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**Poems On Several Occasions**

**Gay, John**

**London, 1745**

Epistle III. To the Right Honourable William Pulteney, Esq;

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# EPISTLE III.

To the Right Honourable

WILLIAM PULTENEY, Esq;



ULT'NEY, methinks you blame my  
breach of word;  
What, cannot *Paris* one poor page afford?  
Yes, I can sagely, when the times are past,  
Laugh at those follies which I strove to taste,  
And each amusement, which we shar'd, review,  
Pleas'd with meer talking, since I talk to you,  
But how shall I describe in humble prose,  
Their Balls, Assemblies, Operas and Beaus?  
In prose, you cry! Oh no, the Muse must aid,  
And leave *Parnassus* for the *Tuilleries*' shade;

Shall

Shall he (who late *Britannia's* city trod,  
 And led the draggled Muse, with pattens shod,  
 Through dirty lanes, and alley's doubtful ways)  
 Refuse to write, when *Paris* asks his lays!

Well then, I'll try. Descend, ye beauteous Nine,  
 In all the colours of the rainbow shine.  
 Let sparkling stars your neck and ear adorn,  
 Lay on the blushes of the crimson morn,  
 So may ye balls and gay Assemblies grace,  
 And at the Opera claim the foremost place.

Trav'lers should ever fit expression chuse,  
 Nor with low phrase the lofty theme abuse.  
 When they describe the state of eastern Lords,  
 Pomp and magnificence should swell their words;  
 And when they paint the serpent's scaly pride,  
 Their lines should hiss, their numbers smoothly slide:  
 But they, unmindful of Poetick rules,  
 Describe alike Mockaws, and Great-Moguls.  
*Dampier* would thus, without ill-meaning satire,  
 Dress forth in simple style the *Petit-maitre*.

*In Paris, there's a race of animals,  
 (I've seen them at their Operas and Balls,)*

*They*





*They stand erect, they dance when-e'er they walk,*  
*Monkeys in action, perroquets in talk;*  
*They're crown'd with feathers, like the cockatoo,*  
*And, like cameliens, daily change their hue;*  
*From patches justly plac'd they borrow graces,*  
*And with vermilion lacker o'er their faces,*  
*This custom, as we wisely discern,*  
*They, by frequenting Ladies toilettes, learn,*  
 Thus might the trav'ler easy truth impart.  
 Into the subject let me nobly start!

How happy lives the man, how sure to charm,  
 Whose knot embroider'd flutters down his arm?  
 On him the Ladies cast the yielding glance,  
 Sigh in his songs, and languish in his dance;  
 While wretched is the Wit, contemn'd, forlorn,  
 Whose gummy hat no scarlet plumes adorn;  
 No broider'd flow'rs his worsted ancle grace,  
 Nor cane emboss'd with gold directs his pace;  
 No Lady's favour on his sword is hung.  
 What, though *Apollo* dictate from his tongue,  
 His wit is spiritless and void of grace,  
 Who wants th' assurance of brocade and lace.

While the gay fop genteelly talks of weather,  
 The fair in raptures doat upon his feather ;  
 Like a Court Lady though he write and spell,  
 His minuet step was fashion'd by \* *Marcell* ;  
 He dresses, fences. What avails to know ?  
 For women chuse their men, like silks, for show.  
 Is this the thing, you cry, that *Paris* boasts ?  
 Is this the thing renown'd among our Toasts ?  
 For such a flutt'ring fight we need not roam ;  
 Our own Assemblies shine with these at home.

Let us into the field of Beauty start ;  
 Beauty's a theme that ever warm'd the heart.  
 Think not, ye Fair, that I the Sex accuse :  
 How shall I spare you, prompted by the Muse ?  
 (The Muses all are *Prudes*) she rails, she frets,  
 Amidst this sprightly nation of *Coquettes* ;  
 Yet let not us their loose coquett'ry blame ;  
 Women of ev'ry nation are the same.

You ask me, if *Parisian* dames, like ours,  
 With rattling dice prophane the *Sunday's* hours ;  
 If they the gamester's pale-ey'd vigils keep,  
 And stake their honour while their husbands sleep.

Yes,

\* *A famous dancing-master.*



Yes, Sir, like *English* Toasts, the dames of *France*  
 Will risque their income on a single chance.  
*Nannette* last night at tricking *Pharaon* play'd,  
 The cards the *Taillier's* sliding hand obey'd ;  
 To day her neck no brilliant circle wears,  
 Nor the ray-darting pendant loads her ears.  
 Why does old *Chloris* an Assembly hold ?  
*Chloris* each night divides the sharper's gold.  
*Corinna's* cheek with frequent losses burns,  
 And no bold *Trente la va* her fortune turns.  
 Ah too rash virgin ! where's thy virtue flown ?  
 She pawns her person for the sharper's loan.  
 Yet who with justice can the fair upbraid,  
 Whose debts of honour are so duly paid ?

But let me not forget the *Toilette's* cares,  
 Where art each morn the languid cheek repairs :  
 This red's too pale, nor gives a distant grace ;  
*Madame* to-day puts on her Opera face ;  
 From this we scarce extract the milk-maid's bloom,  
 Bring the deep dye that warms across the room :  
 Now flames her cheek, so strong her charms prevail,  
 That on her gown the silken rose looks pale !

Not but that *France* some native beauty boasts,  
*Clermont* and *Charolois* might grace our Toasts.

When the sweet-breathing spring unfolds the buds,  
 Love flies the dusty town for shady woods.  
 Then *Tottenham* fields with roving beauty swarm,  
 And *Hampstead* Balls the city virgin warm,  
 Then *Chelsea's* meads o'erhear perfidious vows,  
 And the prest grafs defrauds the grazing cows.  
 'Tis here the fame; but in a higher sphere,  
 For ev'n Court Ladies sin in open air.  
 What Cit with a gallant would trust his spouse  
 Beneath the tempting shade of *Greenwich* boughs?  
 What Peer of *France* would let his Dutches's rove,  
 Where *Boulogne's* closest woods invite to love?  
 But here no wife can blast her husband's fame,  
 Cuckold is grown an honourable name.  
 Stretch'd on the grafs the shepherd sighs his pain,  
 And on the grafs what shepherd sighs in vain?  
 On *Chloe's* lap here *Damon* lay'd along,  
 Melts with the languish of her am'rous song;  
 There *Iris* flies *Palæmon* through the glade,  
 Nor tips by chance — 'till in the thickest shade;





Here *Celimene* defends her lips and breast,  
 For kisses are by struggling closer prest ;  
*Alexis* there with eager flame grows bold,  
 Nor can the nymph his wanton fingers hold ;  
 Be wife, *Alexis* ; what so near the road !  
 Hark, a coach rolls, and husbands are abroad !  
 Such were our pleasures in the days of yore,  
 When am'rous *Charles Britannia's* scepter bore ;  
 The nightly scene of joy the *Park* was made,  
 And Love in couples peopled ev'ry shade.  
 But since at Court the rural taste is lost,  
 What mighty Sums have velvet couches cost !]

Sometimes the *Tuillerie's* gawdy walk I love,  
 Where I through crowds of rustling manteau's rove ;  
 As here from side to side my eyes I cast,  
 And gaz'd on all the glitt'ring train that past,  
 Sudden a fop steps forth before the rest ;  
 I knew the bold embroidery of his vest.  
 He thus accosts me with familiar air,  
*Parbleu ! on a fait cet habit en Angleterre !*  
*Quelle manche ! ce galon est grossièrement rangé,*  
*Voilà quelque chose de fort beau et degagé !*

This



This said: On his red heel he turns, and then  
 Hums a soft minuet, and proceeds agen.  
*Well; now you've Paris seen, you'll frankly own*  
*Your boasted London seems a country town;*  
*Has Christianity yet reach'd your nation?*  
*Are churches built? Are Masquerades in fashion?*  
*Do daily Soups your dinners introduce?*  
*Are musick, snuff, and coaches yet in use?*  
 Pardon me, Sir; we know the *Paris* mode,  
 And gather *Politeffe* from Courts abroad.  
 Like you, our Courtiers keep a num'rous train  
 To load their coach, and tradesmen dun in vain.  
 Nor has religion left us in the lurch,  
 And, as in *France*, our vulgar croud the Church;  
 Our Ladies too support the Masquerade,  
 The sex by nature love th'intriguing trade.  
 Straight the vain fop in ign'rant rapture cries,  
*Paris the barb'rous world will civilize!*  
 Pray, Sir, point out among the passing band  
 The present Beauties who the town command.  
*See yonder dame; strict virtue chills her breast,*  
*Mark in her eye demure the Prude profess;*  
*That frozen bosom native fire must want,*  
*Which boasts of constancy to one Gallant!*

*This next the spoils of fifty lovers wears,*  
*Rich Dandin's brilliant favours grace her ears ;*  
*The necklace Florio's gen'rous flame bestow'd,*  
*Clitander's sparkling gems her finger load ;*  
*But now, her charms grown cheap by constant use,*  
*She sins for scarfs, clock'd stockings, knots, and shoes.*  
*This next, with sober gate and serious leer,*  
*Wearies her knees with morn and ev'ning prayer ;*  
*She scorns th' ignoble love of feeble pages,*  
*But with three Abbots in one night engages.*  
*This with the Cardinal her nights employs,*  
*Where holy sinews consecrate her joys.*  
*Why have I promis'd things beyond my power !*  
*Five assignations wait me at this hour,*  
*The sprightly Countess first my visit claims,*  
*To-morrow shall indulge inferior dames.*  
*Pardon me, Sir ; that thus I take my leave,*  
*Gay Florimella slyly twitch'd my sleeve.*

Adieu, Monsieur — The Opera hour draws near.  
 Not see the Opera ! all the world is there ;  
 Where on the stage th'embroider'd youth of *France*  
 In bright array attract the female glance :

This



This languishes, this struts to show his mien,  
And not a gold-clock'd stocking moves unseen.

But hark! the full *Orchestra* strike the strings;  
The Hero struts, and the whole audience sings.

My jarring ear harsh grating murmurs wound,  
Hoarse and confus'd, like *Babel's* mingled found.  
Hard chance had plac'd me near a noisy throat,  
That in rough quavers bellow'd ev'ry note.  
Pray Sir, says I, suspend a-while your song,  
The Opera's drown'd; your lungs are wondrous strong;  
I wish to hear your *Roland's* ranting strain,  
While he with rooted forests strows the plain.  
Sudden he shrugs surprize, and answers quick,  
*Monseur apparemment n'aime pas la musique.*  
Then turning round, he join'd th' ungrateful noise;  
And the loud Chorus thunder'd with his voice.

O sooth me with some soft *Italian* air,  
Let harmony compose my tortur'd ear!  
When *Anastasia's* voice commands the strain,  
The melting warble thrills through ev'ry vein;



Thought stands suspense, and silence pleas'd attends,  
While in her notes the heav'nly Choir descends.

But you'll imagine I'm a *Frenchman* grown,  
Pleas'd and content with nothing but my own,  
So strongly with this prejudice possess,  
He thinks *French* musick and *French* painting best.  
Mention the force of learn'd *Corelli's* notes,  
Some scraping fidler of their Ball he quotes;  
Talk of the spirit *Raphael's* pencil gives,  
Yet warm with life whose speaking picture lives;  
Yes Sir, says he, in colour and design,  
*Rigaut* and *Raphael* are extremely fine!

'Tis true his country's love transports his breast  
With warmer zeal, than your old *Greeks* profess.  
*Ulysses* lov'd his *Ithaca* of yore,  
Yet that sage trav'ler left his native shore;  
What stronger vertue in the *Frenchman* shines!  
He to dear *Paris* all his life confines.  
I'm not so fond. There are, I must confess,  
Things which might make me love my country less.  
I should not think my *Britain* had such charms,  
If lost to learning, if enslav'd by arms;

*France*



*France* has her *Richlieus* and her *Colberts* known,  
And then, I grant it, *France* in science shone ;  
We too, I own, without such aids may chance  
In ignorance and pride to rival *France*.

But let me not forget *Corneille*, *Racine*,  
*Boileau's* strong sense and *Moliere's* humorous Scene.  
Let *Cambray's* name be sung above the rest,  
Whose maxims, *Pult'ney*, warm thy patriot breast ;  
In *Mentor's* precepts wisdom strong and clear  
Dictates sublime, and distant nations hear.  
Hear all ye Princes, who the world controul,  
What cares, what terrors haunt the tyrant's soul ;  
His constant train are anger, fear, distrust,  
To be a King, is to be good and just ;  
His people he protects, their rights he saves,  
And scorns to rule a wretched race of slaves,

Happy, thrice happy shall the monarch reign,  
Where guardian laws despotic power restrain !  
There shall the plough-share break the stubborn land,  
And bending harvests tire the peasant's hand :  
There liberty her settled mansion boasts,  
There commerce plenty brings from foreign coasts.



O *Britain*, guard thy laws, thy rights defend,  
So shall these blessings to thy sons descend!

You'll think 'tis time some other theme to chuse,  
And not with Beaus and Fops fatigue the Muse!  
Should I let Satyr loofe on *Engliff* ground,  
There fools of various character abound;  
But here my verse is to one race confin'd,  
All *Frenchmen* are of *Petit-maitre* kind.

