

*Anonymous*

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ONANIA;  
OR,  
THE Heinous Sin OF Self-Pollution,  
AND All its Frightful Consequences,  
in both SEXES, Considered.  
WITH  
Spiritual and Physical Advice  
to those, who have already injur'd themselves  
by this Abominable Practice.

And Seasonable Admonition to the *Youth* (of both SEXES) and those whose Tuition they are under, whether *Parents, Guardians, Masters, or Mistresses*. To which is added, A Letter from a Lady (very curious) Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage-Bed. With the Author's Answer thereto. . . .

Gen. 38. ver. 9, 10.

The Tenth EDITION.

Above Fifteen Thousand of the former Editions have been Sold.

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LONDON Printed: Re-printed at BOSTON, for John Phillips, and  
Sold at his Shop on the South-side of the Town-House. 1724.

*Addressed primarily to adolescent males, Onania is nevertheless unique among early eighteenth-century imprints. Not only does its anonymous London author, a Puritan minister, discuss onanism as a vice practiced by both sexes, but as a vice prevalent among persons of all ages. An even more significant aspect of Onania is its tone. The pamphlet is representative of the most rigidly conservative "sexuality literature" of the 1700s. Indeed, the writer goes so far as to equate masturbation, homosexuality and bestiality, declaring that the same might be observed of all three: "That the Crime in it self is monstrous and unnatural; in its Practice filthy and odious to Extremity; its Guilt is crying, and its Consequences ruinous." Each of the three, he argues, "destroys conjugal Affection, perverts natural Inclination, and tends to extinguish the Hopes of Posterity."*

*And he is more dramatic than Mather in detailing the effects of self-abuse on physical health. "It manifestly hinders the Growth both in Boys and Girls," he declares. "Few of either Sex, that in their Youth commit this Sin to excess for any considerable time, come ever to that Robustness or*

*Strength which they would have arriv'd to without it." Specifically relative to young men, he writes:*

*The frequent Use of this POLLUTION . . . causes Stranguaries, Priapisms, and other Disorders of the Penis and Testes, but especially Gonorrhea's, more difficult to be cur'd, than those contracted from Women actually labouring under foul Diseases. . . .*

*In some it has been the Cause of fainting Fits and Epilepsies; in others of Consumptions; and many young Men who were strong and lusty before they gave themselves over to this Vice, have been worn out by it, and by its robbing the Body of its balmy and vital Moisture, without Cough or Spitting, dry and emaciated, sent to their Graves."*<sup>9</sup>

*Masturbation "frequently practis'd" by women, says the author,*

*makes 'em look pale, and those who are not of a good Complexion, swarthy and haggard. It frequently is the Cause of the Hysterick Fits, and sometimes, by draining away all the radical Moisture, Consumptions. But what it more often produces than either is Barrenness, and at length a total ineptitude to the Act of Generation itself. Misfortunes very afflicting to them, because seldom to be redress'd.*

*The body of the pamphlet concludes with a summary of "natural Remedies to which a Christian must not think it below him to be beholden," especially if his constitution is such that "the Stimulations to this Sin, may be very vehement and hard to be resisted." The author's recommendations, primarily directed to males, include "using a spare Diet"; paying close attention to "the Kind and Quality of your Meat"; avoiding "windy Foods" whose "Flatuosity" tends to "puff up the Humour, and make those Parts more turgid"; being "abstemious about the Full and Change of the Moon, for then the whole Body is fuller of Moisture"; and taking "proper Medicines, as well as Food, and us[ing] pretty much Exercise."*

*The author of Onania took an undeniably conservative approach to masturbation and other perceived abuses of sexuality. Those who argue, however, that the pamphlet is harsh and unyielding in its "luridly set[ting] out" the "evils of the practice" (see Christopher Hibbert, *The English: A Social History, 1066-1945*, p. 399) are undoubtedly passing judgment on the first edition, and are perhaps unaware that British editions after 1717—and hence all American editions—included an appendix that softened many of the author's original declarations.*

*The author's first matter of business in the 1717 appendix is to chastise those who have interpreted his writings to mean that a couple commits sin "when the End can't be had for which that Sensation was given." He denies that a couple engaging in intercourse when the woman is pregnant or when she has passed menopause is in effect performing a masturbatory act. It has never been his view, he insists, that a sexual act which "centers in the Pleasures of Sense" is necessarily "a Frustraneous Abuse of [the couple's] Bodies." That such acts "only center in the Pleasure of Sense," declares the author, "is true, but so does Musick, yet it is not forbid us." And he observes that the Bible affords "not the least Shadow of Reason to make us believe, that Abraham had left off all carnal Commerce with Sarah, when it had ceas'd with her to be after the Manner of Women, but rather the contrary."*

*Although the author condemns any method of "frustrating what [God] has appointed for the Multiplication of our Species," observing that "there is a Decorum to be observ'd as to the Marriage-Bed" which excludes "all Excesses and Indecencies, that are destructive either to Health or Chastity," he is careful to emphasize that the marriage vow "cannot actually be defiled without a third Person." Marriage, he says, is "a Provision for incontinence in either Sex; a "lawful Refuge to all, who from a Fault either of their Constitution or manner of Living, find themselves incapable of remaining single without Sin."*

*Finally, the writer declares: "Self-Pollution is not Murder, because what is wasted might prove a Child; if it were, all nocturnal POLLUTIONS, which no Body can prevent, would be so many Murders." Two principles are implied by this statement, both of which diverge from the author's original positions recorded in the main text of Onania. First, that masturbation—while sinful—is decidedly less serious than other means of "hindering Conception," including abortion or a man's "criminal untimely Retreat" which "disappoints his Wife's as well as his own fertility." Second, that nocturnal emissions are not the result of transgression*

*but are unavoidable and even natural. These are admittedly small concessions in an otherwise "traditional" and unyielding text. But they give evidence of the growing influence of the Age of Reason, of common sense and scientific openness, even within the church.*

*Indeed, one must finally allow for at least one important contribution which Onania makes to American sociological literature: however primitive its efforts, the pamphlet strives to ground itself in fact. While many of its arguments are rendered false or illogical by the light of modern science, its use of case studies, its appeals to secular authorities, and its reliance on contemporary medical knowledge to substantiate a religious framework are commendable innovations.*

## *from the Preface*

*THE Sin of ONAN, and GOD's sudden Vengeance upon it, are so remarkable, that every Body will easily perceive, that from his Name I have deriv'd the running Title of this little Book; and that I treat of this Crime in Relation to Women, as well as Men, whilst the Offense, is SELF-POLLUTION in both. I could not think of any other Word which would so well put the Reader in Mind both of the Sin and its Punishment at once, as this.*

*THIS Practice is so frequent, and so crying an Offense, especially among the MALE YOUTH of this Nation, that I have Reason to imagine, a great many Offenders would never have been Guilty of it, if they had been thoroughly acquainted with the Heinousness of the Crime, and the sad Consequences to the BODY as well as the SOUL, which may, and often do ensue upon it. This was the chief Motive that induc'd me to write on this Subject.*

*... AND as I am fully persuaded, that there are very few Sentences throughout the BOOK, which do not more or less tend to the Mortification of Lust, and not one that can give Offense to the chastest Ear, so I dare recommend the serious Perusal of it to both Sexes: And that it has been look'd upon as Instructive, without being hurtful (by others as well as my self), will appear from the following LETTER sent me by a very Learned and Pious Divine.*

"SIR,

"I Received the Favour of your little BOOK against SELF-POLLUTION, and have given it, as it deserv'd, a Second reading. . . . In hope in God . . . [it] will . . . awaken . . . the Guilty, (who are *Daily*, and often-times *Dangerously* wounded by this foul Practice) and deterring the Innocent and Unwary from falling into it. Would all Masters of Schools have but a strict Eye over their Scholars (amongst whom nothing is more common, than the Commission of this vile Sin, the Elder Boys Teaching it the Younger, as soon as ever they arrive to the Years of Puberty), [to] tell them the Heinousness of the Sin, and give suitable Correction to the Offenders therein, and shame them before their School-Fellows for it [author: *or rather privately, reprove and admonish them of the Sin and Danger*]; I am perswaded it would deter them from the Practice, and by that means save them from Ruin; Thousands of the Youth of this Kingdom Learning it there, who probably might never have known it elsewhere.

"Sir, Yours &c."

*. . . [T]ho' the seeming Modesty of those fair Pupils before their Superiors, may give no room for their being Thought Guilty of such Practices, I am credibly inform'd, it is now become almost as frequent amongst Girls, as Masturbation is amongst Boys; and a Gentleman of great Distinction, (my good Friend) whose Veracity I can depend upon, has told me some Years since, that the Governess of one of the most eminent Boarding-Schools we then had, did, with Tears in her Eyes, inform his Lady, that she had surpris'd and detected some of her Scholars, (to her great astonishment and concern) in the very Fact; and who upon Examination confess'd, that, they very frequently practis'd it, cum Digitis & aliis Instrumentis, and that chiefly those of them from the Age of about 15 and upwards.*

*NOR is this abominable Sin, Practis'd only by the Youth, but also by the Adult of both Sexes. Married Men, as well as Single, Widows, and even Married Women that are Lascivious, as well those whose Husbands are with them, as those that are absent, as the many Complaints, that such have made of injuries brought upon them selves thereby, make manifest.*

*TO show the Inoffensiveness of this Treatise to the most Chaste, a certain Grave and very Learned Divine and Physician, whose Judgment, none, with any Justice, can call into question, having had the perusal of it, return'd it, with his Opinion of it, in these words,*

This little BOOK, ought to be Read, by all Sorts of People, of both Sexes; of what Age, Degree, Profession, or Condition soever; Guilty or not Guilty of the Sin declaim'd against, in it.

### ***from Chapter 1. Of the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution.***

SELF POLLUTION is that unnatural Practice, by which Persons of either Sex, may defile their own Bodies, without the assistance of others, whilst yielding to filthy Imaginations, they endeavour to imitate and procure to themselves that Sensation, which God has order'd to attend the carnal Commerce of the two Sexes, for the continuance of our Species.

IT is almost impossible to treat of this Subject so as to be understood by the meanest Capacities, without trespassing at the same time against the Rules of Decency, and making Use of Words and Expressions which Modesty forbids us to utter. But as my great Aim is to promote Virtue and Christian Purity, and to discourage Vice and Uncleaness, without giving Offense to any, I shall choose rather to be less intelligible to some, and leave several things to the Consideration of my Readers . . . .

I am persuaded, that those who have defil'd themselves by this Practice already, or else by wicked Thoughts are tempted so to do, must understand what I mean by SELF-POLLUTION, as I have defin'd it, without any farther Interpretation. To them it is that I chiefly recommended these Pages, with my hearty Desire of their most serious Consideration on what is contain'd in them: And as to such who . . . may be wholly ignorant of the Sin . . . I think them happy in their Innocence; assuring them . . . that they shall meet here with nothing but what shall more and more incite them to Chastity . . .

. . .  
. . . When we reflect on the End of Marriage in all Countries, and in all Societies, and the manner after which God has ordain'd that our Species should be continu'd, natural Religion, and our own Reason would instruct us, that to destroy

that End, must be very offensive to God, if there is one; for whether we commit Abomination with those of our own Sex, as the Scripture says, *Men with Men*; or with Beasts; or that we defile our own Bodies our selves with this shameful Action, the Consequences are the same to the Society and our Species; and what a learned Divine has said of the first, is equally applicable to all three, *That the Crime in it self is monstrous and unnatural; in its Practice filthy and odious to Extremity; its Guilt is crying, and its Consequences ruinous; It destroys conjugal Affection, perverts natural Inclination, and tends to extinguish the Hopes of Posterity.*

FOR *Fornication* and *Adultery* it self, tho' heinous Sins, we have Frailty and Nature to plead; but SELF-POLLUTION is a Sin, not only against Nature, but a Sin, that perverts and extinguishes Nature, and he who is guilty of it, is labouring at the Destruction of his Kind, and in a manner strikes at the Creation it self. . . .

I Shall not here meddle with the Causes of Uncleanness in general, such as *Ill Books*, *Bad Companions*, *Love-Stories*, *Lascivious Discourses*, and other Provocatives to *Lust* and *Wantonness*; as these are sufficiently treated of in most Books of Devotion and Practical Divinity, so I refer the Reader to them, and design only to speak of those peculiar Causes, which belong to this Sin, and hardly any other.

THE first Cause is Ignorance: There are Thousands, among the Youth of both Sexes *Ingenious*, *Docile*, *Diligent*, and *Tractable*, who either by the Example of their Intimates; through their own Wantonness; or by being idle and alone; and some by mere Accident, have learn'd to Pollute themselves after this manner, that would have abhorred the Thoughts, had they understood the Nature of the Sin, and been acquainted with the Heinousness of the Crime. . . .

THE Second, is the Secrecy, with which SELF-POLLUTION may be committed: All other Actions of Uncleanness must have a Witness; this needs none. . . . From all which, it is evident, that the Secrecy of this Sin has betray'd many into it, whom hardly any thing else should have tempted.

THE third and last Cause I shall allege, is Impunity. Tho' the Laws against *Fornication* and *Adultery*, are in many Places either very remiss, or ill executed, yet the Dread of them keeps the fearful in Awe. The Punishment for unnatural Impurities committed with others, is Capital. . . . whereas in SELF-POLLUTION, neither the cautious, nor the covetous, imagine that they have any thing to fear.

. . .

## **from Chapter II. Of the Frightful Consequences of SELF-POLLUTION.**

. . .

. . . In the first place, it manifestly hinders the Growth both in Boys and Girls, and few of either Sex, that in their Youth commit this Sin to excess for any considerable time, come ever to that Robustness or Strength which they would have arriv'd to without it. In Men as well as Boys, the very first Attempt of it has often occasioned a *Phymosis* in some, and a *Paraphymosis* in others; I shall not explain these Terms any further, let it suffice that they are Accidents which are very troublesome & painful, and may continue to be tormenting for some time, if not bring on Ulcers and other worse Symptoms. . . .

THE frequent Use of this POLLUTION; likewise causes *Stranguaries*, *Priapisms*, and other Disorders of the *Penis* and *Testes*, but especially *Gonorrhoeas*, more difficult to be cur'd, than those contracted from Women actually labouring under foul Diseases. When the Seminal Vessels are first strain'd, and afterwards relax'd, the Ferment in the *Testes* is destroy'd and the Seed grown thin and

waterish, comes away unelaborated, without any provocation; this Distemper often proves fatal, even under the Hands of the most skillful. . . .

IN some it has been the Cause of fainting Fits and Epilepsies; in others of Consumptions; and many Young Men who were strong and lusty before they gave themselves over to this vice, have been worn out by it, and by its robbing the Body of its balmy and vital Moisture, without Cough or Spitting, dry and emaciated, sent to their Graves. In others again, whom it has not kill'd, it has produc'd Nightly and excessive Seminal Emissions; a Weakness in the *Penis*, and loss of Erektion, as if they had been Castrated. *Many a young Gentleman* (says . . . Dr. Baynard) *has been for ever utterly undone by it; . . . That used when young it so forces and weakens the tender vessels, that when they come to Manhood, it renders them ridiculous to Women, because important, a Curse half tanty to Castration; many of them not being able to touch a Woman, but* *ad primum labiorum contactum semen emittunt, &c.* In some Men of very strong Constitutions, the Mischiefs may not be so visible, and themselves perhaps capable of Marrying; and yet the Blood and Spirits impair'd, and the Seed render'd infertile, so as to make them unfit for Procreation, by its changing the Crafts [archaic: *power, strength*; also *workings*] of the Spermatick Parts, making them become barren, as Land becomes poor by being over-till'd; and few of those that have been much accustomed to this vice in their Youth, have ever much reason to boast of the Fruits of their Marriage-Bed; for if by Nature's extraordinary Helps, they should get any Children, which happens not often, they are commonly weakly little ones, that either die soon, or become tender, sickly People, always ailing and complaining; a misery to themselves, a dishonour to [the] human Race, and a scandal to their Parents.

. . .

In Women SELF-POLLUTION if frequently practis'd, relaxes and spoils the retentive Faculty, occasions the *Flour albus*, an obnoxious as well as perplexing Illness attending that Sex, which upon account of the Womb, may draw on a whole Legion of Diseases; among other Disorders, it makes 'em look pale, and those who are not of a good Complexion, swarthy and haggard. It frequently is the Cause of *Hysterick Fits*, and sometimes, by draining away all the radical Moisture, *Consumptions*. But what it more often produces than either is *Barrenness*, and at length a total ineptitude to the Act of Generation it self, Misfortunes very afflicting to them, because seldom to be redress'd.

THE Reason why I am not more particular in describing the many Calamities and bodily sufferings, which this Practice may be the occasion of in Women, I hope will be obvious to every Reader that is capable of making reflections. It would be impossible to rake into so much Filthiness, as I should be oblig'd to do, without offending Chastity. Women, who have any Esteem for their Honour, and would keep their Reputation unspotted, which is, that many of them who thus defile their Bodies, by being heedless, or perhaps more fill'd with impure Desires than ordinary, actually deflower themselves, and foolishly part with that valuable Badge of their Chastity and Innocence, which when once lost, is never to be retriev'd. This may be the fatal Cause whenever they marry, of endless Jealousies and Family Quarrels, and make their Husbands suspect more than they have deserv'd, wrongfully imagining, that there is but one Way by which Maids may forfeit their Virginity.

THE next evil Consequences to be apprehended from SELF-POLLUTION, are all those other Vices which it may lead the way to, and in time be the Occasion of . . . .

THE Devil may suggest to the Haughty and the Bashful, that in SELF-POLLUTION they'll run no Hazard of their Reputation, and that no body in the World shall know it but themselves . . . .But whatever Reservedness before others, they may flatter themselves with, whenever the Fact is once committed, if it was but a trifling Sin, they can have no Innocence to boast of afterwards. The Barrier that fenc'd their Chastity is broke, and the Enemy to Purity and Holiness makes daily Inroads, and ravages through every Passage of the conquered Soul.

. . .

AMONG the Consequences of the Sin I treat of, ought not to be forgot the Troubles and Agonies of a wounded Conscience, whenever it is rous'd, and makes the polluted startle, affrighted at the Enormity of their Crime. . . .

### ***from Chapter III. Spiritual and Physical Advice to those who have injur'd themselves by the abominable Practice of SELF-POLLUTION.***

. . . There is no Christian who can be ignorant, that no Pardon can be obtain'd for this as well as other Sins, without Repentance in general; but many are apt to deceive themselves concerning the Nature of Repentance, as not well knowing in what it consists; wherefore, it is requisite I should say something of the Manner after which this Duty ought to be performed, as well as the Necessity of it.

THE first Branch of Repentance, and the first Duty of the polluted, is a Sorrow for what they have done . . . .

NEITHER is it sufficient to be somewhat grieved and ashamed; but this Grief must be affecting, such as enters deep, and pierces the very Heart, filling it with Sadness and Remorse, Detestation and Fear; or if it be not such at the beginning, it must be such at length. This is above all others the one infallible Mark of a hearty Sorrow, and sincere Repentance; that the Sinner finds no longer any Pleasure or Satisfaction in the things he had formerly delighted in, but seeks to withdraw and get out of the way of them . . . .

BUT above all, Care must be taken, that this Grief be lasting; for Mens Sorrow is oftentimes but light at the beginning of their Conversion, as will easily be apprehended, if we but call to mind that there are two sorts of Sins. Some there are for which a Man is apt to have an extreme Concern, as soon as he ever has committed them, and they are such as he is not betrayed into by his own Inclination, nor can take Delight in. . . . But it is quite otherwise with those Sins into which Men are drawn by Pleasure, and which gratify their Inclinations, and especially when they are become habitual. Though they take up a Resolution of quitting these, they do not at first look upon 'em with the Aversion due to them; they could yet please themselves with them, and it is not without doing Violence to themselves, and refitting their own Inclinations, that they get rid of them. . . .

ANOTHER great Duty that belongs to Repentance, is Conversion and Amendment: The Guilty must forsake their Sin, and continue no longer in it. When our Blessed Saviour pardon'd the Woman taken in *Adultery*, he said to her: *Go and Sin no more*. The Crime must therefore be totally renounc'd; and they which do not this, but relapse into it, have not repented of it. Every Act, and every repetition of their Sin is an Aggravation of both their Guilt and Punishment.

. . . All the several Species of Impurity, and all the Defilements of either Body or Mind; all lewd Actions, wanton Glances, impure Thoughts and Desires, together

with such Familiarities as expose to Temptations; all obscene Discourse, or Expressions, and the like, which are contrary to Chastity, must be entirely laid aside.

...

IT suffices not barely to fly Impurity, but they likewise must shew forth their Repentance, by a Life of Mortification; and if it be a general Doctrine among Christians, not to take Care of the Flesh but to mortify the Body, and keep it under, and bring it into Subjection, none have more reason for the Observance of these Injunctions than those whom the Passions of the Flesh have drawn into Sin. A love of Pleasures and compliance with the Flesh, are no where more highly blameable, than in such as are guilty of Impurity. And it must also be granted, that when any one is touch'd with a lively Sense of this Crime, he goes on no longer in quest of his vain Delights, he is not then in a Condition to rejoice and please himself, but places his Consolation rather in the Exercises of Repentance . . .

**from A Second Letter of Advice from another of the Divines [actual title: "The other LETTER from the same Divine {who wrote the short letter preceding it}, has this"]**

...

*I Believe in some Constitutions, the Stimulations to this Sin, may be very vehement and hard to be resisted, and therefore it will not be amiss to tell you that you must call in the Assistance of all other natural Remedies to which a Christian must not think it below him to be beholden. As first: Meditate much upon sad & doleful Objects; get your fancy painted with such kind of Images as have little of Light and Gaiety in them . . . [since] more dark Thoughts are apt to blunt and stupify them, making them long for nothing of Pleasure.*

...

2dly. YOU must use a spare Diet, but not totally abstain. Fasting I believe some use as a Remedy against the Provocations of Uncleanliness; but I think in some Tempers, it rather sharpens the Humour, and makes it more itching and apt to irritate.

3dly. HAVE a Care for the Kind and Quality of your Meat. As 1<sup>st</sup>. Salt [ed] Meat you must forbear, which you may know by the Nature of the Word makes Men salacious. . . . All windy Foods, for the Flatuousness of them, do puff up the Humour . . . and make those Parts more turgid; such as Beans and Pease, Artichoaks, &c. . . .

4thly, I would advise you to be most abstemious about the Full and Change of the Moon, for then the whole Body is fuller of Moisture than at other Seasons.

5thly, IT will be good only to eat dry Suppers, unless it be Water-Gruel, and such like cooling Diet.

6thly, Take proper Medicines, as well as Food, and use pretty much Exercise (tho' not too violent) . . . The Bed is too great a Friend to this Sin, therefore let me advise you, to make no further use of it than for sleeping; for whilst you lie awake, at your ease, your Flesh will be egging you on to this sinful Pleasure. Therefore employ your self with some good Book, till you find Sleep a coming, and in the Morning, quit your Bed as soon as you awake. . . . Sleep also on one Side, and not on your Back, for that heats the Reins, & causes irritations to Lust. I know it will cost some Violence at first to Nature, to be flung so suddenly out of a warm Bed upon a cold Floor, but the difficulty will soon vanish after 5 or 6 times Practice of it, and



*the comfort you will have in your own Breast by it, will much more than make amends. . . . Do not handle those Parts at any Time, but when Necessity of Nature requires, for handling of them puffs up, irritates and raises Flesbly Inclinations; and I should think likewise, that it will be good, after you have humbled yourself so far from this Sin as to forsake it, then not to think of it any more, or as little as you can; for even the thinking upon that Sin, doth but renew the Desire of it. Any thoughts concerning Things belonging to those Parts, do but excite and provoke Lust. For then the Thoughts send the Spirits to those Parts, and make them swell . . . . Forget therefore as much as you can, that there has been any such thing done by you, and employ your Thoughts otherwise, till you may think of it with more safety, that is when you are Married.*

BUT if after all you most exact compliance with the injunctions here enforced, involuntary POLLUTIONS in your sleep, should still infest you, I would advise you, whenever you are apprehensive, or in fear of them, to do what *Forestus*, a noted Physician in his time, lays down, as certain when every thing else has fail'd, which is, to tie a string, when you go to Bed, about your Neck, and the other end of it about the Neck of your *Penis*, which when an Erection happens, will timely awaken you, and put an effectual stop to the seminal Emission.

THESE are excellent Advices, and Marriage the chief Preventative, it being an Institution appointed by the Almighty, as a Remedy against Incontinence, and to preserve us from the Guilt of Impurity, as well as for the Propagation of our Species' whereby the united Pair may with Honour use that Freedom with one another, as was by no means lawful for them to do while they were single, yet there are Restraints in that State also, Bounds set, that they are not to exceed. And tho' the married State is the most happy and comfortable State in the World, where there is (as there ought to be) an Union of Souls, as well as Bodies, and notwithstanding Holy Writ advises it to those that have not the Gift of Continence, yet we too often find them rather inclin'd to pursue their Lusts, than enter into it; some by vowing Celibacy think themselves excus'd; others thro' Libertinism, and to be less confin'd in their Passions; others to avoid some Inconveniencies or Restraints they apprehend to accompany the Marriage Life; and others again, because they cannot meet with a Fortune to their Mind; their Circumstances in the World, as they plead, not allowing them otherwise to alter their Conditions; and in the mean time, all of them (not being chaste) do expose themselves to the continual Danger of Temptations that way, and cannot avoid being ever and anon overcome by them . . . . It was an Idle and Luxurious Life, that gave Occasion for a certain young Gentleman of Birth and Fortune, as well as Parts, to lament himself upon an advantageous Offer of marriage made him by his Friend.

THAT he was now, through his Follies altogether incapable of the married State, having been from his Youth most inordinately addicted to the shameful Practice of SELF-POLLUTION, so hateful to GOD and injurious to himself, and which neither his Reason, Conscience, Education, nor Prayers were of force enough to master that unruly Passion, which had plung'd him, not only into the reproachful Infirmary of an irreparable Weakness of the Genitals, so ridicul'd by Men, and so detestable to Women kind, but also into most dreadful Horrors of Conscience, and well nigh Despair.

AND no doubt, but from the same Cause it is, that so many very likely Gentlemen of Fortune, that we we see or hear of Abroad, do refuse the Offer of

Advantageous Matches, being Conscious to themselves of their Infirmary, which as they are ashamed to own, they as industriously take Care to conceal, excusing themselves with the Answer of being too young, or not yet dispos'd to marry; and as they a little advance in Years, that they are then too old. . . .

EARLY Marriages would be a means of preventing many of those Mischiefs, and the Disgrace which oftentimes the Guilty this way bring upon themselves and Families. A noted Physician of our own, in his Book of the Parts of Generation, advises to it, and says,

“That for want of it, as the Stream is damm'd up with untemper'd Mortar, it doth and will rage the more, and a vent one way or other it will and must have, for that all, of both Sexes, from a natural Instinct, when arrived to the Years of Puberty, and enjoy their full Health and Strength, have amorous Motions, especially those of Sanguine Complexions, and Hot Temperaments; who for want of Marriage, and a due awe upon themselves are prompted to commit unlawful ACTIONS, or else are subject to involuntary POLLUTIONS . . . and if they are kept from Marriage by a kind of force, as many are when the Inclinations are strong towards it, they are the more eager for it . . . and so oftentimes for want of a natural Stream, are over-run into unnatural Practices: And not only the Male Youth in particular, but the Female, when arrived to the Years of Puberty, and give themselves up to Plays, Balls, Mens Company, wanton Discourse, high living and the like, whereby the Humours are heated, and the Desire augmented, have Inclinations to Venery . . . .”

. . .

MARRIAGE, as it is Honourable in all Countries, so it has been held in great Esteem from the beginning of the World, among all Sorts and Sects of People . . . .

THOSE who have not only injur'd their Souls, but likewise their Bodies visibly, by this Practice of SELF-POLLUTION, if the Case by Chirurgical, ought immediately to repair to a skillful Surgeon. Of *Impotency, Infertility*, and other infirmities of this kind, as there are several Degrees, so some are less difficult to be Cur'd than others. Where the Strength is but in part decay'd, the Blood not altogether dispirited, and the Tone of the Parts but lately relax'd, Cold-Bathing has been beneficial to many; in some only accompanied with a Milk-Diet, in others with a more nutritious manner of Living, gentle Exercise, and a few Restorative Medicines. But as every Body cannot bear the Cold-Bath, and Milk does not agree with all Constitutions, in such Cases, as well as others more stubborn and deplorable, as it is impossible to give general Rules for so many Particulars, I would advise every Body to apply themselves to a learned and experienced Physician, and without Hesitation open their Case, which, if he be a sagacious Man, may be done with very few Hints, and so contriv'd, that the Physician shall not know the Patient.

SOME People are of [the] Opinion, that in Diseases proceeding from Uncleaness, whoever points at a Remedy, encourages the Sin; but I leave every impartial Reader, after he hath perused this little Treatise, to judge whether it be reasonable to think, that any Mortal should be induc'd to run the Hazard of drawing upon themselves the frightful Consequences of SELF-POLLUTION, as here related, by what has been said of the Possibility of being Cur'd, when labouring under them: More especially, when I shall have added the Caution I intend to conclude with, and which is, *That whatever Remedies may be applied, or Physicians made use of, no Rule nor Prescription can ever be effectual in removing the*

*Bodily Infirmities occasion'd by SELF-POLLUTION, without they are likewise accompany'd with an entire Cessation of this Practice, a total Abstinence from the Sin itself, and an unalterable Resolution of never falling into it again, and that all Relapses are ever fatal in those Cases.*

WITH this Caution, I should have clos'd, but that the following LETTER came to my Hands from a Lady unknown, concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage-Bed, which as it is very Curious, and may, with my Answer to it, be of Service to many in the married state; I thought it proper to give the Reader, one and the other before I dismiss'd him.

*To the Author of O NANIA.*

*June 5. 1717.*

SIR,

THOUGH I am altogether a Stranger to you Person, yet having read a little Book of yours, I am become acquainted with your refined Notions, and like what you have said against one particular Species of Uncleanness: I bought your Book in hopes you had said something concerning the Married State; what Decorum there must be observ'd not to defile the Marriage Bed. I wish you had said something more on that Point, for the sake of some of my own Sex, I have disputed with. They have such gross Notions, they imagine the Marriage-Bed can't be defiled unless they commit Adultery. I fancy, Sir, you have finer Thoughts than to think Marriage a Provision for the Man's Brutality; therefore I have used the Freedom to address myself to you, hoping you will vouchsafe to tell me whether I am not right in this Particular. First then, I consider those Inclinations were given for the Continuance of our Species and no other end, and Marriage instituted that it might be in a decent regular manner: therefore, Fornication was forbid, not as it is itself Evil, but it not making for the Good of Society, 'tis fitter one Man abide by one Woman, that there may be a due Care of the Offsprings' Education. To be Instrumental to introduce poor Creatures into the World, and not to take Care of them is worse than the Brutes. SELF-POLLUTION you have proved a Sin, because 'tis deordinate [archaic: to pervert the natural order] from the End; 'tis an Abuse of the Creative Power, and very properly I think you term it Murder. Now what is in its self Evil, Marriage can't make Good, therefore I conclude the Marriage-Bed defil'd, the Man and Wife committing Sin, when the End can't be had for which that Sensation was given; for tho' the Man be at all Times capable of Generation, the Woman is not, as when she has Conceived; and when she, according to the course of Nature, is past it, it then centers in the Pleasures of Sense, and is a Frustraneous Abuse of their Bodies, the same in my opinion with SELF-POLLUTION and SODOMY. The Man being at all Times capable of Generation, has made me sometimes think the Men might have Plurality of Wives; but then I consider, GOD made but one Woman for the Man. Sir, I'll tire you no longer with my Impertinency, only to beg Pardon for this Freedom, and to crave the Favour of a Line or two, which I assure you, Sir, will infinitely oblige her that is

*Your unknown Friend*

*and Servant.*

**THE ANSWER.**

MADAM,

THE Reason why in the *ONANIA*, I did not meddle with any Part of Uncleaness relating to the Married-State, is, because I always did as I still do conceive, that no Branch of it could have any Affinity with the Sin of ONAN, and consequently was foreign to my Purpose. But as your ingenious Letter, and the Scruple you seem to labour under, are well worthy of the most serious Reflections, I shall endeavour, as far as I am able, to satisfy you in the Particular on which you require my opinion; and in order to it, desire you to be referr'd to the following Answer.

IN the first Place I am altogether of your Opinion, and think it undeniable, that the Inclinations you hint at were given us for the continuance of our Species, and no other End. Secondly, I am forc'd to allow, that where that End cannot be had, as when the Woman has conceiv'd or by the Course of Nature is past it, all embraces are Frustraneous, and can center in nothing but the Pleasure of sense, and I would think my self oblig'd to subscribe to all the Consequences you can infer from it, if I was not assur'd that you are mistaken as to the End of Marriage and the Sinfulness of *fornication*. In Relation to the latter you imagine that it is forbid, not because it is in it self Evil, but as it is destructive to the good of Society: This is a dangerous Assertion, and gives too great a handle for *Deists* and other *Libertines*, who would persuade the World, that Religion is only a Political Invention, and no farther to be minded, than as it is Beneficial to the Order and Government of Society.

THE only Rule a Christian is to walk by, is the Word of God; where his Precept is Plain, we are restrain'd from any other Standard of the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of an Action, whether it brings a visible Good or a visible Evil, either to our selves or the Publick. The Justice of GOD is as incomprehensible, and his Mercy. What could, to human Understanding, be more innocent than the Eating of an Apple? And yet what Crime was ever more severely punish'd? The Sin of *Adam* was not Luxury, nor Wantonness, but Disobedience, and consisted solely in the Transgression of a direct Command of his Creator; that *Fornication* is forbid, is plain from Holy Writ; but why is it forbid, is Arrogance to determine. When our Notions are too much refin'd they are apt to lead us into Error. You say that *Fornication* not making for the good of Society, it is better one Man abide by one Woman, that there may be a due care taken of the Offsprings' Education. This is as strong an Argument against *Polygamy*, as it is against *Fornication*, and therefore is not calculated for the good of Societies in general; for among the *Mahometans*, and those Heathens whose Religion allows them a Plurality of Wives, there are Nations as Flourishing and Populous as there are among the Christians, and the Neglect of the Offspring is no greater Complaint among them than it is among us. What you add to strengthen your Argument, that to be Instrumental to introduce poor Creatures into the World, and not to take Care of them, is to be worse than the Brutes, I will easily grant, but am apt to think, that in saying this, you made not a due Reflection on the true Reason why *Fornication* among us, is so often the Cause of this Piece of Inhumanity which you justly condemn.

MARRIAGE is honourable throughout Christendom, not so much on a Religious Account, and because it is a State entered into by the Institution of GOD; but chiefly as it is a Fashion and Custom every way countenanc'd and encourag'd by the Laws of the Land, a Formality, which we see that even those of the highest Rank, Kings and Emperors not excepted, are proud to submit to. Among all Ranks and Qualities of People, there are Women deeply involved in Sin, and wholly neglectful of almost every Christian Duty; yet those of them who are

Fashionable, and would be counted to understand themselves, will, out of Pride only, without any other Consideration, always refuse to converse with any of their Sex, that re openly known to have forfeited their Honour. As by this caution Strumpets are render'd despicable, so becomes their Offspring, and all Bastards must infallibly bring Shame and Ignominy, which prove so often fatal to the Lives as well as Fortunes of illegitimate Children. But notwithstanding all this, those who are Spurious, and born out of Wedlock, are only infamous in Comparison to those who are born in Wedlock from the same Parents, or others of the same Degree: The natural Son of a great Prince, will always have the Precedency of the most legitimate Child of a Peasant; from whence it is plain, that in a Country where one Man was not to be confin'd to one Woman, and no Body was to be Married, the Issue of one Woman would not be less honourable to the Father, that the Issue of another, and consequently no Man could be aw'd by that Ignominy and Reproach, which with us are certainly the chief, if not the only Causes, of the little Provision you complain, is generally made for the Offspring of *Fornication*.

IT is not to be imagin'd, that Men or Women should take less Care of their Cffspring than other Creatures, if they were not diverted from it by a more pressing Motive than Brutes are capable of acting from. Avarice is sometimes more powerful than the strongest Ties of Nature; and the Fear of Death it self, is overcome by the fear of Shame only. However our Passions may impose upon us, Men generally love every Thing for their own sakes, and Self love is conspicuous, even in Suicide. The Love of rational Creatures to their Children, arises not so much from a natural Instinct, as is commonly imagin'd, and depends very much on the Delight they take in, and the various Comforts they receive from them; and if we would enter into the true Cause why illegitimate Children are generally more neglected than others, we must compare the Scandal of having half a dozen Bastards, to the Applause and Credit which People receive from the Education and all the good Qualities of so many lawful Children, and we shall find that it is altogether owing to the Shame & Ignominy of it, occasion'd by a Custom, which never could be introduc'd in any Society, before Marriage had been Time out of Mind in fashion among them. I have urged this so far to make it evident, that you are mistaken as to the End of Marriage; because it would be absurd to imagine that Marriage was instituted to prevent a Mischief, which could have no Being, if People did not Marry at all. Marriage then is of a more Sacred Original, and was instituted for Reasons more worthy of the Holiness of GOD, than the procuring of temporal Felicity, the Good of Society, or any other political Consideration. Throughout the Scriptures it is manifest, that GOD has no greater Aversion to any Thing than Uncleaness of all Sorts; it would be inconsistent with his Purity, that he should suffer rational Creatures, made after his own Image, promiscuously to mix themselves with one another like brute Beasts. For this reason he has will'd, that one Man should abide with one Woman, and, *vice versa*, till the Death of either; and to render this Agreement for Life more solemn, he has honour'd it with that Institution which we call Marriage.

FROM what has been said, it will easily appear, that the most palpable End of Matrimony to be trac'd from Holy Writ, is to prevent the Sin of Uncleaness; that is, [to] hinder all People in whom Carnal Desires are stirred up, from *Fornication*, SELF-POLLUTION, and other sorts of Defilements. From this [perspective of the] End of Matrimony I argue thus: Whatever, instead of promoting, is destructive to the sacred End of marriage, could never be requir'd from us by GOD; but the Forbearance you plead for is such, *Ergo*, it could never, &c. As for Instance, could

you imagine that a young lustful Man, full of Health, after having lain four or five Weeks with a Woman he likes, should now be more able to restrain and curb his carnal Appetites, than he was before he had touch'd a Woman? Matrimony at this Rate, instead of rendering People more chaste, would serve rather to whet their Lust, and prompt them on to all manner of Uncleanness. If it be objected, that a lasting Sickness of the Wife, or the long Absence of the Husband, to which most Military, and all Seafaring Men are subject, may produce the same Inconveniency, I answer, that there is a great difference between Accidents and Misfortunes, that may put a stop to the Commerce between a Man and his Wife, and a settled Abstinence as it were entail'd on the State of Matrimony, and which you imagine all married People ought to comply with. Besides, the Sickness of the Wife is a Calamity inflicted by the Hand of GOD on the Husband, as well as her self, and may serve to put them both in mind of their Duty. And those who are exposed to the Sea, or engag'd in other perilous Enterprises, may even from thence reap Materials to subdue Lust and other disorderly Passions; and in these Cases, to overcome all Temptation, they shall have the express Word of GOD to assist them: The Hope of everlasting Glory may excite them to the Obedience of the divine Commands, as the Fear of eternal Punishment may deter them from doing Evil, for whether the Man or his Wife be Sick or Well, present or far off, the nuptial Vow, till the Death of either separates the Union, cannot be broke, and GOD's Command against Adultery is as plain as it is strict.

BUT what shall we say to a young couple, both in Health, that live in Peace and Harmony, and have been a considerable Time striving to render themselves delightful and endearing to each other? How shall they practice this Forbearance, when every Night, naked, they lie in the same Bed together, as most mean People can make no other Shift? This to some would be an insupportable Temptation: But what Reasons, what Inducements, shall make them undergo this severe Abstinence, or rather excruciate themselves with this intolerable Penance? What Hope have they to excite them to this extraordinary Piece of Purity, or what can frighten them from an imaginary Sin, against which there is no express Command of God? Nay, which way shall they imagine That to be a Transgression, concerning which the Scriptures are altogether silent, both Old and New Testaments?

IT is inconsistent with the Goodness, any the Justice of GOD, that any Action in his Eye should be so heinous a Sin as Sodomy, and that he either by his Precept, or the Example of Punishment in others should not have warn'd us against it. There are many Duties incumbent on married People that are expressly commanded, and not so easily observ'd: The real Difficulties that may occur in that State, are sufficient; we need not, by being over nice, invent any more.

I Am of your Opinion, that there is a Decorum to be observ'd as to the Marriage-Bed, and therefore think that all Excesses and Indecencies, that are destructive either to Health or Chastity, are Sinful, and from this I have my Warrant from Scripture; but I likewise think that it cannot actually be defiled without a third Person, and then my Sentiment is, that all shameful Freedoms with others, defile it almost equally with Adultery it self. The Compliment you design me, by fancying that I have finer Thoughts than to think Marriage a Provision for the Man's Brutality, I cannot accept of, for I sincerely believe that State to be a lawful Refuge to all, who from a Fault either of their Constitution or manner of Living, find them selves incapable of remaining single without Sin; therefore I would not scruple to call Marriage a Provision for Incontinence in either Sex.

BUT I am at a loss for the meaning of the word Brutality; for if you give this Name to all Embraces in general, you include the most Lawful ones, even those tending only to Procreation, & then the Expression is very injurious; but if you call so all Commerce with Women after thy have conceiv'd, or are past it, the Word is the most improper in the World; for how can that be Brutality, what Brutes are not wont to do?

I WOULD not have you tell me, that what I say now, shews the Practice to be against Nature, and that Men, always refining upon their Passions, have by their Luxury wrapt the very Bent of their natural Appetites, and so accustomed themselves to Enormities, which Beasts themselves are not guilty of. There is a vast difference betwixt irrational Creatures and our own Species; we may often observe the same Operations in both from very different Principles. It is true, that the Females of most Brutes never admit the Males all the Time of their Pregnancy. But at the Seasons when their procreative Appetite stimulates them to Coition, such a Ferment is stirr'd up within them, as Advertises all Males round them, and some at a great distance, of their Salacity. The Females that are affected with this, are always capable of being impregnated, and without it no Male solicits them. I need not tell you that our Species is destitute of this Piece of Knowledge; but shall only observe, that the very want of this Instinct in Men, is another Argument against you. For is it to be imagin'd, that GOD should have denied us a Faculty (granted to Brutes), if it was of so great a Concern to our eternal Happiness, as this would be, if what you urge was true? Would it not be clashing with the divine Justice, to have made an Action heinously Criminal, of which we are not sure whether we commit it or not?

THE Business of Conception is full of Uncertainty. Many Women, even such as had been Mothers before, have been impos'd upon by Flatulencies and other Ailments, and thought themselves with Child, and to be Deliver'd, when at last they have brought forth nothing but Wind; others again have attributed that to Diseases, for Months together, which has been really owing to their being impregnated, and fallen in Labour before they suspected themselves to be with Child. And in some the only Sign to be rely'd on that Women have not Conceiv'd, has continu'd to appear regularly all the Time of their Pregnancy. Multitudes of Women likewise, have had reason to think themselves past Child-bearing, and after that brought fine Children into the World: From whence it is evident, that if what you condemn, was so heinous a Sin as *Sodomy*, and by every Body believed to be such, Procreation itself would suffer very much. The Danger of committing so capital a Crime, would render good People cautious beyond Necessity. The Uncertainty I have spoken of, would raise a thousand Scruples to obstruct the nuptial Enjoyments, and the Fear of having conceiv'd already, would in many Cases hinder them from conceiving at all.

THERE is in the History of the Old Testament likewise a Circumstance that seems to make against you, and which I would have you seriously to consider. If GOD has willed, that Men should practise the Forbearance you urge, it is not to be thought that the *Patriarchs*, to whom GOD has from Time to Time revealed himself in so peculiar a Manner, could have been ignorant of it. *Abraham*, then, we'll say was well acquainted with GOD's Will as to this particular; but how comes it, that in this Part of the sacred History, there is not the least Shadow of Reason to make us believe, that *Abraham* had left off all carnal Commerce with *Sarah*, when it had ceas'd with her to be after the Manner of Women, but rather the contrary? For had *Abraham* discontinued the nuptial Embraces, there is no

doubt but he would have acquainted *Sarah* with the Reason of it, which alone would have been sufficient Ground for her Disbelief, when the *Angel* foretold that she was to have a Son. She knew that when she was young, and her Husband likewise in the Prime of his Age, and there was no visible Impediment why she should have no Children, she had all along remain'd infertile, which made her wonder how she should now conceive, when she had such manifest Tokens of being past Child-bearing, and her Husband was of a declining Age, and his Vigour much diminished. It was this that provoked her Laughter; she was far from reflecting on the Forbearance of *Abraham's* Benevolence, and seemed rather, when she laughed, conscious of the many fruitless Endeavours they had made since their Youth. It is likewise to be observed, that when *Sarah* said that her Lord was *likewise* Old, she could not mean that he was impotent by Age, and incapable of performing the conjugal Rites: The contrary appeared after *Sarah's* Death; for he married another Wife, and had at least six Children by her, so that she only called him Old in respect to his first Vigour, which certainly was decreas'd.

BESIDES, if *Sarah* had the least Suspicion that it was a Sin for Men to meddle with their Wives after they were past Child-bearing, she would never have alleged, as a Reason of her Unbelief, that her Lord *likewise* was Old; for if the Act itself had been an Indecency, a Thing never practis'd, what had it signified whether *Abraham* was Old or Young?

WHEN in the beginning of this LETTER, I allowed the Embraces you condemn to be frustraneous, I would only be understood as to Procreation; for else it is manifest they are of great use to Society: They are the Bond of conjugal Amity, and by their means a thousand little Differences and petty Quarrels are made up between a Man and his Wife, which without them would become wide Breaches, and often render the married Couple for ever irreconcilable. That (as you say) they only center in the Pleasure of Sense, is true, but so does Musick, yet it is not forbid us. What I say of SELF-POLLUTION, you would apply to this, which is wrong. SELF-POLLUTION is not Murder, because what is wasted might prove a Child; if it were, all nocturnal POLLUTIONS, which no Body can prevent, would be so many Murders: But because the Seed is wasted in a sinful Manner, it is a Crime, which GOD has punish'd with Death. This ought not to be confounded with an Action which GOD allows of, if not encourages.

BESIDES, from the Time the Woman has conceiv'd, till she is brought to Bed, and got up again, the procreative Faculty in the Man is of no Use. The same may be said, when the Wife is past Child-bearing; therefore, it is plain, what I have said before, that the Forbearance you commend, would destroy the End of Matrimony, as it is manifestly explain'd by *St. Paul*; for after he had told the *Corinthians*, that it was good for a Man not to touch a Woman, he goes on thus: *Nevertheless, to avoid Fornication, let every Man have his own Wife, and let every Woman have her own Husband.* The Apostle names the End of Marriage to them, *to avoid Fornication*: And as he knew very well, that the Ceremony, or having the Name of being married, would not suffice for this, but that the only means to keep People Chaste, and hinder them from *Fornication*, was carnal Copulation, and even the frequent Practice of it; therefore he adds, *Let the Husband render to the Wife due Benevolence, and likewise also the Wife unto the Husband.* He speaks of it as a Duty, which both owe to each other, and which ought never to be neglected but by common Consent, and that only for a little while, and a religious Purpose. *Defraud ye not one another, except it be with Consent for a Time, that ye may give your selves to Fasting and Prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your Incontinency.*



IF what you induce us to believe, at the Close of your LETTER concerning your Sex, be true; and the Scruple you propose and which seems to Grieve you, be real, then Madam, I am persuaded you are convinced of your Error before now; and I would not have taken so much Pains, or been so diffusive on this Subject, was I not assured that the same Difficulty is often started, and the same Arguments are used, by Libertines and other lewd Profligates, to perplex conscientious People: For the openly Wicked, who neither can, nor endeavour to hide their own evil Courses, are always pleas'd when they have an Opportunity by the least shew of Reason, to insinuate, as if all Men were bad alike, and the soberest Part of the World no better than themselves.

I Began my LETTER by telling you, that I thought no Part of Uncleaness, relating to the married State, had any Affinity with the Sin of ONAN; but have since considered better of it, and am assured, that there are married Persons, who commit a heinous Sin to GOD, by frustrating what he has appointed for the Multiplication of our Species, and are commonly such, as think Children come too Fast, and distrust Providence for their Maintenance and Education. They indulge themselves in all the Pleasures of Sense, and yet would avoid the Charges they might occasion; in order to which, they do what they can to hinder Conception. What I mean, is, when the Man, by a criminal untimely Retreat, disappoints his Wife's as well as his own fertility: this is what truly may be call'd a frustraneous Abuse of their Bodies, and must be an abominable Sin. Yet it is certain, that Thousands there are in the Married State, who provoke and gratify their Lust, as far as is consistent with this their destructive Purpose, and no farther.