Excursions
Volume 6, Issue 1 (December 2015) Occupations

Elizabeth D. Johnston, ‘Stripp’d’

Excursions, vol. 6, no. 1 (2015)

Stripp’d
Lines Written after Attending a Teacher’s Conference
On Revisiting Las Vegas, March 16, 2013

Stripp’d of their gaudy hues by Truth,
We view the glitt’ring toys of youth,
And blush to think how poor the bait
For which to public scenes we ran
And scorn’d of sober sense the plan
Which gives content at—Thirty-eight

Charlotte Smith, “Thirty Eight” (1783)

At twenty-three, a paradise.
A gin in hand and pair of dice,
I chased the scenes I’ve learned to hate.
Rapturous joy, all appetite,
no sober plan I lacked the sight
I now enjoy at-- Thirty-eight.

I scan the strip, the gaudy lights,
the view in which I drank delight —
I blush and wish to turn away
from smoke-soaked halls, the carpet’s stain,
the cracks along the window panes,
the players losing life at play.

On break for lunch, we stroll the streets
past men, bent-kneed in sweat-drenched tees,
who press in palms coupons for girls,
“quick delivery to your door”--
the bait so young, the bait so poor--
odious swine who slop in pearls.

I blush and wish to render more
than incensed scowl, or glare of scorn
before the shuttle picks us up
then drops us at the Stratosphere,
where book reps buy our food and beer,
and high above we richly sup.
We wits, who from a distance pan
the trappings of this shiny land,
glut our pity on those weaker--
bemoan the beggar, bloated gambler,
sagging stripper, vagrant dweller,
the drunk, the drugged, wayward seekers.

We gorge on lofty discontent,
then wonder where the waiter went,
return to rooms, our bellies full,
to scented soaps, to laundered sheets
and fall into a blameless sleep,
no thought that we’re responsible.

In sleep suspended, scholars rest,
then rise, pack bags, with other guests
through airports drag our weary weight--
theses to grade and souvenirs--
relieved that we live nowhere near
Las Vegas when we’re—Thirty-eight.