

Elizabeth Thomas, “Epistle to Clemena”

Description

[ELIZABETH THOMAS]

“Epistle to Clemena”

*Occasioned by an Argument she had
maintain’d against the AUTHOR.*

Tho’ you my Resolution still accuse,
And for *Misanthropy* condemn the Muse;
Still finding Fault with what I most commend,
And lose good Humour in the Name of *Friend*:
Yet if these pettish Heats you lay aside,
And by calm *Reason* let the *Cause* be try’d. 5
I make no Question, but it would appear,
You had no Cause to *boast*, nor I to *fear*.

For when two bind themselves in Marriage Bands,
Fidelity in each, the *Church* commands; 10
Equal’s the Contract, equal are the Vows,
Yet Custom, diff’rent Licences allows:
The *Man* may range from his unhappy *Wife*,
But *Woman*’s made a Property for *Life*.
To no dear *Friend* the Grief may be reveal’d, 15
No, she poor Soul, must keep her Shame conceal’d:
And, to the Height of doating Folly grown,
Believe her *Husband*’s Character her own.

So I have seen a lovely beauteous *Maid*,
By *Duty* forc’d, by *Interest* betray’d, 20
Resign her self into *Nefario*’s Arms,
And make the sordid Wretch sole Master of her Charms.
With seeming Transport he the Bliss receives,
With seeming Gratitude, rich Presents gives:
The finest *Brillants* thro’ the Town are sought, 25
The costliest *Liv’ries* for her Servants bought;
The richest *Tissues* for her self to wear,
And nothing that she lik’d could purchas’d be too dear.
But ‘ere the Sun his annual Course had run,

Or thrice three Moons with borrow'd *Lustre* shone; 30
 The *Libertine* resum'd his brutal Life:
 Oh! then how nauseous grew the Name of *Wife*.
 Her Conversation, and her Charms were stale,
 Nor *Wit* and *Beauty*, longer could prevail:
 The Night he turn'd to Day, the Day to Night, 35
 Yet still uneasy in *Aminta*'s Sight.

At two, perhaps, he condescends to rise,
 Fetches a Yawn or two, and rubs his Eyes:
 Run, run, cries he, to Captain *Hackum*'s straight,
 And tell the Rakes, I for their Coming wait; 40
 Be sure you bring the *Dogs*, and heark, d'ye hear,
 Bid *Tom*, the *Butler*, in my Sight appear.

The hungry *Bravo*'s to their Patron run,
 And wonder that his *Levee* is so soon:
 Bless me, says one, how well you look to Day! 45
 T'other replies, ay, he may well look Gay,
 When *Wine*, and *Women*, pass his Time away.
 While Bus'ness other Mortals Peace destroys,
 He gives his Soul a nobler Loose to Joys.
 Enough, *Nefario* cries, sit down my Friends, 50
 See where the sparkling *Burgundy* attends.
 This *Wine* was sent from *France* but t'other Day,
 And never yet in *Vinter*'s Cellar lay.

Set in for Drinking thus, they each recite
 The wonderful Atchievement of the Night. 55
 One tells how he did *Phillis* serenade,
 Fought with the *Watch*, and made them run afraid:
 While t'other shrugging cries, I chang'd my *Bed*,
 And was in *Triumph* to the *Counter* led.
 But if the Town does *Canes* enough afford, 60
 I'll drub that *Rascal* where I bought my *Sword*.

Sated at last with fulsome *Lies* and *Wine*,
Nefario swears aloud, 'Tis *Dinner* Time.
Aminta's call'd, and calmly down they sit,
 But she not one poor Word or Look can get. 65
 This *Meat*'s too salt, t'other's too fresh, he cries,
 And from the *Table* in a Passion flies:
 Not, that his *Cook* is faulty in the least,
 But 'tis the *Wife* that palls his squeamish Taste.

Well, after having ransack'd *Park* and *Play*, 70
 He with some *hackney Vizor* sneaks away,
 To fam'd *Pontack*'s, or noted Monsieur *Locket*'s,

Where Mrs. *Jilt*, as fairly picks his Pockets.
 'Thus bubbled, in Revenge, he walks his Round,
 From *Loft* three Stories high, to *Cellar* under Ground: 75
 Scow'rs all the *Streets*, some Brother *Rake* doth fight,
 And with a broken *Pate* concludes the *Night*.
 Or in some *Tavern* with the gaming Crew,
 He *drinks*, and *swears*, and *plays*, 'till Day doth Night pursue.

Mean while *Aminta* for his Stay doth mourn, 80
 And sends up pious *Vows* for his Return:
 Fears some Mishap, looks out at ev'ry Noise,
 And thinks each Breath of Wind, her dear *Nefario*'s Voice.
 At last the Clock strikes Five, and Home he comes,
 And kicks the *spaniel* Servants thro' the Rooms; 85
 'Till he the lovely pensive *Fair* doth spy,
 Nor can she 'scape the sordid *Tyranny*:
 A thousand brutish Names to her he gives,
 Which she poor Lady patiently receives:
 A thousand *Imprecations* doth bestow, 90
 And scarcely can refrain to give th' impending Blow.
 'Till tir'd with *Rage*, and overcome with *Wine*,
 Dead drunk he falls, and snoring lies supine.

Wretched *Nefario*! no Repentance shows,
 But mocks those ills *Aminta* undergoes: 95
 Ruin'd by him, with Pain she draws her *Breath*,
 And still survives *an Evil worse than Death*.

Ah *Friend*! in these deprav'd unhappy Times,
 When *Vice* walks barefac'd, *Virtues* pass for Crimes:
 Many *Nefario*'s must we think to find, 100
 Tho' not so bad as this, yet *Villains* in their Kind.
 Hard is that Venture where our *All* we lose;
 But harder yet an honest Man to choose.

NOTES:

23 *Transport* "Vehement emotion...mental exaltation, rapture, ecstasy" (*OED*)

26 *Liv'ries* "The uniform or insignia worn by a household's servants" (*OED*)

31 *Libertine* "A person (typically a man) who is not restrained by morality, esp. with regard to sexual relations; a person of dissolute or promiscuous habits" (*OED*); also called "rakes."

43 *Bravo's* In this context, fellow rakes.

44 *Levee* "A reception of visitors on rising from bed; a morning assembly held by a prince or person of distinction" (*OED*).

57 *Watch* Watchman, “appointed to keep watch and ward in all towns from sunset to sunrise” (*OED*).

59 *Counter* “Prison” (*OED*).

70 *Park and Play* References to St. James’s Park and the theatre, both known haunts for rakish men and prostitutes in the period.

71 *hackney Vizor* “A prostitute” (*OED*).

72 *Pontack’s* A popular London tavern located on Abchurch Lane; *Monsieur Locket’s* Another “fashionable tavern where the young and gay met to dine,” located in Gerard street, Soho (John Timbs, *Clubs and Club Life in London*(London, [1875]), pp. 379-80, 322).

74 *bubbled* “Deluded, duped, or cheated” (*OED*).

77 *Pate* “The head, the skull” (*OED*).

85 *spaniel* “Submissive or cringing” (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems on Several Occasions. By a Lady* (London, 1726), pp. 174-79. [Google Books]

Edited by Will Hinds