

The Women's Petition Against Coffee. Representing to Publick Consideration the Grand Inconveniencies accruing to their Sex from the Excessive Use of that Drying Enfeebling Liquor. Presented to the Right Honourable Keepers of the Liberty of Venus. By a Well-willer (London, n.p., 1674), [2], 6pp. BL: 1038.i.47.(1). ESTCR11811. Hünersdorff.

The Women's Petition Against Coffee is a libertine squib on the revolution in sexual manners supposedly inaugurated by the emergence of the coffee-house. *The Women's Petition* returns to the genre of the mock petition, closely related to other mock tracts of restoration satire, especially the mock complaint and mock queries. Like these forms, the satire is directed against the authoritative and political pretensions of the original form: in this case the petition addressed to an authoritative body: here '*the Right Honourable Keepers of the Liberty of Venus*', an ironic reference to rakes and whores. Ostensibly the satiric focus is on men: the coffee-house renders them impotent and effeminate. The theory that coffee 'extinguishes the Inclination to Venery, and induces Sterility' had been reported by Olearius in his embassy to Persia in 1634, and confirmed in the Danish physician Simon Paulli's *Commentarius de abusu tabaci et herbae thee* ([Strasbourg], Argentorati, 1665), fols 37r–39r. But the satire is not directly concerned with medical theory: rather the topic is gender roles, directed against the desiring woman, whose libidinality is limitless and whose carnal appetite is insatiable (a reprise of enduring misogynist discourse). The petition begins by recalling nostalgically the days when English men were virile and lusty, and ascribes the passing of this sexual vigour to this 'Newfangled, Abominable, Heathenish Liquor' called coffee. The satire is directed against the cultural reformation that coffee-houses were understood to have introduced in London society: the men who congregate in the coffee-houses are associated with the supposedly feminine attributes of talking and gossiping. Men in the coffee-house '*out-babble* an equal number of [women] at a *Gossiping*, talking all at once in Confusion, and run-

ning from point to point ... insensibly, and ... swiftly' (below p. 116). This conceit is literalised as sexual impotence, and concatenated with complaints about the amount of time men devoted to the homosocial world of the coffee-house. The contrast between kinds and manners of drinking probably carried political connotations: the flamboyant and libertine world of wine and beer drinking was associated with Royalist politics; while the austere and discursive world of coffee-house debate was associated with radical and republican politics.

The tract is in prose amounting to six pages, and is anonymous. There is no extant evidence about the author, and no conclusions can be drawn concerning the writer's gender from internal evidence. The title has suggested to some a woman author, following the model offered by a petition on behalf of women debtors addressed to Cromwell during the Commonwealth, entitled *The Womens Petition, to the Right Honourable ... Lord Cromwell* (London, n.p., 1651). George Woodcock suggested Aphra Behn in the 1970s, but this has not been widely followed. According to Peter Brown, 'various names have been put forward as to the author', concluding that it 'was no lady who wrote this' (Peter B. Brown, *In Praise of Hot Liquors: the study of chocolate, coffee and tea-drinking 1600–1850* (York, York Civic Trust, 1995), pp. 16–17). Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962; trans. by Thomas Burger ([Cambridge], Polity Press, 1989)), makes use of this satire as evidence for women's resistance to the homosocial coffee-house public (p. 257n.). Such a conclusion might only be drawn, one suspects, without a first-hand knowledge of the text, or even its subtitle, as the tract makes its satirical purpose more than clear. The satire was reprinted in four pages in 1700 as *The City-Wives Petition, against Coffee. Presented to the Publick Consideration, the Grand Inconviences that accrue to their Sex, from the Excessive Drinking of that Drying, and Enfeebling Liquor: to the Right Honourable, the worshipfull court of female assistants, the humble petition and address of several thousands of buxome good women, languishing in extremity of want* (London, A. VV., 1700).

THE
WOMEN'S
PETITION
AGAINST
COFFEE.
REPRESENTING
TO
PUBLIC CONSIDERATION
THE
Grand INCONVENIENCIES accruing
to their SEX from the Excessive
Use of that Drying, Enfeebling
LIQUOR.

Presented to the Right Honorable the
Keepers of the Liberty of *VENUS*.

By a Well-willer —

London, Printed 1674.

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To the Right Honorable the Keepers
of the Liberties of *Venus*; The
Worshipful Court of *Female-Assistants*, &c.

The Humble Petition and Address of several Thousands of Buxome Good-Women, Languishing in Extremity of Want.

SHEWETH,

THAT since 'tis Recken'd amongst the Glories of our Native Country, To be *A Paradise for women*: The same in our Apprehensions can consist in nothing more than the brisk *Activity* of our men, who in former Ages were justly esteem'd the *Ablest Performers* in Christendome; But to our unspeakable Grief, we find of late a very sensible *Decay* of that true *Old English Vigour*; our *Gallants* being every way so *Frenchified*, that they are become meer Cock-sparrows, fluttering things that come on *Sasse*, with a world of Fury,

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(2)

But are not able to *stand* to it, and in the very first Charge fall down *flat* before us. Never did Men wear *greater Breeches*, or carry *less* in them of any *Mettle* whatsoever. There was a glorious Dispensation ('twas surely in the Golden Age) when *Lusty Ladd*, of *seven* or *eight hundred* years old, *Got* Sons and Daughters; and we have read, how a Prince of *Spain* was forced to make a Law, that Men should not Repeat the *Grand Kindness* to their Wives; above *NINE* times in a night: But Alas! Alas! Those *forwards* Days are gone; The dull *Lubbers* want a *Spur* now, rather than a *Bridle*: being so far from doing any works of *Supererrogation* that we find them not capable of performing those *Devoirs* which their *Duty*, and our *Expectations* Exact.

The Occasion of which *Insufferable Disaster*, after a *ferious Enquiry*, and *Discussion* of the Point by the *Learned* of the *Faculty*, we can Attribute to nothing more than the *Excessive* use of that *Newfangled*, *Abominable*, *Heathenish* Liquor called *COFFEE*, which *Riffling* Nature of her *Choicest Treasures*, and *Drying* up the *Radical Moisture*, has so *Eunuch*: our *Husbands*, and *Crippled* our more kind *Gallants*, that they are become as *Impotent*; as *Age*, and as *unfruitful* as those *Desarts* whence that unhappy *Berry* is said to be brought.

For the continual sipping of this *pittiful* drink is enough to *bewitch* Men of *two* and *twenty*, and tie up the *Codpice-point* without a *Charm*. It renders them that use it as *Lean* as *Famine*, as *Rivvel'd* as *Envy*, or an old meager *Hagg* over-ridden by an *Incubus*. They come from it with nothing *moist* but their *frotty* *Notes*, nothing *stiff* but their *Joints*, nor *standing* but their *Bars*: They pretend 'twill keep them *waking*, but we find by *scurvy* Experience, they
sleep

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Step quietly enough after it. A Betrothed *Queen* might trust her self a bed with one of them, without the nice Caution of a *Sword* between them: nor can all the Art we use revive them from this Lethargy, so unfit they are for Action, that like young Train-band-men when called upon Duty, their *Amunition* is wanting; peradventure they *Present*, but cannot give *Fire*, or at least do but *flash in the Pan*, instead of doing Execution.

Nor let any Doating Superstitious *Cato's* shake their Goatish *Beards*, and tax us of *Immodesty* for this Declaration, since 'tis a publick Grievance, and cries aloud for Reformation. *Weight* and *Measure*, 'tis well known, should go throughout the world, and there is no torment like Famishment. Experience witnesses our Damage, and Necessity (which easily supersedes all the Laws of Decency) justifies our complaints: For can any Woman of *Sense* or *Spirit* endure with Patience, that when priviledg'd by Legal Ceremonies, she approaches the Nuptial Bed, expecting a Man that with *Sprightly* Embraces, should Answer the Vigour of her Flames, she on the contrary should only meet *A Beaful of Bones*, and hug a meager useles Corpse rendred as *sapless* as a *Kixe*, and *dryer* than a *Pumice-Stone*, by the perpetual *Fumes* of *Tobacco*, and bewitching effects of this most pernicious *COFFEE*, whereby Nature is *Enfeebled*, the Off-spring of our Mighty Antecessors *Dwindled* into a Succession of *Apes* and *Pignies* and

— The Age of *Man*

Now Cramp't into an Inch, that was a Span.

Nor is this (though more than enough) *All* the ground of our Complaint: For besides, we have reason to apprehend and grow *Jealous*, That Men by frequenaing these *Stygian Tap-houses* will usurp on our Prerogative of *Tatling*,

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ling, and soon learn to excel us in *Talkativeness*: a Quality wherein our Sex has ever Claimed preheminnce: For here like so many *Frogs* in a *puddle*, they sup muddy water, and murmur insignificant notes till half a dozen of them *out-babble* an equal number of us at a *Gossiping*, talking all at once in Confusion, and running from point to point as insensibly, and as swiftly, as ever the Ingenious *Pole-wheel* could run divisions on the *Base-viol*; yet in all their prattle every one abounds in his own sense, as stiffly as a *Quaker* at the late *Barbican* Dispute, and submits to the Reasons of no other mortal: so that there being neither *Moderator* nor *Rules* observ'd, you may as soon fill a *Quart pot* with *Syllogismes*, as profit by their Discourses.

Certainly our Countrymens pallates are become as *Fanatical* as their Brains; how else is't possible they should *Apostatize* from the good old primitive-way of *Ale-drinking*, to run a *whoring* after such variety of destructive *Foreign* Liquors, to trifle away their *time*, scald their *Chops*, and spend their *Money*, all for a little *base, black, thick, nasty bitter stinking, nauseous* Puddle water: Yet (as all *Witches* have their *Charms*) so this ugly *Turkish* Enchantress by certain *Invisible VVyres* attracts both Rich and Poor; so that those that have scarce *Twopence* to buy their Children *Bread*, must spend a penny each evening in this *Inspid* Stuff: Nor can we send one of our *Husbands* to *Call a Midwife*, or borrow a *Glester-pipe*, but he must stay an hour by the way drinking his two *Dishes*, & two *Pipes*.

At these Houses (as at the Springs in *Afric*) meet all sorts of Animals, whence follows the production of a thousand *Monster Opinions* and *Absurdities*; yet for being dangerous to Government, we dare be their *Compurgators*, as well knowing them to be too *tame* and *tootalkative*

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kative to make any desperate Politicians : For though they may now and then destroy a Fleet, or kill ten thousand of the *French*, more than all the Confederates can do, yet this is still in their politick Capacities, for by their personal valour they are scarce fit to be of the Life-guard to a Cherry tree : And therefore, though they frequently have hot Contests about most Important Subjects ; as what colour the Red Sea is of ; whether the Great Turk be a Lutheran or a Calvinist ; who *Cain's* Father in Law was, &c. yet they never fight about them with any other save our Weapon, the Tongue.

Some of our Sots pretend tipping of this boiled Soot cures them of being Drunk ; but we have reason rather to conclude it makes them so, because we find them not able to stand after it : 'Tis at best but a kind of Earthing a Fox to hunt him more eagerly afterward : A rare method of good-husbandry, to enable a man to be drunk three times a day ! Just such a Remedy for Drunkenness, as the Popes allowing of Stews, is a means to prevent Fornication : The Coffee-house being in truth, only a Pimp to the Tavern, a relishing soup preparative to a fresh debauch : For when people have swill'd themselves with a morning draught of more Ale than a Brewers horse can carry, hither they come for a pennyworth of Settle-brain, where they are sure to meet enow lazy pragmatikal Companions, that resort here to prattle of News, that they neither understand, nor are concerned in ; and after an hours impertinent Chat, begin to consider a Bottle of Claret would do excellent well before Dinner ; whereupon to the Busb they all march together, till every one of them is as Drunk as a Drum, and then back again to the Coffe-house to drink themselves sober ; where three or four dishes a piece, and smoaking, makes their throats as dry as Mount *Etna* enflam'd with Brimstone ; so that they must away to the next *Red Lattice* to quench them with a dozen or two of
Ale;

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Ale, which at last growing nauseous; one of them begins to extol the blood of the Grape, what rare Langoon, and Racy Canary may be had at the *Miter*: Saist thou for cries another, *Let's then go and replenish there with our Earthen Vessels*: So once more they troop to the Sack-shop, till they are drunker than before; and then by a retrograde motion, stagger back to *Sobèrize* themselves with Coffee: Thus like *Tennis Balls* between two Rackets, the *Fopps our Husbands* are bandied to and fro all day between the *Coffee-house* and *Tavern*, whilst we poor Souls sit *mopeing* all alone till *Twelve* at night, and when at last they come to bed smoakt like a *Westphalia Hogs-head* we have no more comfort of them, than from a *shotten Herring* or a dried *Budrusk*; which forces us to take up this Lamentation and sing,

*Tom Farthing, Tom Farthing, where hast thou been, Tom Farthing ?
Twelve a Clock e're you come in, Two a Clock e're you begin, And
then at last can do nothing: Would make a Woman weary, weary;
weary, would make a Woman weary, &c.*

Wherefore the *Premises* considered, and to the end that our Just *Rights* may be restored, and all the Antient *Priviledges* of our Sex preferred inviolable; That our Husbands may give us some other *Testimonies* of their being Men, besides their *Beards* and wearing of empty *Pantaloons*: That they no more run the hazard of being *Cuckol'd* by *Dildo's*: But returning to the good old strengthning Liquors of our Forefathers; that *Natures Exchequer* may once again be replenisht, and a Race of Lusty Hero's begot, able by their *Atchievements*, to equal the *Glories* of our Ancesters.

We *Humbly Pray*, That you our Trusty Patrons would improve your Interest, that henceforth the *Drinking COFFEE* may on severe penalties be forbidden to all Persons under the Age of *Tetraesqere*; and that instead thereof, *Lusty nappy Beer*, *Cock-Ale*, *Sordial Canaries*, *Restoring Malago's*, and *Black-recruiting Chocholes* be Recommended to General Use, throughout the *Tropian Territories*.

In hopes of which *Glorious Reformation*, your *Petitioner's* shall readily *Prostrate* themselves, and ever *Pray*, &c.

F I N I S.

The Women's Petition Against Coffee

- p. 111, ll. 14–15: the Right Honourable Keepers of the Liberty of VENUS: refers to those charged with the protection of the arts of love: libertines, rakes, courtesans and whores. During the English Republic (1649–53), and again during the Rump (1659–60), parliament abolished the kingly office and constituted itself as the 'Keepers of the liberty of England'; for which see 'An Act declaring what offences shall be adjudged Treason' (17 July 1649) in *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625–1660*, ed. by Samuel Rawson Gardiner (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 388. Venus is the goddess of love and the amatory arts.
- p. 113, ll. 3–4: *Worshipful Court of Female Assistants*: prostitutes, courtesans, whores. A 'court of assistants' constituted the governing body of each of the City livery companies that regulated trade in London.
- p. 113, ll. 6–7: *Buxome Good-women*: A goodwife or good-woman is the mistress of a house; buxom, full of health, plump, comely.
- p. 113, l. 18: *Cock-sparrows*: the male of the sparrow, applied to men who show sparrow-like characteristics (*OED*).
- p. 113, l. 19: Sa sa: English transliteration of the French exclamation 'ça ça', used to encourage and excite.
- p. 114, l. 10: *dull Lubbers*: big clumsy stupid fellows (*OED*).
- p. 114, l. 13: *Devoirs*: duties, here sexual (*OED*).
- p. 115, l. 9: Cato: Marcus Porcius Cato (234–149 BC) was a Roman statesman and orator, here used as a byword for conservative rhetoric.
- p. 115, l. 22: *sapless as a Kix*: kex, the dry stem of various herbaceous plants, such as cow parsnip or wild chervil. Figuratively, a dried-up sapless person. (*OED*).
- p. 115, ll. 27–8: *The Age of Man ... Span*: misquoted from John Donne (1572–1631), *An Anatomy Of The World* (London, William Stansby for Samuel Macham, 1611) on the shortness of life: 'And as in lasting, so in length is man / Contracted to an inch, who was a span' (p. 7).
- p. 115, l. 32: *Stygian Tap-houses*: Stygian means pertaining to the River Styx, or more generally, to the infernal regions of classical mythology. Tap-houses were small alehouses where beer is drawn from a tap.
- p. 116, l. 10: *Quaker ... Dispute*: a meeting of the Quakers held at the Barbican on 28 June 1674, defending themselves against recent allegations.
- p. 117, ll. 7–9: *as what colour ... Father in Law was*: quibbles of Biblical scholarship.
- p. 117, l. 32: *Red Lattice*: a lattice painted red was the mark of an inn; hence also of an alehouse or tavern (*OED*).
- p. 118, l. 2: *rare Lagoon, and Racy Canary*: lagoon was a kind of white wine, and canary a light sweet wine from the Canary Islands (*OED*).

- p. 118, ll. 13–16: Tom Farthing ... Woman weary, &c: the first verse of a contemporary bawdy song in which a woman complains that Tom Farthing stays out too late, and when he gets home is too weary to have sex. See *A Perfect Collection of the Several Songs now in Mode either at the Court or Theatres* (London, n. p., 1675), p. 39. The name Tom Farthing was thereafter associated with silly and lewd song lyrics.
- p. 118, ll. 29–30: Lusty nappy Beer, Cock-Ale, Cordial Canaries, Restoring Malago's and Back-Recruiting Chocolet: nappy beer was strong and foaming, having a head; cock-ale was mixed with the jelly or minced meat of a boiled cock, beside other ingredients; cordial canaries were hearty and health-giving sweet wines from the Canary Islands; malago was a white or red fortified wine from Malaga in Spain, also known as sack; chocolet or chocolate was supposed to have restorative powers (*OED*).

The Mens Answer to the Womens Petition Against Coffee

- p. 123, l. 10: *Postures than Aretine: Aretino's Postures* (1524) was the name given to a well-known illustrated sex manual in verse, comprising sixteen sonnets by Pietro Aretine (1492–1556) and sixteen explicit engravings from drawings by Giuliano Romano, a pupil of Raphael, depicting various athletic sexual positions.
- p. 123, l. 22: Italian *Padlocks*: chastity belts.
- p. 123, ll. 26–7: *Commissioners of Whetstones Park, the Suburb Runners, and Moor-fields Night-walkers*: ironic reference to areas of London where prostitutes were commonly encountered. Whetstone Park was a street which lay between Lincoln's Inn and Holborn; Moorfields was an open area north of the city. A 'suburb sinner' was a loose woman, so named because the suburbs of London were associated with debased and licentious habits of life.
- p. 123, l. 29–p. 124, l. 1: *preparations of Cantharides, spiced Meats, Anchoves, Cullises, Jelly-broths, Lambstones, Diasatyryon, Bononia Sawsages*: aphrodisiacs. Cantharides is Spanish Fly, a rubefacient and vesicant prepared from the dried beetle *Cantharis vesicatoria*; cullis and jelly-broths were both restorative strong meat broths; lambstones were lamb's testicles; diasatyryon was a medicinal preparation of which the principal ingredient was sanders or sandalwood; and bononia sawsages are a large kind of preserved Bologna sausage (salami). They, and most of the other aphrodisiacs here listed, are referred to in Henry Stubbe's *The Indian Nectar, or, a discourse concerning chocolate* (London, J. C. for Andrew Crook, 1662), pp. 136–7.
- p. 124, l. 3: *Artificial Tranguin*: unknown
- p. 124, l. 7: Solomon: Solomon (970–28 BC), king of the Israelites. Proverbs 30:16–17: 'There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things