



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Description of A City Shower

By Jonathan Swift  
1710

*Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was an Irish satirist, essayist, and poet. As a satirist, Swift pointed out the flaws in people and societies through humor. As you read, take notes on how Swift uses satire throughout the poem.*

- [1] Careful observers may foretell the hour  
(By sure prognostics)<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> more than save in  
wine.
- A coming shower your shooting corns presage,<sup>3</sup>
- [10] Old achès throb, your hollow tooth will rage.  
Sauntering in coffeehouse is Dulman<sup>4</sup> seen;  
He damns the climate and complains of spleen.  
Meanwhile the South, rising with dabbled wings,  
A sable cloud athwart<sup>5</sup> the welkin<sup>6</sup> 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 born aslope:  
Such is that sprinkling which some careless quean<sup>7</sup>
- [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 mingled stain.



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1. predictions
2. paying to ride in a horse-drawn carriage
3. to signal or warn
4. a type of urban Englishman
5. across
6. sky
7. an ill-behaved girl or woman

Now in contiguous<sup>8</sup> drops the flood comes down,  
 Threatening with deluge<sup>9</sup> 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 seams 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<sup>10</sup>  
 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<sup>11</sup>  
 (Those bully Greeks, who, as the moderns do,

[50] Instead of paying chairmen, run them through),  
 Laocoön<sup>12</sup> 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 odors seem to tell  
 What street they sailed from, by their sight and smell.  
 They, as each torrent<sup>13</sup> drives with rapid force,  
 From Smithfield or St. Pulchre's shape their course,  
 And in huge confluence<sup>14</sup> 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.

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8. **Contiguous (adjective):** continuous
  9. **Deluge (noun):** a heavy downpour
  10. Tories and Whigs were two political parties in England
  11. a reference to the Trojan Horse, which was a wooden structure used to trick the people of Troy into unwittingly smuggling in their enemies, the Greeks
  12. Laocoön was a Trojan priest who struck the Trojan Horse with a spear in an attempt to expose the Greeks hidden inside of it. He was unsuccessful in this attempt and was eventually killed by the goddess Athena for this.
  13. a strong and fast-moving stream of water
  14. a meeting of streams

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following statements best identifies a theme of the poem?
  - A. When exposed, life in the city is actually quite dirty and miserable.
  - B. Human civilization is no match for the sheer strength of nature.
  - C. Serious problems like poverty plague cities and cannot be washed away easily.
  - D. Civilizations experience a kind of rebirth and renewal whenever it rains.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "A coming shower your shooting corns presage, / Old achès throb, your hollow tooth will rage. / Sauntering in coffeehouse is Dulman seen; / He damns the climate and complains of spleen." (Lines 9-12)
  - B. "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." (Lines 31-34)
  - C. "Boxed in a chair the beau impatient sits, / While spouts run clattering o'er the roof by fits, / And ever and anon with frightful din / The leather sounds; he trembles from within." (Lines 43-46)
  - D. "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." (Lines 61-63)
  
3. What effect did the author most likely intend with the comparison drawn in lines 43-52 between the beau and the Greeks?
  - A. The author mocks the Greeks by comparing them to a man sitting in his carriage, implying that the warriors' trick with the wooden horse was cowardly.
  - B. The author seems to suggest that the rain is just as fearful as when one's enemies stabbing a spear into one's hideout.
  - C. The author mocks the beau sitting in his carriage trembling because of the rain by comparing him to the Greeks fearfully waiting to attack their enemies.
  - D. The author seems to suggest that the beau is clever for sitting in his carriage because, like the Greeks, it allows him to proceed through the city without trouble.
  
4. What impact does the author's choice of resolution have on the overall meaning of the text?
  - A. The conclusion of the poem describes the filth of the city being washed away, a shocking ending that nevertheless implies that only a little hard work is needed to improve the city.
  - B. The conclusion of the poem focuses on the great force of the flood and therefore suggests that nature will soon destroy all that humans have created.
  - C. The conclusion of the poem describes dead animals being washed away, meant to shock and sadden the reader, thereby emphasizing the need for compassion in the city.
  - D. The conclusion of the poem focuses on the sheer filth found in the city, meant to shock and disgust the reader, thereby emphasizing the poem's criticism of city life.

5. How does the figurative language used in lines 13-16 develop the poem's use of satire?

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