

# "Saturday. The Small-Pox"

By Mary Wortley Montagu

*Correction, editorial commentary, and markup by Workshop participants at the Behn/  
Burney Conference 2019, Laura Runge, Mona Narain, Shea Stuart, Emily MN Kugler*

- [TP] -

SIX  
TOWN ECLOGUES  
With some other  
POEMS

By the Rt. Hon. L. M. W. M. , montagu

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1747.

## SATURDAY.

### The SMALL-POX, <sup>smallpox</sup> .

*FLAVIA.*

1 THE wretched FLAVIA on her couch reclin'd,  
2 Thus breath'd the anguish of a wounded mind;  
3 A glass revers'd in her right hand she bore,  
4 For now she shun'd the face she sought before.  
  
5 'How am I chang'd! alas! how am I grown  
6 'A frightful spectre, to myself unknown!  
7 'Where's my complexion? where my radiant bloom,  
8 'That promis'd happiness for years to come?  
9 'Then with what pleasure I this face survey'd!  
10 'To look once more, my visits oft delay'd!  
11 'Charm'd with the view, a fresher red would rise,  
12 'And a new life shot sparkling from my eyes!

13 'Ah! faithless glass, my wonted bloom restore;  
14 'Alas! I rave, that bloom is now no more!  
15 'The greatest good the Gods on men bestow,  
16 'Ev'n youth itself, to me is useless now.  
17 'There was a time (oh! that I cou'd forget!)  
18 'When opera-tickets, <sup>opera-tickets</sup> pour'd before my feet;  
19 'And at the ring, <sup>ring</sup>, where brightest beauties shine,  
20 'The earliest cherries of the spring were mine.  
21 'Witness, O Lilly; and thou, Motteux, <sup>Lilly</sup>, tell  
22 'How much japan, <sup>Japan</sup> these eyes have made ye sell.  
23 'With what contempt ye saw me oft despise  
24 'The humble offer of the raffled prize;  
25 'For at the raffle still each prize I bore,  
26 'With scorn rejected, or with triumph wore!  
27 'Now beauty's fled, and presents are no more!  
  
28 'For me the Patriot has the house forsook,  
29 'And left debates to catch a passing look:  
30 'For me the Soldier has soft verses writ;  
31 'For me the Beau, <sup>beau</sup> has aim'd to be a wit.

32 'For me the Wit, <sup>wit</sup> to nonsense was betray'd;  
33 'The Gamester has for me his dun, <sup>dun</sup> delay'd,  
34 'And overseen the card I would have pay'd.  
35 'The bold and haughty by success made vain,  
36 'Aw'd by my eyes, have trembled to complain:  
37 'The bashful 'Squire touch'd by a wish unknown,  
38 'Has dar'd to speak with spirit not his own;  
39 'Fir'd by one wish, all did alike adore;  
40 'Now beauty's fled, and lovers are no more!  
  
41 'As round the room I turn my weeping eyes,  
42 'New unaffected scenes of sorrow rise!  
43 'Far from my sight that killing picture bear,  
44 'The face disfigure, and the canvas tear!  
45 'That picture, which with pride I us'd to show,  
46 'The lost resemblance but upbraids me now.  
47 'And thou, my toilette, <sup>toilette</sup>! where I oft have sate,  
48 'While hours unheeded pass'd in deep debate,  
49 'How curls should fall, or where a patch, <sup>patch</sup> to place;  
50 'If blue or scarlet best became my face;

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51 'Now on some happier nymph, <sup>nymph</sup> your aid bestow;  
52 'On fairer heads, ye useless jewels, glow!  
53 'No borrow'd lusture can my charms restore;  
54 'Beauty is fled, and dress is now no more!  
  
55 'Ye meaner beauties, I permit ye shine;  
56 'Go, triumph in the hearts that once were mine;  
57 'But 'midst your triumphs with confusion know,  
58 "'Tis to my ruin all your arms ye owe.  
59 'Would pitying heav'n restore my wonted mein,  
60 'Ye still might move unthought-of and unseen:  
61 'But oh! how vain, how wretched is the boast  
62 'Of beauty faded, and of empire lost!  
63 'What now is left but weeping, to deplore  
64 'My beauty fled, and empire now no more!  
  
65 'Ye, cruel Chymists, what with-held your aid!  
66 'Could no pomatums, <sup>pomatums</sup> save a trembling maid?  
67 'How false and trifling is that art ye boast;  
68 'No art can give me back my beauty lost.  
69 'In tears, surrounded by my friends I lay,  
70 'Mask'd o'er and trembled at the sight of day;

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71 'MIRMILIO, <sup>Mirmilio</sup> came my fortune to deplore,  
72 '(A golden headed cane well carv'd he bore)  
73 'Cordials, he cried, my spirits must restore:  
74 'Beauty is fled, and spirit is no more!

75 'GALEN, <sup>Galen</sup>, the grave; officious SQUIRT, <sup>Squirt</sup>, was there,  
76 'With fruitless grief and unavailing care:  
77 'MACHAON, <sup>Machaon</sup> too, the great MACHAON, known  
78 'By his red cloak and his superior frown;  
79 'And why, he cry'd, this grief and this despair?  
80 'You shall again be well, again be fair;  
81 'Believe my oath; (with that an oath he swore)  
82 'False was his oath; my beauty is no more!

83 'Cease, hapless maid no more thy tale pursue,  
84 'Forsake mankind, and bid the world adieu!  
85 'Monarchs and beauties rule with equal sway;  
86 'All strive to serve, and glory to obey:  
87 'Alike unpitied when depos'd they grow;  
88 'Men mock the idol of their former vow.

89 'Adieu! ye parks!—in some obscure recess,  
90 'Where gentle streams will weep at my distress,

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91 'Where no false friend will in my grief take part,  
92 'And mourn my ruin with a joyful heart;  
93 'There let me live in some deserted place,  
94 'There hide in shades this lost inglorious face.  
95 'Ye operas, circles, I no more must view!  
96 'My toilette, patches, all the world adieu!

## Footnotes

montagu Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, born Pierrepont (1689-1762), was an eccentric woman and talented writer who has not received as much attention as her friends and contemporaries, like Alexander Pope, with whom she had a close relationship before it turned acrimonious. Montagu was a member of the aristocracy, daughter of the Earl of Kingston and Lady Mary Fielding (yes, she was related to the Henry Fielding of *Tom Jones* fame!). She fled an arranged marriage and eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu. Most remember her as a letter-writer, whose letters were designed for posthumous publication. Most significant in these letters are those typically referred to as the "Turkish Embassy" letters, because they discuss her experience traveling to and living in Constantinople (now Istanbul) with her husband, who served as ambassador to Turkey from 1716-1718.

Her "Town Eclogues," from which this selection is taken, are a series of six adaptations of the Roman poet Virgil's Eclogues, written in 37BCE. An "eclogue" is a kind of poem that presents a snippet (or a "selection") of life. In Virgil's eclogues—a series of 10 poems—rural herdsman sing and discuss their experiences, often relating to the turbulent time in Rome just as the Roman Empire was emerging. In the early 18th century, "Augustan" British poets saw themselves as modern inheritors of a Roman tradition inaugurated by Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome.

Montagu's eclogues focus similarly on a turbulent, transitional era characterized by the social, political, and economic structures of rapid commercialization in the England and the United Kingdom. These "Town Eclogues" offer a series of six poems, which you can read in their entirety on [Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive](#). The poems are organized by days of the week and discuss themes of sexuality, relationships between men and women, illness, and fashionable society. In this poem, "Saturday; or the Small-Pox," the poetic speaker recounts the character Flavia's thoughts about her smallpox scars, which were shared by Mary Wortley Montagu herself—Montagu suffered from smallpox in her youth, which marked her for the rest of her life. During her travels to Turkey, she witnessed the act of inoculation for smallpox, which she employed to inoculate her children. She brought word of the innovation back to England, though she is not credited with its popularization. To read more about Montagu's connection with the smallpox vaccine, read [Tom Solomon's article on \*The Conversation\*](#) .

In 1736, Montagu fell in love with an Italian writer, and she left her husband and family to live with him on the Continent, under cover of traveling for health reasons. He never caught up with her in Italy, however, and she traveled through France and Italy in the 40s and 50s, living for a decade with an Italian Count. After her husband died in 1761, she returned to London, and died of cancer shortly after. Her letters were published in 1763, but the first complete modern edition was published in the 1960s. The portrait of Montagu included here was painted in 1725 by Jonathan Richardson. It is currently in the collection of the Earl of Harrowby, Stafford ([via Wikimedia Commons](#)).

- [TH]

smallpox Smallpox is an infectious disease caused by the variola virus, which ravaged many parts of the world until its eradication in 1980. Throughout the eighteenth century, over 400,000 people died in Europe from the disease. It is characterized by pus-filled blisters that form on the skin,

before hardening and falling off; smallpox often caused severe scarring and even blindness among those who survived. The virus was used as a biological weapon, notably by the British against Native Americans in Pontiac's War of the 1760s. The disease was 90% fatal among the Amerindian population, causing mass destruction. Before a vaccine was developed, the virus was managed through a process of inoculation--also called variolation--whereby a small amount of infected fluid, often from a cow, was introduced to a healthy person's body, causing an immune response. This process of inoculation was practiced in Asia and Africa, before appearing in the Ottoman Empire, where Mary Wortley Montagu witnessed the procedure. To read more, see [Tom Solomon's article on \*The Conversation\*](#) .

- [BehnBurney19]

opera-tickets Opera was a fashionable entertainment past-time in the eighteenth century. Opera stars were celebrities, often extravagantly-compensated, and also the subject of some criticism, as [Michael Burden](#) describes in "Opera, Excess, and the Discourse of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century England." Here, Flavia claims that "opera-tickets pour'd before [her] feet," which would have been an extravagance, indeed. According to Judith Milhous and Robert Hume, throughout much of the period ticket prices were fixed at 1s 6d or 5s, for pit/boxes or gallery seating, respectively. "A season subscription for fifty nights," they note, "was 15 [guineas]" (79). For more information on eighteenth-century opera, see [this overview from the Victoria and Albert Museum](#). For more information on cost of living in the early eighteenth century, see the [discussion of coinage at the Old Bailey Online](#).

- [TH]

ring The "ring" referred to a circular path in Hyde Park where fashionable people would walk, ride, or take a carriage ride. It was a place to be seen. You can see a rendering of the Ring in the detail, included here, of the 1833 map of London engraved by William Smollinger. For more information on Hyde Park, see [article from Wikipedia](#).

- [LR]

Lilly Charles Lilly, also known as Charles Lille, "[opened a perfume shop on The Strand in London in 1708 where he sold 'snuffs and perfumes that refresh the brain.'](#)" Peter Motteux, author, also owned an "India house" on Leadenhall Street that sold oriental goods. For more information about Motteux and his shop, see [Wikipedia](#) and [British History Online](#).

- [LR]

Japan Japanese artifacts with painted or vanished design. A fashionable item that would be found in Motteux's store. For more information, see [this article on East Asian lacquer from the Victoria and Albert Museum](#).

- [LR]

beau From the French, a beau is a ladies' man, or a suitor, often very fashionable (OED).

wit Used here as a noun, a wit was (usually) a man known for cleverness or wittiness (OED).

- dun Used here as a noun, a dun in this sense is a demand for payment of a debt (OED).  
- [BehnBurney19]
- toilette Flavia's toilette is her dressing table. The word is used in multiple senses, either to refer to the location of the action of dressing and readying oneself for the day or as a collective term for the items of dressing or applying makeup (OED).  
- [BehnBurney19]
- patch A patch in this sense has a specific historical meaning, now obsolete. In the 17th and 18th centuries, it was common for fashionable people to wear "patches," or small pieces of black silk or velvet, sometimes cut into shapes. These patches--called "les mouches" in French, because they resembled a fly--would be worn on the face, sometimes to cover a blemish or simply for fashionable purposes, as an artificial beauty mark. Patches were also sometimes used to declare a particular loyalty or party. To learn more about patches, see the *Collector's Weekly* article, "[That Time the French Aristocracy Was Obsessed With Sexy Face Stickers.](#)" The image included here, from that article (via the Metropolitan Museum of Art), is an engraving showing a fashionable young woman at her toilette; she has two patches on her cheek. Engraving "The Morning: The Woman at Her Toilet" by Gilles-Edme Petit, c. 1745-1760.  
- [TH]
- nymph According to the OED, "nymph" (n1. 1-3) is a poetic way of describing a beautiful young woman. It derives from classical mythology, but also can suggest an ironic usage.  
- [TH]
- pomatum Pomatum, or pomade, refers to a cosmetic applied to the face--often, it was made with lead, and used to add a whiteness to the skin (OED).  
- [TH]
- Mirmilio In these lines, Montagu invokes characters from Samuel Garth's popular early mock-epic poem, "The Dispensary" (1699). According to [Sarah Gillam, writing for the Royal College of Physicians](#), Mirmilio likely represents William Gibbons, one of the physicians caught up in the late 17th century dispute about whether to open a free dispensary for the health of the poor in London.  
- [TH]
- Galen While not referenced in Garth's "Dispensary," [Galen](#) is a Greek physician (129-216 CE) known for pioneering work in anatomy, among other branches of medicine and philosophy. His humoral work was highly influential in the Medieval and Early Modern periods.
- Squirt Another character in Garth's "Dispensary," Squirt--always designated there "officious"--is an assistant to Horoscope, the chief apothecary in the poem, who revives his master with a squirt from a urinal [at the end of Canto II](#):

Oft he essay'd the Magus to restore,  
By Salt of Succinum's prevailing pow'r;  
But still supine the solid Lumber lay,  
An Image of scarce animated Clay;



Till Fates, indulgent when Disasters call,  
Bethought th' Assistant of a Urinal;  
Whose Steam the Wight no sooner did receive,  
But rowz'd, and blest the Stale Restorative.  
The Springs of Life their former Vigour feel,  
Such Zeal he had for that vile Urensil.

- [TH]

Machaon Another character in Garth's "Dispensary," Machaon there represents a late seventeenth-century physician Sir Thomas Millington ([Gillum](#)). Machaon is also the name of a mythic figure, the son of the Greco-Roman god of medicine [Asclepius](#). In *The Illiad* , Machaon was the surgeon for the Greek army during the Trojan War.

- [TH]