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Poems

Poems on several occasions

Gay, John

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The fan. Book III

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Visual Library

THE FAN.

BOOK III.

THUS Momus ſpoke. When ſage Minerva roſe;
From her ſweet lips ſmooth elocution flows;
Her ſkilful hand an iv'ry pallet grac'd,
Where ſhining colours were in order plac'd:
As gods are bleſs'd with a ſuperior ſkill,
And, ſwift as mortal thought, perform their will,
Strait ſhe propoſes, by her art divine,
To bid the paint expreſs her great deſign.
Th' aſſembled pow'rs conſent. She now began,
And her creating pencil ſtain'd the fan.

O'er the fair field, trees ſpread, and rivers flow,
Tow'rs rear their heads, and diſtant mountains grow;
Life ſeems to move within the glowing veins,
And in each face ſome lively paſſion reigns.
Thus have I ſeen woods, hills, and dales appear;
Flocks graze the plains, birds wing the ſilent air
In darken'd rooms, where light can only paſs
Through the ſmall circle of a convex glaſs;
On the white ſheet the moving figures riſe,
The foreſt waves, clouds float along the ſkies.

She various fables on the piece design'd,
That ſpoke the follies of the female kind,
The fate of pride in Niobe ſhe drew;
Be wiſe, ye nymphs, that ſcornful vice ſubdue:
In a wide plain th' imperious mother ſtood,
Whoſe diſtant bounds roſe in a winding wood;
Upon her ſhoulder flows her mantling hair,
Pride marks her brow, and elevates her air;
A purple robe behind her ſweeps the ground,
Whoſe ſpacious border golden flow'rs ſurround:
She made Latona's altars ceaſe to flame,
And of due honours robb'd her ſacred name;
To her own charms ſhe bade freſh incenſe riſe,
And adoration own her brighter eyes.
Sev'n daughters from her fruitful loins were born,
Sev'n graceful ſons her nuptial bed adorn,
Who, for a mother's arrogant diſdain,
Were by Latona's double offſpring ſlain.
Here Phoebus his unerring arrow drew,
And from his riſing ſteed her firſt-born threw;
His op'ning fingers drop the ſlacken'd rein,
And the pale corſe falls headlong to the plain.
Beneath her pencil here two wreſtlers bend,
See, to the graſp their ſwelling nerves diſtend,
Diana's arrow joins them face to face,
And death unites them in a ſtrict embrace.
Another here flies trembling o'er the plain;
When heav'n purſues, we ſhun the ſtroke in vain.
This lifts his ſupplicating hands and eyes,
And, 'midſt his humble adoration dies.
As from his thigh this tears the barbed dart,
A ſurer weapon ſtrikes his throbbing heart:

While that to raiſe his wounded brother tries,
Death blaſts his bloom, and locks his frozen eyes.
The tender ſiſters bath'd in grief appear,
With ſable garments and diſhevell'd hair,
And o'er their gaſping brothers weeping ſtood;
Some with their treſſes ſtopt the guſhing blood,
They ſtrive to ſtay the fleeting life too late,
And in the pious action ſhare their fate.
Now the proud dame, o'ercome by trembling fear,
With her wide robe protects her only care;
To ſave her only care in vain ſhe tries,
Cloſe at her feet the lateſt victim dies.
Down her fair cheek the trickling ſorrow flows,
Like dewy ſpangles on the bluſhing roſe;
Fix'd in aſtoniſhment ſhe weeping ſtood,
The plain all purple with her childrens blood;
She ſtiffens with her woes: No more her hair
In eaſy ringlets wantons in the air;
Motion forſakes her eyes, her veins are dry'd,
And beat no longer with the ſanguine tide;
All life is fled, firm marble now ſhe grows,
Which ſtill in tears the mother's anguiſh ſhows.
Ye haughty fair, your painted fans diſplay,
And the juſt fate of lofty pride ſurvey:
Though lovers oft extol your beauty's power,
And in celeſtial ſimilies adore,
Though from your features Cupid borrows arms,
And goddeſſes confeſs inferior charms,
Do not, vain maid, the flatt'ring tale believe,
Alike thy lovers and thy glaſs deceive.
Here lively colours Procris' paſſion tell,
Who to her jealous fears a victim fell.

Here kneels the trembling hunter o'er his wife,
Who rolls her sick'ning eyes, and gasps for life;
Her drooping head upon her shoulder lies,
And purple gore her snowy bosom dyes:
What guilt, what horror on his face appears!
See, his red eye-lid seems to swell with tears,
With agony his wringing hands he strains,
And strong convulsions stretch his branching veins.

Learn hence, ye wives! bid vain suspicion cease,
Lose not, in sullen discontent, your peace.
For when fierce love to jealousy ferments,
A thousand doubts and fears the soul invents:
No more the days in pleasing converse flow,
And nights no more their soft endearments know.

There on the piece the Volscian queen expir'd,
The love of spoils her female bosom fir'd;
Gay Chloreus' arms attract her longing eyes,
And for the painted plume and helm she sighs;
Fearless she follows, bent on gaudy prey,
Till an ill-fated dart obstructs her way;
Down drops the martial maid; the bloody ground
Floats with a torrent from the purple wound.
The mournful nymphs her drooping head sustain,
And try to stop the gushing life in vain.

Thus the raw maid some tawdry coat surveys,
Where the fop's fancy in embroidery plays;
His snowy feather edg'd with crimson dyes,
And his bright sword-knot lure her wand'ring eyes;
Fring'd gloves and gold brocade conspire to move,
Till the nymph falls a sacrifice to love.

Here young Narcissus o'er the fountain stood,
And view'd his image in the crystal flood,

The cryſtal flood reflects his lovely charms,
And the pleas'd image ſtrives to meet his arms.
No nymph his unexperienc'd breaſt ſubdu'd,
Echo in vain the flying boy purſu'd;
Himſelf alone the fooliſh youth admires,
And with fond look the ſmiling ſhade deſires:
O'er the ſmooth lake with fruitleſs tears he grieves,
His ſpreading fingers ſhoot in verdant leaves,
Through his pale veins green ſap now gently flows,
And in a ſhort-liv'd flow'r his beauty blows.

Let vain Narciſſus warn each female breaſt,
That beauty's but a tranſient good at beſt.
Like flow'rs it withers with th' advancing year,
And age, like winter, robs the blooming fair.
Oh Araminta! ceaſe thy wonted pride,
Nor longer in thy faithleſs charms confide;
Ev'n while the glaſs reflects thy ſparkling eyes,
Their luſtre and thy roſy colour flies!

Thus on the fan the breathing figures ſhine,
And all the powers applaud the wiſe deſign.

The Cyprian queen the painted gift receives,
And with a grateful bow the ſynod leaves.
To the low world ſhe bends her ſteepy way,
Where Strephon paſs'd the ſolitary day;
She found him in a melancholy grove,
His downcaſt eyes betray'd deſponding love,
The wounded bark confeſs'd his ſlighted flame,
And ev'ry tree bore falſe Corinna's name;
In a cool ſhade he lay with folded arms,
Curſes his fortune, and upbraids her charms,
When Venus to his wond'ring eyes appears,
And with theſe words relieves his am'rous cares.

Rise, happy youth, this bright machine survey,
Whose ratt'ling sticks my busy fingers sway;
This present shall thy cruel charmer move,
And in her fickle bosom kindle love.
The fan shall flutter in all female hands,
And various fashions learn from various lands.
For this shall elephants their iv'ry shed;
And polish'd sticks the waving engine spread:
His clouded mail the tortoise shall resign,
And round the rivet pearly circles shine.
On this shall Indians all their art employ,
And with bright colours stain the gaudy toy;
Their paint shall here in wildest fancies flow,
Their dress, their customs, their religion show;
So shall the British fair their minds improve,
And on the fan to distant climates rove.
Here China's ladies shall their pride display,
And silver figures gild their loose array;
This boasts her little feet and winking eyes;
That tunes the fife, or tinkling cymbal plies:
Here cross-legg'd nobles in rich state shall dine,
There in bright mail distorted heroes shine.
The peeping fan in modern times shall rise,
Through which unseen the female ogle flies;
This shall in temples the sly maid conceal,
And shelter love beneath devotion's veil.
Gay France shall make the fan her artists care,
And with the costly trinket arm the fair.
As learned orators that touch the heart,
With various action raise their soothing art,
Both head and hand affect the list'ning throng,
And humour each expression of the tongue:

So ſhall each paſſion by the fan be ſeen,
From noiſy anger to the ſullen ſpleen.
While Venus ſpoke, joy ſhone in Strephon's eyes,
Proud of the gift, he to Corinna flies.
But Cupid (who delights in am'rous ill,
Wounds hearts, and leaves them to a woman's will)
With certain aim a golden arrow drew,
Which to Leander's panting boſom flew;
Leander lov'd; and to the ſprightly dame
In gentle ſighs reveal'd his growing flame;
Sweet ſmiles Corinna to his ſighs returns,
And for the fop in equal paſſion burns.
Lo Strephon comes! and with a ſuppliant bow,
Offers the preſent, and renews his vow.
When ſhe the fate of Niobe beheld,
Why has my pride againſt my heart rebell'd?
She ſighing cry'd: Diſdain forſook her breaſt,
And Strephon now was thought a worthy gueſt.
In Procris' boſom when ſhe ſaw the dart,
She juſtly blames her own ſuſpicious heart,
Imputes her diſcontent to jealous fear,
And knows her Strephon's conſtancy ſincere.
When on Camilla's fate her eye ſhe turns,
No more for ſhow and equipage ſhe burns;
She learns Leander's paſſion to deſpiſe,
And looks on merit with diſcerning eyes.
Narciſſus' change to the vain virgin ſhows
Who truſts to beauty, truſts the fading roſe.
Youth flies apace, with youth your beauty flies:
Love then, ye virgins, ere the bloſſom dies.
Thus Pallas taught her. Strephon weds the dame,
And Hymen's torch diffus'd the brighteſt flame.

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