knowledge of his times; but the (at least, implicit) connection between female anatomy and (ir)rational behaviour should be noticed, because MAN is defined in *A New English Dictionary* as “a rational creature”, whereas the entry WOMAN has an etymological note – philologically, a wrong one – that identifies women with their uterus:

A WOMAN, (q.d. womb-man) a female Man; the word Mon or Man, is Saxon (as homo in Latin) signifying both Sexes.

This is clear evidence of both Kersey's individual mindset and his role as a lexicographer or a linguistic spokesman for his speech community. It goes without saying that, when one refers to lexicographers in the early modern and modern age, male lexicographers are meant, dictionary-making being until quite recently the diversion or profession of men only. Not surprisingly, therefore, dictionaries have always been full of entries, words, definitions, examples, and comments that display the contemporary attitude – at best patronizing, at worst derogatory – of the social and cultural elite, a male one of course, towards women.

Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language*

Although a large number of entries on women are included in Johnson's dictionary,⁹ only a dozen describe the female body and physical

⁹ See G. Iamartino, 'Words by Women, Words on Women in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*', in J. Considine (ed.), *Adventuring in Dictionaries: New Studies in the History of Lexicography*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 94-125. Ch. Brewer, "'A Goose-Quill or a Gander's?': Female Writers in Johnson's *Dictionary*", in F. Johnston and L. Mugglestone (eds.), *Samuel Johnson: The Arc of the Pendulum*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 120-139,

condition, especially childbirth and typical female illnesses. One single example is worth quoting and comparing with Kersey's corresponding entries:

MOTHER. *n.s.* ...

5. Hysterical passion; so called, as being imagined peculiar to women.

This stopping of the stomach might be the *mother*, forasmuch as many were troubled with *mother* fits, although few returned to have died of them.

Graunt's Bills.

What is noticeable here is not so much the interchangeability of the noun phrase *hysterical passion* and the noun *mother* in its medical acception,¹⁰ which echoes Kersey's entries, but rather Johnson's skepticism about attributing hysteria to women only – an attitude of doubting that confirms his unconventional view of women.

As far as more general body words are concerned, Johnson may be said to epitomize the eighteenth-century idea of decorum in a dictionary, like his, that was meant to provide a linguistic, but also a cultural and educational model.¹¹ See for example Johnson's post-Harveian definition of HEART, which includes a critical comment that balances technicality with popular ideas:

HEART. *n.s.* [heort, Saxon; *hertz*, German.]

1. The muscle which by its contraction and dilation propels the blood through the course of circulation, and is therefore considered as the source of vital motion. It is supposed in popular language to be the seat sometimes of courage, sometimes of affection. ...

His dictionary is rich in technical terms belonging to medicine, as exemplified by *pharyngotomy*,

PHARYNGOTOMY. *n.s.* [Φαρυγξ and τεμνω.] The act of making an incision into the wind-pipe, used when some tumour in the throat hinders respiration.

very often taken from preceding medical dictionaries, among others the English translation (1684) of the Dutch physician Stephan Blankaart's *Le-*

provides a complementary picture, as it focuses on female-authored sources in the *Dictionary* and Johnson's attitude to women, women writers and women's language.

¹⁰ For the meaning and usage of these terms in the eighteenth century, see the relevant examples in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, s.v. MOTHER, *n.*, II.9, HYSTERICAL PASSION, *n.* and HYSTERIA, *n.* 1.

¹¹ See, among others, R. DeMaria, Jr., *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

xicon Medicum Graeco-Latinum (1679), John Quincy's *Lexicon Physico-Medicum* (1719) or Robert James's *A Medicinal Dictionary* of 1743-1745.¹²

Apart from that, Johnson's dictionary lists some of the common everyday words denoting body parts, including some 'private' parts, especially if quotations from literary works can illustrate their usage:

ARSE. *n.s.* [earse, Sax.] The buttocks, or hind part of an animal.

To hang an ARSE. A vulgar phrase, signifying to be tardy, sluggish, or dilatory.

For Hudibras wore but one spur,

As wisely knowing, could he stir

To active trot one side of 's horse,

The other would not *hang an arse*.

Hudibras, cant. i.

BUBBY. *n.s.* A woman's breast.

Foh! say they, to see a handsome, brisk, genteel, young fellow, so much governed by a doating old woman; why don't you go and suck he *bubby*?

Arbuthnot's John Bull.

BUM. *n.s.* [boume, Dutch.]

1. The buttocks; the part on which we sit.

The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale,

Sometime for threefoot stool mistaketh me,

Then slip I from her *bum*, down topples she.

Shakesp.

This said, he gently rais'd the knight,

And set him on his *bum* upright.

Hudibras.

From dusty shops neglected authours come,

Martyrs of pies, and relicks of the *bum*.

Dryden's Mackfl.

The learned Sydenham does not doubt,

But profound thought will bring the gout;

And that with *bum* on couch we lie,

Because our reason's soar'd too high.

W — n.

2. It is used, in composition, for any thing mean or low, as *bumbailiff*.

BUTTOCK. *n.s.* [supposed, by *Skinner*, to come from *aboutir*, Fr. inserted by *Junius* without etymology.] The rump; the part near the tail.

It is like a barber's chair that fits all the *buttocks*.

Shakesp.

Such as were not able to stay themselves, should be holden up

by others of more strength, riding behind them upon the *buttocks* of the horse.

Knolles's History of the Turks.

The tail of a fox was never made for the buttocks of an ape.

L'Estrange's Fables.

FUNDAMENT. *n.s.* [*fundamentum*, Latin.] The back part of the body.

Clearly, Johnson does not seem to be particularly squeamish here. His definitions are simple and straightforward, and his quotations may

¹² See S. Pireddu, 'The "Landscape of the Body": The Language of Medicine in Johnson's *Dictionary*', *Textus: English Studies in Italy*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2006, pp. 107-130.

also have been meant to bring his dictionary users to smile or laugh, as in the case of *FART*:

FART. n.s. [fert, Saxon.] Wind from behind.
 Love is the *fart*
 Of every heart;
 It pains a man when 'tis kept close;
 And others doth offend, when 'tis let loose. *Suckling.*

To *FART. v.a.* [from the noun.] To break wind behind.
 As when we a gun discharge,
 Before the flame from muzzle burst,
 Just at the breech it flashes first;
 So from my lord his passion broke,
 He *farted* first, and then he spoke. *Swift.*

No four-letter words are to be found in Johnson's dictionary;¹³ it includes, instead, learned terms with very aseptic, sanitized definitions or more common everyday words whose original, more general meaning is defined and illustrated:

To *COPULATE. v.a.* [*copulo*, Latin.] To unite; to conjoin; to link together.
 If the force of custom, simple and separate, be great, the force of custom *copulate* and conjoined, and collegiate, is far greater. *Bacon, Essay 40.*

To *COPULATE. v.n.* To come together as different sexes.
 Not only the persons so *copulating* are infected, but also their children.
 Wiseman's Surgery.

COPULATION. n.s. [from *copulate*.] The congress or embrace of the two sexes.
 Sundry kinds, even of conjugal *copulation*, are prohibited as dishonest.
 Hooker, b. iv. sect. 11.

EXCREMENT. n.s. [*excrementum*, Latin.] That which is thrown out as useless, noxious, or corrupted from the natural passages of the body.

We see that those *excrements*, that are of the first digestion,
 smell the worst; as the *excrements* from the belly. *Bacon.*

It fares with politick bodies as with the physical;
 each would convert all into their own proper substance, and cast forth
 as *excrement* what will not be changed. *Raleigh's Essays.*

Their sordid avarice rakes
 In *excrements*, and hires the very jakes. *Dryden's Juv. Sat. 3.*
 Farce, in itself, is of a nasty scent;
 But the gain smells not of the *excrement*. *Dryden.*

¹³ No slang or colloquial words for sexual intercourse or male and female genitalia; the 'dangerous' meaning is tacitly censured in the lexicographical description of such polysemous words as *prick* or *yard*.

You may find, by dissection, not only their stomachs full of meat,
 but their intestines full of *excrement*. *Bentley's Sermons.*
 The *excrements* of horses are nothing but hay, and, as such, combustible.
Arbuthnot on Aliments.

ORDURE. *n.s.* [*ordure*, French; from *sordes*, Lat. *Skinner.*] Dung; filth.

Gard'ners with *ordure* hide those roots
 That shall first spring and be most delicate. *Shakesp.*

Working upon human *ordure*, and by long preparation
 rendering it odoriferous, he terms it *zibetta occidentalis*. *Brown.*

We added fat pollutions of our own,
 T'encrase the steaming *ordures* of the stage. *Dryden.*

Renew's by *ordure's* sympathetick force,
 As oil'd with magic juices for the course,
 Vig'rous he rises. *Pope.*

TURD. *n.s.* [*turd*, Saxon.] Excrement.¹⁴

In a way, Samuel Johnson's attitude to body words in his *Dictionary* – never squeamish but culturally and socially restrained, or at least controlled – can be summarized by referring to an episode told by James Boswell in the *Life*, where it is made clear how Johnson knew of the potential upsetting or ridiculing effect of body words, hence his tendency to keep control of them or, if necessary, to use them for effect. Talking of Dr Campbell's wife, Johnson said that

"she did not disgrace him; the woman had a bottom of good sense". The word *bottom* thus introduced, was so ludicrous when contrasted with his gravity, that most of us could not forbear tittering and laughing; though I recollect that the Bishop of Killaloe kept his countenance with perfect steadiness, while Miss Hannah More slyly hid her face behind a lady's back who sat on the same settee with her. His pride could not bear that any expression of his should excite ridicule, when he did not intend it; he therefore resolved to assume and exercise despotick power, glanced sternly around, and called out in a strong tone, "Where's the merriment?" Then collecting himself, and looking awful, to make us feel how he could impose restraint, and as it were searching his mind for a still more ludicrous word, he slowly pronounced, "I say the *woman* was *fundamentally* sensible;" as if he had said, hear this now, and laugh if you dare. We all sat composed as at a funeral.¹⁵

¹⁴ Johnson rightly defined DEFECATION simply as "Purification; the act of clearing or purifying" because the meaning related to the act of passing faeces was adopted in the following century; the physiological meaning of *excrement*, instead, had been in the language since 1541. See OED, s.v. DEFECATION, 2 and EXCREMENT, 2.

¹⁵ R.W. Chapman (ed.), *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 1141. It is worth noting that, while *fundament* has an entry in Johnson's *Dictionary*, the list of thirteen different acceptations of the word *BOTTOM* does not include what the OED, s.v. *BOTTOM*, n. I.8, documents as used from the mid-sixteenth century,

Frances Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*

Captain Francis Grose (ca 1731-1791) – a soldier, an illustrator of architectural and military antiquities, an author of works on English popular culture, and a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries since 1757 – was probably driven by his interest in antiquities to collect the lexis of non-standard English – cant terms (e.g. thieves' cant), jargon (e.g. naval and nautical terms) and slang words (e.g. about sex) – and publish his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* in 1785. Its Preface argues that the collection will be “extremely useful, if not absolutely necessary, not only to foreigners, but even to natives resident at a distance from the metropolis, or who do not mix in the busy world”, all the more so as this kind of lexis is not to be found in “all the ordinary Dictionaries”.¹⁶ Although the Preface also states that Grose's sources were both a number of previous cant dictionaries and the living usage of soldiers, seamen and the populace in general, recent research has provided evidence of further sources and Grose's compilation procedures.¹⁷

Among the 3,893 entries in the dictionary, the subject matter of body and health is the third largest, with 395 words or 7.2% of the total, after crime and dishonesty (554 or 10.1%) and emotion and temperament (460 or 8.4%); and since this is a dictionary of non-standard English, it may well be imagined that body words – and especially the most unpleasant, offensive, and shocking among them – are part and parcel of Grose's word-list, definitions and examples. Even more explicitly, sex comes seventh in the list of twenty-one subject matters, with 280 or 5.1% of the total.¹⁸

and defines as “The buttocks, the posterior; (also) the anus”. before adding that that meaning is “Generally regarded as colloquial or vulgar until the 20th cent. ...”.

¹⁶ F. Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, London, printed for S. Hooper, 1785, p. ii.

¹⁷ See, first and foremost, J. Coleman, ‘Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*’, in J. Coleman (ed.), *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries, Volume II: 1785-1858*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 14-71. The further editions of Grose's *Dictionary* are analysed in J. Coleman, ‘The Third Edition of Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*: Bookseller's Hackwork or Posthumous Masterpiece?’, in J. Coleman and A. McDermott (eds), *Historical Dictionaries and Historical Dictionary Research*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004, pp. 71-81. An introduction to Grose's work is found in M. Gotti, ‘Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*’, in M. Gotti, *The Language of Thieves and Vagabonds. 17th and 18th Century Canting Lexicography in England*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1999, pp. 101-113, while S. Bending, ‘Every Man is Naturally an Antiquarian: Frances Grose and Polite Antiquities’, *Art History*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2002, pp. 520-530 focuses on Grose's antiquarian interests.

¹⁸ Numbers from Table 1.2 in J. Coleman, ‘Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*...’, p. 268.

As explained in the Preface,

To prevent any charge of immorality being brought against this work, the Editor begs leave to observe, that when an indelicate or immodest word has obtruded itself for explanation, he has endeavoured to get rid of it in the most decent manner possible; and none have been admitted but such, as either could not be left out, without rendering the work incomplete, or, in some measure, compensate by their wit, for the trespass committed on decorum.¹⁹

“The most decent manner possible” may take different forms, lexicographically speaking; as the following examples will show, Grose may use euphemisms in his definitions, censor words by replacing letters with a dash or, in the case of truly unprintable terms, only guide his readership through asterisk-counting and context:

FIZZLE, an escape backward, more obvious to the nose than ears.

PLUCK, ... to pluck a rose, an expression said to be used by women, for going to the necessary house, which in the country usually stands in the garden.

F—K, to copulate.

MEDLAR, a fruit, vulgarly called an open a—se, of which it is more truly than delicately said, that unless it is as rotten as a t—d, it is not worth a f—t.

COFFEE HOUSE, a necessary house, to make a coffee house of a woman's ****, to go in and out and spend nothing.

HUFFLE, to huffle, a piece of beastiality too filthy for explanation.

LARKING, a lascivious practice that will not bear explanation.²⁰

Not all the entry words are that bad, though, and quite a few of Grose's definitions are rich in wit and bawdy humour, for example those related to what a present-day euphemism denotes the body's backside and its physiology:

ARSE, to hang an arse, to hang back, to be afraid to advance.

BUM FODDER, soft paper for the necessary house or torchecul.

CHEEKS, ask cheeks near cunnyborough, the repartee of a St.Giles's fair one, who bids you ask her backside, anglice her a—se.

FART CATCHER, a valet or footman, from his walking behind his master or mistress.

¹⁹ F. Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue...*, pp. vi-vii.

²⁰ For a survey on censorship in English lexicography, see G. Iamartino, 'Lexicographers as Censors: Checking Verbal Abuse in Early English Dictionaries', in G. Iannaccaro and G. Iamartino (eds.), *Enforcing and Eluding Censorship: British and Anglo-Italian Perspectives*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, pp. 168-196.

FARTING CRACKERS, breeches.

FARTLEBERRIES, excrement hanging to the hairs about the anus, &c. of a man or woman.

Witty terms, definitions or illustrative examples are often found when analyzing entry words concerning less ‘embarrassing’ body parts, such as those defining the head:

COSTARD, the head. I’ll smite your costard; I’ll give you a knock on the head.

CROWN OFFICE, the head.

IDEA POT, the knowledge box, the head. See knowledge box.

JOBBERNOLE, the head.

JOLLY, the head, also jolly nob; I’ll lump your jolly nob for you, I’ll give you a knock on the head.

JOLTER HEAD, a long head; metaphorically, a stupid fellow.

KNOB, the head. See nob.

KNOWLEDGE BOX, the head.

NAPPER, the head; also a cheat or thief.

NOB, the head.

NODDLE, the head.

PATE, the head; caroty pated, red haired.

POLL, the head, jolly nob, napper, or knowledge box.

SCONCE, the head, probably as being the fort and citadel of a man; from sconce an old name for a fort derived from a Dutch word of the same signification; to build a sconce, a military term for bilking one’s quarters; to sconce or skonce, to impose a fine, *academical phrase*.

What is to be highlighted here is that, however lexicographically simple Grose’s dictionary is, it shows most of the technical features that thirty years after Johnson’s masterpiece could no longer be dispensed with: definitions are either simple (CROWN OFFICE) or made of a string of synonyms (POLL); polysemy is made clear when necessary (NAPPER, SCONCE); metaphorical usage is labelled where appropriate (JOLTER HEAD); illustrative examples of slang forms and their ‘translations’ in standard English are often included (COSTARD, JOLLY); even cross-references are present (IDEA POT, KNOB).

A final list of entries – on slang words and expressions denoting and connoting the different elements and features of a human head – will further illustrate both Grose’s work as a lexicographer and the rich-

ness and vitality of colloquial, non-standard language in late eighteenth-century Britain:

BRANDY FACED, red faced, as if from drinking brandy.

CRIBBAGE FACED, marked with the smallpox, the pits bearing a kind of resemblance to the holes in a cribbage board.

CRUSTY BEAU, one that uses paint and cosmetics, to obtain a fine complexion.

WEEZLE FACED, thin meagre faced; weezle gutted, thin bodied. A weezle is a thin long slender animal with a sharp face.

FRIDAY FACE, a dismal countenance, before and even long after the reformation. Friday was a day of abstinence or jour maigre.

LANTHORN JAWED, thin visage, from their cheeks being almost transparent, or else lanten jawed, i.e. having the jaws of one, emaciated by a too rigid observation of lent; ...

SCREWJAWS, a wry mouthed man or woman.

MOON EYED HEN, a squinting wench.

WALL, [...] wall eyed, a wall eye, is an eye with little or no sight, all white like a plastered wall.

BOWSPRIT, the nose, from its being the most projecting part of the human face, as the bowsprit is of a ship.

SMELLER, a nose; smellers, a cat's whiskers.

POTATO TRAP, the mouth; shut your potato trap, and give your tongue a holiday, i.e. be silent.

CLACK, a tongue, chiefly applied to women, a simile drawn from the clack of a water mill.

RED RAG, the tongue; shut your potato trap, and give your red rag a holiday, i.e. shut your mouth, and let your tongue rest; too much of the red rag, too much tongue.

HEAD RAILS, teeth; sea phrase.

RED LANE, the throat; gone down the red lane, swallowed.

GINGER PATED, or ginger hackled, red haired, a term borrowed from the cock pit, where red cocks are called gingers.

By Way of Conclusion

This cursory analysis of body words in a small but representative sample of eighteenth-century English lexicography has arguably shown that Kersey's, Johnson's and Grose's dictionaries mirrored the speech-community they were compiled for, with its shared feelings,

beliefs and values, but also its nuanced or marked differences in terms of education, census, social class, age, etc. This also involved the way people experienced their bodies, and their bodies' relation with human nature on the one side, and culture on the other; still, it can safely be argued that, as Enlightened materialism became increasingly influential, many people found it easier to openly refer to the body's parts and functions and considered it natural to indulge its desire.

As spokesmen of their society – better, different sections of their society – the lexicographers under scrutiny in the present essay dealt with body words as they thought fit for themselves and their envisaged readerships. Whatever their differences in background, education and ideals, they were all interested in the English language, be it the language of the aspiring middle classes and everyday usage, of the educated and upper classes and the great literary tradition, or of the lower classes and the most colloquial and informal usage. Collectively, their works show how lexically rich and pragmatically effective the English language was in their days.

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