

CODE SUJET : EHP 1
SUJET JURY
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**Jonathan Swift**

Poem published in *The Tatler*, 17 October 1710

## A DESCRIPTION OF A CITY SHOWER

Careful observers may foretell the hour  
 (By sure prognostics) when to dread a shower.  
 While rain depends, the pensive cat gives o'er  
 Her frolics, and pursues her tail no more.

5 Returning home at night, you'll find the sink  
 Strike your offended sense with double stink.  
 If you be wise, then go not far to dine;  
 You'll spend in coach hire more than save in wine.  
 A coming shower your shooting corns presage,

10 Old aches will throb, your hollow tooth will rage.  
 Sauntering in coffeehouse is Dulman seen;  
 He damns the climate, and complains of spleen.  
 Meanwhile the south rising with dabbled wings,  
 A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,

15 That swilled more liquor than it could contain,  
 And, like a drunkard, gives it up again.  
 Brisk Susan whips her linen from the rope,  
 While the first drizzling shower is borne aslope;  
 Such is that sprinkling, which some careless quean

20 Flirts on you from her mop, but not so clean:  
 You fly, invoke the gods; then turning, stop  
 To rail; she singing, still whirls on her mop.  
 Not yet the dust had shunned the unequal strife,  
 But, aided by the wind, fought still for life,

25 And wafted with its foe by violent gust,  
 'Twas doubtful which was rain, and which was dust.  
 Ah! where must needy poet seek for aid,  
 When dust and rain at once his coat invade?  
 Sole coat, where dust cemented by the rain

30 Erects the nap, and leaves a cloudy stain!

Now in contiguous drops the flood comes down,  
Threatening with deluge this devoted town.  
To shops in crowds the daggled females fly,  
Pretend to cheapen goods, but nothing buy.  
35 The Templar spruce, while every spout's abroach,  
Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a coach.  
The tucked-up sempstress walks with hasty strides,  
While streams run down her oiled umbrella's sides.  
Here various kinds, by various fortunes led,  
40 Commence acquaintance underneath a shed.  
Triumphant Tories, and desponding Whigs  
Forget their feuds, and join to save their wigs.  
Boxed in a chair the beau impatient sits,  
While spouts run clattering o'er the roof by fits,  
45 And ever and anon with frightful din  
The leather sounds; he trembles from within.  
So when Troy chairmen bore the wooden steed,  
Pregnant with Greeks impatient to be freed  
(Those bully Greeks, who, as the moderns do,  
50 Instead of paying chairmen, run them through),  
Laocoon struck the outside with his spear,  
And each imprisoned hero quaked for fear.  
Now from all parts the swelling kennels flow,  
And bear their trophies with them as they go:  
55 Filth of all hues and odours seem to tell  
What streets they sailed from by their sight and smell.  
They, as each torrent drives, with rapid force,  
From Smithfield or St. Pulchre's shape their course,  
And in huge confluence joined at Snow Hill ridge,  
60 Fall from the conduit prone to Holborn Bridge.  
Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,  
Drowned puppies, stinking sprats, all drenched in mud,  
Dead cats, and turnip tops, come tumbling down the flood.

**Henry Mayhew and John Binny**

From *The Criminal Prisons of London* (1862), originally published in *Illustrated London News* on September 18, 1852

September 13, 1852

5 It was late in the evening (a fine autumn one) when the gun was fired that was the signal for the great gas-bag to be loosened from the ropes that held it down to the soil; and immediately the buoyant machine bounded, like a big ball, into the air. Or, rather let us say, the earth seemed to sink suddenly down as if the spot of ground to which it had been previously fastened had been constructed upon the same principle as the Adelphi stage, and admitted of being lowered at a moment's notice. Indeed, no sooner did the report of the gun clatter in the air, than the people, who had before been grouped about the car, appeared to fall from a level with the eye; and, instantaneously, there was seen a multitude of flat, upturned faces in the gardens below, with a dense chevaux de frise of arms extended above them, and some hundreds of outstretched hands fluttering farewell to us.

10 The moment after this, the balloon vaulted over the trees, and we saw the roadway outside the gardens stuck all over with mobs of little black Lilliputian people, while the hubbub of the voices below, and the cries of 'Ah *bal-loon!*' from the boys, rose to the ear like the sound of a distant school let loose to play.

15 Now began that peculiar panoramic effect which is the distinguishing feature of the first portion of a view from a balloon, and which arises from the utter absence of all sense of motion in the machine itself, and the consequent transference of the movement to the ground beneath. The earth, as the aeronautic vessel glided over it, seemed positively to consist of a continuous series of scenes which were being drawn along underneath us, as if it were some diorama laid flat upon the ground, and almost gave one the notion that the world was an endless landscape stretched up on rollers, which some invisible sprites below were busy revolving for our especial amusement.

20 Then, as we floated along above the fields, in a line with the Thames towards Richmond, and looked over the edge of the car in which we were standing (and which, by the bye, was like a big 'buck basket', reaching to one's breast), the sight was the most exquisite visual delight ever experienced. The houses directly underneath us looked like the tiny wooden things out of a child's box of toys, and the streets as if they were ruts in the ground; and we could hear the hum of the voices from every spot we passed over, faint as the buzzing of so many bees.

25 Far beneath, in the direction we were sailing, lay the suburban fields; and here the earth, with its tiny hills and plains and streams, assumed the appearance of the little coloured plaster models of countries. The roadways striping the land were like narrow brown ribbons, and the river, which we could see winding far away, resembled a long, grey, metallic-looking snake, creeping through the fields. The bridges over the Thames were positively like planks; and the tiny black barges, as they floated along the stream, seemed no bigger than summer insects on the water. The largest meadows were about the size of green-baize table covers; and across these we could just trace the line of the South-Western Railway, with the little whiff of white steam issuing from some passing engine, and no greater in volume than the jet of vapour from an ordinary tea-kettle.

30 Then, as the dusk of evening descended, and the gas-lights along the different lines of road started into light, one after another, the ground seemed to be covered with little illumination lamps, such as are hung on Christmas-trees, and reminding one of those that are occasionally placed, at intervals, along the grass at the edge of the gravel-walks in suburban tea-gardens; whilst the clusters of little lights at the spots where the hamlets were scattered over the scene, appeared like knots of fire-flies in the air; and in the midst of these the eye could, here and there, distinguish the tiny crimson speck of some railway signal.

In the opposite direction to that in which the wind was insensibly wafting the balloon, lay the leviathan Metropolis, with a dense canopy of smoke hanging over it, and reminding one of the fog of vapour that is often seen steaming up from the fields at early morning. It was impossible to tell where the monster city began or ended, for the buildings stretched not only to the horizon on either side, but far away into the distance, where, owing to the coming shades of evening and the dense fumes from the million chimneys, the town seemed to blend into the sky, so that there was no distinguishing earth from heaven. The multitude of roofs that extended back from the foreground was positively like a dingy red sea, heaving in bricken billows, and the seeming waves rising up one after the other till the eye grew wearied with following them. Here and there we could distinguish little bare green patches of parks, and occasionally make out the tiny circular enclosures of the principal squares, though, from the height, these appeared scarcely bigger than wafers. Further, the fog of smoke that over-shadowed the giant town was pierced with a thousand steeples and pin-like factory-chimneys.

That little building, no bigger than one of the small china houses that are used for burning pastilles in, is Buckingham Palace—with St James's Park, dwindled to the size of a card-table, stretched out before it. Yonder is Bethlehem Hospital, with its dome, now about the same dimensions as a bell.

Indeed, it was a most wonderful sight to behold that vast bricken mass of churches and hospitals, banks and prisons, palaces and workhouses, docks and refuges for the destitute, parks and squares, and courts and alleys, which make up London—all blent into one immense black spot—to look down upon the whole as the birds of the air look down upon it, and see it dwindled into a mere rubbish heap to contemplate from afar that strange conglomeration of vice, avarice, and low cunning, of noble aspirations and humble heroism, and to grasp it in the eye, in all its incongruous integrity, at one single glance—to take, as it were, an angel's view of that huge town where, perhaps, there is more virtue and more iniquity, more wealth and more want, brought together into one dense focus than in any other part of the earth—to hear the hubbub of the restless sea of life and emotion below, and hear it, like the ocean in a shell, whispering of the incessant strugglings and chafings of the distant tide—to swing in the air high above all the petty jealousies and heart-burnings, small ambitions and vain parade of 'polite' society, and feel, for once, tranquil as a babe in a cot, and that you are hardly of the earth, earthy, as, Jacob-like, you mount the aerial ladder, and half lose sight of the 'great commercial world' beneath, where men are regarded as mere counters to play with, and where to do your neighbour as your neighbour would do you constitutes the first principle in the religion of trade—to feel yourself floating through the endless realms of space, and drinking in the pure thin air of the skies, as you go sailing along almost among the stars, free as 'the lark at heaven's gate', and enjoying, for a brief half hour, at least, a foretaste of that Elysian destiny which is the ultimate hope of all.

Such is the scene we behold, and such the thoughts that stir the brain on contemplating London from the car of a balloon.

**Christopher Nevinson**  
*Amongst the Nerves of the World*  
1930  
Oil on canvas  
75.3 x 50 cm  
Museum of London

