Jonathan Swift, â??The Furniture of a Womanâ??s Mindâ?•

Description

JONATHAN SWIFT

â??The Furniture of a Womanâ??s Mind.â?•

Written in the Year 1727

A Set of Phrases learnâ??d by Rote;
A Passion for a Scarlet-Coat;
When at a Play to laugh, or cry,
Yet cannot tell the Reason why:
Never to hold her Tongue a Minute;
While all she prates has nothing in it.
Whole Hours can with a Coxcomb sit,
And take his Nonsense all for Wit;
Her Learning mounts to read a Song;
But, half the Words pronouncing wrong;
Has evâ??ry Rapartee in Store,
She spoke ten Thousand Times before,
Can ready Compliments supply
On all Occasions, cut and dry.
Such Hatred to a Parsonâ??s Gown,
The Sight will put her in a Swoon.
For Conversation well enduâ??d;
She calls it witty to be rude;
And, placing Raillery in Railing;
Will tell aloud your greatest Failing;
Nor makes a Scruple to expose
Your bandy Leg, or crooked Nose.
Can at her Morning Tea, run oâ??er
The Scandal of the Day before,
Improving hourly in her Skill,
To cheat and wrangle at Quadrille.

In chusing Lace a Critick nice,
Knows to a Groat the lowest Price;
Can in her Female Clubs dispute
What Lining best the Silk will suit;
What Colours each Complexion match,
And where with Art to place a Patch.

If chance a Mouse creeps in her Sight,
Can finely counterfeit a Fright;
So, sweetly screams if it comes near her,
She ravishes all Hearts to hear her.
Can dextâ??rously her Husband teize,
By taking Fits wheneâ??er she please:
By frequent Practice learns the Trick
At proper Seasons to be sick;
Thinks nothing gives one Airs so pretty;
At once creating Love and Pity.
If *Molly* happens to be careless,
And but neglects to warm her Hair-Lace,
She gets a Cold as sure as Death;
And vows she scarce can fetch her Breath:
Admires how modest Women can
Be so *robustious* like a Man.

In Party, furious to her Power:
A bitter Whig, or Tory sowâ??r.
Her arguments directly tend
Against the Side she would defend:
Will prove herself a Tory plain,
From Principles the Whigs maintain;
And, to defend the Whiggish Cause,
Her Topicks from the Tories draws.

O yes! If any Man can find
More Virtues in a Womanâ??s Mind,
Let them be sent to Mrs. *Harding,*
Sheâ??ll pay the Charges to a Farthing:
Take Notice, she has my Commission
To add them to the next Edition:
They may out-sell a better Thing;
So, Halloo Boys! God save the King.

NOTES:

2 *Scarlet-Coat* A reference to a soldier in the British army; from the seventeenth century onwards known as â??redcoatsâ?• (*OED*).

6 *prates* To â??speak foolishlyâ?• or with â??little purposeâ?• (*OED).*

7 *Coxcomb* A â??foolâ?• or â??simpletonâ?• (*OED).*

11 *Rapartee* â??A witty or sharp replyâ?• (*OED*).

15 *Parsonâ??s* Clergyman of the Anglican Church of England *(OED).*

19 *Raillery* â??Abusive, unpleasant or unkind criticismâ?• (*OED*).

26 *Quadrille* â??A trick-taking card game for four players using forty cardsâ?• (*OED*).

28 *Groat* An English coin worth four pence that â??ceased to be issued for circulation in 1662â?• (*OED*).

32 *Patch* â??A small piece of black material, typically silk or velvet, cut into a decorative shape and worn on the face, either for adornment or to conceal a blemish, esp. in the 17th and 18th centuriesâ?• (*OED*).

37 *teize* Tease; to â??worryâ?•, â??vexâ?• or â??annoyâ?• (*OED).*

43 *Molly* â??A girl, a woman, esp. a lower-class oneâ?• (*OED).*

44 *Hair-Lace* â??A string or tie for binding the hair; a fillet, headbandâ?• (*OED*).

50 *Whig â??*One faction of two opposing political parties in England, particularly during the 18th century. â??Whigsâ?? was applied to those who claimed the power of excluding the heir from the throneâ?• (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*); *Tory â??*One faction of two opposing political parties in England. â??Toryâ?? applied to those who supported the hereditary right of James, duke of York, despite his Roman Catholic faithâ?• (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*); *sowâ??r* Variant of sour: â??having a harsh, morose, or peevish dispositionâ?• (*OED*).

59 *Mrs. Harding* Sarah Harding, widow of Dublin printer John Harding who was prosecuted for publishing Swiftâ??s *Drapierâ??s Letters* in 1724. At her husbandâ??s death in 1725, Sarah took over the business and, despite being taken into custody briefly in 1725 herself, she continued to publish politically controversial work by Swift (James Woolley, â??Sarah Harding as Swiftâ??s Printer,â?• in *Walking Nabothâ??s Vineyard: New Studies of Swift,* pp. 164-77).

60 *Farthing* â??The quarter of a penny; the coin representing this valueâ?• (*OED*).

SOURCE: *The Works of Jonathan Swift,* vol. 2 (Dublin, 1751), pp. 248-50. [*HathiTrust*]

Edited by Alejandra Pereda