I. Introduction

In the Life of Johnson (1791), James Boswell recounts a debate between Samuel Johnson and young Richard Burke, involving a curious discussion of the difference between intuition and sagacity; one being immediate in its effect, the other requiring a circuitous process; one he observed was the eye of the mind, the other the nose of the mind. A young gentleman present took up the argument against him, and maintained that no man ever thinks of the nose of the mind, not adverting that though that figurative sense seems strange to us, as very unusual, it is truly not more forced than Hamlet’s “In my mind’s eye, Horatio.” [A] curious discussion of the difference between intuition and sagacity; one being immediate in its effect, the other requiring a circuitous process; one he observed was the eye of the mind, the other the nose of the mind. Brad Pasanek calls this exchange “profoundly Shandean” and tantalizingly compressed. And yet for all its brevity, the notion of the mind’s nose continued to be reproduced into the nineteenth century, and indeed variants of the expression existed in parallel with the Boswellian anecdote. Pasanek mentions in passing the variant of Delphine de Girardin’s in her La Canne de M. De
Balzac (1836), “l’instinct c’est le nez de l’esprit”—“instinct” here substituting for Johnson’s “sagacity.” But the 1799 poem addressed to Baillie Thomas Smith twice mentions the notion of the mind’s nose, but notes it as a “cant phrase for conscience”—a parallel to the Shakespearean footnotes in later editions of the Life of Johnson that suggests that the notion of “mind’s nose” and “conscience” was part of the larger zeitgeist.

Johnson’s own phrase was reproduced in the London Magazine in 1826, but later repetitions of the sentiment are far murkier. In the “Bon-mots, Characters, and Opinions” section of his Memoirs of Samuel Foote (1805), William Cooke includes a nearly direct lift from the Life, one of the few direct quotations from the Life in the Memoirs that is not a Foote-related anecdote:

> Of the difference between these two qualities (the one being immediate in its effect, and the other requiring a circuitous process). Foote said, “the former was the eye, the latter the nose of the mind.”

This variant of the sentiment was reprinted as a witticism of Foote’s in the Theatrical Pocket Magazine of 1829 and The Tatler of 1831. Later periodical repetitions of the expression in the late nineteenth-century seem to hedge their bets on authorship: the London Journal gives the attribution as a “Great Writer” in two separate issues in 1866 and 1884.

In this essay I am less interested in distinguishing between questions of attribution than in the sheer multiplicity of expressions of the mind’s nose and sagacity, a word which has two parallel uses in the eighteenth century: the OED antedates sagacity of mind to 1548, and sagacity of nose to the early seventeenth century. Johnson includes both the olfactory (“quickness of scent”) and the mental (“acuteness of discovery”) in his own definition of the word in the Dictionary—unsurprising given Boswell’s anecdote. Annotations in nineteenth-century
editions of the *Life of Johnson* frequently insist that the original Latin connected intuition specifically to sight, and sagacity to smell, though this only seems to be half-right, as “*intuitus*” holds specific connection to looking and gazing but “*sagacitas*” has a more hazy connection to the sense of smell.

I find myself fascinated by Johnson’s (and Foote’s and Girardin’s, etc.) “nose of the mind” and its connection to sagacity because it highlights the sense organ that is often underrepresented in the eighteenth century, as well as in our own day. During the eighteenth-century, the process of olfaction was only dimly understood, though many attempts were made to place it into context—a process that continues to this day. When Johnson pronounces sagacity the “nose of the mind,” he does so in an intellectual context where the process of physical olfaction is seen as foundational but “low”—intimately connected to the body—and potentially malleable. What we know now as olfaction’s unique ability to bypass our rational centers of our brain creates personal osmologies, or smellscapes, that are extremely suggestible, deeply personal, as well as culturally constructed and contingent.

For Johnson, the “nose of the mind” can be understood as closely connected to a notion of the mind’s nose—in other words, the osmology or scent-connotations insofar as we can recover them. As I have argued elsewhere, the level to which that ambition is achievable is low. That said, in this essay I explore a few ways we can examine the work of Johnson and his circle for signs of Johnson’s olfactory reality, and how Johnson uses—and suppresses—olfactory data in his own work. Through an examination of what we know of Johnson’s conversation through the biographies, as well as his own writing, we can see the variety of ways that smell language was deployed in eighteenth-century culture.
II. Johnson’s Nose

As we know, while Johnson’s mind was extremely acute, his physical senses were far less so: scrofula had damaged his sight in one eye15 and his biographers generally agree that he was hard of hearing, deaf in one ear from an early age, if not birth. James Boswell recounts a moment where Johnson, “being dull of hearing, did not perceive” that his auditors were not heeding his remarks (or did not care), and thus “continued to vociferate his remarks, and Bear (“like a word in a catch’ as Beauclerk said,) was repeatedly heard at intervals” (Life, 2:347). Music, by all accounts, was beyond (or beneath) his notice.16 Thus, it may seem like a discussion of Johnson as a sensate person is hobbled from the start. But despite these limitations, Boswell contends that his capacities of attention and “the force of his attention and perceptive quickness made him see and distinguish all manner of objects, whether of nature or of art, with a nicety that is rarely to be found” (Life, 1:41). Hester Thrale Piozzi, not one to heedlessly ratify Boswell’s assessments, corroborates this notion: “It was indeed astonishing how he could remark such minutenesses with a sight so miserably imperfect; but no accidental position of a ribband escaped him, so nice was his observation, and so rigorous his demands of propriety.”17

What those close to Johnson noted can be understood to correlate with Johnson’s second definition of sagacity and sagaciousness—that is, it is his mental acuteness of penetration more than raw physical aptitude that allows him to perceive fine detail, when he so chooses. Admittedly, there are still limitations in his senses of sight and sound that cannot physically be overcome. But what we know of the workings of the other senses, particularly that of smell, suggest that such perceptual physical limitations are far less relevant when it comes to developing these other senses. If Johnson’s physically-limited hearing was poor, and his challenged sight was focused and acute insofar as his near-sightedness could allow him to do so,
on the other extreme we know that Johnson’s taste, metaphorical and literal, were highly honed indeed. Boswell gives us Johnson as a self-proclaimed “man of very nice discernment in the science of cookery” who, “when invited to dine, even with an intimate friend … was not pleased if something better than a plain dinner was not prepared for him” (Life, 1:470). Johnson claimed his ability to critique food was based on experience of a “wider range” that allowed him to “more exquisitely judge” (Life, 1:470)—a process of discernment by distinction and contrast that is how the senses of taste and smell are trained. Because one’s ability to taste is closely connected to one’s retronasal (that is, the scent that comes to the nasal cavity via the mouth) sense of smell, we have every reason to think that Johnson’s sense of smell was similarly sharp.18

Moreover, any assessment of Johnson’s osmology needs to take into account that, at least to some of Johnson’s companions, he lived a pungent life. On the one hand, this seems to have been a pleasure: Hester Thrale Piozzi recalls Johnson’s relish of the smell of food cooking, for example. This could also be far less pleasant, at least for those around him: in the same breath, she recounts a story of Johnson discovered at home “all covered with soot like a chimney-sweeper, in a little room, with an intolerable heat and strange smell, as if he had been acting Lungs in the ‘Alchymist,’ making aether” (Piozzi, Anecdotes, 243). And indeed she claims Johnson was fond of chemical experiments of the potentially-explosive sort, which suggests that pungent compounds were involved (Piozzi, Anecdotes, 243-45). John Hawkins corroborates this, though his assessment was that the scale of Johnson’s chemical ambitions “dwindled down to mere distillation” of peppermint and of “the dregs of strong beer,” producing “a strong but very nauseous spirit, which all might smell, but few chose to taste” (Hawkins, Life, 414.).

We also know Johnson made reference to (and indeed recommended to Boswell’s attention) George Cheyne’s The English Malady (1733), a guide to nervous diseases.19 Robert
DeMaria notes that Cheyne’s work came out during the same year Johnson struggled with his “worst bout” of depression, and that Johnson likely found much to identify with in *The English Malady*. DeMaria concentrates on the prescribed diet and exercise that Cheyne’s work promotes, but Cheyne also lists at great length a variety of pungent remedies of volatiles including ammonia, galbanum, assa foetida, myrrh, camphor, hartshorn, garlic, and horseradish—all of which, but especially ammonia and assa foetida, Cheyne believed had “all the kindly Effects of quieting Anxiety and Oppression, procuring Rest, and all the other Benefits of Opium, without leaving that Lowness and Depression behind”—medical commonplaces of the eighteenth-century. The volatiles Cheyne lists are intensely pungent, and were key components in most smelling bottles, judging from the ways in which many of them are used as a shorthand in various literary sources: sal ammoniac, assa foetida, and hartshorn in particular. These new variants of the pomander were thus less about dispelling environmental hazards than curing the body and mind’s preexisting disordered states—and like snuff tobacco, were perceived increasingly throughout the eighteenth-century as items that could lead to dangerous anosmia, or the inability to smell.

Johnson also lived in a time of changing public attitudes towards various scents. When he declares, as Boswell notes in his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785), that “smoking has gone out,” there is something of a wry lament evident:

To be sure, it is a shocking thing, blowing smoke out of our mouths into other people's mouths, eyes, and noses, and having the same thing done to us. Yet I cannot account, why a thing which requires so little exertion, and yet preserves the mind from total vacuity, should have gone out. Every man has something by which he calms himself:
beating with his feet, or so. I remember when people in England changed a shirt only once a week: a Pandour, when he gets a shirt, greases it to make it last.\textsuperscript{22}

Johnson defamiliarizes as a “shocking thing” the act of smoking in company as “blowing smoke” into nearly every facial orifice, but even in this first vivid image we can see the implied conviviality and mutuality that seems to be a potentially positive byproduct. Moreover, Johnson follows this statement with a lengthy defense of the practice that emphasizes the individual, self-soothing benefits of smoking. As if imagining an interlocutor still objecting to the dirtiness of pipe smoke, Johnson notes the changing attitudes towards hygiene that have also occurred in his lifetime.\textsuperscript{23}

We can see Johnson’s awareness of the shifting ground in regards to tobacco use in his \textit{Adventurer 67}, which contains subtle disdain both for those who provide “their neighbors with the means of sucking smoke through a tube of clay” and who make their money off those “whose elegance disdains the grossness of smoky luxury, by grinding the same materials into a powder that may at once gratify and impair the smell”—that is, snuff. While there is a slight ring of disdain here, Johnson emphasizes it is through the production of these and many other “popular and modish trifles” that “the multitudes of this city” are “preserved from idleness, and consequently from want.”\textsuperscript{24} The title of \textit{Adventurer 67}, after all, is “On the trades of London,” and is a complex meditation on the pleasures and the effects of our attachment to things. Hester Thrale Piozzi recounted her understanding of Johnson having had an early sense of the “vacuity of life” which must “be filled up (says Johnson), and the man who is not capable of intellectual pleasures must content himself with such as his senses can afford” (Piozzi, \textit{Anecdotes}, 152-53). Piozzi’s anecdote would seem to echo Johnson’s pose in \textit{Adventurer 67}: a mixed attitude to physical pleasures that resolves in a sort of “each according to his means,” both mentally and
economically. In his invocation of the two most popular tobacco products of the century, mixing terms of praise and subtle criticism, Johnson takes his place in the century-long debate on the connotations of pipe smoke and snuff too extensive to fully address here.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus far I have addressed Johnson as we know him through the reminiscences of Boswell, Hawkins, and Piozzi. From here I will argue that, for all the pungency of Johnson’s life as reported by his wildly disparate biographers, when we turn from Johnson’s reported utterances to his own literary output, we see a distinct shift that makes sense given the expectations of different genres of the period. I will move from pungency to unscentedness, with a stop into sybaritic luxury in between. For the first, I will note the distinctions between Boswell and Johnson’s published accounts of their travel in the Hebrides as an examination of the perception of “real” encounters with smells of other spaces and people. I will then consider the fragility of fragrance in Johnson’s “Abyssinian Tale” \textit{Rasselas} (1759), especially in comparison with the expectations of the genre in terms of imagined scents, as seen in the direct contemporary piece \textit{Candide}, and the later richly-perfumed tale, William Beckford’s \textit{Vathek} (1786). Finally, I will consider some of the texts in which we can see an active unscenting at play, most notably \textit{London} (1738).

\textbf{III. Johnson’s Nose on The Road}

To begin with the most pungent moments in Johnsoniana, I turn to a scene that occurs very early in Boswell’s \textit{Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides} (1785):

Mr. Johnson and I walked arm-in-arm up the High Street to my house in James’s Court

[...] I could not prevent his being assailed by the effluvia of Edinburgh. I heard a late baronet [...] observe that “walking the streets of Edinburgh at night was pretty perilous,
and a good deal odoriferous.” The peril is much abated, by the care which the magistrates have taken to enforce the city laws against throwing foul water from the windows; but [...] there being no covered sewers, the odour still continues. A zealous Scotsman would have wished Mr. Johnson to be without one of his five senses upon this occasion. As we marched slowly along, he grumbled in my ear, “I smell you in the dark!” (Hebrides, 7)

This moment is illustrated in Thomas Rowlandson’s “Walking Up The High Street,” plate four of the Picturesque Beauties of Boswell (1786). In it, the two men are drawn in full figure in mid-stride, Boswell prancing, one hand tucked in his waistcoat, the other gripping his hat, arm flung wide. His white wig is visibly curled, and his profile shows an upturned nose, double chin, and upturned, open lips. Johnson, a substantial figure, is not arm-in-arm with Boswell, but instead is turned towards the other man, one hand with walking stick held aloft, mirroring slightly Boswell’s outstretched one. At the center of the composition, between the two profiles, we see Johnson has his knuckle held to his nose, eyes and mouth shut. In his illustration, Rowlandson highlights the tapping of Johnson’s finger upon his nose, though the source of the scent that he can “smell in the dark!” is not visibly legible in the print.

Johnson’s nose again appears in Rowlandson’s tenth plate, “Scottifying the palate at Leith.” While Boswell’s account of this moment is an attempt at forced consumption of salted speldings fish, Rowlandson shows Boswell all but shoving the fish up the prostrate Johnson’s nostrils, which are flared wide and visible to the viewer. These are the only moments of implied scent that Rowlandson depicts, but elsewhere Boswell recounts the unpleasant scent of his seafowl-feather-stuffed pillow, “a room damp and dirty, with bare walls, a variety of bad smells,” and the stink of breakfast cheese (Hebrides, 118).
While Rowlandson and Boswell note these stenches in vivid detail in their respective mediums, the initial moment of Edinburgh’s stench goes unmentioned in Johnson’s own *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775), but Johnson includes his own olfactory details in his version of their travels. Johnson later corroborates Boswell’s antipathy for “the tea-table by plates piled with large slices of cheshire cheese, which mingles its less grateful odours with the fragrance of the tea” (*Yale Works*, 9:56). Aside from this “pollution,” in Johnson’s own account, his encounters with scent seem to be marked by pleasant surprise, or at least, they lack the bombastic diction of Boswell’s account and Rowlandson’s illustrations. The absence of scented plants and scentless, withered hay strikes him more than the presence of anything else. Peat fires, which are a decidedly acquired taste, he merely notes were occasionally offensive (*Yale Works*, 9: 80, 101-02). While Ruth Mack has recently argued that we should read Johnson’s *Journey* as scientific, as it is rooted in the senses and a notion of precision, the precision she means in her reading rests in sight, and things seen, enumerated, and contextualized, rather than tasted, touched, or smelt.28

As we have seen, Johnson’s sight was not particularly physically keen, but his ability to discern and to render judgment often far surpassed those limitations, particularly with respect to those senses, like the sense of smell, that can be trained and honed. In this Johnson is no different than most humans, who have the physical capacity to distinguish millions, if not trillions, of different odorants, though we lack (in English, at least) a corresponding precision in our olfactory language.29 But we can nevertheless see movement toward precision at work in Johnson’s descriptions of scented spaces. At Fingal’s Table, Johnson notes with evident surprise “The air in this apartment was very warm, but not oppressive, nor loaded with vapours. Our light showed no tokens of a feculent or corrupted atmosphere” (*Yale Works*, 9:146). Scotch whisky he
declared, “was strong, but not pungent, and was free from the empyreumatick taste or smell” as compared to English malt brandy (Yale Works, 9:56). Even in Bamff, “The necessity of ventilating human habitations has not yet been found by our northern neighbours; and even in houses well built and elegantly furnished, a stranger may be sometimes forgiven, if he allows himself to wish for fresher air.” (Yale Works, 9:22).

But it is not only in the realm of travel accounts that Johnson deploys notions of scent, nor is Scotland the only site that Johnson’s nose will find space to observe and critique. Johnson notes the suffering of those in prison with the “corruption of confined air,” and who are “putrified by filth” in the oft-reprinted Idler 38 (1758) (Yale Works, 2:118-19). Neglect is not the only cause of unbearable scents. Overwhelming use of artificial scents also appear in Johnson’s essays. Among the excesses of Peter Plenty’s hoarder wife in Idler 35 (1758) is her need to keep their rooms “always scented by fumigations” to destroy the ever-present moths (Yale Works, 2:111). And the unique torture proposed in Idler 8 of a method of training soldiers to fight by creating a practice fortification and setting the soldiery upon it comes not from foul scents but impossibly delicious ones. There, Johnson proposes making soldiers fast until “about an hour after dinner-time” while “the scent of roast meat and tobacco” wafts from inside (Yale Works, 2:28). And in his fiction, scented language emphasizes similar notions of the seduction of luxury.

IV. Johnson’s Nose and the Smells of Luxury

Johnson did not only observe the scents of his own time, however—he incorporated them into his imaginative work as well. What we can see in Johnson’s output is a sense of the olfactive as luxurious. In his repeated use of luxurious fragrance as the early warning sign of corruption or slothfulness, Johnson participates in the culture’s anxiety about various costly but unessential
goods. Put into conversation with his own knowledge of his gluttony, this becomes another stress point in Johnson’s work (akin to his attempts at hope in a world he often found depressing).

Pleasant smells are not always seductive dangers to Johnson, though it helps if they require some work to access. In his Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson compares the work of “a correct and regular writer” to a garden well and variously planted, “and scented with flowers.” In comparison, Shakespeare is a massive “forest” sometimes “interspersed with weeds and brambles” of irregularities, but “sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and roses” (Yale Works, 7:84)—two plants long connected to notions of beauty, peace, and love. This notion of cultivated sweetness would seem to connect to Piozzi’s account of a striking metaphor of Johnson’s:

“Virtues are like shrubs, which yield their sweets in different manners according to circumstances which surround them: and while generosity of soul scatters its fragrance like the honeysuckle, and delights the senses of many occasional passengers, who feel the pleasure, and half wonder how the breeze has blown it from so far, the more sullen but not less valuable myrtle waits like fortitude to discover its excellence, til the hand arrives that will crush it, and force out that perfume whose durability well compensates the difficulty of production.” (Piozzi, Anecdotes, 243)

While we can all appreciate a “generous” soul or a “correct and regular writer” of “cultivated” genius, Johnson suggests there is a grandeur to a towering forest of “natural genius” that far overshadows any “weeds” that may appear in such a context. In a similar fashion, honeysuckle is an obviously lovely and showy plant in the eighteenth-century garden compared to the compact, tender myrtle shrub or to the scent of myrtle, only accessible to those who put in the effort of “the difficulty of production.”
In *Idler* 96 (1760), the Lapland king Hacho eats honey after a lifetime of “temperance” and “contempt of luxury,” an indulgence that leads to a “refined and vitiated” palate that made fruits, “luxurious desserts,” and wine to his daily diet. These excesses of taste lead to a complete rejection of “the general simplicity of life” in both dress (a tooth-decorated helmet) and in spatial luxury (the perfuming of interior with fires of “the most aromatick fir”) in favor of “indolence and effeminacy” that “stole upon him by pleasing and imperceptible gradations, relaxed the sinews of his resolution, and extinguished his thirst of military glory” (Yale *Works*, 2:296-97).

We see again in *Rasselas* (1759) this contempt of the stultifying effect of luxury. The Happy Valley is Edenic in its collection of “by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature has taught to dip the wing in water” and “All the diversities of the world were brought together, the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded.” The wealth and richness of sensory delight touches all senses, including that of scent: “the banks of the brooks were diversified with flowers; every blast shook spices from the rocks.” But Johnson early and often signals that this is dangerously artificial in several ways. First, the “blessings” are unmixed with the evils, and the further addition of “delights and superfluities” created annually by “artificers of pleasure” create only the “appearance of security and delight,” not the reality. (Yale *Works*, 16:9).

Johnson had also touched on the theme of cloyed senses earlier in *Adventurer* 67 (1753), paralleling the emotionless courtier inured to the royal presence with “the rustic” who “tramples under his foot the beauties of the spring with little attention to their colours or their fragrance” (Yale *Works*, 2:383-84). In a similar fashion,

[T]he sons and daughters of Abissinia lived only to know the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose, attended by all that were skilful to delight, and gratified with whatever the
senses can enjoy. They wandered in gardens of fragrance, and slept in the fortresses of security. (Yale Works, 16:11.)

But Rasselas is surfeited by the pleasures the Happy Valley can give. Early on, he says to himself,

I can discover within me no power of perception which is not glutted with its proper pleasure, yet I do not feel myself delighted. Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy. (Yale Works, 16:13)

He has no desires until he discovers a desire to see the miseries of the world—a desire that ultimately sends him out of the Happy Valley.

Imlac suggests “Mortification is not virtuous in itself, nor has any other use, but that it disengages us from the allurements of sense. In the state of future perfection, to which we all aspire, there will be pleasure without danger, and security without restraint” (Yale Works, 16:167). While Rasselas has some moments of olfactory cues, as I have shown they are luxurious and therefore dangerous, and Johnson does not linger on them in the way that other orientalist tales, most notably Beckford’s later “Arabian tale” Vathek (1782), would. And this is in keeping with a move across the century. With the exception of Smollett and a certain strand of the Gothic tradition, fiction in particular underwent an anosmic shift—in a sense increasingly stripped of even the small olfactory cues. And it is anosmia that I want to finally touch on.

V. Unscenting the Text

In Johnson’s imitations of Juvenal’s satires, this underscenting is particularly striking. In London the metropolis is, like Juvenal’s Rome, a corrupt space, but Johnson’s poem elides over the
stenches present in real London and Juvenalian Rome (as represented by Dryden). Consider Dryden’s 1693 translation of the third Satire—which Johnson was familiar with—which reeks with herds-men turned beaus reeking “sweet oil,” though having arrived on vessels “stowed with prunes and rotten figs” (28). Like Dryden and Johnson’s London, Rome in the time of Juvenal had inadequate drainage, leading to streets filled with effluvia that no amount of rain or water could ever entirely make clean – a useful olfactory image for satirists. While Juvenal’s original relies on references to bodies, mud, and sewers that many modern translators downplay, Dryden’s translation lingers on various nastiness, including the hypocrisy of praising “a belching, or well-pissing lord” (29) where one’s “own third story smokes, while thou, supine, / Art drenched in fumes of undigested wine,” where “‘Tis frequent here, for want of sleep, to die, / Which fumes of undigested feasts deny, / And, with imperfect heat, in languid stomachs fry” (33-34). One cannot really overestimate the gleeful stenches of Dryden’s translation, which reaches a crescendo in the following insult:

“Where did you whet your knife to-night?” he cries,
And shred the leeks that in your stomach rise?
Whose windy beans have stuft your guts, and where
Have your black thumbs been dipt in vinegar?
With what companion-cobbler have you fed,
On old ox-cheeks, or he-goat’s tougher head?
What, are you dumb? Quick, with your answer, quick,
Before my foot salutes you with a kick.
Say, in what nasty cellar, under ground,
Or what church-porch, your rogueship may be found? (38)
In contrast, Johnson’s *London* elides over much of the most pungent of the insults of both the original, urinous Juvenalian third satire and Dryden’s filthier transformation of the poem, creating a strangely unscented space save by implied comparison to the “drooping flowers” and healthful breezes of an imagined space on “the fair banks of Severn or of Trent” (*Yale Works*, 6:58). “Flowery,” in the Johnsonian lexicon, works here as a referent without specificity quite intentionally. Consider in *The Life of Savage* Savage’s imagined “scenes of flow’ry felicity, like those which one poet has reflected to another” with “no interruption from pride, or ignorance, or brutality” (*Yale Works*, 22:941)—a far different fate, of course, than his brutal end. Johnson throughout undercuts the idealized impossibility of enjoying an imaginary rural retreat entirely cut off from the realities of life. A solitary evening rambler of safe suburban retreats is certain to be killed by “some fiery fop, with new commission vain” or “some frolick drunkard” decides to “stab you for a jest” (*Yale Works*, 6: 59). Johnson returns to this trope of foul city and the imaginary and impossible rural retreat elsewhere in his work. The prosperous shopkeeper in *Idler* 16 (1758) who expresses his delights in the “fresh air” and “rural” pleasures of Islington that he experiences through his window, where “clouds of dust” prevent him from opening. (*Yale Works*, 2:53).

Johnson, toiling away in “smoky London,” is keenly aware of the ways in which smell is a construct and an easy trope to play with. As we have seen, this is present throughout Johnson’s work to greater or lesser extents, as he delivers precisely the sort of atmospheric effects that are “required” of a given form. As an author who wrote very explicitly for the commercial marketplace, it is unsurprising that Johnson’s osmology in his work reflects general trends towards an unscented middle class, observing but muting the scents “above,” “below,” and indeed all around him. This is but a very preliminary sort of dipping-into Johnson’s massive
output, but I hope I have begun to show a little of what happens when we read with attention focused on more than just the obviously-dominant senses, and remain curious about what we may need to reimagine.

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1 The attribution appears in several places, including Percy Fitzgerald, “Some New Lights on ‘Bozzy,’” The New Century Review 2.10 (1897): 328-340. Richard was probably the son of the more famous Edmund.


7 Some, though not all, of the quotations and anecdotes Cooke includes concerning Johnson come from The Life, without direct attribution.


10 “CHAT AND MISCELLANIES.” The Tatler. 133 (Feb. 05, 1831): 530.


16 See for example Hawkins *Life,* 319, where he argues that Johnson’s lack of musical appreciation is due more to lack of early instruction than to physical incapacity.


19 “I would not have you read any thing else of Cheyne, but his book on health, and his ‘English Malady’” (Boswell *Life,* 3:26-27).


22 *Johnson and Boswell in Scotland: A Journey to the Hebrides,* Pat Rogers, ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 24 (Hereafter *Hebrides*)


See chapter one of Friedman, *Reading Smell*.


Recent work suggests that this is not only a challenge of our particular cultural orientation, but may indeed be rooted in the way that olfactory information is relayed to the language centers of the brain. Jay A. Gottfried, et al, “A Designated Odor–Language Integration System in the Human Brain.” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 45 (5 November 2014, 34): 14864-14873. Asifa Majid argues this imitation may not be universal, and that non-western languages, such as Maniq, may be better able to do this encoding. See Asifa Majid and Ewelina Wnuk, “Revisiting the Limits of Language: The Odor Lexicon of Maniq.” *Cognition* 131 (2014) 125-38.
Johnson would have likely had in mind either *Lonicera sempervirens* or *Lonicera × Americana*, both of which are climbing shrubs of modest height—evergreen *sempervirens* is 1.25-4 meters high mature, while deciduous *Americana* is 4-8 meters high.

*Myrtus communis* is a compact (1.5-2.5 m tall mature) and slow-growing Mediterranean shrub that needs a lot of tender care in England’s cold, wet climate. If left untrimmed, and if given a sufficiently hot summer, it will produce flowers—rare in Britain outside of a hothouse. The leaves are the source of the essential oil. They were falling out of fashion in favor of more dramatic plants as the eighteenth-century wore on.


As Ana Olga Koloski-Ostrow has noted, it would take a classical reader only “a little imagination” to envision the smells that “emerge quite powerfully” from the third satire. See “Roman Urban Smells: Archeological Evidence” in *Smell and the Ancient Senses* (Routledge, 2015), 93.