

Lexicography as a Mirror of Society: Women in John Kersey's Dictionaries of the English Language

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Abstract

This paper investigates the representation of women in *A New English Dictionary* (1702 and 1713 editions) and *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* (1708), respectively the first English universal general-purpose and abridged dictionaries, both of them compiled by John Kersey. The words used to refer to 'all things women' in the English language, as they are selected and lexicographically described by Kersey, are analysed in order to provide evidence of the nature of dictionaries as cultural objects and the role played by lexicographers as propagators of the shared values and ideology of their age and society.

Keywords: eighteenth-century lexicography, John Kersey, women in dictionaries, sexism, gender, ideology.

1. Introduction

Recent research has made it clear that dictionaries from past centuries are an inexhaustible source of information and data: on words and their lexicographical treatment, of course, but also on cultural, social, political, and even moral or theological issues; seen from this broader perspective, dictionaries also provide a composite picture of both their compilers' personality and the shared values and ideology of their age and society¹.

¹ It is not difficult to provide dictionary criticism supporting this claim. According to Rosamund Moon, for example, "Dictionaries only succeed because of an act of faith on the part of their users, and that act of faith is dependent on those users believing their dictionaries both authoritative and beyond subjectivity" (Moon 1989: 59): dictionaries may or may not be authoritative but, being compiled by human beings, they are hardly objective. And Henri Béjoint (2010: 203) takes up and translates a 1991 statement by Henri Meschonnic arguing that "dictionaries, encyclopedias and grammars are the best examples of texts that one should read

A lexicographer's individual mindset and his role as a spokesman for his speech community can best be analysed in dictionary entries dealing with any sensitive issues in a given culture and historical period: political and social ideas, religious faith, race, age, sex and gender. It goes without saying that, when we refer to lexicographers in the early and late modern age, we mean male lexicographers, dictionary-making being until quite recently the diversion or profession of men only². As a consequence, dictionaries have always been full of entries, words, definitions, examples, and comments that display the contemporary attitude – at best patronising, at worst derogatory – of the social and cultural elite, a male one of course, towards women.

This is the rationale behind the present research on the representation of women in John Kersey's dictionaries, in particular *A New English Dictionary* (1702 and 1713 editions) and *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* (1708). Samuel Johnson might be considered a more likely candidate for this kind of analysis³, as his idiosyncratic and often biased definitions are very well known⁴; and yet, although it can be conceded that Johnson's strong personality and ideological stance pervaded his lexicographical masterpiece, thus making it all the more interesting for that, it can be argued that Kersey's dictionaries – given

between the lines, where the conflicts, the hidden and ignored oppositions, the clichés that make up the family album of a culture can be detected more easily than anywhere else”.

² Among the very few early exceptions to this ‘rule’, one may think of such women lexicographers as Elizabeth Elstob, the pioneer scholar of Anglo-Saxon who included bilingual lists of Old and Modern English words in her grammar (Elstob 1715); Anne Fisher, the grammarian and the author of both a spelling dictionary and a dictionary of heathen gods and goddesses published in the same volume (Fisher 1773); and Hester Lynch Piozzi, who compiled a dictionary of synonyms (Lynch Piozzi 1794). None of these works, however, belonged in the mainstream tradition of English monolingual lexicography. On women and dictionary-making, see Russell (2018).

³ Indeed, Johnson's lexicographical treatment of women-related words was the topic of Iamartino (2010).

⁴ Apart from Johnson's texts on the English language edited and commented on in Kolb and DeMaria (2005), the many book-length studies of Johnson's dictionary include DeMaria (1986), Reddick (1996; 2005), Lynch and McDermott (2005), McDermott and Moon (2005), Iamartino and DeMaria (2006), Johnston and Mugglestone (2012), and Mugglestone (2015).

his less prominent, ‘humbler’ status as a lexicographer, and the fact that he gave Britain its first general-purpose and abridged dictionaries – may be even more representative than Johnson’s of the current mindset and ideological attitude towards women; hence, the words used to refer to ‘all things women’ in Kersey’s wordlists and the way he describes them will be analysed.

Before that, however, it is worthwhile to set the present research in a wider perspective and base it on more general assumptions. Firstly, it should be emphasised that the issue of gender (and, more specifically, men’s consideration for and judgement on women) is not unlike other touchy subjects in a given culture and historical period. Gender, of course, is not a synonym for sex: it implies that dissimilarities between the sexes, though based on biological differences, are socially, culturally, and politically constructed⁵. Secondly, any given culture and historical period will consider some of the abovementioned issues as taboos, while other issues pose no problem at all: to make an obvious example, a cavalier attitude to religion or monarchy was a risky business centuries ago, whereas being politically incorrect to minority groups was no problem at all; nowadays, the situation is quite different. Thirdly, any language cannot but mirror its speech community’s ideology – its values and dominant attitudes, its stereotypes and taboos; languages are distorting mirrors, though, since they give voice to their speakers’ thoughts and feelings but can also disguise and stifle them⁶. Fourthly and finally, just as (or insofar as) every language reflects its speakers’ worldview, the lexicographer working on that language will reflect

⁵ The sex versus gender dichotomy is often discussed in feminist writings, most interestingly in those books dealing with the relationship between language and gender, e.g. Lakoff (2004) and Talbot (1998: 7–13 and *passim*). A historical perspective on gender issues in early modern Britain and their impact on society and language can be found, among others, in Fletcher (1995), Sommerville (1995), and Shoemaker (1998).

⁶ The impact of ideology on dictionaries and their roles as vectors of the dominant ideology – the latter term to be interpreted as the set of values and social norms of the Establishment – has been studied since at least the 1970s, especially by French metalexicographers: see e.g., Dubois and Dubois (1971), Buzon (1979), Girardin (1979), Landau (1985), Beaujot (1989), and Mackintosh (2006). This topic has been dealt with in a historical perspective by D’Oria (1988), Giacomelli Deslex (1990), Kahane and Kahane (1992), Fleming (1993), Benson (2001) and Iamartino (2014).

language usage. Things are not that simple, of course, as the history of lexicography makes clear: influencing factors include (a) the descriptive versus the prescriptive approach to dictionary-making; (b) the fact that in most cases dictionaries were (and perhaps still are) produced by and for the cultural and social establishment; (c) the influence exerted by tradition – preceding dictionaries, in particular – on the art and craft of lexicography; and finally (d) the lexicographer’s individual (more recently, the lexicographers’ collective) intention of becoming part of the cultural and ideological mainstream or steering away from it⁷.

2. John Kersey’s dictionaries

The historians of dictionary-making in Britain have long made clear that the development of English monolingual lexicography reached a turning point at the beginning of the eighteenth century: the earlier tradition of the so-called hard-words dictionaries gave way to the slow introduction into monolingual English dictionaries of the bulk of the language; correspondingly, while most seventeenth-century dictionaries had been compiled for specific categories of users, later works were meant to do service to all types of users⁸. Women had figured prominently among the prospective readers of early English dictionaries since Robert Cawdrey’s *Table Alphabeticall* mentioned “Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other vnskilfull persons” (Cawdrey 1604: Title-page) as its prime target⁹; but, as soon as English dictionaries tended to become ‘general’ and ‘universal’ in the early and mid-eighteenth century, women were not usually mentioned as the intended users of a dictionary: they are briefly referred to in the title-page and preface of Kersey’s 1702/1713 dictionary (see below), but they are not in his 1708 work; nor are they explicitly mentioned in the title-pages of Nathan Bailey’s and Samuel Johnson’s dictionaries.

⁷ This paragraph reproduces, almost verbatim, what I wrote in Iamartino (2010: 95-96).

⁸ The most relevant critical literature on the history of English lexicography includes Starnes and Noyes ([1946] 1991), Hayashi (1978), Green (1996), Hüllen (1999), Considine and Iamartino (2007), Considine (2008; 2010; 2012; 2014), Cowie (2009), Béjoint (1994: 92-106; 2010: 50-95), McDermott (2012), and McConchie (2012).

⁹ Apart from the relevant pages in the books mentioned in footnote 8, on Cawdrey see Noyes (1943), Peters (1968), McConchie (1992), Brown (2001), Stein (2010), and Morini (this volume).

Unlike Johnson, nothing is known about John Kersey's personality and opinions, and only scant information about his life is available: according to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, he was born around 1660, the son of another John Kersey who was a teacher of mathematics. Kersey the younger was apprenticed in the Stationers' Company in 1673, and around 1680 he started working as a journal editor and translator. Interestingly,

He called himself 'Philobibl.' when revising and augmenting the folio sixth edition of E. Phillips's *New World of Words, or, Universal English Dictionary* (1706; 3rd edn, 1721); he had added '20,000 hard words in arts and sciences', while stating that it was 'no part of our design to teach liberal or mechanical arts and sciences as a late learned author has attempted to do', referring to the 1704 *Lexicon technicum* by John Harris. In 1708 he published the octavo *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, a condensed 'portable' version of the 'voluminous' 1706 work. He was ostensibly still alive when a third, corrected and enlarged, edition appeared in 1721. (Wallis 2004).

Wallis does not mention the other dictionary that John Kersey is credited with compiling, i.e. *A New English Dictionary*, published in 1702 and, as such, the first dictionary of the English language to appear in the eighteenth century. Though the compiler is simply mentioned as J.K. on the title-page, modern scholarship¹⁰ tends to attribute this dictionary to John Kersey.

Kersey "was a progressive and businesslike lexicographer who in the course of his career experimented with different types of dictionary for different uses and strata of users" (Starnes and Noyes [1946] 1991: 69): in fact, *A New English Dictionary* of 1702 was the first general dictionary of the language, primarily designed for those who were unable to master English thoroughly; his revision (1706) of Edward Phillips's *New World of Words*, instead, was meant as a reference work for advanced students; and his *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, an abridgment of his own 1706 work on Phillips, is the first English abridged dictionary¹¹.

¹⁰ See Starnes and Noyes ([1946] 1991: 69), Heddeshimer (1968) and Osselton (1979).

¹¹ A less positive judgement of Kersey's contribution to English lexicography was made by N.E. Osselton who analysed *A New English Dictionary* and concluded that "Kersey may have provided English dictionaries with the ordinary words; but

Leaving aside Kersey's revision of Phillips' dictionary, his own compilations will be focussed on here, in order to assess how women are linguistically and lexicographically represented in his dictionaries and to what extent this mirrors the contemporary attitude towards the female sex. Kersey's dictionaries will not be analysed one by one, but the 1702 edition of *A New English Dictionary*, the revised 1713 second edition of the same dictionary, and the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* of 1708 will be considered as making up one single lexicographical corpus: this seems to be the most feasible way to study Kersey's women-related entries in his dictionaries, as the 1702 dictionary was heavily revised for the 1713 edition and the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* was published exactly in between the two, so that correspondences are as relevant as differences among them.

As far as the paratextual material is concerned, women are mentioned in the title-page of *A New English Dictionary*, both editions, as part of the target users:

The Whole Digested into Alphabetical Order, and Chiefly Designed for the Benefit of Young Scholars, Tradesmen, Artificers, and the Female Sex, Who Would Learn to Spell Truly; Being so Fitted to Every Capacity that it May Be a Continual Help to All that Want an Instructor. (Kersey 1702: Title-page)

Women are mentioned again at the end of the Preface, with a wider scope referred to in the second edition of 1713:

'Tis also altogether needless to insist upon the apparent usefulness of this small Volume, to all Persons who are not perfectly Masters of our most elegant Speech; or on the assistance it gives to young *Scholars, Tradesmen, Artificers, Foreigners and others*; and particularly, to the more ingenious Practitioners of the FEMALE SEX, in attaining to the true Sense and method of Spelling such Words, as from time to time, they are dispos'd to make use of upon any Occasion. (Kersey 1713: vi)

Two minor but not irrelevant differences can be noticed between this and the corresponding passage in the earlier edition: here, as in the

it was left to his imitators and successors to evolve a satisfactory technique for dealing with them" (1979: 561). See also Miyoshi (2017: 114-130).

1713 title-page, foreigners are also mentioned among the prospective target users; as to women, the dictionary will help them, not only to spell correctly (as in the 1702 edition) but also to understand the meaning of words¹².

No mention, instead, is made of women in the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, either in the title-page or in the very brief Preface, the learned origin of this abridged dictionary probably excluding women from its intended readership.

As final introductory remarks, a few statistical data are in order: the first edition of *A New English Dictionary* lists around 28,000 entry-words, quite a few of them simply there for the sake of their spellings (in fact, no definitions follow); in the 1713 revised edition, some of these latter entry-words are given a proper definition, but in most cases they are simply deleted, and, as a matter of fact, the 1713 entry-word list is reduced to about 21,000; the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, instead, has some 35,000 entries. As far as women-related entries are concerned, the selected corpus consists of 520 entries, collected by comparing 344 entries from *A New English Dictionary*¹³ with 378 entries from the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*: of the 520 entries, 202 are listed in both dictionaries, whereas 142 are to be found in *A New English Dictionary* only, and 176 in the *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* only.

3. Women in John Kersey's dictionaries

A taxonomy of John Kersey's women-related entries can group and organise words in a number of different semantic fields. Words may denote factual realities and objects – and as such they can be considered (theoretically at least) as neutral data – or may refer, in either a denotative or connotative way, to more personally or socially relevant facts, behaviours and realities. However, it should be borne in mind that any item of reality, even the simplest and apparently

¹² On this passage from the Preface see Fleming (1993: 203).

¹³ Either or both editions, the first having 35 fewer pertinent entries than the second. The Appendix to the 1713 edition includes “A Table of the Proper Names of Women” and “A Table of Nick-Names, or English Christian Names Shorten'd”, but the female names here have been ignored for the present survey.

innocent one, may be represented by an ideologically loaded word conveying biased images¹⁴.

3.1. Articles of clothing

Entries defining the articles of clothing make up a fairly large group; here women are generally mentioned in the definitions as a matter of fact. If the lists from the two dictionaries are compared, it will be noticed that *DAB*, though the bigger book, has fewer words from this semantic field¹⁵:

NED – (48 entries) ALAMODE, BEAD, BOBBINS, BODKIN, BUSK, CAUL, CLOGGS, COMMODE, CORNET, FAN, FARDINGALE, FAVOUR, FILLET, FURBELOE, GEAR, GORGET, HOOD, HOUSEWIFE'S CLOTH, JUMP, KERCHIEF, MANTOE, MAZARINE HOOD, MINNEKINS, NIGHT-RAIL, PAINT, PATTEN, PENDANT, PETTICOAT, PIN, PINNER, PLACKET, PURFLE, RIBBON, A WOMAN'S SAFEGUARD, SCARF, SHADE, SHIFT, SMOCK, STAYS, STOLE, STOMACHER, TAPE, TIPPET, TIRE, TUCKER, UMBRELLA, WEED, WHITTLE.

DAB – (31 entries) ALAMODE, BRACELET, CAUL, COMMODE, CORNET, COSHACKS, FAN, FARD, FARDINGALE, FILLET, FURBELOE, GEAR, GORGET, HOUSEWIFE'S CLOTH, JUMP, MANTOE OR MANTUA-GOWN, NIGHT-RAIL, PLACKET, RIBBON, RUFF, SCARF, SHIFT, TIPPET, TIRE, TUCKER, UMBRELLA OR UMBRELLO, WEED OR WEDE, WHISK, WHITTLE, WIMPLE, WREATH.

DAB does not list such everyday names as *petticoat* and *smock* or the name of some accessories (BEAD, KERCHIEF, SHADE, etc. in *NED*); on the other hand, it includes more peculiar and often polysemous words¹⁶, such as

¹⁴ Henceforth *A New English Dictionary* will be referred to as *NED*; if no date follows, this means that the entry or entries under scrutiny are found in both editions. Examples will be taken from *NED* 1713, unless the entries in *NED* 1702 have a different wording that is worth mentioning; minor differences in orthography, capitalisation and punctuation will be considered irrelevant to the discussion. The *Dictionary Anglo-Britannicum* will be referred to as *DAB*. When a given entry is included in both *NED* and *DAB*, no acronym will be used.

¹⁵ Italics are used to refer to words as lexemes; small caps to refer to them as dictionary entry-words. Orthographical and morphological variant forms are reproduced as they are in the original entries.

¹⁶ Since the various meanings of a polysemous word are often included in one and the same entry and – more importantly – since the women-related meaning at least

- DAB* – COSHACKS, a sort of Girdles worn by Turkish Women.
- DAB* – RUFF, an old-fashion'd Ornament for the Neck: Also a kind of Fighting-bird. Also a Fish that is somewhat smaller than a Perch. Also a Beating, or getting the Better at a Game of Cards.
- DAB* – WIMPLE, the Muffler or plaited Linnen-cloth, which Nuns wear about their Neck; also a Flag, or Streamer.
- DAB* – WREATH, a Garland; a Roll, such as Women wear on their Heads to carry a Milk-Pail, &c. Also the Torce or twisted work in Architecture: Among Hunters, a Boar's Tail.

Moreover, its definitions are usually more detailed than *NED*'s:

- NED* – A MANTOE, a sort of Gown worn by Women.
- DAB* – MANTOE OR MANTUA-GOWN, a loose upper Garment, now generally worn by Women, instead of a straight-bodied Gown.
- NED* – A NIGHT-RAIL, a Linnen Whisk which Women wear in their Chambers.
- DAB* – NIGHT-RAIL, a sort of Gorget, or Whisk, which Women usually wear in their Chambers.
- NED* – An UMBRELLA OR UMBRELLO, a skreen us'd by Women to shelter them from Rain; a Frame to keep off the Sun from a Window.
- DAB* – UMBRELLA OR UMBRELLO, a kind of broad Fan or Skreen, commonly us'd by Women to shelter them from Rain. Also a Wooden Frame cover'd with Cloth to keep off the Sun from a Window¹⁷.

These terms and their entries mirror the recent or contemporary changes in fashion – a RUFF is “an *old-fashion'd* Ornament for the neck”, while a MANTOE is “a loose upper Garment, *now generally* worn by women, instead of a straight-bodied Gown” (italics mine in both definitions) – and, in more general terms, help to paint the new picture of product innovation, modern commerce, increasing material wealth, new consumer behaviour, and better standards of living in the eighteenth century¹⁸.

sometimes derives from another one, the entries from *NED* and *DAB* will usually be reproduced in full.

¹⁷ *DAB* also has the entry “UMBELLA, (L.) a little Shadow a Skreen-fan, Umbrella or Bongrace. Among Herbalists, Umbella are taken for the round Tufts or Heads of some Plants”.

¹⁸ See Berg (2005). Of course, the abovementioned articles of clothing refer to the

3.2. Other objects referring to women

DAB is also richer than *NED* when names for other objects somehow connected to women are listed in the dictionary. For instance, while *PILLION* has the same definition in the dictionaries, “a kind of Saddle for Women to ride (up)on”, some differences stand out in other cases. It may be a matter of more or less elaborate definitions or detailed polysemous entries, as in

DAB – PALFREY, a Horse of State for a Princess, or great Lady.

NED – A PALFREY, a Horse of State for a great Lady.

DAB – FAVOUR, Kindness, good Office: Also, a small Present made by a lady; a Knot of Ribbons, worn at a Wedding.

NED – A FAVOUR, a Knot of Ribbons.

DAB – TUMBREL, an Engine commonly call'd a Ducking-stool; also an old Word for a Dung-Cart.

NED – A TUMBREL, a Dung-Cart, a Ducking-stool.

The latter example here is particularly interesting because, unlike *NED*, *DAB*'s wordlist includes two further synonymic entries:

DAB – CUCKING-STOOL OR DUCKING-STOOL, an Engine us'd for the Punishments of Scolds and brawling Women.

DAB – GOGING-STOOL, a Ducking-stool.

These entries are reminiscent of the condition of inferiority and discrimination women lived in: ducking-stools were used to punish the so-called ‘scolding women’, who had been charged with breach of the peace. Technically speaking, there were differences among a *ducking stool* (a sort of chair put at the end of an oscillating plank, so that it could be plunged in water), a *cucking stool* or *goging-stool* (literally, defecation chair, as commodes were often used for the same kind of punishment) and a *tumbrel* (a tipcart, usually used for carrying dung, sand or stones). Anyway, whatever their precise nature and usage, they were all instruments of social humiliation and censure that – if we are to believe Kersey's definitions in his

life of the middling and upper classes. Still, *NED* also has such an entry as “A TATTERED HOUSE-WIFE, a Woman clothed with Rags”.

1706 revision of E. Phillips's *New World of Words*, i.e. the dictionary *DAB* was abstracted from – were originally in use for men as well (for example, fraudulent tradespeople) but in the early eighteenth century primarily for women accused of scolding, slandering and backbiting¹⁹, less often for sexual offences like having an illegitimate child or being a prostitute.

3.3. Women's jobs and living conditions

Quite a few entry-words in Kersey's dictionaries refer to women's jobs, occupations, or living conditions. These words can be divided into different groups, for both semantic and formal reasons.

In the first group women are simply defined by their social status and conditions or occupation, as in the case of *GOVERNANTE*, *HEROINE*, *LAND-LADY* (*NED*), *MATRON* (*DAB*), *MERCURY WOMEN* (*DAB*), *MIDWIFE* (*NED*), *MIDWIFERY* (*NED*), *MILLENER*, *NEIF*, *NUN*, *NUNNERY*, *NURSE* (*NED*), *NURSE-KEEPER* (*NED*), *QUEEN*, *RECLUSE*, *SPINSTER* (*NED*), and *TENDER*. A sample comparison will show that the definitions are often identical, but either dictionary may be more precise in a few cases:

DAB / *NED* – *MILLENER*, one that sells Ribbons, Gloves, &c.

DAB – *NEIF*, OR *NEIFT*, (L.T.), a Bond Woman.

NED – A *NEIF*, (in Law) a Bondwoman born in one's House.

DAB – *QUEEN*, is either a Sovereign Princess that holds the Crown by Right of Blood, or one that is marry'd to a King; which last is commonly call'd Queen Consort. It is also a Term us'd at Cards and Chess Play.

NED – A *QUEEN*, a Sovereign Princess.

The second group of occupational terms is made of quite a long list of 36 derived words formed with the *-ess* suffix to denote a wide range of female roles:

¹⁹ The relevant entries in Phillips's (1706) edition read: *CUCKING-STOOL*, OR *TUMBREL*, an Engine now us'd for the punishment of Scolds and brawling Women; as in former times, for that of Brewers and Bakers transgressing the Laws; who being set in such a Stool, were plung'd over Head and Ears in Stercore, or stinking Water. *GOGIN-STOOL*, a Ducking for Scolds and Shrews. *TUMBREL*, an Engine contriv'd for the punishment of Scolds and unquiet Women, commonly call'd a Ducking-stool; also an old Word signifying a Dung-Cart.

ABBESS, ACTRESS (*NED*), ADULTERESS (*NED*), AMBASSADRESS, ARCHDUCHESS (*NED*), BARONESS, COHEIRESS (*DAB*), COUNTESS (*NED*), DEACONESS, DISSEISORESS (*DAB*), ELECTORESS, EMBASSADRESS (*DAB*), EMPRESS, GODDESS (*NED*), HEIRESS, HERMITESS (*NED*), HOSTESS, INCHANTRESS, LANDRESS (*DAB*), MARCHIONESS (*NED*), MISTRESS (*NED*), PATRONESS, PEERESS, POETESS, PRIESTESS (*NED*), PRINCESS (*NED*), PRIORESS, PROPHETESS (*NED*), SEAMSTRESS, SHEPHERDESS (*NED*), SORCERESS, SPECTATRESS, SULTANESS, TUTORESS (*NED*), VISCOUNTESS, VOTARESS.

The *-ess* suffix here may convey various subtle nuances of meaning in relation to the different word bases it is attached to. First of all, when the ranks of the nobility or important offices are referred to in the bases, the *-ess* suffix suggests that the female forms are – socially as well as linguistically – dependent on and secondary to the corresponding male ones, as in ARCHDUCHESS “an Archduke’s Wife” (*NED*), BARONESS “a Baron’s Wife”, and the same in COUNTESS (*NED*), ELECTORESS, EMBASSADRESS (*DAB*), EMPRESS, MARCHIONESS (*NED*), PEERESS, PRINCESS, SULTANESS, and VISCOUNTESS. Sometimes, however, an important social status is denoted with no reference to male power, as in PRINCESS “a Female Prince” or PATRONESS “a Female patron”.

In religious language, *-ess* forms may also denote important positions for women, as in ABBESS “a Governess of Nuns” (*DAB*) or “the Governess of a Nunnery” (*NED*), DEACONESS “(in the Primitive Church) a Widow admitted to the Order of a Deacon” (*DAB*) or “(in old Times) a Widow admitted to the Order of a Deacon” (*NED*), PRIORESS “a Governess in a Monastery of Nuns, either in chief or under an Abbess” (*DAB*) or “a Governess in a Cloister of Nuns” (*NED*)²⁰; no such commanding role is implied in other religion-related words as HERMITESS “a Woman-Hermit” (*NED*), PRIESTESS “(among the Heathens) a Woman-Priest” (*NED*), PROPHETESS “a Woman that Prophecies” (*NED*), and VOTARESS “a Female Votary”. GODDESS “a heathen female God” (*NED*) is obviously a very special case.

Female jobs are also referred to in a straightforward, ‘unmarked’ way, e.g. ACTRESS “a Female Stage-player” (*NED*), HOSTESS “the

²⁰ *Governess* is used as a defining term, but it has no entry in either dictionary; only *NED* 1702 has “A GOVERNANTE, or Governess in a family”.

Landlady of an Inn" (*DAB*) or "the good Wife of an Inn" (*NED*), LANDRESS "a Washer-woman" (*DAB*), POETESS "a Female Poet", MISTRESS "a Female Governor or Teacher" (*NED*—although this word may also mean "a Sweet-heart"), [A SEAMSTER or] SEAMSTRESS "[a Man or] Woman that sows (*sic!*) or deals in Linnen", SHEPHERDESS "a Woman Shepherd" (*NED*), TUTORESS "a Female Tutor" (*NED*), etc. In a few words, instead, the *-ess* suffix denotes a condition a woman is in, which may be either positive, as in COHEIRESS "a Woman that shares an Inheritance with another" (*DAB*), DISSEISORESS "a Woman that puts another Person out of his or her Land, &c." (*DAB*), HEIRESS "a female Heir", and SPECTATRESS "a female Beholder"; or negative, as in [A ADULTERER or] an ADULTERESS "[he or] she that commits Adultery" (*NED*), INCHANTRESS "a Witch, or Sorceress" (*DAB*) or "a Sorceress or Witch" (*NED*), and SORCERESS "a Witch or Hag".

A final group of occupational terms comprises those ending in *-trix* as feminine equivalents of masculine nouns in *-tor*, all of them borrowings from Latin only to be found in ancient statutes and legal documents; the definitions in Kersey's dictionaries are often similar or even identical; not surprisingly though, given its more learned source, *DAB* has twice as many as *NED*:

DAB – ADMINISTRATRIX, she that has such Goods and Power committed to her.

NED – ADMINISTRATRIX, a Woman that has such Goods and power Committed to her.

DAB / *NED* – TESTATRIX, a Woman that makes such a Will.

DAB / *NED* – MEDIATRIX, a Woman that mediates.

DAB / *NED* – NEGOTIATRIX, a Woman that Manages.

DAB – BRASIATRIX, a Brewing-Woman, a Female Brewer.

DAB – EXECUTRIX, a Female Executor.

DAB – IMITATOR OR IMITATRIX, a Man or Woman that imitates.

DAB – PROTECTRIX, a Patroness, or Defendress.

Strange as these words may seem²¹, most of them do define an active

²¹ They are all listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, except for *brasiatrix*.

role that women – presumably, in most cases at least, rich upper-class women – were able to play in contemporary society, especially as far as legal dealings were concerned. And yet, since an *executrix* was a woman dealing with the instructions in her husband's will, and since women often survived their husbands, one may wonder whether the feminine equivalent of *executor* was really necessary. *Administratrix*, instead, defined the widow of a man who had left no last will and testament, so that she could only administer his money and property. Finally, *testatrix* must have been used to refer to widows and spinsters only, as married women were forbidden to make a will²².

3.4. Female body and physical condition

The representation of the female body in the arts, literature and, arguably, also in lexicography is less biologically than culturally and ideologically determined, and it has traditionally been used to reinforce a patriarchal view and hierarchy of sexual difference, with women being portrayed as the 'weaker vessel'²³.

Although Kersey defines the word BEAUTY as either "a beautiful, very fair or charming woman" (*DAB*) or "a beautiful or very fair Woman" (*NED*), the pages of his dictionaries are not peopled by such paragons of beauty; we find, instead,

DAB / *NED* – BELDAME, a decrepit old Woman.

DAB – BLOWZE, a fat, red-fac'd blotched Wench.

NED – A BLOWZE, a fat bloated Wench.

NED – A DOWDY, a swarthy gross Woman.

NED – A GREAT MAWKS, a huge nasty Slut.

NED – AN OLD TROT, 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 female illnesses. Indeed, quite a few entries define three stages

²² On these issues see Erickson (1993).

²³ See the references in footnote 5.

of procreation – pregnancy, childbearing and delivery. Some of them are present in both dictionaries, i.e. ABORTION, ABORTIVE, TO BEAR, CHILDIR, IMPREGNATE, MISCARRIAGE, TO MISCARRY, MOTHER, MOTHERHOOD, PREGNANCY, PREGNANT, PROLIFICK, and TRAVEL. Two of them – ABORTION and MOTHER – may be quoted to highlight the different lexicographical styles of *DAB* and *NED*, the former dictionary displaying a more marked tendency to formulate encyclopaedic definitions and to include in one single entry the multiple meanings of a polysemous word, while the latter favours shorter and simpler definitions and tends to formally separate different meanings:

DAB – ABORTION, Miscarriage in Women, or the bringing forth of a Child so long before its time, that is in no Capacity to live.

NED – ABORTION, miscarriage in Women, untimely Birth.

DAB – MOTHER, a Woman that has brought forth a Child; also the Womb in which the Child is form'd, or a Disease in that Part; also, the Dregs of Ale, Beer, Oil, &c.

NED – A MOTHER, a Woman that has brought forth a Child.

NED – The MOTHER, the Womb, or a Disease in that part; the dregs of Oil, Wine, &c.

A dozen childbirth-related entries are only included in *NED* – TO BREED, CHILD, TO CHURCH A WOMAN, TO CONCEIVE, TO DELIVER, DELIVERY, LABOUR, MATERNAL, PROCREATE, PROCREATION, TEEM, THROWS OR PANGS, TO TRAVEL – the 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*.

Most of the 27 childbirth-related words only to be found in *DAB* are straight from Latin or Greek, thus confirming that this dictionary, though an abridged one, was compiled for an educated readership:

ALLANTOIS OR ALLANTOIDES, AMBLOSIS, AMBLTICKS, 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.

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 (thus establishing a connection between anatomy, psychology and pathology):

DAB – FERVOUR OF THE MATRIX, a Distemper when the whole Substance of the Womb is extreme hot.

DAB – HYSTERICA, Medicines against the Diseases of the Womb.

DAB – HYSTERICA PASSIO, a Disease in Women commonly call'd Fits of the Mother.

DAB – MATRIX, the Matrice or Mother. Also the Pith in Trees or Herbs.

NED – The MATRICE OR MATRIX, the Mother or Womb.

DAB – VAPOUR, a watery Exhalation, or Steam, rais'd by Fire or the Heat of the Sun. In a Medicinal Sense, Vapours is taken for Fits of the Mother, or Melancholy; a Disease.

NED – VAPOURS, (in a Physical sense) Fits of the Mother or Melancholy; a Disease.

NED – The WOMB, or Mother, in Women²⁴.

It might be argued that there is no harm intended here, on the lexicographer's part, as Kersey may simply have given voice to the medical knowledge of his times. Still, the (at least implicit) connection between female anatomy and irrational behaviour cannot be overlooked, because *MAN* is defined in *NED* as "a Rational Creature" while the etymological note of *WOMAN* – philologically, a wrong one – identifies women with their uterus:

A *WOMAN*, (q.d. Womb-man) a Female Man; the word Man or Mon in Saxon (as *Homo* in Latin) signifying both Sexes.

A few more terms referring to the anatomy, physiology or pathology of women are listed in both dictionaries (*TERMS*, *WILL-JILL*), sometimes in *NED* only (*MENSTRUOUS*, *TEAT*, *WHITES*), but more often only in

²⁴ See also the entries for *MOTHER* quoted above.

DAB: ADOLESCENCY, ANDROGYNOUS, HYSTERALGIA, HYSTERICAL OR HYSTERICK, HYSTEROCELE, HYSTEROTOMIA, LIGAMENTA UTERI, MAMMA, MATRICALIA, MULIEBRIA, NYMPHOMANIA, UTERI ASCENSIO, UTERI PROCIDENTIA, UTERINE, UTERINE FURY, UTERUS, VIRGINEUS MORBUS, VULVA.

3.5. Women's social role and personal behaviour

If the female body is used to mark the distance between men and women, the ideological model of male dominance versus female subservience founded on gender-based distinctions can best be traced in words describing women's social role and personal behaviour. These words may have either positive or, more often, negative denotations and connotations.

Even the word that, in eighteenth-century English, may best portray women in a fully positive social and/or personal light, i.e. *LADY*, is worth commenting on, since *NED* defines it as "a Woman of Noble Birth", whereas the definition in *DAB* stresses her inevitably minor role, subordinate to her male counterpart: "a Person of Quality's Wife, or Daughter".

Other words have a positive, or at least neutral, descriptive meaning in Kersey's dictionaries. For example, *DAB*'s wordlist includes *DAMSEL*, *FROW*, *LEAFDIAN* OR *HLEAFDIAN*, *MADEMOISELLE* and *MEDEWIFE*. *NED* has simpler, everyday words, such as *GENTLEWOMAN*, *GIRL*, *GIRLISH*, *GOOD-WIFE* OR *GOODY*, *GRANDAME*, *HOUSEWIFE*, *HOUSEWIFERY*, *LADISHIP*, *LASS*, *WOMANISH*.

Two entries worth commenting on are *VIRAGO* and *COURTESY* / *CURSEY*. The former is defined as "a stout, or manly woman" in *NED* 1702, while both *DAB* and *NED* 1713 have it as "a manly, or courageous Woman" – thus showing that women may be valued in a positive way if they take on a supposedly male quality²⁵. As to *COURTESY* / *CURSEY*, while *DAB* has one single entry, "COURTESY, Civility, Kindness, a good Turn; a Cursy, or Reverence done by a

²⁵ A few decades later, however, in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* the positive meaning of the word would be balanced by a negative one: "VIRAGO. *n.s.* [Latin.] 1. A female warrior; a woman with the qualities of a man. [...] 2. It is commonly used in detestation for an impudent turbulent woman. [...] (Johnson 1755: s.v. VIRAGO).

Woman”, *NED* 1713 improves on the 1702 edition by giving each sense its own entry: *COURTESY* reproduces the first sense of *DAB*’s definition, whereas the expression *TO MAKE A CURSEY* is given its alphabetical position under *cursey* and is defined as “to bend with the Knees, as Women do in token of Respect”, thus making explicit the most symbolic gesture of female subordination to men. *NED* 1713 also lists an entry defining an attitude that is perhaps not quite so compliant: “*TO BRIDLE IT*, to draw the Chin into the Neck, as Women do”.

A positive view of women is implied in the presentation of those words that define a restrained attitude to sexuality. Both dictionaries include *CHASTE*, *CHASTITY*, *MAID*, *MAIDEN*, *VIRGIN* and *VIRGINITY*. *DAB* has the less common words *MODEST*, *MODESTY*, *PUCELAGE*, *PUDICITY* and *VIRGO* as well.

In both dictionaries, however, words abound that criticise women’s unruly behaviour. They display a few recurring features: (a) the word *woman* is often replaced in the definitions by such more semantically loaded terms as *wench*, *slut* or *girl*; (b) these nouns will systematically collocate with negative adjectives (*ill-bred*, *ill-natured*, *nasty*, *sorry*, etc.); (c) a number of entries clearly show how the negative connotation attached to words describing women derives from the metaphorical extension of words that in themselves have nothing to do with women (e.g., *crack*, *jade*, *ramp/rampant/ramping*, *rig*, *vixen*); (d) it is sometimes difficult to explain the specific negative connotation of a given term since, for example, moral filth may be mirrored by physical dirtiness. The stereotypical female tendency to complain loudly and behave improperly is denounced in such entries as

NED – A HOIDON, a clownish, ill-bred Wench.

NED – RAMP, OR RAMP-SCUTTLE, a ramping Girl.

DAB – RAMPANT, ramping, wanton: In Heraldry, it is when a Lion is painted in a Posture of climbing, or standing upright on the hinder Legs.

NED 1702 – RAMPANT (in Heraldry) when a beast is painted rearing up the right foot as it were ready to combat; as a lion rampant.

NED 1713 – RAMPANT, ramping, wanton.

NED 1713 – A LION RAMPANT (in Heraldry) one painted in a climbing posture, or rearing up his Fore-feet.

DAB – RIG, a Horse that has had one of his Stones cut, and yet has got a Colt; a ramping, or wanton Girl.

NED – A RIG, OR TOM-RIG, a ramping wanton Girl.

NED – A SCOLD, a scolding Woman.

NED – A SHREW OR SCOLD, a curst, ill-natured Woman.

DAB – TERMAGANT, a ranting, lusty Woman.

NED 1702 – A VIXEN, OR FIXEN a fox's cub; also an arrant scold, or brawling wench.

DAB / *NED* 1713 – VIXEN, OR FIXEN, a Fox's Cub; a forward Child; a ranting Woman.

whereas being idle, untidy or dirty is condemned in

DAB / *NED* – CURTAIL, a Drab, or nasty Slut.

DAB – DOXY, a She Begger, a Trull.

NED – DOXY, a she Begger, a sorry Wench.

DAB – JILL OR JILL-FLIRT, an idle Slut, a sorry Wench.

NED – A JILL OR JILL-FLURT, a sorry Wench, an idle Slut.

NED – A MAULKIN OR MAUKIN, an Oven-mop, a scarecrow, a nasty Wench.

DAB – PUZZLE, a dirty Slut; also a Difficulty or Trouble.

NED – A PUZZLE, a difficulty or Trouble; a dirty Slut.

DAB – QUEAN, a Drab, a Jade, a nasty Slut.

NED – A QUEAN, a Drab or nasty Slut, a Scold.

DAB – SLATTERN, a slattering Woman, i.e. one that minds nothing, but leaves all at random.

NED – A SLUT, a dirty nasty Wench.

NED – SLUTTISH, that belongs to, or acts like a slut.

NED – A TRAPES, a meer Slattern, a dirty Slut.

DAB / *NED* – TROLLOP, an idle, nasty Slut.

DAB – TRUNDLE-TAIL, a Wench that runs up and down with a draggled Tail.

NED – A TRUNDLE-TAIL, a Wench that runs about with a dragged Tail.

Quite unsurprisingly, criticism is even harsher when sexually unrestrained women (or reputedly so) and their sexual behaviour are defined:

NED – A CRACK, a cleft, a flaw, a noise, as of a thing that is breaking; a boasting Fellow, a light Housewife.

DAB – GIGLET, OR GIGLOT, a wanton Woman or Strumpet. *Chaucer*.

NED – A JADE, a sorry Horse or Mare, a lewd Wench.

NED – JADISH, belonging to a Jade; as, a Jadish trick.

NED – A JILT, a lewd Woman that puts Tricks on those who have to do with her.

NED – To JILT, to play the Jilt.

3.6. Love and sexual relations

The lexis of love and sexual relations between men and women makes up the largest section in the corpus of Kersey's words on women, including more than one hundred items. The examples, therefore, will be divided into five different sub-categories: courtship; marriage; adultery; chastity, unchastity, and prostitution; and rape.

3.6.1. Courtship

Words denoting legal and 'respectable' forms of sexual relations before marriage stress the man's role: AMOROSO, COURTSHIP (*NED*), GALLANT, TO GALLANT, GALLANTIZE (*DAB*), GALLANTRY, INAMORATO (*DAB*), SERENADE, TO SERENADE ONE, SUITER/SUITOR and TO SUITOR all explicitly or implicitly refer to man's active role toward his MISTRESS "a Sweet-heart" (*NED*) or PRETTY PARNEL "a young Female Lover" (*NED*).

More ambiguous in their lexicographic presentation are BILLET DOUX, TO DALLY, INAMOURED, PARAMOUR, VALENTINE(S), and TO WOO (*NED*), as they might refer to women as well. It is also worth noting that, whereas COQUETRY defines the behaviour that is typical of a COQUET, i.e. "a wanton Girl, a fiscing Gossip" (*NED* 1713), the variant form COCQUET in *DAB* may refer to either women or men:

DAB – COQUETRY, (*F.*) skill in carrying on amorous Intrigues, Effeminacy, Wantonness.

NED – COQUETRY, skill in carrying on amorous Intrigues, Wantonness.

DAB – COCQUET, (*F.*) a Beau, a Gallant; also a Girl that speaks fair to several at once.

3.6.2. Marriage

Whatever the precise nature of courtship, when we move on from courtship to marriage it is not surprising at all to find a strikingly high number of entries dealing with legal and economic terms. In fact, it was only in 1753 that Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act was passed, which remedied the total chaos of marriage settlements in early eighteenth-century Britain, all the more so as contemporary marriage was basically an economic issue, rather than an affective one²⁶. Given the more learned nature of *DAB*, legal and economic terms abound there, only some of them listed in *NED* as well:

ADMEASUREMENT OF DOWER, ADVENTITIA DOS, AFFIANCE, ALIMONY (also *NED*), AMENABLE, BARON AND FEMME, COGNATION, COMMITTEE OF THE KING, COURTESY OF ENGLAND, COVERT, COVERTURE, DESPONSATION, DEUTEROGAMY, DIVORCE, BILL OF DIVORCE, DOTE ASSIGNANDA, DOTE UNDE NIHIL HABET, DOWRY, ENDOWMENT (also *NED*), ENDOWMENT DE LA PLUS BELLE PART, ENTRY CAUSA MATRIMONII PRAELOCUTI, FEME COVERT, FRANK MARRIAGE, FRANK BANK OR FREE BENCH, GENEROSA, MULIER, MULIERATUS FILIUS, WRIT OF NEIFTY, PARAPHERNA, QUARENTAIN OR QUARENTINE, QUARENTENA HABENDA, QUEEN DOWAGER (also *NED*), QUEEN GOLD (also *NED*), RELICT (also *NED*), SECTIS NON FACIENDIS, TO SEQUESTER (also *NED*), SPINSTER (also *NED*), SPOUSE-BREACH, PETTY TREASON, UXOR, UXORIUM, WIDOW OF THE KING, WIDOW-BENCH.

Semi-technical or everyday words dealing with marriage life are also well-documented in Kersey's dictionaries:

AFFINITY (*NED*), ALLIANCE (*DAB*), BACHELOR, BACHELORSHIP (*NED*), BANNS OR BANES OF MATRIMONY, TO BED WITH (*NED*), BEDD-ALE OR BIDD-ALE (*DAB*), TO BETROTH, BIGAMY, BRIDAL (*DAB*), BRIDE, BRIDEGROOM (*NED*), CELIBACY, TO COHABIT, COHABITATION, CONJUGAL, CONNUBIAL (*DAB*), DISPARAGEMENT (*NED*), DIVORCE (*NED*), TO DIVORCE (*NED*), DIVORCEMENT (*NED*), DOWAGER (*NED*), DOWRY (*NED*), TO ENDOW, EPITHALAMIUM, ESPOUSALS, TO ESPOUSE, FAVOUR (*DAB*), TO HEN-PECK (*NED*), HONEY-MOON, HUSBAND (*NED*), MARRIAGE, MARRIAGEABLE, TO MARRY (*NED*), TO MATCH (*DAB*),

²⁶ See Lemmings (1996), Stone (1992) and Evans (2005). The idea that economic advantage was very often behind courtship and marriage in the eighteenth century largely informs the content of John Cleland's *Dictionary of Love* of 1753 (see Iamartino 2013).

MATRIMONIAL, MATRIMONY, MISOGAMIST (*DAB*), MISOGAMY (*DAB*), NUPTIAL, PARANYMPH (*DAB*), POLYGAMY, QUEEN CONSORT (*NED*), REPUDIATION (*DAB*), TO REPUDIATE, SPOUSE, UNENDOWED (*NED*), UNMARRIED (*NED*), TO UNMARRY (*NED*), TO WED, WEDDING (*NED*), WEDLOCK, WIDOW (*NED*), WIDOWER, WIDOWHOOD, WIFE.

Some of these entries deserve to be quoted from and briefly commented on. The entry *MARRIAGE* clearly shows the different defining style in the two dictionaries, *DAB* preferring a more formal, technical definition, *NED* a more homely one. *HUSBAND*, *BIGAMY*, *TO DIVORCE*, *TO REPUDIATE* and even *TO WED* show who wears the trousers in the eighteenth-century family. If we are to believe Kersey's definition of *POLYGAMY*, this is an option open to women too; more realistically, *TO HEN-PECK* husbands is a more feasible alternative:

DAB – *MARRIAGE*, a Civil Contract, by which a Man and a Woman are join'd together.

NED – *MARRIAGE*, the joyning together of man and wife.

NED – *HUSBAND*, (q.d. house-band) a married man, the master of a family.

DAB / *NED* – *BIGAMY*, (*G.*) the having of two Wives.

NED – *TO DIVORCE*, to put away one's wife.

DAB – *TO REPUDIATE*, to divorce, or put away one's Wife.

NED – *TO REPUDIATE*, to divorce or put away.

NED – *TO WED*, to marry a wife.

DAB – *POLYGAMY*, a being marry'd to several Wives, or Husbands at the same time.

NED – *TO HEN-PECK*, a Term us'd when a Woman gets the mastery of her Husband.

3.6.3. Adultery

Of course, yesterday as much as today, another feasible solution to unhappiness in marriage was adultery. Kersey is not biased at all in this case: an *ADULTERER* is "he that commits adultery" (*NED*) and an *ADULTERESS* is "she that commits adultery" (*NED*); likewise, the adjective *ADULTEROUS* and the abstract noun *ADULTERY* put the blame on both sexes. However, other words in the language testify that women, not men, are keen on breaking the marriage vows – or,

at least, are linguistically and lexicographically constructed as being a threat to marital union:

DAB – CORNUTE, horned, or having Horns; a Cuckold: Also a kind of Chymical Still, or luted Mattrass, with a crooked Neck.

NED – A CORNUTE, a horned Cuckold, a kind of Chymical Still.

NED – TO CORNUTE ONE, to make him a Cuckold.

DAB – CUCKOLD, one whose Wife's lewd Pranks are said to have grafted Horns on his Head.

NED – A CUCKOLD, one whose Wife's lewd Pranks are said to graft Horns on his Head.

NED – TO CUCKOLD ONE, to make him a Cuckold.

NED – TO ELOPE, to leave one's Husband, and live elsewhere with an Adulterer.

DAB – WITTAL, a contented Cuckold.

NED – A WITTAL, a contented Cuckold that wits, or knows all, i.e. knows himself to be so.

The linguistic and lexicographic results of this state of affairs are the entries *BASTARD*, *TO BASTARDIZE* and *BASTARDY*.

3.6.4. Chastity, unchastity, and prostitution

Chastity, of course, was expected of women before marriage; before and after marriage, all forms of licentiousness were condemned upon. Despite the double standard of sexual morality that praised promiscuous men and denigrated promiscuous women (Thomas 1959), the most relevant words denoting chastity and unchastity in *NED* and *DAB* refer to both men and women:

NED – AMOURS, Love-concerns or Intrigues.

NED – TO BUGGER, to commit Buggery, the coupling of one Man with another; or of a Man or Woman with a Beast.

DAB – BUGGERY, the Coupling of one Man with another, or of a Man or Woman with a brute Beast.

DAB – COITION, an Assembling or Meeting together; Carnal Copulation: Also that mutual drawing Faculty, or Tendency towards each other, which is found between Iron and the Load-stone.

DAB – COPULATION, (*L.*) a coupling or joyning together; carnal coupling between Male and Female.

NED – COPULATION, a coupling between Male and Female.

DAB – DEBAUCHERY, corruption of Manners, Licentiousness, Lewdness.

DAB / NED – FORNICATION, the Act of Uncleanness between single Persons.

DAB – LEACHER, a leacherous or lustful Person.

NED – A LEACHER, a lustful Person.

DAB – RIBALDRY, OR RIBAUDRY, (*F.*) Whoredom, Debauchery, lewd, or licentious Talking.

NED – RIBALDRY, Whoredom, Debauchery, lewd talking.

DAB – VENERY, the Act of Carnal Copulation. Lustfulness; also the Art, or Exercise of Hunting.

Only a few words and definitions stress men's responsibility for morally illicit behaviour, and women's acquiescence to it:

DAB – CONCUBINAGE, the keeping of a Concubine, or Miss; Fornication.

NED – CONCUBINAGE, the keeping of

NED – A CONCUBINE, a Woman that lies and lives with a Man, as if she were his Wife.

DAB – LEMAN, (*O.*) a Concubine, a Harlot.

DAB – MISS, a Title given to a young woman; also a kept Mistress, a Lady of Pleasure.

Taken together, Kersey's dictionaries list more than 30 entries to denote prostitution and related words. Here again, the terms of reproach or disgrace may derive from semantic changes by which words acquire unfavourable connotations, so that the positive or neutral meaning of a given word coexists with the negative one in the same entry or in contiguous ones:

DAB – BAGGAGE, Soldiers Furniture and Necessaries, Provision for an Army: Also a Trull, a Soldier's Punk, a Camp-Whore.

NED – BAGGAGE, Furniture and Necessaries for an Army.

NED – A BAGGAGE, a Soldier's Trull, a Camp-whore.

DAB – BAWD, a lewd Woman that makes it her Business to debauch others for Gain; a Procuress.

NED – A BAWD, a Lewd Woman that debauches others for Gain.

- DAB* – COURTESAN OR COURTEZAN, a Lady, a Lady of Pleasure.
DAB – CUCQUEAN, a Wench, or Whore.
DAB – DAMISELLA, (*O.L.*) a light Damsel, a Miss, a Lady of Pleasure.
DAB – DRAB, a common Whore, a dirty Slut.
NED – DRAB, a common Strumpet, a nasty Slut.
DAB – FLIRT OR JILL-FLIRT, a sorry Baggage, a light House-wife.
NED – A FLIRT OR JILL-FLIRT, a light House-wife.
DAB – HARLOT, a Whore.
NED – A HARLOT, a Whore, so called from Arlotte, the Concubine of Robert II. D. of Normandy, and Mother to K. Will. I.
DAB – A PROSTITUTE, (*L.*) a common Harlot, a shameless Whore.
NED – A PROSTITUTE, a common Harlot.
NED – A PUNK, an ugly, ill-favoured Strumpet.
NED – A PUSS, a Cat, a sorry Wench.
DAB – STRUMPET, a light Housewife, a common Harlot.
NED – A STRUMPET, a common Harlot.
DAB – TRULL, a sorry Wench, or pitiful Baggage.
NED – A TRULL, a sorry Wench, a vile Strumpet.
DAB – WENCH, a Maid, or Girl; a Whore, or Crack.
NED 1702 – A WENCH, a young girl; light housewife, or strumpet.
NED 1713 – A WENCH, a young Maid or Girl; a Whore or Crack.
NED – A WHORE, a lewd Woman, that lets out the use of her Body for Hire.

A number of entries focus on the activity itself and its context:

- DAB* / *NED* – BAWDRY, a Bawd's Trade, or Imployment.
DAB – BAWDY, lewd, filthy, smutty; also filthy Words, or Discourse.
NED – BAWDY, lewd, smutty; also filthy Discourse.
DAB – BORDEL, (*S.*) a small Cottage: Also a Stews or Bawdy-house.
DAB – BROTHEL OR BROTHEL-HOUSE, a Stews, or Bawdy house.
DAB – BROTHELRY, Bawdry, Lewdness.
DAB – TO PROSTITUTE, to expose or set open to every one that comes, to yield up one's Body and Honour to Lust, to sensual Pleasure, or mercenary Interest.

NED – TO PROSTITUTE, to set open to every one that comes, to give up one's self to Lust, &c.

DAB – PROSTITUTION, the Act of Prostituting.

NED – PROSTITUTION, a prostituting.

DAB – PUTAGE, (F.L.T.) Whoredom.

DAB – PUTANISM, a Whore's Trade or Living.

DAB – STEWS, those Places that were heretofore allow'd in *England* to Women of professed Incontinency: Brothel-houses.

NED – The STEWS, or common Bawdy-Houses.

NED – WHOREDOM, the vile Acts or Practice of Whores.

NED – WHORISH, belonging to, or given to Whoredom.

Other entries define the men who go to prostitutes:

DAB / *NED* – FORNICATOR, a Haunter of Stews, a Whoremonger.

DAB – PIMP, a Procurer of, or an Attendant upon Whores.

NED – A PIMP, one that procures or waits on Whores.

DAB – TO PIMP, to play the Pimp.

NED – TO PIMP, to follow such a base Employ.

DAB – RIBAUD, (O.S.) a luxurious Spendthrift; a Whoremonger.

NED – TO WENCH, to keep Wenches company, to go a Whoring.

DAB – WENCHER, OR WENCHING-MAN, one that keeps Wenches Company, or goes a whoring.

NED – TO WHORE OR GO A WHORING, to keep company with Whores.

NED – A WHORE-MASTER OR WHORE-MONGER, one that follows or keeps Whores.

3.6.5. Rape

Men may be responsible for sexual assault against women. With the partial exception of STUPRATION, all the pertinent words and entries in Kersey's dictionaries refer to violence against virgins (as if violence at home and in married life did not exist):

DAB – TO DEFLOUR OR TO DEFLOWER, to ravish a Virgin; to take away the Grace, or Lustre of a thing.

NED – TO DEFLOUR OR DEFLOWER, to ravish a Virgin, to take away the grace of a thing.

DAB – TO FORCE, to oblige or take by Force; to Ravish.

DAB – RAPE, a wild Radish; also a Tool us'd by Farriers; Also the Stalks of the Clusters of Grapes when they have been dry'd and freed from the Grapes; Also the carrying away of a Virgin, with an Intent to deflower, or to marry her against her Consent: Also the Act of Violence itself committed upon the Body of a Woman.

NED – A RAPE, a wild Radish, a Farrier's Tool; the carrying away, or forcing of a Virgin.

DAB – TO RAVISH, to take, or snatch away, to commit a Rape upon a Virgin; also to charm, or please exceedingly.

NED – TO RAVISH, to commit a Rape, to charm or please exceedingly.

DAB – RAVISHMENT, the ravishing, or violent deflowering of a Virgin; also a Rupture, or Transport of Joy, &c.

NED – RAVISHMENT, the ravishing or deflow'ring of a Virgin, a transport of Joy, &c.

DAB – STUPRATION, the ravishing of a Woman, the committing a Rape.

3.7. Men and women as worlds apart

A final, small list of examples is meant to emphasise that, according to Kersey's contemporary life-styles and mindset, men could wield their social and psychological power over women not only if they projected themselves as physically, socially and culturally different, but also, in a way, if they kept them at a distance and did not bother about them at all.

If *VIRAGO* is positively defined because such a woman adopts a supposedly typical male behaviour (see § 3.5 above), the definitions of *EFFEMINACY*, *EFFEMINATE*, *TO EFFEMINATE* and *TO WOMANIZE IT* conversely put the blame on men who are found guilty of unmanly, female weakness:

DAB / *NED* – *EFFEMINACY*, Womanish Softness.

DAB – *EFFEMINATE*, Woman-like, delicate, nice.

NED – *EFFEMINATE*, Woman-like, delicate.

DAB – *TO EFFEMINATE*, to make Womanish or Wanton, to soften by Voluptuousness.

NED – *TO EFFEMINATE*, to make Womanish or wanton.

NED – *TO WOMANIZE IT*, to act or behave one's self like a Woman.

And there is a social stigma attached to the definitions of COTQUEAN and UXORIOUS, as if mixing with women to excess (“too busy”, “over-fond”) might mean denying one’s personal and social role as a man:

DAB – COTQUEAN, a Man that is too busy in meddling with Womens Affairs.

NED – UXORIOUS, that is overfond of, or dotes upon his Wife.

4. Conclusion

Sidney Landau once wrote that “Dictionaries are comparable to archeological sites waiting to be excavated” (Landau 1985: 268). Usually, dictionaries aim to describe the living language of their own times, but language use is rooted in past or present – or, better, past and present – worldviews. Historians of lexicography, then, may ‘unearth’ language data but also immaterial cultural items, shared ideas, social attitudes, etc.

The present survey of John Kersey’s lexicographical description of women-related words in his dictionaries confirms the hypothesis that dictionaries – perhaps more than other cultural artefacts – do mirror the linguistic and extra-linguistic world they are produced in. John Kersey was certainly in line with what his male readership thought of gender differentiation, which was rooted in society and universally taken for granted. His entries, at best, display a paternalistic attitude towards women, whose main if not only worth lay in their attractive appearance and spotless virtue.

Technically speaking, Kersey was an innovative lexicographer in some ways; but he did follow the path of traditional lexicography as a ‘gentlemen’s club’, where compilers and dictionary-users were male, and shared the idea of sex-based hierarchy – a kind of discrimination against women that was possibly even more widespread and unquestioned than social and economic differences among men. Definitely, Kersey did not want to subvert the traditional order of society; and though eighteenth-century lexicography contributed to and took advantage of the widening of the reading public and better educational opportunities for women, it would take a long time before women were not

discriminated against in dictionaries²⁷ and their status in society improved.

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²⁷ Indeed, sexism in dictionaries and the making of non-sexist dictionaries nowadays have been debated since the 1970s when the feminist movement started to denounce unacceptable sexist and ideologically coloured definitions and illustrative examples in dictionaries – a further proof of the unavoidable interplay between social issues and dictionary-making.

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