

The Grapes

Dearest Deborah,

Please reconsider! You know you can come here too--there's room for three! He who presumes to justify the ways of God to man, cannot ever hope to justify his own ways to his daughters!

For a man so very interested in education, he was quite disinterested in ours. Oh he was willing to spend a great deal for the education of his nephew, but for his daughters? Nothing. He took care to teach us only what we'd need to know to be his servants. Don't you remember Deb, the hours of drill in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syrian, Italian, Spanish, French? Don't you remember the boredom, the frustration--reading pages and pages we didn't understand? But that was fine--*he* understood it. And make no mistake, we were to read *for him*, not for ourselves. He used to joke, don't you remember, 'one tongue is enough for a woman'. He insisted that our minds were 'infantile'--minds that at ten and twelve years of age could be taught to read aloud in seven languages.

Then when our 'whining' finally got too disturbing, he sent us here to learn gold and silver embroidery. This is our education! But of course, it isn't us he is thinking about at all: it is well known what a luxury gold and silvering is considered to be, and therefore what status it confers on the father who is able to send his daughters for such training.

Well, two of his daughters--Deb come join us! Does he still call you in the middle of the night to take down his precious verses, complaining that he 'wants to be milked'? (How apt for such a cow, such a stupid beast!) I remember that whenever we grumbled about it, rubbing our eyes, stumbling with the candle, he would make *such* a fuss, be so appalled, and insist that *that* was when Inspiration chanced to light upon him, and it *must* be obeyed. Inspiration, hell! That man never had an inspired thought in all his life. He *chose* to think about his work then--*he* needed to be obeyed. That whole routine made him feel like God's chosen messenger.

Deborah, why *do* you stay? Do you think for your pains you will get gratitude? recognition? You should know by now, you won't--not from him or from anyone else. Why, you too have heard his comments: "I looked that my vineyard should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes". And

he's not the only one--just the other day I read "Milton's daughters chose to reject the fair repute that simple fulfilment of evident duty would've brought them". 'Evident duty'? What of his to us? 'Simple fulfilment'? Let them live with him for but a day! Why, we are "damned to everlasting fame... as embittering his existence"! Is that recognition? Gratitude? I wouldn't be surprised if historians refuse to even name you as his amanuensis. And don't count on his will for recompense.

Don't you see that by not providing us with a real education, he has silenced us, withheld from us a voice? (And this from a man who writes so strongly *against* censorship!) Or at least he crippled what voice we had--poor Anne, she still cannot speak easily. Do you know why she has that impediment? It's not from birth: it's because every time she opened her mouth to say something, he insulted her, mocked her, sneered at her--or if she was lucky, just ignored her. It's no wonder she couldn't even write her name for the longest time--without a voice, one has little identity.

Deb, you should come too--let him know what it's really like to be blind, to be handicapped, disadvantaged, to be denied certain opportunities, certain possibilities, to be dependent, to have to have others speak for you, unable to speak for oneself--We know, because we are uneducated, because we are women in his world.

love,

Mary