

Mary Leapor

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Mary Leapor was born in 1772 and raised in Brackley, Northamptonshire. At an early age, Leapor joined the workforce as a kitchen maid to Susanna Jennens: a fellow poet who allowed Leapor to use her library and became the first of Leapor's mentors. Leapor wrote extensively even while working, and the daily events and struggles of the working class inspire much of her writing. During this period, people thought it improper for working-class people and women to write, and because of this Leapor's peers often disregarded her work. Nevertheless, Leapor longed for a successful career as a professional writer and began distributing her handwritten work. Through the circulation of her poems, Leapor gained the interest of Bridget Freemantle, a woman of higher status and influence who became Leapor's second mentor. Leapor began collaborating with Freemantle, who through her influence helped Leapor develop a following. During her career, Leapor wrote over a hundred poems as well as a play that was ultimately rejected by critics. By her early twenties, Leapor's desire for success transformed into the need to support her aging father, and she died of measles in 1746, aged twenty-four.

Because Leapor died having never seen the publication of her work, Freemantle created her posthumous career and marketed Leapor as a working-class, downtrodden female author. Freemantle emphasized tragedy to appeal to an audience who did not see the value in women's writing and suggested that Leapor's interest in writing came solely from her need to support her father, rather than her interest in the craft and self-expression. Freemantle's publication of Leapor's work has since been recognized as controversial because it aimed to appeal to the conventions of gender roles during the era, ultimately undermining Leapor's true character (Goulding 85.)

In terms of style, Leapor is recognized for her satire and blend of genres, which she developed by studying the work of Alexander Pope, biblical literature, and gentlemen's magazines. Leapor's subject matter focuses on the politics of gender and class systems to which she was privy. Leapor often wrote in heroic couplets, which are featured here in "Dorinda at her Glass," as a nod to Pope and other popular poets of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. "Dorinda at her Glass" is in iambic pentameter and is the opening poem of Leapor's

posthumous *Poems Upon Several Occasions*, acting as an enlightening introduction to Leapor's literary voice. Throughout the poem, the titular upper-class Dorinda frets over her fleeting youth all the while reminiscing about the vices that youth allowed her to indulge in. Dorinda, although initially threatened by her aging, eventually realizes this to be a reflection of the vices and pleasures she enjoyed throughout her youth. Dorinda finds comfort in her old age and warns her female peers to appreciate the physical consequences of their vices, to accept their aging, and to enter the final stages of their lives with virtue. "Dorinda at her Glass" showcases how Leapor has now become an essential voice in English feminist literary studies. By exploring concepts of beauty and gendered politics from the perspective of a working-class woman during the eighteenth century, Leapor's "Dorinda at her Glass" contributes to a currently resonant conversation.

Further Reading

Milne, Anne. "The Place of the Poet in Place: Reading Local Culture in the Work of Mary Leapor." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2015, pp. 125–39.

Overton, Bill. "Mary Leapor's Verse and Genre." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2015, pp. 19–32.

Reference

Goulding, Susan. "Reading 'Mira's Will': The Death of Mary Leapor and the Life of the Persona." *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2002, pp. 69–89.

Dorinda at Her Glass¹³²

DORINDA,¹³³ once the fairest of the Train,¹³⁴
 Toast of the Town, and Triumph of the Plain;¹³⁵
 Whose shining Eyes a thousand Hearts alarm'd,¹³⁶
 Whose Wit inspired, and whose Follies charm'd:
 Who, with Invention, rack'd her careful Breast 5
 To find new Graces to insult the rest,
 Now sees her Temples take a swarthy¹³⁷ Hue,
 And the dark Veins resign their beauteous Blue;
 While on her Cheeks the fading Roses die,
 And the last Sparkles tremble in her Eye. 10

Bright Sol had drove the sable¹³⁸ Clouds away,
 And cheer'd the Heavens with a Stream of Day,
 The woodland Choir¹³⁹ their little Throats prepare,
 To chant new Carols to the Morning Air:
 In Silence wrap'd, and curtain'd¹⁴⁰ from the Day, 15
 On her sad Pillow lost *Dorinda* lay;
 To Mirth a Stranger, and the like to Ease,
 No Pleasures charm her, nor no Slumbers please.
 For if to close her weary Lids she tries,
 Detested Wrinkles swim before her Eyes; 20

¹³² *Poems Upon Several Occasions*, printed J. Roberts, 1748, pp. 1–8; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

¹³³ *Dorinda* name meaning “gift of beauty” (“doron” Gr., “linda” Sp.)

¹³⁴ *Train* those who attend on the royal court/high society

¹³⁵ *Plain* countryside

¹³⁶ *Alarm'd* caused excitement

¹³⁷ *Swarthy* dark in colour

¹³⁸ *Sable* black in colour

¹³⁹ *The Woodland Choir* a group of singing birds

¹⁴⁰ *Curtain'd* drawn curtains that encircle a bed

At length the Mourner rais'd her aking¹⁴¹ Head,
 And discontented left her hated Bed.
 But sighing shun'd¹⁴² the Relicks¹⁴³ of her Pride,
 And left the Toilet¹⁴⁴ for the Chimney Side:
 Her careless Locks upon her Shoulders lay 25
 Uncurl'd, alas! because they half were Gray;
 No magick Baths employ her skilful Hand,
 But useless Phials¹⁴⁵ on her Table, stand:

She slights her form, no more by Youth inspir'd,
 And loaths that Idol¹⁴⁶ which she once admir'd. 30
 At length all trembling, of herself afraid,
 To her lov'd Glass¹⁴⁷ repair'd the weeping Maid,
 And with a Sigh addressed the alter'd Shade.¹⁴⁸ }

Say, what art thou, that wear'st a gloomy Form,
 With low'ring¹⁴⁹ Forehead, like a northern Storm; 35
 Cheeks pale and hollow, as the Face of Woe,
 And Lips that with no gay Vermilion¹⁵⁰ glow?
 Where is that Form which this false Mirror told
 Bloom'd like the Morn, and shou'd for Ages hold;
 But now a Spectre in its room appears, 40
 All scar'd with Furrows, and defac'd with Tears;

¹⁴¹ *Aking* aching

¹⁴² *Shun'd* shunned

¹⁴³ *Relicks* "something kept as a remembrance, souvenir, or memorial: a historical object relating to a particular person, place, or thing; a memento" (*OED*)

¹⁴⁴ *Toilet* dressing room or area where women groom themselves

¹⁴⁵ *Phials* small glass jars to hold liquids

¹⁴⁶ *Idol* Dorinda's reflection in her dressing room mirror

¹⁴⁷ *Glass* a mirror

¹⁴⁸ *Shade* ghost or a shadow implying death

¹⁴⁹ *Low'ring* a look implying misery or anger

¹⁵⁰ *Vermillion* red or deep orange hue

Say, com'st thou from the Regions of Despair,
 To shake my Senses with a meagre Stare?
 Some stragg'ling¹⁵¹ Horror may thy Phantom be,
 But surely not the mimic Shape of me. 45
 Ah! yes — the Shade its mourning Visage¹⁵² rears,
 Pants when I sigh, and answers to my Tears:
 Now who shall bow before this wither'd Shrine,
 This Mortal Image, that was late Divine?
 What Victim now will praise these faded Eyes, 50
 Once the gay basis for a thousand Lyes?

Deceitful Beauty—false as thou art gay,
 And is it thus thy Vot'ries¹⁵³ find their Pay;
 This the Reward of many careful Years,
 Of Morning Labours, and of Noon-day Fears, 55
 The Gloves anointed,¹⁵⁴ and the bathing Hour,
 And soft Cosmetick's more prevailing Pow'r;
 Yet to thy Worship still the fair Ones run,
 And hail thy Temples with the rising Sun;
 Still the brown Damsels to thy Altars pay 60
 Sweet-scented Unguents,¹⁵⁵ and the Dews of *May*;
*Sempronia*¹⁵⁶ smooths her wrinkled Brows with Care,
 And *Isabella* curls her grisled Hair:

¹⁵¹ *Stragg'ling* “of hair, plants, a hedge, etc.: Growing irregularly or dispersedly: shooting or spreading too far” (*OED*)

¹⁵² *Visage* the face

¹⁵³ *Vot'ries* votaries, people who have dedicated their lives to a religious or spiritual system

¹⁵⁴ *Anointed* to moisturize or to layer with ointment

¹⁵⁵ *Unguents* ointments or lubricants

¹⁵⁶ *Sempronia* a type name for an upper-class female meaning “always the same” (“semper” Lat.)

See poor *Augusta*¹⁵⁷ of her Glass afraid,
 Who even trembles at the Name of Maid,¹⁵⁸ 65
 Spreads the fine *Mechlin*¹⁵⁹ on her shaking Head,
 While her thin Cheeks disown the mimick Red.
 Soft *Silvia*, who no Lover's Breast alarms,
 Yet simpers out the Ev'ning of her Charms,
 And tho' her cheeks can boast no rosy Dye, 70
 Her gay Brocades¹⁶⁰ allure the gazing Eye.

But hear, my Sisters—Hear an ancient Maid,
 Too long by Folly, and her Arts betray'd;
 From these light Trifles turn your partial¹⁶¹ Eyes,
 'Tis sad *Dorinda* prays you to be wise; 75
 And thou *Celinda*,¹⁶² thou must shortly feel
 The sad Effect of Time's revolving Wheel;
 Thy Spring is past, thy Summer Sun declin'd,
 See Autumn next, and Winter stalks behind:
 But let not Reason with thy Beauties fly, 80
 Nor place thy Merit in a brilliant Eye;
 'Tis thine to charm us by sublimer ways,
 And make thy Temper, like thy Features, please:
 And thou, *Sempronia*, trudge to Morning Pray'r,
 Nor trim thy Eye-brows with so nice a Care; 85

¹⁵⁷ *Augusta* a type name meaning “great” or “bold” (“Augustus” Lat.)

¹⁵⁸ *Maid* an older, unmarried woman

¹⁵⁹ *Mechlin* a type of fine lace usually decorated with floral motifs, a popular addition to women's clothing during the period

¹⁶⁰ *Brocades* a type of textile characterized by raised embellishments usually with metallic coloured detailing

¹⁶¹ *Partial* biased

¹⁶² *Celinda* a type name meaning “heavenly” (“caelum” Lat.) “beauty” (“linda” Sp.)

Dear Nymph¹⁶³ believe —'tis true, as you're alive,
 Those Temples show the Marks of Fifty-five.¹⁶⁴
 Let *Isabel* unload her aking Head
 Of twisted Papers,¹⁶⁵ and of binding Lead;
 Let sage *Augusta* now, without a Frown, 90
 Strip those gay Ribbands¹⁶⁶ from her aged Crown;
 Change the lac'd¹⁶⁷ Slipper of delicious Hue
 For a warm Stocking, and an easy Shoe;
 Guard her swell'd Ancles from Rheumatick¹⁶⁸ Pain,
 and from her Cheek expunge the guilty Stain. 95

Wou'd smiling *Silvia*¹⁶⁹ lay that Hoop¹⁷⁰ aside,
 'Twou'd show her Prudence,¹⁷¹ not betray her Pride:
 She, like the rest, had once her flagrant¹⁷² Day,
 But now she twinkles in a fainter Ray.
 Those youthful Airs set off their Mistress now, 100
 Just as the Patch¹⁷³ adorns her Autumn Brow:
 In vain her Feet in sparkling Laces glow,
 Since none regard her Forehead, nor her Toe.
 Who would not burst with Laughter, or with Spleen,¹⁷⁴

¹⁶³ *Nymph* originating from nymphs of Greek mythology, meaning a beautiful, young female

¹⁶⁴ *Marks of Fifty-Five* fifty-five years in age

¹⁶⁵ *Twisted Papers* paper used to twist hair around worn by women while they slept to curl their hair

¹⁶⁶ *Ribbands* hair ribbons

¹⁶⁷ *Lac'd* laces on slippers were used to add decoration which signaled higher status

¹⁶⁸ *Rheumatick* as in rheumatism or auto-immunity which causes pain in joints

¹⁶⁹ *Sylvia* type name from pastoral poetry meaning "of the woods" (Lat.)

¹⁷⁰ *Hoop* stiffening to hold skirts fashionably wide

¹⁷¹ *Prudence* wisdom in decision making

¹⁷² *Flagrant* burning with passion

¹⁷³ *Patch* a small piece of material used to cover up scars and blemishes: sometimes used as an accessory during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

¹⁷⁴ *Spleen* "violent ill-nature or ill-humour; irritable or peevish temper" (*OED*)

At *Prudo*,¹⁷⁵ once a Beauty, as I ween?¹⁷⁶ 105
 But now her Features wear a dusky Hue,
 The little Loves have bid her Eyes adieu :
 Yet she pursues the Pleasures of her Prime,
 And vain Desires, not subdu'd by Time;
 Thrusts in amongst the Frolick and the Gay, 110
 But shuts her Daughter from the Beams of Day:
 The Child, she says, is indolent¹⁷⁷ and grave,
 And tells the World *Ophelia* can't behave:
 But while *Ophelia* is forbid the Room,
 Her Mother hobbles in a Rigadoon,¹⁷⁸ 115
 Or to the Sound of melting Musick dies,
 And in their Sockets rolls her blinking Eyes;
 Or stuns the Audience with her hideous Squal,¹⁷⁹
 While Scorn and Satire whisper through the Hall.

Hear this, ye fair Ones, that survive your Charms, 120
 Nor reach at Folly with your aged Arms;
 Thus *Pope*¹⁸⁰ has sung, thus let *Dorinda* sing;
 "Virtue, brave Boys,— 'tis Virtue makes a King:"
 Why not a Queen? fair Virtue is the same
 In the rough Hero, and the smiling Dame: 125
Dorinda's Soul her Beauties shall pursue,
 Tho' late I see her, and embrace her too:

¹⁷⁵ *Prudo* a type name meaning prudent or prude

¹⁷⁶ *Ween* expect

¹⁷⁷ *Indolent* an individual who is lazy

¹⁷⁸ *Rigadoon* a dance that was popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

¹⁷⁹ *Squal* as in squall, a short-lived burst of sound

¹⁸⁰ *Pope* Alexander Pope, particularly *Essay on Man*, Epistle II

Come, ye blest Graces, that are sure to please,
The Smile of Friendship, and the careless Ease;
The Breast of Candour,¹⁸¹ the relenting Ear, 130
The Hand of Bounty, and the Heart sincere:
May these the Twilight of my Days attend,
And may that Ev'ning never want a Friend
To smooth my Passage to the silent Gloom,
And give a Tear to grace the mournful Tomb. 135

¹⁸¹*Candour* “freedom from malice, favourable disposition, kindness: ‘sweetness of temper, kindness’” (*OED*)



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