

London: The Third Satire of Juvenal, Imitated

London, published in 1738, represents Johnson's attempt to satirize the grubby world of London and also to rise above it. The poem is an "imitation" of the Third Satire of the Roman poet Juvenal, which imagines a friend of the poet, named Umbricius, who is sick and tired of the city of Rome and is leaving for the countryside for good. In doing an imitation of his classical source, Johnson is not simply *translating* Juvenal's poem, but updating it, finding modern correlations to the Latin original. Here, London stands in for Rome, "Thales" stands in for Juvenal's Umbricius, and the Tuscan countryside to which Umbricius was headed becomes Wales. Exhausted by the filth, crowds, noise of London, and the difficulty of making a living as a writer, Thales (believed by some scholars to refer to Richard Savage, another hack writer who had become a friend of Johnson's) in some ways expresses Johnson's own frustrations. But *London* itself, published in a handsome folio edition, written in the heroic couplet form that to readers of the 1730s identified the high style of serious poetry, using the form of the imitation to signify its neoclassical aspirations, and hyped in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (which published ads for the poem, and also excerpted it), is clearly an attempt to Johnson to get out of hackdom as soon as possible, to become a poet like Alexander Pope, making a good living independent of the whims and tight fists of the booksellers and magazine editors.

The poem also positioned itself as part of the growing opposition to the government of Sir Robert Walpole, who had dominated British politics since taking over as the de facto Prime Minister (there was no such official position yet) in 1721.



Sir Robert Walpole. Wikimedia Commons

Walpole successfully suppressed dissent through a mixture of brutality, bribery, and control of the print media. By the late 1730s, however, attacks on his regime were becoming more open and frequent, prompting new attempts on the part of his government to suppress dissenting voices. In particular, the Stage Licensing Act of 1737 called for theater managers to submit all plays for government approval in advance of performance. Prompted in part by satires against the regime like John Gay's *The Beggars Opera* (1728) and the satirical afterpieces by Henry Fielding that had been very popular in the mid-1730s, the Stage Licensing Act had a chilling effect on the theater, and particularly thwarted Johnson's attempt to become a playwright; he had arrived in London just that year with a half-finished tragedy in his luggage, a play called *Irene* that was not staged until 1749. By using Juvenal's Third Satire as a point of departure, *London* manages to critique the Walpole regime indirectly and through coded references, but contemporary readers, particularly those in sympathy with the opposition, were readily able to see how the poem mocked Walpole's reign as corrupt.

Probably because of its political stance, *London* seems to have sold reasonably well, and Alexander Pope, the most famous poet of the period (and a sympathizer with opposition politics),

praised it. But as a vehicle for establishing Johnson's reputation as a significant poet who could make a living off his art it was a dead end, and Johnson had to continue to grind out work for hire for another decade and a half. It was not until he achieved fame in the 1750s, first as the author of a *Spectator*-like series of journalistic essays called *The Rambler* and then as the editor of the *Dictionary of the English Language*, which made him a kind of national treasure, since he had single-handedly accomplished for English what it had taken large teams of scholars to do for other European languages. Here, let's read Johnson as eighteenth-century Grub Street's finest product—and its most perceptive critic.

About the text

This edition of London was prepared by students in "Samuel Johnson: From Print to Digital Media" in the spring of 2014: Sarah Booth, Kay Marie Ferguson, Laura Gilstrap, Katelyn Hebel, Brandan Hummel, Lauren Marrero, Maureen O'Connor, and Erica Seymour. They used the TypeWright tool in 18thConnect to edit from the copy of the first edition available in the Eighteenth-Century Collections Online database.

LONDON:
A
POEM,
In IMITATION of the
THIRD SATIRE of JUVENAL

—*Quis ineptæ*

Tam patiens Urbis, tam ferreus ut teneat se?

Juv.

THO' Grief and Fondness in my Breast rebel,
When injur'd *Thales* bids the Town farewell,
Yet still my calmer Thoughts his Choice commend,
I praise the Hermit, but regret the Friend,
5 Who now resolves, from Vice and LONDON far,

To breathe in distant Fields a purer Air,
And, fix'd on *Cambria's* solitary Shore,
Give to *St. David* one true Briton more.

For who would leave, unbrib'd, *Hibernia's* Land,
10 Or change the Rocks of *Scotland* for *the Strand*?
There none are swept by sudden Fate away,
But all whom Hunger spares, with Age decay:
Here Malice, Rapine, Accident, conspire,
And now a Rabble rages, now a Fire;
15 Their Ambush here relentless Ruffians lay,
And here the fell Attorney prowls for Prey;
Here falling Houses thunder on your Head,
And here a female Atheist talks you dead.
While THALES waits the *wherry* that contains
20 Of dissipated Wealth the small Remains,
On *Thames'* Banks, in silent Thought we stood,
Where GREENWICH smiles upon the silver Flood:
Struck with the Seat that gave *Eliza* Birth,
We kneel, and kiss the consecrated Earth;

25 In pleasing Dreams the blissful Age renew,
And call BRITANNIA'S Glories back to view;
Behold her Cross triumphant on the Main,
The Guard of Commerce, and the Dread of Spain,
Ere *Masquerades* debauch'd, *Excise* oppress'd,
30 Or English Honour grew a standing Jest.
A transient Calm the happy Scenes bestow,
And for a Moment lull the Sense of Woe.
At length awaking, with contemptuous Frown,
Indignant THALES eyes the neighb'ring Town.
35 Since Worth, he cries, in these degen'rate Days,
Wants ev'n the cheap Reward of empty Praise;
In those curst Walls, devote to Vice and Gain,
Since *unrewarded Science* toils in vain;
Since Hope but soothes to double my Distress,
40 And ev'ry Moment leaves my Little less;

While yet my steady Steps no Staff sustains,
And Life still vig'rous revels in my Veins;
Grant me, kind Heaven, to find some happier Place,
Where Honesty and Sense are no Disgrace;
45 Some pleasing Bank where verdant *osiers* play,
Some peaceful *vale* with Nature's Paintings gay;
Where once the harrass'd BRITON found repose,
And safe in Poverty defy'd his Foes;
Some secret Cell, ye Pow'rs, indulgent give.
50 *Let -- live here, for -- has learned to Live.*
Here let those reign, whom Pensions can incite
To vote a Patriot black, a courtier white;
Explain their Country's dear-bought Rights away,
And plead for Pirates in the Face of Day;
55 With slavish Tenets taint our poison'd Youth,
And lend a Lye the Confidence of Truth.
Let such raise Palaces, and Manors buy,
Collect a Tax, or farm a Lottery,
With *warbling eunuchs* fill our *Licensed Stage*,
60 And lull to Servitude a thoughtless Age.
Heroes, proceed! What Bounds your Pride shall hold?
What Check restrain your Thirst of Pow'r and Gold?
Behold rebellious Virtue quite o'erthrown,
Behold our Fame, our Wealth, our Lives your own.
65 To such, a groaning Nation's Spoils are giv'n,
When publick Crimes inflame the Wrath of Heav'n:
But what, my Friend, what Hope remains for me,
Who start at Theft, and blush at Perjury?
Who scarce forbear, tho' BRITAIN'S Court he sing,
70 To pluck a *titled Poet's* borrow'd Wing;
A Statesman's Logic unconvinc'd can hear,
And dare to slumber o'er the *Gazetteer*;
Despise a Fool in half his Pension drest
And strive in vain to laugh at *H-y's* Jest.
75 Others with softer Smiles, and subtler Art,
Can sap the Principles, or taint the Heart;
With more Address a Lover's Note convey,

Or bribe a Virgin's Innocence away.
Well may they rise, while I, whose Rustic Tongue
80 Ne'er knew to puzzle Right, or varnish Wrong,
Spurn'd as a Begger, dreaded as a Spy,
Live unregarded, unlamented die.
For what but social Guilt the Friend endears?
Who shares *Orgilio's* Crimes, his Fortune shares.
85 But thou, should tempting Villainy present
All *Marlborough* hoarded, or all *Villiers* spent,
Turn from the glitt'ring Bribe thy scornful Eye,
Nor fell for Gold, what Gold could never buy,
The peaceful Slumber, self-approving Day,
90 Unsullied Fame, and Conscience ever gay.
The cheated Nation's happy Fav'rites see!
Mark whom the Great caress, who frown on me!

LONDON! the needy Villain's gen'ral Home,
The *Common Shore* of Paris and of Rome;
95 With eager Thirst, by Folly or by Fate,
Sucks in the Dregs of each corrupted State.
Forgive my *transports* on a Theme like this,
I cannot bear a French Metropolis.
Illustrious *Edward!* from the Realms of Day,
100 The Land of Heroes and of Saints survey;
Nor hope the British Lineaments to trace,
The rustic Grandeur; or the surly Grace,
But lost in thoughtless Ease, and empty Show,
Behold the Warriour dwindled to a Beau;
105 Sense, Freedom, Piety, refin'd away,
Of FRANCE the Mimic, and of SPAIN the Prey;
All that at home no more can beg or steal,
Or like a *Gibbet* better than a *Wheel*;
Hiss'd from the Stage, or hooted from the Court,
110 Their Air, their Dress, their Politicks import;
Obsequious, artful, *Voluble* and gay,
On *Britain's* fond Credulity they prey.
No gainful Trade their Industry can 'scape,

They sing, they dance, clean Shoes, or cure a Clap;
115 All Sciences a fasting Monsieur knows,
And bid him go to Hell, to Hell he goes,
Ah! what avails it, that, from Slav'ry far,
I drew the Breath of Life in *English* Air;
Was early taught a *Briton's* Right to prize,
120 And lisp the Tale of *Henry's* Victories;
If the *gulled* Conqueror receives the Chain,
And what their Armies lost, their Cringes gain?
Studious to please, and ready to submit,
The supple *Gaul* was born a Parasite:
125 Still to his Int'rest true, where'er he goes,
Wit, Brav'ry, Worth, his lavish Tongue bestows;
In ev'ry Face a Thousand Graces shine,
From ev'ry Tongue flows Harmony divine.
These arts in vain our rugged Natives try,
130 Strain out with fault'ring Diffidence a Lye,
And gain a Kick for awkward Flattery.
Besides, with Justice, this discerning Age
Admires their wond'rous Talents for the Stage:
Well may they venture on the Mimic's Art,
135 Who play from Morn to Night a borrow'd Part;
Practis'd their Master's Notions to embrace,
Repeat his Maxims, and reflect his Face;
With ev'ry wild Absurdity comply,
And view each Object with another's Eye;
140 To shake with Laughter ere the Jest they hear,
To pour at Will the counterfeited Tear;
And as their Patron hints the Cold or Heat,
To shake in Dog-days, in December sweat.

How, when Competitors like these contend,
145 Can surly Virtue hope to fix a Friend?
Slaves that with serious Impudence beguile,
And lye without a Blush, without a Smile;
Exalt each Trifle, ev'ry Vice adore,
Your Taste in Snuff, your Judgment in a Whore;

150 Can Balbo's Eloquence applaud, and swear
He gropes his Breeches with a Monarch's Air.
For Arts like these preferr'd, admir'd, carest,
They first invade your Table, then your Breast;
Explore your Secrets with insidious Art,
155 Watch the weak Hour, and ransack all the Heart;
Then soon your ill-plac'd Confidence repay,
Commence your Lords, and govern or betray.
By Numbers here from Shame or Censure free,
All Crimes are safe, but hated Poverty.

160 This, only this, the rigid Law persues,
This, only this, provokes the snarling Muse;
The sober Trader at a tatter'd Cloak,
Wakes from his Dream, and labours for a Joke;
With brisker Air the silken Courtiers gaze,
165 And turn the varied Taunt a thousand Ways.
Of all the Grievs that harrass the Distrest,
Sure the most bitter is a scornful Jest;
Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous Heart,
Than when a Blockhead's Insult points the Dart.
170 Has Heaven reserv'd, in Pity to the Poor,
No pathless Waste, or undiscover'd Shore?
No secret Island in the boundless Main?
No peaceful Desart yet unclaim'd by SPAIN?
Quick let us rise, the happy Seats explore,
175 And bear Oppression's Insolence no more.

This mournful Truth is ev'ry where confest,
SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPREST:
But here more slow, where all are Slaves to Gold,
Where Looks are Merchandise, and Smiles are sold,
180 Where won by Bribes, by Flatteries implor'd,
The Groom retails the Favours of his Lord.
But hark! th' affrighted Crowd's tumultuous Cries
Roll thro' the Streets, and thunder to the Skies;
Rais'd from some pleasing Dream of Wealth and Pow'r,

185 Some pompous Palace, or some blissful Bow'r,
Aghast you start, and scarce with aking Sight,
Sustain th' approaching Fire's tremendous Light;
Swift from pursuing Horrors take your Way,
And Leave your little ALL to Flames a Prey;
190 Then thro' the World a wretched Vagrant roam,
For where can starving Merit find a Home?

In vain your mournful Narrative disclose,
While all neglect, and most insult your Woes.
Should Heaven's just Bolts Orgilio's Wealth con-found,
195 And spread his flaming Palace on the Ground,
Swift o'er the Land the dismal Rumour flies,
And publick Mournings pacify the Skies;
The [Laureat](#) Tribe in servile Verse relate,
How Virtue wars with persecuting Fate;
200 With well-feign'd Gratitude the pension'd Band
Refund the Plunder of the begger'd Land.
See! while he builds, the gaudy Vassals come,
And crowd with sudden Wealth the rising Dome;
The Price of Boroughs and of Souls restore,
205 And raise his Treasures higher than before.
Now bless'd with all the Baubles of the Great,
The polish'd Marble, and the shining Plate,

Orgilio sees the golden Pile aspire,
And hopes from angry Heav'n another Fire.
210 Could'st thou resign the Park and Play content,
For the fair Banks of [Severn of or Trent](#);
There might'st thou find some elegant Retreat,
Some [hireling Senator's](#) deserted Seat;
And stretch thy Prospects o'er the smiling Land,
215 For less than rent the Dungeons of the Strand;
There prune thy Walks, support thy drooping Flow'rs,
Direct thy Rivulets, and twine thy bowers;
And, while thy Beds a cheap Repast afford,
Despise the Dainties of a [venal](#) Lord :

220 There ev'ry Bush with Nature's Music rings,
There ev'ry Breeze bears Health upon its Wings;
On all thy Hours Security shall smile,
And bless thine Evening Walk and Morning Toil.

Prepare for Death, if here at Night you roam,
225 And sign your Will before you sup from Home.

Some fiery Fop, with new Commission vain,
Who sleeps on [Brambles](#) till he kills his Man;
Some frolick Drunkard, reeling from a Feast,
Provokes a Broil, and stabs you for a Jest.

230 Yet ev'n these Heroes, mischievously gay,
Lords of the Street, and Terrors of the Way;
Flush'd as they are with Folly, Youth and Wine,
Their prudent Insults to the Poor confine;

Afar they mark the [Flambeaus](#) bright Approach,

235 And shun the shining Train, and golden Coach.
In vain, these Dangers past, your Doors you close,
And hope the Balmy Blessings of Repose:

Cruel with Guilt, and daring with Despair,
The midnight Murd'rer bursts the faithless Bar;

240 Invades the sacred Hour of silent Rest,
And plants, unseen, a Dagger in your Breast.

Scarce can our Fields, such Crowds at [Tyburn](#) die,
With Hemp the Gallows and the Fleet supply.

Propose your Schemes, ye Senatorian Band,

245 Whose Ways and Means support the sinking Land;
Lest Ropes be wanting in the tempting Spring,
To rig another Convoy for the K-g.

A single Jail, in [ALFRED'S](#) golden Reign,
Could half the Nation's Criminals contain;

250 Fair Justice then, without Constraint ador'd,
Sustain'd the Ballance, but resign'd the Sword;

No Spies were paid, no Special Juries known,
Blest Age ! But ah ! how diff'rent from our own !

Much could I add, -- but see the Boat at hand,

255 The Tide retiring, calls me from the Land:
Farewel ! – When Youth, and Health, and Fortune spent,
Thou fly'st for Refuge to the Wilds of *Kent*;
And tir'd like me with Follies and with Crimes,
In angry Numbers warn'st succeeding Times;
260 Then shall thy Friend, nor thou refuse his Aid,
Still Foe to Vice forsake his *Cambrian* Shade;
In Virtue's Cause once more exert his Rage,
Thy Satire point, and animate thy Page.

F I N I S.