

Mary Leapor, "An Essay on Woman"

Description

MARY LEAPOR

• An Essay on Woman •

Woman's a pleasing, but a short-lived Flow,
Too soft for Business, and too weak for Power:
A Wife in Bondage, or neglected Maid;
Despised, if ugly; if she's fair betray'd.
Tis Wealth alone inspires every Grace, 5

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. 10

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, 15

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. 20

Who would be wise, that knew *Pamphilia's* Fate?
Or who be fair, and join'd to *Sylvia's* Mate?
Sylvia, whose Cheeks are fresh as early Day;
As Evening mild, and sweet as spicy *May*:
And yet That Face her partial Husband tires, 25

And those bright Eyes, that all the World admires.
Pamphilia's Wit who does not strive to shun,
Like Death's Infection, or a Dog-Day's Sun?
The Damsels view her with malignant Eyes:
The Men are vex'd to find a Nymph so wise: 30

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

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

28 *Dog-Day*â€™s â€œThe hottest part of the summerâ€•(OED).

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

35 *Censures* â€œExpression of disapproval or condemnationâ€•(OED).

36 *grate* â€œTo affect painfully,â€•irritateâ€•(OED).

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

43 *Sty* â€œA human habitationâ€•no better than a pigstyâ€•(OED).

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

53 *Avarice* â€œInordinate desire of acquiring and hoarding wealthâ€•(OED).

54 *wanton* â€œLustful; 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