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Social Criticism in John Gay's Trivia

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**Social Criticism
in John Gay's Trivia**

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**A Thesis
Presented in Candidacy for the
Degree of Master of Arts**

by
Margaret
Emma Flammang

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This Thesis, presented by Emma Flammang as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of North Dakota, is hereby approved by the Committee under which she has carried on her work:

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CHIEF OF BOND

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Introduction

The rank of John Gay as a writer has rested almost entirely on his The Beggar's Opera, and readers have overlooked the wealth of valuable material on social life of the eighteenth century which is to be found in other of his works, particularly Trivia. It is my purpose to make a study of this poem to discover the social customs of that day and the writer's opinion of the same.

To accomplish this purpose I have for my own convenience divided my study into three chapters. In the first chapter I have included a description of London streets, with their dirt, numberless conveyances, and incompetent police protection; in the second, the criminals and fakers of the city; and in the third, the manners and dress of the time.

John Ashton in Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne has to some extent carried on a study of this type, and I have here endeavored to extend his work. Botsford's English Society in the Eighteenth Century, Boas and Hahn's Social Backgrounds of English Literature, and The Spectator have been of particular value in this work.

CHAPTER 1
LONDON STREETS

London streets of the eighteenth century were narrow, ill-paved, crooked, dirty, and crowded. There were no sidewalks, and the mixture of couches, sedan chairs, carts, and wagons made this admonition to the walker very timely:

Though expedition bids, yet never stray
Where no rang'd posts defend the rugged way.
Here laden carts with thund'ring waggons meet,
Wheels clash with wheels, and bar the narrow street; -1-

Londoners knew how to avoid some of the commoner mishaps
and

When drays bound high, they never cross behind,
Where bubbling yest is blown by gusts of wind;
And when up Ludgate-hill huge carts move slow,
Far from the straining steeds securely go,
Whose dashing hoofs behind them fling the mire,
And mark with muddy blots the gazing 'squire. -2-

It was almost impossible to cross these streets, and at places traffic became so congested that the person desiring to cross was in danger of sustaining serious injury. Gay says only by politeness would a person be able to gain a crossing:

If wheels bar up the road, where streets are crost,
With gentle words the coachman's ear accost;

.....

1 Gay, Trivia, 11, 227
2 Ibid., 11, 289

He ne'er the threat, or harsh command obeys,
 But with contempt the spatter'd shoe surveys.
 Now man with utmost fortitude thy soul,
 To cross the way where carts and coaches roll;
 Yet do not in thy hardy skill confide,
 Nor rashly risque the kennel's spacious stride;
 Stay till afar the distant wheel you hear,
 Like dying thunder in the breaking air;
 Thy foot will slide upon the miry stone,
 And passing coaches crush thy tortur'd bone,
 Or wheels enclose the road; on either hand
 Pent round with perils, in the midst you stand,
 And call for aid in vain; -3-

The drivers of the vehicles were noted for their rudeness and uncivility, and when a walker found himself in misfortune, instead of giving assistance

The coachman swears,
 And car-men drive, unmindful of thy prayers. -4-

Although not attempting a crossing, a person

Who knows not that the coachman lashing by,
 Oft' with his flourish cuts the heedless eye; -5-

sometimes sustains serious injury.

The foot-traveler was not the only one who was not free from harm, for sometimes

The drunken chairman in the kennel spurns,
 The glasses shatter, and the charge o'erturns.
 Who can recount the coach's various harms,
 The legs disjoined, and the broken arms? -6-

.....

3 Ibid., 111, 165

4 Ibid., 111, 179

5 Ibid., 11, 311

6 Ibid., 11, 519

The drivers had no respect for the rights of each other, and at times a congestion of traffic would end in a fight among the drivers:

Now oaths grow loud, with coaches coaches jar,
 And the smart blow provokes the sturdy war;
 From the high box they whirl the thong around,
 And with the twining lash their shins resound:
 Their rage ferments, more dang'rous wounds they try,
 And the blood gushes down their painful eye.
 And now on foot the frowning warriors light,
 And with their pond'rous fists renew the fight;
 Blow answers blow, their cheeks are smear'd with blood,
 'Till down they fall, and grappling roll in mud. -7-

In addition to their crowded condition, the streets were filthy; ashes and refuse were thrown from the windows, regardless of the passerby. There was no means of disposing of the sewage. In rainy weather, the gutter, which was in the middle of the street, was flooded, and in addition puddles were everywhere, so that

Oft the loose stone spirts up a muddy tide
 Beneath thy careless foot; -8-

With Gay we wonder, if the discomfitures endured were not enough, without the boys adding more.

Why do ye, boys, the kennel's surface spread,
 To tempt with faithless pass the matron's tread?
 How can ye laugh to see the damsel spurn,
 Sink in your frauds, and her green stocking mourn? -9-

-
- 7 Ibid., 111, 25
 8 Ibid., 11, 266
 9 Ibid., 11, 331

Not only must the walker be careful of his step, but he must watch above, for,

from on high,
Where masons mount the ladder, fragments fly;
Mortar, and crumbled lime in show'rs descend,
And o'er thy head destructive tiles impend. -10-

But workmen were not the only menace from above; often in rainy weather the spouts, which emptied right out into the streets, drenched more than one innocent person below. The only thing to do,

When from high spouts the dashing torrents fall,
Ever be watchful to maintain the wall;
For should'st thou quit thy ground, the rushing throng
Will with impetuous fury drive along;
All press to gain those honours thou hast lost,
And rudely shove thee far without the post.
Then to retrieve the shed you strive in vain,
Draggled all o'er, and soaked in floods of rain. -11-

It never paid to gaze around, for

That walker, who regardless of his pace,
Turns oft' to pore upon the damsel's face,
From side to side by thrusting elbows tost,
Shall strike his aking breast against the post;
Or water, dash'd from fishy stalls, shall stain
His hapless coat with spirts of scaly rain.
But if unwarily he chance to stray,
Where twirling turnstiles intercept the way,
The thwarting passenger shall force them round,
And beat the wretch half breathless to the ground. -12-

A walker who could keep the wall could proceed most swiftly, but

.....

- 10 Ibid., 11, 267
11 Ibid., 111, 205
12 Ibid., 111, 101

it was no easy matter to hold this position, as everyone realized its advantages. Even the chairman would

With assuming stride,
Press near the wall, and rudely thrust thy side: -13-

Common civilities should be paid to certain people, as the lame, the aged, and the blind,

But when the bully, with assuming pace,
Cocks his broad hat, edg'd round with tarnish'd lace,
Yield not thy way; defie his strutting pride,
And thrust him to the muddy kennel's side; -14-

In addition to the discomfitures underfoot and from above, there were always the dirty passers-by to avoid. The chimney sweep, the chandler with his bag, the butcher with his greasy tray, all threatened the wearer of fine clothes. There were three trades which were to be avoided, especially by people clothed in black:

oft in the mingling press
The barber's apron soils the sable dress;
Shun the perfumer's touch with cautious eye,
Nor let the baker's step advance too nigh. -15-

There were also three trades for the person to avoid who wore youthful colors, for

The little chimney-sweeper skulks along,
And marks with sooty stains the heedless throng;
When small-coal murmurs in the hoarser throat,

.....
13 Ibid., 111, 153

14 Ibid., 11, 59

15 Ibid., 11, 27

From smutty dangers guard thy threaten'd coat:
 The dust-man's cart offends thy cloaths and eyes,
 When through the street a cloud of ashes flies;
 But whether black or lighter eyes are worn,
 The chandler's basket, on his shoulder born,
 With tallow spots thy coat; resign the way,
 To shun the surly butcher's greasy tray,
 Butcher's whose hands are dy'd with blood's foul stain,
 And always foremost in the hangman's train. -16-

At night it was almost impossible to find one's way through the streets. The only means of lighting, which were used were lanterns hung in front of occasional dwellings. These dimly lighted streets brought mishaps to vehicles, as well as to passengers:

E'er night has half roll'd round her ebon throne;
 In the wide gulf the shatter'd coach o'erthrown
 Sinks with the snorting steeds; the reins are broke,
 And from the crackling axle flies the spoke. -17-

The watchman of the streets wore a drab greatcoat with countless capes and a Belcher handkerchief or comforter; he was, as a rule, soddish, stupid, and uncivil. ¹⁸ At night he had a watch box so he could snooze comfortably when he chose. As he made his rounds he carried a huge lantern, so the thief knew a long time ahead of time that he was coming. To further announce his progress to the evil doer,

.....

16 *Ibid.*, 11, 33

17 *Ibid.*, 111, 341

18 Quarterly Review, Vol. 11, p. 160

the sturdy paver thumps the ground,
Whilst ev'ry stroke his lab'ring lungs resound; -19-

as he calls the hour and the state of the weather. These watchmen were regarded with contempt by everyone, bribed when necessary, and as this passage shows, of use chiefly as escorts at times when the person was not quite himself:

Yet there are watchmen, who with friendly light
Will teach thy reeling steps to tread aright;
For sixpence will support thy helpless arm,
And home conduct thee, safe from nightly harm;
But if they shake their lanthorns, from afar
To call their breth'ren to confed'rate war
When rakes resist their pow'r; if hapless you
Should chance to wander with the scow'ring crew;
Though fortune yield thee captive, ne're despair,
But seek the constable's consid'rate ear;
He will reverse the watchman's harsh decree,
Moved by the rhet'rick of a silver fee. -20-

We can easily imagine that with a police force of this description that outbreaks of violence were common, although offenses of light importance were often severely punished. Hangings were common, and prisons were schools of vice, where the prisoners were starved, beaten, and tortured. ²¹ Persons who owed a small sum of money were sometimes cast into prison and remained there for life unless a friend paid their debts. Their lot really was worse than that of the criminal, who might be whipped, branded, or hanged, but at least his punishment was

19 Gay, "Trivia", 1, 13
20 Ibid., 111, 307
21 Boas and Hahn, Social Backgrounds of English Literature, p. 160

soon over, and he was not obliged to die a slow death. The insane were put in Bethlehem Hospital, and chained, whipped, and abused. Other forms of punishment were pressing the victim to death, stretching, and the use of the pillory. Here the victims were fastened in place, sentenced to public exposure, and often pelted with missives so they were disfigured for life or killed. ²² Gay warns the pedestrian

Where elevated o'er the gaping croud,
Clasp'd in the board the perjur'd head is bow'd,
Betimes retreat; here, thick as hailstones pour
Turnips, and half-hatch'd eggs, (a mingled show'r)
Among the rabble rain: Some random throw
May with the trickling yolk thy cheek o'erflow. -23-

A newcomer in London had great difficulty in finding his way because the houses had signs instead of numbers. ²⁴ He was wise,

If drawn by bus'ness to a street unknown,
Let the sworn porter point thee through the town;
Be sure observe the signs, for signs remain,
Like faithful landmarks to the walking train.
Seek not from prentices to learn the way,
Those fabling boys will turn thy steps astray;
Ask the grave tradesman to direct thee right,
He ne'er deceives, but when he profits by't. -25-

Signs of all descriptions were hung from business places. These were very misleading, because as a rule they bore no relation whatever to the trade of the person inside. The Spectator found

22 Boynton, Percy, London in English Literature, p. 142
 23 Gay, "Trivia", ll, 221
 24 Boas and Hahn, op. cit., p. 160
 25 Gay, "Trivia", ll, 65

them to be as inconsistent as a cook at the "Boot" and a shoe-maker at the "Pig"²⁶ Odd combinations as the "Bell and Neat's Tongue", "Dog and Gridiron", and "Fox and Geese" were also to be found.

Another oddity of London streets and one which helped add to the general din and confusion, was the street cries. Everything required for use and for the maintenance of daily life was cried in the streets. Potatoes, vegetables, fruits, brooms, feather-beds, foot-stools, writing-ink, singing-birds were all hawked from every corner. "The water-carrier with iron-hooped buckets slung from a yoke on his shoulder and his cry of 'Any fresh and fair spring water here' was not among the least important of these cries."²⁷ To a Londoner

Successive crys the seasons' change declare,
And mark the monthly progress of the year.
Hark, how the streets with treble voices ring,
To sell the bounteous product of the spring.
Sweet-smelling flowers, and elder's early bud,
With nettle's tender shoot's, to cleanse the blood:
And when June's thunder cools the sultry skies,
Ev'n Sundays are prophan'd by mackrell cries
Wallnuts the fruit'rer's hand, in autumn stain,
Next oranges the longing boys entice,
To trust their copper fortunes to the dice.
When rosemary, and bays, the Poet's crown,
Are bawl'd, in frequent cries, through all the town,
Then judge the festival of Christmas near, -28-

The milk-maids added their voices to the din with "Milk-maids

.....

26 Spectator, No. 108

27 Bradley, Rose, The English Housewife of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, p., 171

28 Gay, "Trivia", 11, 425

below" and rattled their pails. Asses' milk was used and these animals were led through the streets by girls who milked them where the milk was wanted.

Before proud gates attending asses bray,
Or arrogate with solemn pace the way;
These grave physicians with their milky chear
The love-sick maid and dwindling beau repair; -29-

Another cry, one which was perhaps more welcome than some others in a city of dirty streets, was when

the boy calls thee to his destin'd stand,
And the shoe shines beneath his oily hand. -30-

The Spectator divided the cries of London into two groups; the vocal and the instrumental. He remarked "as for the latter they are at present under a very great disorder. A freeman of London has the privilege of disturbing a whole street for an hour together with the twanking of a brass kettle or a frying-pan."³¹

To this he added the watchman's thump and the sowgelder's horn. The vocal cries, as already mentioned, were those of the milk-maids, chimney-sweeps, and the sellers of coal, glass, brick dust, dill and cucumbers, card-matches, and the menders of chairs.

There was yet another noise in the streets, that of the ballad singer, or singers, for they usually went in couples. People were warned against them:

.....

29 Ibid., 11, 13

30 Ibid., 11, 101

31 Spectator, No. 251

Let not the ballad-singer's shrilling strain
 Amid the swarm thy list'ning ear detain:
 Guard well thy pocket: for these Syrens stand
 To aid the labours of the diving hand;
 Confed'rate in the cheat, they draw the throng,
 And cambrick handkerchiefs reward the song. -32-

The London shops were low and most of them had overhanging
 penthouses, which were very inconvenient.

Where the low penthouse bows the walker's head,
 And the rough pavement wounds the yielding tread;
 Where not a post protects the narrow space,
 And strung intertwines, combs dangle in thy face; -33-

More offending to the pedestrians than the noise and the
 dirt, were the odors of some of the streets:

Here steams ascend
 That, in mix'd fumes, the wrinkled nose offend,
 Where chandlers cauldrons boil; where fishy prey
 Hide the wet stall, long absent from the sea;
 And where the cleaver chops the heifer's spoil,
 And where huge hogsheads sweat with trainy oil,
 Thy breathing nostril hold; but how shall I
 Pass, where in piles Cornavian cheese lye;
 Cheese, that the table's closing rites denies,
 And bids me with th' unwilling chaplain rise. -34-

Gay, when he sighed for Covent Garden, the center of social
 life of that time, considered its freedom from these smells
 as a great advantage although it had other defects:

-
- 32 Gay, "Trivia", lll, 77
 33 Ibid., lll, 19
 34 Ibid., ll, 247

O bear me to the paths of fair Pell-Mell,
 Safe are thy pavements, grateful is thy smell.
 At distance rolls along the gilded coach,
 Nor sturdy carmen on thy walks encroach;
 No lets would bar thy way were chairs deny'd,
 The soft supports of laziness and pride;
 Shops breathe perfume, thro' sashes ribbons glow,
 The mutual arms of ladies, and the beau, -35-

Considering all the perils to the walker, especially at night, on the unlighted streets, he certainly had need of this advice:

Let constant vigilance thy footsteps guide,
 And wary circumspection guard thy side;
 Then shalt thou walk unharm'd the dang'rous night,
 Nor need th' officious link-boy's smoaky light.
 Thou never wilt attempt to cross the road,
 Where alehouse benches rest the porter's load,
 Grievous to heedless shins; no barrow's wheel,
 That bruises oft' the truant school-boy's heel,
 Behind thee rolling, with insidious pace,
 Shall mark thy stocking with a miry trace.
 Let not thy vent'rous steps approach too nigh,
 Where gaping wide, low steepy cellars lie;
 Should thy shoe wrench aside, down, down, you fall,
 And overturn the scolding huckster's stall,
 The scolding huckster shall not o'er thee moan,
 But pence exact for nuts and pears o'erthrown. -36-

 Where the nail'd hoop defends the painted stall,
 Brush not thy sweeping skirt too near the wall;
 Thy heedless sleeve will drink the colour'd oil,
 And spot indelible thy pocket soil. -37-

-
- 35 Ibid., 11, 257
 36 Ibid., 111, 111
 37 Ibid., 111, 237

CHAPTER 11

CRIMINALS OF THE STREETS

The many discomfitures which the inhabitants of London endured in traveling its dirty, narrow, and ill-lighted streets were as nothing compared to the treatment suffered at the hands of the unlawful element which infested the city.

One of these groups were the beaux, whose nightly frolics and broils were of frequent occurrence. In Queen Anne's reign those roysterers were called Mohocks. There seem to have been two special outbreaks of this group, one in 1709, and the other in 1712. Steele tells of one of these; "When I was a middle-aged man, there were many societies of ambitious young men in England, who, in their pursuits after same, were every night employed in roasting porters, smoaking coblers, knocking down watchmen, overturning constables, breaking windows, blackening sign posts, and the like immortal enterprizes, that dispersed their reputation throughout the whole kingdom. One could hardly find a knocker at a door in a whole street after a mid-³⁸night expedition of these beaux esprits."

Gay speaks of the Mohocks and their window breaking,

.....

thus:

Now is the time that rakes their revells keep;
 Kindlers of riot, enemies of sleep.
 His scatter'd pence the flying Nicker flings,
 And with the copper show'r the casement rings.
 Who has not heard the Scowrer's midnight fame?
 Who has not trembled at the Mohock's name?
 Was there a watchman took his hourly rounds,
 Safe from their blows, or new-invented wounds?
 I pass their desp'rate deeds, and mischiefs done
 Where from Snow-hill black steepy torrents run;
 How matrons, hoop'd within the hoghead's womb,
 Were tumbled furious thence, the rolling tomb
 O'er the stones thunders, bounds from side to side.
 So Regulus to save his country dy'd. -39-

The watchmen were in mortal fear of these Mohocks, or rakes, as they were also called, because they always traveled in a body, and were too strong for them. When the watchmen presumed to demand where they were going, they were usually misused.

That these bands were often made up of noblemen is told in the life of Lord Mohun, of whom it is said, "He spent his time in Raking, Dancing, Fencing, and music, and unhappily gave himself up to all the manner of vices that the country and town afforded." ⁴⁰ And again, "he was as wicked as the oldest rake, ⁴¹ years ere he had done growing."

The greatest scare which these offenders gave the public

.....

39 Gay, "Trivia", 111, 321
 40 Forsythe, Robert S., A Noble Rake, p. 13
 41 Ibid., p. 14

took place March 12, 1712. The Spectator of that date is devoted to the account of their misdeeds: "An outrageous Ambition of doing all possible hurt to their Fellow-Creatures, is the great cement of their Assembly, and the only qualification required in the Members. In order to exert this Principle in its full Strength and Perfection, they take care to drink themselves to a pitch, that is, beyond the Possibility of attending to any Motives of Reason and Humanity; then make a general Sally, and attack all that are so unfortunate as to walk the streets through which they patrole. Some are knock'd down, others stabb'd, others cut, and carbonado'd. To put the Watch to a total Rout, and mortify some of the inoffensive Militia, is reckon'd a coup d'eclat. The particular Talents by which these Misanthropes are distinguished from one another, consist in various kinds of Barbarities which they execute upon their Prisoners. Some are celebrated for a happy Dexterity in tipping the Lion upon them; which is perform'd by squeezing the Nose flat to the Face, and boring out the Eyes with their Fingers; Others are called the Dancing-Masters, and teach their Scholars to cut Capers by running Swords thro' their Legs, a new Invention, whether originally French I cannot tell; A third sort are the Tumblers, whose office it is to set Women on their Heads, and

commit certain Indecencies, or rather Barbarities, on the Limbs
 which they expose."⁴²

This dreaded association was supposed to be under the orders of a chief or Emperor, who wore a crescent on his forehead, and is so described in Spectator No. 347 and in Gay's burlesque, "The Mohocks". Finally public feeling became so strong that the Queen issued a royal proclamation against them, March 17, 1712.⁴³

Some writers hold that stories of these bands have been exaggerated and as Budgell said have begun to doubt "whether indeed there were ever any such society of men",⁴⁴ but when we remember that the civil power of that day lay in the hands of old, infirm men, badly paid, hampered by a long staff and a lantern, we can well suppose that no one would respect them, and certainly not a Mohock.

Thieves and pickpockets were another menace. Gay says of them:

Here dives the skulking thief with the practis'd slight,
 And unfelt fingers make thy pocket light.
 Where's now thy watch, with all its trinkets, flown?
 And thy late snuff-box is no more thy own.
 But lo. his bolder theft some tradesman spies,
 Swift from his prey the scuddling lurcher flies;
 Dextr'ous he 'scapes the coach with nomble bounds,
 Whilst ev'ry honest stop thief rescounds.
 So speeds the wily fox, alarm'd by fear,

.....
 42 Spectator, No. 324

43 Ashton, John, Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne, 387

44 Spectator, No. 347

Who lately filch'd the turkey's callow care;
 Hounds following hounds grow louder as he flies,
 And injur'd tenants joyn the hunter's cries.
 Breathless he stumbling falls: Ill-fated boy!
 Why did not honest work thy youth employ?
 Seiz'd by rough hands, he's dragg'd amid the rout,
 And stretch'd beneath the pump's incessant spout;
 Or plung'd in miry ponds, he gasping lies,
 Mud chokes his mouth, and plasters o'er his eyes. -45-

That these pickpockets operated also at the opera is shown
 by the conversation of these characters:

Fitch. I ply'd at the opera, madam; and considering
 'twas neither dark nor rainy, so that there was no great
 hurry in getting chairs and coaches, made a tolerable hand
 on't. These seven handkerchiefs, madam.

Mrs. Peachum. Colour'd ones. They are sure sale from
 our ware-houses at Redriff among the seamen.

Fitch. And this snuff-box.

Mrs. Peachum. Set in gold. A pretty encouragement to
 a young beginner.

Fitch. I had a fair tug at a charming old watch. Pox
 take the Taylors for making the fobs so deep and narrow.
 It stuck by the way, and I was forc'd to make my escape
 under a coach. Really, madam, I fear I shall be cut off
 in the flower of my youth, so that every now and then
 (since I was pumpt) I have thoughts of taking up and going
 to Sea. -46-

There were many more indignities of both greater and a less
 degree committed, so many in fact that,

Who can the various city frauds recite,
 With all the petty rapines of the night?
 Who now the Guinea-dropper's bait regards,
 Trick'd by the sharper's dice, or juggler's cards?
 Why should I warn thee ne'er to join the fray,

.....

45 Gay, "Trivia", lll, 59

46 Gay, "The Beggar's Opera", Sc. VI, 6

Where the sham-quarrel interrupts the way?
 Lives there in these our days so soft a clown,
 Brav'd by the bully's oaths, or threaten'ing frown?
 I need not strict enjoyn the pocket's care,
 When from the crowded play thou lead'st the fair;
 Who has not here, or watch, or snuff-box lost,
 Or handkerchiefs that India's shuttle boast? -47-

Only those

Careful observers, studious of the town,
 Shun the misfortunes that disgrace the clown;
 Untempted, they contemn the jugler's feats,
 Pass by the Meuse, nor try the thimble's cheat. -48-

The streets of London were filled with beggars of all descriptions, the lame, blind, aged, widows, and children. Many of these deserved aid and Gay was justified in his criticism of the rich in not rendering it:

Proud coaches pass, regardless of the moan
 Of infant orphans, and the widow's groan;
 While Charity still moves the walker's mind,
 His lib'ral purse relieves the lame and blind.
 Judiciously thy half-pence are bestow'd,
 Where the laborious beggar sweeps the road.
 Whate'er you give, give ever at demand,
 Nor let old-age long stretch his palsy'd hand.
 Those who give late, are importun'd each day,
 And still are teaz'd because they still delay.
 If e'er the miser durst his farthings spare,
 He thinly spreads them through the public square,
 Where, all beside the rail, rang'd beggars lie,
 And from each other catch the doleful cry;
 With heav'n, for two-pence, cheaply wipes his score,
 Lifts up his eyes, and hasts to beggar more. -49-

.....
 47 Gay, "Trivia", lll, 247

48 *Ibid.*, ll, 285

49 *Ibid.*, ll, 451

However needy these beggars might have been, there were some who made a business of being thieves at night and lame, blind, or crippled beggars in the day time. Gay tells of one,

Where Lincoln's-Inn, wide space, is rail'd around,
Cross not with vent'rous step; there oft is found
The lurking thief, who while the day-light shone,
Made the walls echo with his begging tone:
That crutch which late compassion mov'd, shall wound
The bleeding head, and fell thee to the ground. -50-

Steele, having noticed these impostors also, said: "Lame-ness and Blindness are certainly very often acted; but can those that have their Sight and Limbs, employ them better than in knowing whether they are counterfeited or not? I know not which of the two misapplies his Senses most, he who pretends himself blind to move Compassion, or he who beholds a miserable Object without pitying it....I looked out of my Window the other Morning earlier than ordinary, and saw a blind Beggar, an Hour before the Passage he stands in is frequented, with a Needle and Thread, thriftily mending his Stockings: My Astonishment was still greater, when I beheld a lame Fellow, whose Legs were too big too walk within an hour after, bring him a Pot of Ale. I will not mention the Shakings, Distortions, and Convulsions which many of these practise to gain an Alms: but sure I am, they thought to be taken care of in this Condition,

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50 Gay, "Trivia", 111, 133

51

either by the Beadle or the Magistrate. And this is what happened. In 1704 a proclamation was issued against rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars, and promised to anyone who should discover one of these persons, and, taking him before the justice of the peace, get him committed to the workhouse, a reward of twelve pence.

52

Dangerous to the virtue of the innocent were the harlots or whore women, who were ever ready,

To lure the strangers unsuspecting hearts; -53-

but to one who was a resident of London this type of woman was easily recognized, for,

'Tis she who nightly strols with saunt'ring pace,
 No stubborn stays her yielding shape embrace;
 Beneath the lamp her tawdry ribbons glare,
 The new-scower'd manteau, and the slattern air;
 High-draggled petticoats her travels show,
 And hollow cheeks with artful blushes glow;
 With flatt'ring sounds she soothes the cred'lous ear,
 My noble captain! charmer! love! my dear!
 In riding-hood near tavern-doors she plies,
 Or muffled pinner's hide her livid eyes.
 With empty handbox she delights to range,
 And feigns a distant errand from the 'Change;
 Nay, she will oft' the Quaker's hood prophane,
 And trudge demure the rounds of Drury-lane.
 She darts from sarsnet ambush wily leers,
 Twitches thy sleeve, or with familiar airs
 Her fan will pat thy cheek; -54-

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- 51 Spectator, No. 430
 52 Ashton, op. cit., p. 421
 53 Gay, "Trivia", lll, 264
 54 Ibid., 267

Gay tells of the fate of a yeoman, who after having sold his herds, wandered through the streets of London, with his pockets full of gold, fell an easy victim to one of these women:

Drawn by a fraudulent nymph, he gaz'd, he sigh'd;
 Unmindful of his home, and distant bride,
 She leads the willing victim to his doom,
 Through winding alleys to her cobweb room.
 Thence thro' the street he reels from post to post,
 Valiant with wine, nor knows his treasure lost.
 The vagrant wretch th' assembled watchman spies,
 He waves his hanger, and their poles defies,
 Deep in the Round-house pent, all night he snores,
 And the next morn in vain his fate deplores. -55-

Among the rogues and vagabonds may be classed the gypsies, whose mischiefs in the country are described by Sir Roger: "If a stray Piece of Linnen hangs upon an Hedge, they are sure to have it; if the Hog loses his Way in the Fields, it is ten to one but he becomes their Prey; our Geese cannot live in Peace for them; if a man prosecutes them with Severity, his Hen-roast is sure to pay for it; They generally straggle into these parts about this Time of the Year; and set the Heads of our Servant-Maids so agog for Husbands, that we do not expect to have any Business done as it should be whilst they are in the Country. I have an honest Dairy Maid, that crosses their hands with a Piece of Silver every Summer, and never fails being promised the handsomest young Fellow in the Parish for her pains. Your

.....

55 Gay, "Trivia", lll, 289

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Friend the Butler has been Fool enough to be seduced by them; and, though he is sure to lose a Knife, a Fork, or a spoon every time his Fortune is told him, generally shuts himself up in the Pantry with an old Gypsie for above half an Hour once in a Twelvemonth. Sweethearts are the things they live upon, which they bestow very plentifully upon all those that apply themselves to them. You see now and then some handsome young Jades among them: The Sluts have very often white Teeth and black Eyes." ⁵⁶

The rough amusements which the people of the early eighteenth century enjoyed, attest to the general lack of refinement in taste. Bear and bull baiting were common. The animals who were to take part in the combat were first paraded through the streets, as Gay tells us:

Experienc'd men, inur'd to city ways,
 Need not the Calendar to count their days.
 When through the town with slow and solemn air,
 Led by the nostril, walks the muzled bear;
 Behind him moves majestically dull,
 The pride of Hockley-Hole, the surly bull;
 Learn hence the periods of the week to name,
 Mondays and Thursdays are the days of game. -57-

It is only to be expected that these places were disorderly. The rough element desired an outlet for its energy and found it

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56 Spectator, No. 130

57 Gay, "Trivia", 11, 405

in such exhibitions. There were at this time in London two more bear gardens in addition to the one which Gay mentions. These were Clerkenwell and Tuttle Fields. The common manner of bull baiting was to tie a rope to the roots of the horns of the ox or bull and fasten the other end of the rope to an iron ring fixed to a stake driven in the ground, so the ground he could cover would be limited. Dogs were then turned loose, which started the sport. The dogs ran at the bull and tried to seize him by the muzzle or dewlap, while the bull tried to gore the dog. Sometimes a dog was successful and retained his hold until he was forcefully removed by the men. At other times the bull succeeded in tossing a dog so far into the air that he was fatally injured in falling, or he gored him to death. ⁵⁸

Bears and bulls, though baited, were never allowed to be killed by the dogs, this, however, was not true of cock-fighting, which was passionately indulged in in Queen Anne's reign. There were many cock pits, one of which was the famous one near Gray's Inn Walks, or Gardens, where, Sir Roger walked with the Spectator.

A form of hoax practiced on Londoners were the tricks of the astrologers. People of this time were very superstitious.

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58 Ashton, p. 224-5

Addison described the commonest ones as the misfortunes which followed the spilling of salt, the crossing of one's knife and fork, and the unlucky number thirteen. ⁵⁹ He does not touch on the harmful ones of the belief in witches and astrologers. The astrologers were unscrupulous and their only concern was to bleed their patrons of every cent they could get. Gay had no faith in any of these superstitions in foretelling weather, or in anything else, as will be seen by this,

All superstition from thy breast repel.
 Let cred'lous boys, and prattling nurses tell,
 How, if the festival of Paul be clear,
 Plenty from lib'ral horn shall strow the year;
 When the dark skies dissolve in snow or rain,
 The lab'ring hind shall yoke the steer in vain;
 But if the threat'ning winds in tempests roar,
 Then war shall bathe her wasteful sword in gore.
 How, if on Swithin's feast the welkin lours,
 And ev'ry penthouse streams with hasty show'rs,
 Twice twenty days shall clouds their fleeces drain
 And wash the pavement with incessant rain.
 Let not such vulgar tales debase thy mind;
 Nor Paul nor Swithin rule the clouds and wind. -60-

The belief in witchcraft was still firmly rooted in the country, although feeling had somewhat disappeared in London. Addison tells of the Coverly Witch, Moll White, how he and Sir Roger went and visited her hut, and found a broomstick behind the door, and the tabby cat, which had an evil reputation because of its mistress, and how Old Moll had been accused of making children spit pins, and of giving maids the nightmare. ⁶¹

59 Spectator, No. 7

60 Gay, "Trivia" I, 175

61 Spectator, No. 117

Old women, who were infirm and affected with disease were often severely persecuted by their neighbors for crimes attributed to them. According to Addison, poor Moll would have fared badly had it not been for Sir Roger: "the country people would be tossing her into a Pond and trying Experiments with her every Day, if it was not for him and his Chaplain."⁶²

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62 Spectator, No. 117

CHAPTER 111

MANNERS AND DRESS OF THE TIME

There existed in England in the eighteenth century, an elaborate code of fashionable gallantry. Men affected to worship the beauties of the day, and treated all women with exaggerated courtliness. The actual position of women, however, was low. They had no legal rights whatever, could not own property, or obtain a divorce on any grounds. Chesterfield gives the opinion men held of women, "a man of sense will humor them and flatter them; he will never consult them seriously, nor really trust them, but he will make them believe that he does both. They are invaluable as tools, but contemptible in themselves."⁶³

Women of this day led, unproductive, unsatisfying lives. Addison says that he remembers the time when ladies received visits in bed, and describes the custom; "It was then looked upon as a piece of ill breeding for a woman to refuse to see a Man, because she was not stirring; and a Porter would have been thought unfit for his Place, that could have made so awkward an excuse. As I love to see everything that is new, I once prevailed upon my Friend Will. Honeycomb to carry me along with him to one of these Travelled Ladies, desiring him, at the sametime, to present me as a Foreigner who could

63 Stephen, Leslie, English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century, p. 113

not speak English, so that I might not be obliged to bear a part in the discourse. The Lady, tho' willing to appear undrest, had put on her best Looks, and painted herself for our Reception. Her Hair appeared in a very nice Disorder, as the Night-Gown which was thrown upon her Shoulders was ruffled with great Care."⁶⁴

A woman of leisure spent all morning in bed, dressed all afternoon, dined in the evening, played cards till midnight. There was little home life, for the men spent their evenings at their club, their coffee-house, the tavern, or the play. This separation of the sexes in society "made for greater coarseness in the men, and an increasing indulgence in gossip and tittle-tattle in the women."⁶⁵ While the men drank and gambled, or talked politics at the coffee-houses, the women drank tea and also gambled. Money for gambling meant a heavy item, and women were constantly in debt and difficulties, even to the loss of their virtue.

Social life of the time centered around the drawing room and coffee-houses. The coffee-house was not a new institution in Queen Anne's reign, the first one having been established in London, 1652, but it reached the height of its popularity in the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ It was a gathering place where one could

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64 Spectator, No. 45

65 Bradley, Rose, English Housewife in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, p. 113

66 Boas and Hahn, op. cit., p. 151

learn the news, pass an hour or two pleasantly, talk politics or the latest literary gossip, transact business, write a letter, or in some cases, gamble.⁶⁷ Men of every rank met on a common level here, and each took the first seat that was handy. That the man of leisure spent a large part of the day here may be seen by this account of a gentleman's day at a fashionable place, "We rise by time; and those that frequent great man's levees, find entertainment at them till eleven, or, as in Holland, go to tea tables. About twelve, the beau monde assemblies in several coffee houses and chocolate, the best of which are the Cocoa-Tree and White's Chocolate houses, the Saint-James's, the Smyrna, and the British Coffee houses. We are carried to these places in chairs. If it be fine weather, we take a turn in the park till two; and if it be dirty, you are entertained at piquet or basset at White's, or you may talk politics at the Smyrna. At two we go to dinner, and in the evening to the playhouse. After the play the best generally go to Tom's and Will's Coffee-houses, where there is playing at piquet and the best of conversation 'til midnight."⁶⁸

Men, especially the beaus or fops, spent much of their

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⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 151

⁶⁸ Living Age, Vol. 43, p. 189

time in dressing. Mission describes them as: "creatures compounded of a Perriwig and a Coat laden with Powder as white as a Miller's, a Face besmear'd with Snuff, and a few affected⁶⁹ airs." Gay says:

You'll sometimes meet a fop, of nicest tread,
Whose mantling peruke veils his empty head,
At ev'ry step he dreads the wall to lose,
And risques, to save a coach, his red-heel'd shoes;
Him, like the miller, pass with caution by,
Lest from his shoulder clouds of powder fly. -70-

The only cares of these beaux seem to have been their dress and their bodies, their business, the playhouse and the drawing room. All they could talk about was dress, equipage, and the ladies.

Men's hats were rather low-crowned, made of felt, with very broad flapping brims, which were looped up, or cocked as the wearer desired. They were usually black, although a man of the time, perhaps jokingly, says: "I shall very speedily appear at White's in a cherry-coloured Hat. I took this Hint from the Ladies Hoods, which I look upon as the boldest Stroke that the fair Sex has struck for these hundred years last past."⁷¹

The part of man's apparel which received the most care was the periwig, Falbala, or Furbelow, the dress wig of the time.

.....

69 Ashton, *op. cit.*, p. 105

70 Gay, "Trivia", 11, 53

71 Spectator, No. 319

They were long and expensive, made of woman's hair. One of the greatest disgraces known to a gentleman was to appear in public with a ruffled wig, and if one was caught out in a shower,

Thy wig alas! uncurl'd, admits the show'r.
 So fierce Alecto's snaky tresses fell,
 When Orpheus charm'd the rig'rous pow'rs of hell,
 Or thus hung Glaucus' beard, with briny dew
 Clotted and strait, when first his am'rous view
 Surpriz'd the bathing fair; the frighted maid
 Now stands a rock, transform'd by Circe's aid. -72-

There were many varieties of wigs, if what Budgell says is true: "I had a humble Servant last Summer, who the first time he declared himself, was in a Full-Bottom'd Wig; but the Day after, to my no small Surprize, he accosted me in a thin Natural one. I received him, at this our second Interview, as a perfect Stranger, but was extreamly confounded, when his Speech discovered who he was. I resolved, therefore, to fix his Face in my Memory for the future; but as I was walking in the Park the same Evening, he appeared to me in one of those Wiggs that I think you call a Night-cap, which had altered him more affectually than before. He afterwards played a Couple of Black Riding Wiggs upon me, with the same Success; and in short, assumed a new Face almost every Day in the first Month of his Courtship."⁷³

72 Gay, "Trivia", 1, 202

73 Spectator, No. 319

Gay gives us a curious bit of economy:

When suffocating mists obscure the morn,
Let thy worst wig, long us'd to storms, be worn;
Or like the powder'd footman, with due care
Beneath the flapping hat secure thy hair. -74-

Beaus were often robbed of their cherished wigs:

Nor is thy flaxen wigg with safety worn;
High on the shoulder, in a basket born,
Lurks the sly boy; whose hand to rapine bred,
Plucks off the curling honours of thy Head. -75-

Another method in stealing wigs was to cut a hole in the leather backs of carriages, through which the occupant's wig was pulled.

The well-dressed gentleman's costume might well consist of "a scarlet suit, laced with broad gold lace, lined and faced with blue; a cinnamon cloth suit, with plate buttons, the waistcoat fringed with a silk fringe of the same color, and a rich yellow flowered satin morning gown, lined with a cherry coloured satin with a pocket on the right side."⁷⁶

Men's shoes ran to great extremes. The beaus wore the heels very high and they were often red in color. Gay gives this advice concerning foot wear:

When the black youth at chosen stands rejoice,
And clean your shoes rescounds from ev'ry voice;
When late their miry sides stage-coaches show,
And their stiff horses through the town move slow;
When all the Mall in leafy ruin lies,
And damsels first renew their oyster cries:
Then let the prudent walker shoes provide,

74 Gay, "Trivia", 1, 125

75 Ibid., 111, 55

76 Botsford, English Society in the Eighteenth Century, p. 91

Not of the Spanish or Morocco hide;
 The wooden heel may raise the dancer's bound,
 And with the scallop'd top his step be crown'd:
 Let firm, well hammer'd soles protect thy feet
 Thro' freezing snows, and rains, and soaking sleet.
 Should the big laste extend the shoe too wide,
 Each stone will wrench th' unwary step aside:
 The sudden turn may stretch the swelling vein,
 Thy cracking joint un hinge, or ankle sprain;
 And when two short the modish shoes are worn,
 You'll judge the seasons by your shooting corn. -77-

Every gentleman carried a sword, which he was constantly losing, either through carelessness, or if he did not heed Gay's warning,

Where the mob gathers, swiftly shoot along,
 Nor idly mingle in the noisy throng.
 Lur'd by the silver hilt, amid the swarm,
 The subtil artist will thy side disarm. -78-

Largely due to the fact perhaps that these swords were constantly worn, they were frequently used on slight provocation. There was a law against duelling, but it was little enforced. Men were insulted by the smallest incident, and when arrested they often secured their release by saying they belonged to holy orders, which meant that they came under the jurisdiction of the church.

As much carried as the sword, was the cane. This often proved of use as well as being ornamental:

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77 Gay, "Trivia", l, 23

78 Ibid., lll, 51

If the strong cane support thy walking hand,
 Chairmen no longer shall the wall command;
 Ev'n sturdy carr-men shall thy nod obey,
 And rattling coaches stop to make thee way:
 This shall direct thy cautious tread aright,
 Though not one glaring lamp enliven night.
 Let beaus their canes with amber tipt produce,
 Be theirs for empty show, but thine for use. -79-

Umbrellas were considered for the use of women only, so
 the men were obliged to wear heavy coats to keep out the cold
 and rain:

Nor should it prove thy less important care,
 To chuse a proper coat for winter's wear.
 Now in thy trunk thy D'oily habit fold,
 The silken drugget ill can fence the cold;
 The frieze's spongy nap is soak'd with rain,
 And show'rs soon drench the camlet's cockled grain.
 True Witney broad-cloth with its shag unshorn,
 Unpierc'd is in the lasting tempest worn;
 Be this the horse-man's fence; for who would wear
 Amid the town the spoils of Russia's bear?
 Within the Roquelaure's clasp thy hands are pent,
 Hands, that stretch'd forth invading harms prevent.
 Let the loop'd Bavaroy the fop embrace,
 Or his deep cloak be spatter'd o'er with lace.
 That garment best the winter's rage defends,
 Which from the shoulders full and low depend;
 By various names in various counties known,
 Yet held in all the true Surtout alone:
 Be thine of Kersey firm, tho' small the coat,
 Then brave unwet the rain, unchill'd the frost. -80-

Lucky were they who,

when all the town's afloat,
 Wrapt in the embraces of a kersey coat,
 Or double-button'd frieze; -81-

.....
 79 Gay, "Trivia", I, 61

80 Ibid., I, 41

81 Ibid., I, 191

Concerning other parts of men's apparel: Gloves were constantly worn; handkerchiefs were nearly always of silk, though sometimes of cambric, and were in constant use because of the snuff habit; beaver muffs were used in the early part of Queen Anne's reign, perhaps to match the white and black beaver hats which were then worn.

It is impossible to give the varying fashions in women's dress of this century, but the following, speaking of a 1719 lady, will give some idea of the styles: "behold one equipped in a black silk petticoat with red and white calico border, cherry coloured Stays trimmed with blue and silver, a red and dove coloured damask Gown flowered with large trees, a yellow Satin Apron, trimmed with white persian, and muslin Headclothes with crowfoot edging double Ruffles with fine edging, a silk-furbelowed scarf, and a spotted Hood."⁸²

Then, as now, the women dressed like men, as far as they could. For riding habits they wore a "hat and feather, a riding coat, and a perriwig, or at least tie up their hair in a bag or ribbon, in imitation of the smart part of the opposite sex."⁸³

The same feminine vanities existed then, as today. On a lady's dressing table:

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⁸² Botsford, *op. cit.*, p. 90-91

⁸³ Spectator, No. 435

Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here
 The various off'rings of the world appear;
 From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
 And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil,
 This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
 And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
 The tortoise here and elephant unite,
 Transform'd to combs, the speckled, and the white.
 Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
 Puffs, powder, patches, bibles, billet-doux. -84-

Women carried umbrellas as freely as men did canes, and when
 so equipped,

Good housewives all the winter's rage despise,
 Defended by the riding-hood's disguise;
 Or underneath th' umbrella's oily shed,
 Safe thro' the wet, on clinking pattens tread.
 Let Persian dames th' umbrella's ribs display,
 To guard their beauties from the sunny ray;
 Or sweating slaves support the shady load,
 When eastern Monarchs show their state abroad;
 Britian in winter only knows its aid,
 To guard from chilly show'rs the walking maid.
 But, O! forget not, Muse, the patten's praise,
 That female implement shall grace thy lays;
 Say from what art divine th' invention came,
 And from its origine deduce the name. -85-

Gay then tells us the interesting story, or legend, of how
 Vulcan fell in love with Martha, (or Patty), the daughter of a
 Lincolnshire yeoman; how to save her feet from the cold and wet
 he studded her shoes with nails; but still she had a cold and
 lost her voice, until he hit upon the idea of the patten, the

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84 Pope, Alexander, "The Rape of the Lock", p. 129
 85 Gay, "Trivia", 1, 209

use of which restored her to health, and

The patten now supports each frugal dame,
Which from the blue-ey'd Patty takes the name. -86-

As necessary to a woman's costume as a sword was to a man's was the fan, and almost as dangerous. Spectator No. 102 gives its varied uses. Even in church a young lady knelt just before a man and "displayed the most beautiful Bosom imaginable, which heaved and fell with some Fervour, while a delicate well-shaped Arm held a Fan over her Face."⁸⁷

The coquet had a technique all her own, which was "to give herself the larger field for discourse, she hates and loves in the same breath, talks to her Lap-Dog or Parrot, is uneasy in all kinds of weather, and in every part of the room! She has false quarrels and feigned obligations to all the men of her acquaintance; sighs when she is not sad, and laughs when she is not merry; a great mistress of that part of oratory which is called action, and indeed seems to speak for no other purpose, but as it gives her an opportunity of stirring a limb, or varying a feature, of glancing her eyes, or playing with her fan."⁸⁸

Gay's purpose in writing "Trivia", if we can take his own word for it was:

.....

86 Gay, "Trivia", 1, 281

87 Spectator, No. 53

88 Ibid., No. 247

Through winter streets to steer your course aright,
How to walk clean by day, and safe by night,
How jostling crowds, with prudence to decline,
When to assert the wall, and when resign,
I sing: -89-

And into this he has woven a valuable description of the life
of his time; its manners, customs, dress, and ill-doers.

.....
89 Gay, "Trivia", 1, 1

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