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An essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire by Montagu, Elizabeth Robinson,

Elizabeth Montagu English essayist, satirist, literary critic, and epistler. With *Some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. Montagu* was one of the most famous female literary hosts of her time period, and was the benefactor of numerous writers. Through her intellectual pursuits she contributed to the acceptance of women outside their traditional social roles. They revealed Montagu as a strongly opinionated person as well as much about the social and cultural atmosphere of the eighteenth century. She was the daughter of Matthew Robinson, a landowner, and his wife Elizabeth Drake, a wealthy heiress. Montagu was the first daughter and fourth child born to the couple, who had twelve children total. Her younger sister Sarah later known as Sarah Scott became a famous novelist in her own right. Montagu grew up in Coventry, Cambridgeshire, and was raised in part by her maternal grandmother. Conyers Middleton, taught at Cambridge and played a role in the proper education Montagu was given. She learned English, French, and classical literature and was exposed to literary circles and discussions from an early age. Intellectually mature, Montagu made her debut in society when she was only 13 years old. She was married at the age of 22 to Edward Montagu, who was 51 years old. The marriage was a practical one: The couple had only one child, a son who died when he was fifteen months old. Beginning in the early s, Montagu began hosting a salon in her home in Mayfair, London. She included intelligent people from many backgroundsâ€”not just the well-born or famous. From these salons developed the literary circle known as the Bluestockings, so-called because the women dressed more informally than usual. Montagu and other women served as leaders, though both sexes were included in the discussion. Montagu was the leader of the group by virtue of her intellect and regular hosting duties. By the s, Montagu was publishing her own works. She contributed three dialogues to the satirical *Dialogues of the Dead*, which was written primarily by Lord Lyttelton, who was also associated with the Bluestockings. At the end of that decade, she published a piece of literary criticism, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear*, which defended Shakespeare against a previously published attack by Voltaire. Even before his death, which was preceded by a long illness, Montagu had helped him oversee the mines and other businesses. She continued to serve as the business agent until her death. To ensure the estate would have an heir, she adopted a nephew, Matthew Robinson Montagu. Despite her increased estate responsibilities, Montagu continued her literary pursuits. She made a celebrated trip to Paris in , where her fame as the author of the *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* was cemented. In , Montagu built a home in Portman Square, London, labeled Montagu House, which became another center for the Bluestocking circle. Montagu also increased her activities as a patron, giving money and other kinds of support such as recommendations and arranging for employment to authors and others, including her tenants and employees, both former and current. Montagu died on August 25, , in London. Throughout her lifetime she had been a prodigious letter writer. Her heir, Robinson Montagu, published a number of her epistles within several years of her death. *Modish*, *Hercules* and *Cadmus*, and a modern bookseller and *Plutarch*. In the piece, she compares Shakespeare to playwrights both French and Greek with Shakespeare being deemed superior. The piece was translated into French and Italian and was reprinted several times. During her lifetime, a few of the thousands of letters she wrote were copied and published in periodicals. These letters reveal much about her personality, intelligence, wit, and lifestyle. Topics included practical matters related to her sex, society, customs, fashions, food prices, literature, and religion. *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* met with generally positive reviews when originally published. Samuel Johnson voiced one of the most negative responses to the work, but this might have been part of a bigger personal quarrel between them.

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There were also authorship issues when the essay was originally published. It was not widely known as her work at first, but when some learned that the author was a woman, they expressed an opinion that it was not her place to write such a work. In retrospect, many critics see the essay as part of a changing view of Shakespeare, though some regard her prose style as rather weak. Critics have analyzed the letters from many angles, including social history, the nature of her marriage, travel, financial dealings, and her sometimes complicated relationships with the people in her life.

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