[John Norris], â??The Rainbow. A Fableâ?•

Description

[JOHN NORRIS]

â??The Rainbow. A Fableâ?•

â??Nimium ne crede Colori.â??Virg.

An age there was, some authors teach,
When all things were enduâ??d with speech;
Nor plant, nor bird, nor fish, nor brute,
Nor thing inanimate was mute:
Their converse taughtâ??or these men lieâ??
Better than books, morality.
One grain more faith afford me now,
I ask but one more grain, I vow,
Speech on mere visions to bestow.
Then youâ??ll believe, that truth I tell,
That what I now relate befell.
Calm was the day, the sky was clear,
Save that a light cloud here and there,
Floating amid the azure plain,
Promisâ??d some gentle showâ??rs of rain;
Thoâ?? *Men* are faithless, *Clouds* are true,
As by the sequel soon Iâ??ll shew.
Sol from the zenith now departed,
Eastward his rays obliquely darted,
The clouds, late glories of the day,
By western winds are borne away,
Till to the east each vapour blown,
In lucid showâ??rs came gently down.
Now full opposâ??d to Phoebusâ?? rays,
Iris her vivid tints displays;
A watâ??ry mirror spread below,
To her own eyes her beauties shew.
I scarce can think Narcissus eyâ??d
Reflected beauty with such pride;
Or modern belle for birth-night dressâ??d,
Raptures so exquisite expressâ??d.
Some time enamourâ??d oâ??er the lake
She hung, thenâ??thus she spake.
â??Say, in Creationâ??s ample bound,

Where can there such a form be found?
How fine that curve! how bright those rays!
Oh I could here for ever gaze;
See, see, resplendent circles rise,
Each above each, of various dyes!
Mark that first ring of sanguine light!
Beamâ??d ever ruby half so bright?
Or can the flaming topaz vie
With that next stream of golden dye?
Where was that emâ??rald ever seen
Whose rays could rival yonder green?
Or whereâ??s that sapphireâ??s azure hue,
Can emulate itâ??s neighbâ??ring blue?
See! purple terminates my bow:
Boast amethysts so bright a glow?â?•
Thus to each charm she gave its due,
Nay moreâ??but that isâ??entre nous,
Exhaustless seemâ??d the copious theme,
For whereâ??s the end of self-esteem?
She finding still for praise pretence,
From vanity drew eloquence:
When in the midst of her career,
Behold her glories disappear.
See her late boasted tints decay,
And vanish into air away,
Like spectres at thâ?? approach of day.
On things too transient hangs their fate,
For them to hope a lasting date,
The fallen rain has clearâ??d the skies,
And lo! the short-livâ??d phantom dies.
My applicationâ??s brief and plain,
Beautyâ??s the *Rainbow*, *Youthâ??s* the *Rain*.

NOTES:

Author The poem is signed â??Eugenio.â?• A reviewer of this volume of *The Annual Register* identifies the author as â??John Norris, Esq, who was a student at Temple and fellow at Caius College in Cambridgeâ?• (*The Critical Review: Or, Annals of Literature, Volume 13. London: 1762,* p. 486).

Epigraph *Nimium ne crede Colori.â??Virg.* From the Latin poetâ??s pastoral poem, *Eclogues II.* Trans. â??Trust not too much to colour, beauteous boyâ?• (*classics.mit.edu*).

17 *sequel* In reference to â??*Cloudsâ?•* at line 16.

18 *Sol* â??The sun (personified)â?• (*OED*); *zenith* â??The point of the horizon at which a heavenly body risesâ?• (*OED*).

24 *Phoebusâ??* The sun personified as Apollo as the god of light or of the sun.

25 *Iris* â??The goddess who acted as the messenger of the gods, and was held to display as her sign, or appear as, the rainbow; hence, allusively, a messengerâ?• (*OED*).

28 *Narcissus* â??[The name of] a beautiful youth who fell in love with his own reflection in water and pined to deathâ?• (*OED*).

51 *entre nous* â??Between ourselves; in privateâ?• (*OED*).

56 *career* â??The height of a personâ??s activityâ?• (*OED*).

Source: *The Annual Register* (London, 1762), pp. 256-57.

Edited by Karen PeÃ±a