

# Essay on leapor's poems

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Leapor's poems basically focus on how women were perceived during her time. They seek to tell the plight of the 18th Century woman and her place in the society. This is not surprising as the time setting places her work at a period when gender issues and the woman's place in the society was under critical observation; with few of the women who could stand out coming up to defend their rights. Leapor's poem, *An Essay on Woman* gives insight into the nature of life for the British woman during this time. It elaborates on the perceived beauty of the woman, interaction with men in domestic life, chores and the perception on marriage in this society. The selected passage summarizes the message in the poem through its diction, rhetoric and symbolism; it acts as an anchor for the core message of the poem and reveals the true nature of the woman in marriage back then.

The excerpt's first line introduces the poet's intentions by clearly and boldly stating 'WOMAN'(Leapor 2608), followed by a hyphen signaling a definition. This single word gives the reader a clear picture of what is to follow and sets the audience to a whole lot of imagination. The poet does not disappoint and goes ahead to define who or what woman is by giving clear metaphorical description of the word and in essence the person, woman. The excerpt acts as a good introduction to the whole poem. The first two lines summarize the good and the bad about the woman which is proven by the rest of the poem as the poet seeks to justify these claims. It states, 'WOMAN-a pleasing but a short-lived flower, /Too soft for business and too weak for power,' (2608). These two lines reveal the good in the woman, as in 'pleasing' and the disadvantage of the woman as in 'short lived' and 'too soft.' This is the exact picture painted in the rest of the poem where being woman is limiting

and the good of it is coated in ugly prejudice. For example, the conclusion to the poem summarizes the unhappiness of the woman and her state of “slavery” (2609). The woman is married for convenience and she chooses to be married mostly for status sake. The passing beauty of the ‘flower’ is no longer appreciated.

The excerpt gives the description given to a woman based on her looks. It gives a picture on how women are judged based on her appearance. This look though beautiful at first, quickly fades with age after which the woman remains spited by men. She also brings out the choices available for women as that of a slave or a wife. The excerpt brings out this theme as an introduction. The rest of the poem builds up on this by giving examples of personalities like Cordia and what they go through as women. The poet seeks to emphasize the strength of the woman and her resolve to survive inspire of her troubles. The lines in the second stanza, ‘but Artemisia, let your servant sing;’ show the poet’s optimism and the need for the woman to stand above all else. The excerpt promotes the themes of the plight of the married woman, prejudice against women and the survival attitude and strength of the woman. The major theme of the poem however revolves around marriage. The expectations placed in marriage and the reason the women get in marriage is questioned by the poet, “what small advantages wealth and beauty brings?”(line 20). The excerpt acts as an introduction to the theme of the poem.

The excerpt uses free verse form with irregular rhyme. Each stanza has its rhyme scheme and this is different for every two lines. The irregular rhyme

could be seen to further the theme in the poem, that of deception and misconception of the marriage institution and the woman's appearance. The poem uses casual language in the form of dialogue. This conversational approach makes the audience to easily identify with the characters in the poem and is more persuasive in viewing the woman's word from the author's view point. Leapor relies in satirical rhetoric to bring home her ridicule of the marriage institution. Through this rhetoric, she reveals the ill intentions of men in marriage; the focus on dowry that the man would use to boost his social status. "What care I how black I be? / Twenty pounds will marry me; / If twenty won't, forty shall, / For I'm my mother's bouncing girl" (qtd Olsen 34). The language used in this and other parts of the poem is satirical. This furthers the theme of the poem by emphasizing the poet's spite for the societal views on marriage and exposes how empty the perception is. The poem uses metaphorical objects like a flower of fading beauty to paint the picture of the perceived short-term value of a woman. Leapor uses irony and satire to mock the society and bring home her views on marriage and the value of the 18th Century woman.

## **Works Cited**

- Leapor, Mary. "An Essay on Woman." Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. Steven Greenbalt. New York: Norton. 2006. 2608-2609. Print.
- Olsen, Kirstin. "'Twenty Pounds Will Marry Me': The Family." Daily Life in 18th-Century England. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999.