

Classic Poetry Series

Mary Leapor
- poems -

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Mary Leapor(1722 - 1746)

Mary Leapor was christened on 26 Feb 1722 at Marston St Lawrence. Her father, Phillip Leapor, was a Brackley man, who was a gardener employed by Sir John Blencowe until 1726. Her mother was Anne Sharman from Weston by Weedon.

Mary was a poetess, and was also employed in service as a cook maid in Weston working for Susannah Jennens, the married daughter of John Blencowe, whose husband owned Weston Hall. Mary fell out of favour in the household, but returned to her parents home in Brackley, from where she died and was buried 'in wool' in Brackley on 14 November 1746.

Mary Leapor produced a substantial body of exceptional poetry which was only published after her early death at the age of twenty-four.

An Epistle To A Lady

In vain, dear Madam, yes in vain you strive;
Alas! to make your luckless Mira thrive,
For Tycho and Copernicus agree,
No golden Planet bent its Rays on me.

'Tis twenty Winters, if it is no more;
To speak the Truth it may be Twenty four.
As many Springs their 'pointed Space have run,
Since Mira's Eyes first open'd on the Sun.
'Twas when the Flocks on slabby Hillocks lie,
And the cold Fishes rule the wat'ry Sky:
But tho these Eyes the learned Page explore,
And turn the pond'rous Volumes o'er and o'er,
I find no Comfort from their Systems flow,
But am dejected more as more I know.
Hope shines a while, but like a Vapour flies,
(The Fate of all the Curious and the Wise)
For, Ah! cold Saturn triumph'd on that Day,
And frowning Sol deny'd his golden Ray.

You see I'm learned, and I shew't the more,
That none may wonder when they find me poor.
Yet Mira dreams, as slumbring Poets may,
And rolls in Treasures till the breaking Day:
While Books and Pictures in bright Order rise,
And painted Parlours swim before her Eyes:
Till the shrill Clock impertinently rings,
And the soft Visions move their shining Wings:
Then Mira wakes,-- her Pictures are no more,
And through her Fingers slides the vanish'd Ore.
Convinc'd too soon, her Eye unwilling falls
On the blue Curtains and the dusty Walls:
She wakes, alas! to Business and to Woes,
To sweep her Kitchen, and to mend her Clothes.

But see pale Sickness with her languid Eyes,
At whose Appearance all Delusion flies:
The World recedes, its Vanities decline,
Clorinda's Features seem as faint as mine!

Gay Robes no more the aching Sight admires,
Wit grates the Ear, and melting Music tires:
Its wonted pleasures with each sense decay,
Books please no more, and paintings fade away,
The sliding Joys in misty Vapours end:
Yet let me still, Ah! let me grasp a Friend:
And when each Joy, when each lov'd Object flies,
Be you the last that leaves my closing Eyes.

But how will this dismantl'd Soul appear,
When stripp'd of all it lately held so dear,
Forc'd from its Prison of expiring Clay,
Afraid and shiv'ring at the doubtful Way.

Yet did these Eyes a dying Parent see,
Loos'd from all Cares except a Thought for me,
Without a Tear resign her short'ning Breath,
And dauntless meet the ling'ring Stroke of Death.
Then at th' Almighty's Sentence shall I mourn:
"Of Dust thou art, to Dust shalt thou return."
Or shall I wish to stretch the Line of Fate,
That the dull Years may bear a longer Date,
To share the Follies of succeeding Times
With more Vexations and with deeper Crimes:
Ah no -- tho' Heav'n brings near the final Day,
For such a Life I will not, dare not pray;
But let the Tear for future Mercy flow,
And fall resign'd beneath the mighty Blow.
Nor I alone -- for through the spacious Ball,
With me will Numbers of all Ages fall:
And the same Day that Mira yields her Breath,
Thousands may enter through the Gates of Death.

Mary Leapor

Crumble-Hall

When Friends or Fortune frown on Mira's Lay,
Or gloomy Vapours hide the Lamp of Day;
With low'ring Forehead, and with aching Limbs,
Oppress'd with Head-ach, and eternal Whims,
Sad Mira vows to quit the darling Crime:
Yet takes her Farewel, and Repents, in Rhyme.

But see (more charming than Armida's Wiles)
The sun returns, and Artemisia smiles:
Then in a trice the Resolutions fly;
[And who so frolick as the Muse and I?]
We sing once more, obedient to her Call;
Once more we sing; and 'tis of Crumble-Hall;
That Crumble-Hall, whose hospitable Door
Has fed the Stranger, and reliev'd the Poor;
Whose Gothic Towers, and whose rusty Spires,
Well known of old to Knights, and hungry Squires.
There powder'd Beef, and Warden-Pies, were found;
And Pudden dwelt within her spacious Bound:
Pork, Peas, and Bacon (good old English Fare!),
With tainted Ven'son, and with hunted Hare:
With humming Beer her Vats were wont to flow,
And ruddy Nectar in her Vaults to glow.
Here came the Wights, who battled for Renown,
The sable Friar, and the russet Clown:
The loaded Tables sent a sav'ry Gale,
And the brown Bowls were crown'd with simp'ring Ale;
While the Guests ravag'd on the smoking Stove,
Till their stretch'd Girdles would contain no more.

Of this rude Palace might a Poet sing
From cold December to returning Spring;
Tell how the Building spreads on either Hand,
And two grim Giants o'er the Portals stand;
Whose grisled Beards are neither comb'd nor shorn,
But look severe, and horribly adorn.

Then step within -- there stands a goodly Row
Of oaken Pillars -- where a gallant Show

Of mimic Pears and carv'd Pomgranates twine,
With the plump Clusters of the spreading Vine.
Strange Forms above, present themselves to View;
Some Mouths that grin, some smile, and some that spew.
Here a soft Maid or Infant seems to cry:
Here stares a Tyrant, with distorted Eye:
The Roof -- no Cyclops e'er could reach so high:
Not Polyphemus, tho' form'd for dreadful Harms,
The Top could measure with extended Arms.
Here the pleas'd Spider plants her peaceful Loom:
Here weaves secure, nor dreads the hated Broom.
But at the Head (and furbish'd once a year)
The Herald's mystic Compliments appear:
Round the fierce Dragon Honi Soit twines,
And Royal Edward o'er the Chimney shines.

Safely the Mice through yon dark Passage run,
Where the dim windows ne'er admit the sun.
Along each Wall the Stranger blindly feels;
And (trembling) dreads a Spectre at his Heels.

The sav'ry kitchen much Attention calls:
Westphalia Hams adorn the sable Walls:
The Fires blaze; the greasy Pavements fry;
And steaming Odours from the Kettles fly.

See! yon brown Parlour on the Left appears,
For nothing famous, but its leathern Chairs,
Whose shining Nails like polish'd Armour glow,
And the dull clock beat, audible and slow.

But on the Right we spy a Room more fair:
The Form -- 'tis neither long, nor round, nor square;
The Walls how lofty, and the Floor how wide,
We leave for learned Quadrus to decide.
Gay China Bowls o'er the broad Chimney shine,
Whose long Description would be too sublime:
And much might of the Tapestry be sung:
But we're content to say, The Parlour's hung.

We count the Stairs, and to the Right ascend,
Where on the Walls the gorgeous Colours blend.

There doughty George bestrides the goodly Steed;
The Dragon's slaughter'd, and the Virgin freed:
And there (but lately rescu'd from their Fears)
The Nymph and serious Ptolemy appears:
Their awkward Limbs unwieldy are display'd;
And, like a Milk-wench, [glares] the royal Maid.

From thence we turn to more familiar Rooms;
Whose Hangings ne'er wer wrought in Grecian Looms;
Yet the soft Stools, and eke the lazy Chair,
To sleep invite the Weary, and the Fair.

Shall we proceed? -- Yes, if you'll break the Wall:
If not, return, and tread once more the Hall.
Up ten stone steps now please to drag your Toes,
And a brick Passage will succeed to those.
Here the strong Doors were aptly framed to hold
Sir Wary's Person, and Sir Wary's Gold.
Here Biron sleeps, with Books encircled round;
And him you'd guess a student most profound.
Not so -- in Form the dusty Volumes stand:
There's few that wear the Mark of Biron's Hand.

Would you go farther? -- Stay a little then:
Back thro' the Passage -- [up] the Steps again;
Thro' yon dark Room -- Be careful how you tread
Up these steep Stairs -- or you may break your Head.
These Rooms are furnish'd amiably, and full:
Old shoes, and Sheep-ticks bred in Stacks of Wool;
Grey Dobbin's gears, and Drenching-Horns enow;
Wheel-spokes -- the Irons of a tatter'd Plough.

No farther -- Yes, a little higher, pray:
At yon small Door you'll find the Beams of Day,
[Where] the hot [Leads] return the scorching Ray.
Here a gay Prospect meets the ravish'd Eye:
Meads, Fields, and Groves, in beauteous Order lie.
From hence the Muse precipitant is hurl'd,
And drags down Mira to the nether World.

This for the Palace -- Yet there still remain
Unsung the Gardens, and the menial Train.

Its Groves anon -- its People first we sing:
Hear, Artemisia, hear the Song we bring.
Sophronia first in Verse shall learn to chime,
And keep her Station, tho' in Mira's Rhyme;
Sophronia sage! whose learned knuckles know
To form round cheese-cakes of the pliant Dough;
To bruise the Curd, and thro' her Fingers squeeze
Ambrosial Butter with the temper'd cheese:
Sweet Tarts and Puddens, too, her skill declare;
And the soft jellies, hid from baneful Air.

O'er the warm kettles, and the sav'ry steams,
Grave Colinettus of his Oven dreams:
Then, starting, anxious for his new-mown Hay,
Runs headlong out to view the doubtful Day:
But Dinner calls with more prevailing Charms;
And surly Graffo in his awkward Arms
Bears the tall Jugg, and turns a glaring Eye,
As tho' he fear'd some Insurrection nigh
From the fierce Crew, that gaping stand a-dry.

O'er-stuff'd with Beef; with Cabbage much too full,
And Dumpling too (fit Emblem of his Skull!)
With Mouth wide open, but with closing Eyes
Unwieldy Roger on the Table lies.
His able Lungs discharge a rattling Sound:
Prince barks, Spot howls, and the tall Roofs rebound.
Him Urs'la views; and with dejected Eyes,
"Ah! Roger, Ah!" the mournful Maiden cries:
"Is wretched Urs'la then your Care no more,
"That, while I sigh, thus you can sleep and snore?
"Ingrateful Roger! wilt thou leave me know?
"For you these Furrows mark my fading Brow:
"For you my Pigs resign their Morning Due:
"My hungry Chickens lose their Meat for your:
"And, was it not, Ah! was it not for thee,
"No goodly Pottage would be dress'd by me.
"For thee these Hnads wind up the whirling Jack,
"Or place the Spit across the sloping Rack.
"I baste the Mutton with a chearful Heart,
"Because I now my Roger will have Part."

Thus she -- But now her Dish-kettle began
To boil and blubber with the foaming Bran.
The greasy Apron round her Hips she ties,
And to each Plate the scalding Clout applies:
The purging Bath each glowing Dish refines,
And once again the polish'd Pewter shines.

Now to those heads let frolic Fancy rove,
Where o'er yon Waters nods a [pendent] Grove;
In whose clear Waves the pictur'd Boughs are seen,
With fairer Blossoms, and a brighter Green.
Soft flow'ry Barks teh spreading Lakes divide:
Sharp-pointed Flags adorn each tender Side.
See! the pleas'd Swans along the Surface play;
Where yon cool Willows meet the scorching Ray,
When fierce Orion gives too warm a Day.

But, hark! what Scream the wond'ring Ear invades!
The Dryads howling for their threaten'd Shades:
Round the dear Grove each Nymph distracted flies
(Tho' not discover'd but with Poet's Eyes):
And shall those Shades, where Philomela's strain
Has oft to Slumber lull'd the hapless Swain;
Where Turtles us'd to clasp their silken Wings;
Whose rev'rend Oaks have known a hundred Springs;
Shall these ignobly from their roots be torn,
And perish shameful, as the abject Thorn;

While the slow [Carr] bears off their aged Limbs,
To clear the way for Slopes, and modern Whims;
Where furnish'd Nature leaves a barren Gloom,
And awkward Art supplies the vacant Room?
Yet (or the Muse for Vengeance calls in vain)
The injur'd Nymphs shall haunt the ravag'd Plain:
Strange sounds and Forms shall tease the gloomy Green;
And Fairy-Elves by Urs'la shall be seen:
Their new-built Parlour shall with Echoes ring:
And in their Hall shall doleful Crickets sing.

Then cease, Diracto, stay thy desp'rate Hand;
And let the Grove, if not the Parlour, stand.

Mary Leapor

Man The Monarch

Amaz'd we read of Nature's early Throes
How the fair Heav'ns and pond'rous Earth arose:
How blooming Trees unplanted first began;
And Beasts submissive to their Tyrant, Man:
To Man, invested with despotic Sway,
While his mute Brethren tremble and obey;
Till Heav'n beheld him insolently vain,
And checked the Limits of his haughty Reign.
Then from their Lord, the rude Deserters fly,
And, grinning back, his fruitless Rage defy;
Pards, Tygers, Wolves, to gloomy Shades retire,
And Mountain-Goats in purer Gales respire.
To humble Valleys, where soft Flowers blow,
And fatt'ning Streams in crystal Mazes flow,
Full of new Life, the untam'd Coursers run,
And roll, and wanton, in the chearful Sun;
Round their gay Hearts the dancing Spirits rise,
And Rouse the Lightnings in their rolling Eyes:
To cragged Rocks destructive Serpents glide,
Whose mossy Crannies hide their speckled Pride;
And monstrous Whales on foamy Billows ride.
Then joyful Birds ascend their native Sky:
But where! ah! where, shall helpless Woman fly?

Here smiling Nature brought her choicest Stores,
And roseat Beauty on her Fav'rite pours:
Pleas'd with her Labour, the officious Dame
With-held no Grace would deck the rising Frame.
Then view'd her Work, and view'd, and smil'd again,
And kindly whisper'd, Daughter, live, and reign.
But now the Matron mourns her latest Care,
And sees the Sorrows of her darling Fair;
Beholds a Wretch, whom she design'd a Queen,
And weeps that e'er she form'd the weak Machine,
In vain she boasts her Lip of scarlet Dyes,
Cheeks like the Morning, and far-beaming Eyes;
Her Neck refulgent--fair and feeble Arms,
A Set of useless and neglected Charms.
She suffers Hardship with afflictive Moans:

Small Tasks of Labour suit her slender Bones.
Beneath a Load her weary Shoulders yield,
Nor can her Fingers grasp the sounding Shield;
She sees and trembles as approaching Harms,
And Fear and Grief destroy her fading Charms.
Then her pale Lips no pearly Teeth disclose,
And Time's rude Sickle cuts the yielding Rose.
Thus wretched Woman's short-liv'd Merit dies;
In vain to Wisdom's sacred Help she flies;
Or sparkling Wit but lends a feeble Aid:
'Tis all Delirium from a wrinkled Maid.

A tattling Dame, no matter where, or who;
Me it concerns not--and it need not you;
Once told this Story to the listening Muse,
Which we, as now it serves our Turn, shall use.

When our Grandsire nam'd the feather'd Kind,
Pond'ring their Natures in his careful Mind,
'Twas then, if on our Author we rely,
He view'd his Consort with an envious Eye;
Greedy of Pow'r, he hugg'd he tott'ring Throne;
And, better to secure his doubtful Rule,
Roll'd his wise Eye-balls, and pronounc'd her Fool.
The regal Blood to distant Ages runs:
Sires, Brothers, Husbands, and commanding Sons,
The Sceptre claim; and ev'ry Cottage brings
A long Succession of Domestic Kings.

Mary Leapor

Mira's Will

IMPRIMIS -- My departed Shade I trust
To Heav'n -- My Body to the silent Dust;
My Name to publick Censure I submit,
To be dispos'd of as the World thinks fit;
My Vice and Folly let Oblivion close,
The World already is o'erstock'd with those;
My Wit I give, as Misers give their Store,
To those who think they had enough before.
Bestow my Patience to compose the Lives
Of slighted Virgins and neglected Wives;
To modish Lovers I resign my Truth,
My cool Reflexion to unthinking Youth;
And some Good-nature give ('tis my Desire)
To surly Husbands, as their Needs require;
And first discharge my Funeral -- and then
To the small Poets I bequeath my Pen.

Let a small Sprig (true Emblem of my Rhyme)
Of blasted Laurel on my Hearse recline;
Let some grave Wight, that struggles for Renown,
By chanting Dirges through a Market-Town,
With gentle Step precede the solemn Train;
A broken Flute upon his Arm shall lean.
Six comick Poets may the Corse surround,
And All Free-holders, if they can be found:
Then follow next the melancholy Throng,
As shrewd Instructors, who themselves are wrong.
The Virtuoso, rich in Sun-dry'd Weeds,
The Politician, whom no Mortal heeds,
The silent Lawyer, chamber'd all the Day,
And the stern Soldier that receives no Pay.
But stay -- the Mourners shou'd be first our Care,
Let the freed Prentice lead the Miser's Heir;
Let the young Relict wipe her mournful Eye,
And widow'd Husbands o'er their Garlick cry.

All this let my Executors fulfil,
And rest assur'd that this is Mira's Will,
Who was, when she these Legacies design'd,

In Body healthy, and compos'd in Mind.

Mary Leapor

Strephon To Celia

Madam

I hope you'll think it's true
I deeply am in love with you,
When I assure you t'other day,
As I was musing on my way,
At thought of you I tumbled down
Directly in a deadly swoon:
And though 'tis true I'm something better,
Yet I can hardly spell my letter:
And as the latter you may view,
I hope you'll think the former true.
You need not wonder at my flame,
For you are not a mortal dame:
I saw you dropping from the skies;
And let dull idiots swear your eyes
With love their glowing breast inspire,
I tell you they are flames of fire,
That scorch my forehead to a cinder,
And burn my very heart to a tinder.
Your breast so mighty cold, I trow,
Is made of nothing else but snow:
Your hands (no wonder they have charms)
Are made of ivory like your arms.
Your cheeks, that look as if they bled,
Are nothing else but roses red.
Your lips are coral very bright,
Your teeth -- though numbers out of spite
May say they're bones -- yet 'twill appear
They're rows of pearls exceeding rare.

Now, madam, as the chat goes round,
I hear you have ten thousand pound:
But that as I a trifle hold,
Give me your person, dem your gold;
Yet for your own sake 'tis secured,
I hope -- your houses too insured;
I'd have you take a special care,
And of false mortgages beware;

You've wealth enough 'tis true, but yet
You want a friend to manage it.
Now such a friend you soon might have,
By fixing on your humble slave;
Not that I mind a stately house,
Or value money of a louse;
But your five hundred pounds a year,
I would secure it for my dear:
Then smile upon your slave, that lies
Half-murdered by your radiant eyes;
Or else this very moment dies --

Strephon

Mary Leapor