

"The Dean's Provocation  
for Writing the Lady's  
Dressing-Room"

By Mary Wortley Montagu

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and  
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The  
Dean's Provocation  
FOR WRITING the  
Lady's Dressing-Room  
A  
POEM

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THE  
Dean's PROVOCATION  
For WRITING the  
*DRESSING-ROOM.*

The Doctor, in a clean starch'd Band  
A Golden Snuff-box in his Hand  
With Care his Diamond Ring displays  
And artful shows its various Rays;  
While grave, he stalks down \_\_\_\_\_ Street,  
His dearest \_\_\_\_\_ to meet.

Long had he waited for this Hour,  
Nor gain'd Admittance to the Bow'r;  
Had jok'd, and punn'd, and Swore, and writ,  
Try'd all his Gallantry and Wit;  
Had told her oft what part he bore  
In OXFORD's, <sup>Oxford</sup> Schemes in Days of yore;  
But Bawdy, Politicks, nor Satyr  
Could touch this dull hard-hearted Creature.

JENNY, her maid, could taste a Rhyme,  
And griev'd to see him lose his time,  
Had kindly whisper'd in his Ear,  
For twice two Pounds you enter here;  
My Lady vows without that Sum,  
It is in vain you write or come.

The destin'd Offring now he brought,  
And in a Paradise of Thought;  
With a low Bow approach'd the Dame,  
Who smiling heard him preach his Flame.  
His Gold she took (such Proofs as these  
Convince most unbelieving Shees)  
And in her Trunk rose up to lock it,  
(Too wise to trust it to her Pocket)

And then return'd with blushing Grace,  
Expects the Doctor's warm Embrace.

And now this is the proper Place,  
When Morals stare me in the Face;  
And for the sake of fine Expression  
I'm forced to make a small Digression.

Alas! for wretched Human-kind,  
With Wisdom mad, with Learning blind  
The Ox thinks he's for Saddle fit.  
(As long ago friend *Horace* , <sup>Horace</sup>  
And Men their Talents still mistaking,  
The Stutterer fancys his is speaking.

With Admiration oft we see  
Hard Features heighten'd by Toupee  
The Beau affects the Politician,  
Wit is the Citizen's Ambition;  
Poor *P----* , <sup>Pope</sup> Philosophy displays on  
With so much Rhyme and little Reason,  
But tho' he preaches ne'er so long  
That *all is right* , his Head is wrong.  
None strive to know their proper Merit  
But strain for Wisdom, Beauty, Spirit.

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Nature to ev'ry thing alive,  
Points out the Path to shine or thrive,  
But Man, vain Man, who grasps the whole,  
Shows in all Heads a Touch of Fool;  
Who lose the Praise that is their due,  
While they've th'Impossible in view.

[So I have seen the Injudicious Heir,  
To add one Window, the whole House impair.]

Instinct the Hound does better teach,  
Who never undertood to preach;  
The frighted 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 Rev'rend Lover, with surprise  
Peeps in her Bubbies and her Eyes,  
And kisses both--- and tries---- and tries----  
The Ev'ning in this hellish Play,  
Besides his Guineas thrown away;

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Provok'd the Priest to that degree.  
He swore, *The Fault is not in me.*  
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 G-d,  
The Blame lies all in Sixty odd;"  
And scornful, pointing to the Door,  
Sai'd, "*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, cry'd she,  
Should you palm such a Cheat on me?  
I've lock'd it in the Trunk stands there,  
Go break it open if you dare;  
For poor four Pounds to roar and Bellow  
Why sure you want some new Prunella?  
What if your Verses have not sold,  
Must therefore I return your Gold?  
Perhaps you have no better Luck in  
The Knack of Rhyming than of -----

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I won't give back one single Crown,  
To wash your Band, or turn your Gown."

I'll be reveng'd you sawcy Quaen,  
(Replys the disapointed Dean)  
I'll so describe your *Dressing-Room* ,  
The very *Irish* shall not come;  
She answer'd short, I'm glad you'll write,  
You'll furnish Paper when I Sh---e.

Finis

## Footnotes

- Oxford [Robert Harley](#), the earl of Oxford, was a prominent politician and the leader of the British government between 1711 and 1714. Swift worked closely with Harley during those years, serving as a political advisor and the author of pamphlets and essays in support of government policies. Both men fell from power when Queen Anne died in 1714 and was succeeded by George I. It was at this point that Swift was in effect exiled to Ireland, where he lived and worked the rest of his life. Swift was proud of his time in government, and looked back at that period with a mixture of bitterness and nostalgia. Two decades later, Montagu implies, Swift's references to that period in his life had gotten tiresome, and were not exactly the thing to impress a possible lover.
- Horace in his 14th verse *Epistle* , the Roman poet Horace (65-8 BCE), uses the figure of speech of an ox wishing that he could wear a saddle to observe that people often are interested in pursuing things that do not fit their natural talents.
- Pope Alexander Pope, who at this point was writing more philosophical poems than in his early career, most notably his *Essay on Man* , which Montagu refers to a couple of lines later, (sort of) quoting that poem's line "Whatever is, is right." Pope and Montagu had been friends at one point, but had fallen out for reasons now lost to history.