

Women Writers of the 16th to early 18th centuries

On the following pages, you will find poems by four English poets of the early modern period. As you read them, think about how their work reflects a **departure** from earlier work by women. What **issues** are they taking on in their writing that are new? How does their **tone** differ? Also, think about why **poetry** was such a popular genre for women writers.

If you are interested in these writers: Anne Finch, Mary Chudleigh, and Aemilia Lanyer have works on the bibliography for the final paper.



Katherine Fowler Philips
a.k.a. "The Matchless Orinda"
(1631-1664)

Friendships Mystery, To My Dearest Lucasia

Come, my Lucasia, since we see
That miracles Men's Faith do move,
By wonder and by prodigy
To the dull angry World let's prove
There's a Religion in our Love.

For Though we were design'd t'agree,
That Fate no liberty destroys,
But our Election is as free
As Angels, who with greedy choice
Are yet determin'd to their joys.

Our hearts are doubled by the loss,
Here Mixture is Addition grown;
We both diffuse, and both ingross:
And we whose minds are so much one,
Never, yet ever are alone.

We court our own Captivity
Than Thrones more great and innocent:
'Twere banishment to be set free,
Since we wear fetters whose intent
Not Bondage is but Ornament.

Divided joys are tedious found,
And griefs united easier grow:
We are our selves but by rebound,
And all our Titles shuffled so,
Both Princes, and both Subjects too.

Our Hearts are mutual Victims laid,
While they (such power in Friendship lies)
Are Altars, Priests, and Off'rings made:
And each Heart which thus kindly dies,
Grows deathless by the Sacrifice.

To My Excellent Lucasia, On Our Friendship

I did not live until this time
Crown'd my felicity,
When I could say without a crime,
I am not thine, but thee.

This carcass breath'd, and walkt, and slept,
So that the world believe'd
There was a soul the motions kept;
But they were all deceiv'd.

For as a watch by art is wound
To motion, such was mine:
But never had Orinda found
A soul till she found thine;

Which now inspires, cures and supplies,
And guides my darkened breast:
For thou art all that I can prize,
My joy, my life, my rest.

No bridegroom's nor crown-conqueror's mirth
To mine compar'd can be:
They have but pieces of the earth,
I've all the world in thee.

Then let our flames still light and shine,
And no false fear controul,
As innocent as our design,
Immortal as our soul.

To Mrs. M. A. at Parting

I Have examin'd and do find,
Of all that favour me
There's none I grieve to leave behind
But only only thee.
To part with thee I needs must die,
Could parting sep'rate thee and I.

But neither Chance nor Complement
Did element our Love ;
'Twas sacred Sympathy was lent
Us from the Quire above.
That Friendship Fortune did create,
Still fears a wound from Time or Fate.
Our chang'd and mingled Souls are
grown
To such acquaintance now,
That if each would resume their own,
Alas ! we know not how.
We have each other so engrost,
That each is in the Union lost.

And thus we can no Absence know,
Nor shall we be confin'd ;
Our active Souls will daily go
To learn each others mind.
Nay, should we never meet to Sense,
Our Souls would hold Intelligence.

Inspired with a Flame Divine
I scorn to court a stay ;
For from that noble Soul of thine
I ne're can be away.
But I shall weep when thou dost grieve ;
Nor can I die whil'st thou dost live.

By my own temper I shall guess
At thy felicity,
And only like my happiness
Because it pleaseth thee.
Our hearts at any time will tell
If thou, or I, be sick, or well.

All Honour sure I must pretend,
All that is Good or Great ;
She that would be *Rosania's* Friend,
Must be at least compleat.
If I have any bravery,
'Tis cause I have so much of thee.

Thy Leiger Soul in me shall lie,
And all thy thoughts reveal ;
Then back again with mine shall flie,
And thence to me shall steal.
Thus still to one another tend ;
Such is the sacred name of *Friend*.

Thus our twin-Souls in one shall grow,
And teach the World new Love,
Redeem the Age and Sex, and shew
A Flame Fate dares not move :
And courting Death to be our friend,
Our Lives together too shall end.

A Dew shall dwell upon our Tomb
Of such a quality,
That fighting Armies, thither come,
Shall reconciled be.
We'll ask no Epitaph, but say
ORINDA and ROSANIA.

Parting with Lucasia. A Song.

Well, we will do that rigid thing
Which makes Spectators think we part;
Though Absence hath for none a sting
But those who keep each others heart.

And when our Sense is dispossesst,
Our labouring Souls will heave and pant,
And gasp for one anothers breast,
Since their Conveyances they want.

Nay, we have felt the tedious smart
Of absent Friendship, and do know
That when we die we can but part;
And who knows what we shall do now?

Yet, I must go; we will submit,
And so our own Disposers be;
For while we nobly suffer it,
We triumph o'er Necessity.

By this we shall be truly great,
If having other things o'ercome,
To make our victory compleat
We can be Conquerors at home.

Nay then to meet we may conclude,
And all Obstructions overthrow,
Since we our Passion have subdu'd,
Which is the strongest thing I know.

Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656-1710)

To The Ladies (1703)

WIFE and Servant are the same,
But only differ in the Name:
For when that fatal Knot is ty'd,
Which nothing, nothing can divide:
When she the word *obey* has said,
And Man by Law supreme has made,
Then all that's kind is laid aside,
And nothing left but State and Pride:
Fierce as an Eastern Prince he grows,
And all his innate Rigor shows:
Then but to look, to laugh, or speak,
Will the Nuptial Contract break.
Like Mutes she Signs alone must make,
And never any Freedom take:
But still be govern'd by a Nod,
And fear her Husband as her God:
Him still must serve, him still obey,
And nothing act, and nothing say,
But what her haughty Lord thinks fit,
Who with the Pow'r, has all the Wit.
Then shun, oh! shun that wretched State,
And all the fawning Flatt'ners hate:
Value your selves, and Men despise,
You must be proud, if you'll be wise.

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720)



The Introduction

Did I, my lines intend for public view,
How many censures, would their faults pursue,
Some would, because such words they do
affect,
Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect.
And many, have attained, dull and untaught
The name of wit, only by finding fault.
True judges, might condemn their want of wit,
And all might say, they're by a woman writ.
Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
Such an intruder on the rights of men,
Such a presumptuous creature, is esteemed,
The fault, can by no virtue be redeemed.
They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play
Are the accomplishments we should desire;
To write, or read, or think, or to enquire
Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time;
And interrupt the conquests of our prime;
Whilst the dull manage, of a servile house
Is held by some, our outmost art, and use.

Sure 'twas not ever thus, nor are we told
Fables, of women that excelled of old;
To whom, by the diffusive hand of Heaven
Some share of wit, and poetry was given.
On that glad day, on which the ark returned,
The holy pledge, for which the land had
mourned,
The joyful tribes, attend it on the way,
The Levites do the sacred charge convey,
Whilst various instruments, before it play;
Here, holy virgins in the concert join,
The louder notes, to soften, and refine,
And with alternate verse, complete the hymn
divine.
Lo! the young Poet, after God's own heart,
By Him inspired, and taught the Muses Art,
Returned from conquest, a bright chorus meets,
That sing his slain ten thousand in the streets.
In such loud numbers they his acts declare,
Proclaim the wonders, of his early war,
That Saul upon the vast applause does frown,
And feels, its mighty thunder shake the crown.
What, can the threatened judgment now
prolong?
Half of the kingdom is already gone;
The fairest half, whose influence guides the rest,
Have David's empire, o're their hearts
confessed.

A woman here, leads fainting Israel on,
She fights, she wins, she triumphs with a song,
Devout, majestic, for the subject fit,
And far above her arms, exalts her wit,
Then, to the peaceful, shady palm withdraws,
And rules the rescued nation with her laws.
How are we fall'n, fall'n by mistaken rules?
And Education's, more than Nature's fools,
Debarred from all improvements of the mind,
And to be dull, expected and designed;
And if some one, would Soar above the rest,
With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed,
So strong, th' opposing faction still appears,
The hopes to thrive, can ne're outweigh the
fears,
Be cautioned then my Muse, and still retired;
Nor be despised, aiming to be admired;
Conscious of wants, still with contracted wing,
To some few friends, and to thy sorrows sing;
For groves of laurel, thou wert never meant;
Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there
content.

The Circuit of Apollo

Apollo as lately a circuit he made
Through the lands of the Muses, when Kent he surveyed,
And saw there that poets were not very common,
But most that pretended to verse were the women,
Resolved to encourage the few that he found,
And she that writ best, with a wreath should be crowned.
A summons sent out, was obeyed but by four,
When Phoebus, afflicted to meet with no more,
And standing where, sadly, he now might descry,
From the banks of the Stour the desolate Wye,
He lamented for Behn [*i.e. Aphra Behn, poet and playwright*] o'er that place of her birth,
And said amongst Femens [*i.e. women*] was not on the earth
Her superior in fancy, in language, or wit,
Yet owned that a little too loosely she writ;
Since the art of the Muse is to stir up soft thoughts,
Yet to make all hearts beat without blushes or faults.
But now to proceed, and their merits to know,
Before he on any, the bays would bestow,
He ordered them each, in their several way,
To show him their papers, to sing, or to say,
Whate'er they thought best, their pretensions might prove,
When Alinda began, with a song upon love.
So easy the verse, yet composed with such art,
That not one expression fell short of the heart;
Apollo himself did their influence obey,
He caught up his lyre, and a part he would play,
Declaring, no harmony else could be found,
Fit to wait upon words of so moving a sound.
The wreath he reached out, to have placed on her head,
If Laura not quickly a paper had read,
Wherein she Orinda [*Katherine Philips*] has praised so high,
He owned it had reached him, while yet in the sky,
That he thought with himself, when it first struck his ear,
Whoe'er could write that, ought the laurel to wear.
Betwixt them he stood, in a musing suspense,
Till Valeria withdrew him a little from thence,
And told him, as soon as she'd got him aside,
Her works, by no other but him should be tried;
Which so often he read, and with still new delight,
That judgment 'twas thought would not pass till 'twas night;
Yet at length he restored them, but told her withal,
If she kept it still close, he'd the talent recall.
Ardelia came last, as expecting least praise,
Who writ for her pleasure and not for the bays,
But yet, as occasion or fancy should sway,
Would sometimes endeavor to pass a dull day
In composing a song or a scene of a play.
Not seeking for fame, which so little does last
That ere we can taste it, the pleasure is past.
But Apollo replied, though so careless she seemed,
Yet the bays, if her share, would be highly esteemed.

And now, he was going to make an oration,
Had thrown by one lock, with a delicate fashion,
Upon the left foot, most genteelly did stand.
Had drawn back the other, and waved his white hand,
When calling to mind, how the prize, although given
By Paris to her who was fairest in Heaven,
Had pulled on the rash, inconsiderate boy
The fall of his house, with the ruin of Troy,
Since in wit, or in beauty, it never was heard,
One female could yield t'have another preferred,
He changed his design, and divided his praise,
And said that they all had a right to the bays,
And that t'were injustice, one brow to adorn
With a wreath, which so fitly by each might be worn.
Then smiled to himself, and applauded his art,
Who thus nicely has acted so subtle a part,
Four women to wheedle, but found 'em too many,
For who would please all, can never please any.
In vain then, he thought it, there no longer to stay,
Yet the case to Parnassus should soon be referred,
And there in a council of Muses be heard,
Who of their own sex, best the title might try,
Since no man upon earth, nor himself in the sky,
Would be so imprudent, so dull, or so blind,
To lose three parts in four from amongst womankind.

The Unequal Fetters

Could we stop the time that's flying
Or recall it when 'tis past
Put far off the day of Dying
Or make Youth for ever last
To Love would then be worth our cost.

But since we must loose those Graces
Which at first your hearts have won
And you seek for in new Faces
When our Spring of Life is done
It would but urge our ruin on.

Free as Nature's first intention
Was to make us, I'll be found
Nor by subtle Man's invention
Yield to be in Fetters bound
By one that walks a freer round.

Marriage does but slightly tie Men
Whilst close Prisoners we remain
They the larger Slaves of Hymen
Still are begging Love again
At the full length of all their chain.

Æmilia Lanyer

“Eve’s Apology in Defense of Women” from *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (1611)

Now *Pontius Pilate* is to judge the Cause
Of faultlesse *Jesus*, who before him stands;
Who neither hath offended Prince, nor Lawes,
Although he now be brought in woefull bands:
"O noble Gouvernour, make thou yet a pause,
Doe not in innocent blood imbrue thy hands;
But heare the words of thy most worthy wife,
Who sends to thee, to beg her Sauiors life.

"Let barb'rous crueltie farre depart from thee,
And in true Iustice take afflictions part;
Open thine eies, that thou the truth mai'st see,
Doe not the thing that goes against thy heart;
Condemne not him that must thy Sauior be;
But view his holy Life, his good desert:
Let not vs Women glory in Mens fall,
Who had power giuen to ouer-rule vs all.

"Till now your indiscretion sets vs free,
And makes our former fault much lesse
appeare;
Our Mother *Eue*, who tasted of the Tree,
Giuing to *Adam* what she held most deare,
Was simply good, and had no powre to see,
The after-comming harme did not appeare:
The subtile Serpent that our Sex betraide,
Before our fall so sure a plot had laide.

"That vndiscerning Ignorance perceau'd
No guile, or craft that was by him intended;
For, had she knowne of what we were bereau'd,
To his request she had not condescended.
But she (poore soule) by cunning was deceau'd,
No hurt therein her harmlesse Heart intended:
For she alleadg'd Gods word, which he denies
That they should die, but euen as Gods, be
wise.

"But surely *Adam* cannot be excus'd,
Her fault, though great, yet he was most too
blame;
What Weaknesse offred Strength might haue
refus'd,
Being Lord of all the greater was his shame:
Although the Serpents craft had her abus'd,
Gods holy word ought all his actions frame:
For he was Lord and King of al the earth,
Before poore *Eue* had either life or breath.

"Who being fram'd by Gods eternall hand,
The perfect'st man that euer breath'd on earth,
And from Gods mouth receiu'd that strait
command,
The breach whereof he knew was present
death:
Yea hauing powre to rule both Sea and Land,
Yet with one Apple wonne to loose that breath,
Which God hath breathed in his beauteous
face,
Bringing vs all in danger and disgrace.

"And then to lay the fault on Patience backe,
That we (poore women) must endure it all;
We know right well he did discretion lacke,
Beeing not perswaded thereunto at all;
If *Eue* did erre, it was for knowledge sake,
The fruit beeing faire perswaded him to fall:
No subtill Serpents falshood did betray him,
If he would eate it, who had powre to stay
him?

"Not *Eue*, whose fault was onely too much loue,
Which made her giue this present to her Deare,
That which shee tasted, he likewise might proue,
Whereby his knowledge might become more
cleare;
He neuer sought her weakenesse to reprove,
With those sharpe words wich he of God did
heare:
Yet Men will boast of Knowledge, which he
tooke
From *Eues* faire hand, as from a learned
Booke.

"If any Euill did in her remaine,
Beeing made of him, he was the ground of all;
If one of many Worlds could lay a staine
Vpon our Sexe, and worke so great a fall
To wretched Man, by Satans subtill traine;
What will so fowle a fault amongst you all?
Her weakenesse did the Serpents word obey,
But you in malice Gods deare Sonne betray.

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"Whom, if vniustly you condemne to die,
Her sinne was small, to what you doe commit;
All mortall sinnes that doe for vengeance crie,
Are not to be compared vnto it:
If many worlds would altogether trie,
By all their sinnes the wrath of God to get;
 This sinne of yours, surmounts them all as
farre
 As doth the Sunne, another little starre.

"Then let us haue our Libertie againe,
And challenge to your selues no Sou'raintie;
You came not in the world without our paine,
Make that a barre against your crueltie;
Your fault beeing greater, why should you
disdaine
Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?
 If one weake woman simply did offend,
 This sinne of yours hath no excuse, nor end.

"To which (poore soules) we neuer gaue
consent,
Witnesse thy wife (*O Pilate*) speakes for all;
Who did but dreame, and yet a message sent,
That thou should'st haue nothing to doe at all
With that iust man, which, if thy heart relent,
Why wilt thou be a reprobate with *Saul*?
 To seeke the death of him that is so good,
 For thy soules health to shed his dearest
blood?"

