

# Excursions

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Elizabeth D. Johnston, 'Stripp'd'

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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--  
essays to grade and souvenirs--  
relieved that we live nowhere near  
Las Vegas when we're—Thirty-eight.