

Early Modern Women Poets

(1520-1700)

An Anthology

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Remember what Relation, Sir, you bear
 To Royal *Charles*, Subject and Son You are;
 Two Names that *strict Obedience* does require; 35
 What Frenzy then does Your rash Thoughts inspire,
 Thus by *Disloyal Deeds* to add more Cares
 To them of the bright Burden that he wears?
 Why with such eager speed hunt You a Crown
 You're so unfit to wear, were it Your own? 40
 With Bows, and Legs, and little Arts, You try
 A rude, unthinking *Tumults* love to buy:
 And he who stoops to do so mean a Thing,
 Shows he, *by Heaven*, was ne're designed for *King*.
 Would you be Great? do Things are *Great* and *Brave*; 45
 And scorn to be the *Mobile's* dull Slave;
 Tell *the base Great Ones*, and the *Shouting Throng*,
 You scorn a *Crown* worn in *another's wrong*.
 Prove your high Birth by Deeds Noble and Good,
 But strive not to Legitimate Your Blood. 50

Ephelia

(1681)

¹³ *excluding*: Exclusion Crisis, the attempt to exclude the Catholic James, Duke of York, from the succession. After the discovery of the 'Popish Plot' the Whigs tried in three successive parliamentary sessions to force through a bill to change the succession but all three attempts (1679, 1680, 1681) failed. ³¹ *Royal Father*: the Duke of Monmouth was son of Charles II and Lucy Waters. ⁴¹ *Legs*: a formal deep bow, with one leg extended forward, the toe pointed (a token of deep respect). ⁴⁶ *Mobile*: *mobile vulgus*, the fickle crowd, a phrase from Ovid, *Tristiae* 1. 9. 11

JANE BARKER

(1652-1732)

JANE BARKER was a Jacobite gentlewoman. She was baptized on 17 May 1652 in Blatherwycke, Northamptonshire. Her father, Thomas Barker, bore a coat of arms. He attended the court of Charles I, possibly as a servant to the Lord Chancellor, Keeper of the Great Seal. Her mother was a Cornishwoman, Anne Connock. Her father fought on the King's side in the Civil War, an uncle fought for James II against William, and another uncle fought against Monmouth at Sedgemoor, where he was killed. She herself was as ardent a supporter of the Stuarts as any of her male relatives, and a convinced Jacobite. By 1662 the family had moved from Northamptonshire to Wilsthorp, Lincolnshire, where Thomas Barker managed a sizeable farm belonging to John Cecil, Earl of Exeter. Jane Barker herself had been sent to school in Putney, and returned about this time to her family. In her early teens, she learned how to manage a farm, and at 15 or so, was sent to an aunt in London, probably to acquire civified manners.

One of her greatest interests was medicine, and she became a practising herbalist. She was related to Richard Lower, a London physician, and co-founder of the Royal Society. Her brother Edward matriculated at St John's College Cambridge, in 1668, and completed his MA at Christ Church Oxford, in 1674-5. He taught her Latin, the use of herbs, and anatomy, and his early death in 1675 grieved her greatly. She was extremely serious about her own medical practice: in a poem in *Poetical Recreations*, she renounces poetry in favour of reading Galen and Hippocrates (in Latin: she does not claim to read Greek); in another, she expresses her delight in finding that an apothecary had filed her bills with the doctors'. She was not the only woman in her generation to practise medicine semi-officially: a contemporary, Mary Trye, learned medicine from her father, and kept his practice going after his death, as she explains in *Medicatrix, or the woman-physician* (1675).

Jane Barker lived contentedly in Lincolnshire for a decade, exchanging verses with friends and family, and working on her fiction, but in 1685, she and her mother left the farm, besieged by bad luck and debt, and went to London, where she joined the court of Mary of Modena (like Anne Finch and Anne Killigrew) and converted to Catholicism, whilst continuing to practise as a herbalist. Religion is another major theme of her writing. When James II was driven into exile in 1688, she was one of the almost 40,000 supporters who followed him. She settled in St Germain-en-Laye with a number of Connock relatives, notably her cousin, Colonel William Connock. She made contact with the English Benedictine convent of Pontoise, and witnessed the profession there of Arabella FitzJames, illegitimate daughter of James II. Her manuscript collection of Poems Referring to the Times (1700: London, BL Add. MS 21,621) was, according to its dedication, compiled as a gift for James II. Another early collection of poems was published in 1688, *Poetical Recreations*, a collection of her own work together with poems by Cambridge friends, and some by the publisher, Benjamin Crayle. She lived in France for a time after the exile of James II, though towards the end of her life, she was living in London. From the 1680s onwards, she became interested in fiction, and the first of several novels was published in 1715 (*Exilius*). By 1696, she was nearly blind with cataracts, which were couched—whether this improved her sight, is not clear. She returned to England in 1704, and took over the farm at Wilsthorp. In the early 1730s, she was one of those who argued for the canonization of James II: she claimed that the touch of a cloth dipped in the dying king's blood cured a 'death's head', an apparently cancerous growth, about the size of a 'grain of oatmeal', on her breast. She returned to France towards the end of her long life, because she died and was buried at St Germain-en-Laye, on 29 March 1732.

The subject of the third poem included here is more presumably a member of the English Augustinian house of canonesses at Paris than of the other English Augustinian convent at Louvain. This kind of fancy-work was very much part of nun's culture: for example, a recruit to the English Benedictine house at Ghent in 1623 is described as 'the mistress of making and teaching y^e silke flowers in both y^e monasterys and she who first found out y^e art of printing leaves', and a pair of recruits to the 'Blue Nuns' of Paris in 1690 who were skilled, respectively, in making watches and studded watch-cases, 'declared they would not be admitted on the score of being obliged to work more than their Religious duties would with eas permit, and as the rest of the Community'. All this reflects a continual financial problem in English convents: the abbess of Ghent comments with obvious relief, that they had 'by severall marchaunts very good vent for theyr silk flowers'.

233

*On the DEATH of my Dear Friend
and Play-Fellow Mrs. E.D. having
Dream'd the night before I heard thereof
that I had lost a Pearl*

I dream'd I lost a pearl, and so it prov'd;
I lost a Friend much above Pearls below'd:
A Pearl perhaps adorns some outward part,
But Friendship decks each corner of the heart;
Friendship's a Gem, whose Lustre do's out-shine 5
All that's below the heav'nly Crystalline.
Friendship is that mysterious thing alone,
Which can unite, and make two Hearts but one;
It purifies our Love, and makes it flow
I'th' clearest stream that's found in Love below; 10
It *sublimates* the Soul, and makes it move
Towards Perfection and *Celestial* Love.
We had no by-designs, nor hop'd to get
Each by the other place among the great;
Nor *Riches* hop'd, nor Poverty we fear'd, 15
'Twas Innocence in both, which both rever'd
Witness this truth the *Wilsthorp-Fields*, where we
So oft enjoy'd a harmless *Luxurie*;
Where we indulg'd our easie Appetites,
With Pocket-Apples, Plumbs, and such delights, 20
Then we contriv'd to spend the rest o'th'day,
In making Chaplets, or at Check-stone play;
When weary, we our selves supinely laid
On beds of *Vi'lets* under some cool shade,
Where the Sun in vain strove to dart through his *Rays* 25
Whilst Birds around us chanted forth their *Lays*;
Ev'n whose we had bereaved of their yong
Would greet us with a *Querimonious* Song.
Stay here, my Muse, and of these let us learn,
The loss of our deceased Friend to mourn: 30
Learn did I say? alas, that cannot be,
We can teach Clouds to weep, and Winds to sigh at Sea,
Teach *Brooks* to murmur, *Rivers* to ore-flow
We can add Solitude to Shades of *Yeaugh*.
Were *Turtles* to be witness of our moan, 35
They'd in compassion quite forget their own:
Nor shall hereafter Heraclitus be
Fam'd for his Tears, but to my *Muse* and me;
Fate shall give all that *Fame* can comprehend,
Ah poor repair for th'loss of such a *Friend*. 40

17 *Wilsthorp-Fields*: Wilsthorpe, near Market Deeping, in Lincolnshire 20 *Pocket-Apples*: apples in their pockets 22 *Check-stone*: chequers 27 *bereaved*: birds-nesting, or collecting birds' eggs, was a children's pastime—rather a tomboyish one for two little girls 28 *Querimonious*: Jane Barker read Latin, so this may be a pun, conflating 'ceremonious' with Latin 'querelae', laments, complaints 34 *Yeaugh*: yew 35 *Turtles*: turtle-doves 37 *Heracitus*: concerned with the fleeting nature of the world, and hence known as 'the weeping philosopher'

234

Necessity of Fate

I

In vain, in vain it is, I find
 To strive against our *Fate*,
 We may as well command the Wind
 Or th' *Seas* rude Waves to gentle manners bind,
 Or to *Eternity* prescribe a date, 5
 As frustrate ought that *Fortune* has design'd.
 For when we think we're Politicians grown,
 And live by methods of our own;
 We then *obsequiously* obey
 Her Dictates, and a blindfull Homage pay. 10

II

For were't not so, surely I cou'd not be
 Still slave to Rhime, and lazy Poetry
 I who so oft have strove,
 My freedom to regain;
 And sometimes too, for my assistance took 15
 Business, and sometimes too a Book,
 Company, and sometimes Love:
 All which proves vain,
 For I can only shake but not cast off my Chain.

III

Ah cruel Fate! all this thou did'st foreshow 20
 Ev'n when I was a Child;
 When in my *Picture*'s hand
 My Mother did command,
 There shou'd be drawn a Lawrel-Bough:
 Lo then my *Muse* sat by and smil'd, 25
 To hear how some the Sentence did oppose,
 Saying an *Apple*, *Bird*, or *Rose*
 Were objects which did more befit
 My childish years, and no less childish wit.

IV

But my smiling Muse well knew that constant Fate 30
 Her promise wou'd compleat;