

Mary Robinson

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Mary Robinson was born on November 27th, 1757 in the town of Bristol, England. She moved to London, England at the age of fourteen and continued to live there for most of her adult life. Although struck with debt, disease, and poverty throughout her adulthood, Robinson was a public spectacle and something of a celebrity in the city of London. She created a career as an actress at a young age and started an affair with the Prince of Wales shortly after. The affair and its demise became the subject of intense spectacle. Despite her low-income financial situation, she spent time with the elites of London and was associated with this lifestyle in the press. This gave Robinson two different perspectives of London in coordination with class. Robinson was also disabled half-way through her life due to a rheumatic fever. No longer able to walk properly, she hired hackney-coaches to get around. This gave Robinson a different perspective of London compared to those who travelled on foot, allowing her to take in every inch of London's urban landscape and social life. Robinson died in ill health and poverty on December 26th, 1800 in the county of Surrey, England. Many of her works were at her request published posthumously by her daughter from her marriage with Thomas Robinson, Maria Elizabeth.

"London's Summer Morning" is a blank verse descriptive ode in iambic pentameter. It was written in January 1795 but was not published until after her death in *The Star* in 1812. The poem illustrates a busy morning in London's eighteenth century and daily working-class urban life. Robinson uses repetition to describe the heat and murky weather of London, displaying both the class inequality in the city and the industrialization which was emerging.

Further Reading

Pascoe, Judith. "The Spectacular Flaneuse: Mary Robinson and the City of London." *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1992, pp. 165-171.

Weitzman, Arthur J., "Eighteenth-Century London: Urban Paradise or Fallen City?" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1975, pp. 469-480.

“London’s Summer Morning”¹¹

Who has not wak’d to list¹² the busy sounds
 Of Summer’s Morning, in the sultry smoke
 Of noisy London? On the pavement hot
 The sooty chimney-boy, with dingy face
 And tatter’d covering, shrilly bawls¹³ his trade, 5
 Rousing the sleepy housemaid. At the door
 The milk-pail rattles, and the tinkling bell
 Proclaims the dustman’s office, while the street
 Is lost in clouds impervious. Now begins
 The din of hackney coaches,¹⁴ waggons, carts; 10
 While tinmans’ shops, and noisy trunk-makers,
 Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-cutters,
 Fruit barrows, and the hunger-giving cries,
 Of vegetable vendors, fill the air.
 Now ev’ry shop displays its varied trade, 15
 And the fresh sprinkled pavement cools the feet
 Of early walkers. At the private door
 The ruddy¹⁵ housemaid twirls the busy mop,

¹¹ Copytext from *The Star* newspaper in 1812.

¹² Listen to.

¹³ A piercing cry.

¹⁴ A carriage for hire, the most common passenger vehicle in late eighteenth-century London.

¹⁵ Red faced.

Annoying the smart 'prentice¹⁶, or neat girl
 Tripping the band-box¹⁷ lightly. Now the sun 20
 Darts burning splendor on the glitt'ring pane,
 Save where the canvas awning throws a shade
 On the gay merchandise. Now, spruce and trim¹⁸,
 In shops (where Beauty smiles with Industry¹⁹),
 Sits the smart damsel,²⁰ while the passenger²¹ 25
 Peeps thro' the window, watching ev'ry charm.
 Now pastry dainties catch the eyes minute²²
 Of humming insects, while the limey snare²³
 Waits to enthral them. Now the lamp-lighter
 Mounts the tall ladder, nimbly vent'rous, 30
 To trim the half fill'd lamp²⁴: while at his feet
 The pot-boy²⁵ yells discordant! all along

¹⁶ Apprentice.

¹⁷ A small, thin container which was used for storing starched collars and caps in the eighteenth century. Tripping is to walk lightly, almost dancing.

¹⁸ Spruce and trim is neatly and attractively dressed.

¹⁹ Hard work.

²⁰ Shop clerk or assistant.

²¹ Of the hackney coach.

²² Very small, with the stress on the second syllable and reference to the insects in the next line.

²³ Flytrap.

²⁴ Oil-powered streetlights were used in the late eighteenth century and the wick had to be trimmed regularly for proper burning.

²⁵ Eighteenth-century term for server or busser in a local tavern or pub.

The sultry pavement, the old cloaths-man²⁶ cries
 In tone monotonous, and side-long views
 The area, for his traffic. Now the bag 35
 Is sllily open'd, and the half-worn suit
 (Sometimes the pilfer'd²⁷ treasure of the base
 Domestic spoiler), for one half its worth,
 Sinks in the green abyss.²⁸ The porter now
 Bears his huge load along the burning way²⁹, 40
 And the poor Poet wakes from busy dreams
 To paint the Summer Morning.

²⁶ Buyer and seller of used clothing.

²⁷ Stolen.

²⁸ The clothes-man's sack.

²⁹ Hot pavement.



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