Mary Leapor, â??An Essay on Womanâ?•

Description

MARY LEAPOR

***â??*An Essay on Womanâ?•**

Womanâ??a pleasing, but a short-livâ??d Flowâ??r,
Too soft for Business, and too weak for Powâ??r:
A Wife in Bondage, or neglected Maid;
Despisâ??d, if ugly; if sheâ??s fairâ??betrayâ??d.
â??Tis Wealth alone inspires evâ??ry Grace,
And calls the Raptures to her plenteous Face.
What Numbers for those charming Features pine,
If blooming Acres round her Temples twine?
Her Lip the Strawberry; and her Eyes more bright
Than sparkling *Venus* in a frosty Night.
Pale Lilies fade; and when the Fair appears,
Snow turns a Negro, and dissolves in Tears.
And where the Charmer treads her magic Toe,
On *English* Ground *Arabian* Odours grow;
Till mighty *Hymen* lists his sceptred Rod,
And sinks her Glories with a fatal Nod;
Dissolves her Triumphs; sweeps her Charms away,
And turns the Goddess to her native Clay.

But, *Artemisia*, let your Servant sing
What small Advantage Wealth and Beauties bring.
Who would be wise, that knew *Pamphiliaâ??s* Fate?
Or who be fair, and joinâ??d to *Sylviaâ??s* Mate?
Sylvia, whose Cheeks are fresh as early Day;
As Evâ??ning mild, and sweet as spicy *May*:
And yet That Face her partial Husband tires,
And those bright Eyes, that all the World admires.
Pamphiliaâ??s Wit who does not strive to shun,
Like Deathâ??s Infection, or a Dog-Dayâ??s Sun?
The Damsels view her with malignant Eyes:
The Men are vexâ??d to find a Nymph so wise:
And Wisdom only serves to make her know
The keen Sensation of superior Woe.
The secret Whisper, and the listâ??ning Ear,
The scornful Eyebrow, and the hated Sneer;
The giddy Censures of her babbling Kind,

With thousand Ills that grate a gentle Mind,
By her are tasted in the first Degree,
Thoâ?? overlookâ??d by *Simplicus*, and me.
Does Thirst of Gold a Virginâ??s Heart inspire,
Instillâ??d by Nature, or a careful Sire?
Then let her quit Extravagance and Play;
The brisk Companion; and expensive Tea;
To feast with *Cordia* in her filthy Sty
On stewâ??d Potatoes, or on mouldy Pye;
Whose eager Eyes stare ghastly at the Poor,
And fright the Beggars from her hated Door:
In greasy Clouts she wraps her smoky Chin,
And holds, that Prideâ??s a never-pardonâ??d Sin.

If this be Wealth, no matter where it falls;
But save, ye Muses, save your *Miraâ??s* Walls:
Still give me pleasing Indolence, and Ease;
A Fire to warm me, and a Friend to please.

Since, whether sunk in Avarice, or Pride;
A wanton Virgin, or a starving Bride;
Or, wondâ??ring Crouds attend her charming Tongue;
Or deemâ??d an Idiot, ever speaks the Wrong:
Thoâ?? Nature armâ??d us for the growing Ill,
With fraudful Cunning, and a headstrong Will;
Yet, with ten thousand Follies to her Charge,
Unhappy Womanâ??s but a Slave at large.

NOTES:

6 *Raptures* â??A state, condition, or fit of intense delight or enthusiasmâ?• (*OED*).

10 *Venus* Here a reference to the evening star.

12 *Negro* â??A member of a dark-skinned group of peoples originally native to sub-Saharan Africa; a person of black African origin or descent. Early use also applied to other dark-skinned peoplesâ?• (*OED*).

15 *Hymen* The God of marriage in Greek myth.

18 *Clay* That is, her original human form.

19 *Artemisia* A pseudonym for Leaporâ??s friend and patron, Bridget Freemantle.

28 *Dog-Dayâ??s* â??The hottest part of the summerâ?• (*OED*).

32 *Woe* â??A state or condition of misery, suffering, or emotional distress; misfortune, troubleâ?• (*OED).*

35 *Censures* â??Expression of disapproval or condemnationâ?• (*OED*).

36 *grate* â??To affect painfully,â?¦irritateâ?• (*OED*).

38 *Simplicus* Conventional name for a rustic or simple man.

43 *Sty* â??A human habitationâ?¦no better than a pigstyâ?• (*OED*).

50 *Mira* Leaporâ??s poetic name for herself; *Walls* Defenses (*OED*).

53 *Avarice* â??Inordinate desire of acquiring and hoarding wealthâ?• (*OED*).

54 *wanton* â??Lustful; not chaste, sexually promiscuousâ?• (*OED*).

59 *Follies* Foolish actions, ideas, practices (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (London, 1751), pp. 64-67. [Internet Archive]

Edited by Alexis Kleinberg