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**The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.**

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

**London, 1721**

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N<sup>o</sup> 247. *Thursday, December 13.*

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Τῶν δ' ἀδάμαστον πλεῖσιν ἀδὴν  
Ἐκ σομάτων ἰδέεια

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**W**E are told by some ancient authors, that *Socrates* was instructed in eloquence by a woman, whose name, if I am not mistaken, was *Aspasia*. I have indeed very often looked upon that art as the most proper for the female sex, and I think the Universities would do well to consider whether they should not fill their rhetoric chairs with She professors.

It has been said in the praise of some men, that they could talk whole hours together upon any thing; but it must be owned to the honour of the other sex, that there are many among them who can talk whole hours together upon nothing. I have known a woman branch out into a long extempore dissertation upon the edging of a petticoat, and chide her servant for breaking a china cup, in all the figures of rhetoric.

Were women admitted to plead in courts of judicature, I am persuaded they would carry the eloquence of the bar to greater heights than it has yet arrived at. If any one doubts this, let him but be present at those debates which frequently arise among the Ladies of the *British* fishery.

The first kind therefore of female Orators which I shall take notice of, are those who are employed in stirring up the passions, a part of rhetoric in which *Socrates* his wife had perhaps made a greater proficiency than his above-mentioned teacher.

The second kind of female Orators are those who deal in invectives, and who are commonly known by the name of the censorious. The imagination and elocution of this set of rhetoricians is wonderful. With what a fluency of invention, and copiousness of expression, will they enlarge upon every little slip in the behaviour of another? With how many different circumstances, and with what variety of phrases, will they tell over the same story? I have known an old Lady make an unhappy marriage the subject of a month's conversation. She blamed the bride in one place, pitied her in another; laughed at her in a third; wondered at her

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in a fourth; was angry with her in a fifth; and in short, wore out a pair of coach-horses in expressing her concern for her. At length, after having quite exhausted the subject on this side, she made a visit to the new-married pair, praised the wife for the prudent choice she had made, told her the unreasonable reflections which some malicious people had cast upon her, and desired that they might be better acquainted. The censure and approbation of this kind of women are therefore only to be considered as helps to discourse.

A third kind of female Orators may be comprehended under the word *Gossips*. Mrs. *Fiddle Faddle* is perfectly accomplished in this sort of eloquence; she launches out into descriptions of christenings, runs divisions upon an head-dress, knows every dish of meat that is served up in her neighbourhood, and entertains her company a whole afternoon together with the wit of her little boy, before he is able to speak.

The Coquette may be looked upon as a fourth kind of female Orator. To give her self the larger field for discourse, she hates and loves in the same breath, talks to her lap-dog or parrot, is uneasy in all kinds of weather, and in every part of the room: She has false quarrels and feigned obligations to all the men of her acquaintance; sighs when she is not sad, and laughs when she is not merry. The Coquette is in particular a great mistress of that part of oratory which is called action, and indeed seems to speak for no other purpose, but as it gives her an opportunity of stirring a limb, or varying a feature, of glancing her eyes, or playing with her fan.

As for news-mongers, politicians, mimicks, story-tellers, with other characters of that nature, which give birth to loquacity, they are as commonly found among the men as the women; for which reason I shall pass them over in silence.

I have been often puzzled to assign a cause why women should have this talent of a ready utterance in so much greater perfection than men. I have sometimes fancied that they have not a retentive power, the faculty of suppressing their thoughts, as men have, but that they are necessitated to speak every thing they think; and if so, it would perhaps furnish a very strong argument to the *Cartesians*, for the supporting of their doctrine, that the soul always thinks. But as several are of opinion that the fair sex are not altogether strangers to the arts of dissembling, and concealing their thoughts, I have been forced to relinquish that opinion, and have therefore endeavoured to seek after some better reason. In order to it, a friend of mine, who is an excellent Anatomist, has promised me by the first opportunity to dissect a woman's tongue, and to examine whether there may not be in it certain juices which render it so

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wonderfully voluble or flippant, or whether the fibres of it may not be made up of a finer or more pliant thread, or whether there are not in it some particular muscles, which dart it up and down by such sudden glances and vibrations; or whether, in the last place, there may not be certain undiscovered channels running from the head and the heart, to this little instrument of loquacity, and conveying into it a perpetual affluence of animal spirits. Nor must I omit the reason which *Hudibras* has given, why those who can talk on trifles speak with the greatest fluency; namely, that the tongue is like a race-horse, which runs the faster the lesser weight it carries.

Which of these reasons soever may be looked upon as the most probable, I think the *Irishman's* thought was very natural, who after some hours conversation with a female Orator told her, that he believed her tongue was very glad when she was asleep, for that it had not a moment's rest all the while she was awake.

That excellent old ballad of the *Wanton Wife of Bath* has the following remarkable lines:

*I think, quoth Thomas, womens tongues  
Of aspen leaves are made.*

And *Ovid*, though in the description of a very barbarous circumstance, tells us, that when the tongue of a beautiful female was cut out, and thrown upon the ground, it could not forbear muttering even in that posture

— *Comprehensam forcipe linguam  
Abtulit ense fero. Radix micat ultima lingua.  
Ipsa jacet, terræque tremens immurmurat atræ;  
Utque salire solet mutilatæ cauda colubræ,  
Palpitat.*

If a tongue would be talking without a mouth, what could it have done when it had all its organs of speech, and accomplices of sound about it? I might here mention the story of the pippin-woman, had not I some reason to look upon it as fabulous.

I must confess I am so wonderfully charmed with the music of this little instrument, that I would by no means discourage it. All that I aim at by this dissertation is, to cure it of several disagreeable notes, and in particular of those little jarrings and dissonances which arise from anger, censoriousness, gossiping and coquetry. In short, I would have it always tuned by good-nature, truth, discretion and sincerity.

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