[Anne Ingram, Viscountess Irwin], â??An Epistle to Mr. POPE. By a Lady. Occasioned by his Characters of Womenâ?•

Description

[ANNE INGRAM, VISCOUNTESS IRWIN]

â??An Epistle to Mr POPE. By a Lady. Occasioned by his Characters of Women.â?•

Nec rude quid profit video ingenium.

By custom doomâ??d to folly, sloth and ease,
No wonder, *Pope* such female triflers sees:
But would the satyrist confess the truth,
Nothing so like as male and female youth;
Nothing so like as man and woman old;
Their joys, their loves, their hates, if truly told:
Thoâ?? different acts seem different sexâ??s growth,
â??Tis the same principle impels them both.
View daring man stung with ambitionâ??s fire,
The conquering hero, or the youthful â??squire,
By diffâ??rent deeds aspire to deathless fame,
One murthers man, the other murthers game:
View a fair nymph blest with superior charms,
Whose tempting form the coldest bosom warms,
No eastern monarch more despotick reigns,
Than this fair tyrant of the *Cyprian* plains.
Whether a crown or bawble we desire,
Whether to learning or to dress aspire;
Whether we wait with joy the trumpetâ??s call,
Or wish to shine the fairest at a ball:
In either sex the appetiteâ??s the same,
For love of power is still the love of fame.
Women must in a narrow orbit move,
But power alike both males and females love.
What makes ye diffâ??rence then, you may enquire,
Between the hero, and the rural â??squire;
Between the maid bred up with courtly care,
Or she who earns by toil her daily fare:
Their power is stinted, but not so their will;
Ambitious thoughts the humblest cottage fill;
Far as they can they push their little fame,
And try to leave behind a deathless name.
In education all the diffâ??rence lies;
Women, if taught, would be as bold and wise

As haughty man, improvâ??d by art and rules;
Where God makes one, neglect makes twenty fools.
And thoâ?? *Nugatrixes* are daily found,
Fluttâ??ring *Nugators* equally abound;
Such heads are toyshops, fillâ??d with trifling ware,
And can each folly with each female share.
A female mind like a rude fallow lies;
No seed is sown, but weeds spontaneous rise.
As well might we expect, in winter, spring,
As land untillâ??d a fruitful crop shouâ??d bring:
As well might we expect *Peruvian* ore
We shouâ??d possess, yet dig not for the store:
Culture improves all fruits, all sorts we find,
Wit, judgment, senseâ??fruits of the human mind.
Ask the rich merchant, conversant in trade,
How nature operates in the growing blade;
Ask the philosopher the price of stocks,
Ask the gay courtier how to manage flocks;
Inquire the dogmas of the learned schools,
(From *Aristotle* down to *Newton*â??s rules;)
Of the rough soldier, bred to boisterous war,
Of one still rougher, a true *British* tar;
Theyâ??ll all reply, unpractisâ??d in such laws,
Thâ?? effect they know, thoâ?? ignorant of the cause.
The sailor may perhaps have equal parts,
With him bred up to sciences and arts;
And he who at the helm or stern is seen,
Philosopher or hero might have been.
The whole in application is comprisâ??d,
Reasonâ??s not reason, if not exercisâ??d;
Use, not possession, real good affords;
No miserâ??s rich that dares not touch his hoards.
Can female youth, left to weak womanâ??s care,
Misled by custom (follyâ??s fruitful heir);
Told that their charms a monarch may enslave,
That beauty like the gods can kill or save;
Taught the arcanas, the mysterious arts,
By ambush dress to catch unwary hearts;
If wealthy born, taught to lisp *French* and dance,
Their morals left (*Lucretius* like) to chance;
Strangers to reason and reflection made,
Left to their passions, and by them betrayâ??d;
Untaught the noble end of glorious truth,
Bred to deceive even from their earliest youth;
Unusâ??d to books, nor virtue taught to prize;
Whose mind a savage waste unpeopled lies;
Which to supply, trifles fill up the void,
And idly busy, to no end employâ??d:

Can these, from such a school, more virtue show,
Or tempting vice treat like a common foe?
Can they resist, when soothing pleasure wooes;
Preserve their virtue, when their fame they lose?
Can they on other themes converse or write,
Than what they hear all day, & dream all night?
Not so the *Roman* female fame was spread;
Not so was *Clelia*, or *Lucretia* bred;
Not so such heroines true glory sought;
Not so was *Portia*, or *Cornelia* taught;
Portia! the glory of the female race;
Portia! more lovely by her mind than face.
Early informâ??d by truthâ??s unerring beam,
What to reject, what justly to esteem;
Taught by philosophy all moral good,
How to repel in youth thâ?? impetuous blood;
How her most favourite passions to subdue,
And fame throâ?? virtueâ??s avenues pursue;
She tries herself, and finds even dolorous pain
Canâ??t the close secret from her breast obtain.
To *Cato* born, to noble *Brutus* joinâ??d,
She shines invincible in form and mind.
No more such generous sentiments we trace
In the gay moderns of the female race;
No more, alas! heroic virtueâ??s shown,
Since knowledge ceasâ??d, philosophyâ??s unknown.
No more can we expect our modern wives
Heroes shouâ??d breed, who lead such useless lives.
Wouâ??d you, who know thâ?? arcana of the soul,
The secret springs which move and guide the whole;
Wouâ??d you, who can instruct as well as please,
Bestow some moments of your darling ease,
To rescue woman from this *Gothic* state,
New passions raise, their minds anew create:
Then for the *Spartan* virtue we might hope;
For who stands convincâ??d by generous *Pope*?
Then wouâ??d the *British* fair perpetual bloom,
And vie in fame with ancient *Greece* and *Rome*.

NOTES:

Title Alexander Pope (1688-1744), poet and translator, was one of the most influential literary figures of his era. His poem, â??Of the Characters of Women: An Epistle to a Lady,â?• was first published in 1735.

Epigraph *Nec rude quid profit video ingenium* Nor can I see what benefit can come from untrained talent (Horace, *Art of Poetry*, l. 410).

1 *custom* Traditional social practice or habitual behavior.

16 *this fair tyrant of the Cyprian plains* Reference to a woman whose power is derived from beauty and sex appeal; associated in classical mythology with Cyprus and the cult of Aphrodite.

17 *bawble* Variation of â??bauble,â?• a trinket.

19 *the trumpetâ??s call* A reference to the Biblical tradition that a trumpet will sound preceding the last judgement (I Corinthians 15:52).

22 *For love of power is still the love of fame* Cf. Pope, â??Of the Characters of Women, ll. 207-214. Irwinâ??s line echoes Popeâ??s l. 210.

37 *Nugatrixes* Female triflers; apparently made up by Irwin from the Latin â??nugatorâ?• (â??triflerâ?•).

38 *Nugators* Male triflers.

41 *fallow* Land left uncultivated.

45 *Peruvian ore* Gold.

47 *Culture* Cultivation.

50 *the growing Blade* The botanical world of plants.

54 *Aristotle* (384-322 BC) Greek philosopher and natural scientist; *Newton* Sir Isaac Newton(1642-1727), influential English physicist, mathematician, and natural philosopher.

56 *tar* Sailor.

61 *he who at the helm or stern is seen* The captain of a ship.

68 *heir;)* Printerâ??s error; corrected to â??heir);â?•

71 *arcanas* Mysteries, or secrets; *art* Printerâ??s error; corrected to â??arts.â?•

72 *ambush dress* Dressing to entrap men.

73 *lisp* Speak.

74 *Lucretius like* Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99-c. 55 BC), Roman poet and philosopher, best known in the eighteenth century for his poem, *De rerum natura* (â??On the Nature of Thingsâ?•) which popularized Epicurean ideas regarding science and ethics. Irwin here references a central principle of Epicurean/Lucretian atomism: the random swerve (â??clinamenâ?•) of atoms from their natural downward course.

86 *fame* Reputation.

90 *Clelia* Cloelia, Roman maiden famous for her bravery and courage; *Lucretia* Legendary heroine of ancient Rome, raped by Sextus Tarquinius and committed suicide after her father and husband promised revenge on the Tarquins, eventually driving them from Rome and laying the foundations of the Republic.

92 *Portia* Porcia Catonis (70-43 BC); *Cornelia* Cornelia Africana, an example of virtuous womanhood.

101 *dolorous pain* Severe physical pain; Porcia is said to have lacerated her own thigh and endured the pain to prove to Brutus that he could trust her with his secrets.

102 *the close secret* Brutusâ??s role in the plot to assassinate Julius Caesar.

103 *Cato* (95-46 BC), Roman statesman, father of Porcia Catonis; *Brutus* (85-42 BC), Roman politician, divorced his first wife to marry Porcia Catonis.

106 *gay moderns of the female race* Contemporary women dedicated to their social pleasures.

115 *Gothic* â??Barbarous, rude, uncouthâ?• (*OED*).

117 *Spartan* â??Distinguished by simplicity, frugality, courage, or brevity of speechâ?• (*OED*).

Source: *The Gentlemanâ??s Magazine* (December, 1736), p. 745.

Edited by Bill Christmas