

The Lexicographical Lesbian: Remaking the Body in Anne Lister’s Erotic Glossary

Stephen Turton

In recent years, literary criticism has witnessed a flourishing of what Paula Blank presciently called ‘etymological moments’: playful tracings of the roots of words that unearth unexpected links between the past and the present, and in so doing unsettle our certainties about both. Many of these moments have occurred under the rubric of queer philology, which has particularly called into question scholarly assumptions about the historical transmission of discourses on gender, sexuality, and embodiment. However, this impulse to reclaim the discursive history of the sexed and sexual body is not new. Between 1814 and 1820, the Yorkshire gentlewoman Anne Lister—now famous for her diary’s candid accounts of her love affairs with women—pored through English, Latin, and Greek dictionaries, looking up terms for sexual acts and anatomies and collating what she found into a personal glossary. Lister’s citing and rewriting of these definitions illuminate the protean forms that a dictionary can take for its writers and users: a source of knowledge, a moral guide, and even an erotic aid. Through lexicography, Lister found new ways of reading the body and reimagining its borders, the better to fit the contours of her own desires.

A decade ago, in concluding an article she called ‘The Proverbial “Lesbian”: Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice’, Paula Blank presented this hopeful reflection on the past and future of her titular term:

[P]erhaps the risks we take in further queering ‘lesbian’ may be a source of a further pleasure, of a kind—the feeling of taking control of a language that is ours by surrendering to it as also not ours, the satisfaction of knowing more about where it has been and whom it has been with, and thus, perhaps, what it might yet mean to us.¹

In her exploration of the history of ‘lesbian’ across Greek, Latin, and English, Blank offered a prolonged counterpoint to the kind of ‘etymological moment’ she believed was then on the rise in queer literary criticism. Such moments were not acts of ‘sustained philology’ but rather a kind of scholarly wordplay, ‘a brief, unanticipated, passing invocation of a particular word’s literal

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¹ Paula Blank, ‘The Proverbial “Lesbian”: Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice’, *Modern Philology*, 109 (2011), 108–34.

sources' (112). Far from dismissing the brevity or levity of etymological moments, however, Blank saw them as an expression of 'our drive to view language as fact, as presence, as identity, as confirmation of who we were and who we still may be, even as we and all such certainties are then undone by it' (118). For Blank, meaning was never a *fait accompli*. The semantic history of a lexeme cannot be reduced to a series of discrete and irreversible steps, and the polysemous potential that inheres in all words is both unsettling and exhilarating.

Brief etymological diversions, as well as longer philological wanderings, have continued to arise in queer criticism as researchers have mapped the history of sexuality using the navigational tools of rhetoric, lexicology, and codicology.² Some of this research has angled itself as a conscious departure from what Carla Freccero termed 'phallogog[y]'³—that is, scholarly practices guided by a 'discourse of heteronormativity and masculinist epistemologies', in which the study of texts and languages is structured by metaphors of patrilineage and reproduction (language and manuscript 'families', 'cognate' words, 'spurious' texts, 'fathers' of the canon, and so on).⁴ Queer philology, as an alternative analytic, is 'founded on dissonance, instability, and misprision rather than on [...] teleological linearity', according to Roberta Magnani and Diane Watt, and should 'draw critical attention [...] to the ways in which philology's manifold methods [...] are often themselves thoroughly implicated in the languages of sex, gender, and the body', in the words of Jeffrey Masten.⁵ In this paper, I would like to bring this critical attention to bear on one historical figure and one text type in particular: Anne Lister and the dictionary.

I begin with the dictionary. The historiography of dictionary-making has itself often been a phallogogical affair, in which works mainly written and edited by men have been presented as deriving from, competing with, and then succeeding each other in a series of Oedipal conflicts. Histories of monolingual English lexicography, for instance, recount that Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721) was displaced by Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), that Johnson was supplanted by Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) and its derivatives, and that Webster was in turn surpassed by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1928) edited by James Murray, Henry Bradley, William Craigie, and Charles Onions.⁶ This patrilinear model continues to be challenged by feminist scholars, who have done a great deal to recover the history of women lexicographers before 1900.⁷ There is also a growing body of research into what might be called non-heteronormative dictionaries, as studies of lesbian feminist lexicography have been joined by scholarship on lexicons of gay slang (written both by the people who used it and by eavesdropping psychologists). This latter research, which has mostly focused on dictionaries compiled in the West, has so far

² E.g., [Sal] Nicolazzo, 'Reading *Clarissa's* "Conditional Liking": A Queer Philology', *Modern Philology*, 112 (2014), 205–25; Susan S. Lanser, *The Sexuality of History: Modernity and the Sapphic, 1565–1830* (Chicago, 2014), 219–21; Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* (Philadelphia, 2016); Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia, 2016), 171–226; Roberta Magnani and Diane Watt, 'Towards a Queer Philology', *Postmedieval*, 9 (2018), 252–68.

³ Carla Freccero, 'Practicing Queer Philology with Marguerite de Navarre: Nationalism and the Castigation of Desire', in Jonathan Goldberg (ed.), *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham and London, 1994), 107–23.

⁴ Magnani and Watt, 'Towards a Queer Philology', 259.

⁵ Magnani and Watt, 'Towards a Queer Philology', 252; Masten, *Queer Philologies*, 18–19.

⁶ See, e.g., James A. H. Murray, *The Evolution of English Lexicography* (Oxford, 1900); De Witt T. Starnes and Gertrude E. Noyes, *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson, 1604–1755*, new edn (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1991); N. E. Osselton, 'The Early Development of the English Monolingual Dictionary (Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries)', in A. P. Cowie (ed.), *The Oxford History of English Lexicography*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2009), 131–54. Cf. John Considine, 'A Dictionary Ecosystem: Four Centuries of English Lexicography', in Sarah Ogilvie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Dictionaries* (Cambridge, 2020), 89–100.

⁷ Alicia Rodríguez-Álvarez and María Esther Rodríguez-Gil, 'John Entick's and Ann Fisher's Dictionaries: An Eighteenth-Century Case of (Cons)piracy?' *International Journal of Lexicography*, 19 (2006), 287–319; Lindsay Rose Russell, *Women and Dictionary Making: Gender, Genre, and English Language Lexicography* (Cambridge, 2018); Javier Ruano-García, 'The Contribution of Angelina Parker to the *English Dialect Dictionary*', *Dictionaries*, 41 (2020), 1–24; Carol Percy, 'British Women's Roles in the Standardization and Study of English', in Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Helena Sanson (eds), *Women in the History of Linguistics* (Oxford, 2020), 279–303.

been restricted to the decades after 1900, as communities organized around non-hegemonic sexual and gender practices have become more visible—and their language more audible—to outsiders.⁸

However, this does not mean that before 1900 there were no such communities, or that they were not associated with recognizable linguistic styles or vocabularies—although for English the surviving evidence is often second-hand and hostile. To take a brief example from the early eighteenth century: when Charles Hitchen, marshal of the City of London, published a pamphlet accusing his fellow thief-taker Jonathan Wild of criminal dealings in 1718, Wild retaliated with another pamphlet that attacked Hitchen as a sodomite. The marshal was claimed to frequent a molly house at which men ‘assum[ed] effeminate Voices, Female Airs, &c.’ and addressed one another as ‘Madam’ and ‘Ladyship’, the use of feminine titles being ‘a familiar Language peculiar to that House.’⁹ At the other end of the century, the neoclassical sculptor Anne Seymour Damer was rumoured to belong to a secret network of women-loving women. The *Morning Post* reported in 1776 that ‘the Hon. Mrs. John D—r’ had held a meeting with like-minded others to ‘consult relative to a proper, and suitable name for [their] new female *Coterie* [...] when it was agreed, that sect should be called *Tribadarians*’. Several months later, the *Post* published a definition of ‘*Tribadarian*’, as ‘[m]any of [its] readers [had] expressed a desire to know the meaning of the term’: ‘it seems they are a set of fashionable ladies, who upon *particular occasions* prefer the company of their own sex.’¹⁰ In stories like these, the line between truth and scandal is difficult to determine. The people being targeted naturally did not own up to participating in any such acts of language play. Damer dismissed newspapers’ gossip about her as ‘calumny.’¹¹ Hitchen, who was found guilty of attempted buggery in 1727, had included in his pamphlet on Wild a glossary of ‘Flash Words’ he claimed were then ‘in Vogue’ in London’s underworld, but the idiom of the molly house was unsurprisingly absent.¹²

Nevertheless, language play can be carried out at the level of the individual as well as of the community. This is strikingly illustrated in the private papers of Anne Lister (1791–1840). An unmarried gentlewoman who owned an out-of-the-way estate in Halifax, Yorkshire, Lister came to new prominence in the 1990s after excerpts from her diaries were decoded and published by Helena Whitbread.¹³ A significant portion of the diaries had been written in a ‘crypt hand’ of Lister’s own design, a cipher of Latin and Greek letters and mathematical symbols that concealed vivid accounts of her love affairs with other women. Now housed in the Calderdale Collections of the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Lister’s manuscripts remain something of a sacred relic for historians of sexuality, who have used them to shed light not only on her gendered and sexual persona but on her religious beliefs, political opinions, classical education, and reading habits.¹⁴

⁸ On the French and English lesbian feminist lexicography of Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig, see Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, ‘The Text as Body/Politics: An Appreciation of Monique Wittig’s Writings in Context’, *Feminist Studies*, 7 (1981), 264–87; Kristine J. Anderson, ‘Lesbianizing English: Wittig and Zeig Translate Utopia’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 34 (1994), 90–102. Gay slang lexicons are covered by Gary Simes, ‘Gay Slang Lexicography: A Brief History and a Commentary on the First Two Gay Glossaries’, *Dictionaries*, 26 (2005), 1–159; Julie Coleman, ‘Glossaries of Sexuality’, in *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 2010), 265–90; William L. Leap, *Language before Stonewall: Language, Sexuality, History* (Cham, 2020), 305–30.

⁹ [Jonathan Wild], *An Answer to a Late Insolent Libel* (London, 1718), [38–9]. London’s molly houses are documented by Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700–1830*, 2nd edn (Stroud, 2006).

¹⁰ *The Morning Post*, and *Daily Advertiser*, 11 November 1776, 2, and 19 March 1777, 2. On the existence of ‘sapphic sects’, see Lanser, *The Sexuality of History*, 193–221.

¹¹ Emma Donoghue, ‘“Random Shafts of Malice?”: The Outings of Anne Damer’, in John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda (eds), *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham, 2010), 127–46.

¹² Charles Hitchen, *The Regulator: or, a Discovery of the Thieves, Thief-Takers, and Locks, Alias Receivers of Stolen Goods in and About the City of London* (London, 1718), 19–20.

¹³ Anne Lister, *The Secret Diaries of Anne Lister: I Know My Own Heart*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London, 2010, originally published in 1988), and *The Secret Diaries of Anne Lister: No Priest but Love*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London, 2015, originally published in 1992); hereafter cited as *Heart* and *Priest*. Note that Whitbread silently expands Lister’s contractions and modernizes her punctuation. She uses italics to indicate passages decoded from Lister’s crypt hand in *I Know My Own Heart* but drops this practice in *No Priest but Love*. I will resume it in my own transcriptions of Lister’s papers.

¹⁴ E.g., Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, 1993), 92–106; Anna Clark, ‘Anne Lister’s Construction of Lesbian Identity’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7 (1996), 23–50; [Jack] Halberstam,

The digital publication of page scans of the diaries in 2019, accompanied by an ongoing transcription project, promises to bring Lister's writing to an even wider audience.¹⁵ In addition to her journals, Lister left behind several (as-yet undigitized) commonplace books into which she copied extracts from her daily reading. This ranged from classical literature to Romantic poetry, sentimental novels, and anatomical texts—still popular landmarks of queer philology today—but it also extended to general and specialist dictionaries. Lister's consultation of these last works led her, in her twenties, to compile her own glossary of erotic terms.

While a dictionary may seem a dry book compared to the lush delights of Juvenal's satires or Byron's *Don Juan*, I believe that Lister's lexicographical practices are worthy of attention by both dictionary scholars and queer philologists. First, Lister offers evidence in support of some conjectures about the history of lexicography that are easy to put forward but harder to prove: dictionaries were not always read just by their intended audience, nor were definitions always interpreted in ways that their compilers might have expected. Second, Lister shows us that the jouissance which Paula Blank observed modern critics taking in etymological moments is not new. For Lister, looking up words' origins and meanings was both a means to self-knowledge and a source of private pleasure. Her reading of the dictionary not only draws attention to how philology is intertwined in discourses of gender, sexuality, and the body, but it shows how language can be co-opted to reimagine the philologist's own sexual and gendered embodiment.

I. LABELLING LISTER

Before I come to examining Lister as a 'lexicographical lesbian', I should acknowledge that applying that phrase to a person born in the last decade of the eighteenth century is not a straightforward matter. Historians of sexuality differ over how far back in time 'lesbian', with its contemporary evocations of a psychosocial identity, can be projected without becoming untenably anachronistic. Emma Donoghue retains 'lesbian' on the grounds that it has been used in English to mean a woman who is sexually intimate with other women since at least the 1730s, notwithstanding the connotative and cultural shifts it has subsequently undergone.¹⁶ Valerie Traub, however, has placed '*lesbian*' in italics to 'remind readers of [its] epistemological inadequacy, psychological coarseness, and historical contingency.'¹⁷ Judith Bennett has offered 'lesbian-like', while Harriette Andreadis prefers 'female same-sex erotics'.¹⁸ Susan Lanser chooses 'sapphic' over 'lesbian' in part to emphasize the difference between eighteenth- and twenty-first century textual formations, and in part to evoke a less identitarian canopy.¹⁹

If one accepts that 'lesbian' can be applied to women who lived in the long eighteenth century, then the question remains whether it is the right term to apply to Lister. When, in 2018, a plaque was put up in York to commemorate Lister's unconventional life, the plaque's description of her as a 'gender-nonconforming entrepreneur' led to a public outcry against lesbian erasure, an apology from York Civic Trust, and a new plaque referring to Lister as a 'Lesbian and Diarist'.²⁰ Although Lister has been hailed as 'the first modern lesbian' by some scholars,

Female Masculinity (Durham and London, 1998), 65–73; Stephen Colclough, "'Do You Not Know the Quotation?'" Reading Anne Lister, Anne Lister Reading', in John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda (eds), *Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham, 2010), 159–72; Chris Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation: Anne Lister and the Ancients', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 30 (2021), 112–35.

¹⁵ See 'Anne Lister—Reading Anne's Diaries', *Catalogue* (pubd online April 2019) <<https://wyascatalogue.wordpress.com/exhibitions/anne-lister/anne-lister-reading-annes-diaries>> accessed 21 Aug 2021.

¹⁶ Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (London, 1993), 7.

¹⁷ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2002), 16.

¹⁸ Judith M. Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9 (2000), 1–24; Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1714* (Chicago, 2001), 3.

¹⁹ Lanser, *The Sexuality of History*, 15.

²⁰ 'Anne Lister: Plaque Wording to Change after "Lesbian" Row', *BBC News* (pubd online September 2018) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-45397536>> accessed 21 Aug 2021; 'Anne Lister: Reworded

others have responded with cautious demurrals.²¹ Jack Halberstam encourages Lister's readers to eschew sexual labels and instead 'see what emerges from an analysis of a masculine woman when we examine her life without the comforting and distracting lens of contemporary lesbian identities.'²² Annamarie Jagose concurs that 'it is worth trying to put aside the semantic driftnet of "lesbian" long enough to see what floats up in Lister's account of herself.'²³ Aside from the risk of anachronism, slotting Lister into any modern identity category is complicated by how stubbornly she remains what Chris Roulston calls a 'figure of rupture.'²⁴ She padded her bust but disliked being reminded of her petticoats (*Priest*, 80, 259); she alternately fantasized about having a penis and expressed relief that she did not (228–9); she was thought to be 'singularly made' by a surgeon who examined her in Paris but personally believed that her sexual difference was entirely mental, not anatomical (256, 82). If Lister lived today, would she understand herself (or be understood by others) as a lesbian, or would she—or he, or they—be transmasculine, bigender, nonbinary, genderfluid, intersex, a combination of these things, or none of them? The question may seem academic, but the reactions it incites are clearly not confined to the academy.

I already seem to be taking sides by putting 'lesbian' in my title. One might suspect that, in the midst of tipping my hat to Blank's article, I have stepped unseeing into the very trap that Jagose warned against—the one whereby scholars, through our 'obliviousness' to the contemporary identitarian taxonomies 'by which we recognize our desire, in the first place, as "ours"', are led 'to misrecognize Lister, to misrecognize her sexual subjectivity' as commensurate with ours.²⁵ However, in echoing Blank's title, I hope also to follow her exhortation that we should not merely accept but revel in the capacity of language, like sexuality, to be both 'ours' and 'not ours'—to escape from us just as we think we have a steady grasp on it. Traub has recently altered her position on 'lesbian' by raising the possibility of historians rethinking the word 'not in terms of identity or subjectivity, but in terms of historiographic method and the practice of theorizing it', and thereby 'shift[ing] inquiry away from the recuperation of identities and toward the structures of representation and knowledge operative both [in the past] and now.'²⁶ This would allow 'lesbian' to function rather like 'queer', although counterbalancing the latter's tendency to give more weight to the masculine than the feminine (288–91).²⁷ Under Traub's proposal, to read Lister through 'the sign of the lesbian' is not to confer a comfortably stable signifier upon her but to highlight the historical volatility of 'lesbian' as a term whose meaning has been 'simultaneously known and not known, simultaneously signified and rendered insignificant' (287)—and, by extension, to ask how Lister negotiated her own gendered and sexual embodiment within the signifying systems of femininity and masculinity that operated in the early nineteenth century.

As other scholars have pointed out, Lister's self-fashioning largely took place through books.²⁸ In fact, on at least two occasions when she was probing the sexual attitudes of other women to whom she did not (yet) want to reveal her own desires, she presented her knowledge of female erotic intimacy as entirely abstracted from her reading. As she said to Miss Pickford after the latter had revealed herself to be romantically involved with Miss Threlfall, '*the difference between you & me is, mine is theory, yours practice. I am taught by books, you by nature*' (*Heart*, 296). To Mrs Barlow, she pretended, 'All I know about things [...] is a mass of undigested knowledge

York Plaque for "First Lesbian", *BBC News* (pubd online February 2019) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-47404525>> accessed 21 Aug 2021.

²¹ As observed by Carolina Gonda, 'Writing Lesbian Desire in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Jodie Medd (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature* (Cambridge, 2015), 111.

²² Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 65.

²³ Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca and London, 2002), 16.

²⁴ Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation', 114.

²⁵ Jagose, *Inconsequence*, 21.

²⁶ Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, 267, 285.

²⁷ But see Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation', 114, for a thoughtful analysis of Lister as 'queer'.

²⁸ Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 102–3; Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', 31–40; Colclough, "'Do You Not Know the Quotation?'" 161; Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation', 113.

which I [...] know not how to use, for I am a very innocent sort of person' (*Priest*, 60). But this was a defensive front: to her long-term lover, Mariana Lawton, Lister confided, 'my conduct & feelings [are] surely natural to me inasmuch as they were not taught, not fictitious, but instinctive' (*Heart*, 320). Still, while Lister did not acquire her feelings from reading, she did learn how to parse them through it. Her attempts to digest this mass of knowledge into a kind of self-bricolage are attested to by the works she cited in her diaries and quoted from in her extract books. Here, her 'hung[er] precisely for words and labels' to describe matters of sexuality and corporeality would sometimes give rise to an etymological moment.²⁹

For instance, after copying out a passage on the ancient veneration of the 'Scarabæus' from Thomas Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* (1792–1800), Lister was struck by Maurice's remark that scarab beetles were once thought 'to be all males, cast[ing] ye seed of generat[i]o[n] int[o] round balls of earth'. This coprophilic image recalled to her an epigram of Ausonius in which the boy-loving Marcus is compared to a scarab because of his habit of being 'postico vulnere fossor' (literally, a digger at the back gash). Thinking back on a former time when she 'was uncertain how that crime was committed not knowing how there could be any pleasure in working at the anus', Lister, who now knew better, mused, 'postico vulnere fossor is a good definition of a sodomite'.³⁰ Much like contemporary queer philologists, in picking out the semantic and metaphorical threads of a word, Lister shuttled eclectically across texts and times, weaving together ancient and modern discourses and assessing this body of learning against her own understanding of the human body. This was a negotiatory hermeneutic. Lister was willing to admit to what she did not know, but she was also prepared to doubt or contradict what she read or to twist the meaning of a text so that it better fit her own purposes.³¹

II. TRANSGRESSING THE RULES OF COMMON MODESTY

Lister knew the value of a good definition. At the age of 12, she wrote grandly to her aunt, 'Have the goodness to purchase for me a dictionary. I mean one of the very best publications... I have five guineas to spare & I don't know how I can expend it better to my own satisfaction' (*Priest*, 19). As an adult, she would browse (and note the prices of) the new works at her local bookseller, such as the 1816 edition of Scapula's Greek–Latin lexicon ('2 vol[ume]s [quar]to £6.6.6d') and Todd's 1818 revision of Johnson's dictionary ('6 [quar]to vol[ume]s, pub[lished] at 11 Guin[ea]s').³² When she consulted dictionaries in private, the words Lister chose to look up often reflected her irrepressible sexual curiosity. In some respects, she proved to be a real-life version of the apocryphal ladies who had trawled through Johnson's dictionary looking for 'naughty' words.³³ While those ladies had come away empty-handed, Lister made a better haul by casting her net over a wider array of wordbooks.

In what is now known as the sixth volume of her *Extracts from Books Read*, Lister devoted most of page. 26 and a little of page. 27 to collating an erotic glossary. An annotated transliteration of the glossary, which she wrote in crypt hand, is appended to this paper.³⁴ All but three of its entries seem to have been drawn from one source: the *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* of Nathan Bailey. First published in 1721, this octavo volume—much more portable

²⁹ Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation', 121.

³⁰ Halifax, Calderdale Collections, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/EX/6, ff. 24–5 (28 January 1820).

³¹ See Roulston 'Sexuality in Translation', 121–2; Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', 31; Colclough, 'Do You Not Know the Quotation?', 161.

³² Halifax, Calderdale Collections, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/E/1, f. 157 (10 January 1818), SH:7/ML/E/3, f. 130 (10 July 1819).

³³ Henry Digby Beste, *Personal and Literary Memorials* (London, 1829), 11–12.

³⁴ SH:7/ML/EX/6, ff. 26–7 (May(?) 1820). Lister's definitions were first noticed by Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', 32. Clark reports that they are in ciphered Latin, but this is an accidental conflation of two sections of Lister's extract book: her ciphered English definitions are followed on the next page by unciphered Latin extracts from Lubinus's commentary on Juvenal's satires, including annotations on certain words used by him.

than Johnson's unabridged multi-volume editions—had been regularly reissued up to 1802. Lister does not credit Bailey's dictionary by name, but she appears to have used an early edition, perhaps even the second (1724).³⁵ From there, she copied definitions of a medley of demotic and learned terms for sexual acts ('buggery', 'fuck'), physiology ('catamen[i]a'), pathology ('clap', 'to clap', 'nymphomania'), and anatomy ('cunt', 'glans', 'peni[s]', 'penis cerebri', 'penis muliebris', 'prick', 'verenda', 'veretrum').³⁶ All of these words are listed on the first page of Lister's glossary. They are not alphabetized; Lister seemingly looked them up and wrote them down as they occurred to her.

The only headword on the glossary's first page that is not traceable to Bailey is also the only one that has no obvious sexual connotations: 'yaws', the name of an ulcerative tropical disease. Lister encountered the word while reading Floyer and Baynard's *History of Cold-Bathing* and wrote out the relevant passage in 'plain hand' underneath her glossary. The quotation is mostly a racist anecdote about an 'Ind[ia]n, who, ignor[an]t of ye use of merc[ur]y, used [Tobacco] as a salivat[i]o[n] for ye yaws, a s[or]t of leprosie or pox among y[e]m.'³⁷ Bailey's dictionary had no definition of 'yaws', but Lister apparently found one in *A Complete and Universal English Dictionary* by James Barclay: 'a common distemper in Guinea, and hot climates, which sailors call the pox.'³⁸ Given that both Barclay and the *History of Cold-Bathing* describe yaws as a 'pox', and the *History* suggests that it might be treated with mercury—a common prescription for venereal disease—perhaps Lister surmised that yaws was also venereal, and so a suitable item for her erotic wordlist.³⁹

As to the date of the list's composition, Lister records on page 26 of her extract book that the first page of the glossary was copied into the book from notes she had made on a separate sheet on 3 October 1814. There is no explicit indication of when the copying took place, but material on pages 25 and 28 of the extract book is dated 23 January and 9 June 1820 respectively, and the glossary was likely written up between those days. Lister's diary mentions that on 5 May 1820 she was 'cop[yin]g fr[om] old mem[oran]da on scraps of pap[er] 31½ pp. of notes & obs[ervations] int[o] my book kept for y[i]s purpose', and she worked at this task intermittently for the next week.⁴⁰ The glossary entries on page 27 of the extract book were new additions made at this time, as we will see later. For now, I want to focus on Lister's use of Bailey's dictionary on page 26.

Lister clearly knew where to look for naughty words. It is true that Bailey's definitions of 'CUNT' and 'TO FUCK' were modestly veiled in Latin—as '*Pudendum Muliebre*' (the genitals of a woman) and '*Fæminam Subagitare*' (to handle a woman sexually)—but most eighteenth-century lexicographers did not admit these terms at all.⁴¹ Rather, they saw it as their duty to keep indecent language out of the minds and mouths of their users, especially women and children.⁴² In 1764, John Marchant accused Bailey (without naming him) of showing no ' REGARD to the Morals of his young Readers' by 'introduc[ing] into his Dictionary some of the most

³⁵ Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London, 1724); henceforth *UEED*. Lister spells 'catamenia' as '*catamena*', which is an error unique to Bailey's second edition. She also gives the supposed French etymon of 'buggery' as '*bugerare*', as Bailey's dictionary did from its first edition to its seventh (1735), after which the spelling changed to 'Buggerare' (eighth to twelfth edition) and then 'Bougrerie' (thirteenth edition onwards).

³⁶ Of these, only 'CLAP' ('A venereal infection') and 'TO CLAP' ('To infect with a venereal poison') had appeared in Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London, 1755).

³⁷ SH:7/ML/EX/6, f. 26. The full passage on yaws quoted by Lister may be found in John Floyer and Edward Baynard, *Ψυχρολουσία: or, the History of Cold-Bathing*, 6th edn (London, 1732), 382.

³⁸ James Barclay, *A Complete and Universal English Dictionary on a New Plan* (London, 1774), s.v. 'YAWS'.

³⁹ Years later, Lister herself would take mercury to treat a venereal infection (*Priest*, 60; see below).

⁴⁰ Halifax, Calderdale Collections, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/E/4, ff. 98–9 (S, 6, 8, 9, 11 May 1820).

⁴¹ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'CUNT', 'TO FUCK'.

⁴² See Lynda Mugglestone, 'Registering the Language: Dictionaries, Diction and the Art of Elocution', in Raymond Hickey (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century English: Ideology and Change* (Cambridge, 2010), 309–38; Stephen Turton, "'Improper Words": Silencing Same-Sex Desire in Eighteenth-Century General English Dictionaries', *Oxford Research in English*, 8 (2019), 9–36.

obscene Terms our Language is acquainted with'. Marchant promised that his own *New Complete English Dictionary*, its title notwithstanding, omitted 'all those Terms that carry any Indecency in their Meaning, or have the least Tendency to corrupt the Minds of Youth'.⁴³ In 1785, the assurance of the anonymous *General and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* that it would be 'extremely acceptable to female readers, who may consult it without a possibility of offence to delicacy, every improper word being rejected', earned it a commendation from the *Monthly Review*, which called it 'a pretty dictionary' that would doubtless 'be well received in our seminaries of female education'.⁴⁴

Within this repressive milieu, Lister's copying of 'cunt', 'fuck', and other choice words from Bailey would surely have been enough to get her accused of 'nymphomania'—another term she picked up from the dictionary. According to Bailey, 'NYMPHOMANIA' was 'the same with *Furor Uterinus*'; that is, 'a Distemper which provokes Women to transgress the Rules of common Modesty'.⁴⁵ Common modesty dictated that, in matters of sex, it was a man's place to know and a woman's place to be known. Catharine MacKinnon encapsulated the social norms that have historically granted men erotic agency, while denying it to women, in the aphorism 'Man fucks woman; subject verb object'.⁴⁶ We can see this transitive paradigm at work in Bailey's definition of 'To FUCK', which takes a woman as its object. The definition has no explicit subject, but the one who fucks may be read as male by default. Similar moments of tacit androcentrism occur elsewhere in the dictionary. For example, while Bailey's second edition describes 'CLAP' gender-neutrally as 'a Swelling in the Groin and Privities' (reproduced in Lister's glossary), the thirteenth edition amends this to 'a Running of Matter from the Yard, occasioned by Copulation with an impure Woman'.⁴⁷ The symptoms that the woman in question might suffer, and the manner in which she had contracted the clap, do not concern the lexicographer; nor do potential channels of transmission other than penile intercourse.

Of course, Lister's own life offers a riposte to the phallogical assumptions of such definitions. In 1821, she would herself acquire a venereal disease from Mariana Lawton, who had in turn picked it up from her philandering husband (*Priest*, 25). How might Lister have reacted to the later definition of 'CLAP' if she had encountered it? More significantly, how did she react to the definition of 'To FUCK'? Clark and Roulston argue that Lister found ways of identifying with Greek and Roman depictions of female sexuality while reading around the misogynistic discourses in which they were often framed.⁴⁸ If this is true of Lister's reading of the classics, might it also be true of her use of dictionaries? Finding that Bailey had not specified anything about the subject who fucks a woman, could she have imagined herself into that role?

In a previous article, I posed a similar question about the unruly ways in which early modern women who used male-authored dictionaries might have reworked their androcentrism.⁴⁹ At the time, I worried my speculation might come across as ahistorical fantasy—the kind of lesbian reading that Bennett calls 'fascinating [...] rather than historically plausible'.⁵⁰ Lister lived some time after the period I was considering then, but uncovering her glossary has made me think that the question may not have been so fanciful. She did not annotate her copy of Bailey's entry, and so any interpretation of her thinking must remain tentative. However, that she did have a knack

⁴³ John Marchant and Mr Gordon, *A New Complete English Dictionary* (London, 1760), iii–iv.

⁴⁴ *A General and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1785), ii; review of *A General and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1785) in the *Monthly Review*, 73 (1785), 464.

⁴⁵ Bailey, *UEED*, s.vv. 'NYMPHOMANIA', 'FUROR Uterinus'.

⁴⁶ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1989), 124.

⁴⁷ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'CLAP'; Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 13th edn (London, 1749), s.v. 'CLAP'.

⁴⁸ Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', 32; Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation', 123.

⁴⁹ Stephen Turton, 'Unlawful Entries: Buggery, Sodomy, and the Construction of Sexual Normativity in Early English Dictionaries', *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America*, 40 (2019), 81–112.

⁵⁰ Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms", 8.

for slipping her own desires into the spaces left by lexicographers is borne out elsewhere in her papers.

Beyond the English sexual lexicon, Lister's classical reading acquainted her with the intricate erotic vocabulary of ancient Rome. Her etymology of *'fuck'* follows Bailey's in registering the (non-cognate) Latin analogue *'futuō'*, which typically described the action of a penis entering a vagina. Latin had separate verbs for a penis entering an anus (*'pedicare'*) and a mouth (*'irrumare'*)—but it also had verbs to describe the actions of the receptive partners in these couplings. *'Fellare'* was to admit a penis into the mouth, *'cevere'* into the anus, and *'crisare'* or *'crissare'* into the vagina. As Williams notes, this was a 'bluntly phallic' paradigm: although it allowed women to have some erotic agency in sex with men, it left no obvious place for sex without men.⁵¹ However, the semantic norms of Latin, like those of English, were always open to exploitation. Juvenal's sixth satire thus applies *'crisare'* not to the movement of a woman in penovaginal intercourse, but to a seductive dance performed by one woman and admired by another: *'ipsa Medullinae fluctum crisantis adorat'* (she in turn worships Medullina's undulating surges).⁵²

Lister's diary records that she spent 29 June 1820 reading Juvenal's sixth satire, as well as a Latin commentary on it by Eilhard Lubinus.⁵³ Lubinus's annotation on *'crissare'*—*'mulierum est, cevere virorum'* (it is [used] of women, *cevere* of men)—is far from illuminating.⁵⁴ So, Lister turned to Adam Littleton's *Latin Dictionary*, in which *'Crisso'* is glossed more frankly as *'to wag the tail (de muliere dic. in actu copulationis)'* (said of a woman in the act of copulation).⁵⁵ Like Bailey's entry for *'To FUCK'*, Littleton's entry for *'Crisso'* does not specify the gender of the person with whom the woman is copulating, although a male partner may be assumed by default. It is telling, then, that when Lister copied Littleton's entry into her diary, she altered the wording to *'crisso is for a woman to bend herself impudently'*. This revised definition erases the explicit reference to copulation and the implicit presence of a male partner, leaving only the woman—or rather two women, the one in the definition and the one voyeuristically defining her. Woman glosses woman: subject verb object. Lister's rewriting of the phallogical script created an opening not only for self-knowledge but, quite literally, for self-pleasure. She ended her reflection on *'crisso'* by confiding in her diary, *'thinking of these things after getting into bed in a state of great excitement for a good while & afterwards it is sad to confess another cross'*, *'cross'* being her codeword for an orgasm.⁵⁶

Lister's use of dictionaries entangles the semantic and the somatic in unusually vivid ways. In her hands, the dictionary is not just a tangible object but an object that invites other kinds of tactility. We might think of this as *'the sign of the lesbian'* meeting *'the touch of the queer'*—Carolyn Dinshaw's phrase for how queerness *'provoke[s] perceptual shifts and subsequent corporeal response in those [it] touch[es]'* by *'knock[ing] signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange'*.⁵⁷ Lister's glossing knocks signifiers loose from their usual moorings, unsteading patriarchal notions of women as passive sexual objects (and passive dictionary users), but it also estranges the conventional ties that hold sexual behaviour and sexual embodiment together. If having a female or male body determines the erotic acts that a person is expected to perform, then acting out in unexpected ways can in turn unsettle the signifying system that divides the male from the female in the first place.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Craig A. Williams, *Roman Sexuality*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2010), 178–9.

⁵² Juvenal and Persius, *Satires*, ed. and tr. Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, MA and London, 2004), 262–3.

⁵³ SH:7/ML/E/4, f. 129 (29 June 1820).

⁵⁴ Eilhard Lubinus, *D. Iunii Iuvenalis satyrarum libri V* (Hanover, 1619), 263.

⁵⁵ Adam Littleton, *Dr Adam Littleton's Latin Dictionary*, 6th edn (London, 1735), s.v. *'Crisso'*.

⁵⁶ SH:7/ML/E/4, f. 129. Lister marked her orgasms in the margins of her diary with the symbol *'+*'.

⁵⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham and London, 1999), 151.

⁵⁸ See Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, *'Embodied Sociolinguistics'*, in Nikolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates* (Cambridge, 2016), 173–97.

III. DISMEMBERING DESIRE

When Lister impudently bent Littleton's entry for 'Crisso', turning it away from the phallogical transitivity of 'man fucks woman' to open a space for herself as an erotic subject, did the phallus disappear with the man or did Lister lay claim to that too?

The question may startle less when read against the backdrop of Lister's diaries. In 1821, she jotted down a daydream: 'Foolish fancying about Caroline Greenwood, meeting her on Skircoat Moor, taking her into a shed there is there & being connected with her. Supposing myself in men's clothes & having a penis, tho' nothing more' (Heart, 167). And in 1826, after she had been flirting with one of Mariana Lawton's sisters, Mrs Milne: 'Fancying I had a penis & was intriguing with her in the downstairs water-closet at Langton before breakfast, to which she would have made no objection' (Priest, 229). Castle suggests that a 'highly self-conscious penis envy—to put it most provocatively—seems to have shaped Lister's sexual personality', while Clark argues that Lister used the phallus as a Lacanian "'fetish," or a signifier, for what [a woman] is normally denied: the female body'; it was thus 'a sign of her desire for a woman, rather than of her desire to be a man.'⁵⁹ However, I am less interested in what Lister's fantasies say about her unconscious than in what they show of her fascination with the discursive elasticity of the body.

The glossary in Lister's extract book contains more headwords and definitional terms for organs that are conventionally gendered male ('glans', 'peni[s]', 'prick', 'veretrum', 'verenda', 'virile member', 'yard') than female ('clitoris', 'cunt', '[furor] uterinus', 'penis muliebris'), albeit only the lines dealing with female terms are marked with asterisks.⁶⁰ The further significance of the asterisks is unclear, yet perhaps the most striking aspect of Lister's genital survey is her lingering over the word 'penis'. This, she notes, is another name for 'a mans yard', but she also records that 'penis muliebris' is 'the same as clitoris', while 'penis cerebri' denotes the 'conarium' or 'pineal gland', which 'hangs in the small cavity [in the brain] called the anus'. Perhaps the image of a cerebral penis tucked inside an anus appealed to Lister's bawdy sense of humour. More subversive than that, however, is the way in which these last two entries decouple the phallus from the male body.

Long before psychoanalysis invented penis envy, the medical term 'penis muliebris' (the penis of a woman) slotted into an early modern taxonomy which set up the male body as an idealized prototype against which the female body was understood as an imperfect copy or counterpart. In this model, the clitoris became a lesser homologue of the penis.⁶¹ Yet, as Bucholtz and Hall observe, while people's conceptions of their bodies are 'shaped and reshaped by the linguistic systems available and the language ideologies that inform them', people 'do much more than unthinkingly repeat discursive hand-me-downs'.⁶² Butler, in surveying Lacan's treatment of the phallus as a privileged signifier such that 'to offer a definition of the phallus [...] is to posture as if one has the phallus', concluded that 'precisely because it is an idealization, one which no body can adequately approximate, the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization'.⁶³ For Lister, offering a definition of 'penis muliebris' might have prompted an etymological

⁵⁹ Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 102; Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', 43–4.

⁶⁰ This imbalance did not reflect a paucity in Lister's source, Bailey's *UEED*, which included 'LABIA', 'TUTTY, TUZZIMUZZY' ('a jocular Name for the *Pudendum Muliebre*'), 'VAGINA UTERI', 'VULVA', and 'WOMB', among other headwords.

⁶¹ See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1990), 96–8, as well as Katharine Park and Robert A. Nye, 'Destiny Is Anatomy', *The New Republic*, 204 (1999), 53–7, for a careful critique of some of Laqueur's arguments. Note that two other terms explained by Lister (and Bailey) to mean a man's yard, 'veretrum' and 'verenda', could also be used to refer to the vulva in Latin: see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), 52–4. Lister may not have known this. Littleton's *Latin Dictionary* limits 'Veretrum' to 'a man's privy parts' but defines 'Verenda' as 'the privy parts of a man or woman'.

⁶² Bucholtz and Hall, 'Embodied Sociolinguistics', 182–3.

⁶³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York, 2011, originally published in 1993), 31, 53.

moment in which the phallus—the signifier and the body part it signified, with all the social privileges they carried—was both hers and not hers, both ‘muliebris’ and ‘virilis’, the same as but different from the clitoris. Would this be a rejection of phallogogy, or, more daringly, a reappropriation of it? If the foregoing seems like a welter of playful contradictions, then so did Lister’s daydreams. Upon receiving a love letter from Mrs Milne, she reflected with amusement, ‘Tis well I have not a penis. I could never have been continent’ (*Priest*, 228). In her actual pursuits of women, she was content to let the phallus remain a ‘*penis cerebri*’—all in the mind.

Ironically, one of the side effects of schematizing the clitoris as a replica of the penis was that it raised the possibility of the former being used in place of the latter in sexual intercourse. Across the early modern period, numerous medical and pseudo-medical texts claimed, with palpable anxiety or salacity, that there existed women whose clitorises were so large that they could satisfy the erotic appetites of other women without the need for men.⁶⁴ By the early eighteenth century, these stories had reached the ears of lexicographers. John Quincy’s medical dictionary, the *Lexicon Physico-Medicum*, warned under ‘*Hermaphrodite*’ that ‘some Females’ might be mistaken for having the ‘genital Parts of both [Sexes]’ because they ‘have their *Clitoris* of an uncommon size [...] which frequently happens from lascivious Titillations, and Frictions.’ Quincy also supplied the rather obscure headword ‘*Confricatrices*, or *Confrictrices*’, to describe ‘such lustful Women who have learned to titulate one another with their *Clitoris*, in imitation of venereal Intercourses with Men.’⁶⁵ Two years later, Bailey reproduced Quincy’s ‘*Confricatrices*’ entry almost verbatim in the second edition of his *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*.⁶⁶ It is not among the entries Lister took from Bailey for her glossary, and it is quite possible she overlooked it. Female same-sex relations were absent from Bailey’s definition of ‘BUGGERY’, which Lister did copy, and which was limited to ‘the Copulation of one Man with another, or of a Man or Women [*sic*] with Brute Beasts.’⁶⁷ Notably, while sex between men is permitted to be ‘Copulation’ by Bailey, sex between women is not. According to both Bailey and Quincy, what confricatrices do together is only an ‘imitation’ of intercourse with men. The clitoris is an imperfect substitute for the penis, and so clitoral stimulation is an imperfect substitute for penile penetration. The confricatix is thus, like the lesbian, ‘simultaneously signified and rendered insignificant.’⁶⁸

Perhaps if Lister had encountered ‘CONFRICATRICES’ in Bailey, this dismissal would have been enough to stay her pen. While she may have fantasized about what it would be like to have a literal ‘penis muliebris’, she seems to have been less ready to entertain reports of women-loving women with enlarged clitorises. In her diary, she accepted that there was ‘an internal correspondence or likeness of some of the male or female organs of generation’, but she saw nothing truly anomalous about her own sexual embodiment: ‘I had thought much, studied anatomy, etc. Could not find it out. Could not understand myself. It was all the effect of the mind. No exterior formation accounted for it’ (*Priest*, 81–2). She certainly did not view her own erotic acts and desires as insignificant or inauthentic, even if they were not ratified by any dictionary. Fortunately, when the definitions of male lexicographers failed her, Lister was capable of writing her own.

⁶⁴ Valerie Traub, ‘The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris’, *GLQ*, 2 (1995), 81–113; Donoghue, ‘Female Hermaphrodites’, in *Passions between Women*, 25–58.

⁶⁵ John Quincy, *Lexicon Physico-Medicum: or, a New Physical Dictionary*, 2nd edn (London, 1722), s.v. ‘*Hermaphrodite*’ and ‘*Confricatrices*, or *Confrictrices*’.

⁶⁶ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. ‘CONFRICATRICES, CONFRICTRICES’.

⁶⁷ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. ‘BUGGERY’. For other definitions of ‘buggery’ (some of which did encompass sex between women) and ‘copulation’ in early English dictionaries, see Turton, ‘Unlawful Entries’, 94–100.

⁶⁸ Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, 287.

IV. IN HER OWN WORDS

I turn now to the second page of Lister's glossary, composed in May 1820 and containing only two entries: 'masturbation' and 'tribas'. These were not spontaneous lookups in Bailey's and Barclay's dictionaries, neither of which defined the words, but entries created by Lister herself in reaction to the works she was reading at the time: Scapula's Greek–Latin lexicon, Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, and Martial's epigrams, all of which are referred to by name in the glossary. In her diary, Lister mentions that she was reading Bayle on 16 March 1820, Martial on 5 May (the day on which she began copying notes from her old papers), and Scapula on 7 May.⁶⁹

Of course, none of these three works was aimed at women. A knowledge of Latin was a prerequisite for reading Scapula or an unexpurgated edition of Martial, and Bayle's scholarly dictionary, although translated from French into English, still included 'long *Latin* Passages' on the expectation that its users were 'well skill'd' in that language.⁷⁰ Because these books were tacitly assumed to be closed to women—for whom it was indecorous, even suspicious, to pursue classical learning⁷¹—they could discourse openly on subjects that popular works tended to avoid. That Lister extracted references to masturbation and tribades from these books is a further testament to her willingness to assert her sexual and scholarly agency in defiance of cultural norms—albeit she was never entirely free of them.

This last point is demonstrated by Lister's definition of 'masturbation', which is 'self pollution'. The definition was a kind of reprimand to herself. Although Lister was careful to mark her orgasms in her diary, these crosses were heavy ones to bear. After climaxing over her translation of 'crisso', she had repented of her 'sinful immodesty'.⁷² Her entry for 'masturbation' itself seems to have been prompted by a near miss. The definition is followed by a citation: 'see *Martials epigram to Ponticus book nine*'. In epigram 9.41, Ponticus is mocked for preferring masturbation ('masturbatus') to vaginal sex ('futuis').⁷³ While reading Martial's epigrams, including that on Ponticus, on 5 May, Lister was 'excited almost to masturbation': 'but I have just escaped have laid aside the book & will not I hope spend another morning in this terrible way'.⁷⁴ Still, it would be wrong to suggest that Lister passively absorbed the sexual mores of her times. She too viewed vaginal sex as superior to masturbation—even (or especially) if both participants were women. As she assured Miss Pickford about her relationship with Miss Threlfall, 'you remember an early chapter of *Genesis* & it is infinitely better than the thing alluded to there, meaning onanism', because that has 'no mutual affection to excuse it' (Heart, 296).

What Lister balked at between women was the use of a dildo, or what she curiously termed 'Sapphic love' (Priest, 84). She seemed discomfited by the thought of Miss Pickford 'using a phallus to her friend' (Heart, 315) and would later tell Mrs Barlow on the same subject, 'There was artifice in it. It was very different from mine & would be no pleasure to me. I liked to have those I loved near me as possible' (Priest, 82). Lister's actual erotic practices, as distinct from her daydreams, offer a sharp retort to the notion that genital sex between women is a failed imitation of phallic penetration. To her, it was intercourse with a phallus that was inauthentic and unpleasurable. Given her views on 'Sapphic love', it is intriguing that in her glossary Lister disentangles another word with a Greek root, 'tribas', from the dildo: 'see *Mart[ial]s to Bassa liber one it does not appear that she made use of olisbos a leather penis as Scapula says some of them did*'. In Martial's epigram 1.90, Bassa—who is wryly called 'fututor', the masculine agentive of

⁶⁹ SH:7/ML/E/4, ff. 73 (16 March 1820), 98 (5–7 May 1820).

⁷⁰ Pierre Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, vol. 1 (London, 1710), sig. D2r.

⁷¹ Roulston, 'Sexuality in Translation', 117–19; Gonda, 'Writing Lesbian Desire in the Long Eighteenth Century', 111. Recall the *Morning Post's* mocking attribution of the neoclassical nonce-word 'Tribadarian' to the neoclassical sculptor Anne Damer.

⁷² SH:7/ML/E/4, f. 129 (29 June 1820).

⁷³ Martial, *Epigrams*, ed. and tr. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA and London, 1993), 268.

⁷⁴ SH:7/ML/E/4, f. 98 (5 May 1820).

‘futuō’—is rebuked for her liaisons with other women: ‘inter se geminos audes committere cunnos’ (you dare to join two cunts).⁷⁵ Lister uses Martial’s accusation to challenge Scapula’s claim in the *Lexicon Graeco-Latinum* that ‘Τριβῶδες’ (tribades) are ‘dicuntur foeminae, perditae libidinis ac nefariae lasciviae: quae δλίσβω sese τριβουσιν mutuō’ (said to be women of depraved lustfulness and vile lasciviousness who mutually rub themselves with dildos).⁷⁶ Lister does not reject this definition outright, but in her citation of what ‘Scapula says’, his statement about the universal behaviour of tribades is watered down by the addition of ‘some of them’. To Lister, for whom classical erudition was joined with embodied experience, it was obvious that women did not need a phallus—whether a dildo or an enlarged clitoris—to satisfy each other.

Nonetheless, if sex between women was as consequential as penovaginal intercourse, then it was subject to some of the same ethical considerations. Martial’s epigram on Bassa ends with the riddle ‘hic ubi vir non est, ut sit adulterium’ (where no man is, there is adultery).⁷⁷ The implication must have perturbed Lister, who had kept up her affair with Mariana Lawton long after the latter’s marriage. Her entry for ‘tribas’ goes on to cite ‘Bayles dictionary[r]ticle Sanchez where it is questioned whether a womans connection with another that is married be adultery or not’; this is followed by a cross-reference to a diary entry Lister had made on 16 March 1820. The diary records that on that day she ‘r[ea]d in Bayle’s Dict[ionary] (Eng[lish] trans[latio]n) artic[le]s Sanchez, [...] Sappho, Sarah ... ver[y] interest[in]g’. In a marginal note added on 30 April, Lister clarifies that Sanchez ‘wrote a strange book giving an account of all the horrible crimes acknowledged at confession there is a question whether a woman being connected with a married woman is adultery or not’.⁷⁸ In fact, this question had not appeared in Bayle’s dictionary article on Thomas Sanchez (sixteenth-century theologian and author of the *Disputationes de sancto matrimonii sacramento*), but in his article on Sappho. After presenting the ancient evidence that ‘Sappho Loved Women as Men do’, Bayle sardonically remarks, ‘I leave it to a new Father Sanchez to decide, whether a Married Woman, who had complied with the Passion of Sappho, would have Committed Adultery and made her Husband a Cuckold? I do not know whether this question has escaped the inexhaustible Curiosity of the Casuists about Matrimonial Causes.’⁷⁹ Lister may have forgotten the exact reference, but she would echo Bayle’s choice of words in an argument with Mariana about their relationship in 1823: ‘[I said] “This is adultery to all intents & purposes.” “No, no,” said she. “Oh, yes, M—. No casuistry can disguise it”’ (Heart, 304).

If Lister was a figure of rupture, then her reading, citing, and rewriting of dictionaries compels us to see lexicography as a disruptive practice too: by turns informative and oppressive, accusatory and liberatory, normative and subversive. In the right hands, it can reveal new ways of seeing the body (alone or in relation to others), of naming it, and even of pleasing it. While Lister may have regarded the dildo as an inadequate erotic aid, the dictionary clearly was not. Whether her search for personal meaning among the headwords was a kind of lesbian lexicography or queer philology ‘avant la lettre’ may be open to disagreement among modern critics. However, I suspect many of us will perceive in Lister’s etymological moments something akin to our own scholarly ‘desire for touching across time’, as Dinshaw might say; or, to turn once more to Blank, our ‘desire for a provisional reidentification with the past’.⁸⁰ We can recognize something of ourselves in reading Lister because of the way she recognized something of herself in her reading.

⁷⁵ Martial, *Epigrams*, vol. 1, 108–9.

⁷⁶ Johann Scapula, *Lexicon Graeco-Latinum*, new edn, vol. 2 (Glasgow, 1816), s.v. Τριβῶδες.

⁷⁷ Martial, *Epigrams*, vol. 1, 108–9.

⁷⁸ SH:7/ML/E/4, ff. 72 (30 April 1820), 73 (16 March 1820).

⁷⁹ Pierre Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, vol. 4, s.v. ‘SAPPHO’.

⁸⁰ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 40; Blank, ‘The Proverbial Lesbian’, 119.

Of course, it is a recognition unavoidably haunted by alienation. Just as Lister's discursive construction of her erotic and embodied self challenged the paradigms of eighteenth-century lexicography, so it exceeds the limits of contemporary identitarian taxonomies. Yet this strangeness may offer an unexpected delight. Sal Nicolazzo proposes that one of the functions of queer philology is to draw out 'the sedimented afterlives of reception [...] as the present brings new and unexpected demands to bear on the past and vice versa.'⁸¹ Lister's reworking of the sexual lexicon might compel us to reconsider the strangeness of our own bodies and desires and the slipperiness of the labels we use to anatomize them—labels whose meanings are never wholly capturable by even the most vigilant lexicographer. As Johnson admitted at the completion of his own dictionary, certain 'words are hourly shifting their relations, and can no more be ascertained in a dictionary, than a grove, in the agitation of a storm, can be accurately delineated from its picture in the water.'⁸² Words do not shift relations on their own: they are picked up and spun around and tossed away by their users, the better to make language mirror their present realities and, perhaps, foretell their future selves. In stirring up the waters, Anne Lister was able to divine new shapes.

APPENDIX

The below glossary entries are extracted from the sixth volume of Lister's *Extracts from Books Read* (Halifax, Calderdale Collections, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH:7/ML/EX/6, ff. 26–7). The entries have been transliterated from Lister's crypt hand, which does not distinguish spaces between words, capitalization, or regular punctuation; I have added the first two for the sake of legibility. Where Lister's probable sources are not named in the text, I have given them in footnotes.

[f. 26]

*Fuck foutre French foutere Italian futuo Latin from the Greek phutao to plant or the Belgic fuycken or Dutch fucken to thrust or knock or from the Dutch foder to beget fæminam subagitare*⁸³

* *Cunt conte cunnus pudendum muliebre from the Belg kutte or the Saxon cwyth*⁸⁴

*Prick is the Dutch word fo[r] a mans yard peni[s] veretrum verenda all mean the same*⁸⁵

*Glans in anatomy a gland or kernel in the flesh the nut of the virile member*⁸⁶

* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{Penis muliebris the same as clytoris}^{87} \text{—Nymphomania means furor uterinus}^{88} \\ \textit{Catamen[i]a the menses monthly courses or flowers}^{89} \end{array} \right.$

⁸¹ Nicolazzo, 'Reading *Clarissa's* "Conditional Liking"', 225.

⁸² Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 1, sig. B2r.

⁸³ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'TO FUCK'.

⁸⁴ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'CUNT'.

⁸⁵ Bailey, *UEED*, s.vv. 'PRICK', 'PENIS', 'VERETRUM', 'VERENDA'.

⁸⁶ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'GLANS'.

⁸⁷ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'PENIS MULIEBRIS'.

⁸⁸ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'NYMPHOMANIA'.

⁸⁹ Bailey, *UEED*, s.vv. 'CATAMENA' [*sic*], perhaps also 'MENSTRUUA'.

Penis cerebri the same as *conarium* which is a part of the brain that hangs in the small cavity called the anus & also the pineal gland⁹⁰

Clap clapoir the venereal disease a swelling in the groin & privities & to clap one means giving the foul disorder⁹¹

Yaws are a sort of leprosy common in Guinea & hot climates which sailors call the pox⁹²

Buggery from the French *bugerare* which *Menaguis* [sic] derives from the Bulgari a people infamous for unnatural lust the copulation of one man with another or of a man or woman with brute beasts⁹³—
[f. 27]

Masturbation means self pollution see *Martials* epigram to *Ponticus* book nine—

Tribas see *Mart[ial]s* to *Bassa liber* one it does not appear that she made use of *olisbos* a leather penis as *Scapula* says some of them did—*Vide Bayles dictionary* a[r]ticle *Sanchez* where it is questioned whether a womans connection with another that is married be adultery or not see my j[o]urnal of sixteen March eighteen hundred & twenty—

Gonville & Caius College, University of Cambridge, UK

⁹⁰ Bailey, *UEED*, s.vv. 'PENIS CEREBRI', 'CONARIUM'.

⁹¹ Bailey, *UEED*, s.vv. 'CLAP', 'To CLAP'.

⁹² Barclay, *A Complete and Universal Dictionary*, s.v. 'YAWS'.

⁹³ Bailey, *UEED*, s.v. 'BUGGERY'. *Menaguis* is the French etymologist Gilles Ménage.