

ELIZABETH MONTAGU

BY MARCO LOPEZ



EARLY LIFE

- Born in Yorkshire, Great Britain on Oct. 2nd, 1718
 - Fifth child and first daughter of Matthew Robinson and Elizabeth Robinson
 - After Elizabeth, the couple had a second daughter Sarah
- Raised mostly in Coveney, Cambridge
 - Like her father, Elizabeth despised the countryside
 - Preferred urban spaces like London

EDUCATION

- In 1710, Sarah Drake married Dr. Conyers Middleton
 - Middleton was a Cambridge classical scholar
- From ages 6-13, the Elizabeth and Sarah stayed with the Middletons in Cambridge
 - Introduced to classical and English literature and history
 - Studied Latin, French, and Italian
- Both the Robinson and Middleton households developed her passion for intellectual conversation
 - Earned the nickname “Fidget” from her family and peers for her liveliness and vivacity

MARRIAGE

- Elizabeth did not hold high opinions of men and of marriage
 - “for my part, [I] never saw one man that I loved”
- Married Edward Montagu on August 5th, 1742
 - He was twenty years her senior
- Their son John was born May 11, 1743
 - Died unexpectedly in September 1744
- By the 1760s, Edward’s health began to fail
- Elizabeth cared for him and managed his estates
- Edward died in London on May 12th, 1775
 - Left most of his estate to Elizabeth
- Elizabeth was now a wealthy widow
 - No one could legally exercise control over her

THE BLUESTOCKING SOCIETY

- Co-founder and hostess of the Bluestocking Circle
- Held large conversational parties and assemblies
 - Focus was lively conversations on philosophy and literature
- The Bluestocking Society attracted many significant literary and political figures of the time
 - Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Horace Walpole
 - Hannah More, Frances Burney, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld

LITERARY WIT & CRITICISM

- *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare (1769)*
 - Defended Shakespeare from critics such as Voltaire
 - Named him one of the greatest writers in history
- *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with some of the letters of her correspondents*
 - Published post-humorously by her nephew Matthew Montagu
 - Published in two volumes in 1809 and 1825

EXCERPTS FROM *THE LETTERS OF MRS. ELIZABETH MONTAGU*

- On Sir Phillip B. and his wife Lady A. (December 17th, 1738)
 - “I cannot describe him to your Grace, a shadow is too material, and a skeleton too fat--Charon will not ask half his fare to waft him over Styx, for he will take up no room in the boat; Pluto will make him his prime minister, and Proserpine will take him for her husband’s relation. He is really the grim king of the ghosts; he will be president of the court of Death. His wife and he are literally one flesh, for she has all the flesh herself. But why should the fat and lean equally torment your Grace? I know if I was to undertake to describe her, I could never bring her circumference within my sheet of paper.”

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