

From Sacred Dramas (1782)

SENSIBILITY: A POETICAL EPISTLE TO THE HON. MRS BOSCAWEN
(EXTRACT)

240 Sweet Sensibility, thou soothing pow'r
Who shed'st thy blessings on the natal hour
Like fairy favours! Art can never seize;
Nor affectation catch, thy pow'r to please;
Thy subtle essence still eludes the chains
Of definition, and defeats her pains.
245 Sweet Sensibility, thou keen delight!
Thou hasty moral, sudden sense of right,
Thou untaught goddess, virtue's precious seed,
Thou sweet precursor of the gen'rous deed!
250 Beauty's quick relish, reason's radiant mom
Which dawns soft light before reflection's born!
To those who know thee not, no words can paint,
And those who know thee, know all words are faint!
255 'Tis not to mourn because a sparrow dies,
To rave in artificial ecstasies;
'Tis not to melt in tender Oway's fires;
'Tis not to faint when injured Shore expires;
'Tis not because the ready eye overflows
At Clementina's or Clarissa's woes,
260 Forgive, oh Richardson, nor think I mean
With cold contempt to blast thy peerless scene;
If some faint love of virtue glow in me,
Pure spirit, I first caught that flame from thee!
265 While soft compassion silently relieves,
Inquacious Feeling hints how much she gives,
Laments how oft her wounded heart has bled
And boasts of many a tear she never shed.
As words are but th' external marks to tell
The fair ideas in the mind that dwell,
270 And only are of things the outward sign,
And not the things themselves they but define,
So exclamations, tender tones, fond tears,
And all the graceful drapery Pity wears –
These are not Pity's self, they but express
Her inward sufferings by their pictured dress;
275 And these fair marks (reluctant I relate),

TO SENSIBILITY

¹ More refers to Gaius's poem in which Lesbia mourns her dead sparrow, Thomas Oway's *Vénie Pyrenée* (1682), Nicholas Rowe's tragedy *Junia, Shore*

(1714). Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1749), the heroine of which is called Clementina Portetta, and *Clarissa* (1747–8).

These lovely symbols may be counterfeit.

Celestial Pity! why must I deplore

Thy sacred image stamped on basest ore?

There are, who fill with brilliant plains the page

If a poor linnet meet the gunner's rage;

There are, who for a dying fawn display

The tend'rest anguish in the sweetest lay;²

Who for a wounded animal deplore

As if friend, parent, country were no more;

Who boast quick rapture trembling in their eye

If from the spider's snare they save a fly;

Whose well-sung sorrows every breast inflame,

And break all hearts but his from whom they came

Yet, scornful life's dull duties to attend,

Will persecute a wife or wrong a friend;

Alive to every woe by fiction dressed,

The innocent he wronged, the wretch distressed

May plead in vain – their sufferings come not near,

Or he relieves them cheaply with a tear.

The Sorrows of Yamba, or the Negro Woman's
Lamentation (c.1795) (published by Hannah More as a
Cheap Repository broadside, but not written by her)

¹In St. Lucie's distant isle

Still with Afric's love I burn,

Parted many a thousand mile

Never, never to return.

Come, kind death, and give me rest!

Yamba has no friend but thee;

Thou canst ease my throbbing breast,

Thou canst set the prisoner free.

Down my cheeks the tears are dripping,

Broken is my heart with grief,

Mangled my poor flesh with whipping;

Come, kind death, and bring relief!

Born on Afric's golden coast,

Once I was as blessed as you;

Parents tender I could boast,

Husband dear, and children too.

Why man he came from far,

Sailing o'er the briny flood,