

James Barclay

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James Barclay, a teacher and active member of the Church of England, resided in London in the eighteenth century (1746/7–1774). Most of the information we have on his personal life is tied to his religious affiliations. Barclay's few publications known today include a written sermon and a *Complete and Universal English Dictionary* (1774). Although his dictionary was widely accepted at the time, it reads to us more as an encyclopedia because it contains articles pertaining to religion, literature, politics, and similar topics. Barclay published three poems other than "The Metamorphose" that we know of today.

"The Metamorphose" is written in iambic tetrameter and its genre is a character sketch. Though it is unclear which insect Barclay is drawing a connection to, he metaphorically uses a butterfly or moth to tie the aging process to the natural world. Barclay mentions the character Witwoud from the play *The Way of the World* by William Congreve (1700), denoting an individual who believes they are intelligent when they are not. This poem denigrates youth and old age in a way similar to what Muller observes in moral periodicals in the early eighteenth century (91-100), but Barclay's poem omits a positive middle age while emphasizing the inferiority of stupid people at any age.

Further Reading

Borsay, Peter. "Children, Adolescents, and Fashionable Urban Society in Eighteenth-Century England." *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity*, edited by Anja Müller, Routledge, 2006, pp. 53–62.

References

Müller, Anja. "Fashioning Age and Identity: Childhood and the Stages of Life in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals." *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity*, edited by Anja Müller, Routledge, 2006, pp. 91–100.

The Metamorphose²⁹⁷

WITH rolling time that all things change,
Has oft been said, and oft been sung:

²⁹⁷ *A Collection of Poems in Four Volumes. By several hands*, Vol. III, 1770, printed for G. Pearch, pp. 178–179. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

One instance more; the difference strange

’Twixt²⁹⁸ WITWOUD²⁹⁹ old, and WITWOUD young!

In youth, compound of curls and lace,

5

Of giggle, fidget, and of froth;

One simper³⁰⁰ dimpled in his face,

No butterfly more void of wrath.

Pleas’d with himself, with all well-pleas’d,

The flutterer scarce could give offence:

10

Or if he teaz’d, with nought³⁰¹ he teaz’d,

But simple, pure, impertinence.³⁰²

Now view him in declining age,

Assume the sour satyric³⁰³ frown:

On friends and foes discharge his rage,

15

The very SCARECROW of the town.

So Flies, in frisk, and buzz, and play,

That harmless through the summer past,

When ready to be swept away,

Grow blind, and sting us at the last.

20



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²⁹⁸ ’Twixt: , short for “betwixt,” between two extremes.

²⁹⁹ Witwoud: a character in the play *The Way of the World* by William Congreve. Witwoud is a social butterfly who makes weak attempts at cleverness.

³⁰⁰ Simper: “a smile expressive of, or intended to convey, guileless pleasure, childlike innocence, or the like” (OED).

³⁰¹ Nought: nothing..

³⁰² Impertinence: disrespectfulness.

³⁰³ Satyric: satiric, not a reference to Greek satyrs but a declaration that the character makes fun of his peers.