

The Lady's Dressing Room, 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.
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,
An inventory follows here.
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.
On such a point few words are best,
And Strephon bids us guess the rest;
And swears how damnably the men lie
In calling Celia sweet and cleanly.
Now listen while he next produces
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;
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,
Bequeath'd 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,
Some with pomatum, paints and slops,
And ointments good for scabby chops.
Hard 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.
But oh! it turned poor Strephon's bowels,
When he beheld and smelt the towels,
Begummed, besmattered, and beslimed
With dirt, and sweat, and ear-wax grimed.
No object Strephon's eye escapes:
Here petticoats in frowzy heaps;
Nor be the handkerchiefs forgot
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?

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,
Of Celia's magnifying glass.
When frightened Strephon cast his eye on't
It shewed the visage of a giant.
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 warn her
To move it out from yonder corner;
But leave it standing full in sight
For you to exercise your spite.
In vain, the workman shewed 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,
Resolved to go through thick and thin;
He lifts the lid, there needs 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 humane evils upwards flew,
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 vapours 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 never 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,
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 the 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 exprest,
When plumpt 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.
Thus finishing his grand survey,
Disgusted Strephon stole away
Repeating in his amorous fits,
Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!
But vengeance, Goddess never sleeping,
Soon punished Strephon for his peeping:
His foul Imagination links
Each dame he see with all her stinks;
And, if unsavory odors fly,
Conceives a lady standing by.
All women his description fits,
And both ideas jump like wits
By vicious fancy coupled fast,
And still appearing in contrast.
I pity wretched Strephon blind
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.
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
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.