

Poems about a Lady's Dressing Room¹

The Lady's Dressing Room (1732)

By Jonathan Swift

Five hours, (and who can do it less in?)
By haughty Celia spent in dressing;
The goddess from her chamber issues,
Arrayed in lace, brocades and tissues.

[5] Strephon, who found the room was void,
And Betty otherwise employed,
Stole in, and took a strict survey,
Of all the litter as it lay;
Whereof, to make the matter clear,
[10] An *inventory* follows here.

And first a dirty smock appeared,
Beneath the armpits well besmeared.
Strephon, the rogue, displayed it wide,
And turned it round on every side.
[15] In such as case few words are best,
And Strephon bids us guess the rest,
But swears how damnably the men lie,
In calling Celia sweet and cleanly.

Now listen while he next produces
[20] The various combs for various uses,
Filled up with dirt so closely fixt,
No brush could force a way betwixt.
A paste of composition rare,
Sweat, dandruff, powder, lead and hair;
[25] A forehead cloth with oil upon't
To smooth the wrinkles on her front;
Here alum flower to stop the steams,
Exhaled from sour unsavory streams,
There night-gloves made of Tripsy's hide,
[30] Bequeathed by Tripsy when she died,
With puppy water, beauty's help
Distilled from Tripsy's darling whelp;
Here gallypots and vials placed,
Some filled with washes, some with paste,
[35] Some with pomatum, paints and slops,
And ointments good for scabby chops.

¹ All poems in the public domain.

Hard by a filthy basin stands,
Fouled with the scouring of her hands;
The basin takes whatever comes
[40] The scrapings of her teeth and gums,
A nasty compound of all hues,
For here she spits, and here she spews.

But oh! it turned poor Strephon's bowels,
When he beheld and smelled the towels,
[45] Begummed, bemattered, and beslimed
With dirt, and sweat, and earwax grimed.
No object Strephon's eye escapes,
Here petticoats in frowzy heaps;
Nor be the handkerchiefs forgot
[50] All varnished o'er with snuff and snot.
The stockings why should I expose,
Stained with the marks of stinking toes;
Or greasy coifs and pinders reeking,
Which Celia slept at least a week in?
[55] 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.

The virtues we must not let pass,
[60] Of Celia's magnifying glass.
When frightened Strephon cast his eye on't
It showed visage of a giant.
A glass that can to sight disclose,
The smallest worm in Celia's nose,
[65] 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?
[70] And must you needs describe the chest?
That careless wench! no creature warn her
To move it out from yonder corner;
But leave it standing full in sight
For you to exercise your spite.
[75] In vain the workman showed his wit
With rings and hinges counterfeit
To make it seem in this disguise
A cabinet to vulgar eyes;
For Strephon ventured to look in,

[80] Resolved to go through thick and thin;
He lifts the lid, there needs no more,
He smelled it all the time before.

As from within Pandora's box,
When Epimetheus op'd the locks,
[85] A sudden universal crew
Of human evils upwards flew;
He still was comforted to find
That Hope at last remained behind;

So Strephon lifting up the lid,
[90] 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.

[95] O ne'er may such vile machine
Be once in Celia's chamber seen!
O may she better learn to keep
Those "secrets of the hoary deep!"

As mutton cutlets, prime of meat,
[100] Which though with art you salt and beat
As laws of cookery require,
And toast them at the clearest fire;
If from adown the hopeful chops
The fat upon a cinder drops,

[105] To stinking smoke it turns the flame
Pois'ning 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,

[110] When *plumped* into the reeking chest,
Send up an excremental smell
To taint the parts from whence they fell.
The petticoats and gown perfume,
Which waft a stink round every room.

[115] Thus finishing his grand survey,
Disgusted Strephon stole away
Repeating in his amorous fits,
Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!

But Vengeance, goddess never sleeping
[120] 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 like wits:
But vicious fancy coupled fast,
And still appearing in contrast.
I pity wretched Strephon blind
[130] To all the charms of female kind;
Should I the queen of love refuse,
Because she rose from stinking ooze?
To him that looks behind the scene,
Satira's but some pocky queen.

[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,
[140] With which he makes so foul a rout)
He soon would learn to think like me,
And bless his ravished sight to see
Such order from confusion sprung,
Such gaudy tulips raised from dung.

On the Reason's that Induced Dr. S. to Write a Poem called The Lady's Dressing Room (1734)

By Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

The Doctor in a clean starch'd band,
His Golden Snuff box in his hand,
With care his Di'mond Ring displays
And Artfull shews its various Rays,
[5] While Grave he stalks down——Street
His dearest Betty——to meet.

Long had he waited for this Hour,
Nor gain'd Admittance to the Bower,
Had jok'd and punn'd, and swore and writ,
[10] Try'd all his Galantry and Wit,
Had told her oft what part he bore
In Oxford's Schemes in days of yore,
But Bawdy, Politicks nor Satyr
Could move this dull hard hearted Creature.
[15] Jenny her Maid could taste a Rhyme

And greiv'd to see him lose his Time,
Had kindly whisper'd in his Ear,
“For twice two pound you enter here,
My lady vows without that Summ
[20] It is in vain you write or come.”

The Destin'd Offering now he brought
And in a paradise of thought
With a low Bow approach'd the Dame
Who smileing heard him preach his Flame.
[25] 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 return'd 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 forc'd to make a small digression.
[35] Alas for wretched Humankind,
With Learning Mad, with wisdom blink!
The Ox thinks he's for Saddle fit
(As long ago Freind Horace writ)
And Men their Talents still mistakeing,
[40] The stuttrerer fancys his is speaking.
With Admiration oft we see
Hard Features heighten'd by Toupée,
The Beau affects the Politician,
Wit is the citizen's Ambition,
[45] Poor Pope Philosophy displays on
With so much Rhime and little reason,
And though he argues ne'er so long
That, all is right, his Head is wrong.

None strive to know their proper merit
[50] 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.

[55] Instinct the Hound does better teach
Who never undertook to preach,
The frighted Hare from Dogs does run
But not attempts to bear a Gun.

Here many Noble thoughts occur
[60] But I prolixity abhor,
And will persue th'instructive Tale
To shew the Wise in some things fail.

The Reverend Lover with surprize
Peeps in her Bubbys, and her Eyes,
[65] And kisses both, and tries——and tries.
The Evening in this Hellish Play,
Beside his Guineas thrown away,
Provok'd the Preist to that degree
he swore, “The Fault is not in me.
[70] Your damn'd Close stool so near my Nose,
Your Dirty Smock, and Stinking Toes
Would make a Hercules as tame
As any Beau that you can name.”

The nymph grown Furious roar'd, “By God!
[75] The blame lies all in Sixty odd,”
And scornfull pointing to the door
Cry'd, “Fumbler see my Face no more.”
“With all my Heart I'll go away
But nothing done, I'll nothing pay.”
[80] Give back the Money.” “How,” cry'd she,
[“I lock'd it in the Trunk stands there
And break it open if you dare.]
Would you palm such a cheat on me!
For poor four pound to roar and bellow——
[85] Why sure you want some new Prunella?
[What if your Verses have not sold,
Must therefore I return your Gold?
Perhaps your have no better Luck in
The Knack of Rhyming than of——
[90] I won't give back one single Crown,
To wash your Band, or turn your Gown.”]
“I'll be reveng'd you saucy Quean”
(Replys the disapointed Dean)
“I'll so describe your dressing room
[95] The very Irish shall not come.”
She answer'd short, “I'm glad you'll write,
You'll furnish paper when I shite.”