

55 Does not the body thrive and grow
By food of twenty years ago?
And had it not been still supplied,
It must a thousand times have died.
Then, who with reason can maintain
That no effects of food remain?
And is not virtue in mankind
The nutriment that feeds the mind?
Upheld by each good action past,
And still continued by the last:
Then who with reason can pretend,
That all effects of virtue end?

70 Believe me, Stella, when you show
That true contempt for things below,
Nor prize your life for other ends
Than merely to oblige your friends;
Your former actions claim their part,
And join to fortify your heart.
For Virtue in her daily race,
Like Janus⁴ bears a double face;
Looks back with joy where she has gone,
And therefore goes with courage on.
She at your sickly couch will wait,
And guide you to a better state.

80 O then, whatever Heaven intends,
Take pity on your plying friends;
Nor let your ills affect your mind,
To fancy they can be unkind.
Me, surely me, you ought to spare,
Who gladly would your sufferings share;
Or give my scrap of life to you,
And think it far beneath your due;
You, to whose care so oft I owe
That I'm alive to tell you so.

1727 1728

THE LADY'S DRESSING ROOM The first of Swift's so-called scatological poems, which have attracted much critical attention and amateur psychoanalysis, these verses enjoyed considerable popularity in Swift's lifetime, though some contemporaries condemned them as "deficient in point of delicacy, even to the highest degree." One of Swift's friends recorded in her memoirs that *The Lady's Dressing Room* made her mother "instantly" lose her lunch. Sir Walter Scott found in this poem (and other pieces by Swift) "the marks of an incipient disorder of the mind, which induced the author to dwell on degrading and disgusting subjects." If Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* describes Belinda at the "altar" of her dressing table undergoing "the sacred rites of pride" as she and her maid apply all manner of cosmetics to make her a beautiful "god-

dess" and arm her for the battle of the sexes, then *The Lady's Dressing Room* reveals the coar realities of Celia's embodiment—a humorous and disturbing corrective to the pretense of false appearances on which her glorification depends. Although Swift assails the social and literary conventions that celebrate women for their superficial qualities, there is also a misogynistic quality to the poem, which may be attributable to his anger and disappointment over his beloved Stella's death in January 1728. Nevertheless, Strephon is ridiculed for being so naive idealistic about his lover and so easily deceived by appearances; once his secret investigator free him from his illusions, Strephon's permanent revulsion and rejection of all women show his inability to follow a middle course by appreciating women in their complex reality.

The Lady's Dressing Room

Five hours (and who can do it less in?)
By haughty Celia spent in dressing;
The goddess from her chamber issues,
Arrayed in lace, brocade, and tissues:
Strephon,¹ who found the room was void,
And Betty² otherwise employed,
Stole in, and took a strict survey,
Of all the litter as it lay:
Whereof, to make the matter clear,
An inventory follows here.

10 And first, a dirty smock appeared,
Beneath the arm-pits well besmeared;
Strephon, the rogue, displayed it wide,
And turned it round on every side.
In such a case few words are best,
And Strephon bids us guess the rest;
But swears how damnable the men lie,
In calling Celia sweet and cleanly.

15 Now listen while he next produces
The various combs for various uses,
Filled up with dirt so closely fixed,
No brush could force a way betwixt;
A paste of composition rare,
Sweat, dandruff, powder, lead,³ and hair,
A forehead cloth with oil upon't
To smooth the wrinkles on her front;
Here alum flour⁴ to stop the streams,
Exhaled from sour, unsavory streams;
There night-gloves made of Tripsy's⁵ hide,
Bequeathed by Tripsy when she died;
With puppy water,⁶ beauty's help,

4. The god of doorways and of the rising and setting sun, whose two-faced head looks forward and backward, and after

1. Strephon and Celia are names usually associated with pastoral poetry, and are therefore used mockingly here.
2. A typical maidservant's name.
3. White lead face paint, used to whiten the skin.
4. Powdered alum used like modern antiperspirant.
5. A pet.
6. A recipe for this cosmetic, made from the innards of a pig or a fat puppy, was given in the "Top's Dictionary" *Mindus Mulieris* (Womanly Make-up): Or, the *Lady's Dressing Room Unlocked* (1690), which Swift also used!

Distilled from Tripsy's darling whelp.
 Here gallipots^o and vials placed,
 Some filled with washes, some with paste;
 Some with pomatum,^o paints, and slops,
 And ointments good for scabby chops.^o
 Hard^o by a filthy basin stands,
 Fouled with the scouring of her hands;
 The basin takes whatever comes,
 The scrapings of her teeth and gums,
 A nasty compound of all hues,
 For here she spits, and here she spews.

ointment jars
 hair ointment
 lips or cheeks
 close

But oh! it turned poor Strephon's bowels,
 When he beheld and smelt the towels;
 Begunne, benattered, and beslimed;
 With dirt, and sweat, and ear-wax grimed.

unkempt

No object Strephon's eye escapes,
 Here, petticoats in frowzy^o heaps;
 Nor be the handkerchiefs forgot,
 All varnished o'er with snuff⁷ and snot.
 The stockings why should I expose,
 Stained with the moisture of her toes;
 Or greasy coils and pinners^o reeking,
 Which Celia slept at least a week in?
 A pair of tweezers next he found
 To pluck her brows in arches round,
 Or hairs that sink the forehead low,
 Or on her chin like bristles grow.

night caps

The virtues we must not let pass
 Of Celia's magnifying glass;
 When frighted Strephon cast his eye on't,
 It showed the visage of a giant:⁸
 A glass that can to sight disclose
 The smallest worm in Celia's nose,
 And faithfully direct her nail
 To squeeze it out from head to tail;
 For catch it nicely by the head,
 It must come out alive or dead.

Why, Strephon, will you tell the rest?
 And must you needs describe the chest?
 That careless wench! no creature warm her
 To move it out from yonder corner,
 But leave it standing full in sight,

7. Powdered tobacco, sniffed by fashionable men and women alike.
 8. Cf. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 2, "A Voyage to Brobdingnag," ch. 1: "This made me reflect upon the fair skins of

cause they are of our own size, and their defects not to be seen but through magnifying glass, where we find by experiment that the smoothest and whitest skins look rough and coarse, and ill colored."

For you to exercise your spite!
 In vain the workman showed his wit
 With rings and hinges counterfeit
 To make it seem in this disguise
 A cabinet to vulgar eyes;
 Which Strephon ventured to look in,
 Resolved to go through *thick and thin*;
 He lifts the lid: there need no more,
 He smelt it all the time before.

As, from within Pandora's box,
 When Epimetheus oped the locks,
 A sudden universal crew
 Of human evils upward flew;⁹
 He still was comforted to find
 That hope at last remained behind.

So, Strephon, lifting up the lid
 To view what in the chest was hid,
 The vapors flew from out the vent,
 But Strephon cautious never meant
 The bottom of the pan to grope,
 And foul his hands in search of hope.

O! ne'er may such a vile machine^o
 Be once in Celia's chamber seen!
 O! may she better learn to keep
 "Those secrets of the hoary deep."¹

constructor

As mutton cutlets, prime of meat,
 Which though with art you salt and beat
 As laws of cookery require,
 And roast them at the clearest fire;
 If from adown the hopeful chops
 The fat upon a cinder drops,
 To stinking smoke it turns the flame
 Poisoning the flesh from whence it came;
 And up exhales a greasy stench
 For which you curse the careless wench:
 So things which must not be expressed,
 When *plumpede*^o into the reeking chest,
 Send up an excremental smell
 To taint the parts from which they fell:
 The petticoats and gown perfume,
 And waft a stink round every room.

dropped

Thus finishing his grand survey,
 The swain disgusted slunk away,

9. In Greek mythology, Epimetheus, acting against advice, opened the box Jove had given his wife Pandora, and all

hope in the box.
 1. Quoting Milton's *Paradise Lost* 2.891, in which Sin is

Repeating in his amorous fits,
 "Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shifts!"

120 But Vengeance, goddess never sleeping,
 Soon punished Strephon for his peeping.
 His foul imagination links
 Each dame he sees with all her stinks:
 And if unsavory odors fly,
 Conceives a lady standing by:
 125 All women his description fits,
 And both ideas jump^o like wits
 By vicious fancy coupled fast,
 And still appearing in contrast.

130 I pity wretched Strephon, blind
 To all the charms of womankind;
 Should I the queen of love refuse,
 Because she rose from stinking ooze?²
 To him that looks behind the scene,
 Statira's but some pocky quean.³

135 When Celia in her glory shows,
 If Strephon would but stop his nose,
 Who now so impiously blasphemes
 Her ointments, daubs, and paints and creams;
 Her washes, slops, and every clout,⁴
 140 With which she makes so foul a rout;⁵
 He soon would learn to think like me,
 And bless his ravished eyes to see
 Such order from confusion sprung,
 Such gaudy tulips raised from dung.

c. 1730

1732

RESPONSE

*Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: The Reasons that Induced Dr. S. to write a
 Poem called The Lady's Dressing Room*¹

The Doctor in a clean starched band,
 His golden snuff box in his hand,

1. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, energetic traveler and
2. Venus, Roman goddess of sexual love and physical beauty, rose from the sea.
3. One of the heroines of Nathaniel Lee's highly popular tragedy *The Rival Queens* (1677), Swift's common slattern (quean) has had either snuffbox or venereal disease.
4. Washes were either treated water used for the complexion or stale urine used as a detergent; clouts were rags.
5. Both of her skin and, presumably, of the men.

join together

5 With care his diamond ring displays
 And artful shows its various rays,
 While grave he stalks down — street
 His dearest Betty — to meet;²

10 Long had he waited for this hour,
 Nor gained admittance to the bower,
 Had joked and punned, and swore and writ,
 Tried all his gallantry and wit;³
 Had told her oft what part he bore
 In Oxford's schemes in days of yore,<⁴
 But bawdy,^o politics, nor satire
 Could move this dull hard hearted creature.

15 Jenny her maid could taste^o a rhyme
 And, grieved to see him lose his time,
 Had kindly whispered in his ear,
 "For twice two pound you enter here;
 20 My lady vows without that sum
 It is in vain you write or come."

The destined offering now he brought,
 And in a paradise of thought,
 With a low bow approached the dame,
 25 Who smiling heard him preach his flame.
 His gold she takes (such proofs as these
 Convince most unbelieving shes)
 And in her trunk rose up to lock it
 (Too wise to trust it in her pocket)
 And then, returned with blushing grace,
 30 Expects the doctor's warm embrace.

But now this is the proper place
 Where morals stare me in the face,
 And for the sake of fine expression
 I'm forced to make a small digression.

35 Alas for wretched humankind,
 With learning mad, with wisdom blind!
 The ox thinks he's for saddle fit
 (As long ago friend Horace writ⁵)

40 And men their talents still mistaking,⁶
 The sturterer fancies his is speaking.
 With admiration oft we see
 Hard features heightened by toupée,
 The beau affects^o the politician,
 Wit is the citizen's ambition,

45 Poor Pope philosophy displays on
 With so much rhyme and little reason,
 And though he argues ne'er so long

pretends to

obscure

er

2. In Swift's poem, Betty is the maid's name, Celia the mistress's.
3. Montagu echoes Swift's poem *Cadmus and Vanessa*, where the clumsy lover "had sighed and languished, wined and writ, / For pastime, or to show his wit"
4. Swift had collaborated closely in the political sch of Robert Harley, first Earl of Oxford (1661–1724).
5. "The ox desires the saddle" (Horace, *Epistles* 1.14)
6. In this line, Montagu echoes an idea, and a w working it, that Swift used often in his work.

That all is right, his head is wrong.⁷

None strive to know their proper merit
But strain for wisdom, beauty, spirit,
And lose the praise that is their due
While they've th' impossible in view.

So have I seen the injudicious heir
To add one window the whole house impair.

Instinct the hound does better teach,
Who never undertook to preach;

The frightened hare from dogs does run
But not attempts to bear a gun.

Here many noble thoughts occur
But I prolixity abhor,

And will pursue th' instructive tale
To show the wise in some things fail.

The reverend lover with surprise
Peeps in her bubbles, and her eyes,
And kisses both, and tries—and tries. }
The evening in this hellish play,

Beside his guineas thrown away,
Provoked the priest to that degree
He swore, "The fault is not in me.

Your damned close stool⁸ so near my nose,
Your dirty smock, and sinking toes
Would make a Hercules as tame

As any beau that you can name."⁸

The nymph grown furious roared, "By God
The blame lies all in sixty odd,"⁹

And scornful pointing to the door
Cried, "Fumbler, see my face no more."

"With all my heart I'll go away,
But nothing done, I'll nothing pay.

Give back the money." "How," cried she,
"Would you palm such a cheat on me!

For poor four pound to roar and bellow—
Why sure you want some new Prunella?"¹

"I'll be revenged, you saucy quean."²
(Replies the disappointed Dean)

"I'll so describe your dressing room
The very Irish shall not come."

She answered short, "I'm glad you'll write.
You'll furnish paper when I shite."²

chamber pot

whore

1734

VERSES ON THE DEATH OF DR. SWIFT "I have been several months writing near five hundred lines on a pleasant subject," wrote Swift to his friend John Gay in December 1731, "only to tell what my friends and enemies will say on me after I am dead." Swift completed what was to become his most celebrated poem by adding explanatory notes in the early months of 1732. It seems that Swift intended the *Verses* to be published after his death but showed the poem in manuscript to various friends. When the reputation of his *Verses* spread, Swift used the opportunity to publish a different autobiographical poem, *The Life and Genuine Character of Dr. Swift* (1733), which would satisfy public demand and make the eventual appearance of the *Verses* all the more surprising. Six years later, believing they were doing their friend a service, Alexander Pope and William King (1685–1763) published a version of the poem in which they edited out some of Swift's most self-aggrandizing and controversial lines. Swift was "much dissatisfied" with this London edition and responded by supervising the speedy publication of an unexpurgated text of the work in Dublin, though even he had the prudence to leave blank spaces for some of the names in his poem. Among the most controversial elements in the *Verses* were its direct attack on Prime Minister Robert Walpole and his government; the unflattering depiction of the court and singling out of Lady Suffolk and Queen Caroline for ridicule; and Swift's praise of Bolingbroke and Pulteney, leading opposition politicians. Swift's jaunty tetrameter carries an admixture of self-fashioning for posterity and moral instruction, a spirited apologia for his life and writings, and an idealized account of the principles by which he strove to live. *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift* reveals its subject as a champion of liberty and embattled self-promoter, a humanistic preacher and an unsparing satirist.

Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.¹ *Occasioned by Reading a Maxim in Rochefoucauld*

Dans l'adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons quelque chose, qui ne nous déplaist pas.²

"In the adversity of our best friends, we find something that doth not displease us."

As Rochefoucauld his maxims drew
From Nature, I believe 'em true:
They argue^o no corrupted mind
In him; the fault is in mankind.

suggest

5 This maxim more than all the rest
Is thought too base for human breast;
"In all distresses of our friends
We first consult our private ends,
While Nature kindly bent to ease us,
Points out some circumstance to please us."

strains

If this perhaps your patience move^o
Let reason and experience prove.

We all behold with envious eyes,
Our equal raised above our size;

7. Montagu ridicules Pope's conclusion to Epistle 1 of *An Essay on Man*: "Whatever is, is RIGHT" (see page 2673). Over the previous few years, her long, ardent friendship with Pope had dissolved in rancor.
8. In these four lines, Montagu compacts some scattered particulars and the sustained conclusion of Swift's poem: ll. 11–14, 51–52, 69 ff.

9. I.e., Swift's impotence derives not from her odors but from his age (65 at the time the poem was written).
1. "Prunella" is both a fabric used in clergy vestments (Swift was a clergyman), and the name of the promiscuous, low-born heroine in Richard Estcourt's comic interlude, *Prunella* (1708).
2. Compare line 118 of Swift's poem.

1. Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin.
2. François, duc de La Rochefoucauld, *Reflexions on Sentences et Maximes Morales* ("Reflections or Moral Aphorisms and Maxims," 1665).