

Eliza Day

Annabelle Prasad, Simon Fraser University

Eliza Day (sometimes spelt Daye) was born in Surrey, England and lived from 1734 to 1814. At the age of fifty-five, Day began writing, and published her first poetry collection, *Poems, on Various Subjects*, in 1798 (she is probably not the same person as the Eliza Day who wrote *Poems and Fugitive Pieces* (1796). Day's literary work emphasizes themes ranging from human relationships to the art of nature and self-reflection, accentuating the dynamics of society, youth, gender, and family in the late eighteenth century. Day's poetry was also her means of showing affection, as she often wrote to her loved ones.

Despite the lack of information on Day, she was a well-accomplished poet. Her first published works were *Serious Reflections on the Death of Johannes, Who was Shot by his Friend, July 12, 1789*; *Likewise, on the Triumphant Death of Josephus, Aged Eighteen Years*, published in 1789, and *Thoughts Occasioned by the Death of Maria: Who Departed this Life, August 8, 1788*, which were published on their own, whereas the last, *Poems, on Various Subjects* (1798), *Poems on Various Subjects: With several pieces, on the Death of Relatives and Friends* (1814), and *A Poem on the Proclamation of Peace* (1814) are collections.

"To the Memory of a Lady, Whom the Author Much Esteemed When Very Young" is part of Day's collection *Poems, on Various Subjects*, published in 1798 and printed by J. M'Creery. The poem illustrates a woman's influence on Day as a young girl and underscores the gratitude and fond memories of her youth, while emphasizing the joy and depth of their companionship. The poem is written in ballad stanza (alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter), with a rhyme scheme of abab.

Further Reading

Marlene LeGates. "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1976, pp. 21–39.

Roulston, Christine. "Separating the Inseparables: Female Friendship and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1998, pp. 215–31.

To the Memory of a Lady, Whom the Author Much Esteemed when Very Young⁵³

If gratitude was e'er⁵⁴ a debt,

Or friendship were a tye,⁵⁵

Then will I think on Margaret,⁵⁶

Till I shall droop⁵⁷ and die.

To me succeeding years have shewn,⁵⁸

5

Thou wert⁵⁹ a peerless maid;⁶⁰

For years alas! are past and gone,

Since thou in dust wert laid.

The hours of folly,⁶¹ light and vain,

I count a loss to me;

10

But pleasures in reflection's train,⁶²

Are those I pass'd with thee.

To follow thy engaging worth,

My early days inclin'd;

And now I fondly call them forth,

15

To cheer my pensive mind.

⁵³ *Poems on Various Subjects* by Eliza Day, printed by J. MCreery, 1798, pp. 122-123. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

⁵⁴ *E'er*: ever.

⁵⁵ *Tye*: tie, a metaphor to describe friendship as a bond or knot.

⁵⁶ *Margaret*: a charismatic woman who had a great influence on Eliza Day's life as a child, but whose identity is otherwise unknown.

⁵⁷ *Droop*: used in the context of growing old, as the body droops with age.

⁵⁸ *Shewn*: shown.

⁵⁹ *Thou wert*: you were.

⁶⁰ *Peerless maid*: a young woman without equal.

⁶¹ *Folly*: foolishness.

⁶² *Reflection's train*: those who follow a reflective lifestyle instead of foolishness.

Not dearer to my youthful heart,
 My early fancy's pride,⁶³
 Than now, when sicken'd hopes depart,
 And pleasing scenes subside.

20

How oft the time I would prolong,
 When listening to thy tongue;
 For who with wisdom lived so long,
 That ever died so young.



[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

© Annabelle Prasad, 2024

⁶³ *Fancy's pride*: pride in what one imagines to be true.