

The Lover: A Ballad

Lord Byron admired the poem for its relish of life. Quoting the fourth stanza, he wrote: ‘what say you to such a Supper with such a woman? . . . Is not her ‘*Champagne and Chicken*’ worth a forest or two? – Is it not poetry?’ He read some of Lady Mary’s love letters in manuscript, and in the English cantos of *Don Juan* (1819–24) he caught something of her aristocratic world, where wit and sex enlivened each other. *The Lover* may originally have been addressed to Richard Chandler (?1703–69), son of the Bishop of Durham, and Horace Walpole’s subtitle when he

printed it in *Six Town Eclogues. With some other Poems* (1747) was ‘To Mr. C —’. He noted: ‘One of her many amours was with Mr Chandler . . . to whom she wrote that admirable Description of a Lover . . . though in the copies which she gives now she writes (Molly) meaning Miss Skerret’ (*Walpole Correspondence*, 14:245). (Montagu’s friend Molly Skerrett was Sir Robert Walpole’s mistress, later wife.) Grundy dates the poem to the period 1721–5. The text below is that of 1747, with significant variants noted from the Harrowby MS.

1

At length by so much importunity press’d,
Take, C —, at once, the Inside of my breast;
This stupid indiff’rence so often you blame,
Is not owing to nature, to fear, or to shame.
I am not as cold as a virgin in lead, 5
Nor is Sunday’s sermon so strong in my head.
I know but too well how Time flies along,
That we live but few years, and yet fewer are young.

2

But I hate to be cheated, and never will buy 10
Long years of repentance for moments of joy.
Oh! was there a man (but where shall I find
Good sense and good nature so equally join’d?)
Wou’d value his pleasure, contribute to mine;
Not meanly would boast, nor would lewdly design;
Not over severe, yet not stupidly vain, 15
For I would have the power, tho’ not give the pain.

3

No pedant, yet learned; not rake-helly gay,
Or laughing, because he has nothing to say;
To all my whole sex obliging and free,
Yet never be fond of any but me. 20
In public preserve the decorum that’s just,
And shew in his eyes he is true to his trust;
Then rarely approach, and respectfully bow,
But not fulsomely pert, or foppishly low.

4

But when the long hours of public are past, 25
And we meet with Champagne and a Chicken at last,
May ev’ry fond pleasure that moment endear;
Be banish’d afar both discretion and fear!

2 C — (Molly) (MS).

5 lead i.e., a lead coffin.

14 nor would (nor MS).

17 pedant ‘A person who excessively reveres or parades academic learning’ (OED); rake-helly Like a rake-hell, a dissolute scoundrel.

19 free ‘unreserved’, ‘generous’.

21 decorum that’s (Decorums are MS).

24 But . . . or (Yet . . . nor yet MS); pert ‘forward’; foppishly

low ‘exaggeratedly submissive’.

27 moment (hour MS).

Forgetting or scorning the airs of the crowd,
 He may cease to be formal, and I to be proud, 30
 Till lost in the joy, we confess that we live,
 And he may be rude, and yet I may forgive.

5

And that my delight may be solidly fix'd,
 Let the Friend and the Lover be handsomely mix'd,
 In whose tender bosom my soul may confide, 35
 Whose kindness can sooth me, whose counsel cou'd guide.
 From such a dear Lover as here I describe,
 No danger should fright me, no millions should bribe:
 But till this astonishing creature I know,
 As I long have liv'd chaste, I will keep myself so. 40

6

I never will share with the wanton coquet,
 Or be caught by a vain affectation of wit.
 The toasters and songsters may try all their art,
 But never shall enter the pass of my heart.
 I loath the lewd rake, the dress'd fopling despise: 45
 Before such pursuers the nice virgin flies;
 And as OVID has sweetly in parables told,
 We harden like trees, and like rivers grow cold.

35 *may* (might *MS*).

45 *fopling* The fashion victim, embodied in Sir Fopling Flutter in Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676).

46 *nice* 'discriminating'.

46–8 Women rescued from their male pursuers: Daphne became a laurel tree (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1:452–567) and

Arethusa a stream (5:572–641). Cf. the episode of Lodona in Pope's *Windsor-Forest*, 171–206.

48 *grow* (are *MS*); Cf. *Hymn to the Moon*, 12.

An Epistle to Lord Bathurst

Allen, first Earl Bathurst (1684–1775), was for many years one of Pope's closest friends. A larger-than-life personality, with an unbounded appetite for food, drink, sex and good company, he fathered seventeen legitimate children, had many mistresses, and was famed for his gregariousness and his passion for designing and planting his estates. Pope was a frequent guest at Cirencester Park and Richings, where he advised Bathurst on gardening matters. Montagu seems to have had a hot-and-cold affair with Bathurst during the spring of 1725, and Grundy would date this poem to later that year, linking it to his flirtation with Henrietta Howard. Montagu presents Bathurst as an impressionable and whimsical character, and in doing so she anticipates the charges Pope was to bring against aristocratic women in his *Epistle to a Lady*, and

which were traditionally linked to the female sex. Likewise Bathurst's gardening ambitions here prefigure the grandiose and spiritually empty Timon of *Epistle to Burlington*. Montagu's satiric imagination relishes the changeability she detects in every aspect of Bathurst's life. An ironic postscript: in 1730 when he heard news of Lady Mary's being severely ill, he told Pope 'we have both been her humble Admirers at different times. I am not so changeable as you, I think of her now as I always did' (Bathurst to Pope, 19 September 1730).

Text from Doddsley's *Collection of Poems* (1st edn, 1748), 3:306–9, where it was first published as 'An Epistle to Lord B——t'. The notes record significant variants with the Harrowby MS.

How happy you! who vary'd joys pursue;
 And every hour presents you something new!

1–2 Cf. *Epistle from Mrs Y[onge] to her Husband*, 29–30.