

THE MOTLEY ASSEMBLY
A Farce, published for the entertainment of the curious
by Mercy Otis Warren

Boston: Printed and sold by Nathaniel Coverly, in Newbury Street, 1779

Entered by hand by Richard Seltzer

Author of Parallel Lives (All Things Matter Press, 2020)

Spelling and punctuation have been updated for readability

Advertisement:

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Dramatis Personae

Men:

Esquire Runt, a short fat old fellow, fond of gallanting the ladies

Turncoat

Bubble

Captain Aid

Captain Careless, an honest young sea captain

Women:

Mrs. Flourish

Mrs. Taxall

Mrs. Bubble

Miss P and Miss B, daughters of Turncoat

Miss Flourish

Miss Taxall

Miss Doggril

Tab

Berry, servant to Mrs. Bubble

SCENE -- At the House of Mrs. Flourish.

ENTER MRS. FLOURISH AND ESQUIRE RUNT

Runt:

It is a very great mortification to the gentlemen, madam, your not permitting Miss Flourish to go to the assembly.

Mrs. Flourish:

I mean it as such, Mr. Runt. If your sex are so weak and undiscerning as to prefer the fading, short-lived perishable trifle beauty, to the noble exalted, mental accomplishments, which only are of intrinsic value, Mr. Runt, it is fit they should be mortified. O why has heaven permitted our passive sex to be so long deceived and misled by the idle and groundless opinion of the superior wisdom of the male sex! In animal strength I grant their superiority. And I have found some capable of pleasing. But few, very few indeed capable of informing me.

Runt:

But madam, you will be pleased to consider that few ladies are so accomplished as you are allowed to be.

Mrs. Flourish:

Say no more, Mr. Runt. I am almost sick at the bare mention of the word. It is so horribly prostituted and misapplied upon almost all occasions.

Runt:

I beg your pardon, madam.

Mrs. Flourish:

I do not mean in this instance, Mr. Runt. But pray, Mr. Runt, how comes it that you are one of the managers of this motley assembly?

Runt:

I was advised, madam. Mr. Turncoat advised me.

Mrs. Flourish:

To keep him in countenance, I suppose. Well, what appearance do they make, compared to our assemblies in the siege?

Runt:

I wish you had been there the last evening madam, only to have seen the contrast.

Mrs. Flourish:

Contrast indeed! I dare swear. O, Mr. Runt! When shall we see such happy times again? Will they ever return, Mr. Runt?

Runt:

Turncoat says he has long been afraid they never would return, and wishes the friends of government would do as he has done, tack about, and make fair weather with the other side.

Mrs. Flourish:

How versatile is man! Have you known any one of my sex on the side of government to change their opinion, Mr. Runt? Nay more -- have we not openly, in the face of day, and in defiance of our present mock rules, frequently visited our dear, distressed friends in Cambridge. While the men! you dastard men! meanly stole under cover of the night; and some of the highest Whigs, who in some companies have exclaimed against us, have been glad to make use of our interest for you know what purposes. And their wives who have sometime accompanied us, have returned more than half converted, by the gentility, address, politeness, and generosity of the convention troops. O my God! My heart bleeds whenever I think of the poor distressed Convention troops. What will become of them, Mr. Runt? It is impossible they can endure such a horrid march. Enough almost to kill our Yankees.

Runt:

It is very cruel treatment. And it is a wonder if we don't suffer for it in the end. I never could learn the cause, madam.

Mrs. Flourish:

The French! The cursed French! Mr. Runt, are the cause of all our misery. This rebellion would have been crushed long before this, but for them. We could not have held out much longer, when they stepped in, but must have submitted to such terms as our gracious sovereign would have condescended to offer, which all who know his goodness, Mr. Runt, are convinced would have been just and merciful.

Runt:

Your observations are very just, madam, and I am entirely of your opinion. And as to the French, everybody says they are a treacherous crew. I know when I was in England, it was the general opinion there, and that they never would fight. And I don't despair but Old England will give them a drubbing yet. But as to us, I think we are in a worse box than ever. Out of the frying pan, into the fire. And all this for a trifling duty on tea.

Mrs. Flourish:

We must wait with patience, Mr. Runt. I have still hopes, notwithstanding what Mr. Turncoat says. I never thought him much of a politician. It was rather unfortunate for him, that he would not even suffer his daughters to go to a Whig assembly as it was called the winter before last. And now to warmly engage in it because these people are very apt to remember, and may possibly assign this miraculous change to the true motive.

ENTER MISS FLOURISH

Miss Flourish:

O, Mr. Runt, I am exceeding glad to see you. I wanted to ask you a thousand questions. What sort of an assembly had you? Who was there? Were the ladies very much dressed? How did the He-Bears (as Miss Doggril called them) behave? How did they handle their paws? Could you keep your countenance?

Mrs. Flourish:

Stop! Stop! Stop! Miss Volubility, not quite so fast. Who do you think can answer so many questions at once? Now, Mr. Runt, can you think it possible, after all this seeming contempt for the company, that this girl cried a whole day because I would not let her go to the assembly? Assembly! Good heaven! It is a burlesque upon the name of an assembly. I have no patience when I think of it. Yet there's my sister is fool enough to go. Though she told me she would not dance, because she could not bear to give her hand to such cattle.

Runt:

I observed Mrs. ___ refused to dance, but did not know the reason before. Well, I think she is quite right. But Miss Flourish, how comes it that you are so anxious to go?

Miss Flourish:

Because there is a set of us who agreed to go on purpose to make our remarks on the droll figures, for our diversion and entertainment when we got home.

Runt:

Ha! Ha! Ha! You are a rogue, Miss Flourish.

Mrs. Flourish:

Did you observe Mrs. Bubble's behavior, Mr. Runt? It seems to me that creature tries how ridiculous she can make herself. The town rings with her silly speeches. She has not a single advocate in our little polite circle, and is laughed at by the very creatures whom she affects to despise, but has not sense enough even to distinguish the ridiculous part of their character. Excuse me a moment, Mr. Runt.

EXIT MRS. FLOURISH

ENTER MISS TAXALL AND MISS DOGGRIL

Runt:

How do you do, ladies? Give me leave to take your cloaks. What do you hear abroad, ladies?

Miss Taxall:

We hear nothing talked of now but the assembly, and Mrs. Bubble's pretty speeches. O,

Miss Doggril:

I wish you had been in town in the siege. Then you would have seen assemblies! Don't you remember one evening, Miss Flourish? Well, though they are so impudent sometimes, yet they are so genteel, so easy, so careless, and so agreeable that one can hardly be offended at anything they say or do. If you had been with us then, Miss Doggril, you would not wonder at my turning off my Yankee spark.

Miss Doggril:

Kind fortune! Bring them back "or let us drink of Lethe's fountain, and forget to think".

RE-ENTER MRS. FLOURISH IN A HURRY

Mrs. Flourish:

Take care, girls, what you say now. Captain Aid is coming in. Remember he is an officer in the reb -- I had like to have spoke treason -- in our army.

ENTER AID, A LITTLE GAY.

Aid:

Ladies, your most obedient. Mr. Runt, I am yours.

Runt:

Your humble servant, sir, How do you do, Mr. Aid? Captain, I beg your pardon, sir.

Mrs. Flourish:

Take a chair, Captain Aid. Will you drink a glass of wine?

Aid:

With all my heart, madam. Ladies, your health. Mr. Runt, your health. And long life, health, and prosperity, to his most Christian majesty, and godlike, glorious Washington.

Mrs. Flourish:

Thank you, sir *[speaking very faintly]*

Runt:

With all my heart, Captain. I really take that Washington to be a very clever fellow.

Aid:

Let us be silent on that subject, Mr. Runt. We have neither time, nor talents to do it justice.

Mrs. Flourish:

Why? He is no more than man, Captain Aid.

Aid:

Then all mankind beside are left, madam.

Mrs. Flourish:

You have not seen all mankind, sir. I believe Mr. Washington, or General Washington, if you please, is a very honest, good kind of man, and has taken infinite pains to keep your army together. And I wish he may find his account in it. But doubtless there are his equals, to say no more.

Aid:

If you meant that as a compliment, madam, it is really so cold a one, it has me shiver. I will therefore, with your leave, drop the subject; and take another glass of wine.

Runt:

Aye, aye, that's right, Captain. I think there are more fit subjects for a young gentleman's contemplation in this room.

Aid:

Still gallant, Mr. Runt. But the ladies must pardon me if I cannot readily assent to the justice of your rebuke, when I assure them that I think such charms as theirs would justify my inattention to every other object, but what concerns my General, for my country.

Miss Taxall:

I believe we are all very ready to pardon your inattention to us at all times.

Aid:

Curse your impudence. *[aside: Knowing my inclination, and particular attention to please and oblige the ladies, you say what you please without the hazard of offending.]* And as you seem disposed at this time to be merry at my expense, I am extremely sorry to deprive you of the opportunity, by being obliged to leave you.

SCENE changes to the House of Mrs. Taxall

ENTER MRS. TAXALL, MISS TAXALL, AND TAB

Mrs. Taxall:

I am afraid, Tab, we shall be obliged to do something at last. The gentlemen will be tired by and by. I have found already that some of them do not come so often as formerly. And when they do come, are not so ready to take a hint, though pretty broad. And I am really ashamed to speak plainer than I do.

Tab:

Why Ma'am! I am sure you have no reason to complain yet. You remember the last time the gentlemen drank tea here, how very generous one of them was to Miss ____, and another very readily took your hint about the ____, by what he sent the next day. And you cannot but acknowledge that they have been exceeding genteel to Miss Taxall. If any one has reason to complain, I think it is poor Tab.

Mrs. Taxall:

I grant, Tab, they have done very well, considering who they are. But I begin to fear that it will not last, unless we could depend upon a new set every now and then, which is so precarious that I wish we had some other dependence.

Tab:

Why you know Ma'am that I have taken in work for some particular people. But before I would stoop to work for our modern mushroom gentry, I had rather starve.

Miss Taxall:

I think, Mamma, that Tab is to be commended for her spirit. I'm sure I should rather starve than take in work for anybody.

Mrs. Taxall:

Why, I can't but say I commend such a spirit. It is very humiliating to people of taste and fashion, who have brought up a family so very genteelly as I have, to think that any of them must stoop so low. I am, therefore, determined to wait till necessity drives me, before I submit to it. These times cannot last always. Perhaps we may see such days again as we saw in the siege.

Miss Taxall:

O Mamma! I fear we never shall.

Tab:

I don't despair yet.

Miss Taxall:

Well, Tab, if you don't despair, I am sure I have no reason.

ENTER MISS P___ AND MISS B_____

Miss P___:

Your servant ladies! Miss Taxall when did you see Captain Aid? He passed us just now as if he did not know us.

Miss B___:

We heard he was affronted the winter before last, at our not going to the assembly, and now I suppose he is offended because we do go.

Mrs. Taxall:

I have heard several gentlemen remark upon that affair, Miss B___, and the late extraordinary change in your Papa's conduct, not much to his advantage. But I never opened my lips, though I confess to you I think it looks odd.

Miss B___:

Why Ma'am! When my Papa forbid our going to the assembly, the winter before last, he thought the British troops would be here again in the spring following, and retake the town; and was afraid it would hurt his and our characters if he kept company with the liberty people. But now he thinks they will not come again.

Mrs. Taxall:

That may be a sufficient reason for his allowing you to go now. But his being a manager looks as if he was really fond of such company.

Miss B___:

Why ma'am! He was urged to it; and, as it was not like taking up arms, he thought it best to accept.

ENTER TURNCOAT

Mrs. Taxall:

I have been telling Miss B___ that some gentlemen have express great surprise at the apparent alteration in your conduct, Mr. Turncoat.

Turncoat:

I don't doubt it, madam; and readily guess on what account. But if those gentlemen would consider the great change in our affairs, and the critical situation of my family, interest, and connections, they could not justly blame me, as they know my determination still is never to take an active part on either side.

Mrs. Taxall:

Well, sir, I believe you are right, all things considered. Pray, sir, did you hear of the fracas at the concert the other evening between two gentlemen? I wish to hear the particulars.

Miss Taxall:

La Mamma! It was nothing at all. They went so far as to draw on each other, to be sure, but no blood, Mamma. I wish the ladies would adopt the same method of deciding their quarrels, as it neither wounds the skin nor reputation.

SCENE at the House of Mrs. Bubble

Betty:

I have brought back the silk, ma'am. The lady says you have not sent all, and refuses to take it again.

Mrs. Bubble:

Well, I'll see about it. You may go. [exit Betty] Bubble has refused to buy it for me, and I am determined nobody else shall have it.

ENTER BUBBLE

Bubble:

Do you go to the assembly tomorrow evening, my dear.

Mrs. Bubble:

No!. That I shan't. Yes, I will, too, and in my worst gown. But I am determined not to dance. Yes, I will dance a minuet on purpose to mortify you by my dress. Why, Mr. Bubble! How can you ask me to go to the assembly when you know I have got nothing fit to wear? And yet you have refused to buy for me the genteelst, prettiest thing I ever saw -- and everybody says it is exceeding cheap for paper money --only a thousand dollars.

Bubble: Very cheap indeed! Only a thousand dollars!

Mrs. Bubble:

And not much the worse for wear neither. Anybody who was to see it on me would suppose it quite new. But I have a great mind never to go among such cattle again. For unless one can eclipse them in dress, there is no mortifying them any other way, and that is all the pleasure one can take in going into such company.

SCENE changes to a Coffeehouse

ENTER AID AND CARELESS

Aid:

We shall both be in Coventry soon, Careless. Curse on the girls! There is no keeping company with them without being a rascal.

Careless:

Why? What's the matter, Aid? Ha! Ha! Ha!

Aid:

Hold! Hold! Don't you crow. There's a devil of a storm brewing for you my lad. I met Tab just now. She is running about brawling like a bedlamite against you.

Careless:

Poor Tab! What does she say, Aid?

Aid:

Damn me if I can tell, though I hear her run on for half an hour. I can only recollect "that puppy Careless, that young coxcomb! Continental shirts, ha! I'll Continental shirts him -- a little saucy impudent puppy." What the devil does she mean, Careless.

Careless:

Ha, ha, ha! Why I'll tell you, Aid. I was in company the other evening with that pretty set, though by the way some of them are really pretty. But entre nous, Aid, they are a damned set! It is unnecessary to repeat the conversation. Suffice it to say it was upon the old topic, which they handled with so much rancor, and indecency, sparing none of us; and so very lavish of their encomiums, on the British officers, that, I confess, I felt not a little vexed; and in revenge as well as to divert the conversation, proposed their making each two shirts a week for the continental soldiers.

Aid:

Did you by heaven? Well how was it received?

Careless:

As I intended. Faith! It operated so violently on Tab that I expected nothing short of an hysteric fit. Her efforts to contain her rage must have been excessive, if one may judge by her horribly distorted countenance.

Aid:

Why I dare swear, Careless, it was her natural look, which you took for such a horrible distortion.

Careless:

No, no, Aid. Though we all agree she is damned ugly at best, yet I never saw her look quite so much like the devil before. But at last she was relieved by opening upon me. Heavens and earth, what a volley! I stood the shock for some time. At length, I pretended to be very sorry, and begged their pardon. Then addressing Tab -- "I had no thought of giving the least offense," said I. "my dear young lady, but was really simple enough to think that while the gentlemen were fighting, bleeding and dying for their country, that the ladies could do no less than I proposed. Nevertheless, convinced by the force of your arguments, I give up the point." I had scarce finished before I saw symptoms of another explosion from the same quarter, and seeing not one advocate in the room, but on the contrary, every countenance deeply tinged with the irascible, I thought it best to decamp, which I did, leaving them not a little chagrined.

Aid:

I am very glad of it. For between you and I, Careless, I begin to be sick of such company. Though I think what they say is of very little consequence.

Careless:

It is of so much consequence in my opinion that I think it the duty of every Whig to discountenance such indecent raillery and abuse, at all times and upon all occasions.

Aid:

If many would join in it, it would do. But should two or three only attempt it, they would appear ridiculous.

Careless:

Ridiculous or not, was I to continue here for any time, I should not hesitate to treat them with the neglect and contempt they deserve. Such a conduct invariably pursued by those whom they affect to despise would soon effect a great change in their conversation and conduct.

Aid:

I believe you are right, Careless. I wish to heaven the experiment was tried. O how I should glory in seeing the poor despised, neglected, solitary devils, looking and longing in vain for a bow or a smile, to cheer their drooping spirits.

Careless:

No man is more happy than I am in the company of a pretty girl. But shall selfish considerations weigh so much with a man of honor, as to take a little damned paracidal viper to his bosom, because it is pretty. Honor and patriotism forbid it. O, Aid! I am ashamed of the conduct of some of this town, who profess themselves Whigs. They are not barely doubtful, but in my opinion the most dangerous characters among you. But I shall leave you soon, and with less regret on this account. Sincerely wishing that on my return I may find a great reformation, or a thorough extirpation.

Blush Boston! Blush! Thy honest sons bewail,
That dance and song over patriot zeal prevail,
That Whigs and Tories (joined by wayward chance)
Should hand in hand lead on the sprightly dance,
Or sword to sword as harmlessly oppose
As all such heroes would their country's foes,
Here lured by fashion, opposite interests join,
And lull their cares and rage, in cards and wine.
Here friends to freedom, vile apostate meet,
And here unblushing can each other greet.
In mixed assembly, see they crowd the place.
Stain to their country, to their sires disgrace.
Hell in some hearts, but pleasure in each face,
All, all are qualified to join this tribe,
Who have a hundred dollars to subscribe.

THE END